



Speech by

Rosemary Menkens

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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NATURE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (3.24 pm): I rise to present the opposition position in relation to the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2006. As outlined by the minister in her second reading speech, this bill seeks to legislate a permanent ban on recreational duck and quail hunting in Queensland on purely animal welfare grounds based in part on the advice of the RSPCA. The minister highlighted in her speech the community response to the ban, saying that the government received more than 5,000 items of correspondence from people supporting the proposed ban and less than 50 in support of it. This was a rather obvious attempt to convince the House that there was very little, if any, opposition to the bill and that its introduction was not contentious. However, on Wednesday, 11 October during the first sitting of this 52nd Parliament, I presented a petition containing more than 5,000 signatures from petitioners right across Queensland requesting the House to overturn the decision to ban traditional duck and quail hunting and to launch an inquiry into the process involved in making this decision.

For the time being I will put aside the reason for the introduction of the bill but instead address the manner of its introduction and the abuse of due process that occurred. I have lost count of the number of times this House has heard the minister and members on the other side laud their supposed open and responsible government. Incredible as it seems, everyone from the Premier down claims to have a mortgage on accountability. We have witnessed some very high horses indeed being ridden when they have been asked to defend their actions. Openness, transparency and accountability are not the hallmarks of this government and never will be if it continues to follow the example that was set by this bill. I have been approached by members of the public who are very concerned not only about the decision taken to introduce this bill but even more so about the complete lack of consultation and negotiation that preceded its introduction. I had hoped that we might have seen a new approach from the government in this new term. I am therefore very disappointed that in the first sitting days of this new parliament a bill such as this has been introduced.

From 1985 in Queensland recreational duck and quail hunting was authorised on an annual basis under a conservation plan after bird numbers and seasonal and other conditions were assessed. The Queensland duck and quail management plan was due for public review in 2005. However, in August last year the Premier announced that this review would not take place. The failure of the review to proceed despite previous promises meant that no recreational hunting of ducks and quails would be permitted to take place in the future. This effectively signalled the end of a long established and traditional practice in Queensland. There was concern, however, from the green lobby that hunting could again be allowed at some time in the future if a new conservation plan was implemented or if the Nature Conservation Act was amended. This concern and this concern alone has prompted the drafting and the introduction of this particular bill.

It is unfortunate but, contrary to accepted practice and the government's own claims, there was little or no public consultation about the bill. The Sustainable Hunting Alliance has raised serious concerns regarding its introduction, saying that it was effectively disenfranchised and ignored during the process. In stark contrast, the RSPCA seems to have been very heavily involved in both the consultation and decision-

making process, sitting on the minister's advisory committee for duck and quail management as well as the animal welfare advisory committee.

On the RSPCA web site Dr Hugh Worth speaks at great length about duck populations and how little effect hunting has on bird numbers. He says in part—

Duck populations are essentially self-controlling as they are mainly determined by water levels ...

I note that in her second reading speech the minister displayed a comparable, although not very original, view when she said, 'Duck populations are essentially self-controlling. Factors such as wetland availability and water levels influence the populations of Queensland ducks.' I am not arguing against the right of the RSPCA and Dr Worth to argue their case. Indeed, I have the greatest of respect for the RSPCA and its work. However, I will argue for the rights of those holding opposing views to be heard as well. What use is consultation if the result is predetermined?

The Sustainable Hunting Alliance claims that it was given only seven days by the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to present its case. As members would agree, that is clearly an inadequate amount of time and makes it a rather farcical decision in view of this government's oft-repeated mantra of open and accountable government and the many promises it has given us of full and public consultation before any such legislative changes.

That the announcement of the ban was made by the Premier in the lead-up to the last election comes as no surprise in view of his obvious strong lobbying for the green vote at the expense of ordinary Queenslanders' rights and traditional practices. Too often in this great state political decisions affecting many Queenslanders are made in a transparent attempt to woo a minority vote, and this can only lead to accusations of rank, political opportunism, expediency and grubby deals being made to serve a political agenda rather than an environmental one. Perhaps if the government had followed due process and actually had as its first priority the preservation of our native fauna and its welfare as its primary aim this bill may have greater credibility. As it stands, however, it is just another example of a knee-jerk reaction to an ill-defined and contentious issue relying on misleading and rather emotive arguments to argue its case.

We have witnessed this behaviour previously, and I give members the example of the introduction of the wild rivers legislation and forecast possible closures of Moreton Bay fishing areas to both recreational and commercial fishers. Changes are proposed and stakeholders are promised that they will be fully consulted over the changes and that all views will be taken into account. What actually happens, however, is either stakeholder meetings are structured around a preconceived agenda, often with little or no possibility of change, or that those views contrary to the government's aims are ignored. We have witnessed this time and time again in Queensland over the past several years. People's rights are trampled on and their objections overridden by a bureaucracy blind to the effect on our way of life.

I mentioned earlier that I was disappointed that a new term had not brought a new broom and there does not seem to be a new commitment to accountability. I can only assume that the Premier is likewise disappointed. He is on record time and time again saying that he is determined that all Queenslanders will have a responsible government under his stewardship. In a ministerial statement on accountability and integrity in government on 6 November 2002, the Premier demonstrated his commitment to this ideal when he said—

We cannot put a price on open and accountable government. Proper accountability is essential to effective representative democracy—it is a prerequisite for a government that serves its people properly.

In Queensland, the people are assured of integrity in government by an elaborate system of checks and balances, both within and independent of government agencies.

This quote was from *Hansard*.

The 2004 'Queensland Accountability Frameworks' from the Office of the Public Service Commissioner contains this definition of accountability—

Mr LEE: I rise to a point of order. Surely there are some issues of relevance here. I for the life of me cannot see any—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): No, there is no point of order.

Mrs MENKENS: The reason I am talking about the process is that I am concerned. We are very concerned about the process involved within the actual presentation and bringing about of this legislation. The 2004 'Queensland Accountability Frameworks' from the Office of the Public Service Commissioner contains this definition of accountability—

Accountability involves rendering a formal account to someone, such as Parliament or a superior, on how—and how well—one's responsibilities are being met, on actions taken to correct problems and to ensure they do not reoccur. It involves accepting personal consequences such as discipline for problems that could have been avoided had the individual acted appropriately. All public office holders are accountable to the courts because of the requirements of the rule of law.

The Premier also announced his commitment internationally in June 2003 at a reception in Columbia, North Carolina, hosted by Governor Mark Sanford referring to their shared vision for a government that is accountable and open to all members of the community.

I said earlier that we are increasingly being overridden by bureaucracies blind to the effects that they are having on our way of life. Unfortunately this means the government is blind to the practicalities also. There is no valid reason for the introduction of this bill on environmental grounds, hence the focus on animal welfare concerns. It has been many years now that the environmental lobby across Australia has attempted to have recreational shooting banned, with limited success. To date, Western Australia and New South Wales have banned hunting, and duck shooting has never been allowed in the Australian Capital Territory. However, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory all continue to allow the practice under strict guidelines and limits, and that is extremely important—that is, the strict guidelines and limits.

In fact, the issue of cruelty was thoroughly examined by the Victorian state government's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee in 1988 and it found that there were insufficient grounds to support a ban on duck hunting. Departmental officers who observed the opening of the season found there was no evidence of cruelty. The Victorian government also investigated claims of large numbers of birds being wounded, but these claims could not be substantiated. In laying charges of unnecessary cruelty against today's hunters, the RSPCA and the Queensland government have maligned many people involved in the active preservation and protection of the wetlands and other areas where duck and quail live and breed.

Queensland has some 12 million hectares of parks under its control—seven million directly—but there are countless hectares of wetlands in private hands that are maintained by landholders and hunters that would otherwise be lost. Recreational shooters are not the rednecked environmental rapists that the green lobby would have us believe. They and their organisations maintain conservation works in swamps and wetlands. They contribute funds for their upkeep and maintenance and they apply for funding for conservation programs designed to foster and encourage nesting in such areas. Dr Worth himself acknowledges that without adequate management wetlands tend to become weed filled and pest ridden. He says that it is not enough to stop via legislation people hunting because such bans result in a loss of interest in waterfowl, leading to a subsequent loss in interest in wetland preservation.

But do we have an alternative plan? This is my very real concern. Do we have an alternative plan to address this issue introduced with the bill? Of course not, because this bill is not about the birds; it is about politics. It pays lip-service to the EPA's charter to protect and preserve our native flora and fauna but humbly begs and scrapes before the green radicals. This noncommitment to environmental protection by the EPA is further demonstrated in its funding allocations in the last budget. From a total operating budget of \$294 million for 2006-07, only \$6 million spread out over three years is allocated to the destruction of pests and weeds in the seven million hectares of state parks under the direct control of the EPA. With a little bit of maths we can soon work out that this is less than 29c per hectare per year. When we look at it from that perspective, it is clearly hopelessly inadequate to combat the very real problems that our parks face. Yet in spite of this obvious shortcoming, the minister is determined to introduce a bill that will lead to the loss of further wetlands that will have a far greater long-term effect on duck numbers than a hunting season, and this is our very real concern.

There has been no recognition by the department of the conservation efforts of volunteers and the funds that they raise to go towards their efforts. Consequently, at this stage I see no plan put in place by the minister to supplant that loss.

This bill may have been more acceptable if somewhere within its provisions there had been reference to the effects that a ban on hunting would have on bird numbers and habitats. But that seems to be lacking in this bill. It is typical of the government to use its majority in parliament to force through legislation such as this bill without a thought or care for the consequences.

Penny Olsen and Michael Weston, writing for *Birds Australia*, state in an article that appeared in *The State of Australia's Birds* in December 2004 that the greatest threats to our native birds are the deterioration of wetland habitats, the deterioration of water quality, the loss of wetlands, and the increased numbers of pests and other direct disturbances that will occur once these wetlands are no longer being looked after. Penny Olsen and Michael Weston identified a number of contributing problems, including: changed hydrology through reduced and altered natural flows; climate change, through change in rainfall patterns and sea levels; feral animals, such as foxes, feral or uncontrolled cats and dogs and pigs; feral fish that inhabit the waterways, such as carp; aquatic and other weeds; other exotic pests; and insensitive recreational use, including some waterfowl hunting and irresponsible boat and vehicle use.

Further in *The State of Australia's Birds*—a publication that we can only assume has the conservation interests of our native birds at heart—Penny Olsen and Michael Weston state—

Recreational harvesting of certain common waterfowl species is likely to be sustainable.

They state further—

Recreational hunters could become a force for conservation as they have in countries such as the United States.

A primary objective of the Australian Field and Game Federation is wetland conservation. One of its primary objectives is to preserve, restore, develop and maintain waterfowl habitat in Australia. The

federation believes that waterfowl hunters are aware of the importance of our wetlands and the wildlife they hold. Traditionally, the federation has been at the forefront of wetland conservation. Often the federation is the first to notice changes in waterfowl population and to seek reasons for that change.

The federation has dedicated itself to the conservation of wetland environments and waterfowl species throughout Australia by raising funds for wetland conservation, by instigating wetland enhancement and research programs, and by raising government and community awareness. A major fundraising initiative involved lobbying state governments for the introduction of a game licence fee levied on all hunters. That levy raises millions of dollars every year across Australia, much of which is channelled into wetland conservation projects and wetland purchase and lease agreements. Wetland management projects have included the erection of duck nesting boxes, tree planting and revegetation works, civil engineering projects for water management and improved grazing management agencies.

The federation has initiated many research projects, including the effects of grazing on wetlands, waterfowl population counts, banding to ascertain distribution and abundance patterns, bag surveys to monitor the number of waterfowl being taken by hunters, and lead shot studies to determine the availability of spent lead pellets to waterfowl. These efforts have resulted in the development of legislation for water allocation to wetlands for environmental reasons, the recognition of the importance of wetlands in the development of salinity management strategies, the extension of the wildlife reserve system as a part of land reclassification, the conservation of wetlands as part of water law and the development of comprehensive government wetland policies.

I would like to give members an example of the kind of volunteer work and funding that will be lost because this bill fails to consider those outcomes. A group of recreational hunters in the Burdekin electorate was in the process of securing funding and donations totalling nearly \$78,000 to maintain the local wetlands. That maintenance included the building and placement of nesting boxes, the development of pest management plans, and works and tree planting to maintain water quality. This project had gained the respect of Landcare and the local council. Representatives of the group told me that they had also received huge support from Parks and Wildlife staff for the project, because sufficient funding to carry out this kind of work is not available from the department. That seems to be the real problem. The department that has the responsibility for the environment in Queensland seems more intent on stopping traditional practice with little or no justification without doing any constructive work. I ask members to contrast the voluntary efforts of landholders and hunters in sustaining our fauna and its environs with the department's woeful record on the protection of native species and the elimination of exotic pests. This is the situation that exists across the state. Volunteer groups carry out the work of the EPA, but we cannot expect these groups to continue their good work once this bill is passed.

The Premier highlighted in his campaign speech this very fact when he said that he would set aside \$30 million to protect our iconic rainforests, threatened wetlands and important areas of wilderness from destruction. He said that the state would buy this privately owned, high-conservation value land and bring it into state protection. As shadow minister for the environment, I applaud this move by the Premier. I also welcome the increased allocation of funds.

Landholders, farmers and graziers are coming under increasing pressure to increase production and output in order to stay competitive in the global marketplace in which we operate. We all know that. That is a fact of life. In some cases—and often in many cases—those people have to choose between maintaining biodiversity or making a living. With all the goodwill in the world, no-one could or should expect them to sacrifice their future for the public good with no recompense. Most landholders are respectful of the land. Most landholders are aware of just how fragile our environment really is. That is a fact that is conveniently ignored by, or escapes, those people who are most vocal in their demonisation of landholders. All landholders have invested time, money, sweat and toil over several generations. Given the option, they would continue to do so. But as the Premier has recognised, landholders alone should not be the ones to carry the burden for the public good. The public good means public input and payment from the public purse. If all are to benefit, all should pay. That is the right and fair thing to do.

The \$30 million allocation will enable areas that do not currently fall under the protection of the EPA to be identified as those most at risk and most worthy to be bought and paid for by the greater public. Where there is determined to be a need, hopefully those wetlands, savannas, woodlands and rainforests that are held in private hands will, with the landholder's consent, be able to be purchased. However, I am anxious to see just how that process will be undertaken.

It is important that such an initiative have the full support of the community and be embraced by landholders as opposed to being feared by them. Landholders in this state are far too used to having their rights eroded and denied by ill-conceived legislation. There has arisen among some sections of the community an erroneous perception that all landholders are not responsible stewards and are instead intent on abusing this resource. As members would know, that is far from the truth but landholders now are—rightly or wrongly—apprehensive about any moves by the government that may affect how they manage their land and how they operate their businesses. Therefore, I hope that the \$30 million is not used to compulsorily acquire land against an owner's wishes. Cooperation from landholders is implicit in

our conservation efforts and we need to ensure that ongoing cooperation to identify those areas most in need of conservation.

Unfortunately, many landholders adjacent to state parks have a low opinion of the ability of the EPA to manage the areas that they currently have under their control. This is no reflection on the Parks and Wildlife staff who do an incredible job with the resources that they have. It is a simple acknowledgement that the maintenance of our parks and the funds that are currently allocated for this maintenance, including pest control and fire management, fall far short of what is required.

We have parks already overrun with wild pigs and exotic weeds with no signs of any real impact on their spread. Landowners and recreational hunters have every right to be sceptical about how wetlands and other areas that have been maintained voluntarily, for generations in some cases, would fare under the current funding and allocation models. We cannot expect private landholders to continue to expend large amounts of money for no benefit to maintain those wetlands and grass areas which are at present maintained and preserved by the owners and hunters. It is little use talking of public good if public funds are not used to back up this argument. Too often we see decisions supposedly made for a greater public good but in reality becoming an onerous and costly burden on a small group out of favour with the government.

As members, we represent all of our constituents, not just the ones we like or the ones we agree with. It is our duty to listen to any case on its merits and not make decisions based on one-sided arguments or suspect information. Recreational hunters are not rednecks. They are not dangerous or wanton destroyers of wildlife. They are licensed, responsible members of our communities. Their backgrounds are extensively checked as part of the gun licence requirements, and all of them have undertaken and passed annual accreditation and identification tests to the highest standard set by the authorities.

These people are not ignorant of the importance of biodiversity or of the need to look after our indigenous wildlife. In fact, in many cases they are its greatest exponents. Unlike the EPA and many do-gooders, they actually get out there and do something to maintain Australia's abundant fauna. They are more in touch with birds, their habits and their habitats than many people who call themselves environmentalists and preach their creed, which is: do as I say, not do as I do. Just as the EPA persecutes those transgressing its laws however inadvertently yet cannot put its own house in order, these professional environmentalists decry the loss of wetlands and rainforests but rarely put their hands in their own pockets or break a sweat in a national park destroying weeds. The real environmentalists work quietly and constantly to preserve and enhance what we have. Farmers and landholders lock up productive lands. Recreational hunters build nesting boxes and contribute to the upkeep of dams and swamps. Ordinary mums and dads and children plant trees. They destroy weeds and other pests. These are the real wardens of our flora and fauna.

This bill has not been introduced on environmental grounds. The animal rights lobby tried that route and it did not work because there is not any indisputable evidence that bird numbers are declining because of hunting pressure. Instead, we are now told that the ban is to be introduced because of animal welfare concerns over the numbers of birds wounded. This is despite any reliable evidence of such a high percentage of birds shot versus those wounded, because that science and that evidence does not exist. The RSPCA has claimed that as much as 90 per cent of ducks shot suffer a slow and cruel death. If this were so, I doubt anyone could support the practice. But, as usual in the animal welfare debate, the rhetoric from the animal welfare lobby is sometimes at odds with the truth. Never let the facts get in the way of an argument appears to be a method used by those most vehemently opposed to many of our traditional husbandry practices, and this applies equally to the groups arguing against customary hunting practices.

The Chairman of the World Conservation Union's Species Survival Commission Australia New Zealand group, Dr Graham Webb, in a 1998 paper critiquing the proposed introduction of a ban on duck hunting in South Australia, concluded that such a ban based on unfounded accusations of cruelty was at best counterproductive to long-term conservation issues. He said that in contrast there was, believe it or not, compelling evidence for regulated game bird harvesting with hunters demonstrating unequivocal commitment to conservation and sustainable use, and he further identified a string of wetland habitats that only exist today because of the activities of those hunters.

In his summary, Dr Webb said that the views of hunters on conservation and sustainable use are totally consistent with global trends in conservation and that they have continually indicated their willingness to cooperate with government's adaptive approach to game bird conservation and management. Dr Webb identified several inconsistencies with the intent to ban hunting on welfare grounds and agency responsibility for conservation. He said that it was difficult to support such legislation without first considering the conservation consequences implicit in its enactment.

He contended that game birds are currently valued positively by hunters, landholders and nonhunters alike, creating incentives for all to conserve them. By passing a bill such as the one before us, we stand a significant chance of actually enhancing the pest status of such birds. Because this bill is not trying to restrict or limit birds killed under permitted pest management plans, when populations explode, as

happens periodically after good seasons, more birds may actually be killed or wounded but without the controls and codes of conduct that are currently in place.

Mrs Sullivan: Shoot all the old ducks.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you. It is clear that this bill has little to do with unjustifiable claims of cruelty but rather is an attempt to appease a very vocal minority. As Dr Webb points out, the issue of wounding appears to have been chosen for political and public relations purposes and may have little real value in resolving the fundamental philosophical conflict that underlies the proposed ban.

These birds are not shot merely for sport. They are a traditional form of food and every bird taken is eaten, just as fishermen fish for fish that are then eaten. Dr Webb contends that, while wounding can occur during legitimate hunting activities, this can be minimised and such incidences are similar to incidental catches in recreational and commercial fishing operations and should be treated in a similar way. I hasten to add that this does not mean that this issue should be treated in a similar way as the government's handling of the possible closure of fishing areas in Moreton Bay and other issues.

The report is scathing about the models and figures on wounding rates used by the welfare and animal rights lobby to defend its position. It is models such as those criticised by Dr Webb on which the minister has based the decision to bring this legislation forward. Computer simulation models used for predicting wounding rates that, according to the report, cannot and do not predict numbers accurately should be ignored completely in any real discussion of wounding rates in the field. Further, it was found that wounding rate claims investigated by the South Australian department were inflated by some 400 to 500 per cent.

The Victorian government's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee also carried out an extensive six-month investigation of duck hunting and animal welfare related issues in 1988. The opening day was observed firsthand by officers of the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment and veterinary officers from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. A report was prepared by the Bureau of Animal Welfare for the Minister of Agriculture and concluded—

The investigating Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs veterinary officers were unanimous in their opinion that the banning of duck hunting on animal welfare grounds is not warranted and that the adverse aspects of duck hunting are minimal.

Hunters were reported to be very careful to euthanase birds as rapidly and humanely as possible and that the vast majority of any wounded birds were recovered and euthanased. The officers present found no incidence of gross cruelty and that most birds were shot cleanly.

I do take note of the minister's statement in her second reading speech that the proposed ban on recreational hunting will not affect the rights of primary producers to seek damage mitigation permits to shoot birds for the purpose of crop protection. I must admit though that while I am pleased that the minister does show real respect for the rights of farmers, I am disappointed that she does not have a reciprocal respect for the rights of hunters.

I do not doubt the minister's sincerity, but I am concerned when reports reach my office that even now there are moves to restrict the use of shotguns for pest destruction. It has even been suggested that instead of using shotguns, rifles be used to scare the birds instead. I cannot but question the intelligence of such suggestions. Rifles to scare birds for pest mitigation? Do the proponents not think that if this method worked it would not be employed by landholders and farmers? Do they really believe that it is that simple? If only it were.

What this means, of course, is that this government is prepared to put its hand on its heart and swear to value and respect the rights of all Queenslanders until it needs to pander to minority lobby groups in exchange for political favours and it moves to legislate those rights away.

The opposition values the rights of all Queenslanders equally regardless of political affiliation or persuasion. Of course, as with any contentious issue there will be, at the end of the process, winners and losers. Hopefully a compromise solution can be reached that goes some way to satisfying the desires of the relevant parties. Regardless of the eventual outcome it is incumbent on us as members to give a fair hearing to each side. We must consider all the arguments for and against before reaching a decision and not reach that final decision hastily or without a thorough investigation of all the facts—not innuendo, supposition, rhetoric, fallacy or hearsay. We must be careful to ensure that each side of a debate is heard and has equal opportunity to put its side of the case.

The problem that I have with this legislation is that this basic right to be heard was not allowed to recreational hunters and their representative organisations before this legislation was brought before the House. I have had several representations from Field and Game Australia and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia protesting their effective exclusion from the process. They claim that they were not afforded sufficient opportunity to contribute and that claims by the government of having undertaken extensive public consultation are incorrect—at least as far as they are concerned.

They contend that because of this failure to consult, arguments put forward by supporters of the ban, including the RSPCA, were not able to be challenged as to their veracity or accuracy. They also state

that the figures and studies that were provided to support the imposition of the ban on cruelty grounds are factually inaccurate and have been discredited by the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Canadian governments, by South Australia in 1998 and later by the Victorian and Tasmanian governments as well.

They have raised several serious concerns about the lack of objectivity and the biased nature of advice contained within the briefing notes presented by the Biosecurity, Animal Welfare Unit, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee on 4 February 2005. They also claim that these became the basis of the resolution passed by the welfare committee's chair to the minister for primary industries who then passed them to the minister for the environment and recommended the banning of duck and quail hunting on cruelty grounds. The briefing notes were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

Chief amongst the concerns was that the opinions presented by the recognised animal rights organisations were treated as fact. Their concern was that antihunting groups were well represented but that there was no balancing representation from hunting groups. Another of their concerns was that numerous claims were made during the briefing that were unreferenced and therefore their validity is suspect. Another concern was that there were no figures on wounding rates of quail presented and no studies cited, yet quail have been included in this ban without justification. Another of their concerns was that incorrect figures on declining hunting licences were provided stating that they were declining in every state.

My chief concerns with this bill are the precedent it sets in ignoring due process and the lack of any valid or worthwhile positive conservation outcomes. This legislation ignores and disenfranchises the rights and opinions of a group of Queenslanders and uses a blatantly transparent method to legislate a particular ideology using the ruse of a debate over animal cruelty, the facts of which have neither been substantiated nor conceded. It has politicised the consultative processes that government is duty-bound to undertake and makes a farce of the Premier's claim that his government is open, fair, representative and accountable. It has also somehow managed to not only ignore basic conservation principles, but also to have possibly contributed to the decline in the health and extent of our precious wetlands.

There have been no measures outlined on how the department will deal with the loss of volunteer conservation efforts to preserve those wetlands in private hands. There has been no acknowledgement of the extent of these volunteer works nor of the valuable contribution that they have had on safeguarding and maintaining these areas. The department has not revealed just what management plans it has, if any, to ensure that birds continue to have safe and secure nesting grounds. The department has not revealed what plans it may have to monitor and regulate bird populations in the future. In fact, as a direct result of this bill, the relative worth of duck and quail will effectively decrease leading to a loss of interest in the preservation of the species and possible adverse effects on their viability and diversity.

To counter this appalling lack of a proactive management plan I will move an amendment that attempts to drag the debate back to where it belongs. It will put the ideals of conservation ahead of the expediencies of political manoeuvring and allow the merit or otherwise of the ban to be reviewed and judged by independent arbiters after a trial period. It will allow the real effects of the ban to be tallied and debated on a fair and factual basis.

We all know that the real debate here is about one group using its leverage with the government to try to impose its own philosophies and ideologies on others. The issue here is not wounding rates, the issue is whether everyday Queenslanders retain the right to continue traditional practices. The real issue is about the ramifications of a government willing to legislate away the rights of its citizens for short-term political gain; it is about the politicisation of the consultative processes so important in a democracy; it is about the failure of a government to govern for all its constituents; and it is about its willingness to bow to pressure groups to ensure its political survival. This legislation is not about looking after birds, it is about politics pure and simple.