



Speech by

Rosemary Menkens

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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WILD RIVERS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (3.58 pm): I will make a short contribution to the Wild Rivers and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. I am happy to support this bill because it addresses some very serious issues in the original legislation passed in this House less than 12 months ago. I am dismayed that it is necessary that this bill even needs to be considered.

While I welcome and applaud the amendments contained in the bill it is entirely due to the ineptitude of this government that this bill becomes necessary. Basically all we are doing today is fixing yet another example of this government's incompetence in managing this state's environment and resources.

Members of the opposition pointed out the deficiencies of the original wild rivers legislation when it was first introduced in December last year. Again the then minister was forced to introduce a raft of amendments in a vain attempt to make it workable. It did not present any workable solutions to either environmental or development concerns and this shoddy effort has been recognised with the introduction of this bill. But I always give credit where credit is due. In this case, the changes identified in this bill will certainly make the Wild Rivers Act more workable and fair.

Some of the concerns of stakeholders have been addressed and I believe that, while still ensuring protection for some of our most important and pristine areas, it will allow limited use of and access to the land and its resources. I am also pleased to see that consultation was undertaken with AgForce, the Queensland Resources Council, the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Wilderness Society in relation to the amendments. While there are still ongoing concerns with the act, the amendments do at least address some of the most contentious issues and are generally accepted by those consulted. As shadow minister for the environment I can appreciate any efforts made to protect high-value areas, but conservation does have to be tempered with reality.

As it stood, in the 2005 act cropping areas were forbidden in high-preservation areas, mineral exploration was extremely curtailed and mining effectively banned. Necessary urban infrastructure such as fuel storages and workshops were deemed to be incompatible with high-protection areas and there were significant restrictions placed on other buildings such as homesteads, and even gardening was frowned upon. Local councils had great difficulty sourcing useable quarry and road based materials and traditional grazing and agricultural activities were under threat. Some of the onerous and restrictive conditions imposed under the original act have been eased, but there are still issues of serious concern that could severely impact on the lives and futures of residents of declared areas. We are all familiar with precautionary principles, and in some cases they may be warranted. But the heavy-handed approach taken by this government clearly indicates that this is taken to extremes. The fact is that the opposition did not support the original bill which is plainly obvious in all of the *Hansard* speeches because it was unworkable, and these amendments, while welcome, have not changed our opinion. Much more than this is needed to make the bill workable, fair and environmentally sustainable.

The water moratorium in the cape remains in place and has the potential to kneecap any further growth in the area, as do the completely unnecessary water caps in high-flow areas such as the gulf. Let us by all means preserve our flora and fauna for future generations and conserve and protect our unique environment, but not at any and all costs and certainly not at the expense of the lives and futures of

residents of some of our most remote areas. Practical and planned conservation does not mean locking up huge tracts of country on a mere whim. It does not mean condemning those families and communities—those families and communities who are constituents of the member for Cook—to forego any hope of expanding their operations, building for their futures and forever giving up their rights to enjoy amenities that urban dwellers take for granted.

It is clear that the real conditions many of these people live under are foreign to those responsible for the bill. If it were not so serious it would be a joke that again further consultations are scheduled to be carried out in the middle of the wet season, a time when most of the roads in the cape are impassable and could be for months. This only emphasises how far removed from the real world those behind these measures can be. These are more than just spots on a map; these are homes and towns. The measures and provisions in this bill will affect, often adversely, families and communities for years to come and have the potential to exclude them from any of the advances and benefits available to most other Queenslanders.

We simply cannot exclude such a large area from being able to participate in Queensland's future growth and prosperity. We cannot just lock up such a vast tract of land and forever completely deny access to its resources—social, agriculture and mineral. That is the difference between policy and politics, and that is the difference between the coalition and the Labor government. Our policies take into account the effects of legislative changes on all of Queensland, not just a favoured few. We do not pander to factional sensitivities nor narrow sectional interests.

We believe the management of Queensland's natural resources must be environmentally sustainable in the long term. Natural resource management should also recognise the importance of the natural resource based industries and ensure that those industries can operate in an economically efficient manner. Natural resource management should be a partnership—a partnership between governments, industry, community stakeholders and individual landholders. Most importantly, natural resource decision making should always be based on verifiable scientific facts and accurate, complete and integral data sets. Natural resource decision making should also take into account the great regional variations within Queensland.

I firmly believe the goals of environmental sustainability and economic efficiency can be achieved only by providing landholders with legislative certainty and investment security and I fully support the protection of environmentally significant vegetation while at the same time ensuring sustainable agriculture can continue. I do support the amendments because they address some of the many concerns regarding this legislation but want to clearly state my continuing concerns about the adverse effects this legislation will continue to have on residents and communities in the wild rivers area.