



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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WILD RIVERS LEGISLATION

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (10.03 pm): I want to raise serious concerns about the wild rivers legislation and the implementation of the Wild Rivers Code. On 28 September last year this legislation was pushed through parliament under the pretence of protecting rivers. However, after the development of the code it proves that it had nothing to do with protecting rivers but was designed to end sustainable economic and social development in the affected areas.

The Wild Rivers Code is unworkable and it is hard to believe that some bureaucrat was paid to write this nonsense. The code only allows for a two-metre wide clearing for fence lines and is limited to no road crossings in rivers and creeks, no stock water dams in the swamps and watercourses, no improved pastures, no fertilisers for weed control, no feed supplements for cattle and no longer being able to use mechanical equipment or chemicals in a wild river area to prevent the spread of weeds. The solution in the code only allows a 20-by-20 metre area to be cleared by hand which has to be revegetated back to 100 per cent of its natural state before moving on. This means that it will take every man, woman and child in Australia three years to clear one area of noxious weeds to satisfy the code for one wild river catchment.

These practices have been standard for generations by pastoralists who have managed these rivers and this land sustainably for years. These rivers have been maintained and protected by these people because their livelihoods depend on their survival. Many questions need to be asked. How much influence did the conservation movement and the Wilderness Society have in the development of the code? Why were the stakeholders directly affected by the implementation of the code given only a few months to prepare submissions? Will the submissions from people not directly affected by the implementation of the code be given more weight than the submissions of people who are?

My concern is that the radical conservation movement is in the minister's ear and he is sympathetic to its cause. Those groups that are not directly affected by the implementation of the code have no right to influence or decide the fate of a region that they know little about, do not reside in or even participate in its day-to-day community life. Pastoralists in northern Queensland play an important role by helping to protect our state from a massive feral animal and noxious weed problem and the threat of exotic diseases.

In its June 2002 research report, the Productivity Commission examined the potential social, economic and environmental consequences of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in this country. The commission reports that the worst-case scenario would involve key beef and lamb export markets being closed for 15 months and the cost of a foot-and-mouth disease incursion would be between \$8 billion and \$13 billion of gross domestic product and its consequences would be felt for 10 years after the event. Even an isolated outbreak that was brought rapidly under control was estimated to potentially cost \$2 billion to \$3 billion of gross domestic product. Land management is about improving the land, sowing the good seed, producing the best beef and, in the end, putting the best food on the family table. The wild rivers legislation, just like the Vegetation Management Bill, is antirural, antijobs and has the potential of destroying people's livelihoods.

Time expired.