



Speech by

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WILD RIVERS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (3.28 pm): I rise to speak to the Wild Rivers and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The first wild rivers legislation was introduced on 28 November 2005. This legislation was pushed through parliament under the pretence of protecting rivers. However, after the development of the code it proved 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 in declared areas is completely unworkable. It is hard to believe that a bureaucrat was paid to write that nonsense. I will give members one example of the stupidity of the code for the Staaten River catchment which was designed to stop the use of mechanical equipment and chemicals in wild river areas to prevent the spread of weeds. The solution in the code only allowed a 20 x 20 metre area to be cleared by hand which had to be revegetated back to 100 per cent of its natural state before moving on. It would take every man, woman and child in Australia three years each to clear one area of noxious weeds per year to satisfy the code for one wild river catchment.

These practices have been standard for generations of pastoralists who have sustainably managed these rivers and land for years. These rivers have been maintained and protected by the people because their livelihood depends on their survival. The very people that the wild rivers legislation is trying to kick out of the declared areas are the very people and the only people who are dedicated to the protection of the rivers. These are the ones who manage and control the weeds and pests and look after and keep the rivers clean. It is common sense that if landholders are stopped from participating in river usage then the rivers will become infested with noxious weeds and feral animals. That is very simple. If the people who look after and care for the rivers are kicked out who will keep the weeds and feral pigs down? Will we find the conservation movement out there clearing and cleaning rivers?

Mr Hopper: That's work.

Mr KNUTH: No, it is work. You will never see them out there doing a day's work. They would not have a clue about what is going on in northern Queensland. If members look at a river system where someone has cleared and cleaned the rivers, it is clear of rubber vine, lantana and Noogoora burr. Have members opposite ever seen what a wild river looks like? It is full of rubber vine, Noogoora burr, lantana, wild pigs and feral cats. That is what a wild river represents. I do not believe that anyone from the government benches would have a clue what wild rivers are all about.

There is a legislative requirement on mining companies to not damage rivers. However, landowners look after rivers because their livelihood depends on it. There are better ways to protect the river and the gulf. The goal of protection has always been achieved through various groups such as Landcare and the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group which are made up of grassroots people who provide the region with sound, logical advice.

Declaring a river will not reap the benefits that the so-called experts are telling us it will. Many of these experts have never lived, participated in or got their hands dirty with rural work and would not have a clue about local knowledge of the region's environment. You will never see members of the conservation movement cleaning up rubber vine, lantana or doing something about the feral cat. Have members seen what the feral cat does to native species? The conservation movement will be out there protesting for us to do something to stop these people from looking after these rivers, but members will never see anyone from

the conservation movement getting their hands dirty with real work. They would not have a clue about hard work yet they like to get in the government's ear. The government listens to the conservation movement—the greenies—and they would not have a clue.

While I recognise that there have been improvements to this legislation, there are a number of questions that need to be answered about the legitimacy of the current mapping and data. Many of the designated high-preservation areas are based on large-scale data liable to produce significant errors on the ground. Neither the department nor the landowners have had the time or resources to groundproof the boundaries and special features of the proposed declaration. As an example, Van Rook Creek has been included in the Staaten River catchment. However, historically—and scaled data used in property planning has confirmed—Van Rook Creek is a part of the Gilbert River catchment. Most of the water that flows into the Van Rook Creek comes from the Einasleigh River. The Van Rook Creek runs into the sea north of the Gilbert. The major water flow breaks up into the Gilbert.

I call on the minister to properly investigate this inaccuracy and other inaccuracies that will exist when relying on such unreliable data. I ask the minister to look into that because this is a very important issue. We have a creek that has been declared in another declared area when it should be a part of the Gilbert River catchment. This is just one example of the unsound use of the department's spatial database used to develop the proposed declarations.

Mr O'Brien: Spatial.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you.

Mr O'Brien: I will read it for you, if you like.

Mr KNUTH: Where did you learn that word? Did you learn it up in Cooktown, in Cairns, in the dictionary or down here in parliament?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Perhaps the speaker could address his remarks through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. Concerns in relation to validity and accuracy have been acknowledged by Geoscience Australia and Land & Water Australia. Pastoralists in north Queensland play an important role by helping to protect our state from feral animals and noxious weed problems and the spread 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 reported that the worst-case scenario would involve key beef and land export markets being closed for 15 months and that the cost of foot-and-mouth disease incursion would be between \$8 billion and \$13 billion in gross domestic product. The consequences would be felt for nearly 10 years after the event. Even the isolated outbreak that was brought rapidly under control was estimated to potentially cost \$2 billion to \$3 billion in gross domestic product.

Land management is about improving the land, sowing the good seed, producing the best feed and in the end putting the best food on the table. I take great pride in bringing that to the attention of the House.