



Speech by

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.33 pm): How much can a koala bear? The previous speaker, the member for Murrumba, made some sensible comments, particularly about planning and development. It is sometimes difficult for developers if they are developing a small area. If it is a large area then they can put together a substantial, sensible, practical area for wildlife. The houses may then be a little closer together in order to get an economic return and look after the environment.

I think in most cases it is best to have large areas of development. I often think about the foresight of the forefathers who developed Toowoomba and put in the big parks like Queens Park and, to a lesser extent, Laurel Bank Park. Today in many subdivisions we see little pocket handkerchief sized parks with a couple of swings and not much room. Often I think it would be better to have a big suburban park which could have a couple of sports fields, the botanical gardens, forests, picnic areas and wildlife areas. Something of substance would be better than the sum total of all the little ones.

In Brisbane there are areas like Toohy Forest at the back of Moorooka. That is a wonderful area that has been saved. Frogs Rock is at one end of the mountain. As kids we used to play up there. There were caves and all sorts of things there. In Sydney there are areas like the Sir Edward Hallstrom Reserve around the Hawkesbury to the north, the Georges River reserves to the south and the Blue Mountains.

Around that city there are some very big national parks which allow wildlife to live a free and happy life. I heard the previous speaker talk about koalas in the suburbs. That is lovely if we can get it. But that is fraught with great difficulty because of cars, trucks, dogs, cats, electric wires and so on. In a national park there are substantial areas where the wildlife can live a very good life.

We are lucky to have the redwood park right along the eastern escarpment of Toowoomba, the Great Dividing Range. It is a magnificent area for wildlife. It has some problems with introduced species, in particular vegetation. Camphor laurels and those types of trees are on the edge of the range.

I want to speak about the way this bill allows for the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act 1981 to override the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1994. I think that makes a lot of sense when emergency situations arise. We have seen it just recently with equine influenza. This was particularly so at Morgan Park, Warwick, where the first outbreaks occurred.

Whilst I have been critical of certain things that have happened, I do acknowledge, too, that on the ground DPI&F staff have worked terribly hard. The Department of Communities people have worked very hard in the one-stop shops. A lot of lessons have been learned out of this. They are the sorts of lessons that need to be applied if we have future disease outbreaks like mad cow disease or foot-and-mouth disease.

We have seen some horrendous situations occur in Great Britain. There is the human tragedy of people seeing burned herds that have been developed for generations—the huge funeral pyres and the burning and destruction of animals. There were so many issues there with the fires and the surrounding

problems for neighbours. It is important to get those things done as humanely and quickly as possible to, firstly, overcome the particular disease and, secondly, return the area to a desirable environment.

There were problems at Morgan Park. The EPA went in there to help. It was a difficult issue for all involved at the start, because it involved people and the animals that they love. They all wanted to stay there and look after them. If there is going to be a quarantine area then the quarantine area should be a quarantine area and there should be the absolute minimum of human movement. Every additional human movement means a greater risk. People coming and going to restaurants or to hotels and the media or the Premier and my good friend and colleague the local member coming in is an issue. That added to the difficulty in trying to contain that illness.

There were other issues with regard to Morgan Park. The disease became wind borne and was carried by marsupials, flies, birds or anything with fur or hair such as people's coats, hair, clothes and trucks. These all added to the complications. The EPA was there and there were some issues to do with trying to put a bund around the area because of the threat of rain. The disease was little understood at that time compared to what it is now, some eight weeks later. There were issues with the septic systems which were not designed to handle that many people for that long. The waste was going to be pumped into trucks and taken to the council sewerage system, but then it was realised that the council sewerage system was piped to spray and irrigate the paddocks of one of Australia's biggest thoroughbred studs on the outskirts of Warwick.

There were all of these complications and issues that occurred where the EPA was involved, but at the time the overriding and most important issue was the control of the disease and its eradication. There were similar issues with the citrus canker outbreak in central Queensland where there had to be mass clearing of the citrus plantations with huge fires because they all had to be burnt. In some cases the native citrus in surrounding areas and surrounding paddocks also had to be destroyed. That is a good, sensible inclusion in this bill. As long as it is based on the principle of trying to eradicate as quickly as possible the particular disease, then it is well worthwhile.

The issue of flying foxes has been raised because the bill imposes a massive fine of \$75,000 or one year's jail maximum in the event of people interfering with the roosts of flying foxes. The member for Charters Towers has spoken very strongly about this issue because this is a huge problem in Charters Towers. Most towns in Queensland do not have the problem of flying foxes. The member for Ipswich spoke about the problem at Woodend and the fact that, fortunately, it is mostly down the bottom end of a valley and it may be possible to grow other vegetation for them to move to. That will take a while, because flying foxes like great big trees. What attracts them in Charters Towers is the huge trees in the main park. A feature of Charters Towers is the big mango trees around that very old city. I have seen it firsthand with Shane Knuth, the local member, and the damage, the filth and the mess that results in that park is just unreal. Worse than that is what happens around some of the houses. Families and children just want to be able to lead a normal life. These flying foxes leave absolute filth and mess and it is not what anybody would want to endure hoping to live a normal life in a community.

A very significant and horrendous maximum fine or jail term has been put in place if people disturb a roost. Roosts can only be disturbed by those who are authorised to do so. The frustration for the people of Charters Towers is that the EPA will not do anything about it. We would not need this legislation if the EPA were a little bit sensible in some circumstances and did something about them. Flying foxes are very smart creatures; they are intelligent and they learn quickly. Some people in here have been warned and warned and they take a while to learn, but after one or two warnings flying foxes are gone. I understand that with the use of bird fright, which is designed to frighten pest levels of birds from crops and so on, it does not take long for them to get the message and move away and shift their roost to somewhere else. I am so supportive of what has been said in this debate by our shadow minister. Charters Towers is a great example of people's lives and the amenity of a city being destroyed by a species. Whilst it may be a protected species, it can get to the point where its intrusion into a community can make it become vermin-like. That is what has happened there. A pragmatic approach to the problem is required in Charters Towers and other areas.

There was a similar problem recently in northern New South Wales with a colony that moved into a large tree in a school ground. Naturally, people want to see those sorts of colonies moved on. That should happen in a sensible and pragmatic way. No-one on this side disagrees with the fact that flying foxes are a native species and that wherever possible they should have habitat and should be a part of the ecology of our state and that they play as important a role as any other animal or bird life. We all support that. But when it comes to issues such as these, there has to be a willingness by the EPA to fix it up and clear them out and then we would not need this sort of draconian legislation because people are frustrated and have had enough and do something to move a colony on.

Other members have spoken about lyssavirus. When I was health minister there were particular issues regarding lyssavirus. It was just following the Hendra tragedy when Vic Rail died and a number of horses died or were put down. Lyssavirus is part of the family of viruses that includes Ebola, a dreadful

African disease. Basically what happens with lyssavirus and that whole family of viruses is that your brain melts down. It is an awful disease, illness and death. As well as the Hendra issue, there was another fatality in Mackay. There were two people walking along a footpath on the Gold Coast who were swooped on by a bat which scratched their heads. There was a mass panic at the time and they had to undergo blood tests. I remember it well.

Just recently in Peachester there was the death of a horse. A young vet there in a practice diagnosed what she thought was the Hendra virus because of the frothing of the nose of the horse and other things and the tragic way the horse died. Subsequently, in a report that was done it was said that it was not that, but I do not think they were all that sure because it was a long while after the horse had died. But there were warnings by the department of primary industries not to put horse feed containers under trees where bats were either roosting or feeding for the reason that lyssavirus, if it is present and when it is present, is spread by the dropped placentas or the urine of bats. Naturally, people have some concern with regard to bat colonies getting too close or becoming a part of a housing area or a part of a horse area. For that reason, there needs to be some balance in moving these colonies on and some willingness to move the colonies on.

I fully agree, as I said at the outset, with the comments made by the member for Murrumba. There need to be decent, proper areas for wildlife. It is a fact of life that 90 per cent of Brisbane was virtually clear-felled for the 1½ million people who live here. Suburbs like Moorooka and Tarragindi were cleared by bulldozers and new estates put in. That is where people live. That is a fact of life. That is what happened. Now is the time to ensure that future developments have, wherever possible, a balance with good reserved areas. But people do have to live somewhere, too. Particularly in the case of Charters Towers where it is an absolute problem, every consideration should be given to this issue. We have a new minister. I hope that the new minister can look at this issue. I am sure that the member for Charters Towers would be happy to take him around the city to have a good talk to people and to see firsthand what the problem is. I am sure there is an answer to it.

Flying foxes are a native species. Similarly, there are problems with dingoes around the state, particularly in sheep growing areas. There are problems in some of the areas where there are diminishing numbers of sheep. The management of dogs, which was formerly undertaken by sheep producers, is not undertaken to the same extent when cattle producers take over that land. There still are problems for the cattle producers. What the dingoes do is horrific. It might sound tough to be poisoning dogs with 1080, or shooting them, but a dog can creep up the back of a cow that is calving and bite the nose off a calf as it is being born. It is just terrible what happens when the dogs kill sheep and lambs. I think the department needs to continue to manage the dingo problem and never to let it get out of hand.

The dingo problem has threatened to get out of hand in Queensland. In parts of northern New South Wales it is well and truly out of hand because that state has not recognised that the dog problem has to be managed in national parks with baiting programs and the surrounding pastoral areas need to be fully supported. The dogs that come out of national parks cause these problems. If there are enough roos and wallabies around, the dogs will not attack the cattle because, in their natural environment, the dogs live on the older roos or the young roos. That is the harshness of nature, but when national parks are not properly managed and proper dog management programs are not implemented, that is when things get out of hand.

I have heard some of my other colleagues talk about the problems with feral pigs. If there is one thing that is going to be a real problem for Queensland it is feral pigs, particularly in the north of this state. I know that monitoring pigs are being kept on the cape to check to see if some of these mosquito-borne viruses are coming down from New Guinea, but if foot-and-mouth disease ever got into some of those areas where we have cloven hoofed animals such as pigs, I do not know how we would ever eradicate it. The opposition is a great supporter of national parks. The only criticism that has ever come from us is that they need to be well managed in terms of pest animals and pest plants. That is important for the proper partnership of humans with our natural environment.

Previously I heard a member interject and talk about the lungfish in the Mary River. That is one of the great links with the time marine life transformed into terrestrial life. The lungfish species is thousands of years old—if not older. They are a very rare and endangered fish. The government seems to think that it will just put a research centre on the Mary River and that will fix the issue and everyone will be happy. I suggest we put a research centre at Charters Towers and give them a really good hand to get those pesky pests out of Charters Towers.