



Speech by

Rosa Lee Long

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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WILD RIVERS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (3.45 pm): I rise to speak to the Wild Rivers and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. This bill is presented as another fix-up job because the notices this government issued for the declaration of the Staaten, Hinchinbrook, Settlement, Gregory, Morning Inlet and Fraser river systems were flawed seriously enough that their validity was questioned.

Of course, if the first step in the process of declaring wild rivers was invalid then the entire process became invalid. That was a risk that this government decided it did not want to take. We are here today, just three months since the last time this legislation was before the House for correction, fixing mistakes yet again. The first time was to make the legislation somewhat more workable; this time it is to gloss over errors in process. One has to wonder how many other mistakes this government is going to make on this vexed issue. What is galling about this to far-northerners is that this government keeps claiming it consults, that it involves stakeholders and ensures the community is heard. But these claims are wide open to questioning and the waters are very murky indeed surrounding this debate.

During the recent community cabinet visit to my electorate the Premier was reported as saying that the farm lobby group AgForce had ticked off on the issue. I have a copy of a letter from the president of AgForce, Mr Peter Kenny, which reads—

Any assertion that AgForce is in any way supportive of the wild rivers legislation is totally incorrect.

At the same time the Premier is reported as having said that only one pastoralist with an ideological bent had objected. Again Mr Kenny stated—

AgForce member, Barry Keough, was right when he stated that you would be lucky to find one grazier who agreed with wild rivers.

There is a huge difference between the government's claims that wild rivers is widely supported and the enormous opposition to it from those it affects, including the Indigenous population.

Before I go any further, it is interesting that the president of Agforce claims that he has never supported wild rivers when in actual fact we all know that the National Party did support the initial legislation.

Mr O'Brien: You did not divide either.

Ms LEE LONG: I opposed the legislation.

Mr O'Brien: That is not what the record shows.

Ms LEE LONG: You can have a look at my speech and you will see where I opposed it. The legislation is still being rammed down people's throats just so that city folk and urban cowboys can feel warm and fuzzy about something they know nothing about—so that they can feel warm and fuzzy while they clear and expand their urban areas. That is what is going on here.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Would the member direct her comments through the chair.

Ms LEE LONG: I do acknowledge that there is a legitimate interest in having our environment protected from rampant overdevelopment such as we see happening every day in south-east Queensland and in most other urbanised areas. However, while never-ending kilometres of trees are cleared and bitumen, tar and cement takes their place, other parts of the state are faced with this kind of ridiculous legislation.

In addition to the six river systems that are being declared in this amendment there are 13 other catchments in the cape that are now under moratoriums as a prelude to being declared themselves. This will expand the wild rivers process. After the cape and gulf country it could be the whole of western Queensland itself. After all, there have been about 60 rivers mentioned so far as targets of this process.

The wild rivers impact will be similar to when World Heritage was slapped on to the far north, including parts of the tablelands. It devastated industry and obliterated many, many jobs. As a result of that we now import those same products from Third World countries. Not only is this area facing wild rivers impacting on their livelihoods, they are also facing the double whammy of World Heritage listing over the area by the federal government. While the minister in his second reading speech discussed the listing of risk plants, it should be noted that it is rhetoric because the truth is that in the whole of the cape there is only one person dedicated to pest plant control and that person is employed by the Cook Shire Council and not the state government. This shows the real commitment to environmental issues by this government.

Those in areas affected by this bill cannot take any comfort from the integrity of the declaration process because, as we can see today, even when the process is wrong it is going to be rubber-stamped thanks to the ALP majority in this place. The technical flaw in this case was in the very earliest stages of the process and so could potentially have affected any stakeholder input. However, stakeholders were not advised and, in fact, no member of the public was advised. As the explanatory notes say, 'Members of the public have not been consulted.' So not only do we have a mistake, but we have a deliberate process of hiding that mistake from the very people who will be affected.

While this government was busy erecting a wall of secrecy around this, it did find the time to ask itself 12 times—that is, each of the 12 different departments—if it was doing the right thing. Of course, 12 times it told itself that, yes, it was. Yet in the same explanatory notes the terms 'community consultation', 'stakeholders', 'public comment', 'transparency', 'extensive consultation process' were used seven times in just four pages.

Some of these related to earlier processes but nevertheless clearly show how desperate this government is to appear as if it is actually talking to people and actually listening to their input. But, of course, it does not talk to the people and it does not listen to the stakeholders. That is not just my assertion; I am frequently receiving representations, phone calls and even in the streets having this issue raised with me and it is almost universally in opposition to this proposal.

This broad opposition is perfectly summed up in an article in the *Advertiser*, a local newspaper, following the community cabinet meeting where protesters were vocal in their opposition to the wild rivers process and the brutal disregard for their interests on this issue. The article says in part—

Graziers Scott and Anna Harris, from Strathmore Station northwest of Georgetown, said they may no longer be able to develop their property for future cattle enterprise.

"Our biggest burden is that we've come to a standstill over this Wild Rivers," Mr Harris said.

"Everything (cattle and staff) will have to be scaled back.

"They (government) send me dummy letters saying the department will look after us but we've had no consultation. As soon as we throw savage questions at them, they run and hide."

Mr Beattie said he gave an election promise to protect Wild Rivers but graziers said the Government was locking it up.

"We will not be able to develop the property and it will be a slow death," Mr Harris said.

He said if the Government implemented the legislation, he would be forced to relocate because there would be no income from the land.

"We'll go to the Northern Territory or some other state where we're welcome," he said. "We manage the land and we keep the feral pests and weeds out and now they say we can't develop it."

Cook Shire Council Mayor Bob Sullivan said there was not a council in the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Council Cape York area that supported Wild Rivers legislation.

Abingdon Down Station owner Barry Keough and Highbury Station owner Collin Hughes said the legislation was ripping graziers of their rights.

"We'll be in the time warp with Wild Rivers," Mr Keough said. "They're closing the country down by stealth."

Hopevale Shire Council Mayor and ROCCY chairman Greg McLean said there were too many organisations representing the Cape's people.

"The residents of Cape York are to be kept in light and consulted, not the Cape York organisation that is based in Cairns that claims to represent them," Cr McLean said. "The residents need to have a voice."

The wild rivers legislation is a lethal millstone around the future of Cape York and it is anathema to the people who will be affected by it. I will be opposing the bill as I have done before.