



Speech by

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BRIGALOW STATE FOREST, GOLD FOSSICKING

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (9.39 pm): This morning I tabled a petition with 569 signatories calling on the state government to allow access to the Brigalow State Forest for gold fossickers to continue to enjoy a hobby that is one of our great Australian pastimes and ways of life. The Clermont district has a history rich in gold deposits and discoveries, and every year the community celebrates its history with the Goldfest celebrations that bring hundreds of people into the town to fossick and enjoy the lifestyle this rural community has to offer. This decision to lock up forests and deny access will have a significant impact on fossickers and the economy of towns that rely on fossickers who travel from all over the country to grasp hold of a pick, pan and detector to have a go.

In other states, prospectors have good access to state controlled land and are able to pursue this hobby. The lock-up of millions of hectares of Queensland state forests will seriously impact on communities such as Clermont which actively promote the activities as tourist attractions and benefit from the many fossickers who travel to pursue their hobby.

I received a letter from a fossicker who travels to Clermont each winter and is dismayed that in this day and age where obesity is such an issue enjoyable outdoor activities such as fossicking are not available to ordinary people because of the possibility of state forests being locked up. These communities relish the opportunity to showcase their towns. They do not have the multimillion-dollar cinema complexes, massive shopping centres or giant sports stadiums but they have their history, and they offer opportunities for visitors to partake in activities that allow access to bushland with the added advantage of possibly finding some gold.

Tourism is the major source of income in many rural and regional towns. Instead of hindering a community's ability to offer something unique, this government should be encouraging the initiatives these communities show to attract visitors and therefore boost the economy. I would ask the minister to look clearly at the names of the signatories. Every state in this country is represented on this petition. There are even signatories on the petition from New Zealand. This sends a clear message that, firstly, Clermont has done a great job in selling the prospecting angle to the tourist market and, secondly, that locking up the state forests—state forests that belong to Queenslanders—is destroying the viability of an industry that encourages and entices participants from the local community, Queensland, Australia and all over the world.

With fossicking, it is all about going to a creek bed, grabbing a little pick, picking at all the cracks and crevices and dirt, finding some gold, using a metal detector, using a pot and pan and polishing a nugget when you do find one. This is very important for these people. They need access to do this stuff. So on behalf of the Clermont community, the tourists and the fossickers, we call on the minister to make provisions to enable them the access to fossick in local state forests.