



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

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## **WILD RIVERS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Charters Towers—NPA) (3.25 pm): I rise to speak to the Wild Rivers and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The first wild rivers legislation was introduced on 28 September 2005. This legislation was pushed through parliament under the pretence of protecting rivers. However, the development of the code 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 was completely unworkable in declared areas and it was hard to believe that some bureaucrat was paid to write that nonsense.

**Mr O'Brien:** Why did you support it?

**Mr Horan:** Listen to a real north Queenslander. You might learn something.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Would the member for Toowoomba South return to his seat if he wishes to make comment.

**Mr KNUTH:** I will give members just one example in the Staaten River catchment of the stupidity of the code, which was designed to stop the use of mechanical equipment or chemicals in a wild river area to prevent the spread of weeds. The code only allowed a 20-metre by 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. This meant that it would have taken every man, woman and child in Australia three years to clear one area of noxious weeds each to satisfy the code for one wild river catchment. Now the government has developed another code which is just as pitiful as the last one.

These management practices have been the standard for generations of pastoralists who have managed these rivers and who have kept this land sustainable for years. These rivers have been maintained and protected by these people because their livelihoods depend on their survival. The very people who the wild rivers legislation is trying to kick out of declared areas are the same people and the only people who are dedicated to the protection of the rivers. They manage the weed control and the pest control, and they look after the rivers and keep them clean. This is common sense. If we stop landowners from participating in river usage then rivers will become infested with noxious weeds and feral animals. This is logic and you do not have to be Einstein to work it out.

Mining companies have a legislative requirement not to damage rivers. However, landowners look after the rivers because their livelihoods depend on it. Aboriginal groups are dreading this legislation. Their fear is what we already know—that is, this legislation will result in poor future prospects for them, removing any form of development, removing any chance of employment and removing opportunities to invest in the development of the most important piece of land, and that is the land one kilometre each side of the river system.

There are better ways to protect the rivers in the gulf. The goal of protection has already been achieved through various groups such as Landcare and the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group. They are the grassroots people who provide the region with sound, logical advice. Declaring a river is not going to reap the benefits that the so-called experts are telling us it will. Many of these experts have never lived nor participated nor got their hands dirty with real work and would not have a clue about local

knowledge or the region's environment. You will never see members of the conservation movement or writers of this rubbish legislation out there clearing rubber vine or lantana, because it is hard work.

**Mrs Sullivan:** Absolute nonsense.

**Mr KNUTH:** There are a number of questions that need to be answered. I would just like to say that members opposite have never seen a wild river and would not have a clue.

**Mr LEE:** I rise on a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: The member is misleading the House. Many members on this side have in fact seen wild rivers many times.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Mr KNUTH:** If you had seen a wild river, you would be opposing this legislation. But members opposite would not have a clue and the people up there could not care less—

**Mr LEE:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member directly addressed me and made a comment that if I 'had seen a wild river' et cetera. I find that an offensive and untrue proposition. I ask him to immediately withdraw it.

**Mr KNUTH:** I will withdraw that comment.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you. Please continue.

**Mr KNUTH:** The people up there could not care less, and they are quite happy for you to build sports stadiums and spend money on multimillion-dollar car races and shopping centres.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Would the member address his comments through the chair?

**Mr KNUTH:** I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. They are happy for the government to do that, but why try to take away their livelihood, why stop them from developing, why stop them from improving their land, why stop them from being productive? They are not out there trying to make the government's life a misery, so why is the government out there trying to make their lives a misery? What have they done wrong? Why doesn't the government get up there and talk to them? They are very approachable, down-to-earth, hardworking people, but here the government are thinking, 'We'll introduce this and we'll protect our rivers.' The government would not even have a clue.

A number of questions need to be answered about the legitimacy of current mapping and data. Many of these designated high-preservation areas are based on large-scale data which is liable to produce scientific errors on the ground. Neither the department nor the landowners have had the time or the resources to ground truth the boundaries and special features of the proposed declaration. As the member for Darling Downs said, an example is that Vanrook Creek has been included in the Staaten River area. It is very important that the minister listens to this. The Vanrook Creek has been included in the Staaten River catchment. However, historical and scaled data used in property planning has confirmed that Vanrook Creek is a part of the Gilbert River catchment. We flew over the site. We could see as clear as day that the Vanrook Creek is a part of the Gilbert River catchment and not the Staaten River catchment, so that has to be removed. We do not want wild rivers, full stop. We would like it removed and thrown out. We do not have the numbers here to do that, so we want the minister to look at that Vanrook Creek and throw that out.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Would members please desist interjecting?

**Mr KNUTH:** Government members should ask the Aboriginal people in their electorates whether they support this legislation. Most of the water that flows in the Vanrook Creek comes from the Einasleigh River, and Vanrook Creek runs into the sea north of Gilbert River. The minister needs to address that.

Pastoralists in northern Queensland play an important role by helping to protect our state from massive feral animal problems, noxious weed problems and the threat of exotic diseases. Landowners and pastoralists take their time, spend their money and make sacrifices to clean those river systems. No-one else does this. If the government kicks them out, who will do it? The conservation movement? The green movement? Who is going to get up there and clean those rivers? They will become 'wild' rivers—wild rivers full of wild pigs, noxious weeds and rubber vine. Does the government have an answer to that? Who will clean the rivers? It will not be the government members and there will be no-one else to do it either.

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 lamb export markets being closed for 15 months, that the cost of a foot-and-mouth disease incursion would be between \$8 billion and \$13 billion of gross domestic product, and that its consequences would be felt for nearly 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 to give people a good steak—a good rib fillet, a good T-bone—and, if you are a vegetarian, healthy beans, potato and rice. The wild rivers legislation is antirural, it is anticlean rivers, it supports the increase of feral animals and noxious weeds, it is draconian and it destroys people's livelihoods. I take great pride in opposing this legislation.