



Speech by

Ted Malone

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.31 pm): I rise to speak on the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. Firstly, it is a pleasure to have my old mate across the chamber in charge of this legislation. However, I have to say that I am disappointed with the legislation in that there are some aspects of it I cannot support. There are many aspects I can support, but I am concerned about the direction the bill is going in terms of wildlife. I have no problem with protected species being looked after in protected areas such as national parks and other areas in our state, but I have real concerns about the fact that more and more bats are encroaching on urban land. After having lived with those animals over a long period of time around lush crops such as mangoes and lychees et cetera, where farmers are providing watering systems for big areas of cropping trees coming into fruit, I can totally understand that that is attractive to flying foxes and such species and they therefore migrate to those areas. As I said, that is totally understandable. However, the government has now put in place legislation whereby people will be fined a tremendous amount of money for a minimal amount of interference. A fine of \$7,500 is beyond the pale. The legislation provides no means for people to protect themselves, be they farmers, commercial growers, landholders or townspeople, where the bats have encroached on their properties.

There have been several instances in my electorate where this has been a problem. Other members have spoken about other areas where this is a problem—areas such as Charters Towers, and I will speak about that later. In my electorate the North Eton Bowls Club had such a problem with nesting flying foxes in the trees around the clubhouse that the branches broke off the trees, there was faeces on the ground and the noise and the smell were unbearable. The North Eton Bowls Club is not a big bowls club but is trying to maintain its profitability. It is almost impossible to get anybody to visit and play bowls at that club because of the bats. We made numerous pleas to the department to move those bats on, but those pleas fell on deaf ears. Quite frankly, there is still a problem there now.

I am sure there are ways of humanely moving these animals on to other areas. If somebody does a terrible thing by trying to move these animals on, they are going to be fined a huge amount of money. My electorate secretary and her husband stopped at Charters Towers overnight and said that it was the worst experience they had had in their lives. They were in a motel with the bats screeching overhead, faeces all over the lawns and cars and a stench coming through the air-conditioning systems. Members in the House know that the member for Charters Towers has been raising this issue in this place the whole time he has been here. However, we do not seem to be able to get any understanding whatsoever from the department as to how people can move the bats on. There are huge areas of national park that they could go into. We really do have to get a handle on this issue.

I also raise the issue of wild pigs, wild dogs and dingoes. I heard a government member say that it is the role of councils to look after those issues. Sarina Shire Council does a marvellous job with its dog and weeds inspector. I do not think that is his official title, but Michael Tuckett does a marvellous job in trying to get a handle on the 1080 baiting program to control the dog population. The real hassle in an area that is within five kilometres of another house, a school or a township is that it is impossible to use 1080 baiting.

There is no real other way of doing it, and of course shooting becomes an impossibility when the dogs are close to a township. In my electorate sheep farmers are finding that every night two or three sheep are being taken by dogs. It is almost impossible for those people to get some control. Particularly through the lambing season, they suffer horrific losses. They have made calls to the department and the council. As I said, Michael Tuckett tries to do what he can, but it is a real issue.

We think we have some real problems with equine influenza, but I can tell you that if we get foot-and-mouth disease in this country the pig population will spread it all over Queensland. We do not seem to have any mechanisms in place to control pigs. I suggest that we should be looking at bounties on pigs. Professional young people are doing a great job of collecting pigs. However, it is not that remunerative for them to do. There should be some sort of encouragement for them to collect bigger numbers or even get commercial in order to reduce the number of pigs not only in our national parks but also throughout Queensland. My son-in-law came across about 100 pigs in his cane paddock—it is just ridiculous—and that is fairly open country. It is not up against hill country so much. It is a real problem. If we do get foot-and-mouth disease, there is no way of ever controlling it.

I congratulate the shadow minister for looking at the technical aspects of the bill, as she has done a really good job of explaining the bill. I think it was important to raise the issues that I and other members have raised. This is an important issue for the people of Queensland in terms of the environmental control of animals, particularly protected animals.