



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

Hansard Wednesday, 8 October 2008

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## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)**

**Mr KNUTH** (Charters Towers—LNP) (12.19 pm): I rise to speak to the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill provides amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Act 2001, the Integrated Planning Act 1997, the Mineral Resources Act 1989, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Wild Rivers Act 2005. In his second reading speech the minister states—

Many of the changes in this bill are based on a clear principle: local governments will be responsible for managing environmental nuisance and minor water pollution while the EPA will continue to be responsible for managing more serious cases of environmental harm.

I would like to bring to the House's attention an environmental disaster involving a toxic cocktail released from the Mount Leyshon goldmine site into major creeks, rivers and tributaries near Charters Towers during heavy rain on 15 January in which the EPA was invisible. I hope the minister will be able to address this matter, because we need to have the responsibility of the EPA clarified. The Mount Leyshon goldmine is owned by Leyshon Resources Ltd and has been inactive since 2001. Newmont Mining Corporation is responsible for all site maintenance, and the site has not yet been rehabilitated.

The contamination came from the overflow of at least five of the mine's stormwater ponds, highly contaminated skats and flowed into nearby creeks such as Puzzler, Clarke, Two Mile, Seventy Mile and other tributaries and then into the Broughton River, which flows into the Burdekin River. After the contamination outbreak, Newmont Mining warned a small number of landowners in close vicinity of the site to get their livestock out of the creeks and not to drink the evidently contaminated water. What the company failed to do was warn up to 100 families further downstream who relied on the water for all domestic livestock and agricultural purposes that their water had the potential to be contaminated. Most alarming is that the company advised the EPA on 16 January—the day after—yet the EPA was invisible up to 20 days after the outbreak.

It was unbelievable that families were drinking, bathing and swimming in this water for almost 20 days after the incident which the EPA knew about but did nothing about. During this period there were reports of children with stomach upsets, bird deaths, dead plovers, dead finches, dead galahs, and still families were never made aware of it. The EPA made excuses that it could not get through because floodwaters had cut access to the area, yet there was a bitumen road right to the mine site and access was possible within two days. The mining company immediately used a helicopter to access the contaminated spill. With Treasury's resources and the ability of departments to access helicopters and four-wheel drives, I cannot see why the EPA found access an insurmountable problem.

The potential risk factor to human health should be a matter requiring urgent action. I suggest that reports of harm or distress to flying foxes would have an army of EPA heavies swarming the town. If the EPA is going to take on the responsibility of major things like this, we want to ensure that they fulfil the duty for which they were put there in the first place.

**An opposition member** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** Yes, a balance. It says here that the EPA will continue to be responsible for managing more serious cases of environmental harm. As we can see, this is not a good example of good management. This definitely needs to be brought to the attention of the House. The minister in his second reading speech states—

... local governments will be responsible for managing environmental nuisance and minor water pollution while the EPA will continue to be responsible for managing more serious cases of environmental harm.

I would ask the minister what category flying foxes come under. Is it the responsibility of the council, or is it the responsibility of the EPA? I know that the two flying fox species in Charters Towers, which are the black and reds, are non-threatened species under the federal government's biodiversity act. Therefore, it is a state government responsibility to remove the flying foxes. Yet the state government has done very little regarding the flying foxes. Whose responsibility is it when it comes to flying foxes destroying our pristine trees? Is it the council's responsibility or is it the EPA's? Obviously they have been flapping around and roosting in our community for seven years. All we are asking is that the minister come to Charters Towers and not talk about a bat habitat but take a strong stance and say, 'We will do something.' I cannot see what the problem is.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Charters Towers, can you return to the bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** This is a part of the bill, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like the minister to clarify whose responsibility it is to protect the—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Charters Towers, would you please return to the bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** I will. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The minister also states in his second reading speech—

The bill also amends the Nature Conservation Act 1992 to formalise the status of the independent scientific advisory committee established to assess the impacts of horse riding on the south-east Queensland trail network announced by the government last December. This delivers on our commitment for detailed, ongoing monitoring by independent scientists of the trails themselves and adjacent areas.

The minister further states—

In addition to identifying impacts, the review process includes a requirement to consider how any identified significant adverse impacts can be addressed. Ultimately, if the impacts cannot be managed, a trail could be removed from the horse-riding network.

The bill underpins the important role of expert and impartial advice by specifying that the required assessments must be carried out by a scientific advisory committee consisting of experts in relevant fields, such as conservation biology, freshwater ecology, social science, soil science, sustainable recreation and weed management.

I feel sorry for horse riders, because horse riding is an Australian way of life. This country was built on the back of the horse. I cannot see why it is such a crime to ride horses in a national park. The biggest problem that national parks have—and probably the biggest environmental catastrophe besides the cane toad and the feral cat—is the feral pig. Just one pig can tear up a quarter acre of land like a rotary hoe along the banks of the rivers in pristine national parks. I cannot understand why the government is concentrating on horse riding. The greatest crime horse riders can commit at the moment is riding a horse in a national park.

A similar issue cost Goss government back in 1996 when he tried to ban fishing in national parks. I cannot understand why the government is so obsessed with kicking people out of national parks. The government spends hundreds of millions of dollars buying up these national parks which become a breeding ground for feral animals and noxious weeds. One of our great Australian pastimes is horse riding. It is something which this country was founded upon, and yet the government wants to set up this committee which will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to assess the environmental impact these horse riders are having. This is absolutely ridiculous. Have members seen what feral pigs do with turtle eggs? Have they seen what feral pigs do with cassowary eggs? Have they seen the soil erosion feral pigs cause? Why is the government not concentrating on a bigger problem rather than horse riders? I wanted to bring that to the attention of the House and hopefully the minister can address that.