



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Hansard Wednesday, 1 September 2010

HORSE RIDING, NATIONAL PARKS

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (9.40 pm): Yesterday I tabled a non-conforming petition of 3,864 signatures and I now table an extra 325 non-conforming e-petitions and 199 non-conforming signatures, which equates to 4,387 signatures of Tablelands residents who are completely opposed to the closure of horse-riding trails in Far North Queensland.

Tabled paper: Non-conforming e-petition regarding horse riding in national parks [\[2875\]](#).

Tabled paper: Non-conforming paper petition regarding horse riding in national parks [\[2876\]](#).

The petition calls for the minister to support healthy lifestyles so that Australians can maintain a connection to the culture and freedom of this country by continuing existing public access to trails in state forests in the event they are transferred to national parks and to acknowledge that public access to trails used by horse riders ensures a safe and protected environment which encourages the young, elderly and urban Queenslanders into the great Australian bush.

Horse riding in the bush is ingrained in Australia's heritage and is a hugely popular recreation on the Atherton Tablelands. Any decision by this government to close forest trails in Far North Queensland will provoke an immense backlash as it is a blatant disregard of our rural legacy. Queensland was pioneered using horses and this country was opened up off the back of a horse. Getting outdoors, respecting the environment and enjoying it from horseback is part of our Australian history, culture and way of life. Is this government prepared to take responsibility for the eradication of this great Australian pastime from Queensland?

The closure of these trails would force those who currently use them onto public thoroughfares. Any intention to lock up forest trails on the Atherton Tablelands is in direct contradiction of the government's own policies encouraging healthier living, healthy leisure activities and safer riding of trails. The mixed messages and misinformation that have been used to keep the public in the dark over a range of issues will not be accepted by Tablelanders in the continuing recreational use of forest trails. I ask the minister: if off-road trails are closed, where will people ride their horses? Is the minister prepared to take responsibility for forcing young riders onto dangerous main roads?

The minimal impact that horse riding has on the environment has been grossly exaggerated by the minister's department. It puzzles me why horse riding is targeted and yet little has been achieved in targeting Australia's greatest environmental vandal, the feral pig. In one night a single wild boar can rut up a quarter acre of land like a rotary hoe and spread noxious weeds from one end of a national park to another. Even the most radical conservationist can see through the hypocrisy of this government shutting out horses but doing nothing to manage feral pigs.

The 2020 national parks plan needs to be tempered with reason and be developed in genuine consultation with all stakeholders rather than implemented on political grounds to shore up green support. The strength of these petitions is evidence of Tableland residents calling on the minister to provide that guarantee and assurance that horse riders will continue to have access to trails in state forests in the event they are transferred to national parks and will not be forced onto dangerous main roads and highways.