



Speech by


**Andrew Powell**

**MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE**

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE, RESOURCES AND ENERGY COMMITTEE**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (6.12 pm): I rise to address the report tabled by the Environment, Agriculture, Resources and Energy Committee with regard to the 2011 Appropriation Bill. In particular, I address my comments to the Environment portfolio. There may have been some Queenslanders who lived in hope that a new Labor environment minister would actually bring a fresh and outcomes focused approach to managing our richest and most precious resource—our environment. The estimates process quickly dashed that hope. There is a new minister but the same spin. In the short time available at both the estimates committee hearing itself and to me now, I want to touch on perhaps the worst examples of this spin.

What should be the jewel in the crown of our state's natural beauty—our national parks—continues to be a thorn in the side of this Bligh Labor government. The confusion is not on my part; it is clearly the minister who is confused. Despite a damning 2010 report by the Auditor-General and now a new glossy draft master plan called Naturally Queensland 2020 and the promise of consultation, our national parks are in no better shape than they were 12 months ago. Sure, some 100 more national parks have management plans, but at least 400 still do not. Some now have a statement of intent, as if that somehow absolves the government of its legislative responsibility under the Nature Conservation Act. We have a promise of all parks having plans by 2015—four more years before this government has to meet its own legislative imperative.

Meanwhile, even in protected areas that have plans we see waste and disastrous environmental outcomes. I used just two examples to highlight these outcomes during the estimates hearing. I could have used dozens more. On Fraser Island, we can see what happens when common sense is not applied to \$3 million in expenditure on infrastructure upgrades. A year 12 geography student will tell you that when it rains perched lakes like Lake McKenzie fill up. So why build vegetation barriers below the high-water mark? So you can rip them down again? Why build toilets with doors that will not lock? Why build dingo-proof eating areas with gates that do not self-lock? And why build all-access walking tracks with steps in them? Waste, waste and more waste.

In Byfield National Park in the Keppel region we have witnessed what happens when the local voice is drowned out by small Brisbane based lobby groups. In the words of the Stockyard Point Progress Association, there are recurring themes: a lack of consultation about critical decisions, the revocation of good-faith negotiations, the tendency to facilitate allowable damage in parks to drive unpopular management decisions and, most disturbingly of all, unjustifiable decisions that are causing environmental damage in localised settings. So even in the rare situation where there are protected area management plans, they are simply not delivering true environmental outcomes.

This evening I am pleased to hear of the action undertaken by the government regarding the allegations of the disgusting trade in dugong products. It is a shame that the minister was unable to provide

this information on the day or even in the time since. I hope that when concerned Far North Queenslanders make future reports DERM investigators will respond quickly and decisively. But I doubt it. Clearly, DERM is struggling under the pressure of reporting to three separate ministers, for not only has it continued to fail to meet its legislative obligations under the Nature Conservation Act but also it has lost touch with even its most intimate and pivotal stakeholders. For Australia Zoo to be overlooked when convening a state-wide crocodile management forum is a travesty. One of the pre-eminent crocodile research organisations in not only Queensland but also the world does not rate an invitation to a crocodile management forum. I will be holding the minister to her word and trusting that this never happens again.

Then there are koalas. The minister in her opening statement waxed lyrical about the continuing support that this government is giving to koala habitat acquisition and partnership programs. With much fanfare, the government announced a \$48 million package of strategic koala habitat purchases and investment in research. Conservationists and koala carers in this state should be alarmed. That funding is now only \$24.5 million. What the Bligh Labor government did not tell us when it first announced the package is that the funding was conditional on the introduction of a new tax and that, because of its ineptitude, the funding is now lost somewhere in the out years—if it is there at all. All I can say is: watch this space.

Time does not permit me to speak at length about more of the LNP's serious concerns. There is the massive underspend in fencing of national parks—yet another example of where this government has dropped the ball when it comes to being a good neighbour. There is the questionable allocation of funds to clean up our waterways following January's funds. There are underspends in rainforest and green land acquisitions. The list goes on. Only one thing is certain following this estimates season: there may be new faces in the Labor cabinet but it is the same waste, the same mismanagement and the same spin.