




Speech by

Hon. Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Wednesday, 12 September 2012

ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. AC POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection) (4.54 pm): I, too, am pleased to add my support to these legislative amendments, which will protect Queensland's iconic dugong and marine turtles. At the outset, I also acknowledge the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for his leadership in seeing this bill brought into the House. I thank him for doing that and for implementing one of the election commitments that I was instrumental in preparing in the lead-up to the March election. I also acknowledge one of the other speakers in the member for Noosa, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs who, as the former shadow minister for the environment, made every effort to put this on the agenda and ensure that it came to the House should the LNP become—and subsequently the LNP was—successful in forming government. Like him, I would also like to acknowledge the roles of a range of campaigners who have fought tirelessly for this bill.

Mr Rickuss: So it didn't just start?

Mr POWELL: It did not just start. This has been going on for some time, and I will discuss that a bit more in a moment. I mention Colin Riddell and Bob Irwin, as mentioned by the member for Noosa. Also, there are many on the conservation side of the fence who have been very aware of these issues for some time and have been proactively working with Indigenous communities to establish the kind of practices that we will continue to roll out as we implement this legislation.

I, too, want to put on the record, as did the member for Cook, that this in no way removes the native title right of traditional owners to hunt dugong and sea turtle for non-commercial use. In no way does it do that. Anyone who is saying to the contrary is spreading fear and rumour amongst the communities on the cape and in the Torres Strait. While I recognise that traditional owners have hunting rights for non-commercial use, for too long Labor—those opposite—have failed to address animal welfare issues despite repeated and urgent calls for action. These amendments will help ensure that these animals are not subject to unnecessary or unreasonable pain and suffering.

Dugong and turtles are protected species under the Nature Conservation Act and it is important that amendments are made to that legislation as well as to the Animal Care and Protection Act to ensure that we will have a consistent and effective protection regime. Officers from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection have been closely involved in reviewing the amendments and have endorsed the changes involving the Nature Conservation Act. The changes will remove the current exemption for traditional hunters and make it illegal for anyone—anyone—to wound, mutilate, torture or unnecessarily prolong the death of an animal. It is also important to point out the original and full intent of the LNP election commitment around the protection of dugong and turtles. Whilst these legislative amendments are a key and core part of that election commitment, let me read what we also committed to. This document states that we would—

Progressively expand the successful permit and licensing system developed in the Northern Peninsula Area of Cape York into all key habitats, with the guidance of traditional owners and Indigenous organisations.

And that we would—

Enforce the law when it comes to the illegal trade in dugongs and turtle meat and products.

Anyone who somehow thinks that this legislation has come out of the blue, out of nowhere, need only refer to that LNP state election promise and to the detail it entails. I suspect that, again, it is a case of people choosing to cherry pick aspects of a policy rather than reading the complete document. As I have said, it is important to recognise the knowledge and experience of Indigenous communities and the role they play in managing and conserving wildlife including turtles and dugong.

Indigenous communities have made a significant contribution in this regard. That is why we will work with them to achieve long-term conservation outcomes. This will be achieved in part through our expanded Indigenous rangers program. Over the coming year we will be working with Indigenous communities to further develop and implement sustainable harvesting and stronger conservation management practices for dugong and turtles across the state. This will take place as we roll out Queensland land and sea rangers into existing organisations such as land councils, local government authorities and community based groups, drawing on the involvement of these rangers and the resource management groups in the area.

Just to be clear, our commitment also was to expand the number of Queensland land and sea rangers by a total of 40—30 to head to North Queensland and the cape and 10 to Western Queensland. I am pleased to report that, as part of our election commitment, we will see the rollout of the first 10 on the cape in the very near future.

Working together with Indigenous people through negotiated agreements such as these builds relationships and empowers communities. After these plans are finalised, my department and other agencies will be able to more effectively take compliance action, in partnership with the relevant community, when poaching or other unlawful activity is reported.

Finally, I take the opportunity to reinforce this government's commitment to cracking down on illegal dugong and turtle trade. I said it this morning during my ministerial statement and I say it again now: where an industry or an individual is doing the wrong thing under the Environmental Protection Act or, in this case, the Nature Conservation Act, my department will act. Let this serve as a reminder that all Queenslanders have a role in protecting these iconic creatures. This government will be tough on those people who hunt or trade illegally. I commend the bill to the House.