



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Hansard Thursday, 12 July 2012

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREENTAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—KAP) (5.37 pm): The Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 seeks to introduce a licensing model proportionate to environmental risk, introduce flexible operational approvals, streamline the approvals process for mining and petroleum, streamline and clarify information requirements and maintain environmental outcomes. I agree that many projects have been sidelined owing to the oppressive nature of the increasing number of environmental regulations over the past decade, which has impacted on the productivity of this state. In any form the reduction of green tape is welcome policy.

The explanatory notes state that the primary objective of the bill is to cut the regulatory requirements that produce an unnecessary administrative burden with no identifiable environmental outcome whilst still maintaining environmental standards. I will give members an example. In August 2010 my office was the scene of a very angry delegation of small miners, who were slugged with massive bills for leases that in some cases no longer existed. Some of these outrageous bills amounted to \$6,000. Legislation had been introduced effective from 1 July 2009 requiring small miners to pay \$500 per mining lease per year. Prior to that crippling legislation, miners paid a one-off payment to the environmental authority for the duration of the whole term. Then they were forced to pay an environmental authority every year, even though there had been no activity. The miners had not been warned that the changes were about to happen, nor had they been asked to contribute to the discussion on the matter. Most mining leases take years to be granted, leaving miners—this is small miners—with fees for the environmental authority on leases not yet granted.

Another major concern was that the fees were retrospective on the introduction of the new legislation although there had been no warning and no consultation. The miners were furious. I believe that this bill is a step in the right direction to address issues that have been a big concern to those small miners. The explanatory notes state under 'Achievement of policy objectives'—

The approval process applies to all ERAs, including resources activities such as mining and petroleum activities, with the exception of agricultural ERAs in the Great Barrier Reef.

While I agree that this is a good bill when it comes to red or green tape, graziers and farmers who have been hit with these ERMPs on the basis of saving the Great Barrier Reef should have been included in this bill. The LNP had made a commitment. They opposed the bill from the beginning. It was a pre-election commitment that they would get rid of these ERMPs. At present graziers are faced with \$30,000 fines if they do not fill out their ERMPs properly and jail sentences if they do not do them at all. The grazing community is unsure of its obligations because of a promise and a commitment by the LNP. The LNP has not introduced legislation to get rid of it.

In relation to red and green tape, these farmers and graziers have to take photos of wash-outs and then five years down the track have to take another photo to show what this wash-out looks like. Some of these properties are 100,000 to 200,000 acres. How can they take photos of every wash-out on their

property? It is absolutely ridiculous. This is very important. We want certainty and surety. We want to get rid of these ERMPs, full stop. All the government has to do is fast-track legislation like it did with the Electricity (Early Termination) Amendment Bill, which was a good manoeuvre, because those farmers and graziers are waiting for an outcome.

I have concerns about the 20-day time frame for submissions for large scale mining operation activity. There needs to be a longer period. This was a concern put forward by many stakeholders who addressed the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee in its public hearing. Massive mining projects that have been put in place—for example the Baal Gammon Mine, a large mining operation at Watsonville—were fast-tracked before submissions were able to be sought. Then the company went broke and suddenly there was contaminated leakage into the creeks and into the Walsh River and there were massive fish kills. It has been a catastrophe ever since.

I acknowledge the comments of the chairman of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee. He stated that if there is a process that has been prolonged and there are issues of concern people can go to their member of parliament. Being a member of parliament, I have seen over the years that governments can ignore members of parliament. We have an LNP government in power so I do not think we will be ignored now, will we?

The 20-day time frame is an issue. I fully believe that this needs to be addressed. As the member for Lockyer said, we can go to our member of parliament. I believe that he recognises the concern. I believe that it is a big concern. Overall the bill is good but some issues need to be addressed, especially in relation to making submissions and providing the right information. I believe that is very important. An example of that process was the support of Alpha Coal. Landowners were not fed the right information. There was a change of government and suddenly the landowners found that they had train tracks going through their properties when there was a commitment by the government at the time for appropriate negotiations and time to make submissions. This did not happen; the process was fast-tracked. It caused anger amongst the farmers. One can understand where the farmers are coming from and why they are angry. One minute they have farmland and the next minute they have a railway track going through their property, all because there was no due process. I commend the bill to the House but do raise those concerns.