




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

---

Record of Proceedings, 29 October 2013

**NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
BILL (NO. 2)**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (4.55 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2). The thrust of the bill, which I appreciate is to increase accessibility of national parks, is something I firmly believe in and support. There shall always be a tension between the needs and desires of people to preserve our natural environment and people being able to exercise their right to carry out activities and make commercial use of these parks. I think that balance has swung in favour of conservationists over many years.

In my part of the world, accessing these parks is a very important part of our lifestyle. I think there are a lot of anomalies in the way these parks are treated and in people's understanding of how they are operated and what sort of condition they are in, and this distorts people's views. Certainly, many parks have been a large burden on councils and have impacted our lifestyle in remote areas. There are so many anecdotes about national parks, but it is an issue councils constantly raise. I think there has been a silent encroachment on people's lifestyles in these areas. People's rights have been eroded. Over the years access has diminished. This has probably led to some apathy as people have been denied rights but they do not realise.

I am very happy to see a swing back in the other direction. That is not to say that we do not value some of those virtues of conservation, biodiversity and so on, but certainly that is not consistent with some of the national parks in my experience. Many of them just harbour vermin, weeds and feral pests and are not managed that well. It is farcical that privately owned holdings in some areas are in better condition than the national parks neighbouring them. The national park is often the problem when it comes to spreading weeds and pests. I am sure that is not the case in all instances—and perhaps that can be improved—but I just think that creates a lot of misunderstanding.

I commend the minister for his stand on this. I very strongly supported the stand he took on allowing emergency grazing on national parks. They are a resource that is there to be used. In the case of grazing there were some imperatives, and that resource was there to help us. It is not permanent; it is a stopgap measure. It is silly not to use it. There have been some enlightened views demonstrated by the minister. We are grateful to him for those decisions.

Generally, we are very supportive of the measures contained in this bill. We are concerned that the government does not support recommendation 6, overriding the concerns of councils in those cases. As always, we are very interested in having the rights of councils represented. I understand that that leaves it open to all comers to make it difficult for the minister to make decisions. I appreciate the contrast in the two interests there.

The minister can now prepare a management plan to override the chief executive relating to specific circumstances. I certainly welcome that in many cases. I think cattle grazing is a terrific example of that. I know that it is not a part of this bill, but a good case in point relating to the general

thrust of this bill is cattle grazing. In some cases it might be valid to keep cattle off a park. But I think it has been said publicly that there is a lot of buffel grass in these parks that helps the incineration and that when they put a burn through these parks it burns more than it would have otherwise in its natural state. So it actually does it a bit of good. This is just another case where there are anomalies and misunderstandings of how these activities can affect these parks.

Again, the liability issue is a good thing to happen and I agree with the sentiment that people need to take responsibility for their own actions. This just enhances the government's ability to create accessibility, and parks officers are very supportive of that feature of the bill. Returning to the issue of national parks, anecdotally there are just so many stories and evidence of how there are misunderstandings. There is a big park in my electorate where they ended up switching the artificial waters back on. That sends a significant message that man's intervention in that country was identified as improving it, because when they switched the waters back on that allowed life to flourish in an otherwise desolate area. Man's intervention and interaction is not always a negative if it is controlled, and that is quite separate to educating people and people appreciating the environment that they are in. One of my very good friends in my electorate is, in my opinion, one of the best naturalists in North Queensland. His life mission is to educate people on the environment that they live in. I think that that is where the effort needs to be made, not in legislating people and smacking them across the hand every time they try to interact or use the environment. These parks are the property of the Crown and they are for the use of the people. This bill moves towards that, so in that way we are very supportive of it. I commend the bill to the House and am grateful to the minister for his efforts.