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Speech By  
**Ros Bates**

**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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## **AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (8.30 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Agriculture and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill 2013. This is a bill that makes non-controversial amendments to eight acts within the jurisdiction of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. It is ironic that we are debating feral cats and dogs tonight when the 'Katts' and PUPs were in merger talks over dinner. I also bring to the attention of the House that those in the official opposition were not in this House for a period of 10 minutes during the debate tonight, including the former minister.

I note that this bill makes amendments to the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Ruthenberg): What is your point of order?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I find those remarks offensive and ask the member to withdraw. I was using the bathroom.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Would you withdraw, please.

**Ms BATES:** Sure. I withdraw. I still note the fact that there was no-one from the opposition here at the start of this debate.

I note that this bill makes amendments to the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002, introducing a single Queensland weed and pest animal strategy. Weed management on the Springbrook plateau is one of the outcomes spruiked by the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, commonly known as ARCS, that would come from the Springbrook buy-up within my electorate of Mudgeeraba. Many people would not realise that whilst Mudgeeraba is on the Gold Coast it is actually quite a rural electorate. In fact, most of the western side of my electorate right out to the New South Wales border is very rural. A lot of these issues certainly do affect those in my electorate.

It was not long after I was first elected that I started to raise concerns about the secrecy surrounding this \$40 million buy-up of properties and businesses on the Springbrook plateau, which was orchestrated by the previous Labor government under the guise of environmental protection but really it was a Greens preference deal. Despite questions on notice, questions without notice, petitions and countless letters to the previous government, I was never able to satisfy neither myself nor the residents of Springbrook as to what really went on, what the true motivations of the government were in the buyback and what part ARCS played in the process from its inception.

It is with great thanks that I acknowledge the independent report by Minter Ellison. It is basically the first step in raising the cloak of secrecy and is consistent with the Newman government's commitment to transparency and accountability.

I was asked, following media coverage in both the *Courier-Mail* and the *Gold Coast Bulletin* last week of the extremely concerning questions of conflict of interest, to speak on ABC radio. President of ARCS, Dr Aila Keto, was also invited to respond. By any measure, she failed to answer the questions

regarding land protection, particularly around pest management. What value have Queensland taxpayers received for their \$40 million buyback which was supposed to remove weeds and restore the rainforest back to pristine conditions?

This bill talks to weed management and under the agreement that is what was meant to occur. Now we find that there is over \$1 million unaccounted for. That would clear a lot of weeds up in Springbrook. Dr Keto vehemently denies the presence of any conflict of interest. However, under the agreement, the proceeds of the ARCS leased properties must be returned to Springbrook Rescue, a division of ARCS. That is a clear benefit.

In addition, Keith Scott has drawn a salary from Springbrook Rescue which also pays for vehicle expenses. In fact, they now have a brand-new four-wheel drive. Maybe they could run around the mountain and pick up all the feral cats—

**Mr MULHERIN:** I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I question the relevance of what the member is saying. This does not relate to the bill.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Ruthenberg): Member, are you referring to a particular amendment to a particular act?

**Ms BATES:** Yes, I am; the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002. I am talking about pests and also feral cats in the local area.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I am going to allow the member to continue.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you very much. As I was mentioning, there is a brand-new four-wheel drive up in Springbrook. Maybe they could run around the mountain and pick up all the feral cats which are destroying the local area or maybe they could light up the back of the truck with all the lantana that is growing into the many homes and businesses that were left to rot during this failed experiment.

This bill introduced by Minister McVeigh continues to deliver on the commitments that saw the Newman government elected with such strong support, such as the reduction in red and green tape that will follow these amendments. In addition, today the government fulfils an election commitment through the amendment to the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001, increasing the maximum penalties for animal cruelty and empowering the courts to act in a way that will punish and deter. Of course it is deterrence we should pursue, with the goal being that animal cruelty should never take place. It is always an issue that outrages the public and sees enormous media interest.

This bill seeks to also amend the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 which will serve to reduce expenses to local and state governments through the streamlining of reviews and will also serve to shorten the time a dog may be held pending such reviews. I know Minister McVeigh is very well aware of the threat to our national parks. We have seen feral cats and dogs running wild in Springbrook and in the Numinbah Valley. I totally agree with the member for Gregory. It is not just far western electorates that have the problem. I have the problem in the Gold Coast seat of Mudgeeraba.

Minister McVeigh has visited my electorate and has a good understanding of the issues that face my rural residents. He, like Minister Dickson, has watched with interest the storm clouds on Springbrook Mountain. It is interesting to note that ARCS, whom the Beattie-Bligh government gave free rein in Springbrook, continue to spruik furbies regarding the cost to taxpayers and the noble pursuit of everything being done pro bono by these selfless individuals.

Let us set at least one furbie straight. According to the profit and loss statement of ARCS, its expenses totalled \$3,500. That went directly on the restoration of the Springbrook area in 2011-12. ARCS had exclusive use of public assets on a national park, including 17 state government owned properties, some of which have permanent residents living rent free as caretakers.

**Mr BYRNE:** I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Please take your seat, member for Mudgeeraba. What is your point of order?

**Mr BYRNE:** I call for you to rule on relevance. This is not relevant to the bill under discussion.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I am listening fairly carefully here. There was reference to the long title of bill and the bills being amended. I will ask the member, however, to please continue but be conscious of the bill that is being amended.

**Ms BATES:** We are talking here about incredible amounts of funds that our state government already puts into the management of places like Springbrook National Park. In fact, last year it was close to \$1.5 million alone for salaries, operating costs, capital works and maintenance. ARCS sits on that steering committee—the committee which decided which properties and businesses would be bought. This input by an organisation which then manages these multiple properties following a buyback at peppercorn rents, with profits to stream into their own.

I look forward to all the secrets of the buy-up being finally uncovered and those injustices done to the people of Springbrook. I applaud the minister for this bill as it will serve to bring penalties, particularly for animal cruelty, to a level where animal lovers throughout Queensland would see appropriate justice able to be delivered for those worst offences.

This bill also provides for timely notification of veterinary surgeons with vital information regarding biosecurity threats, exotic diseases or declared pests. In Springbrook we do have threats to biosecurity and we certainly have declared pests—at least some which should be declared pests.

I have a great deal of hysteria on my mountain in Springbrook and all too often as the local member I have to respond to ridiculous claims—I have had to speak to both the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing about this—which are raised generally by people who do not even live on the mountain, that our government is a bunch of thoughtless environmental vandals and that we intend to log Springbrook, mine it, let cattle roam to their heart's content, have killer bees in our national parks—

**Mr Minnikin:** Not the killer bees.

**Ms BATES:** I take that interjection. They say that we intend to put a four-lane highway right through the middle of it. Let us make it clear again: there has not been any tree clearing in Springbrook for over 30 years. The Minister for Forestry is well aware of that fact. There is also no cattle grazing there. It is my clear understanding that there is no CSG on Springbrook Mountain anyway.

Only last week at a public hearing into what will not be done on Springbrook Mountain, the department answered this question as far as I was concerned definitively and decisively when the DDG said, 'I can conclusively confirm that there is no intention for logging, grazing or mining on Springbrook National Park.' This should serve to put any environmental concerns to rest and make it clear once and for all that this government respects particularly Springbrook National Park and that it is not under any threat, and I urge all of those whose interests it serves to claim the government holds a contrary position to cease the spread of untruths and innuendos.

I would also like to note that in the Mudgeeraba electorate, as I have mentioned before, we are not free from biosecurity threats such as hendra virus. In fact in July there were seven people on a horse farm in Mudgeeraba who came into contact with a sick horse before it was put down. Again, I thank the minister and his department for their support of my local residents in this regard. I commend the bill to the House.