




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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**REGIONAL PLANNING INTERESTS BILL; PROTECTION OF PRIME
AGRICULTURAL LAND AND OTHER LAND FROM COAL SEAM GAS MINING
BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (5.07 pm): I rise to speak to the Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill. The explanatory notes state—

Objectives of the Bill

The primary objectives of the Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill 2013 are to:

1. Prohibit all coal seam gas and exploration mining activities east of the Condamine River from Chinchilla to the New South Wales Border and from the Longitudinal line running directly through the Chinchilla Post Office east to the coast; and
2. Protect any land under the Strategic Cropping Land Act 2011.

Reasons for the Bill

Fundamentally the Bill is intended to protect prime agricultural land from coal seam gas exploration to ensure the sustainability of the agricultural industry and food security into the future for all Queenslanders.

That is quite sensible. The explanatory notes continue—

Importantly, the designated areas described in this Bill are identified as one of the richest agricultural areas in Queensland.

The current Liberal National Party Government and former Labor Governments alike, have failed to protect the agricultural land defined in this Bill. Accordingly, this Bill is intended, without discretion, to unreservedly protect the defined agricultural land.

It is held that there is an urgent need for a firm stance against the coal seam gas industry, pending the establishment of science to guarantee risk mitigation of Queensland's prime agricultural land including that defined within this Bill.

For the purposes of absolute clarity, this Bill does not seek to prohibit the coal seam gas industry but it specifically excludes coal seam gas exploration and mining in the areas designated in the Bill—including to protect underground water that may potentially be affected either for a particular period or irreversibly.

Importantly, the Bill is also intended to contribute to food security for all of Queensland.

I reflect on what the member for Condamine has been saying. I believe that government members need to change their speaking notes because otherwise they are misleading the House when they say that this bill will result in massive compensation and cost the gas industry in Queensland billions of dollars. You need to change your speaking notes because you are misleading the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Watts): Order! I remind the member for Dalrymple to direct his comments through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have a map here of the productive wells and the exploration wells. The member for Condamine saw that there was great concern for the valuable prime agricultural land in the Darling Downs region. I table this map for the information of the House.

Tabled paper: Map from Google Earth, dated 14 October 2012, titled 'Coal Seam Gas Wells, "Excluded Area": Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill 2013' [4725].

He used his initiative and introduced this bill. He saw that farmers wanted to invest in their properties. He saw that they wanted to put money into their properties. He saw that they wanted to sow good seed and plant good crops but they were hindered by the fact that massive multinational gas companies were going to sink wells and suck the living daylight out of their underground water aquifer. There was no-one out there protecting those farmers. All those farmers wanted was someone, some government, some department, some minister to say, 'We are going to slow this up. We want to set aside prime agricultural land.' This is a \$14 billion industry.

It is not the Deputy Premier's fault that he has taken this position on the member for Condamine's bill. I believe he has been misled by the committee with regard to the bill. He has been misled by the committee. It is not the first time the committee has misled the parliament with regard to legislation. The same occurred with my fair milk mark bill. I was able to clearly rule out all of the myths put forward by the LNP in opposing the fair milk mark bill.

The Deputy Premier has been misled by the committee in terms of what the member for Condamine is trying to achieve here. He is trying to protect prime agricultural land east of the Condamine River from Chinchilla to the New South Wales border.

The committee went to Dalby. We arranged to meet the gas companies. The landowners we met were those in the Condamine alluvium area who will possibly be affected. The council identified very strongly that this—

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr KNUTH: There was a Pat Weir. I hope that he continues on as a good farmer rather than try to become a politician. He will not get there. He has no hope of getting there.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Direct your comments through the chair, member for Dalrymple.

Mr KNUTH: The council identified the Condamine alluvium area as an area that we cannot afford to touch. At the moment, the gas companies are frothing at the mouth as they desperately attempt to get into the Condamine alluvium area.

The member for Condamine was compassionate enough to see that there are areas that need to be protected. He did not draw a line over gas wells that are already in production. He did not do that. He could see within his electorate—other members of parliament were invisible; the members for Lockyer, Toowoomba North and Toowoomba South were invisible—the passion of farmers when it comes to the impact that coal seam gas will have on them. All they were asking for was a clear definition.

That is why it is common sense to support the member for Condamine's bill. It is about protecting this \$14 billion industry. We need to remember that this \$14 billion industry was what saved us during the global economic crisis. We have governments backing these massive gas companies. They will be around for 20 or 30 years but after that they will be gone. They will leave holes in the ground. Then we will not have an agriculture industry. We will not have good food, good fibre, good fruit, good vegetables and good beef. We will have to look elsewhere to supply what this state and country needs.

When we went out to meet the gas companies the committee organised to show us the best of it. This was not the area the member for Condamine was talking about. We went to an area outside where the member for Condamine was talking about. The council said that it did not want coal seam gas mining in the area the member for Condamine is talking about.

When we met with the farmers we did not have the opportunity to go out and see the beautiful prime agricultural land in the Condamine alluvium area which we are talking about. We invited the farmers in, gave them a nice feed and said, 'We will see what we can do, but we cannot promise you anything because you have to learn to co-exist.' That is what was given to the farmers.

We went out and saw the gas companies in the area that the member for Condamine outlines are outside the area contained in his bill. We have nothing to worry about when it comes to the area that the member for Condamine is talking about. He is talking about protecting the area east of the Condamine River down to the New South Wales border.

I table the peer reviewed articles, academic journals and reports which the Katter's Australian Party's research division has utilised in a comprehensive literature review which underpins the logic behind the member for Condamine's private member's bill titled Protection of Prime of Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining 2013. The literature presents a clear picture that there is uncertainty about whether the gas industry has the ability to ensure water quality, land quality, human health and environmental effects. My colleague the honourable member for Condamine will table the international comparative literature review when delivering his reply speech.

Tabled paper: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research report, dated October 2012, titled 'Large scale export of East Coast Australia natural gas: Unintended consequences' [4726].

Tabled paper: Bundle of peer reviewed journal articles regarding coal seam gas [4727].

In speaking to the Regional Planning Interests Bill, the government pats on the back those who participated in the inquiry. They give a standing ovation to the committee members who packaged this together. I sense the Deputy Premier is not really confident in this bill. The submissions showed that people were unimpressed with the Regional Planning Interests Bill. The committee report states—

- Springsure landowners stated the Bill 'sets out broad and generalised purposes and achievements ... about regional planning and regional interests.' They see the failure to state 'the preservation of highly suitable cropping land' as a purpose of the Bill as undermining the Bill's objective to manage coexistence of resource and regulated activities.

The committee gives the perception that they might have changed a few little recommendations and sweetened up a few things, but all the submitters believe that it has gone from a bad bill to a very ordinary bill. There is a little bit of difference but not much—from a bad bill to an ordinary one. So there is a little bit of change there. It continues—

- the Queensland Resources Council raised concerns about the use of the term 'coexistence' as a purpose of the Bill.

I think the National Farmers Federation also raised a lot of concerns about the issue of co-existence. The committee report states—

... some submitters have expressed concern that the term 'coexistence' appears only once in the Bill ... QRC states that it would have preferred to have seen the term used throughout the Bill.

...

AgForce was also concerned with the lack of definition of coexistence in the Bill and suggested that agreed principles around coexistence be included.

The report also states—

Stakeholders from the agricultural and resources sectors raised issues regarding this definition. Some submitters were concerned that the definition is too broad and ought to be clearer.

The definition is too broad. It talks about co-existence. It talks about sustainable management. It talks about development. That all sounds good. But the member for Condamine's bill is clear and it says there will be no coal seam gas mining from this area forward, whereas the Regional Planning Interests Bill does not that say that at all and it is hard to define. So all the submitters have put forward a view that they are not getting a detailed plan or process, because after this bill is passed it will take them years to understand what on earth this bill is talking about, whereas the member for Condamine has made it clear where there is to be no coal seam gas mining.

I admit that the Deputy Premier has a lot on his mind. He has a big job. He is the Deputy Premier in Queensland. But, as I said, he has been misled by the committee. At the same time I believe that he is not confident with regard to this bill that has been brought forward.

I commend the member for Condamine for taking the initiative and for stepping forward, challenging establishments and supporting farmers but giving them security so they can invest—so they know that 30 years down the track they can still farm, that they can provide food and fibre and put meat on the table. That is not seen in the Parliament of Queensland. It is very good to see that someone has the intestinal fortitude to make a decision. I fully support the member for Condamine's Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill, and I commend his bill to the House.