




Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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**NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (10.12 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and, in doing so, I am proud to be a part of a government that is committed to ensuring that we live in a state that has quality national parks—national parks that are sustainable, national parks that support the preservation and protection of natural conditions and cultural resources, national parks that give Queensland residents enjoyment to the greatest extent possible, and national parks that allow for the involvement of Indigenous Australians should the area be of interest under Aboriginal tradition and island custom. This view of national parks is absolutely inconsistent with the Nature Conservation Act in its current form. This act contains provisions that, when in effect, allowed hardship grazing to be permitted on six prescribed national parks until 31 December 2013. We need to ensure that the Nature Conservation Act is up to date and reflects what Queensland residents expect when it comes to their national parks. The current provisions are no longer in effect. They are redundant. No permits can be issued under these provisions. In fact, none of those permits that were issued are still active as they all expired on 31 December 2013, so these provisions need to be removed.

How did these provisions come about in the first place? They were only ever created as a temporary measure—a temporary measure to allow short-term emergency grazing on specified national parks. When the provisions were in operation, only 13 permits were granted and none remain in effect. Late in 2013 the previous LNP government indicated that it did not intend to continue the provisions. This confirms that they were only ever intended to be a temporary measure. Some people might be concerned about the removal of these provisions. However, the removal of these provisions as a result of this amendment will have no impact on graziers. There will be no impact because the provisions are redundant. There are no permits still in existence, so the removal of these provisions as a result of this amendment will have no impact.

I can understand though that some might prefer to reinstate these provisions. After all, these provisions allowed hardship grazing on national parks to again be authorised in Queensland. However, reinstating these provisions and allowing hardship grazing on national parks is not an appropriate use of national parks. Not only is it inappropriate use of national parks, but by allowing this to occur we then have to face the bigger issue of providing a sustainable and equitable response to drought. The outcome of this amendment is that it will make it clear that hardship grazing on national parks is not a sustainable option. It will be clear that national parks should not be used in this way. National parks only make up about five per cent of Queensland—five per cent. These national park areas are not immune to drought. In times of drought, national parks are affected too. In times of drought, these areas provide essential refuge to rare and endangered wildlife. In times of drought, the addition of hardship grazing compounds the impact of drought on national parks.

The amendments to the Nature Conservation Act will solidify the Palaszczuk government's belief that grazing is inconsistent with the cardinal principles of national parks. For those who are concerned with assisting farmers in managing drought in Queensland, there are much more effective, sustainable and equitable mechanisms available to do so. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries provides a number of programs and assistance measures to assist farmers in drought. These measures provide farmers with more assistance than allowing grazing in national parks. The Palaszczuk government is committed to continue these drought assistance programs until 2018. These programs have an estimated value of just over \$52 million and are a much more equitable and viable way of assisting farmers in drought. These programs include drought assistance such as freight subsidies for feed and water, rural financial counsellors, a farm household allowance, mental health programs, land rent rebates, water licence waivers, community assistance packages, electricity charges relief, water supply relief and transport concessions. In addition, the Australian government also provides drought assistance through a number of programs to the value of \$333 million. It is therefore appropriate and much more equitable for farmers affected by drought to be supported through these mechanisms rather than grazing in national parks. I commend the bill to the House.