




Speech By
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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (9.07 pm): As the acting chair of the Agriculture and Environment Committee at the time of the report on this bill, I recognise the extensive work of the former chair, the member for Ipswich, who chaired the hearings on this bill and whose guidance was important to the working of the committee. I also recognise the new committee members, the member for Gladstone and the member for Ipswich West. Both expressed a strong desire to work on the Agriculture and Environment Committee and with great reluctance, but with confidence that the committee was in good hands, I took up another challenge. I also recognise the member for Hervey Bay and particularly the member for Burnett, who clearly and in a professional way expressed his reservations but always constructively in line with his views on the issue. I only wish he had done so tonight. I wish also to recognise the work of the committee, especially Mr Rob Hansen whose assistance and guidance as a first-time member I appreciate.

In this place we have a great responsibility as the custodians of this great state to balance our existence with the preservation of nature within our state. For thousands of years the first peoples of this state maintained this balance, certainly impacting on the environment in which they lived but preserving an incredible natural heritage that we as Queenslanders are now the custodians of. I particularly recognise the Yugumbir people of the Logan and Gold Coast regions who balanced their culture and economy with the incredible diversity of the south-east region. I note that this committee heard submissions from Aboriginal groups involved in the management and joint management of national parks and that the minister has made amendments to continue and strengthen the role of traditional owners in areas that are managed in this way. I believe that these amendments go a long way to addressing the concerns from aboriginal groups over the changes in the act and I thank the Olkola Aboriginal Corporation for their submissions to the committee program.

Since European settlement of this state this balance has been changed profoundly. While we can be rightly proud of the society we have created, we should also recognise that in the process we have destroyed some of the natural heritage that we, in hindsight, regret—although some on the other side do not seem to. Because of this regret we recognised quite early that we must, even as we develop, set aside areas for the purposes of nature and conservation.

Over a century ago, in 1908 this parliament established a part of the Tamborine National Park. As I said, in hindsight we have regrets about some changes we have made to the natural legacy bequeathed to the Queensland colony and the Queensland state. I know a future Queensland parliament would have similar regrets if we did not change the Nature Conservation Act so that its primary purpose is nature conservation.

As a child I had rich experiences in Queensland's incredible national parks. In the Lamington National Park, I saw incredible bower birds build intricate bowers from gathered blue items, both natural items and the odd pen lid or peg from campers, to attract a mate. I marvelled at the ranges, views and

forests. Every Easter we camped at Girraween National Park, near Stanthorpe, and marvelled at the huge peeling extraordinary granite boulders and hills. One summer we made the trip to Cape Hillsborough National Park, near the electorate of the member for Mackay. From Burleigh Heads to Lamington and the tip of Cape York, our national parks have had a profound effect on me. I sincerely hope that I can show them to my family and that, by supporting the bill before the House, we maintain our natural heritage, not just for my children but also for future generations.

As a member of the previous Agriculture and Environment Committee, I was present for the committee briefings and hearings on the bill. The most important part of this bill is that it restores the primary purpose of the act as being simply and clearly the conservation of nature. It restores what most Queenslanders would see as the natural purpose of our national parks. Under the previous government, that purpose was confused with other purposes that may be in conflict with preserving nature within our national parks and national heritage areas. At one hearing, a national parks officer, Mr Klaassen, stated—

The way the object is currently, conservation of nature is one of many objects. It fits in with tourism, recreational, cultural and traditional owner perspectives. They are sitting on a par. Through this amendment, it is making it very clear that conservation of nature is the sole purpose of this act. Under the Nature Conservation Act, in managing national parks it is incumbent upon us as the managers to be mindful that conservation of nature is the primary objective.

All Queenslanders would believe that to be so.

Members opposite have mentioned hardship grazing provisions. It is important to note that at this stage none of those arrangements are active. The LNP may make much of those arrangements, but it was under their government that the permits were withdrawn and now none of them are active. It is right and proper that redundant provisions are withdrawn and the House rightly needs new legislation should there ever be argument in the future that the provisions be revived. For the most part, the management of stock numbers during droughts by using fragile and drought affected areas of national parks is not generally compatible with the cardinal principle of the act—that is, preserving nature.

At the time, those measures were emergency measures at the beginning of the drought phase and not appropriate at the later stage of the drought. During that period, 13 permits were granted. As I have said, none are still active. We know that drought can affect thousands of Queensland farmers and not just those who have had a small measure of temporary relief from permits. The LNP's claims on this matter are misleading. Worse, they seek to mislead farmers suffering through drought. They should be ashamed, but that has been their practice in the past, and under their new leadership nothing has changed.

We have heard much from the opposition about existing grazing leases on national parks and other conservation land. When the state made a decision to buy land for the national park estate for the preservation of nature, some of those lands were used by leaseholders for grazing and the state made agreements to continue to allow grazing in order to facilitate the sale. In some cases, that was for a very long period. The leases restricted the use of the land.

During the hearings, we heard of one case where a family had bought the land in 1972. In 1974 they sold the land to the state with a multi-decade lease as a condition to facilitate the sale. At the end of that multi-decade lease, as was agreed to and accepted by all parties at the time the lease was started, the land was to revert to the natural park estate, which is why the Bjelke-Petersen government bought the land in the first place. The opposition has called those leases 'rolling leases' and indeed the act called them that. However, it is important to make clear that those lands were not the same as all other parcels of state government land that were declared rolling leases. Unlike some other pieces of land defined as rolling term leases, those leases required that the Land Act minister must have the agreement of the chief executive of the Nature Conservation Act before an extension of a so-called rolling term lease on a national park, regional park or forest reserve can be approved.

The member for Burnett referred to a number of parts of the Land Act and the Nature Conservation Act, but there was one section that he did not mention. The member for Moggill said that the bill would give sole power to the chief executive to make a decision about the ecological value of any grazing leases if they should be continued. However, if the shadow minister had done a little bit of work, he would have realised that this is the case under the current Land Act. For his benefit, section 164C(3) of the Land Act reads—

Despite subsection (1), if the rolling term lease is issued under this Act or the repealed Act, but on the authority of another Act, the Minister may grant an extension of the lease only with the agreement of a person whose agreement to the extension is required under the other Act.

Therefore, we need to make reference to the 'other act'—that is, the current Nature Conservation Act. For the benefit of all members on the other side of the House, section 38(4) states—

If a lease granted under this section is also a rolling term lease under the *Land Act 1994*, the lease may be extended under that Act, but only with the consent of the chief executive under this Act.

Note for subsection (4)—

See the *Land Act 1994*, section 164C.

Section 164C of the Land Act is the section that I read earlier. Under those acts, the land was not in any way similar to other pieces of government owned land declared a rolling term lease, yet none in the LNP has made this distinction clear. Do they not understand their own acts? Did they not read the reports of the committee? Do they simply seek to mislead the House over this fact through an act of omission? I am particularly disappointed that the member for the leafy seat of Moggill seeks to perpetuate this misinformation or is he simply not across the issues?

To make this clear for those opposite, I will read from the transcripts of a committee public hearing. I asked a national parks officer the following question—

There was a capacity to grant rolling leases. How many rolling leases have been granted?

With reference to the existing legislation, Mr Klaassen replied—

On national park, none. The chief executive had to consent to the granting of a rolling term lease and none had been granted. We adopted the view that—

and he is talking about a view held under the previous government—

because it was national park, there needed to be a higher standard. We needed to make sure that there was an appropriate review point for us to assess whether the grazing was appropriate or not ... In terms of the state forests, where there are about 755 rolling term leases, I do not have the numbers specifically but well over 600 of those have been approved to be rolling term. That was done and is continuing. It does not have any impact there.

With national park, the primary purpose, as we were talking about earlier, is conservation of nature. In terms of implementing that primary purpose, grazing is not consistent with that so, therefore, having a rolling term lease would not be consistent with the object and cardinal principle.

To make it clear, when existing leases on national park land expire and consideration is given to an application to extend the lease, the ecological nature of the land must be taken into account and whether extending the lease fits with the principle of nature conservation. Having listened to the rhetoric of those opposite, it is obvious that they believe that new leases should be granted without regard to the ecological value of the land or the goal of nature conservation.

Mr Bennett interjected.

Mr POWER: The member for Burnett did say that, because he omitted to mention section 164; he omitted to say what the previous act did. Of course, they go further than the changes that were made by the last government. This is a radical anti national park policy from the opposition. Has the new minister revealed a new LNP policy that means open slather on national parks? I know that Queenslanders want us to consider the ecological value of the land before considering any possible new leases on those lands. Either LNP policy has changed fundamentally or they are playing a cruel trick on farmers and, indeed, all Queenslanders who use national parks by implying that the current legislation grants them rights that it does not and implying that this act has actions that it does not. We must restore the cardinal principle that our national parks estate should have as its guiding principle, one of conserving nature. To do anything else is to slowly erode the natural heritage we preserve for our children and our grandchildren. I commend the bill to the House.