




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (11.29 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Firstly, I would like to address what I believe will be an amendment to the bill relating to the retention of Indigenous involvement in the management of this land as a significant and guiding principle in the act. I believe that the minister will move that amendment. If that is the case, I commend the minister. I believe that there is a similar amendment foreshadowed by the opposition spokesperson.

There is concern that the removal of certain objects of the act may have unintended consequences as it does not allow, for instance, for the provision of opportunities for educational or recreational activities within the conservation parks. This could take place through the erosion of access granted to education providers and those accessing protected estates for educational purposes. This would essentially allow for the complete breakdown of ecotourism operations within these protected areas. Education is an essential part of conservation. If this government hopes to place an emphasis on conservation measures in the long term, it must ensure that the population has the opportunity to understand the importance of our environment by experiencing the reserves firsthand.

I would like to talk about the attitudes held by a lot of people. I think there are a lot of misconceptions around national parks. I am sure I do not have a good understanding of what some of the national parks in some of the coastal areas are like. The national parks in my area are probably very different. I will recount one story relating to a national park in my electorate. I challenged someone in the park to tell me I was wrong. They did not take me up on it, so I assume it is the truth. In a lot of these places that are declared national parks they shut off the artificial waters, as if to take them back to their natural state. In one of these parks they ended up switching the artificial waters back on, because there was an acknowledgement that there was an improvement from those waters. That raises interesting questions about the threshold for what improves the environment and what does not. I think that is a really interesting point to reflect on.

Another issue that has been raised relates to the control of woody weeds and pests in these parks. It is beyond the capacity of taxpayers to fund the monitoring of these things. While I will grant you there will be some damage and impact from grazing activities or other ecotourism activities, I will confidently wager that there is a net benefit from having someone there treating some weeds and doing some management. It will greatly offset any negative activity. When you take into consideration that someone has been there for, in some cases, 100 years taking care of that environment, I think we should have a completely different attitude, particularly in this bill, to how we are managing these parks.

Prickly acacia is the cane toad of woody weeds in Australia. It is doing a great deal of damage on the Mitchell grass blacksoil plains country that is prevalent in the Mount Isa electorate. It is an environmental disaster. Some of that can encroach on national park areas. The environmental damage that is happening there is gargantuan and makes any other sort of impact on the environment seem minor in comparison. We should not lose focus on the real environmental issues out there. Prickly acacia is far and away the biggest environmental issue, particularly in that far western area.

I remember the time we considered grazing in national parks. I pay tribute to the former minister in the previous government, the member for Buderim, who made that happen at a very critical time, when there was a lot of cattle around and not much feed for them. I thank the former minister, who is in the chamber tonight, for providing the opportunity for those people to get on those parks. I recall running into someone from Parks at that time. In conversation he commented to me that I would be surprised that he was not that opposed to some livestock in national parks. What had already been explained to me was that cattle go in and chew down the buffel grass, which is an introduced species. If they do not do that, the buffel grass can create a hotter burn that kills all of the native trees. Overall, that has a net negative effect on the environment. It was of benefit to have some light grazing activities on those national parks. I think that was one of the things considered when emergency grazing on national parks was allowed. I think that is a very sensible thing. Whether we live in Brisbane, Mount Isa or wherever, I think we can all take comfort from the fact that, while it may not be the perfect environmental principle, it is the best and most practical way to manage those things. We should be thinking about that.

There is another story that I think is highly relevant to this debate. At the start of one of the calls for grazing on national parks, a grazier in the desert uplands area in my electorate said, 'Can you explain this to me, Rob? I have stock that I am trying to keep alive to keep me viable. They are busting the fence to jump over to this national park that only 15 years ago was privately owned. I have just got a letter from Parks that they are going to put a burn through the park that will burn all of that feed. Most of the feed there is buffel grass, which is an introduced species which my cattle would go in and eat.' From that example alone members can see that it would be much more practical to allow some drought starved cattle to go through the fence they are already trying to bust through—

Mr Cripps: And not die.

Mr KATTER: And not die and keep that bloke viable. We would be doing a favour for everyone. He would probably spray weeds, kill pigs and whatever to maintain it better than it has been maintained. I do not mean any disrespect to any of the park rangers. It is just that we do not have enough money through taxes to properly fund any of this management, because it is a big job and it is really expensive. The only practical way to do that in most cases is to allow private landholders to do it. By and large, they are all good custodians of the land. I have no problem with putting in place land management programs to keep people in check, but by and large they are good land managers. You will rarely have poor outcomes.

I think there are a lot of misconceptions that are driving this bill. I think the things the government wants to achieve can be achieved through the existing framework and can be managed responsibly, more practically and more cost effectively without having an effect on the economy, rural landholders or education.