




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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**NATURE CONSERVATION (SPECIAL WILDLIFE RESERVES) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (4.13 pm): I rise to address the Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. At the outset, I want to say that the concept of private individuals assisting in the protection of our most special ecosystems, our wildlife, be it fauna or flora, is a wise investment. Indeed, during my term as the minister for the environment in an LNP government, if I recall correctly—and I am sure the minister will correct me if I have this wrong—we oversaw the four millionth hectare under the nature refuge system. It is a system that works extremely well particularly in parts of the world such as the electorate of Glass House, where we do have some excellent remnant ecosystems and some endangered species, such as the Richmond birdwing butterfly, that definitely need protecting. We do have private landowners invested in ensuring that part or all of their property continues to be looked after well in perpetuity. It is a system that works extremely well.

I will be honest: I think even in my time as the minister for environment we did look at whether this concept which the current government has labelled ‘special wildlife reserves’ could be considered, whereby blocks of land that have significant environmental value could be considered in a way that was equivalent to national parks. My concern and that of all my colleagues on this side is that, in trying to achieve this, this bill falls far short. In doing so, it creates many and more of the same issues around national parks. The contributions that I have heard from Labor members in this chamber are what concern me most when I start speaking about some of these issues. As a guide, I know the process that we undertook when looking to secure additional national parks in Queensland was exhaustive. We would go and assess the environmental value of properties and then talk to landholders who potentially—

A government member: Don’t put an ad in the paper!

Mr POWELL: We would not necessarily put an ad in the paper, but we knew the areas we would be looking for. They often bounded existing national parks. I was just talking to the member for Warrego and there were a number of properties adjacent to the Currawinya National Park that we purchased in negotiation. Indeed, the former member for Warrego brought down some of the property owners and we had a very sensible discussion around the appropriate compensation for the purchase of those properties, but that is not where the process ended. We then had to look at mining tenements, agricultural opportunities—all of these steps that must necessarily be exhausted before you get to declaring that property a national park. My fear—and it has been explained at length by many on this side—is that we will not have that same process applied in relation to these special wildlife reserves.

It has been raised by a number of submitters as well that the uncertainty regarding the declaration of a special wildlife reserve creates a very broad application, one that potentially will prevent agricultural or resource industry development. It will lock up marginal country for Greens preferences. They will do that for seats here in Brisbane but neglect what I started out at, that really we should be looking to protect the best of the best. I do not think we will get it under the current state interest or the economic

and environmental assessments listed in this bill. You still need to exhaust all of those mineral and agricultural opportunities. I refer in particular to the contribution of the member for Mansfield, who basically admitted that this is about protecting certain parts of the state from mining. It is not about protecting the best of the best environmentally but protecting a patch of dirt out somewhere in Western or North Queensland from mining. That automatically raises a concern for me that this will be abused. If legislation can be abused, it should not be put in in the first place or it should be significantly amended to prevent it from being abused.

The definition is so ambiguous that the department was quite happy for it to stay that way, so that if it ended up in the court you could drive a truck through it and any opposition to such a declaration would be thrown out because of the ambiguity of the definition. That also applies to that consultation that will occur with those materially affected. Neighbouring landholders first and foremost but Queensland resource companies secondly—anyone with an agricultural interest in the property—also need to be consulted before these kinds of decisions are made. It should not be left up to the minister and her department. There needs to be a comprehensive assessment, like we currently undertake when declaring national parks. That needs to be applied in this situation as well.

The Property Council mentioned the inadequacy of how the minister is to notify parties through notification in newspapers rather than directly contacting them. That flies in the face of what I said we used to do when it came to national parks. You would sit down with the landholder and have a conversation with them. You would talk to the neighbouring landholders and have a conversation with them. You did not put an ad in the paper and hope for the best.

Other colleagues have mentioned the concerns that traditional owners have raised. I understand that some of those concerns are going to be addressed in the amendments, but not all. Others have also mentioned the permanency of this legislation. In essence it becomes a national park and that means the only way it can be changed is through revocation, as we sometimes do, in this parliament. They are few and far between. It creates issues for subsequent landholders in terms of their ability to manage these properties. Do people fully understand the obligations they are signing up to when they purchase such a property? It creates a field of landmines when it comes to that permanency and ownership change.

It also creates some significant concerns around the management of those properties. It surprises me that two submitters, the National Parks Association of Queensland and the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, have raised these concerns. There is no evidence in this bill that suggests that the management plans for these special wildlife reserves will be made public.

One of the rules around national parks is that how the site is intended to be managed must be shared with the broader community, with other departments, with councils and with surrounding landholders. There is no intention to do the same with regard to these special wildlife reserves. Neighbouring landholders should be fearful, as many on this side of the chamber have said. People already do not trust the national parks department to manage their properties properly. As we have heard, fire, weeds and pests often originate in national parks.

Ms Enoch: That's not true.

Mr POWELL: I will take the interjection that that is not true. That is entirely true. It was true in our day and it is true now that pests and weeds are not being managed in national parks.

I am happy to take the minister down one road in my electorate where there is a former state forest on one side and a national park on the other and I will not tell her which side is which. I bet the minister picks the wrong side. The one that has been managed through careful forestry over decades looks like a national park. The one that is a national park looks like my feral backyard.

Investment is not occurring in our national parks, and that is with management plans that are made public. My fear with special wildlife reserves, private landholdings and private management plans is that neighbouring landholders are going to get done over again and the whole concept of a good neighbour will go out the window.

There are so many concerns around this bill. Whilst the idea and concept might seem sound and may have worked elsewhere, this bill cannot be supported. There is one other area that needs to be addressed. The shadow minister for tourism is sitting here. There is no element in this bill that allows ecotourism to operate on these properties either. We continue to fall behind other Australian jurisdictions, especially Tasmania, and other nations such as New Zealand around the use of our protected area estates. It is bad enough that we cannot do it in our national parks responsibly, but to now lock up private land as well under special wildlife reserves with no capacity to operate ecotourism opportunities, which is what makes these special wildlife reserves in other nations so successful, is a real travesty. For that reason, I cannot support this bill.