




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR JORDAN

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

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (12.16 pm): In Queensland we are fortunate to have an incredibly expansive and rich biodiversity, and not all areas of outstanding conservation value can be found in our national parks. In fact, lands of outstanding conservation value are frequently privately owned or managed land. The Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 seeks to ensure that we can comprehensively and securely protect these areas of outstanding conservation value from a range of incompatible uses. Importantly, this is not imposed protection but rather a voluntary scheme that recognises that government alone cannot adequately protect the rich environmental values of our state. This is a shared obligation for those willing to participate. We also recognise that appropriate protection of outstanding natural areas on private land provides certainty and a significant incentive for private investment in Queensland's protected areas.

During its examination of the legislation, the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee received a number of submissions which supported the intent of the legislation. The National Parks Association of Queensland regards the bill as—

... a leading piece of legislation and a genuine effort to counter the challenges involved in growing and managing the protected area estate in Queensland.

The Queensland Trust for Nature strongly supported the proposal for a new class of privately owned and managed protected areas offered under this legislation. Our friends the Local Government Association of Queensland support the establishment of special wildlife reserves as another protective area mechanism, recognising that there may be situations where local government would benefit from the declaration of a special wildlife reserve to offer greater levels of protection.

A submission provided by Bush Heritage Australia outlines that Queensland's protected area network has grown to almost eight per cent of the state and covers both public and private lands, including national parks and nature refuges. We recognise that privately protected areas make an important contribution to Queensland's protected areas. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity sets a target of 17 per cent terrestrial protected area coverage, and it is acknowledged that governments across Australia are grappling with how to achieve this in the context of increased funding constraints and competing priorities. Protected areas initiated by private landholders have and will become an increasingly important strategy in protecting conservation assets for future generations. Bush Heritage Australia acknowledges—

The creation of a Special Wildlife Reserve is an extremely cost effective and efficient strategy to contribute to Queensland Government meeting its conservation obligations.

The bill provides that, prior to the preparation of a proposal for the declaration of a special wildlife reserve, the minister must consider and take into account the 'state interest' in the area of land and consider the area's exceptional natural and cultural resources and values. The term 'state interest' is defined in the legislation to mean an interest the minister considers to be an economic, environmental

or community interest of the state. There were some submissions to the parliamentary inquiry that expressed concern that 'state interest' was too broad in definition. Others believed that conservation value should be prioritised over other state interests when considering a special wildlife reserve.

I believe the bill has the definition just right. The fact it is deliberately broad will ensure that all relevant interests are taken into account and the impact of a potential declaration has regard to the broad range of values in the land being considered. Despite the member for Broadwater's conspiracy theories, state interest is not unique to this legislation. There are state interest considerations in planning legislation and in local government legislation, so it is an absolute furphy to believe that this is an all-consuming power to be used by some evil minister.

The bill will establish management principles for special wildlife reserves and provide a framework to guide the management of special wildlife reserves. The legislation will require a legally binding perpetual conservation agreement and an associated management plan to be negotiated for each special wildlife reserve. This recognises that each special wildlife reserve is unique and that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to this mechanism.

A number of stakeholders raised concern about the lack of public access to agreements entered into in relation to special wildlife reserves. Wildlife Queensland in its submission to the parliamentary committee noted that there needs to be a capacity for the public to (a) know what actions have been undertaken and (b) know that over time the commitments entered into via the management program and conservation agreements are being honoured and maintained. The parliamentary committee scrutinised this particular element of the legislation. The department provided a response that indicated the bill does provide for the public availability of conservation agreements for special wildlife reserves and their existence will be readily apparent from a search of the land title. They also indicated conservation agreements will be made available on request and the bill provides for conservation officers to access these reserves to monitor and inspect for compliance. Whilst landholders may be willing to have their management documents available for public scrutiny, I am pleased to see the minister has proposed amendments to improve transparency.

The parliamentary committee recognised that whilst the decision to seek a declaration for a special wildlife reserve was a voluntary one, the signing of a conservation agreement and implementation of a management program is, in fact, an obligation. It is important to reiterate the point that the negotiation and declaration of a reserve is entirely voluntary. This has not been foisted on private landholders and the full range of state interests will be considered in making a decision on individual special wildlife reserves. A binding mechanism is then in place to provide a high level of protection to privately managed lands of outstanding conservation value. This is particularly important if we as a state wish to encourage further private investment in Queensland's protected area estate.

Through these arrangements, landholders will have certainty and the knowledge that their investment in these lands is protected from incompatible land uses—protections that are currently not available in Queensland or elsewhere in Australia. We have an obligation to do all that we can to protect the exceptional conservation values of the state. As a government we acknowledge that we cannot do this alone. Whilst the acquisition and ongoing management of state owned private areas like national parks will continue to be an important part of the state's ongoing conservation plan, privately protected areas will play an increasing role. The Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 supports this intent. I commend the bill to the House.