




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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (2.06 pm): The Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will establish a new class of privately owned or managed protected area of special wildlife reserves that will deliver Queensland's regulatory mechanisms to protect nature refuges and areas located outside national parks from mining and other types of incompatible land use. In Queensland, our biodiversity has experienced major threats, such as land clearing and habitat fragmentation, including the impacts of past clearing and grazing pastures, invasive weeds and animals. It is important to retain our biodiversity to support our ecosystems. Healthy and well-functioning freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are important for a productive and healthy environment. Intact or well-connected ecosystems provide habitat for native plants and animals. By maintaining our local ecosystems, we are ensuring their long-term conservation.

Nature refuges not only reflect the significant value of the land but also recognise the effect of management to maintain the reserve over time. To assist landholders in establishing a wildlife reserve on their property, whether that be freehold or leasehold, the bill will establish a framework to guide management principles for special wildlife reserves. It will be a legally binding, perpetual conservation agreement and an associated management program that will be negotiated for each special wildlife reserve. The conservation agreement and management program will detail management outcomes and actions to ensure the enduring protection of each special reserve's conservation values in order to achieve the management principles.

We need private investment in Queensland's protected area estate. Landholders need to have confidence and know that their investment will be offered protection from incompatible land use, such as mining and timber harvesting. Currently, that is not available in Queensland. This will be a first for anywhere in Australia.

It is recognised that not all of our unique flora and fauna is found in our national parks. Some significant ecosystems are found only on private landholdings. It also needs to be recognised that there are significant and unique landscapes that need preserving. The cultural and natural significance of areas need recognition and protection.

In my regional community we have significant diversity of our natural habitats that are not found in other parts of the state. For example, Mackay is home to many different habitat areas, including tropical rainforests, wide sandy beaches, beach scrub, mangrove lined creeks and waterways and also open eucalypt forests. Our region is home to a diversity of animals, including 62 mammal species, 350 birds, 95 reptiles, 31 frogs—and new species have been discovered in recent years—and 44 fish species. About 10 per cent of these animals are listed as rare or threatened under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992. Rare or threatened species include the flat back turtle, the false water rat, many species of waders and shorebirds, the rufous owl, the glossy black cockatoo, the ghost bat, the squirrel glider, estuarine crocodile and the beach stone-curlew.

We have an easily accessible reserve on the Bluewater Boardwalk at Sandfly Creek Environmental Reserve which is an important shorebird roost site. Shorebirds mainly use the area at high tide and internationally significant numbers have been observed. The Sandfly Creek Wetlands support one of the highest diversities of shorebirds in the region. Twenty-nine species have been recorded at the site, including 22 migratory species and seven resident species. This significant area is near the busy city centre. It is a living case that highlights the importance of nature needing to be preserved over continued development on all land.

In our mangrove areas you can observe mangrove trees, palms or ground ferns generally larger than half a metre in height that grow above the mean sea level in the intertidal zone of marine coastal environments and estuarine margins. Mackay is home to at least eight mangrove species living in the harsh environment of the intertidal zone. Mangrove soils are regularly waterlogged and loaded with salt. It is estimated 75 per cent of fish caught commercially spend time in mangroves or are dependent on food chains which can be tracked back to mangrove environments. Mangroves also protect the coast by absorbing wave and wind energy, particularly during storms. Mangrove roots can trap sediments and help protect corals and sea grasses in adjacent marine habitats, which can be killed by high levels of sedimentation. The mangrove ecosystem is only one example of how one system is vital to many other ecosystems in our overall environment.

Landholders voluntarily engaging in an agreement for a wildlife nature reserve on their property must be commended for their commitment to the future health of Queensland's unique biodiversity of both flora and fauna. These people who are engaging voluntarily I am sure will not be reckless and delinquent in their duties as has been highlighted by opposition members. I commend the bill to the House.