




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.13 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill with a sense of dread and frustration. This is bad legislation, much like the vegetation management legislation. It is bad for Queensland, bad for farming and bad for rural industries. Like so much of this government's legislation there has clearly been an eagerness to look as green as possible. Green ideology is at the core of the Queensland Labor Party. Those shearers who were sitting beside that tree in Barcardine where the Labor Party was born over 100 years ago would be rolling in their graves at the way this Labor Party is treating regional and rural Queensland. I wish the government had the same eagerness to invest time and effort into developing thoughtful, practical legislation, legislation that respects the rights of Queenslanders and has some checks and balances. That would be new, would it not: checks and balances and legislation that actually works?

Essentially, this bill will establish a special category of private land that will have the protections of a national park bestowed upon it without the government owning it or being responsible for the management and maintenance of the protected areas and without a regime of any public scrutiny of the management practices on the land in terms of fire hazard management, control of erosion, control of feral pests and exotic weeds. We only have to go back a couple of months and look at what happened with the bushfire season. Areas where some of those fires were coming from were not managed. We saw property being destroyed because of bushfires coming out of national park. I do not think the Labor Party has a great record when it comes to national parks and it will not have a great record by introducing this legislation into this House.

If Queenslanders learned anything this summer it was that you do not want to be neighbours with a national park of the current Labor state government because they are not good neighbours. Many constituents of mine tell of the issues poor management creates for them. Parks have been allowed to become a Noah's ark for feral pests, including pigs, wild dogs and feral cats. They are absolutely destroying private property owners trying to get on with the job of producing good food and fibre for this state. We would not need cluster fencing in Western Queensland if the national parks were managed properly and we did not have wild dogs continuing to breed in those national parks. If the state government managed the national parks, took care of the land it owns and manages, we would not have these problems.

Under Labor our national parks have become a seed bank of exotic weeds. No matter how much the landholder invests in eradicating the weeds on their own land, when the conditions are right out come the weeds from the national parks. There has been a lack of fire management. Labor clearly did not want public scrutiny of their lack of fire management in national parks. It wanted to hide the results. It would not have a parliamentary committee hearing into the bushfires. We need to get to the bottom of this.

Given the observed impacts of national park management on neighbouring agriculture I hold serious concerns about the impact of what will essentially be privately owned national parks. To make matters worse, it is completely unclear how the private management practices of these private reserves will be overseen by this government. This government does not have a great track record at the moment. How is it going to oversee this? This legislation does not lay down any rules on how a management plan is to be developed. It does not specify that it has to be based on science.

This legislation does not say who has the approval over such plans or what financial guarantees will be given to ensure the plans will be carried out. This legislation does not say which department will have the powers to police the implementation of the land management on this private ground in real time. Even the National Parks Association of Queensland has been scathing about the lack of accountability for conservation land that is being handed to private interests.

This legislation does not contain a disputes or a complaints regime. Who can neighbouring private landholders complain to about poor management that affects their lands? This legislation seems to ignore the reality that our ecosystems are called systems because they are physically interconnected. The Queensland Farmers' Federation gets this. This morning I heard the minister talking about how he advocates for the Queensland Farmers' Federation. I am sure the agriculture minister would have heard from the Queensland Farmers' Federation about this legislation. Did you take it to the cabinet table? No, you haven't.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stevens): Order! Pause the clock. Minister, there will be no further conversations across the chamber. That was a sincere form of provocation and the next time there will be a warning.

Mr MILLAR: It is important to take notice of the Queensland Farmers' Federation and AgForce because they do not like this legislation. They think this legislation will be damaging to agriculture and rural landholders right across Queensland. According to the minister for environment the neighbours are not materially impacted. They do not even need to be told a reserve is being proposed. They do not have any rights and so there is no redress.

Landholders who directly adjoin a proposed special wildlife reserve will find that they are not even consulted when someone buys up the neighbouring leasehold or freehold and applies to have it classified as a special wildlife reserve. The only obligation is a newspaper ad. If you live in the seat of Gregory you immediately say, 'What newspaper will I find it in?' You have to make sure that you have proper communication with landholders in terms of a special wildlife reserve. Neighbours should be contacted directly by registered post. Labor would not dare do this in terms of residential and commercial property owners in urban areas. Why do they feel it is okay to treat regional and rural Queenslanders as having no rights?

The minister boasts that this is a first for Australia. Not everyone will create a reserve for eco motivations. The concept of a special reserve would certainly appeal to environmental activist groups, like the ones we are seeing at the moment in Bowen and like the ones we are seeing in North Queensland in the member for Burdekin's seat, where he continually has to fight to ensure that things happen, that we continue to see progress in these regional towns and that jobs continue to be created. Such a group like those activists in North Queensland could buy land through a donation from an overseas environmental trust, declare it a special wildlife reserve and undertake no active land management. They would not clear the weeds. They would not reduce the feral animals like wild dogs and pigs.

This legislation does not say how the situation could be dealt with. The group have their rights in perpetuity. Even if the group fizzles out—and let us hope that some of those groups do fizzle out—and sells the land, it would be extremely difficult to revoke, review and renegotiate the special status. What that means is that the land can never be reverted to a productive status—something I would think that the minister for agriculture would want—to grow agriculture. We do not want to be locking up land and allowing it just to sit there idly and increase weeds, feral dogs, feral cats and feral pigs. That land would be in limbo. Primary producers will not want it because it would be just too hard to bring back. You can bet your bottom dollar that as soon as a special wildlife reserve is declared property prices in that whole district will fall and will remain depressed.

Even the Queensland Law Society has plainly said that this bill is not good law, simply on the basis of the requirement of declaring a piece of land a special wildlife reserve. Does the declaration require the satisfaction of strict and encompassing criteria? No. The legislation, the new law of our land,

gives the minister sweeping powers to make a declaration. Then there is the 100-metre buffer zone. This is an outright violation of property rights of our neighbours. Remember, a special wildlife reserve is privately owned.

It is also going to have massive impacts on our Queensland resources. It will affect not just the big players but also those under the Fossicking Act. The Central Queensland gem fields in my electorate are unique in Australia. They draw visitors from around the state and the world. There is small scale machinery mining and also hand mining and fossicking. Now the economic contribution of these fields will be secondary if someone has their land declared a special wildlife reserve. Fossickers will not be able to fossick on designated land or on land within 100 metres of a special wildlife reserve. I think that is absolutely appalling. Not only are you locking up land and agriculture but you are taking away the economic prosperity of these small communities such as the gem fields. This is bad legislation. Again, this shows that the Labor Party is all about green ideology and not about regional and rural Queensland. Shame on you.