




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.03 pm): There have been a number of significant concerns raised by stakeholders through the committee's consideration of the bill, largely relating to the creation of special wildlife reserves. The long title of the bill and the details in the explanatory notes allow me again to call for a parliamentary inquiry into the government's bushfire preparedness. It is made on behalf of those who have been excluded from the process and those who have lost so much in the bushfires of 2018 and 2019.

The opening paragraph of the explanatory notes clearly acknowledges that the government cannot adequately protect Queensland's large protected estate. This parliament needs some very serious investigation as to why the fires have occurred in the first place and to the extreme levels experienced. We are debating this bill to increase the protected estates without any regard to bushfire mitigation strategies. I have raised previously in this House that a million hectares of land was burnt in the Central Queensland Baffle Creek bushfires in December 2018. We have a failed policy agenda when another eight million hectares of national parks are added to our protected estates without bushfire prevention and preparedness activities to reduce vegetation fuel loads.

More tragedy occurred to farming families in my electorate when in March this year we had a six-day fire that came out of the Kinkuna and Burrum national parks near Woodgate. These families have lost more than half of their pasture grass, some 700 hectares, and 22 kilometres of fencing, and they now have to divest of 200 calves and 200 breeders all before they are ready for market—all because this government cannot manage our protected estates. The fire started in the national park and has devastated these farming families.

There is no way that anybody looking at the current state of the burnt out national park areas can say that there is responsible management of these areas at present. What is the future of the special wildlife reserves being proposed in the bill? It is anyone's guess. Some of these fires burnt so intensely that they destroyed much of our national parks. I have quoted this before but scientists say that a thousand years of biodiversity went up in smoke, particularly around Eungella as we all know.

We must acknowledge that a great majority of the serious fires started, or were allowed to develop, in national parks or other government controlled protected estates. Little attempt has been made in recent years to carry out proper forest management or fire hazard reduction there. The state government is a landowner like everyone else, with perhaps more obligations to its neighbours to do hazard reduction burns and maintain these protected estates.

The fires in the Deepwater and Eurimbula national parks are unfortunately examples of the poor management of these areas for many years. History proves we have it wrong. Back when these protected estates were privately held property or were leased to local graziers, there was more open grassland, not thick overgrown scrub as it is now. Over the years since these areas came under government control, they have become hugely overgrown, predominantly with rubbish and weeds such as lantana and giant rat's-tail grass. We all know how devastating they are.

Who can forget when Labor aggressively started to remove the opportunity for managed grazing in selected national parks in times of drought to manage grassland, or the ongoing savage removal of stock grazing permits? The savagery of the Labor government's legislative agenda fails to review and reform many failures—some include state forest leases that adjoin freehold properties, leases now being abolished with the rapid return of noxious weeds and feral animals that cause havoc to neighbours that once cared for the same country. We have seen the increased destruction of our protected estates under this government.

This legislation has been scrutinised by stakeholders. We have heard a few times here this afternoon that this is just not good law. The issue regarding a 'state interest' seems to give the minister unprecedented power to make declarations. We can imagine what these powers mean for the future of Queensland and the future of farming, especially when they are totally beholden to Greens preferences. At the very least, meeting the criteria should require both 'economical, environmental or community interests' and 'state interests' to be satisfied. The Queensland Resources Council expressed concerns because they have not been consulted on the amendments. Combined with the fact that neighbouring graziers might not even be considered as a 'materially affected' party, this will negatively affect families across Queensland.

We hold concerns that the bill will result in the permanent loss of valuable farming land, and we echo the concerns of AgForce Queensland in both this inquiry and the inquiry undertaken in 2017. This is not only about vital horticultural, beef and other agricultural uses that are readily identifiable with Queensland; the committee heard that even beekeeping would be considered incompatible with the special wildlife reserves management principles. We cannot have a Nature Conservation Act that continually gets changed with unintended consequences, particularly in reference to beekeepers in our state.

The LNP holds serious concerns about the impact special wildlife reserves may have on adjacent agricultural producers, impacts similar to those experienced by landholders adjacent to Queensland's national parks where inadequate management of pests—both animals and weeds—continues to impact negatively on agricultural producers. We used to have a good neighbours policy; now we just have locked up land causing havoc.

The lack of clarity provided by the department about how the owners of these reserves will be policed in the implementation of the management plans only adds to these concerns. It shows just how diabolical it is out there in regional Queensland, particularly around protected estates. We cannot manage what we have now, and that has been admitted in the first paragraph of the explanatory notes. Again, off we go with an ideological view and no real management plan prepared around the issue.

We believe the definition of those considered to be 'materially affected' by the creation of these reserves to be inadequate. It is the department's assertion that the term 'materially affected' should be understood by its plain English meaning without further guidance in the bill. This is another example of why there are so many concerns with legislation that is pushed through with so many concerns being raised by so many stakeholders and, importantly, Queenslanders.

The Property Council also highlighted the inadequacy of how the minister is to notify parties. I saw many members opposite shaking their head about the notifications in newspapers. However, it is our understanding, reported to us by stakeholders, that is exactly how this was done. There are many examples, particularly in the environment space, of lack of communication and consultation on a lot of issues. I have experienced many in my part of the electorate where constantly things are pushed through without consultation or communication—turn up for a press release, back on the plane and back to Brisbane they go. Under this bill, conservation agreements for the proposed special wildlife reserves will be perpetual. We have heard about how dire, diabolical and even nonsensical these sorts of issues become when people hold these views.

I now turn to property rights of future landowners. There are very limited circumstances in which these reserves can be revoked, and there are other concerns. The process should be outlined for scenarios in which the relationship between the landowner and the department breaks down due to disagreement. That has not been addressed. I heard people talking up the National Parks Association's contribution. They also raised concerns, which should send alarm bells about the legislative reform process to the minister.

After flagrant disregard for consultation with the traditional owners I know amendments are being proposed. How does this government think they get to the point where they have to move amendments at the 11th hour to appease some of the most important Queenslanders regarding the aspirations of Indigenous people about the future of their land and their opportunities? The government has already claimed that the bill will be amended to clarify these issues, but I understand from reports that that will make it even worse.

This government is incapable of creating and implementing effective environmental initiatives. At the end of the day, the one thing that Labor loves is rolling out these policies with great media announcements but with little practical results on the ground. This relentless environmental ideologically driven agenda is also short on details and delivers small, tangible results in terms of outcome in Queensland. I would challenge anyone who says the proposed legislation we are debating here today will achieve the desired outcome. It looks good on paper and there is a nice, glossy brochure, but the reality is somewhat different.

Last year we saw the container deposit debacle turn into a bungled program. The rollout was meant to come into effect months earlier than it eventually did; it had to be postponed. The government did not do the work and it did not have the ticker to get it right. The rollout was a train wreck, as has been reported many times.

We also now have this big, new waste levy/tax coming, causing havoc. We have seen a changing of the goalposts in terms of who will and will not be affected. I noticed with interest that the other day my own local council put out a memo talking about who will now be affected. We remember the promises in this House about who was going to be impacted by the waste levy/tax. Of course, we now know it was secret; it was going to be the latest tax to be introduced and dressed up as an environmental initiative.

Ms ENOCH: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. It is on relevance to the long title of the bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): I ask the member to come back to the long title.

Mr BENNETT: In conclusion, with 30 seconds to go, I reiterate that there are many examples of how the environmental programs, particularly in the last little while under this minister, have not been aspirational for Queenslanders and they are not having the desired effect for the reef or the environment. More importantly, the agenda driven by the ever-increasing south-east corner that is foisted on the rest of us in Queensland is offensive and arrogant. I think we need to call out what has happened. If the minister would like to come back to the Burnett to engage on some of these environmental programs, as she has promised to do, we would certainly make her welcome.