




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

BIODISCOVERY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (12.05 pm): From the outset, I advise the House that the opposition will not oppose the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Biodiscovery and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. During the course of my contribution, I will highlight some of the areas that we would dearly have loved more time to debate. It is fit and proper that I follow those speakers, particularly the Manager of Opposition Business, who highlighted how, in this mad scramble that we in this parliament find ourselves—with sittings being cancelled and no budget being handed down—we are now cobbling together things in some kind of eleventh-hour mad rush. In a democracy, it is a great shame when we should have every opportunity to debate it. If that means having to sit later, so be it. That option should have been on the table.

I start by thanking the minister for the briefing of her departmental staff and indeed herself in making contact, as is her style. Thank you, Minister. I also acknowledge the clarification in her second reading speech. Shortly I will discuss one of the amendments.

I will start with the mine rehabilitation element and the Rehabilitation Commissioner in the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I want to talk about, first and foremost, the importance of making sure there is a framework for the rehabilitation of mines in this state—not demonised or victimised but rehabilitated. It is wrong of us in this place today to not acknowledge that there are many companies—in fact, the vast majority of companies—that are rehabilitating former mine sites to an excellent standard. Some do such a good job that people would not even know that a mine had been on the site. In the past, there were others that have not been so good. At estimates hearings over the course of two years I highlighted one: Baal Gammon. There was a lot of lip-service but not a lot of activity from the government until it was highlighted.

I refer to the Rehabilitation Commissioner. I acknowledge the quality of questions and the quality of the statement of reservation by LNP members of the committee, the members for Condamine, Buderim and Bundaberg. The commissioner has been given no compliance power but has been given a bureaucracy surrounding that role. I will put forward a cost that we could have avoided in still having this function. The Rehabilitation Commissioner will cost this state \$8 million over the next six years and will employ another six full-time staff. We still do not know what that function will look like. The committee process highlighted just how shambolic that is. We do not know what that function will look like or what powers it will have. We know that it does not have a compliance power, yet somehow we know that it needs another six full-time staff.

I would have thought, using the expertise within the department, that we could have used that opportunity to empower those existing staff towards going into this unit and being able to deliver value for money but also a sense of purpose for those staff with that skill set in the department of environment.

We do not know what that skill set is yet, but I am certain that within that department there would be people with that skill set who could have filled that role and saved taxpayers this whopping big sum of money and still delivered an excellent outcome for the environment.

I want to highlight an element, whilst minor in nature, which will show why cobbling together things in a mad rush is never a good way to do business. The amendment to the reef environment legislation is one that is welcomed by the opposition, and I will tell members why it is welcomed by the opposition. Under the original changes to the reef quality legislation, individual landholders were asked to conduct paperwork to the same level as a mining entity. The irony that this has been put in a bill in which we are discussing mine rehabilitation is not lost on me, but that clarification shows that the government got it horribly wrong early on. I acknowledge the change. I wish it had never got to this stage, but I acknowledge it is a positive change. I would gladly talk about the need for good reef laws every day of the week, but do members know what I would like to talk about? I would like to talk about why it is so important that we should be able to come in this place and debate legislation when it comes to improving water quality and farm viability. That is the sort of debate I would have loved to have in this chamber, not handing over a blank cheque to the bureaucracy an authority to set those standards and change them at a whim, and members will see that tone and that flavour run through other parts of this bill.

I will turn to the biodiversity element of the bill. I acknowledge, as the minister said, in a growing industry and one that is well and truly being supported by those research institutes the need to empower our First Nation peoples, but my comments are not going to reflect the intent of this bill. Rather, they are going to reflect the implementation of it and why we saw in that committee process some flaws. I start with the code of practice—a code that today, in the same way we did with the reef legislation, we will hand over authority not from this place, not for us to be able to debate what that code should look like, but we just hand over a blank cheque for it to be changed at any time in regulation. That is no way for a parliament to conduct itself.

A parliament should be willing to debate and stand by the laws it debates, not to hand over unfettered, unchecked and unregulated authority to those who are not accountable to people. How long will this code of practice take to develop when we do not know what the code of practice will say? The minister initially said 12 months and then the bureaucracy said that it was not possible to be doing it in 12 months and now we are being told we just do not know how long it will be.

Mr Krause: You couldn't possibly put a deadline on it.

Mr CRISAFULLI: I will absolutely take the interjection from the member for Scenic Rim. We have been told that we could not put a deadline on it, so we do not know what the code is and we do not know its implications but we do know that it cannot be done in a period of time that we had initially said that it would be done. What are the implications? There are penalties of up to \$600,000—penalties of up to \$600,000 in a code when we do not know what it looks like and we have handed that over without this place knowing its intent.

I want to talk about the Queensland protected areas and the loss of biodiversity. Mr Deputy Speaker, for your intent, it relates to clause 6 in article 15. When the government quite rightly debates issues like this, I want to highlight why we should be doing so much better in this state. We have spoken in this place about the Auditor-General's report, but I want to squirrel down and talk about the fall in funding when it comes to acquisitions for national parks and protected areas in this state. It is a shameless legacy of this government how—

Ms ENOCH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. We are not talking about funding related to those matters. We are talking about the bills before us.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stevens): Thank you. Member for Broadwater, I ask you to come back to the long title of the bill, please.

Mr CRISAFULLI: Mr Deputy Speaker, at the start of my contribution I highlighted exactly what I am referring to. If you look at clause 6, you will see that the minister is in fact incorrect in saying it does not reference it. Today the Queensland Conservation Council has painted just how poorly a job this government has done in protecting those protected areas and therefore the loss of biodiversity, which is what this bill is about. It is one thing to talk about the environment, but environmental achievements are marked via actions, not words; via practical results, not virtue signalling. The government will stand up and it will empathise with people who will glue themselves to roads and sit on bridges to make a political point, but it will not get dirt under its fingernails and protect areas that need protecting.

There are many reasons why this state needs a change of government—many reasons—but one of them is to re-establish a legacy in this place of locking away areas for communities and people in a way that only practical conservationists can—areas like in the Far North of this state where the former

environment minister empowered Indigenous communities to be able to protect things that were important to them. We are in the only time of this parliament when a government has protected over a million hectares of land in a single term, and for a conservation group to acknowledge that today is a great thing.

Ms ENOCH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The clause that the member is alleging to refer to—clause 6—is about the Great Barrier Reef catchment areas. It is not relevant to the areas that he is discussing. He is out of scope of this bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, I have been listening intently, but I will take advice from the clerks at the table on the matter. However, the matters that the member was talking about were very much in terms of environmental areas and issues that are dealt with under the bill. I will take advice from the clerks at the table. Member for Broadwater, it is limited in terms of how far you can wander off the long title of the bill, so I would ask that you bring your comments back to the long title of the bill.

Mr CRISAFULLI: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will now move on to an area that the minister raised, and that is amending drafting errors when it comes to koala protection, and I acknowledge the minister's intent in this. It was obviously sloppy drafting, but what the minister is doing is seeking to clarify what is an important area, but again I will take the opportunity to talk about practical conservation. For this government to have spent barely a third of what was already a miserly amount in protecting koala populations in the 2018-19 year is another shameful legacy.

The population of koalas in the northern Gold Coast will be at unsustainable levels in less than two decades and they may not exist in less than half a century and yet money that was set aside has not been spent to acquire this corridor. Shameful! We should be arguing in this place whether or not that quantum of money is sufficient, not whether or not, having set a budget, the government cannot even get out of its own way to purchase those corridors back.

Environmental legacy is about practical outcomes. It is about fulfilling what you say you are going to do. The delays in achieving good outcomes for the koala population of this state continue to compound. We heard about the council and its meeting dates, the timelines and the draft policy and we kept on seeing delays. In the meantime what has happened is that areas that needed to be protected were not. I will stand up in this place every day of the week that we get a chance to speak, and we do not have many cognated debates then guillotined after only a few hours, and speak about the need to protect the environment. I will also speak about the need to protect individual land rights.

If there is an area that is viewed to be environmentally sensitive and needs to be protected and it is assigned for development, the owner has to be compensated at a fair and reasonable value. That is why we have set aside money to purchase corridors. A good government will have the vision to say: how can we purchase future developmental land to prevent it from falling into hands that will mean it will cost us more in the future? This government has done neither. It has not locked away parcels in a long-term strategic way. It has not sought to buy those corridors that have been put away because of past mistakes. In the meantime the issue we are discussing here is sloppy legislation rather than futureproofing and vision.

I conclude by saying the opposition will not be opposing these bills. I use my final comments to return to where I started: it is not an issue in my mind of the intent with these changes; it is the implementation that continues to trip up this government. I do not believe this government does not wish to protect koalas—we all do—but it is incapable of making tough decisions. I do not believe the government seeks to undermine protected areas, but it has a lack of vision and foresight to work with agricultural groups to ensure areas like nature reserves are put away, to ensure that those national parks we have already are actually maintained and improved.

Ms ENOCH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. We are moving away from the actual core of these bills.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stevens): Member for Broadwater, in your final comments if we could turn back to the long title of the bill.

Mr CRISAFULLI: And they are my final comments. I note the minister getting a little agitated. I look forward to the minister, in her final contribution, indicating where I was in fact wrong in advising the House that the government has barely spent a third of the funds put away for koala rehabilitation. I look forward to the government correcting the Queensland Conservation Council which today painted an abysmal record of this government.

Ms ENOCH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order again. The member is straying from the bill once again. It is out of the scope of the bills and I ask you to rule on the point of relevance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Member, in your final comments, for the final time, could you return back to the long title of the bill.

Mr CRISAFULLI: In conclusion, the opposition will not be opposing this lengthy cognate bill, but we will continue to highlight where practical environmentalism will trump virtue signalling every day of the week.