




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2022

NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (12.53 pm): I rise to add my contribution to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Whilst the primary objective of this bill is to deliver on the election commitment to provide a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping on specified national parks to continue until 31 December 2044, I will also comment on the other objectives contained in the bill which I will get to shortly.

As noted in the bill, the extension created will only apply to areas where beekeeping could be lawfully undertaken immediately prior to the transfer of land to national parks. As other speakers have indicated, whilst beekeeping is considered inconsistent with the principle that requires national parks to be managed to provide for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values, past processes have enabled beekeeping to continue temporarily in certain national parks until 31 December 2024. Past amendments provided for continued access to specific apiary sites in national parks that are utilised by the beekeeping industry which, in addition to producing honey and other honey bee related products, provide important crop pollination services that support the horticultural industry such as in Bundaberg.

Currently there are 1,088 apiary sites across 49 of Queensland's national parks, with the most common sites being in natural clearings, logging dumps or gravel pits. Eight of these are contained within the Great Sandy National Park. Loss of access to these sites on 31 December 2024 would have a detrimental impact on the supply of these services and products at a time when the industry is concerned about the challenges posed by the threat to these glorious little six-legged insects. Yes, insects! They are insects. I want to thank the member for Bundaberg for his educational insight earlier in the debate.

Mr Smith interjected.


Mr TANTARI: I will take that interjection from the member. As members are aware, there is a threat posed to the beekeeping industry from the varroa mite, a major honey bee parasite, which was discovered in biosecurity surveillance hives at the port of Newcastle recently. Varroa mite is a parasite specific to two species of honey bee and should not attack Australia's native bees, of which there are more than 2,000 species, but there is a possibility the mite could introduce new insect viruses to Australia. The viruses, which could spread, might get into the landscape and then our native bees. The pest affects every other major beekeeping area in the world but it has never established itself in Australia before. The discovery of the varroa mite sent New South Wales into a bee lockdown, with no honey bees allowed to be moved across the state of New South Wales. Keep your fingers crossed, because the parasite has not made it to Queensland—a fear driving our biosecurity agencies to act quickly and decisively to protect against the brownish-red sesame seed sized mite that feeds on honey bees.

Since the early 20th century the mites have spread from Asia to places including North America, the UK, New Zealand and Hawaii. The mite jumped ship from the Asian honey bee, where it is relatively harmless, to the European honey bee. The European honey bee does not have a good defence against it. Just to put it into context, although the mite may be small, apparently it is one of the largest parasitic

mites in the world relative to its host. For example, for a human it would be like having a dinner plate sized tick on you. What ends up happening over time is the more the bees become weak, their life span is reduced and so there are fewer of them to collect food, nectar and pollen. They become more susceptible to other pests and diseases, and eventually the population dwindles to the point of no return. If untreated, a mite infestation will cause a honey bee colony to die. Having continuous access to sites extended in this bill could provide for another layer or barrier against potential infection while having a reserve available to keep the mite at bay. Australia is one of the last countries in the world to not have this mite yet, so the potential impact is very significant. The mites have been associated with significant colony losses globally. Potential impacts have been estimated at around \$70 million to the Australian honey bee industry.

Many inquiry stakeholders identified the important role that honey bees play in the agricultural and horticultural industries. The Queensland honey bee industry produces honey and other products valued at around \$64 million. Honey production has been the major focus of Queensland beekeepers for many years, but significant growth in horticultural industries has seen a significant increase in the demand for paid pollination services. The Queensland Beekeepers' Association advised that honey bee pollination provided an estimated \$2.1 billion of economic value for Queensland in the 2014-15 financial year. The bulk of major crops benefit from pollination, with Queensland's managed honey bees providing pollination services to tree, fruit, vegetable, fodder and broadacre crops. If managed honey bee populations decline, there will be corresponding declines in the supply of about a third of the food we eat, which means increased food prices.

Another element of the bill I would like to touch on is the enhancement of the Department of Environment and Science's capacity to respond to misconduct on Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service managed areas such as state forests, marine parks, reservation areas and national parks, in particular to provide for the new offence of impersonation of a forest officer or ranger and expanding existing obstruction offences so they will apply to obstructing conservation, authorised officers and inspectors in the performance of their functions. These new offences are needed because of several instances in the past in QPWS managed areas where people, for whatever reason, have claimed to be rangers and acted in a threatening and punitive manner or denied people the right to camp on locations that had been pre-booked as a part of their visit. These sorts of dreadful actions need to be curbed and punished if discovered. The government is acting now to stop this sort of outrageous behaviour against park users, and this should be supported by all of us in this place. In my part of the world—where we have some of the most beautiful and pristine environments of land and water within the Great Sandy Marine Park and the fabulous and much loved K'gari—providing an offence for impersonation of an officer is welcomed to ensure the safety and appropriate use of these great sites.

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (2.57 pm), continuing: Before the adjournment I was speaking on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I was referring to the provision of new offences for impersonation of forest officers and rangers. In my part of the world where we have some of the most beautiful and pristine environments of land and water, with the Great Sandy Marine Park and the fabulous and much loved K'gari, providing an offence for impersonation of an officer is welcome to ensure the safety and appropriate use of these great sites. It should send a message as a deterrent and enhance DES's ability to act against this type of conduct.

The other area I would like to touch on before I finish my contribution is the powers to enhance the officer's ability to seize property. As always, this area is increased with caution as it relates to an individual's rights. This bill will limit the powers of an officer enacting their duties. With regard to a conservation officer, they may exercise their new powers under this act to seize an item in the following circumstances: it has been abandoned, such as a burnt-out car; it is being used to commit an offence, such as a wildlife trap used by poachers; is an item not authorised to be in a protected area, such as an unregistered trail bike; to protect the cultural or natural resources of a protected area, for example, moving a vehicle blocking access to a fire trail or other essential road; for the safety of people in a protected area; or for the orderly and proper management of a protected area, such as amplifying sound equipment being used for a rave party.

A lot of people use these protected areas. These simple changes will enhance the value and amenity of our precious natural environments by protecting them against disruptive and damaging behaviours. I thank the Minister for the Environment for introducing these changes and the State Development and Regional Industries Committee, so ably chaired by the member for Bancroft, for their work on the bill. I believe that the changes the Palaszczuk government is introducing in this bill are measured and necessary. They apply a bit of commonsense in confronting a threat to our bee industry and enhancing the usability and management of our greatest natural resource, our environment. I support the bill before the House.