




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (4.33 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The primary objective of the bill is to deliver an election commitment to provide a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping in specified national parks to continue until 31 December 2044. Past processes were associated with the transfer of a number of state forests to protected areas, primarily under the 1999 South East Queensland Forests Agreement, or the RFA as we knew it back then. This includes a change to the Nature Conservation Act to enable beekeeping to continue temporarily in certain national parks until 31 December 2024.

It would seem the government's view is that the extension of time provided by the amendments will give the government time to seek alternative sites outside national parks, support the adoption of industry best practice in protected areas and identify initiatives to assist the industry to progressively relocate off park over the next 20 years, although they have not necessarily been very successful in doing that during the last period.

The LNP has been unable to find any conclusive evidence of the negative impact of honey bees on native flora and fauna. The LNP will not be opposing the bill. However, I support the amendment outlined by the shadow minister to remove the end date for apiary permits in national parks. This will bring Queensland into line with both New South Wales and Victoria, which have no time limit on the provision for beekeeping in their national parks.

I have beekeepers like 'Tractor' Ferguson of Thargomindah who tend to bees in both Queensland and New South Wales. I remember the day we took the then prime minister out to Charleville to see the impacts of the prolonged drought. The mayor of the Bulloo shire, 'Tractor' Ferguson, who is also a beekeeper, stood up at the meeting and said the drought was so bad he had to handfeed his bees. That is why we need these additional areas in Queensland. When we have a drought out in the west, there needs to be somewhere for primary producers who are beekeepers to take their bees so they can actually survive because it takes a long time to build up those hives. It seemed to bring home the message of the prolonged drought. Later on the then prime minister had a hands-on demonstration from 'Tractor' about how to handfeed the bees.

It is not uncommon for beekeepers to operate on both sides of the state border, so it makes sense to keep this legislation as standard as possible across different states. We do not have a cross-border commissioner in Queensland, but it would certainly be something that a cross-border commissioner could look at. This is a sensible amendment from the shadow minister. Bees are an important part of our food supply chain and beekeepers are some of the most conscientious people. They also keep a close eye on what is happening in national parks, often undertaking maintenance of fire trails and access paths. Park rangers cannot be everywhere in national parks. The beekeepers are an added set of trustworthy eyes in these parts. They help the rangers with identification of any illegal activity. It does not cost the taxpayer a cent to have beekeepers doing that voluntary surveillance in the parks. This government needs all the help it can get when it comes to making sure that our parks are

looked after. It is disappointing to see the number of times the Labor government has fallen short on protecting the park assets in their natural condition by not adequately controlling feral animals and pest weeds.

While the initial extension of access to the apiary sites was intended to provide time for alternative beekeeping sites to be located outside national parks, this has proved to be very challenging, which is why the government should support our LNP amendment. Commercial beekeepers, growers and the food industry bodies rely on national parks for apiary sites. They will be decimated without this access. Honourable members will see increases in prices of honey and they will also see much more imported honey if we do not support the beekeepers.

The Australian Food and Grocery Council has stated that on conservative estimates, two-thirds of Queensland's food crops rely on the pollination services of professional apiarists and bees under their care. It is a part of horticulture for bees to undertake that pollination service and they do a fantastic job. Beekeeping is also a very specialised area. One example in Queensland is almonds. Beekeepers provided in excess of 20,000 beehives for almond pollination in 2021. As these industries grow, the need for pollination of bees is growing, too. We need to make sure that those people have certainty going forward. We cannot underestimate the value of bees to our horticultural industries and the food supply chain.

Beekeepers want that certainty so that future generations will take up beekeeping. They need to have that certainty going forward. By legislating a deadline, there is still an expectation that one day the government will remove their ability to access national parks. I urge the government to support our amendment. It makes a minor change. It is important because it sends a strong signal to not only beekeepers but also the horticultural industry of our support for them and the wider industry.

Beekeepers and the horticulture industry deserve this support. They are particularly hardworking and we know that there is a labour shortage in the horticultural industry, particularly in my electorate. I urge the government to support this LNP amendment. It is a sensible amendment and it adds value to this legislation. I urge government members to support it.