




Speech By  
**Barry O'Rourke**

**MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON**

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**NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (4.09 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The main purpose of the bill is delivering on our commitment made to the Queensland beekeeping industry. This bill will provide up to a 20-year extension to the existing arrangements that enable beekeeping to occur on certain national parks. As an aside, it has been estimated that pollination services from honey bees contribute about \$4 billion to \$6 billion annually to the Australian economy.

Commercial beekeeping in national parks is a legacy issue associated with the transfer of state forests to national parks through the state forest transfer processes occurring in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It only applies to areas where beekeeping was in place prior to the transfer of the land into the national park estate. Under the current arrangements, keeping of beehives in national parks was due to expire on 31 December 2024. Through the passing of this bill, it will provide beekeepers with more certainty about extending these arrangements for up to 20 years to 31 December 2044.

I am a hobby beekeeper and I understand the importance of having decent sites where bees can forage and support the environment. You must have good sites to ensure your hives remain healthy and productive and they must be in places where they can be regularly checked. It is important to check your hives for any parasites, and if your hive is doing very well and becomes overcrowded, it may be time to consider splitting the hive.

I am sure all members know the importance of bees. I started keeping bees, both honey bees and native bees, at home as my fruit trees were healthy but produced very few fruit. I can now say I have way more fruit than we can use. Bees are valuable because of their pollination services in helping to provide all foods. In CQ we have a lot of commercial planting, like cereals, sorghum, maize, macadamias—which we have spoken about—and citrus, and the list goes on. With the large-scale macadamia farming, it is essential that they have access to honey bees for their pollination. Some farming areas around the state are naturally adjacent to national parks. Bees are essential for leaf and root crops like onions, broccoli, cabbage and many more vegetables.

As a society, our diet is reliant on bees and other pollinators for cross-pollination. It is essential that we do everything we can to help increase the number of hives after the devastating fires in the southern states where thousands upon thousands of beehives were destroyed. Research has found that there is a direct link between pollination and human health—because not only do bees pollinate food crops, they also improve the nutrient value of the crops they pollinate.

Bees also help to ensure that seeds will set for many kinds of plants, which is particularly important in our national parks. Bees are beneficial to the environment generally. They pollinate wildflowers as well as shrubs and trees, thus enhancing and ensuring plant biodiversity and the beauty of our national parks and gardens. Bees of course also benefit from trees. Trees in turn support our wildlife, help to stabilise our soil structures and landscapes, and are the lungs of the earth.

Apart from the fact that pollination is important for food production, bees contribute greatly to the landscape, whether it is our grazing land, large-scale planting or our gardens. Studies have repeatedly confirmed the value of bee pollination to specific crops, such as macadamias, and how crop production is negatively affected through a lack of bee pollination, resulting in lower yield. Honey bees provide an opportunity to judge longer term environmental health, as they are one of the few insect species which produce colonies which are meant to survive for multiple years.

There are always challenges to getting good sites for our hives outside of national parks where there are plentiful food sources for the bees. That is in part the reason to extend past 31 December 2024. The government recognises that the loss of access to national park sites post December 2024 would have a negative impact on the supply of products and services provided by beekeepers. The department will work with beekeepers to find alternative appropriate sites over the coming years.

This bill will provide up to a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping in our national parks until December 2044 in areas where beekeeping was in existence prior to the transfer of the land. This bill also makes a number of amendments to support the compliance within the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to assist our rangers to carry out their duties. I commend the bill to the House.