




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (6.16 pm): I rise to contribute to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The main focus of this legislation is to deliver a measly 20-year extension to allow beekeeping in Queensland's national parks. Can I say this bill misses the point by a bee's whisker? That is because we are at the end of a 20-year period which would have seen the Labor government ban the keeping of bees in national parks by 2024.

Beekeepers were supposed to transition to other areas in this time because the government believes beekeeping—and we have just heard it—is inconsistent with the management principles for national parks as outlined in the Nature Conservation Act. We completely disagree with that. For 20 years, Queensland beekeepers have been fighting for that to be overturned. For 20 years they have been thinking that they would lose access to this vital resource. For 20 years they have been worrying that eventually their industry and businesses would be completely decimated if they could no longer place their hives in national parks.

Interestingly, in this time, the Labor government have found little to no evidence of the detrimental impact of honey bees on native flora and fauna, and, over the last 20 years, no viable alternative locations to national parks have been found for beekeepers by this state government. I ask the Labor government why impose another 20-year time frame? Why not lift the time frame completely?

Commercial beekeepers deserve certainty. They do not want another deadline, because regardless of the fact it will not end for 20 years, it just starts another cycle of doubt, worry and frustration. An expectation will remain that, by 2044, the government will finally completely remove access to national parks. That is the concern. Queensland will be the only state—I will say that again—the only state in Australia with a sunset clause. It can only lead to people walking away from this vital industry or choosing to expand into New South Wales or Victoria where there is greater freedom in national parks and increased certainty for the beekeeping businesses.

I would like to congratulate the Queensland Beekeepers' Association—it is great to have Jo Martin here—and the many beekeepers who made submissions to the State Development and Regional Industries Committee's inquiry into this bill. A big shout-out again to Jacob Stevens, the President of the Queensland Beekeepers' Association, who I literally ran into in Inglewood just the other day outside the bakery with Lawrence Springborg and the local member, James Lister.

Jacob was in the middle of transporting. There was a truck full of beehives on its way out to Cunnamulla. He was literally stopping for a pie at the Inglewood bakery—I am not allowed to say it was actually a pie. The truck was sitting there full of bees. It is a vital industry. He had a couple of workers with him. This is an industry that employs people. My Nanango electorate is home to many commercial beekeepers. In fact, I have it on good authority that the South Burnett is almost the beekeeping capital of Queensland—it might be overtaking Warwick—with at least six commercial beekeepers in operation.

I would like to thank Brad Jensen of Beekeeping Australia based in Kingaroy, who keeps me solidly up to date about his industry. Brad is a third generation beekeeper and at just 32 years of age has grown his business to seven staff, including five trainees, and 2,000 beehives. He specialises in

honey production along with the pollination of macadamias, avocados, canola and fava beans. Brad is obviously very passionate about beekeeping and, while he strongly supports the 20-year extension, he firmly believes that there should not be another deadline. He says in his submission—

... the date should be removed altogether to give the next generation confidence to pursue a career in bee keeping without them knowing their career will have an end date, as this is something I have struggled with personally for the last 16 years I have been full time beekeeping.

Brad explained to me that beekeepers work with the environment. They love a healthy forest and do no damage to national parks. It is the national parks that provide a place of good nutrition for bees to increase hive strength, particularly after working in pollination jobs. It is the commercial beekeepers like Brad and Jacob who want to work and keep that healthy forest going. Without bees, we would simply not have the food that we need and love. I will not go through it all because I know many other members have done that. Queensland's \$2.8 billion horticulture industry is underpinned by healthy bee colonies for pollination.

We know commercial beekeeping currently occurs in 49 national parks. The Queensland Beekeepers' Association notes that the footprint of apiary sites in national parks across the entire state of Queensland would be no greater than 54.4 hectares. That is it. For those opposite who have no idea how big that is, it is not very big when you are looking at the size of Queensland. It is 54.4 hectares. This equates to a physical footprint of less than 0.0004 per cent of the 14.3 million hectares of protected areas across this state.

Mrs Gerber: It is a bee's whisker.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is a bee's whisker; I will take that interjection from the member for Currumbin. It is not much at all. Importantly, only 59.7 per cent of these sites have active permits. In reality, the actual footprint of current beekeeping in our national parks is minuscule. It is actually 0.00023 per cent.

In fact, it is the beekeepers who are improving the parks in which they operate. They are the ones who are undertaking the maintenance of the fire trails and access tracks. This is often part of their apiary access agreements and is undertaken at the commercial beekeeper's expense. I do want to point that out because we all know that the worst neighbour in Queensland when it comes to national parks is the state Labor government. In this I want to give a big shout-out to the commercial beekeepers who, through their apiary access agreements, actually look after the national parks. They are the ones who are actually doing that hard work.

In 2016 I advocated on behalf of my constituents Clinton and Rodney Ruge of Ruge Honey regarding reinstalling beekeeping sites on Boorara Station at Hungerford. This area was transferred to the Currawinya National Park and beekeeping was banned as no evidence could be found of previous beekeeping immediately before the transfer. Despite attempts by myself, the Ruges and others to convince the department of national parks to allow them to recommence beekeeping, the then minister, Steven Miles, stated, 'QPWS officers inspected these sites and can find no evidence to suggest that they had been previously used for that purpose.' It is so ironic.

The admission by the department that there was no evidence of 40 years of beekeeping on that national park at 11 sites at Boorara Station is the perfect example to make this point. Surely this suggests the environment had been well maintained and the activity was clearly sustainable in the long term. I acknowledge their submission to the committee detailing this experience and note that ultimately they were denied access to this precious beekeeping resource. Ultimately, that is our loss; it is Queenslanders' loss. As the Queensland Beekeepers' Association say, healthy forests equal healthy bees which equal healthy food which equals healthy people. We must fully support this vital industry. I will continue to stand by our beekeepers. They need confidence. They do not need another 20-year sentence.

I will be supporting this bill, but I will also be strongly supporting the shadow environment minister's amendment to this bill. It is much needed. I plead with those opposite: please listen to the submissions; please understand that the young commercial beekeepers deserve certainty for the next generation. Again, healthy forests, healthy bees, healthy food means healthy people.