




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOPER

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (5.45 pm): I rise to support the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I thought I would start with an anecdote.

Mr Skelton: Is it about bees?

Ms BUSH: I take the interjection: it is actually about bees. Before becoming a member of parliament, I was working as a senior officer in the Public Service managing statewide service delivery teams. People who have met me probably know that I love a good quote or a good metaphor. With my teams I used to speak a lot about time management—in the Public Service that is a big part of the role—but also about the importance of impact, making sure that the work that you do has a real impact for Queenslanders.

The anecdote that I used a lot was comparing two insects—the mosquito and the bee. I used to say to my team that both insects are incredibly busy but, while the mosquito is really irritating, the bee has impact. No-one can possibly deny the highly productive qualities of the honey bee. So it should concern us all, and it certainly concerns me, that the bee numbers in Queensland—in fact, throughout Australia and internationally—have been in decline. I will talk about the importance of that in a moment.

This bill is principally about protecting the immediate future of the honey bee in Queensland by providing a 20-year extension to existing arrangements that enable beekeeping to occur on certain national parks. It has been reported that between the years 2006 and 2016, and obviously ongoing, Australia has lost over 100,000 commercial honey beehives. More than 20 per cent of the honey-producing hives have been lost in a single decade.

In Queensland we have gone from 127,000 commercial hives in 2006 to just 73,000 a decade later. We probably all know, and have heard in this debate, the many reasons for that including habitat loss; disease—we now have the varroa mite or the destructor that we know is coming into Newcastle, and I really hope we are able to contain that; intensive farming practices, which we have heard a lot about; the use of pesticides; and climate change. In particular, in Australia we have had bushfires throughout the various states. They have all contributed to the decline of both the honey bee and the native bee. That has had devastating effects environmentally worldwide.

That impacts on honey production domestically, with honey imports in 2013 surpassing exports, but the impact is so much greater than that. As we have heard, it is actually about food security. Globally, one-third of food production depends, at least partly, on animal pollination—and honey bees are our largest pollinator. Although the honey bee is an introduced species in Australia, the majority of crops they pollinate have also been introduced and would struggle to be productive without the honey bee pollination. Almonds, blueberries, cucumbers, apples and avocados—I promised to talk about avocados—all rely 100 per cent on honey bees for their pollination.

I was interested to learn through the committee process that honey bees are in fact a keystone species. I think it was the member for Gympie who referenced that. The ecosystem as we know it simply would not survive without them, so their survival is really critical.

The committee received 29 submissions, the majority of which did support the bill. I will speak to those themes and issues first. Currently there are over 1,000 apiary sites across 49 Queensland national parks, including 145 hives within the D'Aguilar National Park, which is the national park my electorate has a connection with. The bill proposes to provide a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping on specified national parks to continue until December 2044 and delivers on a 2020 government election commitment.

Currently, commercial beekeeping occurs in a number of national parks due to the transfer of state forests to national parks which occurred predominantly in the early 2000s. Commercial beekeeping activities involve beekeepers utilising tracks and trails to transport the hives of European honey bees to the locations we know as apiary sites. Commercial beekeeping is inconsistent with the management principles for national parks in the Nature Conservation Act, which requires that national parks be managed, to the greatest extent possible, for the permanent preservation of the natural condition and the protection of cultural and natural resources.

The Department of Environment and Science advised that the new extension provision to 2044 recognises the detrimental impact the loss of national park access would have on the supply of honey bee products and crop pollination services provided to the horticultural industry. This bill also simplifies the framework for authorising beekeeping on national parks. The department advised that the new framework for managing the extension of beekeeping was developed in consultation with Queensland Beekeepers' Association.

Why national parks? I have to be honest: that was the question that came to my mind when I first looked at the bill. Why do we need national parks? Why are they such a critical part of this process? To understand this I picked up the phone and spoke to a gentleman called Neville Bradford. Neville is a third-generation beekeeper. He has hives in the D'Aguilar National Park. Neville explained to me the work that he does and the role national parks play in beekeeping generally and specifically in his work. I was really fascinated to learn that Queensland honey bee industry products are valued at \$64 million. Honey bee pollination provides over \$2 billion in economic value for Queensland, \$14 billion nationally. It is not just in honey production but also the pollination services that are offered.

The growth of pollination services has resulted in Queensland beekeepers travelling interstate to participate in the pollination season for certain crops. For example, in 2021 the almond industry required 275,000 hives to pollinate crops. Neville explained how national parks are home to such a high volume and variety of flowering plants and that they are haven for bees: free from pesticides, a place to recuperate after their high-intensity pollination work. I did not realise the work that is required for these bees to be transported around and popped into a location, how far they have to drive to get around to all of these trees and pollinate everything. Neville explained to me how they only have so many flaps in their life span and that when that runs out they will decline. They have to monitor them in real-time and pull them off if that starts to happen. It is an extraordinary practice.

I have such newfound respect after reading the submissions and looking through the public transcripts. I want to congratulate the committee on the work they did. Speaking to Neville has been interesting, and it has been such a nice respite from my legal affairs work to look in-depth at this particular bill. Without this respite the honey bee population would absolutely be at risk.

In the time I have left I do want to touch on some of the issues that were raised in the submissions, particularly from environmental interest groups, which were not entirely supportive of the bill. I absolutely get that concern. I have to declare that I am a member of Land for Wildlife, and I really do take the protection of our native species quite seriously. There were issues raised around competition for food and resources, particularly if they become feral. After reading the literature in front of me and having the conversation with Neville, I understand they are breeding out the trait in bees that causes them to roam and become feral. In fact, that is an historical situation from some older crops and it is not as big an issue. As Neville said to me, 'It is in our commercial interests to not let these bees become feral and escape. Commercially, there is no value to us in doing that.'

I would like to congratulate the work of Land for Wildlife and a lot of the bush care groups that go out to create hollows and nesting boxes for sugar gliders and possums, because in Australia 17 per cent of our birds, 42 per cent of our mammals and 28 per cent of our reptiles do depend on tree hollows. It is really important that we make sure they are protected. The work that our bush care groups do in creating artificial hollows is so vital.

I do believe this bill strikes the important balance between making sure we have a really stable, resilient honey bee and food security future moving forward while also recognising that we do have a very important and vital national parks and native fauna that we have to protect, and getting that balance right is so critical. Having read the bill and having looked at the submissions, I do feel really satisfied

that we are in the right place for that, particularly with the recommendations the committee put forward around making sure a strategy is in place to look at whether it is possible to have a transition plan. I commend the bill to the House.