




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (12.13 pm): I rise to speak on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill aims to extend existing arrangements that allow beekeeping in certain national parks. The arrangements will be extended for 20 years until 31 December 2044. Finally Labor is keeping its election commitment and extending access for commercial beekeepers to national parks for another 20 years. As the member for Gympie said in this chamber, beekeepers have been given the run-around. Their concerns have been put on the backburner as successive Labor ministers have put off making a decision that will grant security for beekeepers. Five years ago, the member for Gympie and now the shadow minister for agriculture called on the government to act on the impending closures of access to national parks because beekeepers were facing a dire situation from the government's procrastination. Finally we have action because the deadline is looming.

People who run businesses need lead-in times. Those who have worked in business know that planning and financial commitments are made long in advance. Without guarantees there is no security to invest and the alternative is to close, move or find alternative work. We need to make sure that we put in place the sorts of protections that will give confidence to beekeepers who play a significant role in our economy, not just in the manufacturing of honey but also in the pollination of crops, which is incredibly important. We need only look to the Central Highlands at the moment where growers are moving into watermelons, macadamias and figs. All such flower crops rely on the important work that the beekeepers are doing. We need to give them confidence and make sure that they have a certain future.

When the Nature Conservation Act 1992 was enacted, beekeepers were promised that the government would find alternative sources. In 2018, the government told the industry that the review into the impact of honey bees on native forests was underway. They told beekeepers that they should document the attempts they had made to identify alternative sites and why those sites may be unsuitable or unavailable. They also asked beekeepers to consider managing access tracks and other key infrastructure and to work more closely with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service on pest, fire and biosecurity management. Beekeepers did what was asked of them but the government sat on the report. It is important that beekeepers are given respect and the ability to continue their business, which is so important.

In Queensland there are 167,000 hives, 9,000 registered beekeepers and 399 commercial beekeepers managing 114,000 hives. Commercial beekeeping occurs in 49 national parks and on 1,088 sites. Originally, beekeepers were never in national parks. Changes to government policy put them in national parks as a part of the South East Queensland Forests Agreement in 1999. That agreement allows beekeeping to continue in those areas until 31 December 2024 as part of a transition period. The transition period was to minimise disruption to the industry and provide time for reallocation to other sites.

Over the past 20 years, no viable alternative locations have been found. Beekeepers actively sought out other sites on private land, but the reality is that factors such as urban sprawl mean there is not sufficient land with the specific requirements needed. A department of state development and innovation feasibility study to find alternative sites was not released to the Queensland Beekeepers' Association or the public. The Queensland Beekeepers' Association President, Jacob Stevens, told the committee that 'the results have been verbally communicated to the industry in that there was no substantial alternative resources identified'.

Even the Labor dominated committee expressed disappointment in the lack of progress on the work by the Department of Environment and Science to find alternative sites. The committee chair stated that the committee was of the view that more substantial progress should have been made on this task. There is no excuse. Annually, beekeeping contributes an estimated \$2.4 billion to the Queensland economy. Every year Queensland produces more than seven million kilograms of premium honey. It is the cleanest and greenest honey because it is chemical-free.

The QBA estimates that in 2020 the demand for managed honey bee colonies to provide pollination services amounted to 67,000 hives. Horticulture and small-crop industries will struggle to survive without beekeepers who work beside them to ensure that crops such as strawberries, avocados, watermelons and macadamias are pollinated. Macadamias are worth approximately \$180 million to the state's economy, with most of the 4,000 hectares a year being planted in Queensland. Production is expected to double within the next decade, adding a further \$150 million to the Queensland economy. Pollinating bees are essential to facilitating that growth.

Currently, horticulture is worth approximately \$3 billion to the state's economy and is responsible for more than 20,000 jobs in the regions. Continued access to Queensland's national park sites is a core regulatory condition to secure the future of both the Queensland honey bee and our horticultural sectors. It is important that we continue to support what is a very important industry. It needs all the support we can possibly give it.

In 2014, a Senate inquiry found that 65 per cent of all Australian food sources are reliant on bee pollination. The Australian Food & Grocery Council submission stated that 'by conservative estimates, some 2/3 of Australia's food crops rely on the pollination services of professional apiarists and the bees under their care'.

I call on the Labor government to please work closely with the Beekeepers' Association and those people in the industry, because they provide a significant investment in our food production which is so important. We only have to see what has happened over the last couple of years, obviously with not only COVID-19 but also the war in Ukraine and Russia which see prices going up, that food security is very important. Pollinisation and supporting our bee industry is absolutely paramount for Queensland. We have the cleanest and greenest horticultural industry in Australia and the world and we need to continue to support them not only to provide food for our national security but also in terms of our trade opportunities in South-East Asia and those markets that we are trying to tap into. I call on the government to work closely with the bee industry.

Debate, on motion of member for Gregory, adjourned.