




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2022

NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (6.47 pm): I rise to support the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Firstly, I congratulate the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef for introducing this legislation. It is an important body of work that appropriately recognises the vital measures to protect our environment while ensuring a real threat to our nation's farmers is appropriately managed. This bill is the correct path to take. I also recognise the members of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee for their report on the legislation, particularly the member for Bancroft, the chair, who I know had a particular interest in examining this bill.

Our agriculture industries are a source of great pride for Queenslanders, and rightly so. For the 2021-22 financial year the forecast gross value of production of \$23.5 billion is a remarkable achievement, even more so when one considers just two years ago we were in the darkest days of the COVID pandemic, with government and industry working side by side to make sure our supply lines remained open and great Queensland produce could still be enjoyed around the nation and, where possible, around the world.

Horticulture production is a significant part of this effort and it plays a key role in our agricultural economy. While the beekeeping industry's \$64 million in honey production is certainly important and a sweet contribution on its own, up to \$2.4 billion worth of our state's agriculture production is reliant on pollination services to grow our fantastic Queensland produce.

As I travel around the state in my position as agriculture minister, I see firsthand our rapidly growing macadamia industry, which is reliant on pollination; our citrus production, which is worth hundreds of millions of dollars across the state, is reliant on pollination; and stone fruit and avocados—you guessed it—are also reliant on pollination by our hardworking bees. Many of our agricultural crops rely on this critical process and it is not something that just happens. Queensland's beekeeping industry plays a critical role in providing pollination services to our agricultural industry. Well over 100,000 commercial beehives are in demand right across the state to ensure that we can all enjoy the great food that we grow here. In fact, they are in such demand that each year some 40,000 commercial hives are transported from Queensland to other states, including New South Wales and Victoria, to provide critical services in those places.

As we have heard in the debate this evening, a recent outbreak of the deadly varroa destructor mite in New South Wales, particularly around Newcastle, brought home to us how critically important beekeeping services are. We have put in place appropriate movement controls and a permit system to minimise any risk that contaminated bees, bee products or beekeeping equipment could bring that dangerous parasite into Queensland. I congratulate Biosecurity Queensland for moving so quickly not only to support the Queensland industry but also to offer its support and expertise to New South Wales authorities as they work to eradicate that invasive pest.

I reflect back on a situation that arose in Townsville with a mite. It was not the varroa mite but another mite. I put on record my appreciation for the work that was done in that instance. The secretary of the Queensland Beekeepers' Association, Jo Martin, was in the chamber today. I know that she also commended Queensland Biosecurity. In particular I acknowledge Rob Stevens for his work in eradication and his interest in making sure that we kept Queensland safe from that particular mite. We are also making sure that we protect the industry through our control measures in relation to the varroa destructor mite.

That brings me back to the purpose of the bill. The bill will deliver on the Palaszczuk government's 2020 election promise to provide a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping on specified national parks through to December 2044. Certainly government members know that when you make an election commitment you deliver on it. The Palaszczuk government is delivering on our election commitment. If you want to make changes in this House, firstly you need to put forward a commitment and not just make a statement. You need to give a commitment and then deliver on it.

In the debate this afternoon and this evening, claims have been made that the LNP would do this and do that. That is only as good as their word. This evening is historic as we are delivering on a commitment that will protect the industry for the next 20 years. From conversations that I have had this afternoon with the Queensland Beekeepers' Association, I know for a fact that they are extremely happy with the Palaszczuk Labor government's commitment in this regard. That is what happens when you engage with industry. You engage with them to reach an outcome that they are satisfied with. That is what we have done here today and it is what we did leading up to the 2020 election.

I also put on record my appreciation for and acknowledgement of Minister Enoch in her role as the environment minister. She and I as the minister for agriculture met with the Queensland Beekeepers' Association and we brought forward the bill that we are debating today. That is what good governments do. It is what Labor governments do. They deliver on their promises. They engage with industry. We are seeing the results of that today, regardless of those opposite who are all talk and no substance whatsoever.

Opposition members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Order!

Mr FURNER: There is not one bit of substance. Permits for beekeepers to keep hives in designated areas of certain national parks date back to transitional arrangements put in place through the 1999 South East Queensland Regional Forests Agreement process. While the intent to find alternative sites for those hives outside of national parks was certainly there, it has proven to be more difficult than first imagined. Therefore, the extension is a sensible move to ensure that our beekeeping industry can continue to support the billions of dollars worth of agricultural production that supports thousands of good jobs right across this state. We will work with the industry, as we have shown and demonstrated in the lead-up to this bill.

Mr O'Connor interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Bonney will cease his interjections.

Mr FURNER: Over the coming years we will make new efforts to identify those alternative sites as agricultural production in our state continues to grow and prosper. The reality is that—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr Mickelberg interjected.

Mr FURNER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not taking the interjections. The member for Buderim keeps interjecting, like the thug he is.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Pause the clock. Member for Buderim, I am cautioning you. The next time it will be a warning. I ask that you stop interjecting across the chamber.

Mr FURNER: The reality is that we are going to need our beekeeping industry to grow if we are to achieve our goals for a bigger and more productive agricultural industry. Jo Martin from the Queensland Beekeepers' Association has said that, on current trends, in the next decade the Queensland beekeeping industry will need to increase its size by over one-third, such is the demand from berry fruit growers, nut growers and horticulturalists for pollination by bees.

Mr O'Connor interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Bonney, I have cautioned you. You are now warned under the standing orders.

Mr FURNER: Once again I use this opportunity to praise the incredible work of Jo Martin and Jacob Stevens from the Queensland Beekeepers' Association for what they have done over the past couple of years. Today I proudly stand here wearing their badge, which I have worn to many of their

conferences. I support their industry through and through. Through the pandemic we worked extremely closely with the association to ensure that beekeepers in the state could continue to carry out their critical work through border crossings to ensure the sustainability of the industry. They again stepped up to the plate through the varroa mite issue in New South Wales not only to protect their membership but also to ensure that crops as far afield as Victoria could still be pollinated and billion-dollar losses could be avoided.

Our beekeepers are the quiet achievers. They transport their hives during the night while most of us sleep. The Queensland Beekeepers' Association submission makes it clear that there are 1,088 sites designated for beekeepers to have their hives throughout Queensland. However, currently there are occupancy permits for just 649 of those. Those occupied sites take up a total of 32.45 hectares of national park space across the entire state.

At the extreme other end of the argument we have the dissenting report from the LNP and the Katter party members of the committee. Their report advocates a carte blanche for beekeepers in national parks, with no effort to find alternative sites. That is hardly a balanced approach for the management of our national parks. The Palaszczuk government will work closely with the Queensland Beekeepers' Association, as we have through the process leading to the bill before us today. We will work to accommodate the expanding needs of beekeeping services across our great state. This legislation gets the balance right, ensuring that the agricultural production for which our state has a growing reputation around the world is protected while ensuring our national parks remain protected as well. I commend the bill to the House.