




Speech By
Hon. Meaghan Scanlon

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2022

NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. MAJ SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs) (3.19 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill was referred to the State Development and Regional Industries Committee for review. Their report was tabled on 8 April 2022. I would like to thank the committee for its work. I would also like to thank the people and organisations who made submissions to the committee about the bill and who appeared as witnesses as part of the inquiry. I acknowledge Jo Martin, the state secretary of Queensland Beekeepers' Association, who is in the parliament today. The committee made two recommendations and I am pleased to advise that the government's response to the committee's report was tabled on 8 July 2022.

The Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will make amendments to five acts and four regulations to deliver a number of outcomes regarding future management and administration of Queensland's wildlife and protected areas, such as state forests, recreation areas, marine parks and national parks.

One of the key components of the bill and the issue that received the most feedback through the committee's inquiry on the bill is the amendments to provide for an extension of beekeeping in certain national parks for 20 years. Beekeeping in Queensland's national parks has historically been considered inconsistent with the cardinal principle for the management of national parks under the Nature Conservation Act. The cardinal principle requires that national parks be managed to the greatest possible extent for the permanent preservation of their natural condition and the protection of their cultural resources and values. Introducing any non-native animals, including honey bees, challenges the requirement for preserving the natural conditions of those lands to the greatest possible extent.

However, as part of previous processes involving the transfer of a number of state forests to national parks, in 2004 specific provisions were inserted into the Nature Conservation Act to allow existing beekeeping in state forests to continue to 31 December 2024. During this time it was intended that alternative sites would be found to relocate beekeeping from national parks. I understand that, while some initial work was undertaken in this regard, viable alternative sites are yet to be achieved. In recognition of this and with the 2024 deadline approaching, the government understands that the loss of access to apiary sites in national parks in 2024 without alternative resources available would put the apiary and broader horticultural industry in a difficult situation.

Consequently, prior to the last state election the Palaszczuk government committed to amending the Nature Conservation Act to extend the time for beekeepers to access national parks where beekeeping was an existing use prior to the transfer of land to national park. The proposed 20-year

extension will provide such access until 31 December 2044. During this time the government will undertake further work to assist in transitioning beekeeping out of national parks and work with industry on ensuring best practice management of these activities is occurring in the meantime.

The committee received 29 submissions on the bill. The majority of those were from individuals and businesses within the beekeeping industry and organisations that represent the agricultural and horticultural sectors. There was strong support for beekeeping amendments in the submissions, highlighting the various benefits accrued from the extension of beekeeping in national parks. Many articulated the importance of maintaining access to national parks to not only ensure a continued supply of honey products but also continued support to the horticultural sector, which, with increasing expansion, has come to rely heavily on importing bees onto their properties to pollinate crops.

I note that several conservation groups provided submissions against the extension of beekeeping in national parks. Those submissions focused on the potential impacts to native flora and fauna, and that commercial beekeeping is not consistent with the cardinal principle for managing national parks under the Nature Conservation Act.

I accept that there are different views with respect to these amendments. I also note that there is a lack of specific research around the impacts of commercial beekeeping in Queensland national parks. In 2018 the Department of Environment and Science engaged the University of Sydney to undertake a broad literature review into the potential ecological impacts of commercial beekeeping. This independent review found that, while there is competition between feral bee populations and native birds and animals for nest sites, currently there is insufficient research and evidence to confirm the impacts of European honey bees that are kept in commercial hives. Opportunities for further research on the impacts of European honey bees in national park settings will be considered to ensure the government is informed by contemporary science.

I note from the statement of reservation in the committee's report that the non-government members have a view that the end date of 2044 should be scrapped and licensed beekeepers should be able to access national parks in perpetuity. The 20-year extension seeks to strike a balance between the opposing views expressed in the submissions that the State Development and Regional Industries Committee received in relation to the extension of beekeeping in national parks. The extension will minimise impacts to honey production and crop pollination services by providing the industry with continued access to those sites until 2024. The extension will also provide time to work together to investigate the options for transitioning beekeeping to other suitable lands outside of national parks—lands that may currently be inaccessible or under-utilised—and to work on solutions to the issues raised during the committee hearings, such as the management of feral colonies of bees in tree hollows in national parks.

Since the bill was introduced we have all seen the devastating news about the varroa destructor mite being detected in hives of European honey bees in New South Wales. Fortunately, the varroa mite does not target native bees. The mite is a parasite of the European honey bee and poses a significant threat to Australian beekeeping and the horticultural industry if it cannot be eradicated. I take this opportunity to encourage all Queensland beekeepers, whether they are commercial or recreational beekeepers, to monitor their bee hives for signs of the varroa mite. Details about how you can check hives and report the results can be found by visiting the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries website or the Business Queensland website. Early detection and reporting will provide the best opportunity to respond, contain and eradicate any incursions of the varroa mite.

As I mentioned earlier, the committee's report contained two recommendations. The first recommendation was that the bill be passed and I thank the committee for that recommendation. The second recommendation relates to amendments that will extend beekeeping in national parks. The report recommends that the department develop a clear and accessible guideline for beekeeping on sites in national parks within the next 12 months to ensure potential risks to the natural environment are appropriately managed. It also recommends that the department adopt a clear strategy and plan to identify and secure alternative apiary sites over the period of the 20-year extension.

As outlined in the government's response to the recommendations, the department has established an interagency working group to address those issues. The working group currently includes representatives from the Department of Environment and Science, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Department of Resources and the Department of Transport and Main Roads. The interagency working group has commenced preparing a draft code to ensure best practice is implemented to minimise the potential impacts for beekeeping while it continues in national parks. I can advise that the draft code will be circulated for targeted consultation with representatives from the beekeeping industry, the conservation sector and relevant First Nations groups. I anticipate that it will be finalised in the near future.

The department will continue to work with the interagency working group to investigate opportunities that may exist on other land tenures to relocate beekeeping out of national parks. It will also consider whether there are any other initiatives that may support the industry to progressively relocate beekeeping from national parks over the next 20 years. The department is also working with the industry to develop a standard landholder agreement template. This will be for beekeepers operating on lands where there is no existing permit framework so that they may produce this agreement as evidence of the use of the land in the future, if required. This will support the continuation of beekeeping on the land if the land is dedicated as national park in the future.

I move on to the amendments in the bill that deliver a range of other outcomes within the portfolio. The bill will enhance the capacity of the Department of Environment and Science to respond to misconduct in Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service managed areas such as marine parks, state forests, national parks and recreation areas. In recent times there have been several instances of people misrepresenting themselves as a ranger in Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service managed areas. In one instance, a person claiming to be an off-duty ranger took the vehicle registration details of a visitor and threatened that they would receive a fine in the mail. In another instance, a person in a ranger-like uniform told people that they could not camp in a site they had booked and that they had to find another site.

Such situations have resulted in what should have been an enjoyable experience for these visitors to our national parks turning into an unpleasant one. These instances of ranger impersonation also tarnish the reputation of the genuine rangers of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service who work hard to provide a pleasant environment for visitors in the state's national parks and play a critical role in managing these places, which generate \$2.6 billion in visitor spending annually, supporting 17,000 jobs. New offences are therefore being provided for impersonating a forest officer or a ranger.

Clarification is also provided that the existing obstruction offences under the Nature Conservation Act 1992, the Marine Parks Act 2004 and the Recreation Areas Management Act 2006 also apply when a person obstructs an officer appointed under these acts in the performance of their functions, not just when the officer is exercising a power under these acts. This will apply in instances such as when an appointed officer starts to make inquiries to ascertain the circumstances around an issue that has arisen and people become abusive, threatening or intimidating to avoid answering questions. The new and amended offences will provide a suitable deterrent to these inappropriate behaviours that are emerging in the community and allow the Department of Environment and Science to take action against this type of misconduct.

No concerns were raised about these amendments in the public submissions received by the committee. However, the statement of reservation from the non-government members of the committee expressed their view that providing for the issue of a penalty infringement notice for impersonating a ranger would provide a more streamlined and effective approach than seeking to prosecute a person through the courts. Based on current whole-of-government principles applied for prescribing penalty infringement notices, the complexity and seriousness of these offences makes them unsuitable to be prescribed as penalty infringement notice offences. As with similar impersonation and obstruction offences in legislation applying in Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service managed areas, the evidence and circumstances of each alleged offence will be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine whether a prosecution would proceed through the court.

Other amendments in the bill will correct several minor errors and relocate certain regulatory provisions to the Nature Conservation Act. These amendments will relocate into the Nature Conservation Act from subordinate legislation provisions relating to powers of conservation officers to seize and deal with seized things and administrative provisions relating to approved forms and internal and external review decisions. The relocation of administrative provisions into the act will streamline the legislation by removing replication across these regulations. The relocation of seizure provisions into the act will ensure powers are unambiguous and also not distributed across multiple statutory instruments. These provisions have been redrafted to be consistent with contemporary drafting standards but there are no policy changes associated with these amendments, meaning existing powers and processes are unchanged and there are no new powers or processes. No concerns were raised about these amendments in the submissions or committee report.

The amendments will also streamline the process for making consequential amendments to the Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998. This will remove a duplicative consultation process and allow consequential amendments to subordinate legislation to be made in a timely manner. An outdated version of the Intergovernmental Agreement for the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area is also being removed from the Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993. The intergovernmental agreement will be replaced with a definition indicating that the latest version of the agreement can be found on the Wet Tropics Management Authority's website. This allows any future

changes to the agreement between the state and the Commonwealth to be updated on the website in a timely manner without having to amend the act. The changes will also correct minor errors and omissions in the Wet Tropics act. No concerns were raised about these amendments in the submissions or committee report.

Overall, the committee was satisfied that all of the amendments in the bill were appropriate and fit for purpose. Passage of the bill will fulfil the Queensland government's election commitment to introduce amendments to the Nature Conservation Act to grant a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping in national parks, until 31 December 2044, in areas where beekeeping was an existing use prior to the transfer of land to national park. I commend the bill to the House.