




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (4.58 pm): I rise to contribute to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The backdrop for this bill is 20 years of government inaction. This bill is driven by a complete failure on the government's part to plan for the inevitable arrival of the 2024 deadline to phase out beekeeping in national parks. This bill is undermined by the government's failure to properly explore and understand the potential impacts of historical and existing apiary practices on Queensland's national parks.

The Greens have grave concerns about key elements of this bill and cannot support them. Public land is for public enjoyment, not for the use of commercial operators and corporations. National parks are supposed to be managed for permanent preservation, not for commercial ventures. The Greens will always stand up for public land, the conservation of our precious places and the right of everyday Queenslanders to enjoy the outdoors. Meanwhile, successive Labor and LNP governments have failed to adequately fund or expand our protected areas in Queensland.

Certainly the \$250 million in the most recent budget to acquire new protected areas is welcome. There is no dispute it is a significant amount of money and a substantial improvement, but it will still not get us to the government's target of protecting 17 per cent of the state. More importantly, if the government is willing to hand over these protected areas for private for-profit corporations then what is the point? Keeping our national parks free from commercial operations is not only crucial to protect the state's rare and endangered species and ecosystems but also ensures every single Queenslander can enjoy the natural wonders of our state, no matter whether you are from the regions or the city, a group of friends on a picnic or a family going for a day hike. This is why the cardinal principle of national park management is so important.

I have found it quite extraordinary how many government members, without a shred of irony or apparent awareness, have extolled how this continued practice of beekeeping in national parks runs counter, is contrary, to the cardinal principle of national parks management. I have lost count of the number members who have accepted this on the way through.

To be clear, the Nature Conservation Act tells us that a national park is to be managed to provide, to the greatest extent possible, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values. This is the cardinal principle, the prime principle, of national parks management that we are supposed to be held to in Queensland. The government should always pursue and prioritise this objective in the management of our national parks, not offer them up for profit. This government has form on that front. They continue to pursue long-term exclusive leases of national park land for private development and enterprise under the banner of ecotourism. This is privatisation by stealth and it threatens the integrity of our national parks. It is unacceptable for the government to hand over national park land to private corporations whose primary motive is profit. By extending the operation of commercial beekeeping in national parks for another 20 years this bill continues that trend.

I am not saying that the beekeeping industry should be immediately or suddenly ejected from national parks without warning. Successive state governments have had 20 years to work with apiarists, the agriculture sector and conservation groups to set aside corridors or undertake whatever replanting or restoration works are necessary and end the beekeeping industry's reliance on national parks. For decades governments and industry have known they need to find alternative honey bee sites by December 2024. Now, with two years left, we are told that the government has not found suitable alternative locations for apiaries and, from what I can tell, there is no explanation for this failure. I almost cannot believe I am jumping on the pun train, but the sting in the tail with this bill is that it does not give industry, farmers, conservationists or everyday Queenslanders a plan to end the beekeeping industry's reliance on national parks.

For the past two decades various state governments have left industry and agriculture without an adequate transition plan. I worry that in another two decades this place will again be debating the future of the beekeeping industry and whether it is appropriate that land for public use and conservation is instead being given to private companies. In the last 20 years beekeepers have not moved the apiaries off our national parks, and do we really think that anything will change in the next 20 years without a government-led transition plan? In the last 20 years the government has not taken active steps to transition the beekeeping and agriculture industries away from relying on this use of public land. If this bill is passed it should, at the very least, require the government to adopt a clear strategy to secure alternative apiary sites over the next two decades.

Within the next year the government must also provide beekeepers with clear biosecurity guidelines to ensure risks to our national parks are appropriately mitigated. Not only have successive governments failed to make a transition plan for commercial beekeeping, but they have not conducted the research necessary to understand how this practice impacts on our national parks.

The member for Glass House gave the game away when, in referring to the report that so many have relied on to say there is no impact, he read a little bit past the catchphrase that everyone wants to hear and he laid bare that there is not, in fact, any evidence that shows there is not an impact on our national parks beyond what feral bees might have and instead says that there is simply an absence of evidence. We do not know what impacts these apiaries could be having.

A number of submissions raised concerns about the potential for honey bees to damage native flowers, compete with native bees for pollen and nectar and swarm large hollows on which threatened species like gliders, powerful owls and glossy black cockatoos depend. The Queensland Human Rights Commission's submission said First Nations people's cultural rights to spiritual connections to the land and waters may be impeded if the government continues allowing commercial beekeepers to access national parks in this way. The Greens share those concerns and do not think they have been adequately addressed by the government. Unless this government changes the bill to give clarity and direction to the beekeeping industry, addresses human rights and conservation concerns and stops the privatisation by stealth of our national parks, the Greens cannot support this bill.