




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (6.38 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill is all about continuing the practice of beekeeping in national parks. The primary objective of the bill is to grant a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping in specified national parks to continue until 31 December 2044. The bill further aims to enhance the Department of Environment and Science's ability to prevent and respond to misconduct on areas managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service by creating offences for impersonating or obstructing forestry officers; relocate powers of officers to seize and deal with seized things from subordinate legislation into the Nature Conservation Act 1992 to reflect current drafting practices; to amend the Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993 to reflect intergovernmental changes from the Australian government review of the COAG councils and ministerial forums; remove duplicate consultation processes when amending the Wet Tropics Management Plan as a result of changes to the Wet Tropics act; and correct minor errors in the Nature Conservation Act and Wet Tropics act.

Presently commercial beekeeping operates in 49 national parks. The majority of these were not always national parks. In the early 2000s their status was changed from state forest to national park. The commercial beekeeping activities in this bill include beekeepers utilising tracks and trails to transport hives of non-native European honey bees to apiary sites. Due to the activities of commercial beekeeping conflicting with the management principles of the Nature Conservation Act, an exemption is required. National parks need to be managed for the permanent preservation of their natural condition and the protection of cultural and natural resources, but parks also need to be managed. The tracks and trails that we talk about that the beekeepers use to transport their hives need to be maintained and be trafficable when necessary.

The Nature Conservation Act was amended approximately two decades ago to allow beekeeping to continue in these areas until 31 December 2024. This transition provision was agreed to minimise disruption to the beekeeping industry and provide time for the relocation of bees to substitute sites. Beekeeping contributes approximately \$2.4 billion to the Queensland economy each year. With the growth in our horticultural industries, reliance on pollinating bees is increasing. Broadacre crops like faba beans and sunflowers also utilise the services of bees to pollinate at flowering time. In the south of this country we are seeing farmers wondering how they are going to manage the pollination of crops with the threat of varroa mite. We need to be very vigilant to make sure it does not come into Queensland because Queensland may have to do some of the heavy lifting as far as honey production in this country.

Without the ability for beekeepers to utilise national parks for their apiaries, industry representatives have stated their industry, and those industries that rely on them, would be decimated. Beekeepers actively seek sites on private land and have been doing this historically. However, there is not sufficient land with the specific requirements that they need. I remember when I was farming at

Cecil Plains, sunflowers in particular seemed to be a crop where beekeepers would call in and ask if they could locate hives in that area just to carry their bees through. With different farming practices they would always have to be aware of chemical application and so forth.

Queensland Beekeepers' Association would like the 20-year extension removed to continue the permits in perpetuity. Victoria and New South Wales have no time limit on their provisions for beekeeping in national parks, which has demonstrated support for the industry and allowed growth. Queensland beekeepers are looking over the border to expand as the New South Wales and Victorian governments are providing the certainty they need to continue to grow their business. Any business needs certainty. The LNP as a party has always supported those in the agriculture and horticulture industries and the industry bodies that represent them. Here is another opportunity for the government to provide an industry with some confidence, not to continually challenge it.

The LNP understands the importance and reliance upon the commercial bee industry to ensure our food requirements in the future, both domestically and internationally, are safeguarded. This is supported by the Australian Food and Grocery Council which stated that based on conservative estimates two-thirds of Australia's food crops are reliant upon the pollination services of professional apiarists and the bees in their care. Some crops are almost completely dependent upon bees pollinating them for fruit and nut production. As we produce more food crops we will need more bees to pollinate them. There is already a shortage of commercial hives. During times of drought, cropping is obviously limited by the lack of irrigation water or rainfall events. National parks provide a source of food to keep the bees alive.

The commercial beekeeping industry needs our support and to be valued by this government, as it should be. Without certainty, future generations of beekeepers may not come to fruition. There is a very real fear that one day the government will remove their ability to access national parks. Without access to the national parks there will be nowhere for beekeepers to make sure the nutritional needs of their bees are met during certain times of the year. The Condamine electorate has several national parks, including Crows Nest and Geham national parks, which are apiary sites. Although not large in size, these parks play an important role in providing flowering plants which supply nectar and pollen for bees to feed upon during certain times of the year.

Beekeepers are assisting in improving the state of our national parks by ensuring access is maintained. They are concerned about the lack of funding allocated by this government to maintaining national parks, particularly in view of the upcoming fire season and the enormous amount of fuel after six months of above average rainfall. It is in the best interests of commercial beekeepers to continue to care for the national parks they use and there is no evidence to suggest that they have a negative impact on the flora or fauna within the parks.

The LNP supports this bill with the amendment to remove the end date for the apiary permits in national parks. This will provide the commercial beekeeping industry with the certainty it needs and provide it with the capacity to keep our food production industries going. The bill also proposes new offences for misconduct on areas managed by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service such as state forest, marine parks, recreation areas and national parks.

During the public briefing the committee heard from the deputy director-general of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships who advised that there had been a number of recent examples where visitors to national parks have had negative interactions with people holding themselves out to be rangers and behaving in a disreputable or threatening manner. If someone has committed the offence of impersonating a ranger an investigation will occur, proceedings will be brought in a Queensland court and the offence must be proved beyond reasonable doubt before a finding can be made against that person. The bill also includes amendments that would support Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service officers in the event that they are obstructed in performing their duties.

While the LNP will be supporting the bill, the shadow minister, the member for Bonney, will be moving an amendment to extend the proposed 20-year time limit to allow beekeepers to remain in these specified national parks for perpetuity. All business needs certainty. Over a number of years we have seen this in national parks with the timber industry. It is only now that they are starting to get some guaranteed source of supply so that they can invest and grow their business. Apiaries are no different. The larger apiaries need staff, trucks and handling gear to manage their business. To invest in that they need a guaranteed time frame and there is no reason this should be limited to 20 years. I cannot for the life of me see how the government can say that this is good for 20 years but it is not good for any longer than that. One argument counters the other. I see no reason there should be any opposition to the amendment to be moved by the member for Bonney and I support this bill with that amendment.