




Speech By
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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (4.25 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I was lucky enough to be on the committee for this one and gain some insight into the bee and honey industry. I should also thank Jo and Jacob. I thought they made an excellent account of themselves in the industry and put forward their arguments in a very succinct way. I also thank Scott Sheard, or Bluey the Beeman, as we call him in Mount Isa, who was always very forthcoming with his views on the industry, albeit modest industry in the North West.

I would like, in the initial part of this contribution, to share my reflections on part of the committee process which is a commentary on the government and the culture that is cultivated in our departments. I was really, I would almost say, angered by the fact that there was such a focus on the environmental impacts of this, as there should be—I have no problem with considering the environmental impacts—but then when DAF gave us their input into this bill, there was no acknowledgement of the potential impact or otherwise of what happens if there was not this 20 years granted or if there were not these sites available.

This is a pretty big deal—a \$2.8 billion contribution to the fruit and veg industry. It is pretty highly impactful on the performance of our agriculture in this state. That would be a time, I would have thought, for the department of agriculture, which I would say advocates that position, just as the department of environment advocates for the environmental attributes or impacts of that bill, to be saying, ‘Well, hang on, this could be a problem because if we don’t have these bee sites, it could do this, this and this to our industry.’

After poking and prodding, there was some reluctant response to that, but it really annoys me that that is not at the forefront of the information given to MPs. Not all of us are privy to conversations of farmers who have a natural acknowledgement or intuitive idea of what this could mean and the impacts involved. It could be really difficult for me to get across some of the big city issues and, inversely, it is very hard for some city MPs to get across what this means out in the country areas. It is really annoying when officers in this parliament are not forthcoming and really up-front with this. I cannot help but say that that represents a bias against some of these industries out there. I make that comment because I was pretty wound up about that at the time.

I would say thanks to the government for the 20-year extension. That is a good move. We have to be appreciative that it is there. I would also agree that it should be in perpetuity, of course, but it is not all tears; we have 20 years left.

I will recap on some of the critical points from some of the early contributors. We are talking roughly around 1,100 sites over an ever-expanding national parks footprint about which the government has always been very up-front when it comes to their will in this regard. To put a bit of context around the footprints, we are talking about 600 square metre sites which, for Mount Isa, is a modest house block, but a house block size in hundreds of thousands of acres of national park in some cases.

In regards to the environmental value of national parks, it is great to have national parks and to try to preserve those environmental values, however the derogatory term used up north for National Parks and Wildlife is 'national sparks and wildfires'. Some of them are not maintained well and there are some questionable outcomes from the department of environment in those parks. They have the best intentions, with some great officers in there, but they are under-resourced, and you will get that from a hell of a lot of Parks officers out there, that they are under-resourced and that there are plenty of environmental problems there with pigs, cats and introduced pests and weeds.

There are enormous problems out there. We are talking about bees. However, we have not found any strong evidence of the damage they have done over the past 100 years, so I am not too sure why this was a big deal at all. It should have just been kicked straight through, but here we are again. I am grateful for the 20-year extension, but it should be longer.

Biosecurity is a big issue, so it makes sense to be expanding on that diversity by having that wider displacement. We are never going to be using all of the 1,100 sites. As much as we hope that agriculture will expand by that much, it is good to provide for that option. As was mentioned earlier when there is a blossoming and a flowering and a concentration of rainfall in the area, then the hives can go in there. It is the same with cattle stations; you do not use all of the cattle station all of the time. When you have an oversupply of feed, that is when you put the stock there to eat it down. There is plenty for everyone and then you take them out. We are talking only about the rotation of hives here. Quite surprisingly, they are placed for six weeks and then rotated every two to five years. That is a site of 600 square metres for six weeks every two to five years. That is a really minor footprint for something for which we cannot find evidence of its impact after 100 years. That provides a bit of perspective to what we are talking about here.

There is enormous benefit to the fruit and vegetable industries in macadamias, which seems to be exploding everywhere. Some of those numbers are really startling. This is an education for me about the impact of bees on productivity. For almonds and apples there is 100 per cent dependence on honey bees; for macadamias it is 90 per cent. This is from the report *Analysis of the market for pollination services in Australia* by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. The dependence is startling.

One of the submissions stated that the contribution pollination makes to these industries is questionable. I found that curious because there seems to be a load of evidence that it does make a contribution. There is a large number of people spending a great deal of money on the pollination service for something that apparently has no impact, so that was a curious statement.

Another thing that has not been mentioned so far relates to backyard beekeepers. Not to be disparaging of the backyarders, but there is a pretty large number of backyarders—private beekeepers—doing their thing. There is a pretty big risk from that. We are focusing here on the operations of commercial beekeepers, who are a lot more invested in varroa mite and American foulbrood, some really invasive diseases for the bees. There is just as much risk of those diseases coming from those beekeepers in urban, peri-urban or rural residential areas. That is something else to be mindful of when making a decision on this.

Most of the other key points have been covered by other speakers. I just go back to the point about biodiversity and the huge threat of the varroa mite. One great way to diversify is to ensure those sites—they are not all necessarily going to be used. There is no great, big corporation about to expand and use 1,000 new sites immediately. It is fairly modest operators who operate within that space that contribute to a great industry overall. It is fairly well regulated and we would not expect a huge expansion in the near future beyond what is there now. We would hope for that, but we would not expect it. To be able to diversify around those forests rather than have a diminished number of sites is a really important way to strengthen our biosecurity. I say well done on the 20-year extension. However, there is no reason it should not be done in perpetuity, and that is what I think we should do.