



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**

**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 10 November 2022

**MOTION**

**Revocation and Dedication of Protected Areas and State Forest Areas (Cognate Debate)**



**Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (11.24 am): That is most of the House, I think!

The opposition will not be opposing this cognate motion. Conservation is something we value highly. Proper management and biodiversity protection are important practical ways for us to mitigate the impacts of climate change. As shadow environment minister, I welcome the opportunity to again speak about Queensland's protected area estate.

The proposed revocation of around 18 hectares from Watalgan State Forest will open up substantial opportunity to Sunny Bluff Produce and the surrounding region. The Gorton family have farmed Mullett Creek since 1901, supplying Coles, Woolies, ALDI, Australia-wide markets, as well as in Asia and the Middle East. For the last two decades they have been trying to secure access to more water supply so that they can increase their production. This revocation does not grant them full approval to do this, but it is a necessary step and I am sure it will be a relief to finally be moving forward.

Their proposal would allow for the construction of a 12,000 megalitre dam to provide water security for the existing business and enable the growth of their cropping areas from 250 hectares to 520 hectares. It is expected to result in a trebling of their business and it will mean that their staff of six full-time and 150 harvest workers will increase to 12 full-time and 250 harvest employees—a massive boost for the region. This process will, of course, need to be managed appropriately for the habitat it will impact and this should be monitored accordingly. However, the trebling of the current farm crop production is a significant opportunity. Given that the Gortons have farmed at Mullett Creek for over a century, we know that they will be seeking to do the best they can by the land and to create a new sanctuary for the wildlife in the area. I acknowledge the member for Burnett's strong advocacy in support of this proposal since he was elected to this House.

The revocation of Tuchekeoi National Park is also very small, only 1.2 hectares, but it will give certainty to the locals, including, importantly, Men's Shed Pomona. Over a year ago on 11 October 2021, the minister gave in principle support for this move and this was expected to be confirmed months ago. Once again, this is slow progress by the government and for the sake of this group, it is good that we have finally arrived at this point today. I understand that this revocation will not mean any change to the vegetation in the area, but it will give certainty to the Men's Shed to continue their important community work by giving them a clear tenure for where they call home. I have the Labrador Men's Shed in my electorate and I have seen the impact they have. Mental health issues too often silently plague men in this age group, with social isolation being a major factor and men's sheds provide an essential place for men to talk shoulder to shoulder about what they are going through. I acknowledge the member for Noosa's advocacy for her own Men's Shed and all members for their support of sheds in their areas.

On the Nambour duplication, to see any progress on another one of the transport minister's many, many delayed programs is welcome. This is a necessary revocation to get the rail duplication under way. It will increase transport options for this region. We support actions to make that a reality.

The dedication of 41 hectares of national park to the Conondale Resources Reserve is needed to undertake the proposed geotechnical investigations for the Borumba Dam pumped hydro. We support this work, and the huge opportunities that pumped hydro brings to future energy needs. Apart from that, there is the very small revocation for the Mount Etna Caves National Park for the rectification of road encroachments on the park and the remaining changes dedicating more state forests with conservation value into national parks.

Given that Queensland still has the lowest proportion of area protected of any jurisdiction in Australia, we need to start seeing more progress that matters. What I mean by this is that there is no point protecting parts of our state in name only; it must be backed up by adequate management. Just this week there was an article in *Queensland Country Life* titled 'Neighbouring landholders have concerns over nature refuge', which I will table and read an excerpt from. It states—

Another Wyandra district landholder, Bill Tomlinson, who has owned Elmina Station since 1988, said he had not seen any nature refuges managed properly, and has cause for concern with this latest government acquisition.

'The whole idea is to have refuges that represent what Australia was originally like and this property has had mulga growing there since the 1960s,' Mr Tomlinson said.

He fears it will be left unmanaged and the wild vermin will be out of control.

*Tabled paper:* Article from *Queensland Country Life*, dated 8 November 2022, titled 'Neighbouring landholders have concerns over nature refuge' [1880](#).

As we continue to have motions covering revocations and dedications, it is important to keep ensuring that we are getting genuine conservation outcomes. We support the government's increased funding for our protected area estate, but after nearly eight years in power over half of what it has finally committed to is not due to be spent for at least another three years. We will back sensible and practical revocations—and I acknowledge the protections outlined by the minister for these areas—but any moves more broadly must be matched by better management outcomes for our environment and for our local communities.