




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 1 September 2022

NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (5.39 pm): As we have heard, the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 provides a 20-year extension to allow beekeeping on specified national parks to continue until 31 December 2044. For those who are unaware, commercial beekeeping activities involve beekeepers utilising tracks and trails to transport hives of non-native European honey bees to locations. Currently, there are 1,088 apiary sites across 49 of Queensland's national parks, including the Tewantin National Park, with the most common sites being in natural clearings, logging dumps or gravel pits. High-value floral resources are rare outside national parks due to a combination of extreme weather, urban clearing and agricultural development. National parks provide a safe refuge for our honey makers from potentially dangerous urban and agricultural environments.

The Department of Environment and Science, DES, advised that the new extension provision to 2044 recognises the detrimental impact that the loss of national park access would have on the supply of honey bee products and pollination services provided to the horticultural industry. They acknowledged that national parks provide a safe place for bees, free from chemicals, which can be used for a range of activities including preparation of hives for the pollination of crops, hive recovery after pollination jobs over winter and generating honey to provide income when there is no pollination work to be done. Yes, bees are extremely busy all year round!

Further, they noted that not only are national parks needed for rearing bees for pollination but all of the trees and shrubs and ground flora need bees too for their existence in most cases. The department also advised that this transition position was agreed to minimise disruption to the beekeeping industry and provide the industry additional time to reach a more secure and perpetual arrangement.

The majority of submissions received were from industry organisations within the beekeeping, agricultural and horticultural sectors, most of which outlined their strong support for the bill. Cotton Australia said that excluding bees from national parks could increase risk of exposure of beehives to insecticides used to grow crops on other land in industries such as cotton. If apiarists are forced onto other lands where cotton is grown, it could also hinder cotton crop management. Crop Pollination Association Australia said beekeepers use national parks to get their beehives into a strong healthy condition so the bees can go about their job of pollinating. Some of the crops that rely highly on bees for pollination are almonds, macadamias, blueberries, onions, carrots, apples, pears and cherries—just to name a few of them.

Conservation groups affirmed their opposition to the extension of beekeeping in national parks, with several submissions from environmental groups not supporting the bill. These stakeholders contended that beekeeping is against national park management principles, including the cardinal principle which we heard earlier, and had a detrimental impact on the natural environment. As we have heard today, there appears to be limited data and information on this.

Wildlife Queensland is of the view that the beekeeping industry has had knowledge for over 20 years that access to national parks would cease after 31 December 2024. They highlighted that there is almost 19,000 hectares of high honey-yielding forest areas located on private land which may be available as an alternative resource when access to SEQFA land ceases. We have also heard that the department has been looking for many years and has not sourced this land as yet.

While the committee was satisfied that provisions in the bill are appropriate and fit for purpose and that this extension applies only to areas where beekeeping was an existing use prior to the transfer of the land into the national park estate, there are still questions. For our conservation groups, the rationale provided for this extension will not be satisfactory given that commercial activities in our national parks are seen as in direct contrast to the aims of conservation.

As we are experiencing with the Cooloola Great Walk, these concerns are being exacerbated by outdated management plans that are needed to assess any increase or retention in activity. With this in mind, the committee recommended that the department develop clear and accessible guidelines for beekeeping on sites in national parks within the next 12 months to ensure potential risks to the natural environment are appropriately managed and that it adopt a clear strategy and plan to identify and secure alternative sites over the 20-year extension.

Unrelated to the beekeeping amendments, the bill also enhances the department's capacity to respond to misconduct on Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service managed areas such as state forests, marine parks, recreation areas and national parks. This we welcome very much in my electorate as the ongoing poor behaviours—and quite atrocious behaviours—of a few are impacting the enjoyment of these areas for all. Again, it is vital that the Great Sandy Region Management Plan reviews are finalised.

I thank the committee, submitters, attendees to the public hearing and public briefing and the department for their examination of this bill—as well as our bees that do so much good.

In closing, I call again for any outstanding management plan reviews involving our national parks to be escalated as a matter of urgency so that the questions remaining are answered—as well, that clear scientific data is collected over the next 20 years to assist the decision-makers of the future. This is the reason why I will not be supporting the member for Bonney's amendment. A clear time frame will ensure that the department secures the research needed to give surety to our pollinators. With that in mind, I commend the bill to the House.