




Speech By
Ali King

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (6.21 pm): I reflect, as I have been called to reflect previously in this place, that being the LNP's environment spokesperson must truly be the second-worst job in the world. We need five whole minutes of filibustering and behaving like prawns, because you are not allowed to talk about climate change, anything that might upset property developers or anything that might upset the National Party. In fact, the only role that would be worse than being the environment spokesperson for the LNP—

Mr O'Connor interjected.

Ms KING: We will see that about that, member for Bonney. I take that interjection. I cannot wait to see who the LNP preselects against me in Pumicestone.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member, I ask the member to come back to the long title of the bill.

Ms KING: Certainly. I do reflect that the one thing worse than being the LNP's environment spokesperson would be being its actual environment minister. Then you really would have your foot on either side of the barbed wire fence!

The Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill takes important steps to ensure Queensland's environmental framework is contemporary and fit for purpose. It supports better environmental protection, it enhances community transparency and input and it supports industry with streamlined administrative processes. Essentially, it also lays the foundation for a stronger and more effective environmental regulator. We have seen through past events how incredibly important that is.

Many of the changes in this bill were in fact proposed by the conservation sector or raised by the regulator over many years of conducting investigations. Contrary to the comments of the member for Bonney, as a member of the Health and Environment Committee I congratulate the minister and the department on this bill and on the incredibly thorough consultation process undertaken. Contrary to the claims by the member for Bonney, in fact many of the stakeholders described the approach taken by DES and the minister as collaborative and positive. We heard those comments about the attitude reflected by AgForce in its submission, as noted by the member for Thuringowa. It was certainly a thorough—

Mr O'Connor interjected.

Ms KING: I remind the member for Bonney that he may not want to critique AgForce too thoroughly.

It was certainly a thorough and detailed consultation process. In October 2021 a consultation paper was released to key stakeholders including the LGAQ, the Queensland Resources Council, AgForce and the Environmental Defenders Office, among others. Those stakeholders received an initial draft of the bill in April/May 2022 and an updated exposure draft of the bill in June 2022 for a period of

three weeks, subject to confidentiality. While a couple of stakeholders objected to signing confidentiality deeds prior to the release of those exposure drafts—presumably because they were not able to activate their campaign against measures in the bill by leaking them directly to the *Courier-Mail*—this was necessary because the proposals at that point had not gone through cabinet processes. The department took on a range of feedback about the need for peak bodies to discuss the bill with their member organisations and businesses. The availability of those exposure drafts was extended accordingly. The feedback received was carefully considered in the drafting of the bill before the House, with amendments made to some proposals to address initial stakeholder concerns.

The proposed amendments to the Environmental Protection Act in this bill are designed to protect the environment via contemporary, effective and efficient environmental regulation. A key measure in the bill that will lead to better environmental outcomes is enabling the chief executive to refuse an EIS from proceeding if it is unlikely the proposal could legally proceed. We heard positive reflections on those measures from a number of stakeholders who, while they may never like being told no if their proposals lack merit and are not going to be able to proceed, welcome knowing that at an earlier stage.

The bill also requires public notification for all major amendment applications for environmental authorities for resource activities, improving the availability of community input. Some of the measures in the bill that will support industry include resolving issues with progressive rehabilitation and closure planning frameworks. Our government rightly expects that industry should act to rehabilitate and rectify sites following resource activities. Ensuring that industry has clarity and can plan for those obligations is essential.

Most importantly, though, measures in the bill support the strength and effectiveness of the environmental regulator by strengthening executive officer liability provisions, ensuring that corporate executive officers remain accountable for serious environmental harm that has been caused by their decision-making, even after they sever their relationship with the organisation in question. The community absolutely expects that company directors who make decisions resulting in serious environmental harm are not only held to account but continue to be held to account into the future and cannot sidestep those obligations by changing their employment.

We heard really significant support for those measures from a range of conservation and community groups such as Healthy Land and Water, who said that if an executive officer made a decision that resulted in harm to a person they would be held accountable into the future and they should be accordingly if the harm is environmental in nature. Representatives of the Queensland Law Society stated that they were in furious agreement that former executive officers should be responsible for egregious environmental harm that they may have caused.

I acknowledge my committee colleagues, the secretariat, the minister and the department. I note that this bill will improve environmental outcomes, something that the LNP continue not to understand. I commend the bill to the House.