




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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EMBLEMS OF QUEENSLAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (5.11 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I am so incredibly pleased that the *Muttaborrasaurus langdoni* has been chosen as Queensland's fossil emblem. The muttaburrasaurus lived during the Cretaceous period, about 100 million years ago. It was about seven to eight metres long, which is the average length of two cars. Humans need not have been scared of the muttaburrasaurus as it was a herbivore, eating mainly plants including seed ferns, ferns and conifers. The fossil remains of the muttaburrasaurus were found in Muttaborra, Central Queensland, where the traditional owners are the Iningai people and Bidjara people. Doug Langdon, a local grazier, discovered the fossil bones while mustering cattle in 1963.

The muttaburrasaurus skeleton was the first relatively complete Australian dinosaur fossil found. It was the first Australian dinosaur to be fully reconstructed as a life-size model, and its fossils have only ever been found in Queensland. The muttaburrasaurus is an ornithomimid dinosaur, meaning it is a bird-footed dinosaur. Queensland's new fossil emblem provides a unique representation that showcases our state's rich palaeontological discoveries and history. Queensland really is the fossil capital of Australia.

The state fossil emblem will support economic development and palaeo tourism in Outback Queensland. Many of the Southern Hemisphere's key dinosaur finds are in Outback Queensland, and there is growing interest from around the world in palaeo tourism. We know that some of Queensland's key dinosaur find locations account for an estimated 11 per cent of all tourism, or almost 122,000 visitors, and 26 per cent of leisure tourism visitors to the Outback Queensland region.

I am very proud that the Capricorn Caves in my electorate are Queensland's oldest tourist attraction. It is amazing that here in 2023 we are writing into legislation a state fossil emblem which will support palaeo tourism in Queensland, especially given that the Capricorn Caves are Queensland's oldest tourist attraction, opening to visitors in the early 1880s. The caves are etched out of limestone formed from deposits made by a coral reef 390 million years ago. The first exploration for fossilised bones in the Capricorn Caves began in 1998 by Dr Scott Hocknull, senior curator of GeoSciences Queensland Museum, and Noel Sands, member of CQ Speleological Society. Their search revealed the longest palaeontological record of faunal change anywhere in Australia—from 500,000-year-old rainforest fauna through to 200,000-year-old arid fauna to modern fauna. On the fossil tour through the Capricorn Caves, you really can travel back in time. I encourage all members of this place to consider a visit to the Capricorn Caves, Queensland's oldest tourist attraction.

Mr Hinchliffe: Quite a decent pub near there.

Ms LAUGA: There is a beautiful pub there at the caves, Minister. The palaeo guide will lead you through the caves, revealing thousands of tiny bone fossils and teeth embedded in the caves' sediment. They are mostly the prey of owls and ghost bats, but occasionally a tooth of a marsupial lion or the

Tasmanian tiger is discovered. Inspect the dig site where a bone from a three-metre giant lizard was found. As you trek through the dry rainforest, spot life-size images of the *Bohra*, the giant tree kangaroo, or *Varanus*, the giant lizard.

In an exciting twist of time, a recent citizen science program for Capricorn Caves' Big Science Adventure unearthed a remarkable find—a fossil tooth from an ancient rainforest koala. This discovery provides a fascinating glimpse into the prehistoric past of these iconic Australian creatures who once lived at the caves in my electorate. The highlight of the Big Science Adventure emerged when the final group of fossil hunters, which included the keen eye of Benjamyn Willson, made an exceptional discovery. Ben was actively exploring the dig pits alongside his family when he uncovered the rare treasure. Only one other specimen of an ancient rainforest koala has been found in the deposits; therefore, this may be from the same species or another unnamed one.

Palaeontologists Dr Scott Hocknull and Rochelle Lawrence, who were volunteering for Big Science Adventure as part of National Science Week this year, are meticulously examining the fossil to uncover its story and verify the identity of which species it belonged to. This tooth holds invaluable clues about the habits and environment of ancient koalas. Their dedication to verifying its authenticity underscores the significance of this discovery. In the words of Dr Scott—

The koala fossil is about 360,000 years old and is part of a very rare component of the rainforest fauna. But what it shows is that until very recently koalas in Australia were known by more than just the one living species.

Down the road from Capricorn Caves, at Mount Etna, there is fossil evidence of the modern koala we know and love, the extinct giant koala, and an extinct rainforest koala. I note that the koala is the faunal emblem of Queensland and here we talking about the new fossil emblem of Queensland and the important role in palaeo tourism that the Capricorn Caves has played since the 1880s as Queensland's first tourist attraction—and also the importance of the Capricorn Caves, with fossil evidence of modern koalas, the extinct giant koala and an extinct rainforest koala. I think somehow there is a big loop there that we need to pull together in some sort of great tourism promotion, once this emblem officially becomes the Queensland fossil emblem.

This new tooth may come from the extinct rainforest species or another extinct species. Sadly, the giant and rainforest koalas were driven to extinction in the area when changes in the climate occurred around 280,000 years ago. Many other exciting discoveries were made on the day recently at the Capricorn Caves, including some bones from the extinct land-dwelling crocodile, the giant tree kangaroo and the Komodo dragon. Another discovery was what looks to be the partial limb bone from a giant extinct echidna. Imagine that: a giant echidna. It sounds terrifying!

Ms Pease: How big would the spikes be?

Ms LAUGA: They would be massive. We all are very much looking forward to the fossil verification by Drs Scott and Rochelle. The state fossil emblem will support existing Queensland government investment, including funding allocated to deliver a road map to grow dinosaur tourism across Outback Queensland. The search for a fossil emblem was initiated after a petition from the Winton community putting forward *Diamantinasaurus matildae* as Queensland's official fossil emblem. A working group was formed, and additional nominations of potential fossil candidates were sought. Consultation was undertaken with community groups, including relevant cultural heritage groups and traditional owners. From this consultation, the working group shortlisted 12 candidates for the state fossil emblem ahead of a community vote.

The muttaburrasaurus joins the ranks as the state fossil emblem of Queensland and now sits amongst: the koala, which was officially named as Queensland's faunal animal emblem in 1971 after a newspaper poll showed strong public support for this endearing marsupial; the Cooktown orchid, which became Queensland's floral emblem in 1959 during celebrations to mark the state's centenary; the sapphire, which was named the official state gem for Queensland in August 1985; the Barrier Reef anemone fish, which was officially named as Queensland's aquatic emblem in March 2005 when the public nominated the species as their preferred representative for Queensland; and Queensland's bird emblem the brolga, which has featured on the Queensland Coat of Arms since 1977. It was not until January 1986 that it was announced as the official bird emblem of Queensland.

The muttaburrasaurus is the pride and joy of the community of Muttaborra, a community which I was just speaking about last night with the Royal Flying Doctor Service. It was great to see the RFDS Queensland CEO Meredith Staib, board chair Russell Postle and deputy chair Georgie Somerset AM here at parliament last night with many from the RFDS Queensland team to celebrate 95 years of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which not only provides aerial transportation for patient to critical health care for over 330,000 Australians every year but the RFDS Queensland section delivers more than 12,100 mental health consultations annually, including in the community of Muttaborra, and has the largest mental health service of RFDS sections across Australia.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Service contains several specialised teams which provide psychological therapies and tailored programs for rural and remote Queenslanders, including the beautiful community of Muttaborra. I thank the RFDS team for visiting parliament last night and for their work supporting the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders right across the state, including Muttaborra. I commend the bill to the House.