




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (11.36 am): That is a very long list and it is not one that I wanted to be on. I must be one of the few members who is not on that list.

I rise to speak in favour of the bill because I support these amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 1994. It is an older act and we know that we can improve it. I appreciate the focus on rehabilitation in the bill. When I speak of rehabilitation I am speaking mainly of land that has been contaminated by industrial processes. I appreciate that the bill will make it easier for businesses to do the right thing, whether or not they have inadvertently contaminated land.

I appreciate this bill because my electorate includes the Narangba Innovation Precinct, which is also known as the Narangba industrial estate, which I share with the member for Kurwongbah. It is home to some of Queensland's most important—what we used to call—hard-to-locate industries. The precinct is a hub of chemical manufacturing, mainly involving chemicals used by Queensland agricultural industries such as glyphosate and timber treatments from the old days when copper, chrome and arsenic were injected into timber products. In 2000 I became the chair of the Narangba industrial estate reference group, which is a communications forum of businesses, government departments, councils and community representatives where we share information about what was happening on the estate. As the member for Bancroft, I am still the chair of that group.

I will give the House a bit of history. In 2005, when I was a local councillor, I was on site the night a massive binary chemicals fire happened. At 3.30 in the morning I was helping to brief QFES personnel on how many people were in the path of the smoke plume as we were deciding whether or not we had to evacuate them. The fire destroyed massive tanks of chemicals such as glyphosate. Those tanks were as big as this chamber. That sent a literal river of Roundup down the creek. I can reveal that some quick-thinking action by the Caboolture shire council's works department managers, Allan Hull and Ed Hamill, stopped that glyphosate flowing into Saltwater Creek, Hays Inlet and Moreton Bay. Despite the time of night, they had their workers bulldoze a temporary bund wall across the creek, stopping the chemicals from going into the waterways. If you wanted to do that now, under the current act it would probably take a year to get the permission. The end result of that fire was years and years of action, including administrative action, as the site was remediated. It cost everyone a fortune.

When I talk of contaminated land, I have a vested interest in this and am very interested in how we rehabilitate the land, because my communities have always lived close to those harder-to-locate industries. We live with it every day. It employs 1,800 people, but we want to make coexistence of residents and businesses as seamless and as safe as possible. In that spirit, I want the operation of the Environmental Protection Act to be less cumbersome and more effective. Certainly, within this bill we are doing that.

Under the bill it will be easier to issue a temporary authority in an emergency situation. This is similar to what I talked about previously. The bill will make it easier to trial new or innovative approaches to rehabilitation. I mention the Binary Chemicals example. For years there was a problem of how we deal with this huge reservoir of chemicals sitting underneath those massive concrete pads onsite. That emphasised to me that there have to be new and better ways to remediate these sites. I also welcome the improved contaminated land planning frameworks in this bill, especially when it comes to issues of cost and closure. I remember that we spent probably over a decade with owners and insurers in the Binary Chemicals case talking about cost and closure. There needs to be a better way to do this kind of rehabilitation.

There are many parts of this bill that I do appreciate. I mention the better enforcement powers for compliance officers. Like the member for Lytton, I pay regard to the compliance officers in the department. I know that in the industrial estate of our area they have spent all hours during the night, after hours, trying to find the source of odours coming from the estate. I pay respect to the work that they do.

I thank the minister for bringing this bill to the parliament. I know that she is dedicated to helping protect the wonderful environment of Queensland. The people of Queensland know that it is always a Labor government that will better protect the environment. They know that they cannot trust the LNP to fully look after our environment.