



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

---

Record of Proceedings, 11 October 2023

**MOTION**

**Revocation and Dedication of Protected Areas**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.41 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will be on my best behaviour for the rest of the day. The opposition will not be opposing this revocation motion. In my contribution I will talk about the specific blocks of land that it is adding or removing from our protected estate but, thankfully for members, I will not be too repetitious of what the minister has just outlined. I will then make some general comments about the broader topic of conservation that the motion covers, in particular the government's management of our protected estate and why this needs to be considered and raised when we are discussing adding new protected areas in Queensland.

Firstly, this is a pretty basic thing but unfortunately it does not always happen: I want to thank the minister for allowing me to have a briefing on this motion. The member for Burnett tagged along as well. I walked past him and said, 'This relates to your electorate, Benno. You should come along too.' We appreciated that briefing and I thank the minister very much.

I will start with the changes to the Great Sandy Marine Park. It includes 11 revocations of small parcels of land to remove infrastructure such as boat ramps from the protected estate. Those pieces of marine infrastructure are mostly owned and maintained by the council and the Department of Transport and Main Roads. This motion is to basically speed up the approval process for management activities. It will mean that whoever is responsible for the asset will have an easier and quicker process for works permits and management plans for small maintenance activities such as dredging or other general upgrades.

The largest portions of land in the motion before us relate to state forests. I am sure that the shadow minister who covers forestry, the member for Gympie, will make an excellent contribution. He has been talking up his contribution, which he has told me will be very good. It will be about the government's failure to sustainably manage the industry and the impact that has on our timber supply, which is very important in the housing crisis we are dealing with.

The largest parcels of land are in the Beerwah State Forest or, as the locals call it, Ferny Forest. The member for Glass House, who knows a thing or two about the environment portfolio, will talk about that and Deer Reserve north of Somerset Dam, which connects other protected estates.

There are three very small revocations related to Kamerunga near Cairns for the Western Arterial Road duplication. As the minister said, that is an important piece of infrastructure. There are four blocks of land that for some years have been underwater in the Daintree River. Those are apparently historical titles that were part of a failed logging township from the late 1800s. I guess their removal is just administrative. Another minor administrative revocation is in Tallebudgera, relating to the small driveway for three local properties in the great electorate of Burleigh. That change was figured out with the council over the past couple of years.

Queensland's environment is worth protecting. The practical side of action on climate change requires us to protect more of our state's biodiversity. We are the most biodiverse state in the nation and one of the most biodiverse jurisdictions in the world. From our rainforests through to our wetlands and beaches, we have an obligation to do everything we can to ensure they are conserved for future generations. The main way we can do that is through protected areas and conservation.

Eight years ago the government made a promise to protect 17 per cent of Queensland, but on this Labor is all talk. In those eight years the proportion of Queensland that is protected has increased by barely half of one per cent. When they made that commitment the protected area estate was 7.8 per cent, which was the lowest of any jurisdiction. We are now at 8.38 per cent, which is still the lowest of any jurisdiction. In last year's budget the government put forward funding to increase the public protected estate, but that funding is back-ended and once again their commitment is left wanting. Over half of it will not be spent until after the next election.

There seems to be a continued refusal to take the opportunity of increasing the private protected area estate. I note in this motion that some of the land being revoked from the Daintree National Park will become Aboriginal freehold land and a nature refuge, which I welcome. However, of the funding committed in last year's budget to expand the protected estate, which I just mentioned, none will go towards growing or better managing private protected areas such as nature refuges.

If we want to genuinely grow the protected estate, the fastest way is to focus on our private protected areas. We need to better explain to landholders how this system works. Joining the conservation estate is an opportunity for landholders and it protects our environment. It is a win-win. When a landholder reaches a conservation agreement with the government to have a nature refuge on their property, it does not lock it up and prevent them from doing other things. They can still have cattle grazing. Ecotourism is allowed and carbon farming, of course. It is not a case of locking up land and leaving it. The land does not become sterile for the landholder and they still have the freedom to do other activities.

The risk to so much of our agricultural land in this state is large companies buying it up for the carbon it contains and just leaving it. That benefits no-one. It takes away vital food production areas as well. We can have both. We can incentivise landholders to protect the areas on their properties that are worth protecting through private protected area agreements and still keep that land productive. It is all about choice. We need more Queensland landholders to choose to take part in our private protected area system. However, without proper management there is little incentive for them to do this.

Whether it be the public or private protected area estate, we also regularly see that the government is failing in management. There is no benefit for our environment when land is locked up and left to be overrun by weeds and other invasive species. Invasive species have a devastating impact on our conservation estate. We cannot even quantify the number of feral pigs across our state, but it is certainly in the millions. The closest estimates I have seen are three million to four million plus. Where feral pigs and other invasive animals such as foxes and feral cats are left to run rampant, there is widespread destruction in our national parks and surrounding areas are also impacted. There are very few landholders across the state who have not told me that a national park is the worst neighbour they can have. Bushfires are another major concern, and we will continue to keep a close eye on the resources provided to manage that risk. It should not be the case that landholders do not want to be a neighbour to a national park; however, we know that under Labor that is the situation we are in.

We welcome Queensland's conservation estate growing and the contribution this motion is making to that, but any increase must come with an increase in the standard of management and the resources provided for environmental management. Our Parks and Wildlife Service should be viewed as an essential service delivery arm of government. They are experts in environmental management. We need more rangers and they need to be better resourced.