




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 7 March 2024

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Opal Industry

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.31 pm): I rise to speak on behalf of the Queensland Boulder Opal Association, which is facing not one but two separate threats from the Miles Labor government. While the opal miners struggle with the changes contained in the Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan—I note that the minister is here in the chamber—they have become aware of another threat to the opal industry: Labor's intention to expand Queensland's protected estate by purchasing land with taxpayers' money. This is done very quietly, and the minister knows this, until the purchase is completed, when locals suddenly become aware that deals have been done. There is no prior public consultation about whether these purchases constitute value for money for the Queensland taxpayer. We certainly are not seeing this occur in South-East Queensland, for instance, where urbanisation has sent the state's small koala population of 23,000 into rapid decline. Nor do we see it in the Pioneer Valley, an area of profound environmental value, where the population of over 1,000 platypuses is threatened by the Miles government's pumped hydro project.

On 25 January, the minister announced that the Miles government had purchased 200,000 hectares comprising Tonkoro Station and Melrose Station. As long-established cattle stations, the conservation value of this land is very questionable. Even the Queensland Conservation Council responded tepidly, giving the minister a vague quote for her media release and said 'one' of these properties 'has potential' to be established as habitat for the night parrot. The night parrot is all over Queensland.

The word is that the department is purchasing Vergemont Station as well. We cannot get a straight answer, as public servants refer all requests to the minister, who does not answer until the deal is done. Alarm bells are ringing, because the acquisition of Vergemont Station, covering some of the finest opal-bearing deposits in the state, would sound a death knell for our valuable opal industry. The opals found in this district attract worldwide interest, yet the Miles government seems intent on destroying the industry. Restricted Area 257 on Vergemont Station must be saved for the opal industry to survive. If Vergemont is to be purchased by the Queensland taxpayer, it should be for the purpose of securing these valuable deposits for the future of our opal industry.

The Queensland Boulder Opal Association asks all members to look at the parliamentary mace. It is inlaid with 15 Queensland sapphires and nine Queensland opals—the state's and the nation's official gemstones. Then tell us that the families who mine these gems as a way of life have no future. They deserve a future. The minister should stop threatening their way of life and spend money expanding the protected estate in areas that have genuine conservation needs. I table a letter from the Mayor of Winton shire, Gavin Baskett, calling on the minister to stop doing this.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 5 March 2024, from the Mayor of Winton Shire Council, Mr Gavin Baskett, to the Premier, Hon. Steven Miles, regarding the opal industry [332](#).