




Speech By
Bisma Asif

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms ASIF** (Sandgate—ALP) (6.13 pm): I rise to speak to the second reading debate on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. In doing so, I acknowledge the hard work and passionate environmental advocacy of the shadow minister for the environment, the member for Nudgee. I am sure all members join me in wishing her a speedy recovery.

At the outset I note that the Labor opposition will not be opposing or seeking to amend this bill. However, we will be highlighting a range of concerns with the government's approach to the contents of the bill or, more properly, the lack of contents of this bill. Frankly, it would be difficult to oppose or amend this bill given that the bill is entirely empty. The bill is empty of vision and purpose. It is as empty as the hearts of the LNP when it comes to Queensland's precious natural environment and its conservation.

The opposition will not be opposing or amending this bill because, quite frankly, there is hardly anything in it. There is nothing to amend or oppose. The 18 clauses in the bill establish that electronic systems may be used for the automatic issue of authorities for low-risk activity and affirm the validity of authorities previously issued under electronic systems. This is truly riveting stuff, I must say. The bill is symbolic of the lack of vision of the Crisafulli government when it comes to the environment. That lack of vision showcases missed opportunities. This bill shows that the broader environmental policy landscape that surrounds the Crisafulli government is empty.

I begin by reminding members of what is at stake. Queensland is home to one of the most extraordinary natural environments on earth with the ancient Daintree Rainforest, the Great Barrier Reef, our wild river systems and iconic species found nowhere else on the planet. A full third of our native plant species are found nowhere else in the world. I could go on, but the list would be very long. We are truly very lucky to call Queensland home. It is a state with treasures and we have been entrusted with them. With that privilege comes an extraordinary responsibility to not just protect what we have today but also preserve it for future generations. However, this bill offers minor amendments in a standalone piece of legislation that contains no reform aimed at improving environmental outcomes.

What is entirely absent in the 18 clauses of this bill is the slightest hint of any vision for Queensland's environment from the Crisafulli LNP government. The purpose of the Nature Conservation Act, which this bill amends, is the conservation of nature while allowing for the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the management of protected areas. The act seeks to protect Queensland's biodiversity. Ours is the most biodiverse state in Australia, if not the world. We are fortunate to have the deep connection and wisdom of the traditional owners of Queensland's precious protected species to jointly manage it. Traditional owners bring tens of thousands of years of experience and knowledge in caring for country.

With all of that in mind, this bill leaves this House with bigger questions. How does the bill before the House meaningfully advance the objectives of the Nature Conservation Act? More to the point, what is the Crisafulli government's vision for Queensland's environment? After all, the bill is the first piece of

legislation relating to the environment introduced since they came to government. I would argue that to bring forward these minor amendments as a standalone bill is a stark demonstration of the Crisafulli LNP government's complete absence of vision for Queensland's environment.

These amendments do not bring new reforms or improved outcomes but only seek to ensure that the act operates as intended. That is not to say they are not important clarifications, but it does speak volumes that the new Crisafulli LNP government's first environmental bill delivers little. Their first and currently only environmental bill is to clarify an existing authorisation for the electronic issuing of automatic authorisations for low-risk activities. It begs the question: why were amendments not progressed more efficiently?

This government deeply lacks any imagination for Queensland's natural environment and, by extension, Queensland. I have seen more vision for the environment from the grade 6 students at Nashville State School who wrote to me about their environmental project. I thank them for writing to me and for showing passion for our environment. I must say, they have more passion for the environment than this government does. Ultimately, while not seeking to oppose the minor clarification contained in the bill, the opposition questions the time and resources that could have been spent by this parliament on a bill of actual substance. There are real opportunities for reform that have been missed by this bill.

The Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Environmental Protection Act 1994 have the power to deliver genuine, lasting reforms. It is only if that opportunity is taken. Reforms like strengthening protections for our rangers, deepening cooperation with Indigenous communities in managing country, giving our environmental regulators sharper tools to act, shifting focus towards preventing environmental harm and not just responding—

Mr POWELL: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. The member herself has pointed out there are a number of clauses in this bill. It is a very technical and specific bill. The member has spent more time talking about things that are not in the bill than what is actually in the bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Marr): I will just get some advice. Member for Sandgate, under advice, I ask you to please stay relevant to the bill.

Ms ASIF: I am happy to. I am talking about environmental reforms, which this bill is about, so I will continue.

Mrs Frecklington: Was that a reflection?

Ms ASIF: It was not a reflection.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Excuse me, if everybody could just keep quiet. Member for Sandgate, that was not appropriate. If you could please stay relevant to the bill after that comment back to the chair, that would be appreciated, thank you.

Ms ASIF: I am happy to. There is a contrast between the work of the previous Labor government and the Crisafulli LNP government's missing agenda when it comes to Queensland's environment. In a seven-month period of Labor's last term—less time than this government has now been at the helm—the former Miles Labor government: expanded the protected areas of the Great Sandy Marine Park by nine per cent; banned new oil and gas in the flood plains of the Lake Eyre Basin—

Mr POWELL: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. I ask the member to state which aspect of this bill her current address pertains to.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am just going to take some advice, thank you. Member for Sandgate, I am going to read the aims of the bill to you so you can be clear before you continue—

The ... objective of ... the Bill ... is to clearly establish that electronic systems may be used for automatically issuing particular authorities.

Specifically—

... authorities for low-risk activities under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 ... and the Environmental Protection Act 1994 ... can continue to be issued automatically through the use of an electronic system; and

... there is no doubt regarding the validity of authorities under the NC Act and EP Act that were previously issued automatically by electronic systems.

You have moved away from the objectives of the bill. Can I please ask you to keep that in mind as you continue, thank you.

Ms ASIF: I am happy to. When it comes to this bill before the House and checking the broader backdrop of their environmental policies and the shift that the government has taken, they have scrapped renewable energy projects and signalled an intention to wind back emissions targets. The Minister for the Environment today—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Ms FARMER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will take the first point of order from the member for Nanango.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, my first point of order relates to relevance, and my second point of order relates to the clear disrespect being shown to the chair.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Did you have a point of order, member for Bulimba?

Ms FARMER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask for your ruling on relevance. The Environmental Protection Act and the Nature Conservation Act are quite broad pieces of legislation. I would submit that the member is actually speaking to those acts.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Sandgate, we have made it very clear what the aims of the bill were. Could you explain how what you are speaking about is relevant to the bill, please?

Ms ASIF: I am speaking to the purposes of the bill, but to assist the House I can keep going.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you stick to the purposes of the bill, I will let you continue.

Ms ASIF: On the functions of the amendments and on our position, the department has advised that the substantive amendments contained in the bill to amend the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Environmental Protection Act 1994 will provide clarity about the use of electronic systems to issue authorities where clear criteria are met and to validate any previously issued authorities. I appreciate that the automatic issuing of particular authorities contained in this bill relate to authorities for low-risk activities and are sought following an internal review and for the removal of any doubt regarding the validity of authorities previously issued automatically by an electronic system. I also appreciate that the bill proposes to amend transitional provisions of the Environmental Protection Act to place beyond doubt that the administering authority can issue a penalty infringement notice in response to noncompliance with in-force environmental protection orders, direction notices and clean-up notices.

The reason we will not be opposing or seeking to amend the bill before us is that these amendments are straightforward, operational, clarifying and sensible and will make the job of departmental officers easier without sacrificing environmental or community protections, and the opposition will not oppose just for the sake of opposing. That is not what Queenslanders expect us to do.

Given the short nature of this amending bill, I am sure it would not surprise anyone that there were only three submissions to the committee inquiry—a whopping three submissions. The three submissions from stakeholders also stated there was a lot more room and opportunity to do more such as expand both private and protected areas, protect threatened species and prioritise bioregional planning. Again, a lot of parliamentary resources were spent on something that will have very little impact.

Government members interjected.

Ms ASIF: I am not taking interjections.

A government member: You just did!

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members to my right.

Ms ASIF: Again, a lot of parliamentary resources were spent on something that will have very little impact. Ten months into their term, no real resources have been dedicated by the Crisafulli LNP government to further the principles of this act—not within these amendments or otherwise. The Queensland Conservation Council said it best in its response to this bill—

The Nature Conservation Act and Environmental Protection Act are cornerstones of environmental law in Queensland and must be maintained and strengthened to achieve better outcomes for Queensland's environment.

Rather than take that opportunity, the Crisafulli government has chosen to tinker at the edges, proposing minor technical changes while ignoring the bigger challenges facing our environment. I acknowledge and thank each of the submitters. Committee examination of legislation is a vital part of the parliamentary process, as it is when stakeholders and members of the community get to have their say and raise any issues. Those three submissions raised the lack of real substance in this bill, variously raising the expansion of both private and protected areas, the protection of threatened species—

Ms FARMER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I refer to standing order 251, which says that the member speaking is not to be interrupted except in certain circumstances. I submit to you that the constant interruptions are designed to disrupt the member and do not relate to any of the points in standing order 251.


Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members to my right, the member for Sandgate is not taking your interjections, so please let her continue.

Ms ASIF: With respect to the submission by the Queensland Conservation Council, the peak body for Queensland's environmental movement, I note the department's advice with regard to clause 16 of the bill and the concerns they raised about the discretion afforded the minister to make a regulation which provides a power for the minister to create regulations on which activities can be automatically approved. I accept the safeguards provided by the bill that require particular matters to be prescribed by regulation, not to the detriment of achieving the objective of the Nature Conservation Act, and subject to the disallowance powers of this House.

Further, the department stated that an electronic system used to automatically deal with prescribed matters must be approved by the chief executive, taking all reasonable steps to comply with the requirements of the Nature Conservation Act. I thank the department for their clarification and assurances with respect to the proposed amendments to section 177 of the act with respect to deemed decisions for a standard application for mining activity relating to a mining lease in particular circumstances.

The department made it very clear that there is no change in the bill itself around standard environmental authorities and the requirement to issue those subject to the existing eligibility criteria and standard conditions under that framework. Further, a standard environmental authority application for a mining lease will continue to need a decision by the delegate or chief executive.

Sitting suspended from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

 **Ms ASIF:** Frankly, as I said, it is difficult to oppose or amend this bill because the bill is so bereft of any substance. Those opposite constantly rose on points of order on relevance because they have come in here and legislated something that is so narrow that little will ever be said about their first environmental reform. It is such a shame and a missed opportunity.

I will explain why my comments were relevant. This bill demonstrates a lack of ambition of the Crisafulli government when it comes to the environment. Whilst the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation has advised that the bill will provide clarity about the use of electronic systems to issue authorities where clear criteria are met and confirm the validity of any previously issued authorities and whilst electronic approvals are a contemporary tool and environmental management system and the bill delivers certainty around them, the real certainty that is delivered is that this government have no agenda for Queensland's environmental future. Their lack of ambition showcases both the missed opportunities of this bill and the broader policy environment.

I will conclude by addressing submissions to the committee. The sector is calling for this government to be bold in their ambition. The Labor opposition stands with the Queensland Conservation Council, which said in their submission on the bill—

Beyond these amendments, we urge the State Government to prioritise:

- Continuing to resource regional planning within the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation, to enable effective mapping and modelling of environmental values ...
- Expanding the protected areas estate in both public and private land and appropriately funding maintenance of these protected areas
- Implementing programs that will move towards ensuring no new species extinctions ...

The department advised the committee during its inquiry that there are no actual changes in the bill itself around standard environmental authorities and the requirement to issue those, subject to existing eligibility criteria and standard conditions under that framework. Further, a standard environmental authority application for a mining lease will continue to need to be decided by a delegate or the chief executive. I thank the department for their clarification on this technical matter. It is based on that clarification and the operational and validating nature of these minor amendments that the Labor opposition will not be opposing this bill.

I would like to make it clear: the LNP's vision for protecting Queensland's environment and supporting industry, as revealed by submitters to the committee, is pathetic. It is weak where strength was needed. It is hollow where ambition was needed. Queensland can do better and Queensland must do better, because our environment is worth more than just automatic approvals. Only Labor has the record for delivering for the environment. Only Labor has shown vision to grow the economy, protect the environment and give certainty to all Queenslanders. This bill does little, if anything. It is a big missed opportunity for this state, this government and especially this minister.