



Speech By

Hon. Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Record of Proceedings, 18 September 2025

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Welford, Hon. RJ

 **Hon. LM LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (10.14 am): I rise, along with those before me, to recognise the significant contribution of the Hon. Rod Welford. His reputation as a fierce advocate for the environment is well known, and it is this element of his contribution that I want to focus my contribution on this morning. In Rod's maiden speech he spoke of the three aspects of community life that formed the broad planks of his social philosophy. The environment was one of those three pillars. He said, 'There is no justice for us or our children in destroying our environment.' He understood deeply that long-term economic and social wellbeing could only be secured by conserving the natural ecosystems upon which we all depend; that economic prosperity and social wellbeing are not binary but, rather, must be held in tension; and that Queensland's prosperity cannot be built on the unsustainable exploitation of our land, water and forests.

When Rod became shadow environment minister in 1996, he used his time in opposition to work with the ALP's internal policy committees, industry and the conservation movement to develop an ambitious environmental policy agenda that left a legacy that stands today. It was comprehensive and included nature conservation, sustainable industry, energy efficiency, waste management, heritage protection, World Heritage nominations, land-tenure-blind natural resource management, and expanding and improving protected area management.

When Peter Beattie became premier in 1998, Rod became the Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources. I have it on good authority that it was Rod who convinced Peter to combine the environment and natural resource portfolios. When too often these portfolios are held in tension, Rod understood their deep and important synergies. As someone whose family came from the land, and as a person deeply committed to conservation, I believe that Rod had it right. Those who work the land and those who fight to protect it both love the land.

Rod delivered many significant and lasting reforms during his tenure as environment minister. He established the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Environmental Protection Agency; created the policy for Queensland's first solar water heater rebate scheme; set up the first large-scale water efficiency program in Australia; introduced the first state coastal management plan to protect Queensland coastal beaches; negotiated the only regional forest agreement in Australia that received universal support from the timber industry and conservation organisations; and delivered an extra 425,000 hectares of national parks. These were the things that he said before his retirement he was proudest of, but Rod Welford's most enduring environment legacy lies in the landmark Vegetation Management Act 1999. This was the first time Queensland comprehensively regulated the clearing of native vegetation on freehold land. Through this reform, broadscale clearing was curtailed across millions of hectares of native bushland, halting one of the highest rates of land clearing in the developed world. The framework applied across vast areas of Queensland's landscape. Approximately 90 million

hectares of land containing remnant and high-value regrowth vegetation were brought under statutory regulation. This represents one of the largest areas of land covered by vegetation laws anywhere in the world.

For the first time, Queensland moved decisively to protect biodiversity corridors, reduce salinity and soil erosion and improve the health of our rivers and the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. The vegetation management framework not only safeguarded ecosystems but also recast Queensland as a national leader in conservation policy, and it allowed the then Howard government to meet Australia's Kyoto Protocol commitments. It was a difficult reform—one that required balancing rural landholder interests with the needs of future generations—but it endures today as one of the defining achievements in land management in our state.

Another significant achievement under his stewardship was the strategic buyback of pastoral leases on Cape York Peninsula. Through this program, hundreds of thousands of hectares of degraded or marginal grazing land were purchased by the state and converted to a mix of conservation tenure and Aboriginal freehold title. This initiative advanced both conservation and reconciliation, significantly expanding Queensland's protected area estate while returning land to traditional owners. It enabled the joint management of country, supported Indigenous ranger programs and protected landscapes of immense cultural and ecological significance, from tropical savannas to wetlands and rainforest margins. He also laid the groundwork for significant and comprehensive scientific work to understand and articulate the global significance of Cape York Peninsula's natural and cultural values. That work underpinned the successful listing of parts of the peninsula on the World Heritage tentative list last year by then premier Miles.

Rod understood that lasting reform required both courage and compromise. When he left the role in this parliament he did not leave the role of environmental advocate. When I became environment minister, Rod reached out and asked if we could meet. I am sure he did likewise with every environment minister before me. When we met, he did not ask anything of me. He did not tell me how to do my job or wax lyrical about his achievements. He simply offered his support if I should ever need it.

When I saw Rod weeks before his passing, we were at the launch of the inaugural Queensland Environment Day on World Environment Day. He was obviously very unwell, but he did not take the time he had at that event to talk about himself. He used it to line me up as shadow environment minister and he lined up the environment minister, the CEO of Trust for Nature, the CEO of the Goodman Foundation and countless other conservation stakeholders to urgently seek ongoing environmental reform with the time that he had left.

Queensland is greener, more sustainable and more resilient for the reforms advanced under his stewardship. Vale, Rod Welford.