



Speech by

Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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NATURE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ELMES (Noosa—Lib) (9.16 pm): I rise to speak to the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2006. This is a strange debate in that the government already has the power to cancel duck and quail hunting seasons, which I fully support. The government has cancelled seasons in the past, and I earnestly hope that all seasons are cancelled from this time on. In my electorate of Noosa we have a deep affinity with our environment. The communities of Noosa, Coolum, Eumundi and the hinterland towns are made up of people who have chosen to become part of the local environment rather than ride roughshod over it. We have demonstrated this commitment time and time again. It is reflected in local government planning and will be further demonstrated following the signing off on Noosa council's submission to have the Noosa shire formally declared a biosphere reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program, or the MAB program as it is to be known.

The minister stated when introducing the bill that while hunting would be banned farmers would be able to obtain a damage mitigation permit from the EPA to prevent damage to crops. Interestingly, though, the EPA states that there are very few permits sought. Perhaps this is because waterbird abundance, breeding and wetland area indices have been almost exclusively below average for the years 2000 to 2006. The EPA suggests that this is as a result of duck numbers being in decline rather than increasing. For example, my research finds that for the second year in a row record low numbers of waterbirds were counted on the Macquarie Marshes. The marshes averaged 30,000 in the 1980s, and never below 100, but this year there were fewer than 10 birds. A combination of severe drought in New South Wales and Queensland with river regulation continues to affect many key wetlands. Six species were at their lowest recorded numbers in 23 years, including the plumed whistling duck. Most adult birds were concentrated in the south or the north, with very low numbers in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. Breeding was highly concentrated in the south.

Having spent a great deal of my time and life in western Queensland, I understand the significance of this issue and the dire consequences if crops are threatened. My time in the west provided the magnitude of the problem and I support the resolve of farmers to exercise their right to cull any species of bird or animal that is endangering the viability of their farms. However, we are not just talking about western Queensland and areas of primary production. There are six species of ducks hunted in Queensland: the Pacific black duck, the wood duck, the grey teal, the hardhead, the plumed whistling duck and the wandering whistling duck. With the possible exception of the hardhead, the other species mate for life.

The two quail species are the stubble quail and the brown quail. In Queensland in 2002, there were 402 registered shooters. Those 402 shooters killed or bagged 11,061 ducks and 1,225 quail. As I mentioned earlier, in 2003 the season was cancelled. In 2004, there were 379 registered shooters and those shooters killed or bagged 11,562 ducks and 2,839 quail. Given that ducks cannot be shot while at rest, it would seem that many more would die a cruel and agonising death from gunshot wounds later on.

I am fairly certain that there would be little, if any, duck or quail shooting in my electorate of Noosa. However, I know and understand the way my electorate thinks and feels about the environment and the

protection of the environment, whether that be flora or fauna. If I did not speak up in favour of abolishing duck and quail hunting, I would be failing in my responsibility to the very people who put me in this place.

A recreational pursuit that deliberately sets out to hurt, kill and often fatally wound, causing a slow and agonising death, is no longer acceptable to society. I firmly believe in this day and age that the hunting and killing of any bird or animal, particularly native birds or animals, is not acceptable to the majority of Queenslanders. Again, I am not speaking about the culling of introduced species, such as wild pigs, goats, foxes, feral cats and dogs. The humane culling of these species is necessary. Indeed, it is important for the protection and the survival of our own native species and for the protection of crops and animals belonging to our primary producers.

The years I spent in western Queensland quickly educated me as to the devastation caused by introduced species. I fully support farmers who, through necessity, have to cull these animals. I also understand the need at times for primary producers to even humanely cull our native species, which include ducks, cockatoos, kangaroos and wallabies—whatever it is—that may be destroying their crops and their livelihoods.

My personal belief is that the time has come where the minority must accept that the hunting and killing of defenceless birds and animals in the guise of recreational pursuit is no longer acceptable to a civilised and educated society. Duck and quail shooting has never been allowed in the Australian Capital Territory. Western Australia totally banned shooting in 1990. New South Wales banned recreational duck shooting in 1995. Victoria and South Australia have greatly reduced the number of hunters.

In 2005, the Queensland government again cancelled the duck and quail recreational hunting season following advice from the Duck and Quail Management Advisory Committee based on factors such as rainfall records, long-term weather forecasts, surface water in dams and wetlands, and population data. The advisory committee found that the duck and quail numbers had fallen dramatically during the past few years of drought, making a season unsustainable. A recent waterbird population survey revealed numbers at their lowest level since surveying began in 1984—down from one billion to just 200,000.

I do not believe that there is anyone who does not recognise and accept that whatever we do has an impact on our environment. If we are honest in our intent to act on the premise of protecting and saving our fragile environment by all measures of conservation and preservation, then as legislators we would be failing to uphold this principle if we did not support a total and permanent ban on duck and quail hunting.