



Speech by
Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Thursday, 30 November 2006

WILD RIVERS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ELMES (Noosa—Lib) (4.22 pm): I am delighted to rise to speak to the Wild Rivers and Other Legislation Amendment Bill.

Mr Lawlor: Yes, I know. How do you think we feel.

Mr ELMES: A lot better once I have finished. Support for the protection of the environment, particularly the pristine areas of our state that are fed by outstanding examples of natural rivers, is essential. These waterways must be saved for future generations, provided that guidelines to protect all interested parties can be put in place. Some of the guidelines, which have been outlined, include that legislation will not automatically declare wild rivers, that a declaration will not affect the existing activities of communities in any areas that are nominated and subsequently declared wild rivers, that people undertaking some form of primary production or mining operation at the time of the declaration will be allowed to proceed, and that the provisions also recognise the importance of existing developments and rights in wild river areas, including those of traditional owners.

The fact that areas will not be locked up is most important and must be reinforced at every opportunity. If this legislation is the success that it deserves to be, with provisions that give comfort to those people who live in areas already identified and for those who may be affected in the future, then the checks and balances must be advertised widely and often. The issue is to get the balance right. From what I can see from this bill, the government is to be congratulated on the formula that is contained in it as it enhances the environment and protects those who live and work nearby.

So far, there are six catchments that have been nominated for declaration. Four are in the remote gulf country and include Settlement Creek, the Morning Inlet and the Gregory and Staaten rivers. The other two rivers that are intended to be nominated are on Hinchinbrook Island and Fraser Island. Importantly, those that I have mentioned are rivers that have all, or nearly all, of their natural values intact.

In my own electorate of Noosa there has been widespread community debate on the possible suggestion that the Noosa River also be included. Although the Noosa council is yet to decide whether to proceed, I think the fact that the community has had the debate highlights the commitment to the environment by the Noosa council and the Noosa community at large. It is issues such as this one that make me extremely proud to be the member for Noosa.

With the exception of the inclusion of Fraser Island, all of the nominated areas are in north Queensland. I look forward to seeing a review of waterways throughout the rest of the state that could also be included in the wild rivers legislation, provided that those who wish to nominate river systems keep strictly within the meaning of the legislation in that a wild river means a pristine river, a natural river or a heritage river.

One idea that I believe should be followed came from a combined suggestion from the Queensland Conservation Council and the Wilderness Society in their initial submission and that was to establish a wild rivers unit. In the submission, these well-respected groups called for the concept of a wild rivers unit that would potentially be charged with the creation of management plans for the wild river catchments, with monitoring the implementation of legislation and plans and with reporting on the performance of the

legislation itself. I am firmly of the belief that such a unit, with members drawn from the environment movement, government and other stakeholders, would be a good idea. Their brief would ensure that the proposals for rivers already nominated would be successfully implemented. The unit could also offer advice to communities who are considering the nomination of a river system in their particular area.

To me, there are far-reaching benefits to be derived from the ongoing association that people and industry groups already have with their river systems. The preservation of our rivers and the opportunity that we have in Queensland to further our ecotourism potential makes this legislation and the benefits that flow from it a win-win for all sections of the Queensland community.

Earlier in my speech I extended my congratulations to the government on introducing these amendments. I think the fact that the Wild Rivers and Other Legislation Amendment Bill has bipartisan support shows clearly that Queensland as a whole is moving in the right direction in the protection of our environment for future generations.