



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Thursday, 17 November 2011

WATER AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (4.01 pm), continuing: Before the luncheon adjournment I was talking about the evidence given to the committee by Mr Burgess. After he expressed an opinion about the necessity for riverine protection permits to be issued by the department, I put it to Mr Burgess that landowners have for too long had very unsatisfactory contact with the process of securing the riverine protection permit. Their contact experience with this regulatory instrument is that the process is not responsive enough to meet the needs of landowners to undertake certainly emergency works but all too often straightforward works and works that are considered to be common practice on properties. In response, Mr Burgess said that he could not agree more. Mr Burgess expressed the opinion that DERM officers seemed to be underresourced and swamped with trying to respond to applications for riverine protection permits. Mr Burgess said that ideally applicants seeking a permit would be able to have immediate contact with a DERM officer who had some expertise in this area. Unfortunately, this just does not happen.

The amount of bureaucracy and red tape involved in the application process to secure a riverine protection permit is appalling. It frustrates the living daylights out of landholders who generally and genuinely desire to do the right thing but find themselves so often waiting for extended periods for DERM to process their applications. For that reason the LNP does not oppose the amendment, because we understand the need to reduce the number of circumstances in which landholders need to secure a riverine protection permit to undertake certain works in the absence of DERM being able to provide a responsive service that provides prompt and well-informed advice to landholders seeking a riverine protection permit.

A comfort that Mr Burgess may take out of this situation is that the scope of works that will be made self-assessable will be determined in individual WRPs and will apply only if these works are undertaken in accordance with a self-assessable code listed in the regulations of the Water Act. So if they are to be determined variously within individual WRPs there may be some potential for the list of appropriate self-assessable works to reflect regional differences.

On balance, although I cannot agree with him and join with him in opposing this amendment, I thank Mr Burgess for his thoughtful and honest contribution to the committee's hearing, where he acknowledged that green tape under this government has the real potential to result in perverse environmental outcomes because of its failure to reform or, more often than not, because of its implementation of ineffective bureaucratic regulatory instruments. I have made that exact point on many occasions in this place, usually to objections and accusations from members opposite while they blindly do the bidding of the Greens to the detriment of the environment they claim to care about.

In the last short period available to me, I will make a quick comment in relation to clause 95 of the bill which provides for the recognition of a community based wild river ranger program for wild river areas with the purpose of contributing to the preservation of the natural values of rivers in wild river areas and the development of a resource management economy in wild river areas. Honourable members in this place would have heard me speak on a number of occasions in relation to the Wild Rivers Act. Certainly, they would be well aware that I do not support and have been critical of the wild rivers legislation and the

declarations that have been made as part of Greens preference deals between the Labor Party and Greens. I want to congratulate the shadow minister for the environment, the member for Glass House, on the excellent policy that he has released recently in terms of replacing those wild river declarations on Cape York Peninsula with much more sensible and practical management arrangements.

I have no problems with this amendment, which seeks to give the wild river rangers program permanent and statutory recognition, because if there is one single thing in the wild rivers legislation that is worthy of being maintained it is the excellent opportunities that wild river rangers have been given in declaration areas to pursue practical activities that absolutely enhance the natural resource and the environmental values of the areas that have been declared.