



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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NATURE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (4.56 pm): I rise to speak to the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2006. This bill seeks to legislate a ban on recreational duck and quail hunting in Queensland. Historically, recreational duck and quail hunting has been permitted in Queensland under a variety of permit programs, most recently since 1995 under a series of nature conservation plans. These permit programs, in conjunction with the seasonal declarations, have provided an effective management program for duck and quail hunting in Queensland. That means that the number of permits was controlled as well as the capacity to cancel a recreational duck and quail hunting season if there was a view that, for one reason or another, duck and/or quail populations were not sufficient or were not likely to be sufficient at the conclusion of a season to proceed. Only 376 duck hunting licences were still in effect when the most recent nature conservation plan expired.

Regrettably, despite these controls and management processes, I understand that the environment minister's duck and quail ministerial advisory committee chose not to advise a renewal of the conservation plan, effectively ending the practice of recreational duck and quail hunting in Queensland. However, at the time it remained possible for a conservation plan to be remade without the need for legislation to be introduced into this place. This bill will require that to occur. I wonder why the government has chosen to introduce this bill when it chose to effectively end recreational duck and quail hunting by not renewing the conservation plan. If it was good enough to end duck and quail hunting by not renewing a conservation plan without bringing the matter before the parliament, why is it not good enough to remake a conservation plan without bringing the matter before parliament? It is apparent that this is just a political stunt by the government. If the government were serious and it really believed in the ban on duck and quail hunting and its arguments for doing so, it would have dealt with the matter by introducing a bill at that time.

The explanatory notes provided for this bill refer to the more than 5,000 submissions that were received encouraging the minister to make a legislative change to ban recreational duck and quail hunting while approximately 50 submissions were received objecting to the decision. I would like to add to the record a reminder of the 5,000 signatures tabled in this place by the member for Burdekin opposing the move to ban recreational duck and quail hunting.

I urge members to reflect on the comments made by the member for Burdekin concerning the activities of recreational hunting groups in preserving duck habitats such as wetlands. I understand that a number of groups maintain these wetland areas, volunteering time to control pests and weeds in these sensitive environments. Indeed, I understand that some groups have even gone to the trouble of applying for grants to undertake this work.

What does the government intend to do to fill the gap left by these organisations in the management of those wetland areas? It would be ironic if the efforts of this government to ban a small group of licence-carrying recreational duck hunters, who have been trained in bird species recognition, led to the reduction in the health of duck habitats such as wetlands. I look forward to hearing about the government's plans to increase efforts to maintain these wetlands.

Interestingly, the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee reflected on the question of whether or not the legislation gave sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individual Queenslanders with respect to these types of recreational activities when individuals are carrying the appropriate licences and permits. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee ultimately referred to the parliament the question of whether the provisions of the bill have sufficient regard for the rights of recreational duck and quail hunters and relevant property owners. Given that the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has indicated that it is a relevant matter to discuss as part of the consideration of this bill, I would like to relate to the House the circumstances of one of my constituents who has taken a particular interest in this matter.

Mr Mario Cuzzubbo of Ingham, in my electorate of Hinchinbrook, wrote to my predecessor, Mr Rowell, in September last year following the government's announcement that the conservation plan would not be renewed when it expired last year. I would like to read Mr Cuzzubbo's letter as it is a pertinent example of the genuine concern in one sector of the community about the end of recreational duck hunting in Queensland. The letter is dated 6 September. It reads—

Dear Marc

Over a period of 45 years I have been a responsible shooter regarding ducks in the Herbert River district. In the early days they provided an important part of our diet and in recent times, while there isn't the dependency of ducks on a table, they are still regarded highly as a delicacy.

I am representing a number of duck hunters in the district by expressing my extreme disappointment that the State Government has made a decision not to renew the legislation regarding duck hunting when it expires this month.

I understand that the number of licence holders has been reduced to 376 licensed hunters. I believe that with this reduction in numbers the duck population will not be significantly reduced and there is good reason why the status quo could be maintained with respect to the current number of licences. There is no doubt that this number will inevitably reduce also.

The taking of ducks in particular is part of a tradition that was widely practiced by the older population and statistical information shows that it is rapidly decreasing. It has been raised that something like 90% of ducks shot suffer a slow, cruel death but I believe that if the licensing could stipulate that they weren't to be shot in flight and only shot on the water, this would reduce the effects of wounded ducks not being taken as it is most unlikely that those affected could be airborne.

I have never considered taking more ducks than for the purpose of my immediate needs and I believe I have never exceeded the designated limit. I have always completed and lodged the necessary returns regarding the taking of ducks and I accept that closures can occur due to unfavourable seasonal conditions.

Although it is late, would consideration be given to extending this legislation for at least another 5 years. By this time the number of licence holders may be reduced to a point where the activity of shooting ducks may no longer be of importance. It is with great disappointment that I write this letter as the taking of ducks has become a significant part of the food that my family eats and has become a part of North Queensland recreational activities.

Could you please provide some assistance in this matter.

Regards

Mario Cuzzubbo

This letter is testimony to the decency and considered position of the vast majority of former duck hunters in Queensland. Mr Cuzzubbo demonstrates an understanding and appreciation for proper controls and the need for licences to be issued to responsible hunters who are not barbaric, which was the unfortunate turn of phrase used by the former minister for the environment to describe recreational duck shooting. Indeed, in the case of Mr Cuzzubbo and other duck hunters in my electorate of Hinchinbrook, they consider duck hunting to be a cultural practice that is not done just for some flippant reason but has been practised for many generations. As Mr Cuzzubbo points out, the dependency on duck no longer exists, but it is still considered a delicacy and is enjoyed on special occasions.

The lack of understanding that the government is displaying with regard to this bill may be explained by the fact that it failed to undertake the scheduled public review of the Queensland duck and quail management plan, which was scheduled to occur in 2005. It simply announced that the conservation plan would not be renewed, and now we have this bill. If it had undertaken the scheduled public review, it may have had an opportunity to consider the points of view of responsible recreational hunters about their commitment to the appropriate management of duck habitat, about the value they place on the permit and control systems in place, including the option to cancel hunting seasons due to adverse weather conditions, and about their concerns about duck numbers. But this did not occur and the government did not have that opportunity, and that is a shame.

The amendment that will be proposed by the member for Burdekin will give us an opportunity to review this decision in three years time so that we can assess the result of this bill. I am not convinced that the simplistic proposition being put forward by the government today is responsible legislation as far as the management of duck wetland habitat and the conservation of ducks in Queensland is concerned, and for that reason I urge members to consider and support the amendment.