

***Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill
2025 - Sandy Bolton, MP For Noosa***

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Both businesses and our communities expect to transact with State and local governments' in a timely and efficient manner. The *Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* sets out to address this expectation by clarifying and updating the process for an electronic system to issue authorities for low-risk activities under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (NC Act) and the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* (EP Act).

These include the provision of certain licenses, such as for keeping native animals as pets and permits for camping in protected areas. Under the EP Act it includes certain environmental related activities connected to, for example, agriculture, mining, and some industrial processes.

The amendments aim to reduce time spent on low-risk activities and maximise the use of resources to assess high-risk activities.

There were only three submissions on the bill with the Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) raising a couple of issues.

First that clauses in the Bill reduce transparency and makes enforcement and public participation with environmental authorities more difficult. They warned that there are many examples of automatic decision making going wrong, such as robodebt, and that strong checks and balances are needed.

In response, the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI) advised that that there are the regulation making process, and the approval of the Chief Executive, to ensure that only appropriate processes are made automatic.

Second, they raised that moving conditions out of EAs reduced transparency. The Department argued that changes to section 204 of the EP Act do not alter the intent of the existing provision, it ensures that any EA issued following a standard or variation application is subject to a condition that the holder must continue to meet the eligibility criteria.

Overall the small changes in the bill may offer some efficiencies, however the Government has major challenges around protected areas in Queensland that are not being addressed adequately.

Examples? The promised increase to protected areas by strategic acquisitions and voluntary partnerships which so far seem to be what was committed under the previous government. Making sure our waterways aren't polluted or choked with sediment, as well the identified high risks in our national parks, especially those with high visitation near urban areas.

In Noosa we still contend with feral animals as well impacts from us humans including plastics, dangerous behaviours and damage to fragile systems through overuse.

The National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) have reported that Queensland has one of the lowest spends per hectare for protected areas. With governments election commitments, the Olympics approaching, and a focus on eco-tourism made possible by our natural assets, we must lift funding for our protected areas and QPWS to \$220m over four years and \$80m ongoing for our parks.

With the growth of SE Queensland urban areas due to increasing population and housing, there is going to be inevitable pressure on our natural environmental and all within, including people.

The experience of my own community and the trauma from historical Environmental Authorities which are not fit for purpose, demonstrates why it is vital to get this right. A route to potentially addressing this was through an Independent Environmental Protection Agency for QLD. This is now not an avenue, with our new government confirming it will not proceed, leaving us as the only state in Australia without one.

This, combined with the defunding of the Environmental Defenders Office and the lack of transparency in either SARA decisions, or the advice to them on matters of state interest from participating agencies including DETSI, means it could only get worse.

May there be scope in the newly elected federal Government's introduction of a commonwealth Environmental Protection Agency to help Queensland in seeing a way forward.

Governments of all colours can be narrow sighted, focusing on short term gain from harvesting what cannot be replaced, instead of the long-term damage and the billions needed to remedy, such as polluted airs and waterways. Ballot box decisions and a lack of bipartisan agreements are amongst our greatest challenges. Investment in maintaining our natural assets should not need to be debated, as they are essential to offset the damage we cause.

I can only hope for our future generations that we move beyond short term gratification, to ones that are truly sustainable.

Thank you to the committee, the Department and submitters for their examination of the Bill and I commend it to the House.

(730 words)