

Agreement in Principle

Mr FRANK SARTOR (Rockdale—Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [10.06 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

This bill will enable urgent and essential safety upgrades of public infrastructure in two locations: Copeton Dam, 35 kilometres southwest of Inverell; and the upgrade of the intersection at Boothenda Road and the Golden Highway near Dubbo. To ensure that national parks and nature reserves are protected in perpetuity, lands reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 may not be revoked except by an Act of Parliament. This very important aspect of the national parks system will ensure that our natural and cultural heritage is protected forever for future generations. Any changes to that status should be subject to the scrutiny of the parliamentary process.

From time to time circumstances arise that require the revocation of lands reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. The revocation of lands generally will be undertaken as an avenue of last resort and only where appropriate. This bill represents two such instances. Firstly, let me discuss the proposed revocation from Gwydir River State Conservation Area. When Copeton Dam was completed in 1976, it complied with the engineering standards of the day. However, recent studies have determined that the existing spillway has insufficient capacity to deal with an extreme flood event. Failure of the dam would have catastrophic effects downstream both environmentally and socially.

After an assessment of options, State Water has made a decision to undertake a dam safety upgrade in two stages. Stage one includes the construction of a fuse plug spillway at Diamond Bay and stage two will include building a 1.65 metre parapet wall on the existing dam wall for the temporary storage of floodwaters and making modification to the spillway gates. Stage one will impact on the Gwydir River State Conservation Area. In the very rare instance that the spillway is activated, the path of the water from the spillway to where it enters the Gwydir River would have detrimental impact on the values of the land. The slope would be eroded and the native vegetation severely impacted on. This type of use is not compatible with use of land that is reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

This bill proposes the revocation of approximately 144 hectares from Gwydir River State Conservation Area to enable it to be transferred to State Water for future management as part of Copeton Dam. State Water is acquiring an additional 25 hectares of land, which is vested with the Minister administering the National Parks and Wildlife Act but is not reserved under that Act. This smaller parcel of land was not included when the State Conservation Area was reserved, in anticipation that it would be required for the spillway upgrade. It includes an old quarry which was used during the construction of the dam.

There will be a conservation benefit in addition to the safety benefits of this project. The bill will ensure that there is the transfer of land to Gwydir River State Conservation Area of equal or greater value to offset the revoked land. In fact, the bill provides that the land will not be revoked and transferred to State Water until land of equal or greater conservation value is transferred to the national parks system.

Secondly, the proposed revocation of 1.2 hectares from Beni State Conservation Area for dedication as a public road will also allow for a safety upgrade. Dubbo City Council has secured funding through the Auslink Strategic Program to upgrade and realign the intersection to improve safety. Boothenda Road forms part of the northern freight vehicle route which bypasses Dubbo City Centre and links with the Golden Highway, Newell Highway and Mitchell Highway to the west of the city. By upgrading the road intersection where Boothenda Road meets the Golden Highway, B-double trucks will be able to travel this route thereby reducing the distance the trucks travel by at least five kilometres each way. It will also assist in keeping the trucks out of the city centre. The B-double trucks will be able to use Boothenda Road to access the industrial area at Troy Junction.

The land to be revoked contains disturbed forest and is located at the corner of the small portion of Beni State Conservation Area, adjacent to the Golden Highway. The proposal will have a net conservation benefit because it involves the transfer of high conservation value forest to the national parks system. The proposed compensatory land is an eight hectare parcel of land owned by Dubbo Council for future use as a road, which runs through the large portion of Beni State Conservation Area. This land is not required for future use as a public road and contains undisturbed woodland.

The bill will also make an amendment to the Native Title (New South Wales) Act 1994, to ensure that native title rights and interests existing in relation to the revoked land are protected. This bill will allow for the safety upgrade of public infrastructure at two sites in regional New South Wales while ensuring there is no net loss to the conservation values of the national parks estate. I commend the bill to the House.