



NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard

National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Jenolan Caves Reserves) Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday 21 September 2005.

Second Reading

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.22 a.m.], on behalf of Mr Bob Debus: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I present the National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Jenolan Caves Reserves) Bill to facilitate the Government's karst reserve management restructure. This bill proposes to remove division 8 of part 4 and related schedules from the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. This will effectively abolish the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust and transfer care, control and management of the Jenolan, Wombeyan, Borenore and Abercrombie Karst Conservation Reserves to the Department of Environment and Conservation. The Council on the Cost and Quality of Government recommended that the four karst conservation reserves be transferred from the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust to the Department of Environment and Conservation to improve financial and visitor experience outcomes. The council also recommended that a capital works package be initiated to address outstanding infrastructure works. The Government has adopted these recommendations.

One of the fundamental tenets of the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust was that it be a self-financing and independent entity. In recent years the trust has been unable to sustain its financial resource requirements, by deferring capital works relying on government grants to carry out some essential works. Due to the problems with the trust's financial model, the Council on the Cost and Quality of Government carried out a special review. The review recommended when the last trust board's term expired in January 2004 that an administrator be appointed to review in detail the management of trust and recommend a way forward. The review carried out by the administrator of the financial and structural model of the trust found that the trust had performed very well, given its operating parameters.

However, visitor numbers have declined and the business model has not proved to be sustainable, with lower levels of revenue from popular sites such as the Jenolan Cave system being insufficient to cover capital works and product development for all four karst reserves under the trust. The Government has carefully considered these findings and proposes a sensible, economical and sustainable option for the future management of the karst reserves, ensuring the continued protection and sustainable use of the New South Wales karst reserve system. The Government has developed a revitalisation package not only to conserve these natural and iconic assets but also to assist local economies by providing regional employment and increased tourism opportunities.

The package includes an \$18 million program of works on Jenolan Caves Road, generating new jobs; a \$4 million capital works program to upgrade important cave and above-ground infrastructure; the establishment of a new specialist unit within the Department of Environment and Conservation to ensure best practice management of karst areas throughout New South Wales; the establishment of a Karst Management Advisory Committee under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 comprised of key stakeholder representatives, including karst scientists, speleologists, traditional owners and the New South Wales Heritage Office.

The role and composition of this committee will be defined in the Act. The management of karst reserves will be consolidated, ensuring that Abercrombie, Wombeyan, Borenore and Jenolan karst reserves are managed, along with the State's 30 other significant cave systems, by the one organisation. A further \$120,000 per annum in additional funding will also be provided to enhance management outcomes. To facilitate this comprehensive initiative, minor amendments are required to the National Parks and Wildlife Act to transfer management responsibility from the Jenolan Caves Trust to the Department of Environment and Conservation. This is a sensible and necessary bill. I commend it to the House.