



NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard

National Parks and Wildlife (Adjustment of Areas) Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 28 February 2006.

Second Reading

Ms SANDRA NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation, Minister for Women, and Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development) [7.44 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill proposes the revocation of approximately 1,000 hectares of the Bargo State Conservation Area at Hill Top in the Southern Highlands and vesting that land as part of the corporate lands vested under the Sporting Venues Management Act 2002 in the name of the Minister administering that Act, namely, the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation. Also included in the bill is an amendment to the Sporting Venues Management Act 2002, the main variation being to amend schedule 1 to incorporate the land being excised from the Bargo State Conservation Area. The Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation will develop the site as the Southern Highlands Regional Shooting Complex. The State conservation area land to be revoked is presently under the care and control of the Minister for the Environment, the responsible Minister for the National Parks and Wildlife Act. In outlining these proposals, I am doing so with the full agreement of my colleagues the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Lands who have been consulted on the draft bill.

The Hill Top rifle range is presently an existing range located in the Bargo State Conservation Area. It comprises a single 800-metre full-bore range. It is licensed from the National Parks and Wildlife Service Division, Department of the Environment and Conservation to the Southern Highlands Rifle Club until 2008. Six other clubs in the region will be consolidated to operate at this new facility. The location of recreational and competitive shooting sites is, reasonably, a matter in which the community has a high interest. Large tracts of land are needed to allow for the varying shooting disciplines, including surrounding safe areas and configured land improvements to capture stray projectiles. It is important that the shooting clubs continue to be provided with access to safe and well-regulated sites.

Consistent with the objectives of the States Shooting Club Development Program, one significant means of providing infrastructure support is through the development of regional shooting facilities and through consolidation of ranges that are threatened by urban encroachment or environment issues. This approach also provides long-term security of tenure for shooting clubs. It is sound policy to bring the various shooting disciplines together in appropriate sites. Well-governed regional committees can oversight, manage and promote their sport in a controlled environment and in accordance with lease, firearm licence and compliance requirements. Bringing multiple shooting clubs and disciplines together frees up or reduces demand for other large tracts of land for shooting facilities. It also provides greater levels of certainty for shooting clubs whose current tenure is not secure and provides options for clubs whose current sites may not be appropriate.

Discussions facilitated by the Hon. John Tingle MLC to identify a suitable site to establish a regional shooting complex were held with a number of government agencies and the key shooting club stakeholders in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Southern Highland areas. Seven clubs expressed interest. They are the Southern Highlands Rifle Club, Illawarra Regional Shooting Association, Illawarra Service Rifle Club, Kiama-Albion Park Rifle Club, '74' Pistol Club, Phoenix Pistol Club, and Illawarra Branch, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia. The present Hill Top rifle range site was identified as having the best potential to be developed as a regional shooting complex for these clubs. The proposal is to develop the existing 800-metre full-bore range by providing an additional rifle range 500 metres by 100 metres, and a pistol range 50 metres by 100 metres, along with basic infrastructure facilities. These disciplines cannot be conducted on the current full-bore range.

Funds for the regional shooting complex development have been allocated through the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation's Shooting Club Development Fund. The total site would allow future development possibilities to incorporate other shooting disciplines. In terms of conservation values, the site for the proposed regional shooting complex supports primarily sandstone vegetation communities that are well represented in the vast reserves that surround Sydney. A large part of the site, approximately 80 per cent, will remain vegetated and will act as a safety envelope for the shooting complex once it is established. Vegetation clearance should not disturb glossy black cockatoo habitat or individual plant specimens.

In respect of native title issues, the Crown Solicitor has advised the Government that the bill before the House needed to vest the land in a relevant body in order to be valid under the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993. The proposal to vest the land under the Sporting Venues Management Act satisfies the requirements for validity under the Commonwealth Act, and the right to negotiate regime in the Commonwealth legislation will not apply

to the vesting. The bill therefore provides that native title rights and interests existing in relation to the land detailed in the schedule immediately before the revocation or reservation are not extinguished.

My colleague the Minister for the Environment can assure the House that the Department of Environment and Conservation carefully considers all alternatives to the revocation of land and their merits before revocation of land from a reserve may be considered. To offset the excision from the Bargo State Conservation Area, the bill proposes to reserve certain Crown land to establish a new Bargo River State Conservation Area and the Yengo National Park. A further addition of the Crown land currently leased to the Illawarra Regional Shooters Club will also occur to the Dharawal State Conservation Area via gazettal action at a subsequent point. The total yield of Crown land to the State conservation reserve will be approximately 2,831 hectares, well compensating the loss from the Bargo State Conservation Area.

The Minister for the Environment is able to confirm for the House the conservation benefits that the compensation package will provide to the State. I offer this advice on his behalf to the House. Firstly, the package includes a Crown land area of 552 hectares that comprises part of the Mellong Swamps, an in-holding to the Yengo National Park on the Putty Road. This site is a longstanding reserve proposal due to its unique wetland features and value as a fauna habitat. The site had been identified as a possible option to relocate the Phoenix Pistol Club from the Scheyville National Park. The club, however, participated in discussions about establishing a regional shooting facility and is now committed to being part of the Hill Top regional shooting complex. This leaves the Mellong Swamps area available to consolidate within the Yengo National Park.

A second parcel of Crown land, 1956 hectares, will be provided to allow for the establishment of a new park to be called the Bargo River State Conservation Area. This area provides a crucial stepping stone in the ring of reserved lands around Sydney, linking the Nattai and Blue Mountains national parks to the metropolitan water catchments in the east. They include the headwaters of the Bargo River and part of the Bargo Gorge system that supports several species of threatened flora and fauna. This addition is part of the Government's Circle of Reserves initiatives. These two additions to the State's conservation area holdings will be achieved via the bill. A third addition will be achieved through gazettal once the Southern Highlands Regional Shooting Complex has been completed.

The Dharawal State Conservation Area contains extensive areas of upland swamp and is considered to have high conservation value for its biological and catchment protection values. The proposed addition is a Crown land in-holding of 323 hectares within the existing State conservation area. Conservation groups have been lobbying for a number of years to have this parcel of land added to the reserve and it has been a longstanding commitment of the Government. This Crown land is currently leased to the Illawarra Regional Shooting Association for the development of a rifle range.

The association has withdrawn its development application for the site and will relinquish its lease, concurrent with the development of the Southern Highlands Regional Shooting Complex. It will become a welcome partner in the regional shooting complex at Hill Top. When this land becomes vacant Crown land, it will be available for gazettal under the National Parks and Wildlife Act as an addition to the Dharawal State Conservation Area. This will achieve a long sought after and most welcome upland swamp addition to this conservation area.

The Minister for Lands has endorsed the proposal to transfer the three parcels of Crown land I have just detailed to the jurisdiction of the Minister for the Environment for administration as additions to the State conservation areas under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. I am advised that the Department of Environment and Conservation has carefully considered the revocation and offset compensation package and confirms that the proposal is consistent with the principles detailed in its revocation of land policy. That policy requires that the compensatory land should be of greater size than is the area of land to be revoked, have similar conservation values and, where possible, be adjacent to the reserve where land is being revoked. The compensatory lands are nearly three times the size of the excision and have very high conservation values, and two-thirds are adjacent to the Bargo State Conservation Area.

Additionally, the proposals have been presented to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Committee and the Sydney South Regional Advisory Committee. They support the bill and requested appropriate land management initiatives be implemented. Ongoing management of the site will be a high priority for the department and the leaseholder. The Government will require that when the Southern Highlands Regional Shooting Complex is constructed, a Range Management Committee—equally representative of all users—is established to plan, coordinate and manage the site. A lease will be negotiated, in consultation with the Department of the Environment and Conservation, between the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation and the established Range Management Committee.

One of the responsibilities of the committee will be to work with representatives of the Department of the Environment and Conservation to prepare a land management plan. The plan will need to identify the site's natural and cultural values, any threats to those values, and appropriate management actions for the site. This bill seeks to achieve a positive outcome for recreational shooting in the Illawarra and Southern Highlands areas that will bring together, on one site, shooting facilities and ranges within a defined regional area, consolidated into a single site.

It is equally significant that the bill will yield three highly significant and long-anticipated additions to the New South Wales conservation reserve system. This includes two diverse and productive wetland areas within Dharawal State Conservation Area and the Yengo National Park, and a key regional corridor link joining the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area to the southern water catchments and through to the Victorian border via the Morton National Park. I thank all those who were involved in preparation of the bill, especially members of my department and members of my staff who assisted in its preparation. I commend the bill to the House.