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NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard

FORESTRY (DARLING MILLS STATE FOREST REVOCATION) BILL

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Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BOB DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, and Minister for the Environment) [12.35 p.m.], on behalf of Mr Kerry Hickey: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Forestry (Darling Mills State Forest Revocation) Amendment Bill is a welcome piece of legislation. It implements an agreement that was reached late last year to provide for the involvement of a local Aboriginal group, the Darug people, in an area of land near Baulkham Hills. It is good news for the whole community because it recognises and acknowledges the importance of the land for the descendants of the Darug people and part of the land being assigned is proposed as the site of an education centre. The Darling Mills State Forest is about 36 hectares in size. It is part of the Cumberland National Forest, and it is located near Baulkham Hills. Honourable members have probably seen part of the forest as they drive along the M2 motorway.

In 1994, a native title claim on behalf of the Darug people was made over various areas of Crown land that included Darling Mills State Forest. Following extensive negotiations, in early December last year an agreement was reached between the stakeholders. These were the Minister Assisting the Minister for Natural Resources (Lands), the Minister for Natural Resources, a representative of the descendants of the Darug people and other stakeholders. The agreement provided for a number of things. First, it provided for the naming of most of the bushland known as Excelsior Park and the land within Darling Mills State Forest known as "Bidjigal Reserve" in acknowledgement of the importance of the land for the descendants of the Darug people.

Secondly, the agreement provided for the dedication of the major part of Excelsior Park as Bidjigal Reserve for several purposes. Specifically, these were the preservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage, the preservation of flora and fauna, and public recreation. Thirdly, the agreement noted the need for an Act of Parliament for the revocation of the dedication of Darling Mills State Forest and the addition of the lands comprising the former State Forest to the Bidjigal Reserve. Since that time, the Government has satisfied many of the commitments in the agreement. There has been a dedication of the major part of Excelsior Park, and this dedication has been tabled in Parliament pursuant to section 82 of the Crown Lands Act 1989. The dedication has created the Bidjigal Reserve.

However, it is not a simple matter to dedicate the land of Darling Mills State Forest as part of that reserve. Section 19A of the Forestry Act 1916 requires that the revocation of the dedication as a State forest of any national forest be effected by an Act of Parliament. That leads me to the bill before the House. In accordance with the agreement of December 2003, this Government has prepared a bill that revokes the dedication of Darling Mills State Forest as a State forest and then dedicates that land as part of the Bidjigal Reserve. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Michael Richardson.

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