

Second Reading

The Hon. HENRY TSANG (Parliamentary Secretary) [12.43 a.m.], on behalf of the Hon. Eric Roozendaal: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean River is an iconic waterway and an important ecological and community asset.

Sydney is very fortunate to have such an asset in its backyard. A river that can supply most of our drinking water needs, irrigate a productive food bowl, estimated to be worth in the order of \$259 million per year, and provide recreation for many residents.

However, this also means the operation and management of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River System is complex, because there are so many competing demands.

Providing a water supply for Australia's largest city, irrigation, recreation and a home for the plants and animals that depend on the River is a major challenge.

The New South Wales Government is determined to address this challenge.

It is for that reason that I bring the bill before you today, into the House. This bill establishes a new Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean, and gives it the power to coordinate the whole-of-Government action needed to manage this critical and iconic waterway.

The bill has four objectives and it gives the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean the clearly defined functions it will need to achieve each of those objectives.

Firstly, the Office will improve coordination and implementation of management strategies relating to the health of Hawkesbury-Nepean River System. To achieve this, the Office will:

? Co-ordinate the management of aquatic weeds; and

? Manage the implementation of any agreed arrangements between New South Wales and the Commonwealth, or local Government, to improve the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River System.

Secondly, the Office will improve public access to information and advice about management strategies concerning the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River System. To achieve this, the Office will:

? Act as a single point of information and advice about management strategies;

? Respond to inquiries for advice and provide advice about management strategies; and

? Compile information on management strategies, and provide that information to the public.

Thirdly, the Office will provide increased opportunities for the public to be involved in the development of management strategies to improve the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River System. To achieve this, the Office will:

? Carry out public consultation to determine the views of the public or stakeholders; and

? report to me, as the relevant Minister, and relevant public authorities, on the results of any public consultation.

Lastly, the bill provides for the Office to improve the management of instream development in the Hawkesbury-Nepean waters. The bill provides for the Office to do this by:

? liaising with planning authorities to ensure they fulfil their responsibilities in an integrated and efficient manner;

? providing information and assistance on development to members of the public who propose to carry out in-stream development; and

? accepting development applications for developments in the Hawkesbury-Nepean waters, and forwarding them to the relevant consent authority, along with associated documents and fees.

Before elaborating on these functions, I will briefly outline the administrative arrangements established by the bill. The bill establishes the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean as a Corporation, under my direction with an Advisory Board and a Director.

The Advisory Board will include representatives of the Department of Water and Energy, as chair of this board, the Department of Environment and Climate Change, the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Planning, the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority, the Sydney Catchment Authority and the Sydney Water Corporation.

The bill defines the area to which the functions of the new Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean will apply.

The first three core functions, that is, coordination, provision of information, and public consultation, will be applied to the entire Hawkesbury-Nepean River System.

The last of the Office's functions, that is, the promotion of effective management of in-stream development, will apply to the waters of the River, and its tributaries.

These waters are defined in the bill.

They include the waters downstream of the Upper Nepean Dams (Cataract, Cordeaux, Avon, Nepean) and Warragamba Dam, but upstream of Brooklyn.

Under the bill, these waters also include land that is permanently or intermittently submerged by those waters within a distance of 40m inland from the top of the bank in non-tidal areas, and the 40m from the high water mark in tidal areas.

Under the bill, the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean is subject to the control and direction of my portfolio.

Very importantly, the bill requires agencies to cooperate with the Office. This agency cooperation is critical, and the inclusion of this power in the bill will allow the Office to succeed in its coordination role.

In addition, the Premier and I will be closely monitoring the progress of the Office to ensure better outcomes are delivered for Western Sydney.

By establishing an Office with these functions and these administrative arrangements the Government is today taking a big step forward in managing the Hawkesbury-Nepean.

The four key reasons why the Office is a great thing for people in my part of Sydney:

- ? the Office will deliver improved coordination across Government;
- ? it will provide a single point of contact;
- ? it will provide opportunities for the public to be involved; and
- ? it will facilitate consideration of in-stream developments.

Coordination of Hawkesbury-Nepean Activities

Firstly, in relation to coordination of the management of the Hawkesbury-Nepean, the bill provides for the new Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean to coordinate the range of Government programs already in place to improve river health, such as:

- ? the Hawkesbury-Nepean Nutrient Management Strategy;
- ? the Diffuse Source Water Pollution Strategy;
- ? the Development of an environmental flows regime;
- ? the Water Sharing Plan for the Hawkesbury-Nepean;
- ? the Sydney Metropolitan Water Plan; and
- ? the Weirs Modification Program.

The bill also provides that the Office will have the power to require cooperation from other agencies. This means the Office will be able to coordinate appropriate Government activities in relation to works on river banks. Agencies, including the Department of Planning and the Department of Lands, will be brought together to ensure effective working relations on issues associated with river health.

It also means the Office will be able to coordinate agency effort to support the delivery of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Action Plan. In doing this, the Office will work closely with the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority to ensure consistency of effort and reduce duplication.

Importantly, the bill gives the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean the ability to administer funding programs and on-ground works, which may contribute to significant water quality benefits.

(One-stop Shop)

My colleagues the Member for Penrith, Member for Londonderry and Member for Riverstone have been long term advocates for a single point of call for the river. I am pleased to say that this is exactly what the Office will be.

By establishing the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean, this bill will create a 'one-stop-shop' for members of the community, bringing the programs and expertise of the New South Wales Government together under the one roof.

The Office will act as a single point of access to Government services, including those relating to water quality and quantity management and river use issues.

This will provide the residents of the area with an access point for services and inquiries related to the River. Being located in the community it will be aware of the issues facing river communities and be able to bring these issues to the Government.

(Public Involvement)

The bill also provides for improved community input to the management of the River. The people of the Hawkesbury-Nepean are passionate about their river and the bill recognises this by establishing a stakeholder committee to advise the Government on the best way to manage the health of Hawkesbury-Nepean River.

One of the specific functions of the Office will be to engage with the local community through effective communication and education campaigns. This will create a two way dialogue, in which the community gains a greater understanding of the current Government strategies and actions on the river, and the Government learns about community concerns.

(In-stream Development)

In response to the community, this bill provides for the new Office to simplify the application process for people undertaking in-stream developments.

Under the current planning system, an individual with a development application for in-stream developments, such as building a jetty on a river, must first apply for land owner's consent from the Department of Lands, who manage the river bed, as it is Crown Land.

Once land owner's consent has been granted, the applicant must lodge their development application with the local council, who act as consent authority.

The new Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean will provide assistance to individuals seeking land owner's consent, including the ability to arrange one-on-one consultation with officers from the Department of Lands.

The Office will also work with officers from the Department of Lands to ensure the processes for granting land owner's consent are clear, and streamlined.

The bill will not override existing statutory powers, such as Councils' development consent role, under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.

The integrated development framework has been refined in the 12 years since its commencement, and the Government is not going to create another level of bureaucracy. Rather, the primary role of the Office is to make this legislation work more smoothly.

For example, the Office may accept development applications for developments in the Hawkesbury-Nepean waters, and forward them to the relevant consent authority, along with associated documents and fees.

However, if the Office advises the Government that existing planning, pollution, fisheries or water management legislation is part of the problem, we will act to address the issues.

Further, the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean may work with councils, relevant agencies and the community to identify ongoing concerns with the approvals process for in-stream developments. Such work may feed back into broader whole-of-Government work on strategic issues within planning, land-use and natural resource management.

In summary this new Office is a great thing for people from my part of Sydney. It gives them real access to the decision makers and it gives all the authorities involved in managing the River a chance to coordinate their activities.

By improving information flows and coordination, and by providing onground restoration services such as weed management the Office will deliver the people of western Sydney a better river.

I commend the bill to the House.