



National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill.

Second Reading

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA (Minister for Transport Services, Minister for the Hunter, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Natural Resources (Forests)) [2.32 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have my second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*:

Leave granted.

This bill builds on the achievements of this Government in the area of forest conservation and reform.

This bill is part of a package of initiatives the Government is implementing to protect in reserves 65,000 hectares of substantial areas of north eastern New South Wales' high conservation value old growth forest and rainforest.

The Carr Government has added more than a million hectares to national parks and nature reserves in eastern New South Wales through our forest assessment process.

The Government is creating a reserve system.

The new reserves which this bill provides for are the result of this process.

They protect 65,000 hectares of the north-east forest including Wollumbin and Whian Whian State forests. The new conservation reserves have been shown to contain over 500 species of birds and animals and 4,000 plant species.

The areas also contain pockets of rainforest, wilderness and habitat for threatened fauna like the koala, powerful owl, Hastings river mouse, tiger quoll and yellow-bellied glider.

But the decision to include these areas in reserves has only been made after assessment of the implications for timber supplies on the North Coast.

The bill is one aspect of a package of measures that the Government is implementing. Together, these measures allow for the conservation of the areas while maintaining contracted timber supplies.

The Government has calculated that the impact on timber supply is an average of approximately 30,000 m³ a year.

Measures to address supply issues are being taken to ensure that industry continues to be supplied with contracted volumes and receives a more reliable flow of timber.

The first of these measures was to amend State Forests' integrated forestry operations licence to allow additional timber to be harvested around sensitive areas like streams, old growth forest and threatened species to remove the "buffer on buffer effect".

Studies have estimated that a significant amount of timber is unavailable as a result of these restrictions.

The advent of better technology over the past few years has allowed timber to be harvested without posing a significant risk to the conservation value of these protected areas.

These measures include: a proposal to supply additional timber from productive areas by allowing access to the timber adjacent to filter and riparian buffers and other exclusion zones (called "buffer on buffer").

Amendments to the integrated forestry operations approvals for the north-east regions implementing these changes have been completed and take effect from today. Some additional changes to the threatened species licences to allow for more flexible management approaches are being finalised and will be made as a priority.

Furthermore, we are bringing into production non-loggable forest management zones (FMZ8) that were not

initially included in the supply estimates. This is possible following the completion of investigations into these areas.

As part of the package, we are also now bringing into production some further forested areas, known as "priority one" areas.

The House will also be interested to hear that purchases of private land by State Forests of New South Wales, funded through the 1998 decision, have already added about 5000 m³ to the annual supply and additional purchases will continue to augment supply.

The Government has also undertaken to enter into direct discussions with timber companies that hold wood supply agreements in the region in order to provide even greater certainty to industry.

The Government has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Boral. While this arrangement is still being negotiated, Boral has indicated that by securing long term timber supply it will be able to undertake major investment in mills, value-adding operations and new hardwood plantations. The Government has secured an MOU for other holders of wood supply agreements in the region to negotiate a similar deal.

Renegotiating contracts will mean that industry will not have to wait until the supply level is confirmed in the timber review scheduled for 2006. Mills will gain greater certainty now, not later.

The measures I have outlined are intended to ensure that reliable timber supplies continue to be available. This will promote investment certainty and protect regional jobs.

It also demonstrates the New South Wales Government's commitment to the regional forest agreement and to the native timber industry in this State.

I turn now to the provisions of the bill before the House.

This bill revokes the dedication of certain state forests and reserves them as national park, nature reserve, flora reserves and state conservation area.

State conservation areas

I think it is important to firstly draw attention to the new category of state conservation area under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*.

This new category of reserve was established with a dual purpose: to protect conservation values while permitting mineral and petroleum exploration and production.

The category of State conservation area has been created to allow for exploration and mining to proceed while also protecting conservation values.

While exploration and mining will require the concurrence of the minister for the environment and environmental impact assessments, it is important to emphasise that the Government intends that exploration and mining will occur within State conservation areas.

It is acknowledged that there will continue to be natural areas which have both high conservation values and high mineral value over which the category of state conservation area would still not be appropriate.

State conservation areas are those areas where it has been agreed that it is possible to manage the area for conservation and permit exploration and, if significant discoveries are made, to permit mineral and petroleum production.

If I can deal with the specific details of the bill.

The object of bill is to transfer certain land to the national park estate and to make provision for the transfer of certain land to Aboriginal ownership.

The bill is divided into three parts, which I shall outline to the House.

The first part is the preliminary section which among other things provides for the commencement of the proposed Act on 1 July 2003.

Part 2 deals with land transfers, the details of which are described in the schedules.

I draw your attention to clause 9 of the bill which enables the Director-General of National Parks and Wildlife to adjust the descriptions of land in schedules 1, 2, 3, or 4. These adjustments assist effective management of national park estate land and State forest land.

Any such adjustment must not result in any significant reduction in the size or value of any such land. Adjustments are also authorised in connection with easements.

The Director-General must have the agreement of relevant Ministers to make any changes.

Part 3 of the bill covers a number of miscellaneous matters giving effect to the provisions of the bill.

Clause 13 of part 3 amends the *Native Title (New South Wales) Act 1994* to preserve native title rights and interests in respect of a reservation, or vesting of, or declaration over, land or waters by the operation of the proposed Act.

I now turn to the schedules in this bill.

Schedule 1 deals with State forest reserved as national park, nature reserve, State conservation area.

Schedule 2 deals with certain areas included in schedule 1 whose reservation is delayed.

Schedule 3 sets out the land, whose dedication as State forest is revoked, and is vested in the Minister administering the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* for the purposes of part 11 of that Act.

Schedule 5 makes ancillary and special provisions relating to transitional arrangements.

Schedule 5 deals with existing interests and gives the Minister administering the National Parks and Wildlife Act administration of those interests where land is transferred to the management of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Schedule 5 also contains special provisions with regard to access roads within national parks, nature reserves etc.

The aim of this Government's forest policy has been to create a reserve system which is comprehensive, adequate and representative, protecting and conserving the biodiversity of the State's forests through systematic rather than piecemeal reservation, while at the same time creating viable and ecologically sustainable forest industries.

This is an achievement for the people of New South Wales and for those people, Australians and visitors from overseas, who come to see our State.

It has also resulted in a legislative process for ensuring ecologically sustainable forest management through forest agreements and integrated forestry operations approvals.

I bring up the bill.

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