



National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Kosciuszko National Park Roads) Bill.

Second Reading

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS (Minister for Justice, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [5.36 p.m.]:
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.

Before turning to the detail of the bill, let me first provide some relevant background.

On 31 July 1997, the House would recall that a section of the fill embankment along the Alpine Way above Thredbo in Kosciuszko National Park collapsed. Tragically, a landslide followed killing 18 people.

In 2000, the State Coroner brought down his findings and, among other things, recommended that the Government commission an independent review of the appropriateness of the National Parks and Wildlife Service retaining responsibility for urban communities and road maintenance within national parks.

In response to this, the Government commissioned Mr Bret Walker SC to undertake this review.
Mr Walker recommended:

- That the ski resort areas be retained within Kosciuszko National Park;
- That a new planning regime be put in place for the ski resorts, in which the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources is the consent authority; and
- That responsibility for the Alpine Way and Kosciuszko Road be transferred from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to the Roads and Traffic Authority.

We now have a new planning regime in the alpine region, in which the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources is the consent authority for all development in the area.

With respect to Mr Walker's recommendation concerning the roads, the Roads and Traffic Authority and the National Parks and Wildlife Service have worked closely and arrangements are now in place that enable the transfer to proceed.

This Bill will therefore amend the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, to remove the Alpine Way and Kosciuszko Road from Kosciuszko National Park and vest the land in the Roads and Traffic Authority.

The road corridor to be transferred generally comprises the alignment of the Alpine Way and Kosciuszko Road, measured 20 metres from each side of the roads' centre line, with deviations to ensure that the major structural works that are integral to the road's long term stability, will lie within the road reserve.

Close attention has been paid to ensure that future management arrangements do not compromise either the safe management of the roads or the important conservation values of the park.

The new road management regime presents a more efficient division of responsibilities and a shared approach in which each agency will apply its relevant resources and expertise.

To perhaps state the obvious, the roads in Kosciuszko National Park present significant management challenges due to interrelated factors including geology, slope, drainage, climate and geographical isolation.

The Alpine Way was in fact originally built as a temporary construction road in connection with the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme in the 1950s. Today, it is of course the main vehicular thoroughfare in a geographically isolated area and a vital asset to the regional economy.

The Alpine Way and Kosciuszko Road are used by hundreds of thousands of cars every year to access the all-year-round recreational attractions the park offers.

Under a memorandum of understanding, the Roads and Traffic Authority will manage the road reserve, including the usual functions of carrying out road works and managing traffic and road safety. It will also manage and maintain geotechnical monitoring equipment and structural works that are integral to road stability that are located in the adjoining national park.

The Bill makes specific allowance for the Roads and Traffic Authority to access land adjacent to the road reserve to carry out work and to place ancillary infrastructure and other devices that are necessary to monitor drainage and ensure the long-term stability of the road.

Arrangements have been made, supported by the Memorandum of Understanding, for the two agencies to share information and co-ordinate future risk reduction works in the area.

Let me assure the House that this Government remains firmly committed to upholding the integrity of the State's national parks system.

Kosciuszko National Park covers almost 675,000 hectares and is the largest national park in New South Wales. It contains the Nation's highest mountains, the famous Snowy River and all the New South Wales ski resorts. The alpine area of the park contains unique plant and animal species that don't exist anywhere else in the world.

The rich natural and cultural heritage the park, together with its growing range of recreational activities, attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Kosciuszko National Park is of huge importance to local communities who have done so much to help protect its heritage values.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding, the two agencies expressly seek to work together to preserve the natural environment. The National Parks and Wildlife Service will continue to manage conservation in the road reserve, including management of flora and fauna, weeds and feral animals, and fire control measures.

The Roads and Traffic Authority will develop an Environmental Management system, in consultation with National Parks and other stakeholders, before carrying out work in the road reserve.

In determining the appropriate road reserve corridor to be excised from Kosciuszko National Park, great care has also been taken to minimise impact on leaseholders within the Park.

Only minor adjustments will need to be made to the Kosciuszko Thredbo Pty Ltd head lease and the Charlotte Pass village lease. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the affected leaseholders for their understanding and cooperation as we implement reforms that will improve safety in the area. I am also pleased to report that the Roads and Traffic Authority and the National Parks and Wildlife Service have worked cooperatively to resolve issues that surrounded the use of a strip lease located alongside the road at Perisher, and there will be no impacts on the Perisher Blue Pty Ltd lease.

There are gabion walls and drainage structures that are essential to the structural integrity of the road that currently encroach on the Kosciuszko Thredbo lease area. It is essential for the Roads and Traffic Authority to own and manage these structures. This part of the lease area will therefore be vested in the Roads and Traffic Authority and the lease boundary will be adjusted accordingly.

The Charlotte Pass Village lease crosses Kosciuszko Road where a ski lift crosses the road. The road reserve will be narrower at this point and the lease boundary will be adjusted accordingly.

I understand that the Roads and Traffic Authority intends to enter into an agreement with the lessee, under section 138 of the Roads Act 1993, to allow for the ski lift.

The vesting of the road in the Roads and Traffic Authority will also be a vesting in stratum at some points. This will allow for the skitube lease to remain in Kosciuszko National Park. It will also mean that certain car parking spaces at Thredbo will remain in the lease area, while the infrastructure beneath the surface, which is integral to the stability of the road, will form part of the road reserve that is removed from the park.

Introduction of this Bill reminds us of the tragic landslide of 1997. This Bill continues the Government's commitment to doing everything possible to ensure the safety of visitors to Kosciuszko National Park.

This important Bill will see the State's principal roads authority managing the Alpine Way and Kosciuszko Road in Kosciuszko National Park, and the State's principal conservation agency managing the natural and cultural heritage throughout the national park, including in the road reserve.

I commend this Bill to the House.