



Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No 2).

The Hon. JON JENKINS [3.57 p.m.] (Inaugural speech): I rise to speak to the Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No 2). I am told that the purpose of this speech is to introduce myself and my purpose to this honourable House. However, as this is the last parliamentary session of the year and there is a large amount of legislation to consider, I understand the desire to be brief. My life, although rather short in terms of years, has been an unusual and interesting one and is difficult to summarise quickly. I am sure that someone placed the ancient Oriental curse on me at birth: "May you lead an interesting life!" My direct ancestors, a stonemason and a convict in the first fleets, were mixed with most of the races on this earth, including possibly some indigenous races. In short, like many good Australians, I am of mixed race. But, like all mixed breeds, we are a pretty tough lot.

Environmental issues run deep in my family. Jenkins House on Jenkins Hill takes pride of place in Lane Cove River National Park, a significant part of which was a gift from my great-grandfather to the people of New South Wales. My father, a veteran and an amateur entomologist, has bred and released many rare species of butterflies and their food plants for most of his 84 years. My involvement with conservation groups, such as the Platypus Conservancy, predates my involvement with politics. My family also has a very rich political history. My uncle Eric Lambert, together with Hardy, was a founding Communist activist and author of such weighty tomes as *The Twenty Thousand Thieves* and *The Veterans*. That association continues in this era with my older sister, herself a dedicated socialist, academic and author. I think she describes herself as an existential anarchist. Perhaps someone on the Left can explain what that means to me one day. Conversely, my father was an original One Nation supporter. So you can imagine what the post-Christmas political discussions were like in our household. I thought the middle road was the safest, but of course everyone has issues with me!

My own early childhood was far from ideal: a traumatic start as a ward of the State, following nightmare custody battles to the only child of a single father. I was always interested in science and, in particular, natural sciences and medicine. A motor vehicle accident, and 1½ years in hospital and several years recovering, convinced me that clinical medicine was not a career for me. Further, as a direct result of the accident, and continuing disabilities, I needed a more sedentary vocation than molecular biology/virology for which I originally spent 10 years training. Further studies in computer science allowed me to combine my interests in the form of viral coat protein analysis structure prediction and later virtual surgery and 3D imagery construction.

I have worked in private industry and at universities and I also have my own—or at least I did until I came here—education consulting business. Until recently I was at the Bond University on the Gold Coast, and I have offered my resignation to the university. However, they have declined and have asked me to stay on in an adjunct position, which I am very proud to do. Currently, I live on the beach on the North Coast of New South Wales with my beautiful wife and the two best children one could ask for. I should also mention that we have a mongrel, or should I say a mixed-breed kelpie dog! My general interests include the natural sciences, medicine and medical education. I also have an obvious interest in road safety and related issues. I am an avid water polo player, a member of our local surf club, and try to surf, especially with my children, whenever possible. I have travelled across this country many times, including to our most remote and beautiful places.

Members, and Madam President, some of you may ask why I have come to this place. To leave my research and the exciting opening of the first private medical school in Australia, which I went there to be involved with many years ago, has caused some considerable soul searching on my part. I have given up a full-time continuing academic position and private consulting to come here in the glare of much adverse publicity, and under probably extreme scrutiny, only for an uncertain future! I will also have to leave my beautiful beach sunrises and the best surfing secret on the coast! But hardest of all was the decision to leave my family for long periods. I take this opportunity to thank my wife for allowing me to pursue this effort.

Well, I can assure you it is not for the remuneration and there is no pension at the end of my period in this House. Rather, I have come here for a reason. I have a passion for the environment and its protection and preservation. My firm belief is that our precious natural resources and heritage have not been managed properly. I could go on in this House with endless examples of that, and I am sure you have all read of them in the papers. I would like to use one example, that is, the recent fires in our southern border areas.

The fault for the damage to both property and wilderness lies squarely with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the influence of the fanatical environmentalists within the organisation and its quangos, such as the National Parks Association. The recent cataclysmic fires in the New South Wales Victorian border area have confirmed the fallacy of wilderness areas. It seems possible that at least two of our most rare species may be further endangered and many others are now, or soon will be, in serious trouble due to the resulting vastness of the scorched earth. Even today, two-thirds of one of our most beautiful parks has less than 30 per cent groundcover. There is little spring food or shelter for our precious endangered animals. The scorched earth was a direct result from fuel loads of more than 100 tonnes per hectare, many times the recommended maximum for that type of forest.

Following rains in the area then caused large-scale erosion and, combined with ash, have caused fish kills in the local headwaters of small streams and have rendered some of Canberra's dams effectively unusable. This was all predictable and was in fact predicted 10 years ago. As every inquiry has found, including the recent Commonwealth parliamentary inquiry, and as commonsense told us, it is a simple undeniable fact that if the parks had been managed properly this level of devastation may not have occurred. This is far too detailed and complex a problem to discuss at length but I am happy to further this discussion at any time with anyone and at any place. Perhaps one might read the Commonwealth report: "A Nation Charred" and Peter Clack's book *Firestorm: Trial by Fire* before they come to see me.

This irrational and outdated fundamentalist ideology within the National Parks and Wildlife Service was commented on at some length by the retiring head of the service, Mr Brian Gilligan. I applaud him for his bravery. Note that I have met many people in the National Parks and Wildlife Service who also see this problem. The fundamentalists certainly have a foothold, but there are many thinking and rational people within the service who can see the detrimental effect this ideology is having on our natural heritage. To get to the point: proper fire and feral management requires access, and access requires roads. The fundamentalist fanatics have prevented access to many of our precious parks by causing the closure of the majority of roads and tracks.

As a simple and expected result, these tracks have become overgrown and inaccessible, and this has prevented the management, use and enjoyment of the vast majority of our precious parks. Except in small, protected and geographically isolated areas, such as parts of Tasmania or some islands, it is too late to leave nature to itself: there are too many external influences that we have introduced and we need to be managing at both the macro and micro level now. The ravaging of our parks by feral animals, weeds and fire will be repeated over and over and over again until there are no parks to protect. And the fanatical environmentalists and other irrational, unthinking apparatchiks will be directly responsible.

Tasmania is facing a potential crisis, which could be the acid test of the reign of logic over the ideological madness: the fox has been found in Tasmania. How will they manage the fox in this pristine area without road access? What of emerging threats like the cane toad, the fire ant and the devastating mesquite? How will we deal with these without access? In the case of converted State Forests the existing roads have been used by heavy machinery for as much as 100 years, and probably as much as 100 before that by bullock teams hauling out logs. All of a sudden when an area becomes a national park the first thing they do is close the roads, effectively preventing access. And so we ask the question: why have the roads been closed in our national parks? There is no rational or scientific reason for these closures, it is just the unthinking quasi-religious guilt of the ecofundamentalists: "Man and his machines are evil. We don't want you in our parks". The closures have and will continue to have devastating effects for our natural resources and heritage.

I remember wanting to go and join the protests in Tasmania to save the Huon, and I still think it was right to save those ancient forests. I considered myself a Greenie because I understood the precious and irreplaceable nature of the environment from both points of view: as a simple person looking up at nature, and also as a scientist studying the smallest sub-atomic particles to the complex and ill-understood interactions of our small blue planet to the unfathomable expanse of the universe. Now I have to confess I am an anti-Greenie. So how is it that the environmental movement has become so perverted?

The Government itself should not escape scrutiny or blame in this matter. Either by tacit approval or at the very least a simple lack of due diligence it has allowed this penchant of the instruments which have charge of our heritage and natural resources to occur. And I will continue to remind the Government of this in this House. I refuse to allow the cult of the environment to treat our natural heritage as some unholy, untouchable shrine in front of which we have to prostrate our guilt-racked bodies as we pass the locked gates! Our natural heritage is ours, and our children's, to protect, to manage and to enjoy.

And here is the crux of one of the main issues: if we cannot enjoy our natural resources, our natural heritage, we will not care for them. And this is what is happening: our national parks are a closed sacred cow that we are not allowed to enter, and so have become uncared for and, in many cases, hated places! Do not mistake me, I am not one of the believers that monetary value is the key to ensure survival, although I can see the logic. Rather, to spend time with friends and family in some of nature's most wonderful places is beyond all monetary and political value.

I acknowledge that it is possible to love a place to death but, as usage demands and as more people start to impact on the environment, the solution is management, not banishment. Many places have controlled access, and this has been very successful. But the ranting of the fanatical fundamentalist Luddites continues to cause the blanket closure of our parks. One of the last places accessible to me and my family locally was Mebbin State Forest—now Mebbin National Park. This is not pristine forest; it has been logged for possibly in excess of 150 years, both by mechanised means and by bullock teams. Mind you, they knew how to log in the old days—they took timber, but they left enough for the next generation.

Mebbin contains some very special places of both natural and historic value. This place certainly is not in the category of places being loved to death. It receives, on average, perhaps half a dozen vehicles per day on the main access road, but more on the weekends and less during the week. The forest was crisscrossed by many named roads, which had been in constant use for more than a century. Except for one area—appropriately named Bog Onion Road—there was no significant erosion, and the roads were accessible to most conventional vehicles, although some had four-

wheel-drive-only sections.

There was no reason to close any roads, with perhaps the one named exception. But, come the conversion to a national park, and all but the main loop road were closed! For me, this was personally devastating and was what really tipped the balance from someone who had been apolitical until that point in time to suddenly becoming political. These roads were not closed for any scientific reason or on any logical basis, but simply on a whim. Now that this place where my family and friends have spent many hours is effectively closed to us, many of the roads have already grown over and are now inaccessible for fire and feral management. This follows the same precedent set by all the other parks in this region. Meetings with and submissions to the local park management have been a futile waste.

I make a prediction: As the fuel loads build, cataclysmic fires will occur in this region in the foreseeable future. The animals that manage to survive the initial furnace will have no cover to hide from the feral cats, foxes or birds of prey, and the subsequent rains—we can get up to 20 inches, or 500 millilitres, in a single day—will cause massive erosion. The issue is not really about access. The issue is about the attitude to the management of "your" parks. I know that when the attitude and management are corrected access to "our" parks will be restored. There will be no reason to lock people out! I quote the comments of a self-alleged guardian of the environment by the name of the Hon. Bob Brown made in a recent interview on Radio National:

... it's about managing the environment; it's not about locking them out.

I admit that I am quoting him somewhat out of context, but the principle is the same: it is about management. Now that I have reinforced the environmentalists' dislike of me and the Outdoor Recreation Party, I will try to mend some bridges. I will state for the record that I actually agree with many aspects of the green agenda. How could I not, having been trained in the scientific arts? As for my own politics, those on the right will probably say I am a left-wing radical; those on the left on the Government side will probably call me a right-wing fascist. I suppose I would consider my own politics to be a little bit left of centre on most issues.

One of the benefits of being a single-issue party is that I do not have to toe the line on party ideology—simply because there is none! Each issue is decided on its merits. In fact, was that not our forbears' very intention for this House? So I make a promise to this House: I will always try to listen to all sides, and debate the issues logically and with the quiet forethought, compassion and wisdom of one who has led an interesting life. However, on issues on the environment I will be uncompromising, loud, aggressive and persistent. In doing this I realise that the business of Parliament must of necessity be one of compromise and agreement. Unlike some, I accept the pragmatic nature of a working democracy as the best possible solution to government, and I put my trust in the basic honesty and passion on both sides of the political coin.

I also state that I believe that this House is a House of review, not a House of obstruction, and that in the general sense the Government is elected to govern and should be allowed to do so. However, I reserve the right to deny support for legislation which, either by accident or design, would have an adverse impact on the constituency as a whole. And I further reserve the right to suggest improvements or amendments to legislation that might increase its efficacy or protect those who otherwise might be adversely affected. I look forward to robust and thorough debate on the many challenging issues in this House. I will at all times try to be honest to myself, to this House and to the people of New South Wales. I thank honourable members for their indulgence on this occasion.

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