



**Speech by GLEN ELMES
Member for Noosa**

Hansard, 7 October, 2008

**Environmental Protection & Other Legislation
Amendment Bill - Noosa Trail Network -**

Mr ELMES (Noosa--LNP) (7.35 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak to the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2008. In the main, it is very pleasing to look at the substance of this legislation. There are many very positive points in it, particularly in regard to the clean-up of pollution and the fact that individuals and companies will need to undertake that work. It is an individual responsibility. If you are out there and you are polluting the environment as an individual, it is your responsibility to pay for and clean up the mess.

The other thing that I was pleased to see is that this legislation will also include directors of \$2 shelf companies, because the cost to clean up would go back to the directors. On the other side, as the companies themselves profit from polluting the environment, in this particular case the cost to clean up goes exactly where it belongs, and that is in the expenses column of their general ledger. All of those things we welcome.

The LNP certainly does not have a problem with those particular aspects. However, as the honourable member for Surfers Paradise mentioned earlier, one of the areas where we do have some concerns--and I certainly have some concerns in my area of Noosa--is that of horse trails. The second part of this bill seeks to amend the Nature Conservation Act 1992 to formalise a review of the use of national parks for pleasure horse activities, specifically the south-east Queensland horse-riding trail network. I remember some 2 years ago, before I was elected to parliament, being briefed by the horse-riding fraternity in my electorate about the trails that were subject to being closed. There was an enormous amount of work done at that time, and I must say that I thought that particular aspect had been dealt with. I was surprised as were the members of pony clubs and the horse-riding fraternity at Noosa, that this was back on the agenda.

Another thing that concerns me--and, again, the member for Surfers Paradise mentioned this--is that this piece of legislation seeks to establish an independent and scientific advisory committee which will not be comprised of any horse riders. Some \$150,000 will be spent every year until 2025. I heard part of what the minister said. We have people there with weed control and all these different things, but nowhere do I see positions on the committee allocated to people from the peak bodies that look after recreational horse riders. It is our view that a review of this committee should take place in about three years time. To have it extend over such a long time--to 2025--from our point of view seems wildly out of place.

Proposed section 70JB(3) (b) specifically requires members of the committee not to be part of a government or non-government entity which could have an interest in horse riding. As I mentioned a second ago, we believe that peak riding groups should be consulted. They are the ones that represent the local pony clubs in their particular areas, particularly in the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast hinterland. These local clubs and the riders know the local trails and they should be the ones that are providing an input into these discussions. Three of the

riding organisations that I suggest should be involved in the committee are the Queensland Horse Council, the Queensland Endurance Riders Association and the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association, Queensland branch.

These trails overwhelmingly follow the fire trail network. From everything that I have been able to understand and learn, horse riding is pretty good for maintaining the fire trails. The alternative--and it was certainly the alternative that was being floated 2 years ago--was that these trails were going to be closed down and alternative trails were going to be put in place. This would have resulted in the pleasure riders having to ride their horses on the verges of roads, footpaths and so forth, which would have been dangerous to the rider, the horse and any vehicles that happened to be on that road. Ultimately, horse riding is one of the most environmentally friendly ways of enjoying national parks compared with people who go into state forests and so forth on trail bikes.

To my way of thinking, it is a good thing for people to be able to go through state forests and national parks and enjoy the environment in a passive way, to be able to observe what is going on in the environment and to help keep the fire trails open. I turn now to the Noosa area specifically. For the benefit of the minister, I table two maps that detail the eight trails around the Noosa area that pony riders and so forth in my electorate have suggested are in danger of being closed.

Tabled paper: Two Maps detailing 8 Horse Riding Trails in the Noosa area.

They would like to see some effort being made by the minister and this government to keep them open. The first of the eight trails is the Northern Ringtail State Forest trail. It is a trail that is essential to access Ringtail should the surrounding land be subdivided in the future. The second is the Ringtail State Forest trail. It is a link between Ringtail Creek Road and the boundary track. This trail provides one of the few short loops within the forest.

The third one is the Ringtail State Forest sandy track. It is a favourite with horse riders and it has a sandy surface. The fourth is the Yurol State Forest trail, the link between the boundary track and the pine plantation. This track provides a link for those who reside adjacent to the northern edge of the track to the pine plantation in the south. It also enables a circuit to be ridden. Next is the Yurol State Forest circuit track. This trail provides one of the few short loops within the forest.

The sixth trail is the Tewanin Forest Reserve. It provides a link between the Old Tewanin Road and the Tinbeerwah Lookout. This trail was constructed by the Sunshine Coast track and trails association in around 1991 with the permission of forestry. It is a popular single-file track. It is very rocky and, as a result, there are minimal problems associated with erosion. The seventh is the Woondum Forest Reserve connection trail. This track is currently overgrown in parts. However, over the years forestry has opened it up for fire management purposes. A narrow track provides a link directly to an adjoining property which at times has allowed members of the public to traverse the land to access the forest. Closure of this trail will mean that all of those people who reside north of the Woondum Forest will have no access to the forest at all.

The eighth is the Woondum Forest Reserve east-west existing alternative link. Trails two, three, four, five and eight are only small loops. They are very wide management trails. As I said before, they are fire trails and they provide very easy and able access to horse riders in our particular area. As I said before, the Woondum area is overgrown. It can be accessed via private property, as can some of the other trails around the particular area.

It just seems to me that we have an opportunity here to have a bit of a win-win in terms of the environment and also the management of our state forests and national parks. We have a situation in which trail riders on their ponies, horses and so forth are able to get into the national parks and state forests and enjoy a leisure activity. In many cases they have moved to the area to enjoy these activities. These are not wealthy people. These are people who have bought a small block of land and have a pony for their kids. It is a healthy outdoor activity. I really appeal to the minister to not only look at the eight trails that I have mentioned

and the maps that I have provided but also look at other areas of south-east Queensland where we can maintain what is a very special outdoor activity for many thousands of Queenslanders. One of the things that I find surprising in this whole exercise is that we are looking to shut down some of these trails. As a consequence, some parts of our national parks and state forests along these trails are probably not going to be managed and maintained as they should be.

If we look at some of the other state forests and so forth around my particular area--and I refer particularly to the Kenilworth and Imbil State Forest the Amamoor State Forest, the Noosa trail network and the Noosa north shore beach area--these areas are all infested with lantana. That is not a plant that is carried into national parks through horse droppings and so forth; it is something that is fairly naturally occurring.

The management of our state forests and national parks should be in there cleaning up that mess rather than trying to deny a very peaceful activity from the point of view of the horse riders not only in Noosa but in the rest of south-east Queensland. With those few words, I would like to again congratulate the government on what it has done in the early parts of this bill. I would particularly like to ask that the minister has a look at those eight trails that I have outlined in my presentation tonight and also at the map. People in my area would be very pleased to come down and meet with him and discuss the matter in greater detail. I know the shadow minister is going to be moving an amendment later which of course I will support. In summary, this is a bill that has some value.

With the reservations I have outlined--they will be addressed in the amendment that we will move a bit later on--I commend the bill to the House.
