



Trish Doyle MP

Member for Blue Mountains



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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Matter of Public Importance: Biodiversity Month

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Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (15:34): I am pleased to speak today on this matter of public importance, Biodiversity Month. Biodiversity encompasses every living thing that exists on our planet and the environment in which they live. Biodiversity Month is important in celebrating what is known as the web of life, the interconnectedness of all things in our environment. Biodiversity Month is in September each year and aims to protect, conserve and improve biodiversity. It is absolutely critical that our environments, ecosystems and habitats are preserved for our future generations. Our wellbeing and our enjoyment of life depend on biodiversity, as do our food, our recreation and tourism, our clean water, our rainforests, our woodlands and our oceans.

I acknowledge the good work of peak environmental groups, including the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales, the Wilderness Society New South Wales, the Environmental Defenders Office NSW, the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and the Colong Foundation, as well as our Landcare groups, our Bushcare groups and our First Peoples' expertise in this space. It is important to note Labor's strong record of acting to protect the environment and delivering every significant environmental reform in Australia. I particularly note the achievements of the Carr Labor Government in New South Wales. Nature conservation was a priority for the Government in 1995—for example, Carr prevented logging in parts of south-eastern New South Wales by creating the South East Forests National Park along the New South Wales coastal range from Batemans Bay to the Victorian border.

Through a string of new national parks, 120,000 hectares or 300,000 acres of old growth forest and wilderness areas were protected between 1995 and 2000. In 1999 the Carr Government declared 100 new national parks between Nowra and the Bega Valley. It is important that, as the member for Blue Mountains, I acknowledge and pay tribute to my predecessor, Bob Debus. He was the longest-serving and the best Minister for the Environment in any Australian jurisdiction and oversaw the expansion of the national park system of New South Wales by more than one third. He undertook other environmental policy initiatives, including the first program in Australia to successfully purchase water licences for the restoration of environmental flows in inland rivers, cleaner production and remediation laws and the introduction of the first extended producer responsibility laws in Australia.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Bruce Notley-Smith): The Minister for Corrections will come to order.

Ms TRISH DOYLE: Environmental decisions are rooted in social justice and it is inevitably the poor who pay the most for environmental degradation. It is important for us in this place to acknowledge the impact economically as smart economies gear up to capitalise on the clean energy future.

I proudly draw upon this history and these values in advocating for environmentally sustainable, evidence-based legislation. It is important to acknowledge that the electorate of Blue Mountains is within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. My electorate is unique in that it is a city within a national park. As is well documented, the electorate of Blue Mountains is one of the most fire-prone areas in the world. That was once again sadly demonstrated by the 2013 bushfire emergency. The UNESCO world heritage listing involves particular obligations on the part of Federal, State and local governments. World heritage status requires from us a long-term commitment to environmental protection. During Biodiversity Month it is important that we look to the reasons we need that awareness.

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (15:40): I thank the House—

Ms Trish Doyle: You are very keen.

Mr MARK COURE: This will be on the 6 o'clock news. The Coalition has a long and proud history of protecting the environment. It should be noted that the first Minister for the Environment was appointed by a Liberal-Nationals Government—the Fraser Government.

Ms Trish Doyle: And everything has gone downhill since then.

Mr MARK COURE: No, it has not. Since then, the Coalition has implemented some wonderful initiatives, and I will focus on two of them in my contribution today. When I was a mere candidate for the seat of Oatley—

Ms Trish Doyle: Now look at you.

Mr MARK COURE: I have come a long way since then. The Coalition fought tooth and nail to have Dharawal State Conservation Area declared a national park. In 2001, the then Premier Bob Carr promised he would do that within 12 months, but it did not happen. In contrast, the Coalition Government secured the declaration within 100 days of coming to office in 2011. Of course, that saved the area from mining by BHP-Billiton and prevented pollution of the Georges River. The Georges River headwaters flow through the beautiful Dharawal State Conservation Area, which is in the electorate of Wollondilly, and sprawls into the electorate of Heathcote and other electorates.

More recently, this Government has announced that a container deposit scheme will be rolled out next year. That is yet another practical solution that the Coalition Government has implemented to address pollution. This Government has led the debate on container deposit legislation across New South Wales and Australia, and a scheme should have been introduced decades ago. This State once had a container deposit scheme. However, it was abolished, and it has taken a Liberal-Nationals Government to reinstate it. The Labor Government had 16 years in which to implement one, but it was never mentioned in any of its environment policies during its time in office.

During September we celebrate Biodiversity Month, which aims to promote protecting, conserving and improving our unique biodiversity. This Government is delivering on its election promise to reform the State's complex biodiversity laws to create a modern, comprehensive approach to conserving our biodiversity. The proposed biodiversity reforms will deliver on the 43 recommendations made by the Independent Biodiversity Legislation Review Panel to cut red tape, to facilitate ecologically sustainable development, and to conserve biodiversity in this State.

Under the status quo, the quality of vegetation and biodiversity in New South Wales has continued to decline. That is why we need a system that delivers targeted and strategic investment in conservation to restore our degraded landscapes, which is what the Labor Government failed to do. It is the biggest conservation program on private land in New South Wales, and Bob Carr was never able to deliver it. He could not deliver on a credible and robust conservation program. The Government released a draft package of land management and biodiversity conservation reforms and provided for an eight-week public consultation period. More than 50 stakeholder engagement activities were undertaken across the State, reaching more than 1,600 people. This State has come a long way with biodiversity and preserving the environment since the Coalition was elected. It is delivering practical solutions and saving the environment.

Ms JO HAYLEN (Summer Hill) (15:45): During September we mark Biodiversity Month, which gives us the opportunity to celebrate the natural world around us and to take stock of our impact on the creatures with which we share this planet. It also gives us the opportunity to support the community groups and countless volunteers who work tirelessly to nurture our environment. Unfortunately, Australia is one of the worst offenders in the world when it comes to rates of extinction of fauna and flora. More than 1,000 plants and animals are now facing extinction in New South Wales. The best course of action we can take is to stop the bush from being cleared and to protect the habitats of our native animals. Here in our city we must cherish our beautiful, wild places—our parks, our beaches, our backyards and our rivers. We must preserve our city's natural and built heritage and remember that progress does not need to cost us the planet.

Like many people in New South Wales, I am concerned about this Government's attitude to our natural environment. The Premier is tearing up trees along Anzac Parade when other alternatives could have been found. We are losing hundreds of trees across the inner west for the WestConnex project, including the beautiful remnant forest in Wollie Creek, again when other alternatives could have been found. Ausgrid and its contractors continue to butcher trees in Haberfield, Ashfield, Leichhardt, and Annandale without a word of criticism from the Government. This Government's brutal land clearing legislation will result in the destruction of countless hectares of bush, all of which is vital habitat for this State's native animals. The legislation is so bad that even the NSW Farmers Federation does not support it.

Why are our wild places under siege? It is because this Premier will not let our invaluable urban and natural environment stand in the way of developer profits. We see that again and again. However, there is another way. I am proud to belong to a party that has a strong record of protecting biodiversity. As the member for Blue Mountains said, the Carr Government reduced land clearing from 100,000 hectares a year to only 12,000 hectares a year, and that had a direct impact on biodiversity. It is estimated that 53,000 native mammals have been spared from death each year as a result of that action. We can protect our environment if we want to.

I saw a great example of that in my electorate last weekend. Tempe Lands was a tip 20 years ago. However, community groups, including the Tempe Birdos—who have now spotted more than 100 birds in this beautiful, newly created wetland—have worked hard to bring the area back to life. Every Biodiversity Month we congratulate the wonderful community groups like the Birdos, the Mudcrabs, the Cooks River Valley Association, and the countless volunteers who work so hard to protect our precious biodiversity and our wild places.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Corrections, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Veterans Affairs) (15:48): By leave: Like all members, I believe we should be good custodians of the Earth. Biodiversity Month is a great opportunity for us as the parliamentarians of New South Wales to ensure we all understand the need to maintain our planet and to pass it on in better condition than it was when we inherited it. I am horrified when I hear the political drivel from members opposite about having the moral high ground when it comes to the environment. The

member for Oatley correctly stated that it was a Federal Liberal Government that appointed the first Minister for the Environment.

What the member for Oatley was not able to say in his allotted time is that this Chamber was the home of the very Premier, Tom Lewis, who introduced royal national parks to this State. It was a Liberal Premier who introduced the notion of the national park. Members of this House who want to present themselves as having environmental credentials need to read history and make sure that the appropriate level of recognition is given. It was Nick Greiner and Wal Murray, on forming government in 1988, who established the Environment Protection Authority [EPA].

Those opposite—while making all sorts of promises during the years they were in government and when Bob Carr himself was the environment Minister—failed to establish a jurisdiction such as the EPA through which the environment would be protected. Members opposite talk about the trees on Anzac Parade. What they do not say is that the ultimate benefit of the Anzac Parade redevelopment will be better, cheaper and more reliable public transport, which, one would hope, will mean fewer cars on the road and less carbon dioxide in the environment. I do not understand how turning a public thoroughfare into a public rail network is a bad thing. Is that not what we want and need in our cities? The introduction of more public transport makes our cities more environmentally friendly.

Ms Jo Haylen: We just suggest that you should look at alternatives.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: The member for Summer Hill interjects. I suspect she has never spent a day on a farm. If she did, she would know that farmers are the best environmentalists because they rely on the soil on which they toil for their living. If those opposite are opposed to farmers and think they are so much better than this side of the House, they should read the history. If they did, they would understand that this side of the Parliament is the natural protector of the environment. [*Time expired.*]

Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina) (15:51): By leave: I thank the member for Blue Mountains for raising this matter of public importance today. All the screaming and carrying on in this debate means that members are very passionate about the environment. I think that is excellent, but I do not know that parties claiming a badge of honour around environmentalism is useful. My electorate of Ballina is the most biodiverse area in the State. Until recently my father had a hobby farm, both my grandparents were farmers, and my great-grandparents on my father's side were farmers. I agree with Minister Elliott that farmers are at the heart of biodiversity. We saw that today when our future farmers attended Parliament House and talked to members from both sides of the House about their concerns relating to soil quality and preserving our diversity of species. Many people are concerned about the environment, and a lot of people have been contacting my office about legislation that removes no-go zones in particular.

Biodiversity is the variety of all species of plants, animals and microorganisms and the ecosystems within which they live and interact. The core of the issue relating to changes to the law is that biodiversity is extremely complex. The Government has proposed legislation that suggests that biodiversity can be transplanted or offset, despite the unique character of those many interactions. It suggests that our biodiversity can be picked up from one area and put down elsewhere. In fact, the passage of the proposed amended biodiversity legislation will mean the destruction of species in the naive or mistaken belief that we can recreate them somewhere else. As anyone with an understanding of science knows, that is impossible. Biodiversity and its unique chaos of plants, animals, organisms and microorganisms occurs in situ. It cannot be relocated.

The Greens are concerned that if we accept that biodiversity can be relocated, then high-value areas will be zoned for development, if people pay money to do so, and destroyed. The proposition is that an area of native trees that have stood there for decades, if not hundreds of years, can be destroyed and a similar area can be created elsewhere with new plantings. It is not the same; this proposition is nonsense. The original

area and its ecosystem will be destroyed and its replacement elsewhere with young plants will never, ever offset the original biodiversity area. The Greens will support any improvements the Government makes to this legislation. Again, I acknowledge the member for Blue Mountains for raising this very important issue. It may not be on the 6 o'clock news but it should be.

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (15:54): In reply: I acknowledge the contributions to this matter of public importance on Biodiversity Month. I thank the member for Oatley, the member for Summer Hill, the member for Baulkham Hills and the member for Ballina. Whilst celebrating those who do good work and raise awareness in this space, it is important that any legislation brought before this place ensures that there are no significant increases in land clearing and destruction of precious native vegetation; it does not reduce habitat for native animals including species under threat of extinction; it does not degrade soil quality and increase erosion which impacts on future food production; it does not reduce water quality and damage creek and river ecosystems; it does not significantly increase development along the coast; and it does not increase carbon emissions that contribute to climate change. That is why in Biodiversity Month we celebrate the efforts of the many environmentalists, groups, individuals and community organisations that work in each of our electorates, including Landcare and Bushcare groups, and who come together across the political spectrum for the protection and conservation of our environment.

I finish by acknowledging today we had a special environment briefing and a screening of the short film *Restoring Earth*, which brought together farmers from across the State. It reminded me of my growing up on a big sheep property and seeing the gullies, the soil erosion and the salinity issues that occurred from large-scale land clearing. It is important for us not only to talk about the issues but to learn from the images of the degradation of our earth in order to ensure that we do not leave a degraded environment for future generations. I presume in a very short time we will again be debating environment legislation in this place. I acknowledge the work being done by our Indigenous elders and our farmers who are raising awareness about native vegetation clearing. I again thank the members who contributed to this matter of public importance. I urge members to keep talking about Biodiversity Month.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Bruce Notley-Smith): The matter of public importance having concluded, community recognition statements will now be considered.