

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2016

NGARKAT CONSERVATION PARK

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:16): I rise to support this motion in regard to Ngarkat National Park. The motion reads:

That this house requests His Excellency the Governor to make a proclamation under section 30(2) of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972 excluding allotments 104 and 105 in approved plan No. DP28853, Hundred of Fisk, lodged in the Lands Titles Registration Office at Adelaide, from the Ngarkat Conservation Park.

I note that that was first presented in the council, as I read in the heading. In regard to Ngarkat, and I will expand on my remarks shortly, my electorate used to share a boundary with Ngarkat but now it is just inside because of the last redistribution four years ago. This motion we are going through today needs resolution of both houses of parliament. The park, Ngarkat, covers 270,000 hectares, and it connects via the Ngarkat Highway between Pinnaroo and Bordertown, and there are various other tracks and roads by which you can access the park.

Landlocked inside the park is the rural property Kirra Station, which can only be accessed by a track which is legally part of the park and is currently maintained by the Tatiara District Council. The boundary shift will take this land, which is 10.85 hectares in total, from the park and legally vest it to the council as a road. In exchange, there will be an environmental offset of an extra 42 hectares of unmade closed road which will become part of the park. This road is currently unmaintained and unused.

Certainly, just in regard to Kirra, I think it has been a very important part of quarantine efforts here, not just in South Australia but for Australia, in importing genetics from around the world, because of its isolation in the middle of a national park. It certainly clears up a whole heap of issues around biosecurity and the risk involved there. Just for a little bit of history, back in 1984, there was an evaluation of Angora goats imported from Texas to the Cudal Mohair Stud in Cudal, New South Wales:

The importation of some 74 Texan Angora goats by 17 different syndicates in 1984 has resulted in three quarantine stations holding progeny and while numbers have built up by breeding both within the imports and by crossing with Australian Angoras, the importing syndicates are somewhat reticent to cooperate in more than basic husbandry and reproductive management. Nevertheless, some evaluation work has been possible on Kirra Animal Quarantine Station (situated some 80Km north of Keith, South Australia) in conjunction with fleece classing research.

In regard to the angora goat program, by March 1990 some 1,100 angoras have resulted from this breeding program on Kirra, and in early 1990 the Kirra management committee agreed to allow National Mohair Pool to class the mohair clip and carry out research designed to develop classing techniques and

evaluate production. All animals were shorn in March and September 1990 and the fleeces were weighed and classed. A comprehensive classing code was used to describe the condition, style, length, kempiness and fineness of each fleece. At each shearing, classed fleeces from each description were sampled and three such samples from each management group were randomly selected for testing of sourced yield and mean fibre diameter.

This resulted in 390 test results covering the range of classing types from the four mobs—whether it is kid bucks, kid does, adult bucks and adult does—at two shearings. By combining the classing codes with the test information, it was possible to estimate the clean fleece weight and mean fibre diameter of all animals. Additional information about kemp, style and condition was available from the classing codes. Breed effects were also determined by applying fleece information to the breeding information from the station's records. Shearing information on the buck flocks was less complete than that for the does because of special shearing requirements and the removal of sires from the mob for mating and semen collection. It was not possible to evaluate the reproductive ability of the animals since most of the breeding involved embryo transfer and/or artificial insemination.

Part of the results and discussion around what went on at Kirra were that shearing in March proved somewhat difficult, with a high sand content in the fleeces causing problems with combs and cutters. As a former shearer, I can relate to that. This problem is also encountered in sheep shearing in the district. The September shearing provided easier work with less sand and, while the grease content appeared higher and the style better, the tests indicated that the source yield was similar to that of the March shearing at least in the case of the female flock. Care is needed in interpreting yield information because of the specific sandy conditions experienced in summer in the Kirra environment.

Some other evaluation in regard to imported Texan angoras and their crosses was conducted by the Agricultural Business Research Institute, University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales. They talk about the Moplan estimated breeding values (EBVs) that have been calculated to aid breeders in selection among the Texan and Texan crosses from Kirra due to large variation among these goats. No Texan does were bred to Australian bucks for the reciprocal cross and no Australian angora goats were reared at the Kirra Quarantine Station, therefore heterosis could not be evaluated from this data.

Hybrid vigour influences most traits and will probably cause most angora breeders to overestimate the breeding value or the genetic merit of the Texans based on the performance of first crosses. Differences in performance of Texan and Texan crosses at the Kirra Quarantine Station were evaluated, the largest data set for these goats in Australia.

A little bit of history from the Warburn Stud website: in 1991, after several visits to Kirra Quarantine Station and seeing the superior American Suffolk breed of sheep came the purchase in February 1992 of a share in one of the top Rams APS 18921.90, therefore becoming the first stud to use those superior genetics in New South Wales. This introduced a larger frame sheep. Other rams that have influenced their stud have been several Langley Height rams which bred true Suffolk type. That is a little bit of the history of what has happened at Kirra and

the vital part it has played around the issues of quarantine in this country. It is in the perfect situation. I think this is sensible legislation to get through the house, with the act formalising that the road become part of Tatiara District Council, and giving up the 40-odd hectares of unnamed road back to the park as the trade-off.

I, too, will discuss Ngarkat and the fires, as the member for MacKillop did. As indicated, it is about 270,000 hectares. It is interesting to note that whenever you look at a map involving Ngarkat generally you will see great fire scars through it. There have been countless fires in Ngarkat. Living at Coomandook, not far from it, when the fires start they get going, and you can see the red glow in the night sky. Some people say it is a lightning magnet out there, because that is generally how the fires get going.

These fires have done a fair bit of damage over time. I know one that was over 85,000 hectares in total, which is a major fire, and it tests the authorities and the CFS—which I am part of—in fighting these fires. Generally the trucks stay outside the scrub line and do what they can and the planes can go over occasionally and drop loads of water and gel to deal with the fire.

However, it does cause a real issue for neighbouring landholders. There was an issue, over 10 years ago now, where a big fire could have come out of Ngarkat and head towards the Mallee side up around Parrakie and Parilla, the Lameroo side. It was said that for all intents and purposes there could be up to 100-kilometre an hour winds later that Sunday afternoon that would bring the fire out of the park onto farmland. People were keen to light a burn-back, but everyone was worried about who would take the rap for burning the native vegetation.

I will give you some news: the native vegetation burnt anyway and we lost a lot of farmland because a decision was not taken on the ground. The problem we have is that the people on the ground are nervous about making that proactive decision. I believe they would have been protected by at least a couple of acts of parliament if they had lit the match on the burn-back—because that is exactly what should have happened. It would have saved the stress of losing all that country on the Parrakie, Lameroo and Parilla side and having a major fire to deal with.

In fact, the firebreak was going to be the Mallee Highway. Anyone knows that if a decent fire is coming at you with a fair bit of wind behind it (as we saw with Pinery) the highway is hardly going to be a firebreak. I think people need to be well aware of their rights. I also think that the commanders in these situations need to take really good note of the guys on the ground so that we do not see something escalate especially, as in this case, when that scrub was all going to burn—and it did burn.

However, I must say there has been some good proactive work done in recent years with scrub rollers to knock down breaks around the park, and people have been more aware, especially since that fire, I believe, of making sure that there is some form of control. The issue is not about being wanton or random about getting rid of scrub and native plants on the edge of the park: it is about the

reality of what a fire can do. Coming from the country, we have all seen it and what it can do.

I commend the work of our CFS and our Victorian and New South Wales friends who come over at times to help us fight fires and also certainly Aerotech and the McCabe family, with their planes, and the vital work they do with other pilots in keeping our state and its people safe. Just on that, there are a couple of great park firefighting tractors that are based in Keith that are strengthened for fighting fires in the park. I heard that one was out the other day at Messent and the driver said he was going alright until the plane dropped a load of gel on him and then he could not see out of the windows. Be that as it may, he was safe because of the combined efforts. They have converted some rigs to withstand a fair bit of heat and a fair bit of abuse when having to go through the scrub and trying to tackle these fires.

Certainly, in light of that, beekeepers are a vital asset in the park, I believe. They have had restricted access in recent years, which I think is an issue, because they are really the unseen guardians of the park in my mind, who access tracks and keep tracks made up so that they can access their sites to winter their bees and drag that good Mallee Park honey out of the park.

I think we have to be mindful of that vital honey industry and the work that they do for this state, and certainly the work that the bees do for our agricultural commodities in regard to pollination of a vast array of crops. We must always be aware of making sure that it is one industry that gets more help. I think we need to stop and think about the work that these people do. Sure, they might be lining their own pockets, but they are also carers of the park. They are using it for commercial gain, but they also know they have to look after the park and the flora so that they can make an income.

As the member for MacKillop mentioned, Ngarkat is a great place to go camping. I have not been out there for a little while. I had an interesting trip once with my wife, who was fairly pregnant at the time, heading north from Tintinara through the back of the park. This was in an old three-speed Toyota which I got from a guy called Magnet at Frances, but that is beside the point. It was a good old rig, but I made sure I had enough food and drink to last us for a while, and I did say to my friends, 'If we don't get there by a certain time, come looking for us.' You know what happened: we got there on our own, but once we lost the front axle, and we had a flat tyre about 400 metres from the campsite. That was alright; my wife was only starting to show small amounts of stress.

It is a great place to go. You can do the Border Track, which is something I have not done, but I have certainly come in on various tracks from the Geranium and Parrakie side and the Pinnaroo end as well. It does play a vital part as a national park. It is a very large expanse of parkland. As part of that, the role that Kirra has played in there as a quarantine station is vitally important; it is in an ideal spot for this kind of work. This type of legislation is sensible legislation, and as far as the Tatiara council maintenance on the track into Kirra is concerned, it is probably just validating what they have been doing over many years. I commend the motion.