

Legislative Council

27th February 2008

**NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE (MINING IN SANCTUARIES)
AMENDMENT BILL**

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 17 October 2007. Page 952.)

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (21:33): I am deeply concerned that any mineral explorer or person would flout the rules governing a sanctuary. It would appear that exploratory work undertaken at the proposed sanctuary site left Mount Gee in less than a desirable state, with refuse, including core samples, buried within its boundaries in contravention of the rules governing this area. I unreservedly condemn such behaviour and will be interested to see what actions are taken and outcomes achieved by the authorities to ensure that the mining industry gets the message loud and clear that our environment must not pay the price for financial gain. I know this has also been raised recently in a number of questions asked by the Hon. Mark Parnell of the minister, the Hon. Paul Holloway.

The Hon. Mark Parnell has presented this council with arguments that express well the concerns of his supporters and the questions of how we are to proclaim, manage or, on occasion, revoke sanctuary status, as well as what major contributing factors would lead to the suspension of licences to mine. These concerns need to be considered carefully, and we need to answer the questions with as much accuracy as possible and muster the political will to ensure the desired outcome, namely, sustainable development across this industry that can best meet the needs of this state and its people.

There is evidence that South Australia is rich in mineral deposits, and the splatter of sites across the northern and central parts of this state would suggest that many deposits are yet to be discovered. As responsible legislators, we cannot rule out the economic possibilities that these deposits may offer for centuries to come. Legislation should be proposed and accepted based on the best interests of the population to ensure a future of quality and surety. At some stage, the conservation movement may well need to come to the realisation that it is not what is mined or where, but rather how. I commend the Hon. Mark Parnell for raising the debate on various environmental issues over and over again.

With any venture there will always be costs. It is not always best practice to completely avoid all costs and then, as a result, reap no benefits at all. It is the responsibility of government to develop and enforce restoration provisions rather than support total bans as a short vision, no cost, no benefit solution. We must as carefully as possible identify the risks and manage them appropriately. Perhaps this is an opportunity for all environmentalists to see that a harm-minimisation approach does not work. Minimising the harm is not acceptable for environmental or conservation

management, and minimising the harm is not better than preventing it in the first place.

We have seen what happens when we rest on our laurels with a narrow view of a long-term problem. We are now in a situation where we do not have enough water to allow food and wine growers to flourish in this state, and I refer to those who are struggling in the Riverland. Some growers are having to cut their crops by up to 50 per cent. This has also had a negative impact on other businesses. As the Hon. Sandra Kanck mentioned earlier in her motion on the River Murray, many of our citrus growers are walking off their farms and leaving behind years of blood, sweat and tears.

Economic conservatism does not mean no infrastructure and no progression where we live. In the reality of resource shortages and increasing costs that impact negatively on every South Australian in one way or another, they always impact hardest on those who are least able to bear that burden. We must move away from the frame of thinking that prevents us from seeking solutions to the problems that present. For example: we should not mine because of what happened at Mount Gee; rather, we should look at the concerns of the conservationist and work toward ensuring that such practices are not tolerated by any industry. To lock up an area permanently rather than look at how the riches of that area can serve the greater good with the absolute minimal damage and then have the political commitment and will to ensure that accountability and responsibilities are accepted by all parties is, in my opinion, part of the answer to this question.

It is obvious that the permanent lockout policy referred to in this proposal may have the effect of seriously inhibiting future development of any kind in an area once it has been proclaimed as a sanctuary. One only has to look at the economic predictions for South Australia to recognise that decisions of this kind are not to be taken without the most careful consideration.

BHP Billiton is developing at Roxby Downs what will be the world's biggest uranium mine, Australia's largest gold mine and one of the world's largest copper mines. This is indicative of the potential that South Australia has. The original Roxby agreement was for a period of over 70 years. The life of the expanded mine can only be guessed at as the resource reserves are still being proved.

I know that there are some in this place who would rather that uranium mining does not continue and who also believe that nuclear power is a threat rather than a viable option. Most of the arguments are fear-based: again, the gloom and doom rather than basing policy on world performance and the needs of the state to survive and thrive from the resource boom being experienced in other states. No, we cannot refuse options to the people of South Australia with unrealistic conservation policies, and we also cannot cause environmental damage that would be our legacy for future generations. However, truly sustainable development of the resources that are available with any tight environmental measures to secure the health of the areas mined is how this needs to be dealt with.

We cannot afford to frame our thinking exclusively around 'either/or' options, and decisions must be made to encourage growth and progression for the people of this

state, taking into consideration every possible option. In my opinion—and it is humble—it is not appropriate to use this parliament to push a line that will see the quality of life of South Australians compromised in any way in the future. In my opinion, every viable option must be considered and an open and honest cost-benefit analysis must be presented to ensure that the decisions made in this place are practical, effective, efficient, safe and sustainable.

We all recall the poor taste comment of Mr Brumby, the Premier of Victoria, calling South Australia a backwater. Although that is an offensive remark, what is even more concerning is that 48 per cent of South Australians agreed. It is not enough for the Premier to respond with the comment that Mr Brumby is merely jealous, or for the opposition leader to take offence and just demand an apology. Perhaps, though, it may be necessary for this government, as well as the Legislative Council, to work together to grow this state to its full potential and no longer accept that trying to preserve the image that South Australia is a conservative country town is an image that is appealing or workable.

If we are to keep up with and compete with other states and territories, we must move forward. I am not referring to the monuments that governments seem to love to build and leave behind. I am talking about building this state and working to meet the needs of every South Australian. Mr Rann had a vision of increasing the population to two million by 2050. The question constantly being asked is: how would we sustain such an increase in population? The mining boom may just be the solution—and with that will also come problems with which we must deal. It must be done with appropriate financial management and a strategic plan for the future. I can appreciate that the government has had its tough decisions to make.

South Australia has enjoyed the power of leadership with a sweeping vision before. The politicians of the 19th century realised the opportunities offered by their age. A good example of this was the vigorous action taken to secure the terminus of the London to Australia telegraph for Adelaide. Another was the decision to introduce the telephone immediately after its invention. A parliament of largely independent members was able to pool its talents to adopt what was then the height of communications technology. These technologies enabled communities to optimise their economic opportunities. The same legislators developed a far-flung network of railways.

In the middle of the 20th century, the famous SA premier, Thomas Playford, recognised the need for strategic planning. He oversaw a huge expansion of the state's manufacturing base and made certain that the energy needed to power it would be available; that the workforce needed would be properly trained; that there would be affordable housing for them to live in; schools for their children; new hospitals; and going as far as to create the new city of Elizabeth as the hub of many industries.

I was pondering the question of vision—and it takes some pondering—and recalled the lines of US president, Ronald Reagan. Addressing Americans who had suffered years of economic uncertainty and international setbacks, he said, 'It is time for America to be great again.' We in South Australia have had greatness of vision before: it is now time for us to be great again.

As I read the proposal of the Hon. Mark Parnell and reflected on alternatives, I could see how this so clearly delineated one of the great questions of our age: how do we achieve a balance between conservation, environmental protection and economic development? In short, what kind of future will we actually legislate for? I am sympathetic to the cause of the Hon. Mark Parnell because the past record of environmental responsibility is not impressive. In fact, in some instances, it has been downright pathetic. Are we able to step up to the plate and ensure that what we do, we do well? The Hon. Mark Parnell has legitimate reasons for his concerns.

However, let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater in a desperate attempt to prevent further destruction. I repeat: it is not what we do or where we do it; it is how we do it. I commend the honourable member for producing legislation that will spark debate about the ecological management of this state. This must not come, though, at the cost of economic expansion. As the implications of this bill before us are so profound, I do not believe that this is a question that we should presume could be adequately addressed in a piecemeal fashion.

Extensive mineral, energy and water projects are underway, or in the planning stage in many areas of this state, and clashes of opinion on which should proceed and with what restrictions have already surfaced. It is understandable that government cannot please all the people all the time—and in fact also undesirable—yet it seems that experts outside government bureaucracies are being ignored and dismissed, without any thought that they may have something valuable to offer. We are seeing or hearing more and more that the people of this state do have opinions, and some have very definite ideas about how things could be done differently.

Our newly elected Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, appears to recognise the need for varied advice and for the consultation process, which has been demonstrated through his calling for the 2020 summit of 1,000 individuals to put these kinds of issues on the table and open up vigorous discussions and come up with solutions to the challenges that face this nation. Mr Rudd said that if we can shake out of the tree a dozen good, big ideas for Australia for the next decade, we will have done much better than simply sitting in Canberra—or Adelaide—and listening to the odd public servant and a few lobbyists.

Perhaps this government could consider such a process here in SA that would also include the people. Let the great minds outside our bureaucracies come together, share their information with the public in organised forums and accurate and informative news articles, and then we could decide on the directions needed. It may well be an opportunity for government to realise that the people of this state who would be interested in participating may have a vision for this state which is achievable and which may contribute to the map or master action plan for this state. Is it so far beyond comprehension that the people are able to make their wishes known and that, just perhaps, there could be positive direction to be gained from such an exercise? Obviously, Mr Rudd believes this has merit.

As an Independent, I fully understand and appreciate that this government has a mandate to govern this state, and it is not my role or responsibility to be obstructive in such matters; however, confronting is good. What we do know is that issues around the environment, climate change and economic stability are matters of great concern

to the average citizens who plug away day after day feeling as though they are constantly swimming against the tide.

In conclusion, reluctantly I do not support this bill, although I do believe that the concerns raised deserve attention at other levels and that initiatives need to be developed to ease the concerns of those who are quite rightly concerned about the environmental impact of the mining industry in this state.