

FITZROY RIVER NATIONAL PARK PROPOSAL

Statement

HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [9.58 pm]: I would like to use my member's statement to talk about the Kimberley and, in particular, the Fitzroy Valley and the proposed Fitzroy River national park. I am sure every member in here has received the same emails that I have received, not only from the Kimberley, but also many from the eastern states. Most of the eastern state emails are calling for a national park, whereas the Kimberley ones are saying that they do not want a national park.

The only member that I know in this chamber who has actually done any business around the Fitzroy Valley is Hon Ken Baston. I know that because when I have visited Liveringa, Fossil Downs, Gogo and Noonkanbah stations, they always talk about the great job that Hon Ken Baston has been doing over the years. While I visited those places, I looked at the size of the pivots used for the water they have been allocated, and it is absolutely incredible. Some of these pivots cover an area of more than 90 hectares. I have spoken to many senior Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy area, and most of them do not want a national park. What they want is jobs. They want jobs for their kids and their grandkids.

Some members will be old enough to remember what took place in Noonkanbah nearly 40 years ago when we had demonstrations, rallies and protests saying no to drilling and no to exploration, but now the Aboriginal owners of Noonkanbah want exploration there. They have told me that they want to drill for gas and oil. They are learning to say yes. They are learning to say yes to jobs, to education and to a future without welfare. I have also spoken to elders who do want a national park, and I fully understand why they want a national park. I have lived in Australia for 50 years and when I go home for a holiday, I would love to go back to the places I visited as a boy—where I went fishing, the trees I used to climb, and the woods we used to build cubby houses in and play hide and seek—but they are all gone. Now it is all big fancy houses by the riverbank and small boutique industries where the woods used to be. So I understand why these people do not want change. Unfortunately, progress—that is what it is called—will progress, whether or not we like it.

I believe we are at a crossroads with the Fitzroy River. We already have a national park up there; it is called Geikie Gorge National Park. If the proposed national park goes ahead, we will be reducing the grazing area of the big stations up there. We need to realise that the rainfall up there is more than half a metre every single year. That half a metre of rain allows the Fitzroy River to spew more than 6 500 giganlitres of fresh water and topsoil out into the ocean every single year. If we used that water wisely, we could create another 180 000 hectares of irrigated fodder. Possibly 5 000-plus jobs would be created and the economy would be boosted by more than \$1 billion.

We need to create jobs in the Kimberley, especially for our Indigenous communities. We need real jobs too. The pastoralists, the agricultural industries and the mining industries will create these real jobs. The Indigenous people become really good machinery operators; it does not matter whether it is a tractor, truck, front-end loader, header, bailer or spreader—everything. When they learn how to operate those machines, they enjoy that type of work. The government has to support the pastoralists and the agricultural industries. Wyndham port is ready to export all this extra produce that we can easily produce. If the government is really worried, it can monitor the condition of Fitzroy River and Margaret River and, if it is not happy, it can change the rules, but it will not have to change anything because the industries that operate up there look after the rivers and the environment because that is their livelihood. The worst part about creating a national park in the Fitzroy Valley is that we will be condemning the next two or three generations of Aboriginal children to a life on welfare.

There is one other thing that I would like to say. This is just what I personally believe. Just like we have the World Health Organization, in the future I reckon we will have a world food production organisation. Because of the booming population we have, we will slowly run out of food. This organisation will decide which country is going to grow which product, depending on the type of soil that it has. If anyone here thinks that the world food production organisation is going to allow Australia to lock up millions of hectares of really good producing soil and land, they have it wrong. I really hope that the Minister for Environment talks to the people up there, because they need jobs.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Believe me, I have been talking to them and they are not interested in a whitefella picking jobs for them. Aboriginal people can decide for themselves.

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: That is right, and the Aboriginal people I have been talking to want jobs. They do not want a national park.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is a member's statement, not a debate.

Hon ROBIN SCOTT: Thank you, Madam President.