

DRAFT SECOND READING SPEECH

HON. JEREMY ROCKLIFF MP

Natural Resource Management Amendment Bill 2017

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Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Natural Resource Management Amendment Bill 2017 is to amend the Natural Resource Management Act 2002 in order to improve and strengthen Tasmania's natural resource management arrangements and ensure that our natural resources are managed effectively and efficiently.

The amendments contained in this Bill in no way compromise the management of our natural resources. Rather, they serve to streamline the process, and are in line with the Government's policy to reduce administrative costs as well as the number of boards and councils in the State.

The most significant amendment in this Bill is to remove the roles and functions of the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council from the Act, and instead create the ability for a special purpose committee to be formed on an as-needs basis.

This is not a new initiative. Section 9 of the Nature Conservation Act 2002, for example, has provisions for special advisory committees. In both cases, that is the Nature Conservation Act and the Bill before you, the Minister may establish such committees on a needs basis, and appoint the members to advise on matters in relation to the administration of these Acts.

Madam Speaker, the general functions and powers of the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council are to advise the Minister, as set out in section 7 of the Natural Resource Management Act 2002, and the Council has many minor roles and functions scattered throughout the legislation. The Council has also, in the past, fulfilled an oversight function by identifying priorities, and implementing and administering national and State programs relating to natural resource management.

The 2015 Natural Resource Management review undertaken by the Department found that the Council's role has diminished over the years.

During the review process, many stakeholders questioned the usefulness of the Council's current role, and the majority recognised the need to change the Council and its functions to achieve more robust and targeted outcomes.

Under the proposed amendment, the roles and functions of the Council will be removed. Nevertheless, it is important that the Minister continue to receive specialist advice on emerging and topical natural resource management issues from a broad range of stakeholders.

In removing the Council, the Minister has the ability to form a special purpose committee as required. This enables the Minister to bring together issue-specific experts on a case by case basis rather than relying on a Council with more general expertise.

The Act currently requires that the Minister review the Natural Resource Management Act every four to seven years to ensure the arrangements are operating as intended.

Thirteen years have passed since the Act commenced, and the Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies have demonstrated a clear ability to perform their roles and functions, and they continue to do an outstanding job. The Department's 2015 review was the second to find that the NRM bodies are operating as intended.

Madam Speaker, in light of the excellent performance of the Natural Resource Management bodies, the Bill extends the statutory timeframe for reviewing the Act from every seven to ten years.

Further, a minor amendment to the Act will remove the statutory requirement for accreditation criteria. These criteria are currently used by the Council to assess draft regional strategies and provide advice on which natural resource management strategies should be accredited.

While the accreditation criteria are approved by the Minister, they are primarily an evaluation tool used by the Council to inform its advice on natural resource management strategies and advice.

The provisions for accreditation criteria are also outdated and refer to a national Ministerial Council that no longer exists.

Removing the requirement for accreditation criteria does not in any way alter the Government's capacity to assess and accredit draft regional strategies in accordance with the Act.

Madam Speaker, extensive consultation was undertaken during the course of the review undertaken by my Department, including face to face meetings with key stakeholder groups. The three NRM regional bodies were also provided with a consultation draft of the Bill. There was strong support for all the changes contained in this Bill.

These amendments are not onerous, and as noted earlier, serve to streamline the natural resource management capabilities of the three NRM regional bodies.

Madam Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.