



COFFIN BAY NATIONAL PARK PONIES 1 April 2003

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Will the Minister for Environment and Conservation advise the house what briefings, written or oral, he received in relation to his decision to relocate the Coffin Bay ponies, and did any of these briefings recommend against the removal of the ponies?

The Hon. J.D. HILL (Minister for Environment and Conservation): I am glad that the pony issue is galloping to the top of the agenda today. I know that the member for Flinders has a particular interest in this issue. As I have said in this house on a number of occasions, I took advice from a range of sources, including people—

The Hon. W.A. Matthew interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The one trick pony over there—the member for Bright! I took advice from a range of sources in relation to this, from my department and from people in the local community.

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Some said they support it and some have said they oppose it. That is a reality of life when you have to make decisions. I made a decision based on my own judgment about what was in the best interests of that park and the best interests of the park system. I know that there are people in the member for Flinders' electorate who are very much opposed to the removal of the pony. Equally, there are people in her electorate who are very much in support of the decision that I made.

COFFIN BAY NATIONAL PARK PONIES 1 April 2003

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): My question is again directed to the Minister for Environment and Conservation. Will the minister produce for the house details of the written or oral advice he has received regarding the effect of consumption of salvation Jane (also known as Patterson's curse) on our state's heritage horses located at Coffin Bay? The minister has been quoted as saying it is a furphy to suggest that Coffin Bay ponies will be poisoned by salvation Jane if they are moved to One Tree Hill. Today, a local agronomist states that he has just inspected the land, which is devoid of normal seed. The local agronomist is reported as saying that by September or October there will not be too much grass left; there will be plenty of salvation Jane (Patterson's curse) in full flower (full vegetation), and the horses will not have any option but to feed on that. The local agronomist

predicts that the horses will suffer a slow and agonising death.

The Hon. J.D. HILL (Minister for Environment and Conservation): It is 1 April, so I can only assume that it is an April Fool's Day question from the member for Flinders. There have been negotiations with the Preservation Society about moving the horses to another location. As I have said in and outside this place, if the Preservation Society does not like the recommended site, we are happy to talk to them about alternative sites if they can identify some of those sites.

It is interesting: I grew up in New South Wales, where the plant was called Patterson's curse, but in South Australia, of course, as the member for Flinders has said, it is known as salvation Jane. As I understand it, in agricultural areas it has provided some benefit to stock at various times. I do not know how many paddocks in South Australia there are, nor do I know how many have salvation Jane growing on them, but I would imagine that in this state there is a fair amount of overlap between stock and salvation Jane. I think that the argument being put by the Preservation Society is really a desperate one in an attempt to try to have the decision changed, but that decision will not be changed. As I have already told the member, if she brings these people in to see me, I am happy to talk to them about alternatives, but the decision to move the ponies out of Coffin Bay National Park has been made.

COFFIN BAY NATIONAL PARK PONIES 31 March 2003

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Will the Minister for Environment and Conservation advise the house when he notified the Minister Assisting the Minister for Government Enterprises of his intention to relocate the Coffin Bay ponies from Coffin Bay National Park to the SA Water reserve at One Tree Hill? Members of the Pony Preservation Society believe the minister responsible for SA Water land was not aware of the decision by the Minister for Environment and Conservation to shift the Coffin Bay ponies to land under his control.

The Hon. J.D. HILL (Minister for Environment and Conservation): I note the question that the member has asked. I am not aware of the precise details; I am happy to get the answer for her. I am still waiting for a request from the honourable member's office for her to bring a group of her constituents to talk to me about this matter and how the future of those horses can be managed, so I look forward to her contacting me.

COFFIN BAY NATIONAL PARK PONIES 27 March 2003

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Yesterday, I mentioned that the Minister for Environment and Conservation announced that the Coffin Bay ponies would be relocated to a 400 hectare site owned by SA Water and that this offer was considered to be an insult. This is a minister of a government which claims to be open and accountable, a government which claims that it will speak with the community before making a decision that affects that community, and a government which declared its intention to conduct rural impact studies before implementing decisions. All that appears to have been conveniently forgotten in practice.

On 18 February, the President of the Coffin Bay Ponies Preservation Society, Milton Stevens, was contacted by Ross Allen of the Department of Environment and Conservation requesting a meeting to discuss pony management at the Coffin Bay National Park. Despite being unable to have available many members of the society to attend the meeting, it went ahead. At this time the society

was informed that the minister had decided to relocate the ponies to the SA Water land known as One Tree Hill. There was no public consultation.

Mr Stevens advises that the conditions of the relocation included: first, One Tree Hill was to be leased to the Department of Environment and Conservation for a period of 10 years with a review of the lease after five years; secondly, responsibilities included fencing the area, installation of infrastructure to provide water for the horses, management of pests, animals and plants, management of fire hazards, and establishing access to the site from the north; thirdly, access to the area will be restricted to nominated members of the pony society for management purposes; and, fourthly, no public access will be allowed to the relocation site. The cost was estimated to be about \$60 000 plus ongoing maintenance costs.

My question to the minister on Monday 24 March about the eradication of other introduced species was not, as the minister tried to portray it, one of the more absurd arguments promoted about why the ponies ought to stay in the park. Rather, it pointed out to the minister that this money would be better spent on doing something about the real and uncontrolled problems in the park that I mentioned and not a remnant controlled herd of ponies. One can only assume that the minister is picking on the ponies purely as an easy target to make him look as if he is doing something in the eyes of other possible green defectors.

Further, when seven members of the Preservation Society visited the One Tree Hill site on 18 May, they were advised by SA Water staff that there was actually a restriction of two visitors only—another example of the very poor consideration and communication that has occurred. When members visited the site, there was no obvious bore for water. However, members were advised by SA Water staff that a bore does exist somewhere on the property, although they were unsure of exactly where it is. I doubt that the minister even bothered to ensure that SA Water was aware of the ponies being transferred to its land, and we believe it certainly does not want them there. The minister proposes that an access route be developed. However, I have been advised that approval for the route has not been sought, nor has consultation been undertaken with the Barngarla Aboriginal Community Council, despite the property being subject to native title, an issue raised but not responded to in my questions to the minister on Monday—an answer would be appreciated.

Despite the minister's assurances in his press release dated 19 February titled 'Win win', the minister neglected to acknowledge that the ponies, if located at One Tree Hill, would be poisoned after a few years due to the lack of dry cover and suitable green feed on the property. Ponies will be forced to feed mostly on Paterson's curse, a noxious weed that causes irreversible damage to the horse's internal organs, including the liver, eventually resulting in death, an outcome I believe that would not be considered as a bad result by the minister and his department judging by the way in which they are treating this matter.

This government is a government that is exceedingly tardy in responding to the concerns of the people of this state. The government has mastered the art of ignoring the people, no doubt in the hope that the electors and their concerns will fade away. The Coffin Bay people and those from farther afield who support the ponies remaining in the park seek open communication with the minister to look at a real win-win solution.

Time expired.

COFFIN BAY NATIONAL PARK PONIES 26 March 2003

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Last week, nearly 200 people attended a public meeting to protest the proposed removal of the Coffin Bay ponies from the very large Coffin Bay National Park by the Minister for Environment and Conservation. However, the minister has declined to discuss the decision with a delegation as requested by a motion at the meeting. The minister, in answer to a question in the house on Monday 24 March, stated:

I think that would be a waste of time. Of course, that is your privilege if you wish to bring a group of your constituents to see me and to waste their time, mine and your own—let that be on your shoulders.

The ponies, whose ancestry is traced back to Timor ponies, have been in the area now known as the Coffin Bay National Park since 1847, having been brought to Australia when the first colonial early settlers landed. Mr William Mortlock took over the Coffin Bay peninsula in 1856 and introduced a breeding program. The area was made a national park following the purchase of the privately owned farmland by the state government in the early seventies, by which time the Coffin Bay ponies had been running wild and had bred into their hundreds with three distinct herds.

In a major compromise by the Coffin Bay Pony Preservation Society, a formal agreement was negotiated by the former Liberal government allowing for a herd of 20 mares, their foals and one stallion to remain in the park. This meant that two other herds of ponies were removed and the remaining herd of about 100 ponies at Point Sir Isaacs was reduced to the current tightly managed population.

At that time, the Coffin Bay Pony Preservation Society initiated a management program, and it continues to work with the ponies and departmental staff to ensure that the ponies are well maintained and managed. Every year the horses are trapped and yearlings removed. All ponies in the park over one year old are branded and documented. Students are put through a handling course each year to enable them to gain experience dealing with yearlings that have been untouched. The course also involves picking up the yearlings from the previous year that have not been sold, giving students the opportunity of working with both yearlings as well as two-year-old ponies. The course has received positive feedback and has given the students a sense of self achievement.

The minister in answer to a question in parliament gave kangaroos as one of his reasons for moving the ponies, stating: . . . *if those ponies are left there, we would have to keep waterholes operational, which means we would have to shoot about 1 000 kangaroos a year.*

At the recent public meeting, Mr Stevens questioned the credibility of the minister's Department of Environment and Conservation which presumably gave him this piece of information. An advertisement placed in the *Port Lincoln Times* estimated that there were approximately 30 kangaroos per hectare in the Coffin Bay National Park. Based on those figures, Mr Stevens noted that it equates to some 960 000 kangaroos in the park. Kangaroos need very little water, and I doubt whether closing the waterholes will make any difference to their numbers except in a drought, when feed would also be a problem but with a much lower population than indicated by the department.

In a report written in November 2001 by the Environment, Resources and Development Committee, concern was expressed that ponies degrade the wilderness area in the park. The Coffin Bay Pony Preservation Society in a further concession has suggested that the wilderness area be fenced off and the ponies relocated within the park. This would be a simple procedure, particularly as for the majority of the time the ponies are in other areas away from where the wilderness area is proposed in any case. The Coffin Bay Pony Preservation Society works closely with the local community and parks people, and would like to be actively involved in the regeneration of vegetation in the park that has been degraded by rabbits and 150 years of farming, with stock numbers for sheep alone estimated to have been as high as 10 000 in good years.

At the public meeting Mr Stevens emphasised that the issue of the Coffin Bay ponies is really about national parks management; it does not change whether or not it is a wilderness protected area. The Coffin Bay ponies are unique, and their tourism value cannot be underestimated. Tourism must be a major player in our national parks, and this government is being very short-sighted if it cannot see the potential that is available in having these unique and historic animals available for the public to view and wonder at. Hiding the ponies on unsuitable and inaccessible land is ludicrous and an insult to the pony preservation society and all the hard work it has done.

Time expired.