



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**Environment Protection and Biodiversity  
Conservation Amendment (Bilateral  
Agreement Implementation) Bill 2014**

**Consideration in Detail**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 16 June 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 16 June 2014  
**Page** 6020  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** McCormack, Michael, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr McCORMACK** (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (20:34): The member for Melbourne talked about Andrew Lloyd Webber, and we have just heard from the phantom of the opera. Certainly, in the last parliament he was the phantom of the parliament. He would float around here like some greenie spectre making sure that every bit of legislation had a green tinge to it. I will pay him one due: at least he was consistent—consistently bad, nonetheless, but at least he was consistent. We always knew where the member for Melbourne was coming from; we always knew what angle he would take. I pay him that respect. But we did not know where the member for Richmond was coming from.

During the last election campaign, there were some very mischievous ads placed in the local press against the Nationals candidate for Richmond, Matthew Fraser, that mixed up state and federal issues to scare the daylight out of the people of Richmond on what the National Party stood for. It was mischievous, if not reckless, in the extreme. The member for Page is a really good member. You would not have seen the previous member for Page, Janelle Saffin, ever go against her party. You would not have seen that and you certainly will not see the current member for Richmond go against her party, because to do so would mean instant expulsion. I must give credit to the member for Page because—unlike the member for Melbourne, who said this was a carefully orchestrated manoeuvre—he has courageously advocated to improve the legislation. That is what really good backbenchers do: they advocate for legislation that has already been discussed by the party room. The member for Page has gone out and introduced in consultation with the Minister for the Environment—who is absolutely getting on with the job of ticking off on green projects that will improve business and industry, while at the same time placing those environmental safeguards in place—to make sure the environmental standards of his electorate and the good farming folk he represents are going to be met.

The amendments that the member for Page has come up with are very good: they improve the legislation before the House. The two amendments will boost the role of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on coal seam gas and large coalmining development. That is what we want—we want good legislation. We want amendments which are going to tighten and strengthen those water triggers which are so important. We all know that. I have coal seam gas mining exploration licences being called on in the Riverina, particularly around Hillston. I have to say that, in consultation with state government representatives—through the member for Murrumbidgee, Adrian Piccoli, and through the Minister for Primary Industries, Katrina Hodgkinson—they have put those developments back. They have put the licensing exploration back. That is what National Party members do—in consultation with our coalition colleagues, the Liberal Party, we look at what has happened and then, in consultation, we get better legislation. We get better improvements. We make amendments, as the member for Page has done.

The first amendment will ensure that state and territory decision-makers must seek and take into account the advice of the IESC. This is achieved by making it compulsory for bilateral agreements to include this requirement. Secondly, we will allow the environment minister to request advice from the IESC about the operation of a bilateral agreement in relation to the water trigger. This could include advice on the extent to which the state or territory has assessed the impacts and consequences of the development and considered the initial advice of the IESC. The Minister for the Environment has consulted with NSW Farmers, the National Farmers' Federation, and the Queensland and New South Wales governments—because that is what this side of government does. That is what the federal coalition does. We consult. We never heard any consultation from those on the other side in the last six years—particularly in the last term when there was a hung parliament, and particularly when it came down to issues which affected farmland, agriculture, and regional and rural Australia. All we ever saw—all we ever heard from them—was what the member for Melbourne wanted. We had this green tinge placed over every bit of legislation. And did we ever hear from the member for Richmond about wanting to get her electorate going forward—about her electorate actually looking at things, in relation to weighing up industry as well as the environment, and reaching a satisfactory conclusion? No, we did not. That is why I commend the member for Page for his amendments.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.