

Environmental Protection (Efficiency and Streamlining) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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Environmental Protection (Efficiency and Streamlining) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Introduction

The short title of the Bill is the Environmental Protection (Efficiency and Streamlining) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (“the Bill”).

The Civil Contractors Federation Queensland Limited (CCF QLD) represents the interests and enhanced prosperity of the civil construction industry in Queensland. CCF QLD prides itself on being the voice of the civil construction industry and advocates for the interests of industry to all levels of government. We are responsible for representing the Queensland civil construction industry; from as far north as Cairns to as far south as Northern New South Wales.

Civil Contractors Federation Queensland Limited (CCF QLD) has three Queensland Civil Industry Training Centres (QCITC) located in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns, with Brisbane being our head office. CCF is a Registered Organisation under the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009. CCF operates as a non-profit entity governed by a constitution approved by Fair Work Australia.

Civil Construction in Queensland

Queensland, particularly South-East Queensland has had enormous population growth in recent years. This will continue, with population projections suggesting that South-East Queensland will have 6 million people by 2046, up from approximately 4 million in the middle of 2024¹. The economic and social hub of South-East Queensland, Brisbane, is already Australia’s most congested city². Population growth, driving the need for new housing and transport and the Brisbane 2032 Olympics and Paralympic Games have created a perfect storm in the civil construction industry in Queensland. These factors create an enormous impetus to ensure that Queensland’s entire civil construction sector is as productive as possible in the coming years.

The Queensland Productivity Commission has also recently released its interim report into productivity in the construction sector. The key finding we wish to highlight here is that productivity in the Queensland

¹ Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (2024) ShapingSEQ2023, Planning. Available at: <https://www.planning.qld.gov.au/planning-framework/plan-making/regional-planning/south-east-queensland-regional-plan> (Accessed: 13 October 2025).

² Brisbane is Australia’s most traffic-congested city (no date) Drive. Available at: <https://www.drive.com.au/news/brisbane-australia-most-traffic-congested-city/> (Accessed: 13 October 2025).

construction industry today is only 5 per cent higher than it was in 1994-95. In comparison, productivity in the market economy grew by 65 per cent³.

Productivity; particularly in a complex and interdependent sector like civil construction is not just a function of equipping workers with better tools or better industrial relations, it is also about reducing the difficulty of obtaining, and the cost of producing, the raw materials which are key inputs into the sector. This can best be done by expanding production, including by taking action to streamline approvals for extractive industries. This Bill and associated forthcoming regulation should have the effect of protecting the environment, whilst making it easier to get approvals for low-risk activities through.

Work Force Shortages, Productivity and Queensland's Policy Objectives

Escalating materials costs and a dearth of labour, in the face of the twin challenges of a growing population and an Olympic Games, have meant the civil construction sector has been under significant strain for a lengthy period.

Growth is good, and a stagnant state is one which is dying, but managing the next twenty years of growth, with an Olympics and Paralympics in the middle, requires a deliberate, coherent strategy to deliver the infrastructure and housing we need to manage this growth in a way that boosts our economy, productivity and living standards. Part of this strategy will involve making approvals easier to obtain where appropriate, and this Bill works towards achieving that. The information below provides some context on why this is important.

Housing

Queensland is also set to fall short of its housing target by 96,000 by 2029⁴. Housing construction is entirely dependent on civil works. Subdivisions cannot progress and houses cannot be built until the land is prepared, utilities are connected, and roads are built. Analysts at UNSW Business School note that “*delays in infrastructure projects are stalling*” planned housing, even where rezoning and approvals are in place. This is important to note in the context of accelerating house prices over the past five years, with enormous growth trajectory out to 2030. Making civil construction more productive and efficient will be key to tackling these challenges.

Brisbane 2032 Olympics and Paralympic Games

³ Queensland Productivity Commission (2025) *Summary Report - Opportunities to improve productivity of the construction industry*. Brisbane: Queensland Productivity Commission. Available at: <https://qpc.qld.gov.au/docs/construction-productivity/Summary%20Report%20-%20Opportunities%20to%20improve%20productivity%20of%20the%20construction%20industry%201.pdf> (Accessed: 5 November 2025).

⁴ Tilley, E. (2025, March 17). Housing crisis failure: 96,000 homes short of Qld target.
<https://www.realestate.com.au/news/housing-crisis-failure-96000-homes-short-of-qld-target/>

When delivered well, hosting major events has the effect of enhancing a country's standing on a global stage, leaving a legacy of productive infrastructure, economic growth and increased "soft power" standing⁵. However, when the Olympics are executed poorly, local government debt rises, and the local economy can suffer long term consequences. The legacy of the poorly delivered Rio 2016 Olympics was one of substantial debt, lost opportunity, economic difficulties and mothballed facilities. 15 out of 27 Olympic venues were no longer operational within a year. Millions of dollars in debt remained unpaid and crime and anti-social behaviour skyrocketed. The lack of legacy, misuse of funds and diminishing Brisbane and Australia's standing on the world stage if we do not deliver appropriate infrastructure, high quality stadiums, transport and urban renewal should remain a concern.

Streamlined Approvals as a Solution

The best solution to these problems is multifaceted. A critical lever to achieving these goals is to have supply chains flourishing, increased labour productivity and approvals streamlined, so that facilities and associated transport infrastructure are delivered on time and to a high quality. Part of the solution to this problem is contained within the Bill here, which should help sure up supply chains, and make the sector function more efficiently.

In the absence of real, tangible and significant policy action from Government, including the passing of the Bill; the combined effect of the pressures outlined above is likely delays, cost and wage inflation and even non - delivery of Olympic infrastructure.

The interdependent and highly labour- and capital-intensive nature of the civil construction sector, means every single aspect of the industry must be operating at maximum capacity to deliver the budgeted \$120 billion⁶ (approx.) in infrastructure spend over the budget forward estimates. There is no one lever that needs to be pulled to help deliver this program, but the Bill goes some way to pulling one of those levers.

Action is needed on labour; action is needed on red and green tape and action is needed on productivity to ensure our booming population and the Olympics does not deliver embarrassment and homelessness to Queensland. The Bill helps address some of these challenges in a meaningful way.

Quarrying

We note that current production of quarry materials is projected around 24 million tonnes per annum over the next three years in South-East Queensland. Projected demand is forecast to be around 26 million tonnes per annum, with this 2 million tonne shortfall likely to have a significant impact on housing and infrastructure construction. Given demand for materials is accelerating with the need to deliver Olympic infrastructure, without intervention, this problem could become worse.

The regulation of quarry production is controlled by multiple departments and agencies within the State Government. We are of the view that new quarries are needed, particularly in key locations, and for the

⁵ *Economic benefits of hosting the Olympic Games*. (n.d.). Olympics | Olympic Games, Medals, Results & Latest News. <https://www.olympics.com/ioc/becoming-an-olympic-games-host/economic-benefits-of-hosting-the-olympic-games>

⁶ (2025). Queensland Budget 2025-26. <https://budget.qld.gov.au/>

productive capacity of existing quarries to be increased where possible. Quarries provide the essential raw materials needed to deliver infrastructure and put simply; you cannot build a bridge or a road out of thin air. There needs to be sufficient raw materials, in all locations across Queensland to construct the infrastructure the state so desperately needs.

This shortfall is of particular concern given programs around upgrades to the Bruce Highway and their reliance, oftentimes, on local quarries to fulfil their material needs. Upgrading this road is critical to the State's economic and social future and cannot be delayed due to a dearth of material. The lack of local supply forces contractors to source materials from distant quarries, dramatically increasing haulage costs and exacerbating congestion on arterial roads like the Bruce Highway, the very road we are trying to upgrade. Streamlining local approvals is a triple-win: lower costs, lower emissions, and less congestion.

We note recent amendments to regulation ("Environmental Protection (Extractive Activities) Amendment Regulation 2025") to allow regional Local Governments to engage in extractive activities without an Environmental Authority. This is a positive step and we view this as acknowledgement of this ongoing issue by Government. We understand this may save each Local Government Area (LGA) around \$3,000. We hope that such savings can be used to reinvest into further productive infrastructure.

We note further legislative changes proposed by the Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which are also geared at providing greater access to quarry materials for Local Governments. These regulatory tweaks indicate the Government is aware of this issue.

Given these issues, we are hopeful that an Environmentally Relevant Activity Code is created for quarries- and that there is a focus on ensuring quarry approvals are easy to obtain. We note the Minister has promised to consult on each new code- we hope this takes place swiftly and will be involved in ensuring that any code as it relates to quarrying favours sensible expansion of the sector. To meet the production requirements to complete the pipeline, the swift approval of new quarrying facilities is critical. By legislating to encourage faster approvals, it is likely that productive capacity in this space will accelerate.

Other Matters

The move generally towards faster approvals for low-risk activities and harsher penalties for offences is positive. As outlined above, the complexity of the infrastructure supply chain means that every single part of the ecosystem must be working at optimum to deliver the best possible outcomes. Removing some red tape around progressive rehabilitation and closure plans (PCRPs) will enhance the productivity of companies, meaning they can spend more time on investing in expansion and productive matters.

Simplifying PCRPs means that operators can divert resources—staff time, specialist consultants, and capital from administrative compliance and towards productive activities like increasing extraction capacity and investing in new equipment. This legislative change demonstrates a sensible focus on practical environmental outcomes rather than administrative process.

Removing duplicative administrative burden is also a positive, and we are happy to see this occur in a host of areas through the Bill. The Bill is focused on delivering practical environmental outcomes, whilst boosting the productive capacity of the state.

Conclusion

The twin concerns of enormous population growth and an Olympic Games mean the need for policy settings to be favourable to a thriving and productive civil infrastructure sector is more critical than ever. The Bill helps ensure that the supply of more materials is more reliable at a time when it is extremely important.

We hope other changes to legislation encourage this sort of synergy and productivity and look forward to the passage of the Bill.

Kind regards,



Damian Long

CEO CCF QLD