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PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SA Bennett MP—Chair
Mr NJ Dalton MP
Mr RI Katter MP
Mr GR Kelly MP
Mr JR Martin MP (via videoconference)
Mr TJ Smith MP (via videoconference)

Staff present:

Dr S Dodsworth—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS ORGANISATION (CRITICAL MINERALS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2026

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Tuesday, 14 July 2026

Brisbane

TUESDAY, 14 JULY 2026

The committee met at 12.06 pm.

CHAIR: I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the State Development and Public Works Organisation (Critical Minerals) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. My name is Stephen Bennett. I am the member for Burnett and chair of the committee. With me here today are: Mr James Martin, the deputy chair and member for Stretton; Mr Tom Smith, the member for Bundaberg, who is appearing via videoconference; Mr Nigel Dalton, the member for Mackay; Mr Glen Kelly, the member for Mirani; and Mr Robbie Katter, the member for Traeger, who is on his way.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please remember to speak into the microphone when speaking and turn off your mobile phones or switch them to silent mode. Before we begin, I thank the Resources Centre of Excellence for allowing us to use this space for today's hearing. I now welcome representatives from the Greater Whitsunday Alliance (GW3) and the Resources Centre of Excellence.

BOXALL, Mr Steven, Chief Executive Officer, Resources Centre of Excellence

THOMPSON, Mrs Jodie, Senior Project Coordinator, Greater Whitsunday Alliance (GW3)

CHAIR: Good afternoon. We invite you to make an opening statement and then the committee will have some questions.

Mrs Thompson: Thank you, Chair and committee, for having us here today. The Greater Whitsunday Alliance is the region's strategic economic development body for the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday local government areas. While we did not provide a formal submission to this inquiry, we do welcome the opportunity to share our regional perspective on Queensland's critical minerals future.

Before I begin I would like to provide the committee with three documents developed by our organisation and regional partners: Greater Whitsunday METS Sector—a Revenue Diversification Strategy; the Greater Whitsundays critical minerals road map, and the Reimagine Rehab prospectus.

CHAIR: Can we move a motion that that be accepted? Thank you.

Mrs Thompson: Together, these documents outline a pathway for leveraging our region's existing strengths to support critical minerals development and ultimately long-term economic diversification. The Greater Whitsunday region is already one of Australia's most significant resource economies, with an annual economic output of more than \$87 billion. For decades we have powered the nation's metallurgical coal industry, and in doing so we have developed capabilities that extend far beyond any single commodity. We are home to a highly skilled workforce, a globally competitive and world renowned METS sector, advanced engineering and manufacturing capabilities, and a strong culture of innovation. In fact, we have the highest density of METS businesses in the Southern Hemisphere.

The building in which we are meeting today, the Resources Centre of Excellence, stands as tangible evidence of the region's reputation as a centre of mining excellence, innovation and industry-led collaboration. It was established because governments and industry recognised that the expertise developed in this region is nationally significant. As Queensland seeks to accelerate its critical minerals industry, we know that our region offers a clear advantage. The capabilities required

to support critical minerals are already embedded within our businesses and our workforce. Through the METS diversification strategy we identified substantial opportunities for regional firms to transfer existing skills and services into emerging industries, including critical minerals. Off the back of that strategy we also developed the Greater Whitsunday critical minerals road map, and that builds on this foundation. It positions the Greater Whitsunday region as both a service and an innovation hub for critical minerals projects across Queensland and Australia.

If we are to fully realise the opportunities presented by critical minerals we must also build the intelligence, research and innovative capability that enables industry, investors and governments to make informed decisions and accelerate commercialisation. That is why we see significant merit in the proposed Australian Centre for Critical Minerals Intelligence as outlined in the road map. Located within a region that already supports some of the world's largest and most sophisticated resources operations, such a centre could provide the requirements needed to connect Queensland's critical minerals potential. At the same time, our Reimagine Rehab prospectus demonstrates how former and transitioning mining landscapes can support critical minerals related activity as well as new industries, renewable energy generation, advanced manufacturing, agriculture and research.

In summary, Queensland does not need to build an entirely new critical minerals ecosystem. Regions like Greater Whitsunday already possess much of the capability. The opportunity for us now is to connect, coordinate and accelerate what already exists. The key point from Greater Whitsunday's perspective is that the region has not been waiting for critical minerals to arrive. Through our METS diversification strategy, our critical minerals road map and our Reimagine Rehab prospectus, we have been actively planning for this opportunity for several years. The capabilities, partnerships and strategic vision are already in place. What we are looking for now is the ability to accelerate implementation and translate planning into investment, projects and jobs to illustrate how the region's assets like the RCoE and its suite of facilities are already being brought together in practice. I will now hand over to the CEO of the Resources Centre of Excellence.

Mr Boxall: Good afternoon and welcome to the Resources Centre of Excellence. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today and for choosing to hold this important hearing in Mackay. The RCoE was established to help Queensland's resources sector innovate, diversify and remain globally competitive. Today, through the RCoE—which you are in now—the Future Industries Hub across the road and our flexi-lab pilot processing facility, we are creating an ecosystem that brings together industry, government, researchers and educators and accelerates new opportunities for Queensland.

Queensland is exceptionally well positioned to become a global leader in critical minerals. The question is no longer whether Queensland has the resources; it is whether we can process them faster and add more value to capture more economic opportunities right here at home. Our opportunity is far more than simply extracting minerals from the ground; it is about creating more value in Queensland through innovation, pilot processing, advanced manufacturing, research technology and highly skilled regional jobs. That is exactly why facilities like ours exist.

Flexi-lab is Australia's first critical minerals common user pilot processing plant right here in Mackay. It enables companies to test new technologies, validate processing pathways, recover value from existing resources and de-risk projects before major investment decisions are made. In simple terms, it shortens the journey from discovery to production while encouraging companies to undertake the work right here in regional Queensland. Importantly, it is not a standalone initiative. We work very closely with GW3, our regional councils, industries, university and government partners and have a long-term vision around Mackay as a critical minerals services hub.

Rather than competing with the regions where critical minerals are mined, our ambition is for Mackay to become the place where projects come to solve problems, undertake pilot processing, access first-class engineering and METS capabilities, develop new technologies, train their workforce and accelerate commercial outcomes. We believe that Mackay has the industry capability, supply chains, skilled workforce and collaborative culture to become the service, innovation and commercialisation hub supporting Queensland's important critical minerals industry. The opportunity before Queensland is broader than new mine development. One of the greatest opportunities we see is recovering critical minerals from historical mine waste and tailings, particularly coal tailings across the Bowen Basin. These sites contain valuable minerals that were never economic to recover using previous technologies but are increasingly viable today through advances in mineral processing and separation technologies.

Facilities like our flexi-lab across the road allow companies to test and validate those opportunities before significant investment is made. This has the potential to create new economic activity while improving environmental outcomes by reprocessing legacy waste streams and supporting mine site rehabilitation. In our view, fast-tracking new projects and unlocking value from

legacy mines should progress hand in hand. Importantly, the benefits of this approach extend well beyond mining. They flow to local manufacturers, engineering businesses, tech companies, universities, training providers and our regional economies.

We are encouraged that both the Queensland and Australian governments have recently recognised the Resources Centre of Excellence and the important work that flexi-lab is doing to unlock Queensland's critical minerals opportunities. From our perspective, legislation is an important enabler, but legislation alone will not unlock Queensland's full potential. Success will come from combining good policy with the right infrastructure, research capability, industry partnerships and investment that allows projects to move from concept to commercial reality. That is the role the Resources Centre of Excellence is proud to play.

I hope that during your time here today you will have the opportunity to see firsthand that Queensland's critical mineral industry is already being built—not in theory but in facilities like ours—through collaboration between government, industry and research. If Queensland is serious about becoming a global leader in critical minerals, regions like Mackay will not simply support that future; we will help lead it. Thank you for your time today. I welcome any questions.

Mr MARTIN: Thank you, Steven and Jodie. I certainly agree that critical minerals are so important for Queensland and Australia and I appreciate your contributions. I acknowledge the work that both your organisations have done, especially the Resources Centre of Excellence. This is the third time I have been here now. The bill's title does contain the words 'critical minerals'; however, the content of the bill is broadly a planning bill. It does not contain any projects. It does not identify any specific projects of state significance that it is going to pursue. Do you think this bill could have gone further in order to identify what critical minerals projects could have been looked at? In your opinion, what is it that we need to do in Queensland with critical mineral exploration?

Mr Boxall: We have been working in this space for the last five or six years. We have been lucky enough to have contact with a lot of proponents—a lot of people out there who are looking to activate critical mineral opportunities. I know that there is a vast array of companies, large and small. I think it is very hard to call out which ones and where they are at. The point for me is trying to get clarity around—yes, we need new projects but we also need to look at the opportunities around reprocessing tailings and activating end-of-life and abandoned mines. While I cannot really comment about specific proponents and specific projects, I would like to see this legislation not just cover activating new sites but also really focus on abandoned, end-of-life and reprocessing tailings at existing mines. That is probably—

Mr DALTON: How does the bill support your outcomes being examined through the Greater Whitsunday critical minerals road map? How does this bill specifically go to that road map?

Mr Boxall: As I say, we have been on a journey for five years to get to the point where we have just commissioned a really important piece of common user infrastructure. The more that people can have their projects approved and allow them to start processing material so they can send it to us to start to do their business casings, to start to do their design—that will fast-track their usage and the output of the investment that the Queensland government has made into our flexible pilot processing plant.

Mrs Thompson: The bill really supports the many years of work that has happened in the Greater Whitsunday region. If we look at our METS sector, yes, they are heavily involved in metallurgical coal but there are more than a few handfuls of businesses that also service the North West Minerals Province, so they are not going into critical minerals with a blind eye. There is a lot of intelligence that exists here, and I think the bill supports what we are trying to achieve. There are just a few roadblocks that we do not want to see happen down the road.

Mr SMITH: My question is in relation to the GW3 road map. In response to the opportunities presented by Australia's commitment to accelerate the development of skills and infrastructure, the road map sets out practical steps required to position Mackay and Greater Whitsunday with a leading global role in terms of critical minerals and processing. What practical steps does this bill provide that are not already there for industry?

Mr Boxall: At the moment we have a very small number of people who have approved projects or projects ready to go. From my perspective, this bill is going to ensure the pipeline of projects. We know that some of these projects can take anywhere from five to 10 years to go from finding something in the field to being commercially viable. At the moment, we do not have enough people in that pipeline. I believe that this is going to help really fast-track that. Not every project in the pipeline is going to happen. A number will fall over, and we have seen a number of critical minerals proponents

already start business cases and then walk away. From my perspective, it is going to allow that pipeline of prospective projects to grow really quickly, and that will mean more viable projects in the long run.

Mr G KELLY: Would you agree that Queensland has an opportunity to build an integrated pit-to-port-to-processing economy and that legislation like this provides greater confidence for long-term private investment?

Mr Boxall: Absolutely. As I have just mentioned, there is a bottleneck in getting projects out of the ground. We have to get more projects out of the ground and we have to get them out quicker. We then have to make sure they do not get to another bottleneck, and that is why I flagged the work that is being done here at the flexi-lab and the common user facility in Townsville. We have to keep our eye on making sure we help these proponents move as quickly as they can and not fall over. We also know that common user infrastructure in the mining sector is absolutely the way of the future. No longer are we going to have every mine build their own processing plant and their own transport solution. I think this bill goes a long way to helping to activate the sector and the industry quickly, and it also has its sights on making sure we do not go from one bottleneck to the next.

Mr KATTER: I know it is pretty early days but, when talking about approvals and getting things going and the condition of the industry, the EPBC Act is starting to take effect. Have you had any feedback through your networks on what impact that is having out there?

Mr Boxall: I have certainly heard people talking about it and advocating that it is going to have impacts and they are wanting to feed into the engagement of what changes are happening. I have certainly seen a range of advocacy groups standing up, whether that be for the mining sector or farmers and so on. I think it is one of the many challenges. It is a bit like: what are the challenges going to be for local governments and approvals and so on? There is certainly a long list. We try to fix one area, but what will the impacts be on others? That is certainly something I am hearing people talk about.

CHAIR: Thank you for your contribution here this afternoon, and thanks for your hospitality in having us here, Steven, and making us feel welcome. We will move on.

RYNNE, Mr David, Queensland State Director, Cement, Concrete and Aggregates Australia (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement and then we will move to some requests from the committee.

Mr Rynne: Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for the opportunity to appear. CCAA is the peak body representing companies in those three sectors. Members are Boral, Heidelberg Materials, Holcim, Wagners, Cement Australia and Adbri, and we have a lot of the independents in that mix as well.

We have been speaking to governments for a while now about our ability to meet the community's expectations around building everything that is coming our way over the next period. The infrastructure demand for South-East Queensland in particular is unprecedented, and we have been voicing some concerns with government and with stakeholders for a while now that, whilst we have plenty of rock, especially South-East Queensland, we have very limited capacity to get that rock into the system. I like to use the analogy 'the lake is large but the pipeline is small'. We have plenty of rock in situ, but we have very limited capacity—and decreasing capacity—to get that rock into the system. That is primarily on account of the fact that we are regulated by local governments around our production caps. These production caps, through DAs, were set often decades ago for some of these older quarries. They were relevant at the time, but they are no longer relevant given the profile of demand that is coming our way. Getting changes to those production caps is very difficult through local councils, for all different types of reasons, and we have been asking for state intervention such as we are seeing in this new bill.

We are highly supportive of the bill, but we are seeking some amendments to the legislation to ensure we are in scope as quarrying industry and it provides some investment certainty for those quarry operators that want to augment their brownfield quarries and flex, if you like, to meet this demand that is coming.

We have put forward two submissions. One is a technical legal submission seeking a range of amendments. We have put in a supplementary submission—sorry it was so late; it was done on Friday—with some economic modelling showing the cost to the taxpayer of not optimising quarry supply. When I say 'optimising quarry supply', I mean allowing quarries closest to the demand centres to flex to meet demand, because if we do not then those transport costs will quickly increase and they will flow directly through to taxpayers. We are highly supportive of the bill—it is an excellent piece of legislation—but we are seeking some tweaks to ensure we are absolutely in scope of what the government is hoping to achieve.

CHAIR: Thank you, David. I want to ask about the state strategic projects that we are trying to achieve within the bill. How important is it for us to be able to get the aggregate and the sand to these strategic projects? Could you elaborate more on the production caps? I think they are historic, but could you give the committee some more insight into that?

Mr Rynne: There is a bit of feedback, but I understand from the question that you want some elaboration on how the production caps work.

CHAIR: Yes, that will be fine.

Mr Rynne: Essentially, when a quarry proponent wants to set up a quarry or even expand a quarry, there is an exhaustive regime of regulations, approvals and assessments that have to be met. We go through the Planning Act. Under the Planning Act and State Planning Policy, we need to go through local councils and local governments to get our development assessment approval for a quarry. We are also subject to state legislation and EPBC legislation, so there are three layers of government.

We will get conditions for a quarry by local government in terms of production caps, and production caps are set two ways. They can be set as operating-hour restrictions. For example, from 6 am to 5 pm you are allowed to move product out of the quarry, and from 7 am to 4.30 pm you can actually crush and make noise—explosive work, for example. That in effect sets a cap on the production you can do every year because you are constrained by your operating hours.

In more recent approvals in South-East Queensland, the local governments have tended to give a physical cap. They will say to the proponent, 'We will give you operating-hour restrictions or we will set you at 800,000 tonnes.' Whatever is the lowest is the number that is put on the quantum of saleable product that can move out the front gate of that quarry every year.

Mr MARTIN: I have a question about social licence, which I think you might be able to comment on. Quarries often have issues with neighbours—for example, Boral's Reedy Creek on the Gold Coast, where the application was rejected recently. Under this bill, a regional community facing a fast-tracked project would lose even the right to be notified. In your opinion, do you support that, and wouldn't that create problems for a quarry down the track with its neighbours?

Mr Rynne: That is a complex question. I think the Reedy Creek situation was unique, and I will leave it to Boral to comment on whether they had their social licence. As an observer looking into that process, I would hazard a guess that they did not have their social licence. Unfortunately, the process got very heated and I guess politicised, and government made the decision that it made.

All I can do is stress that we as an industry are absolutely focused on meeting and exceeding community expectations with how we operate. I think the quarry industry maybe decades ago had a bit of a reputation of being not so prudent with respect to some of its approaches in terms of environmental considerations and whatnot. I think that is yesterday's approach; today's approach is, as I say, meeting, understanding and exceeding community expectations.

We are proposing an amendment to the bill so that when we are given a cap—for example, 800,000 tonnes a year—we believe we can go up to and over that cap by about 20 per cent before we start to impinge upon the environmental conditions that are traditionally set by SARA through DETSI and through local government conditions. We are given very tight controls around noise, dust and water quality standards, in particular. When you look at those standards that are set through guidelines, the technical people from my members say, 'We could get up to 20 per cent more product before we go anywhere near exceeding those noise, dust and water quality thresholds.' We do not want to create any problems in terms of our social licence; we want a lot of quarries to do a little bit more to get this ginormous freight task done over the next 10 years.

No, we do not absolve our community obligations and environmental obligations. We certainly want to meet our environmental conditions, but what we are proposing is an amendment where we go up to 20 per cent above our cap, we do not go through a public notification process and we do not go through a material change of use application. We will give communities, governments and stakeholders evidence that that 20 per cent increase will not exceed our environmental conditions—as I say, around noise and dust—and we will give traffic reports and traffic movement analysis. What we are proposing is getting dispensation to go up to 20 per cent over without going through a full public notification and MCU process, but we will give you evidence that we are not going to exceed our environmental obligations.

Mr DALTON: My question is along those lines. Are you hoping that you allow that extra 20 per cent just for a state strategic project which you are supplying, or do you want to be that project itself?

Mr Rynne: I think we are proposing two concepts there. Transport and Main Roads have given us their QTRIP profile. They have given us how many tonnes of aggregate that is rail ballast, hard rock and cubes of concrete for their Sunshine Coast and North Brisbane projects over the next four years. The numbers are extremely large and they will push demand in South-East Queensland to levels that we have never seen before.

We are proposing that we could do this two ways. Using quarries that are closest to those demand centres will keep taxpayer costs down because the transport costs will be minimal, and they should be allowed to go up to 20 per cent over without an MCU or public notification process but they will meet their environmental conditions. Or, if that quarry cannot do all the heavy lifting by itself—and there might be three or four quarries in and around that demand centre—give them all dispensation to go up to 20 per cent and they will share the load. They often do share the load on projects. They will not take on a mega project all by themselves; they will spread the risk amongst suppliers, which is fairly common in the industry.

If that does not occur, the economics of this industry is that quarries closest to the demand will cap out. They will hit their caps, and we are seeing that already. Big quarries in South-East Queensland are already at cap, and they are at cap for the next three years. They are already contracted. The way this will work is that quarries an extra 50 kilometres out will be looked at in terms of tendering and then they will hit their cap, and then the market will keep going out in concentric circles away from the demand to see who is not at cap and who can supply it the cheapest.

If we do not give dispensations to those quarries closest, we will get supply coming from hundreds of kilometres away. It could come from Bundaberg or the back of the Darling Downs, and it will be very expensive by the time it gets to Brisbane. All we are seeking is an optimisation approach that meets our environmental conditions, makes sure we keep our social licence and gives supply into the system that makes economic sense. It is an optimised model.

CHAIR: Thank you for your contribution and your submissions to our committee. We look forward to talking to you in the future.

PROOF

DICKSON, Ms Kate, National Head of Operations, Queensland Director, Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Dickson: Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to participate online today. I am Kate Dickson, the Queensland Director of the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies. I begin by respectfully acknowledging the traditional owners of Queensland, the original explorers of this land. The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies is a national industry body representing over 550 mineral exploration companies across Australia, with almost 80 of them having operations primarily based in Queensland. Our members are mineral explorers, emerging miners, producers and a wide range of support businesses working in and for the industry.

AMEC's Queensland members explore for, develop and produce minerals, including bauxite, copper, graphite, mineral sands, phosphate, rare earth, tungsten, uranium, vanadium and zinc. Many AMEC members have benefited and are currently benefiting from the support provided by the Office of the Coordinator-General. Because of this, AMEC recognises the importance of this bill and the role it can play in strengthening Queensland's position as a leader in critical minerals and resource development.

Our submission outlined areas that we support, areas that we have concerns with as well as some areas for improvement. AMEC supports the streamlining of approvals, reducing duplication and approved infrastructure coordination. However, we have concerns with the limitation of appeal rights, particularly when the construction of infrastructure, such as renewable energy projects, could sterilise the critical minerals buried beneath the surface. AMEC supports the overall intent of the bill and looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Queensland government to help shape the framework that delivers positive outcomes for industry, regional communities and Queensland as a whole. I appreciate the opportunity to address you today and welcome your questions.

Mr SMITH: In your submission you state, 'These reforms will lead to a fast track for bigger companies and a slow track for smaller companies.' Can you expand on that for the committee?

Ms Dickson: Our concern around the legislation is that special consideration will be given to bigger companies, not smaller companies. We were seeking some more clarification about which projects would get the special consideration for what goes into the new powers that are available.

Mr G KELLY: AMEC supports streamlining approvals. How much more competitive will Queensland become against Western Australia if these reforms are implemented?

Ms Dickson: Having AMEC's headquarters in Perth helps me to have good visibility around this. The Western Australian government have recently changed some of their legislation around having a Coordinator-General there. My colleagues in Western Australia think what is happening is really beneficial to Queensland and puts us well ahead of many of the other jurisdictions around Australia.

Mr KATTER: Kate, there was some reference to streamlining approvals. Can you give examples of where there are shortfalls or what problems need to be addressed?

Ms Dickson: It is important to be clear that it does not remove the need for key approvals such as environmental authorities and resource authorities or for federal legislation such as EPBC and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protections. It is more to help speed up administrative processes by allowing the Coordinator-General to step in and resolve issues that are outside those sorts of approvals. The best bit about it is that it removes the bureaucracy but not the approvals.

CHAIR: We talk about the modification orders being a mechanism to address duplication. What is your assessment of the bill so far according to that particular aspect?

Ms Dickson: I covered the modification orders a little bit in answering the previous question. It allows the minister to recommend that certain laws be modified for state strategic projects, particularly if they create unreasonable impediments. Again, it is not removing any of the key authorities that are needed. For example, if something is needed under the Transport Infrastructure Act and it is already covered under the Mineral Resources Act, the Coordinator-General could step in and say, 'That's already covered in a piece of legislation that the company is compliant with, so we don't need to double up.'

Mr MARTIN: In your submission you asked for clearer criteria for what are state strategic projects. In your opinion, is the bill as it is currently drafted a bit loose and a bit broad? It sounds like the minister will essentially be sitting in his office trying to pick winners.

Ms Dickson: It does seem a bit broad, but, as I said earlier, broadness can potentially help junior companies. If it were more defined, we might fit outside those parameters. It would be good to have a few more parameters around what is considered to be significant to the state, but expanding it from just being an economic contribution is very good. It is good that it is being broadened to include being more of a benefit to the community as well.

Mr DALTON: How important is it that these reforms benefit junior explorers and emerging miners as well as large multinational companies, and how would the Coordinator-General assess that?

Ms Dickson: That was a bit fuzzy. Could you repeat the question?

Mr DALTON: Certainly. How important is it that these reforms benefit junior explorers and emerging miners as well as large multinational companies, and how would the Coordinator-General assess that?

Ms Dickson: It is extremely important that it benefits the whole industry. Being on the resources committee, I am sure you are aware that junior mineral explorers and mid-tier miners do a great majority of the work in discovery. It is the big end of town that comes through and often buy things that have been partially developed, or through mergers and acquisitions. There is a whole ecosystem from exploring on the ground right up to the huge multinationals at the other end of town. There is a place for everyone in that ecosystem, and it is important that this supports all of them.

Mr SMITH: Kate, I want to go to the removal of appeal rights, including a scenario where a renewable energy project is declared a state strategic project over a critical minerals deposit and the tenure holder has no right to be heard. Could you explain your organisation's concern for the committee, please?

Ms Dickson: AMEC has made quite a few submissions on this over the years. It is not restricted to this legislation; it is an ongoing issue for mineral explorers. Under the legislation, landholders get compensated for the ground that might be acquired for a project, but exploration companies do not get any compensation if a project is built on their resource authority and they have already spent money exploring that land. There is a bit of a mismatch around how different land users are impacted. To be clear: one of the concerns of AMEC members is that if they have a resource authority to explore and they have spent money on a project and there is a resource under the ground that could be developed in the future then having another state significant project on the same footprint would mean that the resource would not be developed in the future.

Mr G KELLY: Your submission highlights the importance of shared infrastructure. How critical is this for unlocking critical minerals opportunities around the Mackay Isaac region?

Ms Dickson: The committee would be familiar with the issues that happened in the Gladstone region when the gas developments occurred. There were three different companies trying to do the same thing in the same area, so there was a tripling of a lot of infrastructure, which caused a lot of issues in the community at the time with human resourcing and housing. That could have been prevented if the state had coordinated the infrastructure. If there was a significant mine development in the Mackay Isaac region, we could prevent what happened in Gladstone.

Another example that is very relevant to the Bowen Basin is the rail infrastructure that was installed earlier last century. That rail infrastructure was coordinated by the state, and it has hugely benefited the communities in the Bowen Basin.

Mr KATTER: You talked about the smaller ones being disadvantaged if the big ones take advantage. Why would bigger companies be more likely to get access to this process than smaller ones? I am just interested to know why you made that point.

Ms Dickson: We are unclear about the definition and how a project becomes a state strategic project. We are raising that concern because we do not know how projects will be granted the status of being a state strategic project.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming before the committee, Kate, and, more importantly, for your submission, which we welcomed and read with interest. We take on your points of concern and support. Thank you for that.

LONG, Mr Damian, Chief Executive Officer, Civil Contractors Federation Queensland (via videoconference)

MARLOW, Mr Kristian, Policy Adviser, Civil Contractors Federation Queensland (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. Damian, I will hand over to you to make an opening statement for the committee and then we will have some questions for you.

Mr Long: Thank you. The Civil Contractors Federation Queensland is part of a federated structure. We are the only organisation that is represented under Fair Work to represent the interests of the civil construction industry. Our little part is Queensland, so we cover the employers and the supply chain all over Queensland.

Our submissions today are on the back of the concerns around the continuing population growth and the gap between the infrastructure that we need and the infrastructure that needs to be developed for the Brisbane 2032 games. It has been a perfect storm in the industry, particularly around quarry supply. We see quarry supply as a critical mineral. The existing quarry capacity is around 23 million to 24 million tonnes per annum. By 2032, according to the data we are getting at the moment, it will be around 26 million tonnes per annum, so we have around a two- to three-million-tonne shortfall. After discussions with the major drawers of that, being Transport and Main Roads and other clients, we think this is probably a conservative estimate. We think a combination of brownfield increases, greenfield expansions and recycling is probably the best way to bridge that gap. If we do nothing, we are going to be in a really bad place. We are open for questions. I know that we have a short time, so we are happy to answer them.

Mr DALTON: The CCF Queensland supports amendments to the bill to improve productivity and infrastructure delivery. Which proposed changes does the CCF Queensland consider most important?

Mr Marlow: We think ensuring aggregate supplies that are to be used for a state significant project would be very important—that would be a very critical change. It would acknowledge quarries or aggregate very specifically as a critical mineral. We would also ask that when it comes to state significant projects the Coordinator-General be empowered to declare an area-wide conditional production cap concession. For example, if there is a project in Mackay that is related to the Olympics and there is insufficient quarry supply, the Coordinator-General could say, 'These two or three quarries in the Mackay-Whitsunday region, which are supplying the vast majority of our Olympic infrastructure, may have a 20 per cent production cap until this project is completed.' That is a really simple change.

The only other one we would potentially look at is allowing quarries specifically to be designated as a project of significance to the state or regions. When an area needs a quarry urgently, when delivery times are very compressed and when there is a hard deadline on a lot of infrastructure, it should be possible to move those quarries through very quickly.

Mr MARTIN: In your submission, you touched on community resistance to quarries near residential areas. We have spoken about that with some of the other witnesses today. If approvals are centralised, appeal rights are removed and consultation is limited, as this bill proposes, that will not remove resistance to a quarry. Would it not simply create bad blood in the community and people will not have a legitimate outlet or a process in which to share their concerns?

Mr Marlow: Without casting too many aspersions on individuals who may be resistant to a quarry in their area, I think most people would acknowledge that public consultation in the planning process at this point tends to be a dragnet for people who are actively resistant to projects in a lot of cases. We see this in the form of pro forma negative submission around things. We have spoken sometimes with people who are in the engagement space and they are of the view that the traditional—it is not necessarily traditional, but the idea of putting up a portal where people can go online tends to drag in the most negative responses. It does not actually necessarily give a clear view of community sentiment and it also leads to a kind of tragedy of the commons where everyone maybe does not want to live near a quarry or near a concrete recycling plant or does not want the quarry that is near them to operate for longer. There are overarching public policy goals that need to be met and there is a very significant deadline for them, which is 2032. Whilst I am appreciative of your concerns and I accept some of the underlying thrust of your argument, I think it is critical to remember that people might be upset about things but we do not always all get our own way. This is a very significant public policy undertaking to deliver a successful Olympics and it is not going to happen without sufficient quarry supply.

Mr G KELLY: Kristian, gone are the days of building houses out of hay and mud. We know that. It is 2026. Do you find that this legislation could provide certainty for regional contractors servicing Mackay and Isaac and Central Queensland and, moving forward, be a whole lot better for this region?

Mr Long: Yes, absolutely. On the back of Kristian's last comments, it is not a process of having a blanket increase on the whole industry anywhere; it is to give us the flexibility to actually meet demand in specific regions. We do have a cyclic nature in our industry, so there are going to be areas that are hot and in high demand and others that will back off and be low demand. Give us the ability to actually address those issues. If you look at the Mackay-Whitsunday region, we have one of the biggest projects now happening on the Bruce Highway—the Bruce Highway Targeted Safety Program—plus the rest of the QTRIP program that is going to happen throughout Queensland, particularly in the areas around Mackay. It is not only the actual supply from quarries but also the transportation issues—the logistics, particularly in regional Queensland, where we can be transporting quarry products in excess of 300 or 400 kilometres to meet demand. It is a good result from a safety point of view, a logistics point of view and a demand and cost point of view. I think the supply issue is a catch-all for a whole range of other issues that sit underneath it and I think everyone needs to be cognisant of that.

Mr SMITH: Going back to aggregates, your submission talks about aggregates on the Bruce Highway, the Olympics and so forth. In your submission you want aggregate resources expressly named in sections 76A, 76E and 76EB. Without those amendments, does the bill actually deliver anything for your members?

Mr Marlow: We think it is likely that it does deliver something for our members. We think the standard is obviously contestable if those matters are left out. We would rather see it in black and white for our members. We do think the bill in its current form would be helpful, yes. I think there is no denying that. We are not fans of letting perfect be the enemy of good, but we were offered the opportunity to make a submission and so we have suggested some tweaks to provide a little bit more certainty, but we do not think it is the end of the world.

CHAIR: I want to go back to production caps, if I may, with the potential for that to be looked at. We heard from the Cement, Concrete and Aggregates people talking about a 20 per cent increase without having to do a material change et cetera. What would happen now if that did happen—environmentally, traffic and other things—that a quarry operator would potentially look at before that increase in production caps, if granted?

Mr Marlow: Could you repeat the question?

CHAIR: I am curious as to what your operators would do now, if the issue around production caps was going to be increased. Particularly, I was thinking about environmental and traffic inflows—the stuff that we as members of parliament would get from constituents, particularly if they were unsure.

Mr Long: With quarries that are in operation at the moment, the current environmental controls are there. What it becomes is maybe an hours-of-operation issue and, of course, absolutely we are looking at increased traffic movements—truck movements out of the quarry, that additional flow out over the weighbridge. I know that there are ways of addressing it. Transport and Main Roads are looking at transport haul routes and looking at the types of trucks that can be used on those routes. If we could get trucks with a big capacity, you would reduce the amount of travel movements for the same volume of product. I think there are ways of addressing that. I think also having that communications process—from community concern and your constituents that this is to address a specific outcome. It is not a catch-all forever and a day. When there are pinch points, we need to deliver good outcomes for the community. Whether it is roads—a targeted safety program, for instance; a great community initiative and a great safety initiative—or it is Olympics infrastructure, raw materials are needed. They are essential. Making sure we get cost certainty into the whole process is something that we cannot miss.

Mr G KELLY: When it comes to looking beyond this bill, what is the single biggest reform government could make to improve construction productivity?

Mr Long: It starts with industrial relations. That is probably outside this committee's remit. Productivity is not the sole thing we can hang our hat on; it is a combination of a range of small initiatives that will add up to a great outcome. Raw material supply is absolutely critical to productivity—as important as industrial relations. We need to find innovation. We are talking about recycling at the moment as well, as part of our submission. One of the statistics we use is that Victoria recycles about three million tonne a year of concrete products. We recycle 300,000. If we could even

get to half of that, we could bridge part of the problems we have with the quarry supply. There is a whole range of these little initiatives that are sitting there as low-hanging fruit, and we just have to be brave and start picking them off and they will all add up to a very good outcome.

Mr MARTIN: You mentioned the 2032 Olympics and the need for aggregate and quarries to supply the construction that will go along with that. A lot of the submitters have raised concerns about the power this bill has to essentially change all other bills depending on what the Deputy Premier directs—and the Coordinator-General. Would you agree that there should be a sunset clause? Should this bill really only last up until the Olympics or some other time when a review could be done? Is there a need for this to be the law in Queensland forever or would your organisation agree with a sunset clause?

Mr Long: I think a sunset clause is probably prudent but I think on the principle that it is to address a demand need. I think you could almost have reserve powers on this. If a pinch point arose again for another set of circumstances, I would not think because there was a sunset clause you would bury the process. We are a growing state. Our population growth now is far exceeding, year on year, what it is going to look like by 2040 and then 2050 and 2060. We are lucky that people want to come here. We are a fantastic state. We need to underpin it. It is not just roads and rail; we have housing and other infrastructure that all requires quarry products which underpin—asphalt, concrete. Sand is another issue as well. All these things are going to be in increasing demand. I am sure you have spoken to the cement and concrete association as well. We are not approving new quarries. It is difficult to do that. The federal environment laws make it very difficult, as well as our state laws. We do need to find triggers so that we can actually meet demand as quickly as we possibly can. If we can get a template that works into the future and we can turn it on and off as we need to, I think that would be great, but I do not think we can lose sight of the fact that we are not in the Stone Age anymore. We need to start really thinking about how we are going to address the supply issue here in Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you for your contribution and submission. We look forward to talking to you some more.

DUTOY, Mr Patrick, Senior Policy Adviser, States and Territories, Australian Energy Producers (via videoconference)

KNUDSEN, Mr Keld, General Manager, States and Territories, Queensland Director, Australian Energy Producers (via videoconference)

CHAIR: I invite to you make an opening statement around your submission or any other comments you would like to make and then we will have questions from the committee.

Mr Knudsen: I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, the Yagara and Turrbal people for me here in Brisbane, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present.

We welcome the committee's consideration of the State Development and Public Works Organisation (Critical Minerals) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and we appreciate the government's focus on legislation that is designed to attract investment into Queensland. It is important legislation for the delivery of state significant projects.

We acknowledge that the bill is focused on a new wave of globally significant critical minerals investment, but we note that under state significant projects some oil and energy projects may also benefit from this process. We think effective regulation should provide strong environmental, cultural, heritage and landholder protections while avoiding unnecessary duplication and giving investors the confidence they need for state significant projects, which can take years to develop, to be delivered in a timely and predictable manner. State significant projects are likely to be capital intensive, complex and characterised by long development timeframes. Strong coordination and clear, efficient and stable approvals are essential if Queensland is to remain an attractive destination for this sort of investment. We welcome the intent of the bill, in particular project coordination and facilitation, that will provide a strengthening of Queensland's position and in some instances provide tools that are already available in other jurisdictions, like we have seen in Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Territory.

We have made a made few comments on the bill in our submission. This includes that where a Coordinator-General process identifies an inefficiency, a duplication, a regulatory gap or some unintended interaction between statutory processes this should trigger a broader consideration within Queensland's regulatory framework. That would allow that project-specific solution to inform better and broader regulatory improvements. Secondly, in relation to modification orders, where modification orders consolidate duplicative approval processes where an equivalent assessment has already occurred, there would be some benefit in potentially establishing those more broadly. Finally, once a state significant project declaration has been made, we think there is some merit in some extra checks and balances to ensure that it cannot be amended or repealed in a way that impacts on that existing approval.

In the interests of time, we will close there and thank you for your consideration. We think this legislation and the strategic and targeted use of the Coordinator-General can improve Queensland's project coordination. We look forward to working constructively with the committee to achieve that outcome. Thank you. We are happy to take any questions.

Mr DALTON: The AEP supports the strategic project framework. What criteria should be used to determine whether an energy project is of state strategic significance?

Mr Knudsen: In our submission I was waxing lyrical about how any proponents are likely to think their project is of state significance. We certainly think that anything that could significantly contribute to Queensland's energy security, reliability and affordability should be considered to be of state significance. Of course, a lot of that would consider the scale, investment and a whole range of different factors. I do not think there is a single definition that we would use.

Mr SMITH: You ask for protection for proponents against later changes to declarations and modification orders, certainly for investors. Landholders get no equivalent certainty when an order is made over their objection. Should that be run both ways?

Mr Knudsen: That a modification could be made that may impact on a landholder at some point in the future?

Mr SMITH: Should they get the equivalent certainty and protection that you are asking for proponents against later changes to declarations and modification orders?

Mr Knudsen: I think the nuance in our position is that if a future change or modification might significantly or negatively impact on a project then there should be some protections in place for the project. I would not argue against similar protections for landholders or others who might be impacted or operating in a similar area. Where there is a future modification or change, the expectation would be that they would be engaged in that process.

Mr G KELLY: Do these reforms provide investors with greater long-term certainty when making billion dollar investment decisions?

Mr Knudsen: Yes, I think with the Coordinator-General process and more so in the legislative positions, the actual process of declaring a prescribed project and a state significant project and bringing all of those pieces together is very powerful. We have seen that used historically and certainly in other jurisdictions. If we look at what could be a future strategic base, the Taroom Trough is one that jumps into a lot of thoughts when we talk about that from an oil perspective. The ability to work as a single approval and consider all of the processes and additional approvals that are needed would be really significant for us. For investors, they are looking for that guided process that can really help when we are looking for competing capital. An area of the Taroom would require roads, pipelines, water, power infrastructure, multiple proponents and several layers of government agencies and approvals. Being able to bring all those pieces together is certainly a benefit that we think this process and the legislation could provide.

CHAIR: You mentioned duplication in your submission. What kinds of duplication are your members experiencing most commonly?

Mr Knudsen: Through the existing approvals there is a lot of work that went into the environmental EISs. Quite often we revisit those through environmental authorities and duplicative conditions, and there is a lot of overlap between that and some of the broader MER(CP)A and other legislation. We think there is an opportunity to streamline and make sure those conditions are consistent. We do see duplication at a federal level and appreciate this is out of scope for the discussion today.

Mr MARTIN: My question is about the Condamine Alluvium and how this bill impacts that. Does the bill's fast-tracking mechanisms for declaration processes for state significant projects or amendments to other legislation streamline or weaken existing protections for the Condamine Alluvium aquifer?

Mr Knudsen: We do not think this legislation would change or weaken the laws that we have seen recently passed through the parliament. We have not had an opportunity to really match those together, but in the Condamine we certainly think duplication should only be removed through any processes when it has been properly assessed under an equivalent process. Those specific thresholds, landholder requirements and notification requirements should all still be there. In the context of some previous discussion around modification orders, we certainly think they would be useful in order to guide consultation and reduce duplication on consultation around the Condamine, but we do not think that would occur. Patrick, is there anything that you want to add to that?

Mr Dutoy: I would maybe add that one of the thresholds for a modification order is to ensure it cannot have any significant detrimental effect on the environment, which does protect the Condamine Alluvium.

Mr MARTIN: In relation to removing the duplication, the duplication would be removed from the Condamine Alluvium bill and not from this bill. That is my understanding. Is that your understanding?

CHAIR: The RIDA is maintained there. Anyway, I will let the witnesses answer. You did not ask me.

Mr Knudsen: I might need to take that one on notice. I had a bit of trouble hearing.

CHAIR: Could you repeat the question for clarity?

Mr MARTIN: The question is about duplication, which you mentioned. You do not want to see duplication and that is fair enough. Obviously, there has been a lot of community concern about the Condamine Alluvium. A bill just went through parliament. The concern is that this bill could essentially override the Condamine Alluvium bill. In relation to duplication, which thing should be unduplicated or removed: the Condamine Alluvium rules or parts of this bill?

CHAIR: Are we looking for hypotheticals, member?

Mr MARTIN: I can rephrase: what is your organisation's understanding?

CHAIR: That is a better question.

Mr Knudsen: Certainly we appreciate the process that has been gone through. We have been paying close attention to a lot of the landholder discussions throughout the Condamine Alluvium discussion. When we looked at that legislation, the Condamine bill, mostly where we saw the duplication with the EA and the RIDA was where they were looking and asking for the same things. In the context of this bill, we do not think it would remove the right or the requirement for a proponent to seek a RIDA and have to get the protections that apply to that area. I think for a Coordinator-General report or for a coordinated project, we would still need to go through the steps in order to get that.

With the Condamine, for example, the area would first still need to be declared a prescribed area and then be declared a strategic project and then those next steps would need to follow with the Coordinator-General. It still does not remove the protections that are in place. The conditions would still need to be met to remain lawful under the Regional Planning Interests Act and the decisions would still be made by the planning department on MER(CP)A.

Mr DALTON: The bill focuses on legislative tools to be used to ensure timely and effective delivery of major economic developments such as critical mineral projects. What legislative tools could be used to assist AEP?

Mr Knudsen: In relation to possible future oil and gas projects, we think the ability of the Coordinator-General to sequence and coordinate overlapping approvals across agencies and potentially across other layers of government is probably the biggest tool that is available, particularly when we look at an area within the Taroom, for instance, but certainly there are other areas. We have other basins—the Denison Trough, for example—where there are multiple proponents and multiple needs. The ability of the Coordinator-General to bring all these pieces together and facilitate them is definitely a strength and requires effectively us to collaborate and work together in a more structured way.

CHAIR: Thank you, Keld and Patrick, for your contribution and your submission. We appreciate all of the efforts you have put into this inquiry.

HASTINGS, Mr Patrick, Chief Executive Officer, Gladstone Engineering Alliance

CHAIR: Welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement? Then the committee will have some questions for you.

Mr Hastings: Thank you very much, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to appear today. GEA represents more than 200 engineering, manufacturing, construction, maintenance, logistics and professional services businesses from across Central Queensland. Our members support construction, operations and maintenance of some of Queensland's most strategically important industrial, energy and infrastructure assets.

GEA supports the passage of this bill. We support its objectives in improving project facilitation, reducing unnecessary duplication, strengthening infrastructure coordination and providing greater certainty for strategically significant investments. We also recognise that robust environmental and planning assessments remain fundamental to maintaining public confidence and ensuring development occurs responsibly.

Our submission makes one very central point: approvals facilitate projects; delivery creates outcomes. This bill is an important reform but its long-term success will be ultimately measured not only by whether it improves approvals but also by whether it improves Queensland's ability to attract investment and successfully deliver major industrial development. Queensland is entering a period of industrial investment. Major industrial energy and critical mineral projects will increasingly compete for global investment capital. These jurisdictions that succeed will not simply be those with efficient approvals; they will be those that give investors confidence that projects can be successfully delivered.

That is why GEA believes the infrastructure coordination plan provisions are among the bill's most significant. Their value, however, will be determined by how effectively they improve coordination across government, infrastructure providers, proponents and regions. GEA believes that these plans should clearly identify infrastructure responsibilities, sequencing interdependencies and delivery risk, providing greater certainty about how enabling infrastructure will be planned, funded and delivered. Similarly, we believe that the implementation should improve forward visibility of future project activity for regional supply chains. This is not about influencing procurement outcomes or seeking preferential treatment for local businesses; it is about recognising that businesses make investment decisions well before construction begins. Better visibility provides businesses with confidence to invest in people, equipment, systems and capability so we are ready when opportunity arises.

Finally, our submission recommends that the Queensland government investigates the Gladstone State Development Area regional environmental intelligence pilot, based on the Shared Environmental Analytics Facility developed in Western Australia. Gladstone provides an ideal location for such a pilot because of the concentration of major industry, state development area land and the scale of future industrial investment anticipated for the region. The intent is not to replace statutory environmental assessment; rather, it is to improve quality and consistency of regional environmental artefact evidence and reduce unnecessary duplication and give a better understanding of cumulative impacts and support more informed decision-making in a timely manner.

In closing, GEA believes this bill provides an important opportunity to strengthen Queensland's project facilitation framework. Our recommendation is simply that these reforms are implemented but that equal attention is given to the system that enables successful project delivery. Ultimately, Queensland's competitiveness will not be determined by how effectively projects are approved but will be determined by whether its investors have confidence that Queensland is the best place to deliver them. We believe this bill is an important step forward in achieving that outcome. I welcome the committee's questions.

Mr SMITH: When I asked the Resources Centre of Excellence and GW3 what practical steps this bill implements, they seemed to say that the most practical thing was they coordinated plans and projects into a pipeline. In your submission you talk about coordination plans, needing clear funding and sequencing to be responsible and a practical delivery mechanism. Bearing in mind this is just going to create a bit of a pipeline, can you expand on that? What is a coordinated action plan worth without some certainty behind it?

Mr Hastings: I am sorry, I will just repeat that question back to you. What is a coordination plan worth if there is not funding certainty behind it?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

Mr Hastings: I think funding certainty comes from clean coordination, to be honest. There are two parts to it. There is government funding, which supports implementation. If it is well implemented and there is visibility over approval processes and confidence in approval processes then we will see international investment released into Queensland. Without that clarity, we see investment start to tighten.

Mr G KELLY: Patrick, would strong coordination between Gladstone, Mackay and Townsville to create a genuine Central Queensland critical minerals manufacturing corridor put us in a stronger position with this bill?

Mr Hastings: With this bill? Yes and no is the short answer. It really depends on the implementation and the way in which we define pathways in the delivery side. If the delivery side is project by project then the answer is no; it will actually create other challenges. If we start to take a systems approach and we look at it from a regional perspective rather than an LGA perspective then, yes, we will fundamentally start to shift the dial.

Mr KATTER: Can you just go through typical examples of where there are constraints and where you hope to get some benefit out of this, just to put some context around it?

Mr Hastings: Let's use the Gladstone State Development Area as a really good example. It has been sitting there for quite some time. At the moment we treat it as parcels of land for sale from an investment perspective. We do not think about how we would deliver that from a strategic perspective. As we start to see an investment come to town—new projects—we try and sell a block of land rather than facilitate a project. There is a lack of infrastructure planning, a lack of investment consideration that allows actual investment into the region. That is really where the coordination starts to come into play. If we are thinking about the system and we are thinking about what enables projects then we start to map out what are the constraints and how we are improving them as a state to make sure we are enabling investment and growth.

CHAIR: You talked about the state development area in Gladstone and you also mentioned an environmental intelligence pilot. Can you talk to the committee a bit more about that, please?

Mr Hastings: Over in Western Australia, the Western Australia Biodiversity Science Institute and the Western Australian Marine Science Institute have designed a platform that ultimately allows industry and government to share information without breaching areas like ACCC to allow the same models to be run over the information. It is a sharing of your environmental and social information that allows regulators and industry to look at the same information in the same way, reducing the conflict that occurs quite regularly over whether or not a report is seen as robust enough. Regulators and industry receive the same information and competitors are able to use the same information, so you can start to manage cumulative impacts of industry more effectively at the same time as starting to see an expedited approval process. The 10-year forecast return of value from that platform for the Pilbara and western Cockburn Sound is roughly \$1.7 billion at this point in time, just in approval improvements.

Mr MARTIN: Do you think there is a risk in the bill that the broad powers could favour certain proponents over others, so big companies over smaller ones? It is a concern that has been raised by some others.

Mr Hastings: We are talking about state significant projects, so I think big versus small really comes down to supply chain rather than whether or not one can be favoured over another. If we are talking about the coordination of state significant projects, if it is defined as a state significant project it should follow a process and that process should enable, regardless of size.

Mr DALTON: In your opinion, what are the legislative tools to ensure the timely and effective delivery of major economic development strategic projects? Can you be specific?

Mr Hastings: I would say this bill is a good start. From a state significant perspective, I think the Coordinator-General's powers are quite reasonable at this point in time. What we are seeing is that across the board when you are going through multiple processes, the ability to bring those together, to bring those to a head coordination-wise, is where the real benefit lies. Secondly, the ability to start coordinating and allocating responsibility for different pieces of enabling infrastructure would be fundamental.

CHAIR: Member for Bundaberg?

Mr SMITH: No. All good, Chair.

Mr G KELLY: Gladstone has demonstrated the value of an industrial cluster. Could the Mackay and Paget precinct become a singular advanced manufacturing hub servicing the critical minerals industry? What do you know of this area and the strength we have here?

Mr Hastings: I do not think I am qualified to say that one way or the other, to be honest.

Mr MARTIN: Following on from my last question, you talked about supply chains. I think you said in your submission that local businesses were frequently engaged too late in the project life cycle, after procurement models were already set. Noting that, does anything in this bill require early local supply chain feasibility?

Mr Hastings: Not from my memory. Where the value is added is that when you start creating a pipeline you start creating visibility, and when you start creating visibility you can grow confidence around particular areas, which then allows for early engagement. If your project is more visible and the approval pathway is very clear then there is a much bigger social licence requirement to start engaging with supply chains earlier. Then it comes down to organisations like mine to make sure we are working hand in hand with everybody.

CHAIR: Patrick, thank you for your contribution. Have a safe journey home. Thank you so much for your contribution to our committee.

Proceedings suspended from 1.37 pm to 1.52 pm.

HODGE, Ms Kristen, First Nations Legal Policy Committee, Queensland Law Society

JOLLY, Mr Peter, President, Queensland Law Society (via videoconference)

TIMBS, Mr Gerard, Member, Planning and Environmental Law Committee, Queensland Law Society (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement, after which committee members will have questions for you.

Mr Jolly: Thank you for inviting QLS to appear today. In opening, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, the Turrbal and Yagara people in Brisbane and the Yuibera people in Mackay, and pay my respects to elders past and present. With me in the room here in Brisbane is Gerard Timbs, a member of our Planning and Environmental Law Committee, and with you in person is Kristen Hodge, who is co-chair of our First Nations Legal Policy Committee and a member of our Rural, Regional and Remote Committee. As you know, the QLS is the peak professional body for the state's legal practitioners. We are an independent and apolitical representative body.

We certainly support efficient and effective regulatory frameworks that facilitate investments in major projects. Our submission in relation to the bill does raise some concerns that the bill expands executive powers while reducing some safeguards and, in particular, we have some concerns about the extent of the state significance notice modification on border powers, the reduction of review and appeal rights, and the compulsory acquisition provisions that may allow land to be acquired for the benefit of private proponents. Therefore, we encourage the committee to carefully consider whether the measures strike the appropriate balance between project facilitation, accountability and the rights of affected landholders and communities.

That is all I wanted to say as an opening statement. I will ask Kristen to briefly address the society's position regarding First Nations rights and cultural heritage protections, and then the committee might like to ask any questions which it might have.

Ms Hodge: Thank you, President Jolly and committee. The society submits that the bill's interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights requires careful consideration. We are concerned that removing the previous EIS linkage from aspects of the compulsory acquisition framework may weaken processes that often identify and manage cultural heritage impacts, including through cultural heritage management plans. The bill does not clearly explain how these impacts will be addressed if those processes are reduced or altered.

We also have concerns about the extent of the proposed modification orders and powers. While the explanatory notes state that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights cannot be excluded, greater legislative clarity is needed to ensure the cultural heritage protections and engagement processes cannot be unintentionally weakened through a project facilitation measure. The society respectfully submits that clarification and stronger protections are required for First Nations people and cultural heritage. We thank you and welcome any questions.

Mr KATTER: On the amendments, you said that targeted reform of existing coordinated projects and prescribed project frameworks may be preferable. What targeted amendments would QLS consider sufficient? What sorts of amendments are we going for?

Mr Jolly: Would you mind repeating that? We are having some sound issues.

Mr KATTER: You have suggested that targeted reform of existing coordinated projects and prescribed project frameworks may be preferable. Can you tell us what targeted amendments you would consider sufficient?

Mr Jolly: Are you asking about the framework that exists for coordinated projects and prescribed projects? Is that the question related to what is already there? We certainly have made some comments in our submission as to whether the new proposed powers, which are quite extensive, are necessary. Is that the nature of the question?

Mr KATTER: I am not clear if you had an idea of reforms considered by yourselves or whether it was something proposed by the government, but I gathered from the submission that you had some reforms in mind that could be done under the existing powers of the Coordinator-General.

Mr Jolly: No, we have not proposed any specific reform or amendments ourselves. Based on the current bill, we have provided in our submission a number of amendments that could be made to the bill, but certainly we have not put forward any reform or proposed amendments to the act itself.

We simply just said that there is an existing framework under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act related to existing coordinated project declarations, existing prescribed project powers, which raises questions or concern about the under-utilisation of those existing powers. A lot of what is now being proposed in this new bill is perhaps there already but is not being utilised to the full extent.

Mr KATTER: Could you give us an example, retrospectively? Is there something in the past you could point your finger at to say that that decision, as you would see it, provided a good outcome and may not be prevented under the new laws? Could you put some context around some of your concerns?

Mr Jolly: I cannot think of a specific example of a project that has gone through the existing framework, whether that be a prescribed project or a coordinated project. I cannot give you an example off the top of my head, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr KATTER: Don't worry. I am sure there are many issues that it sugar-coats. That is alright.

Mr DALTON: Regarding the judicial review of state strategic project declarations that you recommend, how long does a judicial review take and why does the QLS consider statutory judicial review important for this decision?

Mr Jolly: Can you be specific? Are you talking in reference to a specific provision that we have suggested, or is that—

Mr DALTON: The QLS recommends reinstating that judicial review for state strategic project declarations.

Ms Hodge: The state significant notice decisions are excluded from a judicial review process. Normally a judicial review process is on the merits and the processes undertaken by government to say that that is the right process undertaken. That has been removed. Now the only mechanism for our regional, remote and community landholders and community members is the Supreme Court. There is nothing really there that gives anybody any relief except going to that higher level of court. Our concern is really a practical aspect: how do you allow community members to know that the government has made the decision in the way that the process has happened in accordance with the legislation? Judicial review is about whether the government have done everything they said they were supposed to do under the legislation to make that decision, and there is no review process for that now except in the Supreme Court.

Mr DALTON: How long does a judicial review normally take?

Ms Hodge: I would have to take that on notice.

Mr DALTON: Roughly. Is it weeks? Months? Years?

Ms Hodge: It is months.

Mr MARTIN: My question is with regard to compulsory acquisition. Members on this committee would probably have some experience with compulsory acquisitions in their electorates. I had some houses that were required to be resumed to build a level crossing, but that is private ownership going to a public asset. This bill is a little bit different, though. It departs from that. It looks like essentially private property can be taken from one landholder and then given to another private entity. Can you describe for the committee how that departs from the traditional justification for compulsory acquisition?

Mr Timbs: I am happy to respond to that question. The bill allows land to be compulsorily acquired by the state, conferred by the person for a project that is of a public nature. As you have alluded to, that is a fundamental departure from the traditional justification in the traditional process for compulsory acquisition. There are some concerns that we have raised about that, and there appears to be silence on it. Certainly it allows the power for the minister to acquire the land for a public purpose, but then it does not go through the manner in terms of who is liable for compensation that would be payable to that landowner who is having their land acquired. Is it the private company that is benefiting from that acquisition, or will it be the state that is ultimately responsible for the compensation payable? It is a departure from the normal path for compulsory acquisition.

Having said that, there is an ability already under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act for the Coordinator-General to have the power to acquire land for a public infrastructure facility. That is a power that is there; the Coordinator-General already has a power to acquire land. It sets out in the act already the process that needs to be undertaken in order for that to occur. There is already a power which relates to acquisition for a private infrastructure facility. It just does not go as far as this current bill does when it comes to acquisition of land for a private purpose.

Mr G KELLY: Do you believe judicial review continues to provide an appropriate safeguard under this framework?

Mr Timbs: Yes.

Mr SMITH: My question is with regard to the compulsory acquisition process. The submission says that the bill undermines the identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage because the EIS is what triggers the cultural heritage management plan. My further question is: what are the possible impacts on native title rights, but specifically ILUAs, when there is compulsory acquisition of one commercial entity, giving that to another commercial entity, with that prior commercial entity having signed into an ILUA with First Nations people?

Ms Hodge: There is a mechanism that requires that at least a proponent attempts to enter into an Indigenous land use agreement prior to, but there is no clarification of anything behind that. From our perspective, if you have an environmental impact statement, that is the only thing that mandatorily requires the proponent to meet with the group and speak about how they deal with native title and cultural heritage in the area. Because compulsory acquisition falls under the future act regime at a Commonwealth level, it does not require an Indigenous land use agreement. There are quite significant concerns there, because the only mechanism that allows people to sit down with the group is being removed for compulsory acquisition processes.

Mr SMITH: Could it make an ILUA null and void? One commercial entity has entered into an ILUA and then compulsorily acquiring—giving that land to another commercial entity. What impact could that potentially have on an ILUA?

Ms Hodge: It depends if they signed it, if they took on those obligations, but I might have to take that one on notice and get back to you about the mechanisms of how the contracts work.

Mr SMITH: Yes, please. That would be excellent, thank you.

CHAIR: Noted. While we are talking about that issue, I was interested in the cultural management plans. Would you be able to give some examples or clarity for the committee members who might not necessarily be au fait with what that might look like?

Ms Hodge: Under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act in Queensland, section 23 requires that every land user must exercise a duty of care. The duty of care gives you a list a court might consider as to how you have engaged with Aboriginal people. It essentially allows a proponent to go ahead and self-assess on cultural heritage. If you are mandatorily required to do a part 7 cultural heritage agreement, you have to either provide a cultural heritage agreement or provide a native title agreement that specifically speaks about cultural heritage, and that is the only mechanism that allows that agreement. While section 23 of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act requires everybody to deal with cultural heritage, it does not require the Aboriginal party to be involved.

CHAIR: Give us a grassroots example, though, where that might be applicable. That is a high-level matter. What do these management plans look like, though? Is it over waterways? Is it over—

Ms Hodge: It is over the whole project area—multiple approvals. If you are putting down pipelines, you would have everything covered into that. It would be how you manage cultural heritage, mitigate, avoid, when the group comes out—that sort of thing. It works essentially like an Indigenous land use agreement but specifically covers how cultural heritage is managed, not only at the start of the project but also while the project is happening.

Mr MARTIN: I have asked a similar question of other submitters and I wanted to get the QLS's opinion on sunset clauses. Do you think that would be an appropriate safeguard, considering the broad nature of the act? Should it include an amendment that basically has a sunset clause so that these laws cannot stay in Queensland forever?

Mr Timbs: We put in one of our proposed amendments to consider a sunset date for modification orders and state significance notices. It is a protection that would be reinstated. If it is to proceed with the existing modification orders and state significance notices, having a sunset date there provides a level of protection that currently does not exist.

CHAIR: With that, our time is at an end. We really appreciate your effort and coming down the highway through the roadworks. Thank you to those in Brisbane for your contribution. As always, we appreciate the interest you take in our committee's work and that of other committees. Thank you very much to the Law Society members.

CAPTAIN-WEBB, Mr Jonathon, Director, First Nations Program, Environmental Defenders Office (via videoconference)

KWAN, Mr Andrew, Managing Lawyer, Queensland, Environmental Defenders Office (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. Thank you so much not only for the effort you put into your submission but also for being with us today. I will hand over to you, as a spokesperson on behalf of the Environmental Defenders Office, to make an opening contribution and then we will have some questions for you as we go forward.

Mr Kwan: Good afternoon, committee, and thank you for the invite today. I acknowledge the Yuibera people as the traditional owners of the country on which you are meeting today, and the Yagara and Turrbal people as the traditional owners of the country that Jon and I are coming from. I pay our respects to elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people present today. The Environmental Defenders Office is a community legal centre specialising in planning, environment and resources laws. For more than 35 years we have provided legal service to Queenslanders from all walks of life.

We are very concerned about the bill and implore the committee to recommend that it not be passed. Firstly, on process, the government's consultation on the draft bill was poor, excluding any First Nations community or public interest stakeholders. The government also has not provided evidence of particular problems with the existing laws to justify the extraordinary powers that wildly deviate from established lawmaking principles. Secondly, on the content, we say the bill was developed in an ad hoc and opaque way with largely unchecked decision-making in a way we have never seen before in Queensland. The lack of appropriate safeguards will see a severe undermining of community confidence in government and the social licence of the project proponents as well as put at significant risk our unique environment and existing economic values.

Mr Captain-Webb: I will make some observations from a First Nations perspective on the proposed legislation. First, there appears to be little meaningful engagement with First Nations organisations during the development of the bill, despite its potential to significantly impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Queensland. Legislation that affects First Nations people should be developed through genuine partnership and consistent with the well-recognised principles of free, prior and informed consent.

Second, the bill gives the government lower discretionary powers to determine which projects are to be declared state significant or state strategic projects and therefore gain access to these extraordinary powers. These powers are not confined to critical minerals and could apply to a wide range of developments across Queensland, including ecotourism. For many First Nations communities, such projects may have significant and irreversible impacts to country and cultural heritage. The bill provides little clarity on how these decisions will be made, what limits will apply to those powers and how First Nations will participate in the process.

Third, we are particularly concerned about the proposed modification order powers. While the bill preserves certain key authorisations, the bill does not clearly safeguard current cultural heritage laws, native title processes, human rights protections, consultation requirements or access to the courts from being weakened or modified by these discretionary powers. The uncertainty creates risks not only for First Nations but also for proponents and government seeking development certainty.

Mr MARTIN: My first question is about consultation. I think you touched on it in your submissions. How do you think the government has consulted on this bill? You raised concerns that only industry bodies saw parts of the draft bill before introduction and the public then only had three weeks to respond to a bill that is really quite complex. What did that mean for the communities that you represent?

Mr Kwan: I am having a little bit of trouble hearing. I understand the question to be views on the consultation; is that right?

Mr MARTIN: Correct.

Mr Kwan: As outlined in the departmental briefing paper, it appears government consulted with government departments, key industry stakeholders and some government owned corporations. I think at most the community or public-facing organisations would have been Local Government Association of Queensland and Coexistence Queensland. We know that LGAQ made some sensible, thoughtful analysis and recommendations, and we commend those aspects to the committee. Really, as you have highlighted, there has been no public consultation more broadly or even targeted

consultation with other interest groups—community, First Nations, agricultural, environmental. For a proposal of this magnitude and for such a large proposed deviation from conventional legislative principles, there really should have been a much more wide-reaching and thorough consultation process.

Mr DALTON: What consultation and review rights does the EDO consider should apply before a modification order is made?

Mr Kwan: I am sorry: it is just very quiet at my end. I could not quite hear the details.

Mr DALTON: I will give it to you again. What consultation and review rights does EDO consider should apply before a modification order is made?

Mr Kwan: When considering the option to make modification orders, there should be some prior publishing by the minister of the material that identifies either the duplicitous legal provisions in the statute that may be sought to be excluded or modified or, in the alternative, where modifications orders can be made in relation to overcoming provisions that are problematic. For example, given new technologies, we think the rationale should be published in advance about why the modification orders should be made, those recommendations and supporting material made public and a chance for the broader community, given the scope, to comment on the proposed use of the powers. There are also some other accountability measures that can be put in place, such as requiring the minister to publish a final statement of reasons about any potential declaration as well as reporting requirements back to parliament or similar about the use of the powers on a frequent basis.

Mr SMITH: It is a little bit hard to hear clearly through Teams so you may need to relay this. I asked the Queensland Law Society what potential impacts this bill has in terms of an ILUA. If there is a commercial entity that has agreed to an ILUA and then through compulsory acquisition another commercial entity is coming into that space, onto that land, does that have an ability to break the ILUA? I am not sure whether you have any answer to that, but I bring it up because I note your submission says that the bill does not reflect free, prior or informed consent for First Nations people.

Mr Captain-Webb: With respect to this bill and what is proposed, we do see where there is a compulsory acquisition process and that is negotiated or consented to via an Indigenous land use agreement with the relevant native title claimants or native title holders, that is a process that can be negotiated. However, where there are third parties who are not a party to the Indigenous land use agreement who are then impacted by those negotiations there is a process for people to be involved and it is largely through appealing to the National Native Title Tribunal or to the Federal Court. For us, it is critical that as part of this legislation, where it does intersect with native title rights and interests—engaging one of those principles of free, prior and informed consent where First Nations communities are able to negotiate with developers and proponents and the state government as a party to any Indigenous land use agreement. It is how we bring whole of community along for the journey as well, so private landholders and their interests. Any private interests in public land estates need to be considered as well.

Unfortunately, where there are Indigenous land use agreements negotiated it is largely through native title groups, government, developers and proponents, but it does not have a holistic approach to bring all of community along on the journey. That is why it is critical—and it is part of our recommendations in our submission alongside the Law Society—that there is robust consultation with First Nations communities across Queensland to ensure that, yes, the native title processes are considered but also the additional rights and interests that do not often fit within those Indigenous land use agreements.

Mr G KELLY: I think we have touched on this question a couple of times in different ways. Queensland clearly needs to improve investment and competitiveness. What amendments would allow the government to streamline approvals while maintaining the safeguards your organisation seeks?

Mr Kwan: Can you repeat the question? It was about recommendations to maintain safeguards that enable development?

Mr G KELLY: To streamline approvals while maintaining the safeguards your organisation seeks.

Mr Kwan: Really, there needs to be a close examination of the problematic legislative provisions—the sections of the other acts that are causing the purported duplicitous nature of approvals or causing delay. The material that has been tabled or provided with the bill does not go into that level of detail about where these problematic provisions are. That kind of analysis would really help best form an answer to the most effective governance for Queensland. The other

jurisdictions that have made these laws have different values. They do not have a Human Rights Act, they do not have more heritage properties than any other state and territory, they do not have almost half the head of cattle of Australia in their state, they do not have the Great Barrier Reef and they are not the most natural disaster-prone state. I think a close examination of the problematic provisions in the other acts is required in light of Queensland's special values.

Mr MARTIN: I have a question about ecotourism. In your submissions you raised a concern that potentially this bill could facilitate ecotourism development in our national parks that the current laws prohibit. Could you walk the committee through that, please?

Mr Kwan: I am sorry, I did not quite hear the end of that question, member. It was about our national parks and ecotourism and our concerns around it?

Mr MARTIN: Exactly, yes.

Mr Kwan: Thank you for clarifying. In the Deputy Premier's speech to parliament he did say that (inaudible) ventures in national parks would be out of bounds, but the provisions in the bill do not make that clear. In fact, if a state strategic project was declared and a modification order was proposed then we cannot see any particular limits on the Nature Conservation Act, which is, as you are no doubt aware, the key act governing national parks and other protected areas, from such a modification order changing the way in which ecotourism projects can proceed in a national park. Other states have identified particular off-limits areas or particular acts or particular parts in which an act cannot be modified, but I believe it currently says the object of an act, like the Nature Conservation Act, could be overcome if it is basically in the state interest.

We have grave concerns about the cardinal principles of the Nature Conservation Act being overcome by way of a modification order. One of the problems with the bill as drafted in relation to modification orders is that there is a lack of clarity or definition around what is a duplicitous provision that would enable a ground for a modification order to be made. Is it in the nature of what part of the assessment process? Is it a federal-state interaction? It is just not clear. Similarly, the other problem here if we are making a modification order is that it is also unclear when an assessment provision is unsuitable to deal with a particular development. It is really requiring much more clarity around how those operational issues ought to operate.

CHAIR: Thank you for your time. Thank you for the interest you have taken in this particular inquiry, as always, and we look forward to talking more soon.

MARTIN, Ms Jo, Policy Adviser, Water, Queensland Farmers' Federation (via videoconference)

MURRAY, Mr Michael, Chair, Water and Energy Committee, Queensland Farmers' Federation (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. Thank you for your contribution to this inquiry. I will hand over to you to make an opening statement. Then we will have some questions.

Mr Murray: Good afternoon. Are you guys getting a lot of feedback?

CHAIR: You are fine to go.

Mr Murray: I am getting feedback on my end. We represent the Australian cotton growers. There are about (inaudible) of them in Queensland. Many of them operate on some of the best cropping country in Australia. It only seems a few weeks ago that we were talking to this committee about the regional planning interests bill.

We are concerned. Maybe my concerns are unfounded, but we are concerned that this bill could have undone some of the good work of what was restored under the Regional Planning Interests Act. We are really concerned about any changes that diminish any form of protection to Queensland's best agricultural land and probably the best (inaudible) even limited is how (inaudible) the agricultural areas or strategic cropping land under the Regional Planning Interests Act. I have to admit that I do not have the background. I am not a lawyer. I am not even a bush lawyer when it comes to these sorts of issues. I admit there is a lot of conflicting advice on this bill, but it does seem to me that this bill opens the pathway to override some of those protections on our best of the best land.

What I am calling on this committee to do is to be absolutely certain that that is not the case. If it is the case, we need recommendations and amendments to the bill to ensure that the best of the best land is protected. We are not against development. We realise that it is (inaudible) but there is a very small amount of really good ag land in Queensland and it needs to be protected for future generations. I will leave it there. I will forward you my formal written statement, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Jo, do you want to add anything or are you happy to take questions?

Ms Martin: We are happy to take questions, Mr Chair. I just reiterate that the QFF was engaged in significant work to welcome the reform and the recommendations by the committee with regard to the consideration of the Condamine bill. We also share the concerns of all QFF members and obviously those raised by our epic chair, Michael Murray, with regard to the potential unknown for erosion of those hard-won protections, particularly for the RIDA in this instance.

Mr G KELLY: Obviously the amendments to the legislation that went through the House several weeks back showed that the committee listened to the people. Here we are again today. With this bill, is it that you are hearing what gets said around the back of the ute or are you really starting to see that there is a pattern here? From what has been said here today in this inquiry, I have noticed a lot of common sense. In my community, I have found issues raised about this that need to be defused in a commonsense way, because at the end of the day this legislation is about moving forward with where we want to go with the state. It is not about acquiring some of the best land in the world to basically dig up and destroy. It is all about working together. Jo, what do you think about this, really? Do you feel it is 'here we go again' or would a bit more information be great for you to move forward with this?

Ms Martin: Within this capacity at the moment, there is significant uncertainty within this bill and there are too many unknowns for us at the moment to understand if some of the provisions within the bill will continue to consolidate a RIDA process, maybe for the sake of the environment impact process, for example. As Michael alluded to earlier, it really is not clear how the impacts will be felt, particularly across that priority agricultural area and strategic cropping land. We are probably asking the committee to really unpack what the testing exercise is and the robust nature of the protection provisions for agricultural land, and ensure there are measured outcomes to quantify if there are impacts to land. Then we have a dedicated process to go through. Michael, would you like to make any other comments?

Mr Murray: I think Jo has nailed it. We are really concerned that this does (inaudible) pathway to get around the Regional Planning Interests Act and the limited protections it provides. We are not qualified to make that definitive. We have seen legal advice and other advice that runs both sides of the argument. It is hard to cut through, but I think this committee really needs, and even requires, to engage independent legal advice. It needs to satisfy itself that it in no way diminishes those limited

protections because that is actually critical. I do not know the ins and outs of the (inaudible) clause, but when you read it at a higher level it would seem to give the government the ability to override its own act. I know (inaudible) that is only in exceptional circumstances, but we are dealing with exceptional land as well. Maybe it is a case of just (inaudible) if that is the power this bill would give the government.

Mr SMITH: My question is in two parts. I know that the member for Mirani is getting slammed on Facebook about there not being enough ag groups consulted in the lead-up to the bill or even within this hearing. I will ask a broader question. Can you reflect on what consultation QFF underwent with the government? With regard to the RIDA, which comes from the Regional Interests Planning Act that classifies ag land as being a regional interest, compulsory acquisition in this bill, sections 143 and 146, require no consideration of agricultural land classification, the viability of what remains of the farm or water infrastructure. Could you explain to the committee what losing even a few hectares of prime agricultural land can mean to a farming family?

Mr Murray: It is probably a bit hard to put that definitively. When you have some of the best of the best land, to have any sort of compulsory acquisition hanging over you is not good for those individuals, but it is also not good for the overall resources of the state. One of the key things is the big difference between, say, coal seam gas and renewable developments. At the moment, a farmer actually has to actively agree if they want to host renewables. This takes off that (inaudible) right by providing for compulsory acquisition. That in itself I think is, again, very scary. Again, it diminishes the very limited rights that landholders have. We are probably not so naive that we think compulsory acquisition should not apply anywhere in the state, but when you really have the best of the best land then, as a state, we should be absolutely determined to protect its productive capacity for future generations.

Mr DALTON: You are very clear on your concerns about compulsory acquisition powers for state strategic projects. What safeguards should be included relating to the acquisition of agricultural land?

Mr Murray: Could you repeat that question?

Mr DALTON: What safeguards should be included relating to the acquisition of agricultural land?

Mr Murray: Again, that is very broad and there is no 'one size fits all'. We understand if there is really an absolutely (inaudible) project. There is a lot of land in Queensland, and when push comes to shove some of it may be eligible for compulsory acquisition. What we are really focused on here is: when we have the very best of the ag land, why would we open an additional bar that might see that land being eroded?

Mr KATTER: I would make an exception. I hold the view that there are already inadequacies in current protections around prime ag land. Your view at this point is that this could expose those weaknesses or exacerbate that same problem. Is that a fair characterisation of your position?

Mr Murray: Yes, that is a very much a fair characterisation. I think it has been absolutely highlighted by what the whole ag community went through with the recent Regional Planning Interests Act bill. There was great concern that, even if this bill is only used in very limited circumstances, it is a backdoor way to get around the rights that were actually restored when the previous law was amended and then passed in parliament.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Michael and Jo, as always, for your interest in and passion for this issue. We do appreciate the work that you do as an organisation. We will continue to engage. We thank you for your time and effort.

BRANDENBURG, Mr Shane, Manager, Economic Development, Isaac Regional Council

ROBERTS, Ms Heidi, Director, Community Services, Isaac Regional Council

CHAIR: Welcome. I will hand over to you for an opening statement. Then the committee will have some questions for you.

Ms Roberts: Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today on behalf of Isaac Regional Council. Jessica Bugeja is not with us today. She is an apology.

Our core position is that the Isaac Regional Council supports the ambition behind this bill. Queensland has a major opportunity in critical minerals and Isaac is well placed to help deliver it. Our position is straightforward: Isaac is ready to support growth, but growth must be planned, coordinated regional development and not just individual project approval. Council must be an equal partner as per the Equal Partners in Government agreement.

The opportunity is significant as we unlock new industry that creates new investment, new economic opportunities, processing and mine rehabilitation, and stronger local supply chains, but the business risk is also clear. A new commodity need not give rise to a whole new approvals framework or any legislative inconsistency. If approvals are accelerated without matching investment in roads, housing, water, community services and local infrastructure then growth will land as pressure on communities rather than lasting regional benefit. That is our consistent message. The communities that host major industry generate enormous economic contributions and carry cumulative impacts, and they must have a genuine seat at the table. They must be empowered by a consistent, harmonised legislative framework and they must see a fair return on the economic contributions that we make. That is the only way we can continue to contribute to the future of the nation's economy.

Council's central position is that our decision-making authority, delivery responsibility and community impact must remain at the fore. Streamlining can reduce duplication for the state and it can give proponents clearer and greater certainty. However, alternative parallel planning pathways ultimately leave councils managing multiple processes, as well as the consequences, without sufficient authority, information or resourcing to influence outcomes.

For Isaac, the practical requirements are clear. The legislation and implementation framework should be harmonised. They should provide clear and transparent thresholds for extraordinary planning powers and there must be mandatory consideration of cumulative regional impacts and a coordinated view on regional requirements. Council must be treated as an equal delivery partner, not an afterthought. Regardless of who makes the approval decision, local government is left to manage much of what follows on the ground for the life of a project.

We therefore ask that the bill be supported by mechanisms that formalise local government in key state decisions and aim for a harmonising framework and the delivery of enabling common user infrastructure that is clearly funded and that identifies community impacts and the requirements that are considered and that are financed accordingly. This will require deliberate coordination from all levels of government. In particular, enabling common user infrastructure actually unlocks multiple projects. We ask for coordination of investment and the reduction of duplication. We aim to improve productivity and we want to avoid the shifting of costs onto councils and communities.

We support responsible acceleration, but success will only be measured by reform that enables community benefit, as I said before, harmonisation of legislation and the strengthening of local communities and thus the creation of long-term regional value. Our region generates billions of dollars of opportunity for Queensland and Australia. Partnering with us to ensure a coordinated approach will continue to unlock these opportunities. Vesting local councils with the authority they need to deliver the critical minerals opportunity is a must. We ask that the legislation and its implementation settings give local government the formalised standing, resourcing and authority required to help turn critical minerals reform into an enduring opportunity not just for our region and the state but also for the nation and the world.

CHAIR: I am curious to flesh that out a bit more. You talked about formalised partnerships. I am curious why you would think that does not exist now with the state and it is outside the scope of this bill.

Ms Roberts: We have two strands of legislative frameworks at the moment, one of which is working well for us. Obviously, we administer a raft of coalmining projects, but we also have renewables legislation underway at the moment, and one of the parts of that which is working really

well is the community benefit agreement framework. We are aware that in our region we will be needing to lobby for community under coal and major project approvals and then we have a different framework for renewables. We do not want to end up with another framework for critical minerals.

The piece of the renewables legislation that is working really well is the social impact assessment, the development of a social impact management plan and then a community benefit agreement. We have been able to map what our communities need economically and socially and what is of most importance to them. Then we can frame up those agreements so they can deliver on those. Without that mechanism, without that community benefit agreement in place—we would love to trust that all industry in our region will operate within their enviro thresholds and do well by community, but it locks it in. It gives our community surety, and that is something we can monitor compliance on and report to other councils on. That is something that is working really well that we can see at the moment.

Mr Brandenburg: Council does acknowledge its role as an advisory agency. If it were a referral or a concurrence agency, it would have a greater role in that implementation planning.

Mr MARTIN: Thank you for your submission. Your submission describes the central problem with the bill: decision-making is being moved away from local governments to the state whilst the service delivery obligations and community expectations—the angry emails from the ratepayers—will still be your problem, the council's issue to deal with. What would that misalignment look like in a practical application every day for the Isaac Regional Council?

Ms Roberts: One of the challenges we can see in this is that some of the powers for a minister to make an overriding determination undermine our planning and local government infrastructure plans to some extent. It does end up creating additional duplication, where someone might think they are progressing through one process but the minister can override that. We end up with on-the-ground complications including—and we have major projects in our region, so our rate base is not necessarily a residential one; it is largely company related—outcomes that are not necessarily beneficial to a community if the priority has been put on the delivery of a project.

Mr Brandenburg: On the ground we have seen, again, that associated service infrastructure, whether it be health services or those ancillary services, or the cumulative elements may not be accounted for or considered in a central project. Local government infrastructure such as waste facilities, water treatment plants and the associated infrastructure may not be fully considered through the planning process. Whether you are looking at a single-rise project or a major project, those ancillary local government responsibilities and sometimes state responsibilities such as emergency services, police and ambulance et cetera are considered at the same time, so there is that integrated planning. We welcome many of the things that the act talks to, but on the ground that across-agency understanding is important.

Ms Roberts: I will build on that a little further. On any given night in our region we have 15,000 FIFO workers. We have 22,000 residents and 15,000 FIFO workers, so it is material. Even though the project has been approved and the FIFO workforce comes in, they do use our services such as water and police. All of the services that service a town are utilised by FIFO workers, who then leave and take their money with them. We would love to encourage everyone to reside in our region. The impact on our services is real. Medical services, our township, our roads—all of that is a tangible material impact.

CHAIR: That includes roads with heavy machinery on it.

Mr G KELLY: I commend you for what you have done out there with Isaac Regional Council and renewables and getting those legacy projects up and running. With that change to the legislation, communities come first and obviously councils are right there with them. The way you are speaking today, your uncertainty is that council will be left behind with this bill. We see the nervousness there. Does there need to be nervousness when working with the government to get these projects going? If they are going to go ahead, are you saying government would not talk to council about what is going on in your patch?

Ms Roberts: That is not our experience. Our experience to date with the Coordinator-General has been a very positive one and there has been lots of engagement, which is time and place; you would hope that would be locked in for the future. The formalisation of us being a concurrence agency and on paper having that power would give us a lot more comfort. As we said before, in the negotiation stage everyone is amicable and that is lovely. However, when it comes down to it, if it is not locked in as part of the governance structure that we are a concurrence agency with decision-making power, ultimately the decisions will be made about our region at a state level. That is why we would strongly

advocate for the community benefit agreement. The renewables framework is working particularly well. I think it is about having the surety that comes with the nomination of us performing that particular role. We have our planning powers and we do not want to see those devolved or undermined.

Mr Brandenburg: To quickly add to that point, again we refer to the LGAQ submission and the representative of local government. Our experience with the Coordinator-General's office has been quite strong. We are first in this sort of activity. In local government sectors across Queensland that is a different experience and understanding. That nervousness does remain for us and for others.

Ms Roberts: For other councils.

Mr KATTER: I just want to drill down on that. You brought up a really good point around FIFO. I think that is often where there can be a conflict between the desired outcome of the state and of the local or regional area. There might be a strategy to build a water plant and build the demand for that, but you need to demonstrate that there is growth in the population, whereas the government might not be as willing to walk down that road with you and try to give you the quick fix of FIFO. I want to emphasise that point. I can see that could play a big role or be a risk in the application of this. You might not always align locally—and I see the same in the areas I represent—with what the state might see as the best outcome for the rest of Queensland. That is pretty consistent with what you are saying?

Ms Roberts: Absolutely. A lot of the census data, for example, relates to someone's home base. It does not actually evidence that we have that many people utilising our services on any given night, even though you are meant to fill out the census for where you are. A lot of our data—

Mr KATTER: We are going through that now, aren't we?

Ms Roberts: Yes. A lot of our data shows, 'There are not that many of you out there. What is the demand on your services?', but we know it is real on any given night.

CHAIR: Thank you again for being with us today. I appreciate your input and your stamina. That brings to a conclusion this part of our hearing. I notice some people in the crowd who have been here for the hearing as well. Does anyone want to make a contribution?

McDONAGH, Mr Thomas, Private capacity

Mr McDonagh: I am a local in the Mackay region and I work predominantly in the Central Highlands. I stand before you today as a concerned citizen. I do not pretend to be a legal expert or of a scholarly background; nor am I a greenie or a NIMBY. I work in a coalmine and, like most people here, I understand the importance of the resources sector to our state and to our country. However, what I have seen and understood of the legislation, including what has been said today, quite frankly concerns me.

The act of amendment gives unilateral power to the minister to declare a project an SSP under the new mechanism of modification orders under part 5A, division 3B. The act allows a regulation to prescribe that a stated provision of the act that would otherwise apply to a state strategic project does not apply or applies within stated modifications, essentially allowing the minister to supersede most, if not all, regulatory oversight or, more concerning, oversight from the review as per the Judicial Review Act 1991. This, in turn, with the act's other powers of expanded compulsory acquisition and reforms made in the 2026 restoring electoral fairness act, which allows developers to donate to political parties, leaves me concerned that this reform will begin to lead us down a path where corrupt and unscrupulous individuals can donate to the party and ministers of government, who will in return wave through projects that either require significant oversight or should not go ahead at all.

I think we all know that we are at the beginning of a major boom in both oil and gas in the Taroom Trough and in critical minerals. What we should not do in the rush to profit is allow the resources curse to take hold and destroy our land or allow the rot of graft and corruption to line the halls of power. Even if the Crisafulli government only uses these powers justly and fairly for the betterment of the state, what about the next government or the government after that?

We have already heard today from representatives of different lobbying groups such as the Civil Contractors Federation who wish to expand the scope of an SSP, to be quite blunt, to non-critical industries. Do you really want to risk the harm they could do with these powers? When these powers are baked in, the brackets will creep. Why would a future government, when given the reins, give up these powers? We should be concerned because people are not perfect. When the cancer of corruption sets in, short of a complete purge it is near impossible to root it out.

We have been lucky so far in Queensland. If you look anywhere else in the world that has a predominantly resources economy, you see that it is bad. We are lucky here and we are lucky with the procedures and the policies that we have. We just have to be concerned about the powers not necessarily regarding this government but governments in the future and where this legislation can go.

I hope the ladies and gentlemen of the committee take these concerns into account. I would like to thank them for their time and for listening.

CHAIR: Thank you, Thomas. Does anyone else want to make a statement?

EVANS, Mr Christopher, Secretary, Mackay Conservation Group

Mr Evans: Thank you for the opportunity to make a statement today. I am secretary of the Mackay Conservation Group, which was formed by Mackay locals over 40 years ago. Volunteers from the group have been advocating for the protection of the land and water resources that our communities and ecosystems depend upon. Our group is very concerned about the proposed State Development and Public Works Organisation (Critical Minerals) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. We are deeply concerned that this bill will strip away protections for Queensland's precious water and land resources and erode the rights of communities and landholders to have a say in the developments that directly impact us.

The bill significantly increases the powers of the Minister for State Development and Queensland Coordinator-General to make decisions behind closed doors without adequate scrutiny and locking out communities. The bill appears to heavily favour proponents of large projects—not just critical mineral projects—over landholders and citizens. We are deeply concerned about this bill's unjustified power to exclude or modify other acts at the behest of the Coordinator-General or planning minister. The bill overrides the rights of landholders and communities, allowing proponents to access private land and carry out activities, with little or no recourse for landholders. Private proponents will also be allowed to shortcut environmental assessments and avoid community consultation.

Queenslanders rely on hard-won safeguards such as rigorous environmental impact assessments, meaningful community consultation and community objection rights. We do not want to be silenced and see our legitimate concerns about the impacts of projects on water, farmland and regional communities overridden by private corporate interests. The Mackay Conservation Group considers this bill unacceptable and urges the committee to withdraw the proposed legislation. Communities and landholders should be at the centre of laws that protect land and water, not private industry.

I table an open letter with hundreds of signatures from regional Queenslanders calling for proposed laws to put communities first. Thank you so much for your time.

CHAIR: Thank you, Chris. This was accepted as a late submission from another submitter.

I will conclude the hearing now. Thank you to everyone who participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. There was one question on notice from the Queensland Law Society. QLS will have to provide its response by Monday, 20 July. With that, I will conclude the hearing.

The committee adjourned at 3.04 pm.