

Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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INQUIRY INTO PLANNING (SOCIAL IMPACT AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2025

SUBMISSION TO THE STATE DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND WORKS COMMITTEE

via: SDIWC - Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 - Submission

Submissions due 20 May 2025, midday

Dear Committee Members,

As the Federal Member for Flynn, I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important legislation that is impacting my communities. Having only had a brief time to read this Bill; I would like to focus on the following issues:

106W Requirements for social impact assessment reports

An Impact Assessment report will be able to address the 5 key matters listed in the SSRC Act 2017 and the SIA Guideline 2018.:

- *community and stakeholder engagement*
- *workforce management*
- *housing and accommodation*
- *local business and industry procurement*
- *health and community well-being.*

Community And Stakeholder Engagement

Community Benefit Funds are a farce used widely by the renewable industry to literally con small communities into believing that their project will benefit them.

The reality is these projects offer little in the way of lasting legacy, their support in terms of money invested that continually supports small communities is literally “spilling beer in the pub on a Friday night”.

Many of these projects are multi billion dollar projects run and owned by foreign owned companies who will syphon all profits and, Australian taxpayer subsidies offshore and they have little interest in community benefit, for example a \$2.5 billion solar project will only offer 20 permanent low paid full-time jobs when complete.

There is no benefit for people who live next door to these projects, there is no compensation, no opportunity to object and certainly no obligation for companies to address their issues such as land devaluation, for example: The process has been deliberately designed this way to expediate the renewable energy projects and disempower those directly affected – would you like to live next door to a 5000ha solar factory or a 500mw battery or a 200 Wind Turbine development? Absolutely nothing is being done to address these and many other issues.

There are over 80 renewable and associated projects in the Flynn electorate that I am aware of, this will amount to tens of billions of dollars of investment and in turn generate tens of billions of dollars of profits for the investors over the life of the projects. In comparison the amount of money invested in long-term community investment is disproportionate and is as I have already said the equivalent of “spilling beer on Friday night”.

I will give an example of what I think should happen:

At Wandoan in Central Queensland there is a proposal to build approximately 500 wind turbines by three companies to a cost of approximately \$8 billion (their figures). I have no doubt the boardrooms of these companies will be wanting a 10% net return per year on this investment, so \$800 million per year! Question – how much in terms of percentage of profit will be invested in small communities per year? Maybe a couple of hundred thousand dollars at most, which in the big scheme of things is virtually nothing in comparison.

I suggest that it be “legislated” that a minimum of 2% of profit before tax per year from renewable projects be allocated by these companies to build and repair communications towers and bridges (road infrastructure) in local communities so that these communities have a lasting legacy.

It should be the responsibility of the companies to build this infrastructure not the government (via a payment) so the money does not get burnt up in bureaucracy or directed elsewhere.

If this idea was expanded to all the companies in the Central Queensland renewable energy zone, then many of the problems of bridges and communications of Central Queensland become the responsibility of these foreign owned companies and if done would leave a lasting legacy.

The companies will argue this will affect their profitability, well don't forget that the Australian taxpayer will be asked (through the Capacity Investment Scheme) to underwrite and guarantee their profitability, regardless of whether they produce energy or not.

Housing and Accommodation

At the many REZ meetings and community discussions it has already been raised that another level of paperwork is not a solution to the divisive impacts that these projects are having on rural communities. While offering a Community Benefit Fund may help get new lights for a sports club, there's no benefit to the family who has spent 7 years opposing the transmission lines now running through their family farm that will impact their futures for the next 20 – 50 years depending on project life.

This is also true of the social impact reports. While identifying that there is a critical need for housing and accommodation, and guidelines that suggest using “local” workforce – this can be applied to workers living 150km away. These rural communities have already experienced boom and bust cycles and transient workforces leaving lasting damage. Permanent housing opportunities need to be unlocked for families to move to the regions for their own benefit.

Community and stakeholder engagement has long been hampered by non-disclosure agreements that prevent neighbours from understanding what is coming for them. This is divisive by nature and, even if a miracle happened and the project was squashed, there's no way of rectifying the damage already done. Distrust and mistruths have already had their impact and the only option for some is to leave the regions, walking away from many decades of family farms and community involvement.

Health and Community Well-being

It is important to have a requirement that addresses the social impacts raised. The mental health and anguish experienced by people with the potential of watching their livelihoods destroyed by a foreign investor with zero care for the surrounding neighbourhood and environment – it cannot be measured. How do you fix that? Is there a level of suicide that the government is willing to accept as fallout? We already know that the farming community suffers in silence, often until it's too late. How many more need to share their stories of lost family members who simply couldn't fight the dollars and “community benefits” and “economic development” that they are blamed for standing in the road of?

I note that the NSW government has started advertising for mental health workers in the REZ areas. Are we going to follow them down that path? Instead of addressing the cause, will we continue to throw band aids at these landowners?

Community well-being cannot just have another “training program for upskilling”. How is this a benefit to a landowner with microfibre plastics in their waterways or after their beef is rejected at the local meatworks due to this known contamination from wind turbine blades? The companies bringing in these materials know that they need a supplier to resurface these blades on an annual basis – it’s not fiction, despite many in the community wanting to bury their heads in the sand. These are facts that the proponents have stated. Actual facts, as opposed to their works of fiction that are generally attached to their Development Applications.

I can provide examples if needed – they have been sent to the previous Queensland government on many occasions as part of submissions that were ignored or discounted due to the number of supposed benefits from Chinese made solar panels.

Workforce Management

Regional communities should be thriving by providing alternatives to congested city living. In fact, many rural families have worked hard to be able to purchase land and deliberately relocate their families out here. And now they find that their communities are at the mercy of foreign investors with no care for what makes our regions special.

At the same time, our hospitals and schools are crying out for support and basic maintenance. We lack staff and cannot attract them without the added need for housing. Our telecommunications and roads are suffering and have been stretched to their limits. The added impact of transient workforces, and thousands of trucks carrying 280m long wind blades, with their 5 police escorts, will only further destroy the infrastructure that we rely on. The constant spruiking of “Jobs” to be created needs to be addressed as another fictional area of creative writing – with most projects admitting that there may be 5 -10 jobs after the construction or destruction has been completed. Further investigations show that these jobs are advertised as based in Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane and are mostly remote work, far from the local shops and hairdressers that could benefit from these new “jobs”.

We have provided the Queensland state government with examples of suitable local industries that have positioned themselves, ready to benefit from the REZ developments – only to watch as Victorian companies (BOOM Logistics) throw money to sponsor Powerlink events and take over as “local” suppliers. How on earth is this allowed? The 350 actual local workers and families that support and live in the actual local community are left wondering what on earth is happening to the promise of work, despite their bosses attending and completing all the hoops required to supply to government these days.

Larger Issues at Play

The responsibility of local government to access and approve/disapprove these projects is flawed and designed in a way to gain false social licence. Local government does not have the experience, the resources, the time or budget to access impacts of multi billion dollar projects. If they

disapprove, then they risk being taken to the Land and Environmental Court costing their rate payers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Councillors are told (under the Local Government Act) they are not allowed to engage in operational matters of local government and are reluctant to engage with their rate payers who are affected for fear of reprisal under the Act.

Councillors are then obliged to take direction from the bureaucrats in their planning department with little or no input defeating the reason for being a councillor in the first place. Once again it is deliberately designed that way to expediate these developments – the Local Government Act is flawed in this case and needs to change.

The current Queensland government gave an undertaking to make changes to the codes governing these projects; what they have done amounts to nothing, and political grandstanding as all projects that have Development Applications in prior to 3rd February 2025 operate under the old code. Exonerating renewable energy companies from any changes to the codes for example: Reef legislation that applies to agriculture, mining, and resources does not apply to renewable projects – appalling – one rule for them and another for us.

Conclusion

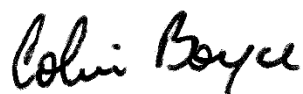
The REZ meetings and community gatherings, including the most recent led by Co-Existence Queensland, continue to box-tick for “Community Engagement”. What resolutions from these meetings have made it to those in government who have the power to make changes? While keeping these groups busy thinking up ways to spend the Community Benefits Funds, why aren’t we at least looking at the cumulative impact of so many projects in these regions? Why can’t we take a sensible approach to our energy needs by using the resources that Queensland is blessed with? If they are good enough to mine and sell to other countries for their cheaper energy, why isn’t it good enough for us to use?

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see what is happening and unfortunately, I see nothing in this Bill that will force the government to look at these projects under an appropriate scope to protect our rich agricultural areas from new industrial scaled developments.

I urge the state government to find a way to reduce the number of rubber-stamped projects that have blatantly lied their way through approvals, and to consider the real impact on communities and families.

As many have NOT commenced construction, surely this is an opportunity to review their proposals with fresh eyes and a view to supporting our food producers in their efforts to protect their land and environments.

Yours sincerely,



Colin Boyce MP

Federal Member for Flynn

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