

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

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I am writing to oppose the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. While the bill introduces stricter social impact scrutiny for renewable energy, it reduces oversight for state-sanctioned infrastructure. This contradiction sends a clear message: environmental laws will be enforced selectively, not uniformly, and undermines public confidence in planning integrity. Of concern, the bill proposes that projects associated with the 2032 Brisbane Olympics be exempted from core environmental and planning laws. This retreat from environmental responsibility is at a time when we can least afford it. In its current form, it would have profound and irreversible consequences on Queensland's environment, particularly in relation to the survival of one of our most iconic and endangered species: the koala. Koalas are a symbol of Australian wildlife, recognised worldwide. They are currently listed as endangered under both the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) and the Nature Conservation Act 1992 (Qld). The amendments proposed in this bill run contrary to those responsibilities and will push them further toward extinction. While the State has mapped koala habitat and priority habitat, Olympic infrastructure and other state projects are planned to significantly impact this. The Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) for 2021-22 SLATS reported that 323,676 ha of woody vegetation was affected by clearing activity, with 83% being cleared in full. A further relaxation of environmental standards will have a negative impact on koalas from multiple perspectives: Loss of habitat and individual preferred trees will impact the established home ranges of koalas and other wildlife. Both the removal of habitat and construction will change or sever existing travel routes and movement corridors for wildlife. This will increase the distance that they must travel which will likely increase their required nutrient intake in an already challenging environment and increase mortality from car strikes, domestic dog attacks, disease and territorial challenges. Already fragile populations will become further isolated, further eroding genetic diversity. This will increase the risk of local extinctions which will further impact the viability of koalas across the state. Koala populations in Queensland have experienced a catastrophic decline over the last two decades due to habitat loss. Already many areas across South-East Queensland have had habitat decimated to fragmented patches which are increasingly at risk of no longer being able to support viable populations. This will be further exacerbated by the relaxation of planning and environmental safeguards. Fundamental conservation safeguards must not be bypassed for political expediency. It is critical that this bill is not passed, and that the integrity of environmental laws are upheld, including full environmental scrutiny for Olympic-related and state-prioritised projects. Furthermore, additional safeguards must be implemented as part of the SEQ Koala Conservation Strategy to: Significantly reduce the amount of full and partial clearance of koala habitat and priority areas. Significantly increase funding for restoration of koala habitat, wildlife corridors and wildlife movement infrastructure. The Queensland Government has both a legal responsibility for our koalas and a moral responsibility to safeguard them for future generations. It is not within the public interest to approve a bill that enables short-term gain at the cost of permanent environmental degradation and species loss. Allowing this bill to pass would signal the Queensland Government's unwillingness to protect our most vulnerable and to exchange infrastructure for this iconic species. Once these habitats are lost, they cannot be replaced. Once koalas are extinct in the wild, no Olympic medal, no piece of infrastructure, no political achievement will be able to bring them back. Their extinction would be a national disgrace and an irrevocable loss for future generations. Short-term economic and political interests must not be prioritized over long-

term ecological stewardship and biodiversity conservation. I urge the Queensland Parliament to act in the interest of future generations, biodiversity, moral decency and the very identity of our state. Protect our koalas—do not pass this bill.