

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

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Submission to the State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee

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

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Thank you for considering my submission, which relates to the proposal by the Queensland State Government to override 15 essential laws designed to monitor development overreach, thus clearing the way for fast-tracking substantial development projects to service the forthcoming Olympic Games in Victoria Park/Barrambin. The removal of these laws from the development compliance process will enable legal disputes and community protests to be either blocked or dismissed. This is an attempt to brush aside the legal checks and balances specifically designed to prevent careless development for short-term gain, but with negative long-term implications, and to which all Queenslanders must adhere.

I find this proposed action to be at once unethical, inexplicable and extremely disappointing, and to fly in the face of globally accepted smart urban design for the 21st century and beyond. In this instance, the laws in question help to protect over 64 hectares of valuable, heritage-listed urban parkland of cultural, environmental and recreational significance, that contribute substantially to Brisbane's enviable reputation as one of Australia's leafiest cities. Furthermore, this way of proceeding is antithetical to the stated requirements of the Olympic Host Contract.

1. Why Victoria Park Matters

- The site is important for me at a personal level. It provides a green oasis in an increasingly growing city, and I take great pleasure in spending time there, walking my dog, picnicking with friends and family, enjoying the beautiful and historical established trees, and knowing that this space has a long history of cultural significance for our Indigenous Australians.
- Victoria Park / Barrambin is Brisbane's largest inner-city park. It spans over 64 hectares and is a rare green space for recreation, ecology, and cultural heritage. The site is deeply significant to Aboriginal peoples, and it also holds immense value for Brisbane's broader community.
- The Victoria Park Master Plan was developed after almost four years of community consultation so the surprise announcement of Olympic venues in Victoria Park is a shocking betrayal of community trust.

2. Why a Stadium in Victoria Park Doesn't Make Sense

Building a stadium in Victoria Park / Barrambin is impractical, environmentally damaging, and contrary to community interests. Key reasons include:

1. **Challenging Topography:** The park's hilly terrain and hard Brisbane Tuff rock would require extensive excavation and blasting, increasing costs and potentially disrupting nearby residents, businesses and hospitals due to vibrations.
2. **Violation of Olympic Host Requirements:** Constructing a stadium here would breach the Olympic Host Contract, which mandates avoiding permanent structures in protected areas and prioritizing previously developed sites.

3. **Existing Traffic Congestion:** The area already experiences significant traffic from nearby hospitals, schools, and universities. A stadium would exacerbate congestion, affecting emergency services and daily commutes.
4. **Inadequate Public Transport:** Unlike other stadiums, Victoria Park lacks sufficient public transport access. The nearest station is a considerable walk away, posing challenges for attendees, especially those with mobility issues.
5. **Loss of Essential Green Space:** As Brisbane's largest inner-city park, Victoria Park provides vital green space in a city already lacking in such areas. A stadium would significantly reduce this public amenity. There are mature native trees in this park which pre-date European settlement and date to pre-1750.
6. **Proximity to Major Hospital:** The park is adjacent to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. Stadium events could disrupt hospital operations, affecting patient care and staff.
7. **Lack of Surrounding Amenities:** The area lacks the bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues that typically support stadium events, leading to potential overdevelopment within the park itself.
8. **Environmental Impact:** The park serves as a natural cooling area, mitigating urban heat. Development would increase heat retention and reduce air quality.
9. **Cultural Significance:** Victoria Park holds deep cultural importance for First Nations communities. Development risks disturbing sacred sites and erasing historical significance.
10. **Every inch of Victoria Park is heritage listed** at the local or state level. This land is part of the story of Brisbane and has a rich WWII and depression era history.
11. **Community Opposition:** There is strong public resistance to the stadium proposal, with concerns about environmental degradation, cultural disrespect, and loss of public space.

3. What the Bill Would Do

- The Bill proposes to list a Stadium in Victoria Park as an 'authority venue' for the 2032 Olympics. The Bill would exempt construction of such Olympics venues and villages from 15 Queensland planning, environmental and heritage laws. The Bill would also remove any access to the Courts in relation to the construction of Olympics venues or villages. It would also override First Nations cultural heritage protections using a new process which railroads First Nations into a default plan if they don't agree in the timeline specified by the Bill.

4. Why This Should Concern Queenslanders

- The Bill removes public safeguards by effectively exempting Olympic venues and villages from laws that apply to ordinary Queenslanders. This includes the Planning Act, Heritage Act, and Environmental Protection Act.
- Access to the Courts is a basic right of all Queenslanders. The Bill proposes to remove this right with sweeping provisions in relation to Olympics venues and villages.
- The Bill introduces a fast-tracked cultural heritage scheme that limits consultation and allows default plans without the agreement of Traditional Owners.
- The potential use of public parkland for commercial Olympic 'villages' risks corruption. These exemptions from planning laws and court review bypass scrutiny and reduce transparency when privatising very valuable public assets.

5. What I Am Asking the Committee to Do

I respectfully ask that your report to Parliament recommend that:

1. Victoria Park / Barrambin be removed from Schedule 1 (Authority Venues);
2. The cultural heritage override provisions be withdrawn;
3. Olympic developments be subject to existing Queensland laws like all other developments;
4. The Victoria Park Master Plan be upheld as a reflection of the community's vision for the park.

Thank you for your consideration.

Louise Noble (PhD)