

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

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To:

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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I write to register my strong objection to the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 ("the Bill"), particularly in relation to its proposed exemptions from key environmental, planning, cultural heritage and local governance legislation. While I acknowledge the intent to streamline the delivery of Olympic infrastructure and renewable energy projects, the Bill represents a dangerous precedent that threatens the integrity of democratic planning, cultural protections, and environmental safeguards.

This submission focuses on the implications of the Bill for Victoria Park / Barrambin, a site of profound Aboriginal cultural significance, historic importance, ecological value, and public community support. The Bill's provision to override numerous legislative frameworks, if enacted, could irreparably harm this cherished public space.

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 hospitals, schools and local residents due to vibrations and spoil removal.
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 both during construction and during events post the Olympics.
4. **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. Significant amounts of the parkland will be lost as a result of a stadium and connecting infrastructure, significantly reducing this place as a public amenity. There are mature native trees and in this park which pre-date European settlement and date to pre-1750 as well as significant native wildlife that call the park home.

5. **Proximity to Major Hospital:** The park is adjacent to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. Stadium events could severely disrupt hospital operations, affecting patient care and staff both during construction and events.
6. **Lack of Surrounding Amenities:** The area lacks the bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues that typically support stadium events, leading to further future potential development in further violation of the place set aside for public use as a park.
7. **Environmental Impact:** The park serves as a natural cooling area, mitigating urban heat. Development would increase heat retention and reduce air quality. Brisbane is already significantly short of open green space. As the city grows, park areas become increasingly valuable to maintain liveability.
8. **Cultural Significance:** Victoria Park holds deep cultural importance for First Nations communities. Development risks disturbing sacred sites and erasing historical significance. Building over cultural sites would be a shameful desecration and fly in the face of promises made to the IOC and reconciliation efforts made over the last decades.
9. **Comprehensive Heritage Listing:** 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. New development within the park will struggle to balance its protection and preservation.
10. **Community Opposition:** There is strong public resistance to the stadium proposal, with concerns about environmental degradation, cultural disrespect, and loss of public space. The community deserves to retain a voice in the parks use. Anything else is undemocratic.

What the Bill Would Do

The Bill proposes to list a stadium in Victoria Park as an 'authority venue' for the 2032 Olympics. If passed, it would:

- Exempt the construction of Olympic venues and villages from 15 critical Queensland planning, environmental, and heritage laws;
- Remove access to the Courts for Queenslanders in relation to these developments;
- Introduce a fast-tracked cultural heritage process that defaults to pre-approved plans if Traditional Owners don't consent within specified timeframes—undermining genuine consultation.

This approach effectively legalises a process of disenfranchisement, stripping away long-standing public protections and replacing them with unchecked discretion.

Legislative Exemptions and Potential Harm to Victoria Park

The Bill proposes the power to override 15 major pieces of legislation. The following Acts are directly relevant to Victoria Park, and their suspension would risk undermining critical safeguards.

(a) City of Brisbane Act 2010

This Act establishes the governance framework for Brisbane City Council, including its role in planning and managing local parks and infrastructure.

Impact: Exempting Olympic infrastructure from this Act could sideline Council's role in stewarding Victoria Park on behalf of the people of Brisbane. It would disempower local government from protecting a site it has formally committed to preserving and restoring through its long-term Vision Plan.

(d) Environmental Offsets Act 2014

This Act requires that environmental impacts which cannot be avoided or mitigated must be offset to maintain ecological values.

Impact: Allowing Olympic projects to bypass offset requirements risks permanent ecological degradation in Victoria Park, which contains established native vegetation and watercourses. Without mandatory offsets, critical habitat loss could go unaddressed.

(e) Environmental Protection Act 1994

This is Queensland's primary environmental legislation, protecting air, land, and water from pollution and degradation.

Impact: Suspension of this Act could permit the degradation of Victoria Park's creeks, soils, and remnant ecosystems during large-scale earthworks or construction. It may allow for activities with significant environmental harm without appropriate assessment or enforcement.

(h) Local Government Act 2009

This Act governs the responsibilities of local councils, including land management and community consultation.

Impact: Similar to the City of Brisbane Act, this could strip Council of statutory authority over Victoria Park and undermine local democratic processes and public accountability. Brisbane residents have already voiced clear support for retaining Victoria Park as open space, and this Act helps ensure such input is honoured.

(i) Nature Conservation Act 1992

This Act protects native plants and animals and their habitats, and governs activities in protected areas.

Impact: Victoria Park is home to native species of flora and fauna and functions as a key biodiversity corridor, providing essential habitat within the urban environment. Exempting Olympic infrastructure from compliance with this Act risks loss of habitat and fragmentation of ecological networks without recourse to legal safeguards.

(j) Planning Act 2016

This Act governs land use planning and development assessment across Queensland.

Impact: Victoria Park is protected through existing planning instruments and overlays. Exempting projects from this Act would enable developments that are fundamentally inconsistent with the designated use of Victoria Park as public open space and could allow for high-impact infrastructure without public notification or assessment against city plans.

(k) Queensland Heritage Act 1992

This Act protects places of cultural heritage significance and ensures appropriate assessment for development on or near heritage-listed sites.

Impact: Victoria Park already contains heritage-listed areas and has a pending application for expansion of its state heritage listing. If this Act is overridden, construction could proceed before assessments are completed, resulting in the destruction or alteration of culturally and historically significant sites, including areas of Aboriginal cultural importance.

(n) Vegetation Management Act 1999

This Act regulates the clearing of native vegetation, especially remnant and endangered ecosystems.

Impact: Parts of Victoria Park contain significant existing areas of vegetation dating back centuries. An exemption could allow extensive clearing without scrutiny, undermining the park's ecological integrity and the goals of the Vision Plan which aim to increase, not reduce, vegetation cover and biodiversity.

Why This Should Concern Queenslanders

This Bill should deeply concern every Queenslander for several reasons:

- **Loss of Public Safeguards:** The Bill exempts Olympic developments from laws like the *Planning Act 2016*, *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, and *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*—laws that protect our environment, heritage, and democratic planning system.
- **Removal of Judicial Oversight:** Queenslanders would lose the right to challenge Olympic-related developments in court. This represents a major erosion of democratic accountability.
- **Cultural Heritage Undermined:** The Bill allows development to proceed under "default" cultural heritage plans, even without Traditional Owner agreement. This disrespects First Nations people and breaches principles of self-determination.
- **Risk of Corruption and Privatisation:** The Bill facilitates the use of public land—like Victoria Park—for commercial Olympic infrastructure and future privatisation, without scrutiny. This opens the door to misuse of valuable public assets.

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What I Am Asking the Committee to Do

In light of the above, I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend the following:

1. **Remove Victoria Park / Barrambin from Schedule 1 (Authority Venues)** in the Bill to ensure its long-term protection, that respects the historical gazetted framework.
2. **Withdraw the cultural heritage override provisions**, which are inconsistent with principles of free, prior, and informed consent;
3. **Allow the State heritage listing expansion to be finalised without interference**, that respects the input of the Queensland community to the process.
4. **Subject Olympic developments to the same laws that apply to all Queenslanders**, including the *Planning Act*, *Heritage Act*, and *Environmental Protection Act*;
5. **Uphold the Victoria Park Vision and Master Plan**, a product of extensive consultation with community and Traditional Owners, as the guiding document for the park's future, while committing to respect the intent and outcomes of the Victoria Park Vision, including ecological restoration and cultural healing.

The Bill, in its current form, grants extraordinary powers that could dismantle decades of cultural recognition, environmental stewardship, and community planning. Victoria Park Barrambin is a unique and irreplaceable part of Brisbane's cultural and natural heritage. Victoria Park is a living place—of memory, nature, identity, and possibility. Any future development must honour this role, not erase it.

Any legislation that threatens its integrity or curtails the community's role in its future must be opposed. Queensland has an opportunity to deliver Olympic infrastructure in a way that respects culture, honours public values, and leaves a true legacy. This Bill, in its current form, jeopardises that opportunity and undermines democratic norms and our constitution. It would

set a dangerous precedent for centralised executive control over planning frameworks in contravention of the public interest and good.

I urge the Committee to uphold the public, environmental, and cultural interest in this matter and to recommend substantial amendments and erasure of this Bill to ensure that Victoria Park is protected for current and future generations.

Sincerely and with hope,

Mr Gene Raciti