

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

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Submitted by:	Townsville City Council
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State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee
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Dear members of the Committee,

SUBMISSION - PLANNING (SOCIAL IMPACT AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2025 (Application Ref: PCU24/0061)

Council refers to the proposed *Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* introduced to the Queensland parliament on 1 May 2025. The Bill has since been referred to State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee for consideration. Council encloses the below submission for the Committee's consideration:

Council understands that there are 3 components to the Bill:

1. **Social impact and community benefit amendments**
The Bill proposes 'to introduce a community benefit system into the Queensland planning framework' for Renewable Energy Projects.
2. **Economic development amendments**
The Bill amends the Economic Development Act 2012. The stated objective of these amendments is 'to enhance administrative efficiency and flexibility, enabling Economic Development Queensland to effectively advance government objectives and drive meaningful progress'.
3. **Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games amendments**
The Bill amends the Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games Arrangements Act 2021 with the objective of ensuring 'that State complies with its obligations under relevant games agreements by ensuring that the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games (the Games) venues and villages are delivered in a timely manner and in a way that maximises the legacy benefits of the Games'.

Council's submission pertains to the first component, being the social impact and community benefit amendments. It is noted that Council's information on the Bill is drawn from the consultation version of the bill and the policy brief facilitated by the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) on 14 May 2025.

While Council supports the increase in focus in ensuring these developments are appropriately considered in terms of the amenity impacts and the wider community considerations, there are concerns that these changes could result in the introduction of unnecessary regulation and time delays for applicants for these important uses.

Additional Red Tape

Firstly, Council notes that it is not the assessment manager for wind farms nominated under s21 of the *Planning Regulation 2017* and that large solar farms fall under the use definition of renewable energy facility which is an impact assessable development in all zones of the Townsville City Plan v2024/01. In which case, where the latter use is considered impact assessable development, these applications are required to undergo public consultation and the highest level of scrutiny afforded by the development assessment (DA) process.

Council raises concerns that the front-loading of the process through the requirement of a social impact assessment, public consultation and a community benefit agreement may result in unnecessary double-handling of this proposals which may dissuade developers. Council notes that some proposals may benefit from a social impact assessment, however this can already be obtained through the issue of an information request following the standard DA process. The proponent of the proposal may design the development in accordance with the relevant legislation, however changes to the proposal are still likely to occur during the DA process which may render any submissions or feedback originally received during the consultation phase obsolete.

Regarding community benefit agreements, Council notes that the delivery of infrastructure and other measures to address social impact can be conditioned through the imposition of reasonable and relevant conditions or through an infrastructure agreement. The proposed social impact assessment and community benefit agreement amendments are outcomes that are already able to occur within the standard DA process if used correctly and so this front-loading of the process may serve to slow the planning process and the delivery of renewable energy infrastructure projects. Where the process is slow and difficult, it may serve to dissuade developers from moving forward with these projects.

Thresholds for Community Benefit Agreements for Solar Farms

The Bill nominates the thresholds for SARA being the assessment manager for Community Benefit Agreements for Solar Farms as projects that produce 1MW of energy or take up 2ha of land. It is highly unlikely any solar farm under 2ha will occur so these thresholds ensure that all solar farm proposals will be subject to a community benefit agreement between SARA and the proponent. Where the outcome of a social impact assessment may necessitate further infrastructure to be provided, Council would be best placed to negotiate the delivery of this infrastructure in accordance with its LGIP / Capital Plan and provide local context and information that SARA may not possess. Accordingly, it is considered that that the size threshold be raised and / or further discretion be provided for Councils to be the assessment manager where they have internal capability and expertise to assess applications of this nature.

Incompatibility with Intent of the *Planning Act 2016*

Council raises the concern that the Bill amendments will serve to further complicate the development assessment process which conflicts with the intent of the *Planning Act 2016*. As per the explanatory notes of the *Planning Bill 2015*:

“The objective of the Bill is to deliver better planning for Queensland by:

- enabling better strategic planning and high quality development outcomes*
- ensuring effective public participation and engagement in the planning framework*
- creating an open, transparent and accountable planning system that delivers investment and community confidence*

- *creating legislation that has a practical structure and clearly expresses how land use planning and development assessment will be done in Queensland*
- *supporting local governments to adapt to and adopt the changes.”*

In its current form, the DA process achieves the abovementioned objectives, however there are concerns that these amendments do not align with the objectives of the Planning Act.

Consideration of Battery Energy Storage Systems uses

Council notes that applications for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) uses will become more common in coming years. The proposed amendment does not appear to consider these related uses or the impacts that will arise from these related uses which may be greater than that of the base uses of wind or solar farms. For example, BESS or workforce accommodation which can also have a large scale social and community impacts.

Fit-for-Purpose SIA Guidelines

General SIA guidelines developed by the Coordinator General for Coordinated Projects or Prescribed projects may not be effectively applied over uses of different scales and impacts. Any SIA guidelines should be tailored specifically for the type and scale of development targeted by this new process.

Resourcing within State Government Departments

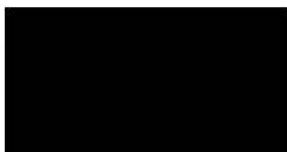
The proposed changes in their current form will place additional resource pressures on State Government Departments to assess and decide development applications. Departments will need to be appropriately resourced (and include the required technical expertise) to be able to consider such applications.

Alignment with Previous Initiatives and Policies

Council has identified the proposed change conflicts with other initiatives and policies presented by the previous government that are embedded into the current DA process. Specifically, the North Queensland Regional Plan 2020 aims to promote renewable energy development and identify locations where assessments can be streamlined. Furthermore, Townsville is identified as a Local Renewable Energy Zone and these additional layers of assessment may make it more difficult to develop these types of uses.

If you have any further queries in relation to the above, please do not hesitate to contact Jake Kidner - Planning Officer on telephone [REDACTED], or email [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully,



Paul Needham
Chief Planning and Development Officer
Planning & Development