



Speech by

**DIANNE REILLY**

**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

---

Hansard 5 December 2001

**COASTAL PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs REILLY** (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (2.43 p.m.): I am pleased to support the Coastal Protection and Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill further implements the Beattie government's commitment to protecting Queensland's sensitive coastal zone. It is designed to protect the public's access to the coast and to end the ad hoc approach to coastal development which has been so rife in Queensland. The amendments are a further step in the implementation of the integrated development assessment system—IDAS—which is at the core of the Integrated Planning Act 1997. This is primarily about streamlining processes and should not be a cause for alarm within the property development industry. In fact, developers should welcome a streamlined process and simplified approval system which clearly provides clear guidelines and policy requirements as outlined in the supporting documentation, the state coastal management plan, released some months ago.

The plan commits councils to, among other things —limiting new developments to existing urban areas to ensure settlements on the coast remain compact; and limiting canal and artificial waterways unless they do not affect coastal resources, increase the risk of flooding, or damage wetlands, fish and shorebird habitats. The coastal plan has been prepared by the Environment Protection Agency following extensive consultation and provides guidelines for local governments and other agencies considering any development which may impact on coastal areas. It will be supported by regional coastal plans to be prepared in coming months.

As I have spoken often in this House of the nature of my hinterland seat, members may be wondering why I have chosen to speak on this bill when, in fact, my electorate does not have a coastline. The reasons are many, and I am sure they will become clear, but the answer itself is simple. In short, the health and preservation of our coast, our waterways and our hinterland water catchments are inextricably linked. The electorate of Mudgeeraba contains a substantial part of the Gold Coast's water catchment, dominated by the Nerang and Coomera Rivers which have their headwaters between Lamington and Springbrook national parks.

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan** interjected.

**Mrs REILLY:** Indeed. I thank the member for Pumicestone for her interjection. I do like to promote healthy water and healthy waterways; it is very important. Catchments provide many of our essential needs, including living space, as well as a supply of water and land for food production in industry. In this instance, the Gold Coast catchment includes the fragile and spectacular Springbrook National Forest, a World Heritage listed forest area. The health of a catchment and therefore every waterway downstream from the catchment depends on how it is managed. Human activity can add both organic and inorganic wastes and nutrients to streams as well as increased salinity levels, reduce oxygen levels and change pH and water temperature. These changes may alter the level of biological activity in the water, increase treatment costs and impact on marine environments.

Any number of processes can affect water quality and can have devastating results for connected ecosystems, fish habitats and marine breeding grounds and, indeed, even on human health. Therefore, all land should be used in accordance with its capability, because inappropriate land use can lead to degradation and off-site effects impacting on water quality.

In effect, ultimately that is what this bill is about—appropriate land use within the state's coastal zones. For the purposes of the state coastal management plan, the coastal zone includes catchment areas where activities have impacts on coastal resources. To date, we on the Gold Coast are fortunate

that most of our water catchment has been relatively well managed and is relatively healthy. There have been sporadic fish kills and outbreaks of blue-green algae due to pollution and an occasional overabundance of nutrients in our Gold Coast waterways, but these have been addressed and, in the main, are quite rare events. This is due in no small part to the constant vigilance and tireless efforts of a very strong environmental lobby, including Surf Riders and in particular GECKO, the Gold Coast and Hinterland Environment Council, or as I like to call them, the Greenies behind the Gold.

But credit must also go to the Gold Coast City Council for demonstrating a commitment to maintaining healthy waterways by engaging in community awareness and education activities and by working in partnership with the state government, community organisations and the private sector to achieve this aim. So, the Gold Coast enjoys a high standard of water, despite quite heavy development adjacent to local rivers in some parts and a proliferation of canal-type developments throughout the coastal strip.

Water quality in the Nerang River has improved in recent years because of the diversion of effluent from three major waste water treatment plants into the Southport Seaway. Understandably, this has caused great angst to environmental watchdogs concerned about the health of our oceans and marine life and is something still to be addressed.

The Nerang River begins its journey near the natural bridge and flows through to the Numinbah Valley and state forest into Advancetown Lake, over the spillway at Gilston and through Nerang, where it enters the canal developments of Benowa, Cyprus Gardens and Broadbeach Waters before entering the broadwater at Surfers Paradise. Just east of my electorate, from the northern tip of the Gold Coast to the New South Wales border, canal developments stretch their curly fingers like so much spaghetti tossed carelessly onto a table.

I do not want to knock canal estates as such, and particularly not canal estate dwellers. The opportunity to live on water is one of the reasons so many people migrate to the Gold Coast. It is almost everyone's dream to live on water. In some circles on the Gold Coast it is accepted that when one moves up or improves one's living status, one moves to water. Some of my best friends live on water. I regularly visit them and quite enjoy sitting by the water in their backyard, watching the mullet jump, crabbing from the pontoon and taking some tranquillity from the gentle ripple of the waves. I must admit that I prefer the green and lush pastures of the hinterland and acreage where I have chosen to raise my family. But, enough is enough, and that is all I am saying: enough is enough!

The Gold Coast is one of the fastest growing areas in the country and it is time to accept that we cannot all live on water. Let us quit while we are ahead and consider what we are doing here. Let us consider the future and ask ourselves whether we can sustain any more of these types of developments and still maintain the health of our waterways. Should we continue along the path of ad hoc development and hope with our fingers crossed that all will be OK in the end, or should we manage and guide development to ensure minimal risk to the environment while providing the opportunity for a quality life style? I would have thought the answer to be obvious. Yet here we have members of the National Party again opposing good environmental policy. They say, amongst other things, that they were not fully briefed, that they did not have the time to get across the legislation fully. They should have conducted some of their own research. There is an interesting idea: putting in a bit of work and utilising the resources of the Parliamentary Library, as I did.

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan** interjected.

**Mrs REILLY:** That is why they have the resources of the Parliamentary Library. They should put in a bit of work, make some requests and do some reading. To say that they did not have time is to say basically that they were too lazy. They had as much time as I did, and I have been researching this issue for weeks.

**Mr Fouras:** And it shows, too.

**Mrs REILLY:** I thank the member for Ashgrove. I was disappointed but I was not surprised to hear that the National Party would not be supporting the bill. I was not surprised because the National Party in particular has long held the dubious honour of being the lap-dog of development and the founding father of the white-shoe brigade—tags it seems reluctant to shake even in this day and age of environmental awareness.

The challenge for coastal management in Queensland is to identify the trends impacting on coastal resources and respond with strategies to achieve sustainable management of the coast. The challenge for members of the National Party is to recognise good legislation when they see it and to support it. Their other challenge, of course, is to make themselves relevant to their voters and to the state of Queensland. I hold little hope for their ability to meet either of these challenges.

But I digress and return to the canals topic. Canals contribute to the lifestyle of places like the Gold Coast, but they can have significant adverse impacts on coastal resources resulting from construction of the waterways and the subsequent filling of adjoining land with the extracted material. In the past, adverse impacts of the development of canals have included the loss of or impacts on coastal

wetlands, increased tidal volumes and associated erosive actions of tidal waters, increased risk of flooding, diminished water quality and loss of fish and migratory bird habitats, just to name a few.

An independent inquiry into the New South Wales Clarence River system in 1999 stated that the greatest concern to citizens is the discharge of highly acidic water from canal estates due to the disturbance and oxidation of acid sulfate soils. Read: bad for fish. Fish do not like acid in their water. It makes them sick and they go away. Just in case members missed it: canal developments, acid sulfate soils, bad for fish. We all like to eat fish. Let us just think about this for a moment.

Several Gold Coast canal estate developments—some with adjoining golf courses—have been highly controversial. In the interests of fairness I will not name them. They have been highly controversial due to their immediate or foreseen—and sometimes both—impacts on wildlife habitats, wetlands and fish and prawn breeding areas. The benefits of wetlands are sediment retention, toxicant removal—that is, they help clean the water—nutrient retention and habitat and breeding sites for wildlife. The benefits of canal assets are: a nice place to live if you can afford it. In New South Wales they have banned canal developments.

Yesterday the member for Keppel voiced his concern about what he called the finality of this bill. But this bill does not ban canal developments—although some people wish that it would and wish that it were so. To suggest that it does when it does not is being unnecessarily alarmist and pessimistic—if we are talking about the views of the development industry. However, conservationists throughout the state, many of whom have contacted me directly, are alarmed because the bill does not put an end to canal estates. But this government's position is that we finish those that we have started and do not start any new ones that may have diverse effects on the environment. It puts the responsibility onto developers and councils to prove that proposed developments—particularly canal estates and dryland marinas and anything else one wants to call them—where people can live on water will not damage the environment. This is fairer and better than waiting around with our fingers crossed to see whether, in 20 years, we have destroyed everything that we possibly could have maintained and preserved for the future of our children.

I prefer to see this bill as a beginning rather than an end. But I am a 'the glass is half full' sort of person. It represents the beginning of good planning and responsible management of coastal zones. It will bring about the start of a new era of environmentally sensitive and sustainable and, most importantly, sensible progress and, yes, development which cannot be held back as the population grows. I believe it strikes a careful and necessary balance between gung-ho dig as you please and prohibition.

Coupled with and complemented by the state coastal plan and subsequent regional coastal plans, I believe the bill provides something all developers really, really should want: a clear guide to doing it the right way—the right way to ensure clean water, local prawns on the table and the future enjoyment of our glorious beaches and rivers for generations to come. I wholeheartedly commend the bill to the House.

---