



Speech by

Dr Bruce Flegg

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard Thursday, 18 October 2007

QUEENSLAND HERITAGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (12.31 pm): Liberal Party members can walk into the parliament here and say that we have placed a high priority on Queensland's cultural heritage for many, many years. From the days when my friend Rob Akers and others tried to defend the Bellevue Hotel to more recent times, the Liberal Party has consistently emphasised the importance of the cultural heritage of this state and the need to protect it. I am glad to be able to speak today on this bill and raise some of these particular issues.

When I came into this place, one of the first issues I took up—and I am very pleased to say it is probably the first win, if I can put it in those terms, that I had—was the Heiner Road Bridge at Ipswich. It is a very important 1860s sandstone rail bridge that this government had earmarked not for demolition but to be buried under the concrete slab of a K-Mart. It was part of the first railway in the entire world to have been built as a government enterprise, it was one of the first railroad structures built in Queensland, yet this government was going to bury it under the cement slab of a K-Mart.

I took up that issue vigorously in this House, as members would be able to see if they read the *Hansard*, and I was joined by some local residents in Ipswich. I am pleased to say that on that occasion the Heiner Road Bridge was protected and the property development in that area was redesigned, something they initially tried to tell us could not be done.

One of the purposes of this bill is to facilitate the entry and removal of places on the Heritage Register to allow places to be declared as an archaeological place and to protect various items that may come up. The stated aim of the bill is to improve the protection of heritage sites and buildings. The opposition, as my colleague the member for Burdekin said, supports this bill, but it is important to make some critical observations about heritage protection in this state because we have not done it well and we continue to not do it well.

In recent times, another heritage issue that I have attempted to champion when I have had the opportunity is the North Bank development in Brisbane. The North Bank development would obscure Brisbane's major heritage site along the bank of the Brisbane River. A few comments about the heritage value of that site that we stand to lose if the government proceeds with North Bank came from the National Trust of Queensland, which wrote on 14 March 2007—

The National Trust of Queensland is strongly opposed to the North Bank Proposal in its current form. The proposal is grossly over-scaled and further separates the City of Brisbane from its river and its past. The North Bank proposal is located where the Queen's Wharf was situated during Brisbane's convict period, and this is the point from which the city grew. This location will be decimated by the proposal.

This proposal will also substantially diminish views to and from the highly-significant precinct of early buildings along William and George Streets, which extends from Parliament House through to the Treasury (Casino) Building. Brisbane is a river city, and a very important part of understanding Brisbane's origins and cityscape is the ability to see and tell the stories of this historically significant precinct as a whole, rather than catching occasional glimpses of some of its individual components.

The fundamental principles underpinning this proposal need to be seriously questioned.

And it continued. We are here debating a bill to increase the protection of heritage sites in Queensland, yet we have a government intent on building a string of high-rise towers on top of the

Brisbane River which would actually hide the historical precinct of Brisbane and cover up forever that part of Brisbane's heritage from which this city grew. If this government is serious about protecting heritage in Brisbane, let it start by protecting the largest historical precinct of early times in Queensland—one which I have barely heard a word about in this House since the introduction of that proposal.

The issues surrounding the preservation of heritage listed sites are complex, and I am pleased so far as these measures go that we are at least acknowledging that. A considerable burden can fall on the owners of heritage listed buildings. We saw that recently with the National Trust of Queensland—an organisation that owns and administers a number of heritage sites and buildings around Queensland—because the ownership structure of these buildings is integrally involved in their preservation.

The National Trust of Queensland enjoys minimal financial support from the state. In order to continue to manage the maintenance of some of its historic products, it had to embark on asset sales. It sold furniture from one of its historic homes to help pay the upkeep on that home. It sold Little Goat Island in Pumicestone Passage in order to raise funds, yet Little Goat Island in its own right had been put aside by a deceased owner expressly for the purpose of heritage protection and education. Yet, because of a lack of government support for the trust and the properties that it has to maintain, the National Trust was forced to sell that asset.

Mrs Sullivan: That is not true, Bruce, and you know it.

Dr FLEGG: I hear the member for Pumicestone interjecting. She did precious little to protect Little Goat Island and its heritage—not just its cultural heritage but also its environmental heritage. It is slap-bang in the middle of Pumicestone passage and one of the most sensitive environmental parts of Queensland.

The National Trust and its financing raise a broader issue, and that is that heritage properties are very expensive to maintain. Whether they are in government ownership like Parliament House, where we stand today, whether they are publicly accessible, like Palma Rosa at Hamilton, whether they are owned by the National Trust of Queensland, or whether they are private homes, they are a very expensive proposition to maintain. If this government is finally going to get serious about protecting cultural heritage, the issue of the cost of maintaining these buildings as they get older will need to be addressed.

I do not think any of us here are suggesting that the government should be picking up the tab for all the maintenance, but at some stage the government will have to address this issue that for many of these organisations—whether it is the National Trust, which has had a very serious issue with it, whether it is a club or society like Palma Rosa, or whether it is a private home—needs to be addressed, and it is certainly not addressed within the contents of this bill.

I visited Palma Rosa recently. I had a tour with members of the English Speaking Union who have owned that building for quite a long time. They were able to show me firsthand the issues that confront people in Queensland who own major heritage listed assets. Palma Rosa is a magnificent building in Hamilton. It was formerly owned by the family of a Queensland Premier, Sir Arthur Palmer. His family held that for three generations. It was built in 1887 and it was bought by the English Speaking Union in 1972.

The English Speaking Union have made that home available for a number of purposes, but by and large it is available to the public of Queensland to use for functions. If I could give the English Speaking Union in Palma Rosa a small plug while on my feet, it is a magnificent heritage listed property, and it was a privilege to share in an activity there and do a tour of inspection. This property, which needs millions of dollars in upkeep, is something that a small community group such as the English Speaking Union is going to have enormous difficulties with. I note the gratitude that the owners of Palma Rosa showed to Brisbane City Council. Campbell Newman, who has always placed a high priority on the protection of Brisbane's heritage sites, allowed significant rate relief. Otherwise that particular property may well have come into considerable distress.

I look forward to the minister commenting on that issue, because it is a serious issue. I do not raise it in a political way. I think it is an issue which the minister is well and truly aware of. It is probably an easier matter for the government when buildings are held either by the National Trust or the English Speaking Union and they are available to the public. But there would be private homes as well where people, as they enter retirement, will have a lot of difficulty keeping them in the sort of condition we would expect from our heritage sites. It will become a growing issue into the future.

Another heritage issue in Queensland, and I have not heard anyone raise this today, is that of the Shingle Inn.

Mr Lawlor: How old are you?

Dr FLEGG: Mate, I can remember a lot of Brisbane heritage sites and I would like to see them protected. The Shingle Inn was housed on the ground floor of what was known as the City Building in Edward Street between Adelaide and Queen streets. Over 100 cafes were operating in Brisbane city by 1937. The Shingle Inn was the only one of these that survived unchanged in a significant manner until

recent times. Of a whole slab of Brisbane's early 20th century history, the only one remaining of 100 was the Shingle Inn.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Dr FLEGG: It is interesting to hear interjections from the member for Southport. What happened to the Shingle Inn? Under the watch of the government, which tried to bury the Heiner Road Bridge under the cement slab of a K-Mart, what happened to the Shingle Inn?

Mrs Stuckey interjected.

Dr FLEGG: I take that interjection from the member for Currumbin, because this is very much heritage in a box. The owners, in order to make way for a development, were given approval to dismantle the Shingle Inn, the last remaining cafe of that era from Brisbane, and put it in pieces in a box. Where is the Shingle Inn today? It is in pieces in a box.

Mr Lawlor: Where do you think it should go?

Dr FLEGG: When this matter was raised in this parliament in a petition from people who have a lot more concern about protecting the heritage of Brisbane than the member for Southport, what was the response of the then minister, Desley Boyle? I will read from a letter and I will table a copy of it for the information of the House. The minister said in reply to a petition to this House—

The Heritage Council was most unhappy with the outcome as it went against the spirit of its original development approval decision. However, there were no lawful alternatives available that would reflect that original agreement.

The minister went on to say—

However, there is no mechanism under the Queensland Heritage Act 1992 to require that this occur and therefore neither myself as the minister nor the Heritage Council has the powers to insist that the Shingle Inn interior is incorporated into a new development in the central business district.

I will table a copy of that letter for anyone who may be interested

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, undated, from the then Minister for the Environment, Minister for Local Government and Planning and Minister for Women (Hon. Boyle) to the Clerk of the Parliament, responding to a petition relating to the Shingle Inn.

I look forward to the minister in his summing-up indicating to me whether this bill would in fact change that situation, because the Shingle Inn was nothing more than a loophole that has allowed the elimination of a significant part of Brisbane's cultural heritage. I will also table for the benefit of the House some information on the history of the Shingle Inn.

Tabled paper: Copy of an information sheet relating to the Shingle Inn, from the Environmental Protection Agency web site.

I notice that a significant portion of the effect of this bill will be to shift certain responsibilities from the Heritage Council to the EPA. I had a close look at this and I have some reservations with regard to it. Certainly the opposition has been prepared to support the majority of this bill in the hope that the government will ensure that it improves the protection of our heritage. What we want is for someone within the heritage community to be able and willing to speak out. We saw it with the Bellevue, the Heiner Road Bridge and the Shingle Inn, and we are seeing it today with Northbank.

Often the only protection the heritage sites of this state have is when someone is courageous enough to speak out. I certainly hope I see the day when the EPA is prepared to run a campaign to defend parts of our cultural heritage. Too often the running of such a campaign has been left to private citizens, community groups and historical societies. I will be looking for this with great interest. What is needed to protect heritage is people with the willingness to speak out.

In the future I think people will have a very dim view of the act of this present government in burying forever the magnificent city scape of heritage sites of Brisbane under the Northbank proposal. I specifically went to the trouble of driving over the Victoria Bridge. It is not easy to drive over the Victoria Bridge these days. I specifically drove over the Victoria Bridge to have a look at the beautiful cultural and historic area from the Treasury building, which is now the casino, the Conrad hotel, the State Library right down to Parliament House. It is our most important heritage precinct. It is a beautiful sight to look at from South Bank or the Victoria Bridge. Future generations will never get to see that view in the form that we see it today if this government proceeds with hiding it behind and burying it under its ill-conceived Northbank proposal.

The final comment I will make is that there may be occasion—and I look forward to the minister's comment on this—when the government needs to acquire a building as the only way to protect it. I think it should be the exception. I am sure the minister would agree with me on that. We have an increasing burden as these historic buildings get older. I believe in a minority of cases that the government will need to look at setting up some sort of fund to purchase the odd example where it cannot be adequately protected in any other way. We have lovely heritage here in Brisbane. We have lost a fair bit of it already. I want to see us fight to preserve what we have left of it.