



Speech by

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Hansard Wednesday, 5 September 2007

URBAN LAND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (4.16 pm): In rising to speak on the Urban Land Development Authority I want to paint a picture of what could be. Are we going to talk about the North Bank proposal as being an answer to housing affordability? Are we going to talk about high-rise towers in the Brisbane River as outweighing the public concern about what those entities would mean for future urban design? But, the saving grace is that it is all about housing affordability! I start with these comments because there are a lot of glib promises being made about what the Urban Land Development Authority is supposed to deliver. This magic concept of solving the very real problem of housing affordability in our community has been waved around like a golden wand to overcome people's concerns about the extraordinary ministerial powers that sit within this legislation.

I use North Bank as an example because we have already seen under this state Labor government an extraordinary proposal for high-rise towers in the Brisbane River. But allegedly the trade-off would be that the public benefit is served because certain infrastructure and other benefits flow by giving away this land for these particular developments. Under what is proposed with this Urban Land Development Authority, it is very possible that the public will find that they have no real say in their local communities to oppose abhorrent development which is championed by the government of the day. Under this legislation, the extraordinary powers that it would give to the authority and then, in turn, to the minister could mean that we will get not the vision of people suddenly having access to affordable housing but these types of developments that are a result of done deals behind closed doors which do not deliver the greater public benefit—and, that is, to ensure that appropriate development is maintained in our communities.

Let me use another example. I have a very real concern—and I want to raise it and seek the minister's assurances that it will not happen—about the development of the Mooloolaba Spit. It is an iconic area, though such areas have not been flagged by the government for inclusion in this legislation that it is proposing. Currently there is a master plan process underway for this area. And what a surprise! The draft master plan that came out under the imprimatur of the department of natural resources in consultation with the Maroochy Shire Council was totally contrary to what the public had called for. It was high-rise development of up to 12 storeys on crown land on the Mooloolaba Spit. I raise this as an example, in addition to the North Bank proposal, because this is what could happen. Under an Urban Land Development Authority and a complicit minister, we could see a move to cut out the community's right to raise legitimate concerns about where it is inappropriate to have high-density housing because there has already been a push for it behind closed doors with those who have done the deals.

I certainly do not want to see high-density development of the Mooloolaba wharf site. I certainly want to see the minister reject the current draft plan which proposes extremely dense development on that site. For anybody who loves Mooloolaba, or for anybody who loves any part of Queensland and has concerns about appropriate development, let me say that this draft master plan, which is out and has not yet been rejected or modified by government, would actually double the commercial space that is already available in Mooloolaba. That gives you a concept of things that concern me. That is what could happen if such a plan does not get modified to an appropriate level that meets and addresses the concerns of the local community. We could end up with abhorrent, highly dense and inappropriate developments.

I want to concur with some of the comments made by my colleague and Deputy Leader of the Queensland Coalition, the member for Moggill. There are some genuine concerns about the extraordinary powers in this legislation, and that is why we are putting forward a number of amendments which we believe will provide genuine rights of review—for example, the appeal right which is not allowed for in this legislation.

We also would like a sunset clause, because the concern is that these entities start off with supposedly strategic objectives but then grow beyond their original stated aims into just another bureaucracy. For example, the Office of Urban Management was supposed to be a strategic body, but people in industry—and not just those at the big end of town but those at the small end as well—will tell you it has gone from being a strategic decision-making body into a body that has become log-jammed and involved in quite detailed and individual decisions. So it has been growing as a bureaucratic entity and struggling to function under its original intention.

What will we see with this Urban Land Development Authority? If it is left without some review, will it also do what all good bureaucracies have done under this Beattie Labor government and continue to grow and go beyond its original stated intention? We believe it is important that the stated intention is actually clearly focused and that the outcomes are delivered in a set period and it is then subjected to the review of this place.

This is quite a dramatic piece of legislation which the public has not had a significant opportunity to really look at. I want to talk about why this government is bringing it forward. When I first saw the density levels that the state Beattie government was talking about for the South East Queensland Regional Plan—with the ambitious target that 50 per cent of the growth would be accommodated in greenfield sites and 50 per cent in infill development—I thought: how on earth can it accommodate the infill development with growth targets in local government areas? At that time it occurred to me that it would probably force councils to adopt certain growth targets by certain periods of time or they would move towards some centralised planning authority that would impose those densities by a master planning process without significant input from the public. Sure enough, we have seen that one of those scenarios is in fact unfolding in this legislation we have before us.

So 50 per cent of south-east Queensland growth that this government is trying to put into the South East Queensland Regional Plan has to occur at infill development, and this is really what is behind this legislation. When those plans start to filter out into the community, the community will soon realise that their voice is being stripped away from them and that they will not have a real and significant say on what that density will look like. When that happens and the community sees actual examples of that, there will be a great deal of concern.

Yes, there are some problems within the processing that has occurred under IPA, and my colleague flagged that, but once again this legislation does not deal with some of the systemic issues that need to be addressed. There needs to be an overhaul of the IPA process. There needs to be a consistent process and a timely way of dealing with applications to ensure that everybody who goes through these town planning processes—and not just those from the big end of town—gets a timely response. But this legislation only deals with the big end of town. It does not deal with the systemic problems that the mum and dad investors and the small business operators are still left to deal with.

There are issues that need to be dealt with in the planning schemes and the approval processes in this state that can quite rightly still balance the concerns of the community, but this legislation does not deal with those issues and that is why we continue to have concerns. There must be a process that does not just look after the big end of the development market and forget about the mums and dads and all the others who are left to deal with the red tape on their own because they do not have the expensive political consultants who work for them behind closed doors to aid their cause in putting forward their pet projects.

So 50 per cent of the density has to come from infill. As I have said, the concern is that this could impose the grand vision of the government on some communities which is contrary to the nature of the area and what the people actually want. It just does not wash that this government says it will consult because we have already seen what consultation meant with the forced council amalgamations. How on earth can we trust the government to truly consult and take on board the concerns of communities if a high level of density is fitted over their community which is contrary to the nature and style of the particular area?

I would put forward an alternative vision to high-density infill that this government seems hell-bent on. While there are some places within the CBD or an urban hub where we appreciate that high density may be appropriate, there are a lot of places where it is not appropriate. It certainly is not appropriate in the Brisbane River, it certainly is not appropriate on the Mooloolaba Spit and it certainly will not be appropriate in many other areas which are yet to come into the public arena but which people will find they have no right to have a say on.

The alternative vision to put forward is this—that there really needs to be a true grasping of what decentralisation is about. Maybe it is time we started talking about whether Brisbane should continue to

grow at the levels which have been promoted by this government. Why should Brisbane continue to grow at the levels that have been pushed and accelerated by this government? There is an opportunity to grasp an alternative vision about planning—it is about true decentralisation, it is about having a network of vibrant, sustainable communities, it is about having satellite cities and communities which have their own network of services but with high public transport corridors between them. In areas like Gympie, Maryborough or Toowoomba, we should have an alternative vision. It is about having high-speed railways to these areas rather than trying to put a whole lot of people into an urban footprint, into existing communities with the density that this Labor government is talking about without the infrastructure.

There is this naive concept that 50 per cent infill into an existing urban area is smart urban development in regard to infrastructure development, but if we start to look at some of the costs of retrofitting infrastructure and accelerating growth in existing highly dense areas, we actually find it is not always the smartest way to get the best outcome for the infrastructure dollar. There has to be a balance and that is what we are talking about. The balance is not in the growth patterns that this government is promoting.

There is an alternative that provides not only good outcomes for the environment but good lifestyle options. It is about grasping the infrastructure that allows communities to be sustainable; it is not this 200-kilometre city vision that this government seems to have. If this legislation is not amended to include some of the measures we are proposing that would put the brakes on the extreme elements, it could mean quite a draconian authority in the hands of a government that has already painted a vision where it is happy to have towers in the Brisbane River but not really address some of the concerns about genuine housing affordability.

The genuine issues of housing affordability go beyond just what this legislation deals with. There has to be an ability for people to access land in a timely way. They have to have the certainty not just in large, master planned projects but also in the smaller end of the market to know that they can get timely approvals. But there also has to be a look at the additional raft of legislation and costs the state increasingly is imposing on the process.

I believe there is an opportunity for affordable housing in many other areas of this state. If the government had the foresight, and perhaps the humility, to accept our argument that there is an alternative vision for genuine decentralisation there would be an opportunity for affordable housing in many other areas where there is sustainable infrastructure and services to deliver that.

In summary, the IPA concerns that we have raised are still not addressed in this legislation. Our call for appeal rights is something we feel very strongly about. But we note that with the government's record on consultation with the public there is a lot of concern that this legislation will not involve genuine public input in master planned projects but particularly in some of those projects that come before the community that could mean significantly increased density over and above what those communities can sustain into the future.

From an environmental point of view I will put this on the table. It is interesting that cities can be up to 10 per cent hotter than towns and surrounding landscape. There are other issues associated with increasing the density of an urban footprint. When people are considering whether density is good for the environment, they need to take into consideration some other balancing issues in regard to the costs associated with people living in close proximity, in air conditioning, with a lot of hard pavement and the accelerated run-off that comes from those particular areas. These are some of the things that we put forward in a call for a plan that does not concentrate just on density but also looks at a decentralised and well-planned network of vibrant communities. It is not about shoehorning growth into one very limited part of the state.