



Speech by
Gary Fenlon

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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QUEENSLAND HERITAGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.29 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Queensland Heritage and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. In doing so I would like to touch briefly on what I think is at the core of this legislation. Underlying the idea of heritage is the concept of the aesthetic. Some years ago in my youth when I painfully ploughed through *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*—and I know the minister is an avid reader of Kant—I was left to ponder where aesthetic theory was going generally. Whilst Kant rested on the divine as a final place where aesthetic values were formed, I think it was a departure point for other aesthetic theories.

Kant's view of the world was that man found himself or herself through the divine. Essentially, ideas of aesthetic judgement from that point really, through sociological theory and so on, attempt to establish aesthetic principles and ideas through the way in which human beings define themselves in the world. In doing so, they define themselves through their history—that is, where they have come from, where they are today and certainly where they are going.

As a society, heritage is a very important element of our lives in simply defining who we are, what we appreciate in terms of beauty and what is valuable. We can certainly engage in healthy arguments about what is valuable and what is beautiful. We certainly wonder sometimes about what is perceived as valuable and beautiful among some of the things that often are identified as valuable for heritage purposes. There again, what might be valuable to one person might be very different to another.

To find a commonality among society in terms of these items of value and places of value is a very important exercise. It is an exercise which fundamentally acknowledges that we must transcend generations when preserving these places and these things so that other generations can appreciate these things of beauty or value. This will certainly help future generations define themselves as people in society in general and in Queensland society.

It gets down to how we define ourselves in our regions and where we came from. Personally, I love going back to the little Catholic primary school where I went to school and seeing the tiny bell tower that seemed very big when I was a kid. That tiny little bell tower has great value. I looked up into the old bell and heard its tiny tones in those days. That is of personal value to me. I would probably argue until the cows come home that such a small thing be preserved.

We have come a long way in Queensland in terms of how we preserve our heritage and the way we have adapted as a society around that. One of the great icons that stands out for me in this sense is the Treasury building. I recall in the early days of heritage legislation the debates that took place in this place and in the wider community about the use of the old Treasury building as a casino. I remember the howls of discontent from my own community and others across Brisbane about what a travesty that would be. Today, we would not find anybody who does not think that that has not been a good—

Mr Purcell interjected.

Mr FENLON: I take the interjection. Today, we would not find anybody who does not think that that was not a good idea. That place would have been a great residence for pigeons. God knows who else might have continued to use it—public servants in Queensland, for example. It was clearly going to be a millstone around the neck of taxpayers in terms of maintenance and using it in a valuable and realistic way for many decades. We have found a solution where the place pays for itself and is well used. People can go in there and appreciate its beauty any day of the week and practically any hour of the day. It is a magnificent use of that building.

What we faced in the past and what we face now is a challenge in terms of our heritage buildings and sites around the community. There are challenges for the government as an owner of many of these facilities and challenges for private citizens who may be the owners of these facilities. This bill goes some significant way, and creditably so, in assisting private owners who need to maintain these premises.

More and more in the future I hope that as a community and as a government we can be creative about how we find solutions to maintaining these facilities and how we find solutions to using these facilities in a good way for the benefit of the wider community or using them for commercial purposes. It has to be done in a balanced way. We have to continue to be flexible and creative in the way that we do this.

One example in my electorate is the Queen Alexandra Home and Community Centre, which had an interesting history over the years with different government landlords. It went from the Nicklin family, as the original resident and owner of the site, through to it being used as an orphanage. It has a magnificent history. Today it is being used by the department of education—as the principal landlord—and the community in general. I am sure in the future that we can look to diverse commercial uses et cetera to ensure that places like that have a return and use to the community and are not maintained simply as a debt to taxpayers. That is a challenge for that place in the future and for all of these great places that we have inherited.

The other important element of this bill is that it addresses what we hope as a community to address in all of our regulations—that is, to give people in the community certainty about where they stand in relation to these matters. This is a bill that clearly goes out of its way to create that certainty. It is streamlining the procedures and establishing a more strategic approach to heritage, including expanding local government heritage responsibilities, transferring development assessment to the EPA, developing heritage principles for state owned heritage and introducing the heritage grants program that I mentioned before to balance these measures. People will know more clearly where they stand, and this point has been reached by very sound consultation with stakeholders, and the legislation will work far more smoothly with this approach.

The bill also requires that local governments establish local heritage registers. Indeed, I trust that this will be an opportunity for local communities to engage in this process more readily because, again by reference to my own memories of my youth and my life, it is the local communities that will give meaning to these sites. It is the people who have lived with them and experienced these sites who will add to their meaning because it is the connection between these physical environments and the human beings who have lived in and around them that breathe life into these places as heritage entities. They do not sit as inanimate objects; they are real social entities because of their connection to human beings and communities in the past. The other element that is clearly acknowledged in this bill which goes back to my comment about making sure that we find diverse and creative ways of preserving these great places is that notion of demolition by neglect. We have to continue to be observant and to be vigilant in ensuring that these great places are not simply left to wind down and deteriorate; rather, we have to be vigilant all of the time about ensuring that they are maintained. This bill will put in place stronger measures to do all of those things, and I commend the minister for bringing this bill to the House.