



Speech by

**Jason O'Brien**

**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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## **QUEENSLAND HERITAGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Cook—ALP) (3.15 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Queensland Heritage and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. The bill is an essential part of the comprehensive reforms the government has initiated to develop a more proactive and strategic approach to heritage in Queensland. The changes reflect the government's clearly established priorities: to deliver sustainable outcomes, to improve engagement with the community and to reduce the burden of unnecessary red tape.

I would like to speak in particular about improvements that the bill will make to an area that has not previously been dealt with in a systematic way, the management of local heritage places by local government. There are places that are significant to the local community that do not, on balance, meet the very high threshold for entry into the Queensland Heritage Register. Currently, the Queensland Heritage Act 1992 makes no provision for the management of local heritage places which are often of great importance to their communities and certainly warrant consideration for preservation. An inconsistent approach and variable management of heritage issues by local government has fed uncertainty and encouraged reactive responses by community groups to development proposals that affect their valued heritage places.

The preliminary findings of the statewide heritage study, which is currently underway in three regions across Queensland, indicated that in recent years many heritage places have been lost as a consequence of urban expansion. Demolition of landmark buildings without any planning approval or community input has highlighted the pressing need to improve protection for important local heritage places. Unless a particular local government has made the effort to survey its region and incorporate heritage into its planning scheme, there is no mechanism to appropriately consider the importance of the place while assessing a proposed development.

Some local governments, such as the Charters Towers and Ipswich councils, have consistently shown commitment to preserving the outstanding character and heritage of their area. However, they remain the exception. My own local government area of Cairns City Council is certainly a council that needs to improve its attitude towards protecting heritage buildings in that city. There has been an increase in the last few years in the number of local planning schemes dealing with heritage. The majority still have inadequate heritage provisions. The aforementioned Cairns City Council has produced a heritage plan, but whether it vehemently sticks to that plan when the crunch comes at development approval stage is another question.

Currently, only about 35 per cent of Queensland local government areas have a local heritage register, leaving large areas of Queensland with no viable system for managing its heritage and many regional heritage sites vulnerable. To prevent further unplanned losses of historic heritage places and to reduce reactive nominations to the state Heritage Register, a workable system for local heritage in all local government areas is urgently required.

By providing a simple, accountable process for keeping local heritage registered and supporting the registers with a code to guide development assessment, these amendments will especially assist local

governments with limited resources. This amendment is designed to empower local governments with a robust system. A local government will decide what is entered into its heritage register. The new system for keeping local heritage registers, which requires the register to be kept readily available to the public, will make identification and protection of local heritage places more practical. By providing a flexible approach that takes account of a local government's planning scheme, the new system for local heritage will mesh effectively with the imminent changes to the local government boundaries and the important reforms being proposed for the Integrated Planning Act 1997.

The improvements to the heritage management framework contained in this bill deliver significant regulatory reform and are an important step towards a more consistent statewide approach to heritage.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Douglas Shire Historical Society. It is trying to do something different from what most members have spoken about. Most members have spoken about preserving buildings and significant landmarks like the Dawn Theatre, which the member for Stafford talked about, for example. The historical society in Port Douglas is trying to return a natural area to the community. Land beside the sugar wharf in Port Douglas should be excavated and returned to beach sand to help restore the waterfront, according to the Douglas Shire Historical Society. So we can see that what is important to local communities can take all sorts of different forms and people's attempts not only to protect but also to restore heritage sites can take unusual methods or unusual paths.

I think the Douglas Shire Historical Society should be commended for its work. It is an important community organisation in my electorate. There are still some important heritage places remaining in Port Douglas, such as the Port Douglas sugar wharf, which hosted for many years the Ben Cropp Shipwreck Museum. Some people might remember that. Its efforts to preserve this site in particular but also other areas in the Douglas shire are to be commended. I table for the information of the House an article from the *Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette* of 11 October that deals with some of those issues that I am talking about.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of an article, dated 11 October 2007, Port Douglas & Mossman Gazette, page 5, titled 'Reclaim beach site'.

I commend the bill to the House.