



Speech by

Rachel Nolan

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard Tuesday, 22 May 2007

URBAN DESIGN

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (9.56 pm): I begin tonight by acknowledging urban designer Juris Greste, who is in the gallery with us this evening, and by thanking him for bringing this important issue to my attention. The notion of Australians as hardened frontiersman is a myth. In fact, Australia is one of the most urbanised nations on earth, with more than 90 per cent of us living in cities and towns. Urban spaces are the stage of life. Houses, parks, office blocks and shopping centres are the environments in which the triumph, the tragedy and what often feels to me like the high farce of life is played out. Good built environments—places that are open, have trees, are walkable and encourage people to talk to one another rather than fearing their neighbours—enrich our lives now and will let us live sustainably as issues like peak oil and climate change really kick in in the future.

But, as anyone who compares South Bank with the soul-sucking monotony of a Westfield surrounded by urban sprawl knows, good urban design does not just happen. Urban design is an important professional discipline bringing together the skills of town planning, architecture, landscape architecture and sociology in the design of spaces that make you feel good about the world. That is why it is such a concern that today, as south-east Queensland grows and tragically sprawls, the crucial discipline of urban design is under threat. Right now the master of urban design course at QUT, the only serious urban design course in south-east Queensland, has just six enrolled students. Similarly, both the state government and councils, with their focus on the more technical field of town planning, employ very few dedicated urban designers. With apologies to John Byrne and others, those we do employ are getting older.

If Brisbane is to make its way as a world city, a local specialisation in urban design with a focus on subtropical landscapes must be nurtured. If Ipswich is to avoid sprawl, we too desperately need urban designers. It is imperative that our universities, councils and the state take an active interest in urban design. As custodians of our cities' future, QUT, the councils and the state government must act to prevent this discipline from fading away. I call today for the QUT course currently under threat to be salvaged by the university and for councils and the state to employ the professional urban designers who can and will design the great towns and cities of Queensland's future.