



Speech by

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AIRPORT ASSETS (RESTRUCTURING AND DISPOSAL) BILL

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (3.05 pm): I rise today to contribute to the Airport Assets (Restructuring and Disposal) Bill. In the process, I want to set the record straight about the Bligh government's objectives in selling airports in north Queensland. Yesterday the *Courier-Mail* Townsville and north Queensland edition carried a page 1 story headed 'Open skies: dream deal for FNQ airports'. This article stated that the plan to sell off the Cairns and Mackay airports would provide exemptions from local planning laws. It also speculated that the state would protect would-be buyers from any legal challenges to make sure a sale was pushed through.

Before turning to a detailed response to this issue, I want to congratulate the Treasurer and the government on the proposed sale of these two regional facilities which will, in the process of the sale, boost health services and hospitals in Cairns, Mackay and Mount Isa. The time is right for the state to step out of this area of the economy. However, I note the strategic retention of the airport land and the sale of the airports as operational assets.

These regional airport assets at Cairns and Mackay plus the Port of Brisbane Corporation's modest shareholding in the Brisbane Airport Corporation have a book value, I am told, of approximately \$800 million. This is \$800 million worth of funding that will be pumped straight into the health services for the vital and growing regions of Cairns, Mackay and Mount Isa. This funding will also allow the government to continue our record outlay on roads, water supply, power upgrades and other infrastructure projects plus the much-needed provision of extra nurses, police and teachers in this fast-growing state. However, contrary to the speculation contained in the article in yesterday's north Queensland edition of the *Courier-Mail*, this government is committed to appropriate, sustainable growth and will not throw proper planning out the window. This standard applies across the state and is not open for negotiation.

There is no suggestion from the Bligh government that we will follow the lead of those major airports controlled by the discredited federal legislation, where the commercial operator can bypass local and state planning regimes by seeking federal approval for expansions. Under the Howard government, federally controlled, privately owned airports became a running sore in the proper planning of Australian cities. This was not a surprise because the Howard Liberal-National government turned its back on our cities. It effectively gave up on playing any sort of policy role in relation to urban communities, and the appalling outcomes of rampant, relatively unchecked development on airport land will be an unfortunate monument to that government for many years to come.

I should make a point of highlighting here today the new attitude of federal minister Anthony Albanese, who has said that the Rudd Labor government is determined to ensure that future developments on airport land take into account the concerns of neighbouring communities and are better integrated with local infrastructure such as public transport. I am very confident about Minister Albanese's views on this matter, as his Sydney electorate encompasses the Kingsford Smith airport. Minister Albanese also announced in April this year that the Rudd government will develop Australia's first-ever comprehensive national aviation policy statement. The aim is to provide greater planning and investment certainty for the industry and address the wider community and environmental impacts associated with airports.

As the first step an issues paper was released which recognises that airports are not islands and the growth of airports can impact on the communities surrounding airports, particularly through increased noise and traffic. Equally, development outside the airport site can impact on the safety and efficiency of the operations of an airport. A key challenge at major airports is to integrate planning for the development of the airport site with consideration of the impacts outside the airport.

The bill currently before us demonstrates our commitment as a government to ensuring these Queensland airports are not planning black spots or islands as the Commonwealth issues paper might have them. The Bligh government is already moving to increase the role of local governments and hence local communities in the future planning and development of these airports. The Bligh government has already committed to staying on as the owner of the Mackay and Cairns airport land and will offer long-term leases, as I mentioned earlier, to interested commercial operators. Because we will retain ownership of the land, residents and councils can rest assured that any expansions or future commercial opportunities at these sites will have to follow an accountable process that ensures that local views are considered.

The purposes of the bill are: to facilitate the divestment of the airport business at Mackay and Cairns and the shareholding in Brisbane airport; to establish a planning regime for the airport land at Cairns and Mackay; and to provide for particular matters about the continuing operation of those airports. That is why I want to speak specifically to the planning elements and clear up the confusion created by the aforementioned article in the north Queensland edition of the *Courier-Mail*.

Let us get one thing straight. The Cairns and Mackay airports are not currently subject to local government planning schemes. This bill offers an increased role for local governments in a number of areas. Councils will now have a formal role in the periodic review of land use plans. Currently the planning regime for strategic port land is governed by the Transport Infrastructure Act and is not subject to the local planning scheme. Under the bill before the House, land use plans continue to be the principal planning document governing development but are subject to the provisions of the bill rather than the Transport Infrastructure Act.

The first land use plan under the bill will be declared by gazette notice by the Treasurer and will be a modified version of the current land use plan. Processes for review of the land use plan at the two-year mark and thereafter at eight-yearly intervals are specified in the bill. The Integrated Planning Act will apply the integrated development assessment system process to development applications in respect of airport land except where IPA is inconsistent with the bill. Where the chief executive of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning is the assessment manager for a development application, local government has been given a new role under the bill as an advice agency. Similarly, there is a range of other community infrastructure which is exempt from local government planning schemes through other mechanisms, whether through community infrastructure designation, state development areas or strategic port land, as I mentioned earlier.

The airport land will remain in ownership of a state owned company. The airport infrastructure is also of strategic importance. It is critical to ensure that adequate buffers remain around the infrastructure as well as appropriate airport related development is encouraged.

Other means by which local government issues are provided for in the bill include that the local government will be entitled to receive certain financial contributions for local government infrastructure—for example, drainage, public transport, roads, sewerage and water supply head works. That is not the case under the current arrangements. Further, within the first two years there is a requirement for the land use plan to include a priority infrastructure interface plan which is a document describing how the consistent development under the land use plan is intended to coordinate with the local government's priority infrastructure plan. The local planning schemes will be required to note the application of land use plans over the airport land so as to notify readers of the need to consult these plans in relation to airport land development issues.

The bill provides for a land use plan to specify what is exempt, self-assessable and assessable development. The land use plan, which will be put in place by the Treasurer from the completion of the transaction, will provide for developments such as the construction of a DFO—that is an example that people are aware of in Brisbane on airport land—to be assessable development requiring the applicant to demonstrate community need for the development.

Where the development is assessable, a development application will need to be lodged with the Department of Infrastructure and Planning as the assessment manager. The department will be in the position to properly assess any such application and the local government will have a formal role as an advice agency. The Brisbane City Council would have wished they had had that opportunity when developments such as DFO were occurring on Brisbane airport land under the discredited federal legislation.

With these mechanisms in place, any application for a development such as a DFO would be thoroughly considered in accordance with IPA and the land use plan, enabling appropriate consideration of

state and local planning issues. Currently in this situation the port authority is the assessment manager. The bill transfers this responsibility to the Department of Infrastructure and Planning.

The airports at Mackay and Cairns are recognised as important state infrastructure. Accordingly, ultimate control over the use of that land, subject to the land use plan, should continue to vest in the state. For development that is inconsistent with the land use plan, the transport minister will also have to have a role as a concurrence agency.

The state is permitting a private airport lessee power to prepare land use plans. However, it is ultimately the planning minister who will assess the draft plans. The minister has wide powers to consult with interested parties, including local government. The bill also sets out a formal process for this consultation and consideration both by the state and local governments.

The mechanism for an airport lessee to prepare a draft plan for assessment is not dissimilar to the normal situation where a landowner prepares a draft master plan or application for preliminary approval overriding a planning scheme or assessment by state and local government agencies. Under an arrangement between the Queensland and local governments in respect of these airports there is already a partial rates exemption in place. The bill continues this position. This approach is largely consistent with the position in respect of other Commonwealth owned airports. The partial exemption recognises that airports are important state owned infrastructure and that much of the airport land cannot be used for facilities which would involve the use of local government services. Runways and buffer zones do not need water and sewerage.

The government will look forward to working in closer consultation with local government with respect to the planning issues relevant to the airports at Cairns and Mackay. Good governments make hard decisions. The Bligh government's choice to effectively end its ownership and operation of airports to fund new hospitals and medical facilities in the regions will produce better health outcomes for those who are most in need of those services. Appropriate checks and balances are provided for in the bill to ensure that the state, in collaboration with local governments, plan and develop the airports in an appropriate way. I therefore commend the bill to the House.