



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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SUSTAINABLE PLANNING BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—LNP) (12.43 pm): The Sustainable Planning Bill is very important at this time in Queensland's history of growth and development. This is the case probably no more so than in the area around Toowoomba. We are experiencing very substantial growth not only in Toowoomba and the surrounding districts but also further out in the south-west with the growth of the energy and coal industries in the Surat Basin. We are seeing growth in many of the towns on the Western Downs, particularly in places like Dalby and Chinchilla.

It is important to have proper and sound planning. It is important to do that planning swiftly so that those who are putting forward huge amounts of money—either theirs or on behalf of investment funds or superannuation funds—know what is happening. Time is money. If developments are to be undertaken, we would like to see the very best result. We would like land, be it residential or commercial, to be available at the best possible price so that people can afford to build a home or build a factory or a business.

I think it is important that the system is efficient. On the other side of the coin, it is important that the developments that we have fit into the geography and the environment and make for good social living and include areas like parks, bikeways and so forth and generally add to people's quality of life.

Toowoomba is famous for some of its broad streets and beautiful trees and parks. If we do not have the vision to provide future generations with lovely big parks where families can enjoy their social life and enjoy living in their city then we have failed. All too often we see suburbs spring up with little pocket handkerchief parks here and there rather than substantial parklands where there can be four or five fields, botanic garden type areas and picnic areas. They are often more useful than little blocks of ground. The council has the expense of having to mow them and trim around all the trees. Beautiful big parklands can fulfil a proper purpose. This legislation is very important for all of those reasons. At this time of growth it is especially important.

One of the things that has been mentioned with regard to this bill is deemed approvals. This is an essential aspect of the legislation for Toowoomba. A lot of council members lost their seats in the election of 2004 because of the unhappiness that resulted from the sheer length of the time it took to gain approvals. When those approvals do not come through, it is not just the developer who loses work but the builders, the concreters, the painters and everybody else who relies on a certain flow of business. The young couples who are waiting for a house are the ones who suffer. I understand in this legislation that, whilst there are deemed approvals, there is also a new system where applications must be properly made and properly prepared. If they are not then they can be rejected by the council on that basis.

The IPA legislation served us reasonably well for a decade or more but it was extremely complex. The forced amalgamations have placed a huge impost on communities, and probably no more so than in the Toowoomba area. Eight councils were amalgamated into one. We had councils stretching from north of Yarraman right down almost to Inglewood and from south of Clifton almost up to Dalby. There were eight different systems, different groups of employees, different computer systems, different administrations and different local leadership. They have been amalgamated into one. It has been a costly and difficult exercise. It has cost the ratepayers of the Toowoomba Regional Council very dearly.

Now that the eight councils have been brought into one, there will be one planning scheme for the entire Toowoomba Regional Council. I know that the minister was up there last week talking about that issue. There is a structured process that the Toowoomba Regional Council is going through and that will culminate in November or December 2011 when the plan is finalised. It has to go through a number of stages and processes and people have to be given time to look at it. For that area of those former eight councils there will be a single system, and hopefully this legislation will make the system and the process simpler while still being accountable and rigorous. We will have to keep an eye on it to ensure it provides people with a good lifestyle and an affordable product.

This legislation is probably moving towards a higher level umbrella type of legislation with a greater concentration on regulations, and that is something that we cannot examine in the debate because the regulations will come in at a later date. When one sees the sheer size of the bill itself—that is, the coathanger—one realises the number of regulations that are going to emanate from that will be massive. That is where this legislation can either be a success or it can fail. That will depend on how practical the regulations are, how reasonable they are and how they take account of those two sides of the coin that I mentioned previously.

Property infrastructure plans will be involved with this legislation. In simple terms, that is where it is identified where the growth is going to be and therefore where the infrastructure needs are going to be—roads, sewerage systems, water and so forth—and then a dollar value is put on that by dividing up the number of allotments to see what it will cost and that gives, if you like, a system of pricing of the infrastructure that is required. This is where there is a very serious problem starting to develop, and it is developing now—that is, the government is withdrawing the 40 per cent subsidy that was provided for infrastructure. In the last budget it said that the scheme would continue. I think it had another two or three years to run, but basically the money has run out and that scheme is no longer continuing other than for those schemes that were previously agreed to. This week we heard the Minister for Local Government talk about two schemes at Gowrie Junction and another scheme nearby which were both part of the former Rosalie shire. They were approved just prior to amalgamation, so it would be about 18 months ago that those schemes were approved. Today the minister announced with much fanfare the money for those schemes, but those schemes were approved about 1½ years ago.

When a 40 per cent subsidy is withdrawn, that means that the 60 per cent that is currently collected has to go to 100 per cent. That means that the headworks charges have to be increased by about 40 per cent. That 60 per cent that was previously found by council has to be increased by 40 per cent to bring it up to 100 per cent. That is what is causing these massive increases in costs, particularly rates, and in the price of land. This morning I spoke about how people are absolutely reeling from the massive increases in costs because of the petrol tax and the increases in the price of electricity, gas, registration—a whole host of things—rates and water charges that are starting to hit people. Average low-income working people can no longer afford these financial hits, because they are not just little hits; they are big hits. It is no longer two per cent and three per cent; it is 10 per cent and 15 per cent. In the case of petrol, it was another 9.3c per litre because of the petrol tax. People do not have any more money. People are on fixed incomes, low incomes or self-funded retirees and they cannot afford it.

To give the House an example, in Toowoomba the access fee for the water pipeline going past your front fence has doubled from \$320 to \$640 per year and the usage fee for water has doubled. I know that Toowoomba is in a unique situation because it has to lift water over a 700-metre direct lift for the water that comes from Wivenhoe Dam to Cressbrook Dam and then from Cressbrook to Mount Lofty. It is a massive vertical lift. However, South-East Queensland got all of these water grids and pipelines put all over the place and the people of Toowoomba still have to pay 60 per cent of the cost of that pipeline, and that is a huge amount. We also need to bear in mind that Toowoomba is the area that is bearing the brunt of all of this development to the west of Toowoomba with the 4,000 B-doubles a day trundling through the main street of our city through 16 sets of traffic lights. That is an absolute social blight on the city and is destroying the four-lane highway before our very eyes, and that destruction is occurring almost on a monthly basis. Then there are the rollovers, the spillovers and the deaths that occur further out on the Warrego Highway and all of the sorts of problems associated with that.

With regard to the growth that is occurring throughout south-western Queensland, Toowoomba is the conduit for all of the export wealth and the energy needs of South-East Queensland. All of that is being funnelled through our city, and it is time that our city got some of the infrastructure that is being placed all over the state, particularly up and down the coast. We can talk about convention centres, bridges, walking bridges, green bridges, major theatres, waterfront developments at some of the northern cities and even big swimming areas in the Whitsundays where the Pacific Ocean laps at the edge. All of these sorts of things such as freeways, busways and underground tunnels are happening while the biggest inland city in Australia is taking all of the trucks hauling coal, grain, beef—the wealth of south-western Queensland—through into South-East Queensland. It is that wealth which provides jobs at the three major abattoirs, provides 70 per cent of the exports going across the wharf at the Brisbane port such as grain exports, provides coal for Swanbank, provides coal for export out of the Brisbane port and in part keeps the lights

on in South-East Queensland. All of this growth is being serviced mostly out of Toowoomba and, of course, the trucks coming through Toowoomba with the products on them.

The Sustainable Planning Bill really is coming at the right time, because there is a massive need for infrastructure in the Toowoomba area and one item in particular—that is, the Toowoomba bypass. It is a national disgrace that we do not have a bypass, because at the moment one of the main streets of Toowoomba is the heaviest freight-carrying road in Australia. It goes right through the centre of our city—a road that should be for mums taking their kids to school, for people going to work, for people going to sport or for people servicing Toowoomba. It is the only major road that runs from the east right through to the west to Wilsonton. The other CBD streets do not go right through from east to west. It is just clogged and choked with these 4,000 trucks a day through the 16 sets of traffic lights. It is a national disgrace that that which is contributing to low unemployment, contributing to the economic growth of our state and the economic growth of Australia gets neglected because we are an inland city. It is just a shame that we cannot get some of the infrastructure that goes elsewhere.

I am pleased that the minister is in the chamber, because I want him to understand that. Toowoomba has contributed to the economy for generations with grain, beef, dairy, pigs, education systems and accountancy and legal and health services. Now the western side of the city is more into mechanical construction. There is Easternwell, one of the biggest drilling companies in Australia with 700 employees—the foremost mining equipment manufacturer in the world, with 85 per cent of the world's underground robotic mining equipment manufactured in Toowoomba. These things have to be recognised. On top of that now with the coal and the energy, we should have this infrastructure.

As this growth occurs, it is so essential that there is planning. I believe this bill is going to give us the opportunity for it. The real nub of it is that we can plan it and say that this is what we need, but how do we fund it? As I pointed out earlier, we are bearing the burden in rates, massive increases in headworks charges and all of these other things because the government has \$87 billion of debt and it can no longer afford to pay and the people end up having to pay. Australia is a place where there are very few major inland cities. We have Toowoomba and Canberra and that is about it. But Toowoomba is one of the important cogs in Queensland, and we need a rail system. The fact that wheat and coal are coming through Toowoomba by truck when they should be coming through by rail but cannot is an absolute tragedy. There should be a rail system that goes through that range so that we can service and grow the south-west. Toowoomba needs proper roads that are not clogged up with 4,000 B-doubles a day, and that is why the bypass is needed. The water issue is being addressed by the Wivenhoe pipeline, but there will be other water needs in the future, particularly because Toowoomba and west of Toowoomba is a low-rainfall area. That has to be addressed. I have always been a believer in having some real vision. With proper engineering, I have always believed in the vision of water from the north from the Bradford scheme.

Sitting suspended from 12.59 pm to 2.30 pm.

Mr HORAN: Prior to the lunchbreak I was speaking about the need for innovative water schemes for the south-west of Queensland and the west of Toowoomba. With all the massive development that is going on, it seems a tragedy that some \$22.5 billion has been spent on giving out \$900 grants throughout Australia with no lasting legacy when some of those funds could have provided water from the floodwaters in the north via dams at Emerald and Nathan and then, say, to the Guluguba Range from whence it would run downhill via the Condamine, Darling and Murray rivers to fix the biggest environmental issue in Australia, which is the Coorong, and also provide water to the Western Downs and the Surat Basin, with all the development that is happening there. The Romans seemed to have been able to do it thousands of years ago throughout Europe and England. Certainly, I believe that we could do it with it modern technology and at the same time provide a lasting royalty and legacy to northern Australia and North Queensland in particular.

With the industrial development that is happening in my area, there is certainly a need for planning for airport facilities for Toowoomba on the eastern downs that can link our great inland city and the Surat Basin for the people who are going there in executive or working positions, so that they can travel to capital cities and to other places like Emerald and Townsville. Industrial land needs to be planned for on the western side of the city. Again, there is this window of opportunity to link up the Australian Inland Railway, which is designed to come from the southern states, through western New South Wales, through the eastern Darling Downs and then via the missing link between Wandoan and Banana to Gladstone and then hopefully one day link up to Darwin via Hughenden. With proper industrial land and planning, we could ultimately be the Singapore of eastern Australia just on the western side of Toowoomba servicing the Surat Basin, servicing the container traffic from ports such as Gladstone and Darwin and for South-East Queensland and also linking with the south of our nation.

All of these are big planning issues that need to be addressed to provide for a proper lifestyle. Often I think that, with the growth of the city—a great city like Sydney has massive parklands to the north, the south and the west with the Hawkesbury and the Georges rivers and the Blue Mountains—we should be looking at having some significant areas of land reserved, because the population of Toowoomba—it is

currently approximately 100,000, and certainly it is 100,000 and 140,000 if you include the surrounding areas—will grow massively in future years.

I join with our shadow minister and my LNP colleagues in supporting this bill. I also support the shadow minister in terms of some of the concerns that he has about the bill, particularly in terms of the regulations that we have not seen and which will play such a significant role in ultimately determining whether this legislation achieves what we all hope it will achieve—that is, swift, open and accountable decision making on development that is balanced with the environment and with people's lifestyles and that, ultimately, will lead to good-quality developments, be they housing or commercial developments that will make us proud of the various regions of our state, and particularly proud of Toowoomba and the south-west area.