



Speech by


Hon. Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Tuesday, 29 May 2012

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREENTAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction

 **Hon. AC POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection) (12.15 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003, the Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995, the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Geothermal Energy Act 2010, the Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2009, the Mineral Resources Act 1989, the North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability Act 2011, the Petroleum Act 1923, the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004, the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971, the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, the Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 2003, the Transport Infrastructure Act 1994, the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011, the Water Act 2000 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008 for particular purposes. I table the bill and the explanatory notes. I nominate the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill [[187](#)].

Tabled paper: Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, explanatory notes [[188](#)].

The green-tape reduction project commenced in 2010 with the aim to reform the licensing application and assessment processes under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 to reduce costs for industry and government while upholding environmental standards for the community. The project rebuilds the approval processes for environmental licensing under the act to reduce costs, improve business investment certainty and allow front-line environmental regulation to be delivered more efficiently. It is a coordinated package of legislation, business processes and information systems reform that has been developed in close consultation with industry. The changes proposed in this bill will reduce the burden in Queensland of slow approvals for industry and government and bring the environmental approvals process in line with international best practice.

I am very pleased to put on record that the Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 offers a substantial contribution to the LNP government's commitment to cut red tape and regulation by 20 per cent. The bill redrafts the provisions of the act that relate to licensing environmentally relevant activities, making it easier and cheaper for businesses to obtain certain environmental approvals, and will save Queensland businesses an estimated \$11.7 million each year. By deleting the three repetitive chapters that currently deal with licensing environmental authorities and replacing them with a single process, 90 pages of regulation—more than 12 per cent—of the Environmental Protection Act will be removed. The main objective of the bill is to introduce a transparent and simplified regulatory system focused on four major areas of reform: a licensing approach that is proportionate to the environmental risk; streamlined approvals for resource activities; flexible operational processes and approvals; and streamlined information requirements for numerous environmental approvals.

One of the features of the bill is a licensing system that is proportionate to risk. Quite simply, we will introduce a standard application process for lower risk businesses. Under this initiative, lower risk environmentally relevant activities that meet set eligibility criteria will be automatically approved to operate under a set of standard conditions. Small and medium size businesses will receive the most benefit, with approximately 50 per cent of all applications proposed to become standard, that is, around 410 per year. This will save each applicant an impressive \$20,000 on average in preparation costs, 150 pages in avoided application materials and 68 days in processing time. This can-do government will introduce a bill that reduces red tape in Queensland by approximately 62,000 pages per year.

This initiative goes a long way to reducing green tape on small businesses, but it is only the first step in reducing the regulatory burden for environmental approvals in Queensland. To take this further, I have asked my department to review the list of environmentally relevant activities in the Environmental Protection Regulation 2008 to identify opportunities to deregulate small businesses that are not licensed in other states. This reform will support the government's aim of building a four-pillar economy and accords with our blueprint for small business. The introduction of flexible operational approvals takes the best features of the integrated development assessment system under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 and combines them with the flexibility of the environmental authority system under the Environmental Protection Act.

This bill provides for a single licence type for all environmentally relevant activities—the environmental authority. Where there is also a need for a development approval, the environmental authority will be approved through the planning framework, the same as it is now. However, at the end of the process, the operator will be issued with a flexible environmental authority that will make the ongoing operations of the business much more responsive by simplifying the process to change an approval as the business grows. One example of the benefits of the flexible environmental authority is the introduction of the amalgamated authority. Operators of more than one site will be able to amalgamate all their environmental authorities to allow multiple sites to be managed as a whole and reduce the number of conditions and the administrative costs of multiple reporting requirements. For the first time, resources companies will be able to combine resources and non-resources approvals into a single authority. For example, a company operating a mining site and associated power station can amalgamate the two approvals into a single environmental authority and avoid conflicting conditions and reporting requirements and reduce administrative costs.

The bill further streamlines the approvals process for resources activities by replacing the current confusing process with a clear modular process with application, information, public notification and decision stages. Within this there are a number of other benefits for the industry. These include the removal of the requirement for an environmental management plan, replacing it with a clear list of application requirements; removal of the need to transfer the environmental authority when the tenure is transferred, meaning over 250 transfer applications a year will no longer be required; and allowing public notification to occur earlier in the process, reducing assessment time frames by around three months.

As an example of this can-do government's election commitment of reducing red tape by 20 per cent, I am pleased to inform the House that this bill will delete the requirement for plans of operations for small miners. This will remove a 15-page administrative requirement from around 2,400 operators in Queensland, a further reduction of 36,000 pages of green tape overall. That is 36,000 pages of green tape that does not have to be filled in, completed and checked by operators in Queensland and then approved by government.

I am pleased to inform the House that the reforms that will be achieved by the bill will be supported by changes to the Environmental Protection Regulation and to business processes and guidance materials. The list of matters that a decision maker must consider in the regulation will be reviewed and streamlined to ensure they support good environmental outcomes rather than bureaucratic, prescriptive requirements. This government's commitment to focus on outcomes rather than unnecessary administration is demonstrated in the development of a manual to support applicants and departmental officers. This will include information on the department's outcomes focused approach to environmental conditioning, which will improve consistency between approvals and the quality of environmental conditions. I have instructed my department to produce clear, simple English guidance materials to improve the quality of applications. This will result in fewer information requests, again helping to reduce delays in the assessment process.


Key industry, community and government stakeholders have been extensively consulted at all stages of the green-tape project and this bill. These initiatives were identified as priorities by industry associations with extensive operational experience. As recently as May 2012, leading stakeholder groups and associations such as the Queensland Resources Council, the Cement Concrete and Aggregates Association and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland have all publicly indicated their strong support to this government's approach in finalising the green-tape reduction project.

The green-tape reduction project reforms the Environmental Protection Act in line with our election commitment to reduce regulation and red tape by 20 per cent. Under the previous government this project

stalled, but I am pleased to inform the House that this can-do government has done and will continue to do what is best for all Queenslanders. We have delivered this project as a priority, as a first step in our relentless pursuit of a reduction in unnecessary green tape in Queensland.

Quite simply, the Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill ensures the objective of the Environmental Protection Act to protect our environment is met, while offering clearer and simpler approval processes to operate for a wide range of business in Queensland. I commend this bill to the House.

First Reading

 **Hon. AC POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection) (12.26 pm): I move—


That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee

 **Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Robinson): Order! In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee.