




Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREENTAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (5.16 pm): I rise to continue the opposition's contribution to the debate on the Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. Where I am from in Far North Queensland, our area contains many prestigious and monumental natural wonders—the Great Barrier Reef, Kuranda and Cape York to name a few. All of these environmental areas, like many others, are at risk of being destroyed by overdevelopment and human interaction. That is why it is crucial that the right legislative framework is implemented—to ensure these areas are protected for years to come. That is why I, like my colleagues in the Labor opposition, will be supporting this bill.

I want to echo the sentiments of the shadow minister and member for South Brisbane when she indicated that the bill before the House is a Labor bill. This bill was drafted by the former Labor government after extensive consultation with myriad different stakeholder groups lasting many months—something that some of those on the government benches fail to grasp when they undertake any form of consultation. This bill will have an effect on 15 pieces of legislation, with the main goal to find a balance between business activities and appropriate environmental risk through a streamlined process which lessens the regulatory burden on the operator whilst maintaining high environmental standards.

One of the main ways this will be achieved is through a streamlined approvals process broken down into three applications. The first is a standard application, which will apply a standard set of conditions to a project which is deemed to be straightforward and of low environment risk such as a petrol station, like the local Mobil in my electorate at Edmonton. This site would be subjected to standard conditions which would apply to all petrol stations across the state.

The second is a variation application. This application would be used for sites with a unique twist such as a petrol station located in a coastal town. It may be subjected to the same standard conditions as all other petrol stations, but because of its close proximity to water it may require additional safeguard barriers which would be applied to the site through schedules to the standard condition application.

The third is a site-specific application. This would be similar to the current full-scale application process, where a full analysis would be undertaken of the entire site to determine what environmental risks are associated with the site and what conditions should be placed upon it. An example of this would be the Alpha Coal site, which would go through a full site-specific process without corner cutting or interference by the government of the day in order to ensure the protection of the environment remains paramount.

As the shadow minister indicated, this bill implements myriad different legislative reforms such as provision for the amalgamation of multiple different environmental authorities into one document. This will enable operators to have one reporting date and one document, which will allow them to better run their business and protect the environment. Another reform will reduce the requirement on operators to provide information and the points in the process at which they are required to produce information. This means that the bulk of the information will be provided by the operator to the regulatory authority at the beginning of the process, with only minor communication occurring subsequently, to gain clarifying information. Another reform is the streamlined application process, which I have outlined.

This Labor bill redefines how businesses in Queensland interact with the environment in a sustainable, methodical manner which reduces the burden on businesses and operators. Almost none of those opposite would have an environmental bone in their body. One minute those opposite are talking hard on environmental issues and talking up their environmental credibility, and I quote from the minister's introductory speech—

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.

I might add that that was work undertaken by the former Labor government, not those on the government benches now, so it cannot really be claimed as one of their election commitments as it was something that was already occurring. Contrast these words with the actions of the government—where in most recent times it cut funding of up to \$97,000 to the Environmental Defenders Office, an office which provides community groups with an advocacy service to fight against activities, such as mines, which have an impact on the environment and their community.

I have just been informed that when the minister spoke earlier he tabled the government's response to the committee. Under the section relating to the points of clarification, the committee invited the minister to provide advice as to the adequacy of the 20 business day notification period. When talking about who would be consulted under this, the minister said, 'I will ensure that my department consults closely with the Queensland Resources Council, the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association and the Environmental Defenders Office in developing this guideline.' This may have been done prior to that decision being made, but it should have been updated. That is a real kick in the guts to the Environmental Defenders Office because it will not have that funding to enable it to continue the job it has been doing.

This government talks the talk on environmental issues but it cannot walk the walk, with many programs such as the Environmental Defenders Office being scrapped or provided with less funding. These organisations play an integral part in the environmental landscape of Queensland. It is a shame that the environment is being used as a target by this government to cut costs just like it is cutting jobs. This Labor bill before the House will play a key role in ensuring appropriate regulations are put in place to safeguard the environment from diabolical situations, such as the Alpha Coal fiasco again, or quashing the absurd request from Clive Palmer to pump thousands of litres of waste into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park from his Queensland nickel operation.

As foreshadowed by the shadow minister and member for South Brisbane, there are still some deficiencies with the bill that could have been amended and improved if the government did not try and rush the bill through, as usual, and instead allowed for proper and further consultation. One of the main issues revolves around the fact that the public notification period for community members is manifestly short. An example of this is that if an operator is proposing to build a large-scale mine on a site—a mine which will last for years, if not decades, and extract thousands and thousands of tonnes of minerals from the ground—members of the community only have approximately 20 days to be made aware of the project, gather information, form a group, collate expert and general material, write a submission and lodge it. Prima facie this does not allow much time for the community to rally against a project which will affect them and their area for many years to come. That is why we will be moving amendments to empower the community and allow them to have a greater opportunity to have their say in their local area.

This bill did not just pop out of thin air, nor was it drafted after the election on 24 March 2012. This 283-page bill was the result of months and months of consultation with key stakeholders and the community by the former department of environment and resource management to ensure a balance can be maintained between the high priority of protecting our environment and the ability to reduce the amount of regulatory burden on operators. It was led by two former environment ministers of this House—Vicky Darling and the former member for Ashgrove, Kate Jones. All of these people had the drive and determination to see our state shine in the environmental sphere, unlike those opposite who come in and claim the work of others as their own in order to fulfil an election promise. I thank each and every person who has contributed to the success of protecting the environment in Queensland, and I commend this Labor bill to the House.