




Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Wednesday, 28 November 2012

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BILL

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (9.38 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the Economic Development Bill 2012. The way this government carries on with its endless spin and rhetoric one would think that the economy was in recession. Queensland's economy is currently growing at four per cent, ahead of the nation. The biggest risk to growth in this state is this LNP government. Even the LNP's own budget papers state that their savage cuts will contribute to the economy slowing next financial year to a weaker result than was recorded under Labor last financial year. As I outlined yesterday in this parliament, the Commonwealth Bank economics research team has made an assessment that this government's budget cuts will weigh on the economy over the years to come.

This is just another voice against this government when it comes to management of the economy and in particular this legislation. And there is another voice—the voice of someone who once invested in and believed in this government. Of course, we all know who I am referring to. It is Professor Clive F Palmer. Professor Palmer has indicated today that he will take legal action against this bill. He said—

It means that the Government will have the power to take away State Significance status from projects leaving no right of appeal, making sovereign risk worse than any country in the world.

He went on further to say—

I think Queenslanders need to be very concerned about this legislation and the fact that it is being rushed through so quickly before anybody has a chance to understand it fully.

And the Deputy Premier says that this is just about process. What a laughable statement. Professor Palmer went on further to say—

The Bill is supposed to be about promoting economic development, but because it has not been done properly it only undermines investment and creates uncertainty.

While I do not have access to legal advice that Professor Palmer has to assess this statement in depth, I wholeheartedly agree with his sentiments about the lack of consultation. What the Deputy Premier fails to understand is that if you do not properly consult you will only create legacy issues and uncertainty. Neither of these outcomes is conducive to economic growth. I thought the Deputy Premier would have learned from this mistake the first time, when the submissions to the committee made it blindingly obvious that this is more than a process bill, but he has not. Instead, the Deputy Premier has put forward a series of amendments at the 11th hour with no opportunity for the committee to consider them—amendments that disregard many recommendations from the committee.

There has been no refinement of the scope in this bill for declaring priority development areas. This is a concern raised by the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Council of Mayors (SEQ), who both point out in submissions that it is inconsistent with the LNP's election agenda of re-empowering local government. It is a little like the farce that dashed expectations right across the state when it came to deamalgamation. The LNP promises one thing and delivers another. There are so many councils disappointed with the LNP and what it promised before the election. It is disgraceful.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr PITT: You broke your promise, Deputy Premier. You broke your promise and now you've got to lie—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ruthenberg): Order!

Mr PITT: You made your bed and now you have to lie in it. You are just going to have to put up with it. These powers will provide a broad scope for the corporation sole, known as the Minister for Economic Development Queensland, to overrule local government planning schemes—

Mr Cripps interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, order.

Mr PITT: The dark horse has fired up—and to remove appeal rights under the Sustainable Planning Act. The Minister for Economic Development Queensland, not to be confused with the portfolio held by the member for Callide, provides powers much broader than for urban development areas under the Urban Land Development Authority Act. The previous government's legislation specifically restricted powers to the development of affordable housing. The previous legislation, as far as I am aware, did not include powers to acquire land that the Minister for Economic Development Queensland has in this bill. These powers go much, much further and there has been no evidence provided—

Mr Seeney: How?

Mr PITT: You have had your go, Deputy Premier. It is my turn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mulgrave, please address your comments through the chair.

Mr PITT: The Deputy Premier has had his turn. He is going to have to sit there and listen to what the opposition has to contribute to this debate.

These powers go much, much further, and there has been no evidence provided of how they will support economic growth. For all the talk of consultation with local government, there is no requirement in this bill for the Minister for Economic Development Queensland to consider the outcome of consultation with local government in the decision to declare a priority development area. This is merely saying, 'We will legislate to consult,' but nothing further. The Urban Land Development Authority Act at least, at section 11, required a minister to consult with local government about a revocation or reduction of an urban development area and required that it be considered in making a decision.

Labor left private infrastructure investment in this state at record levels. The Deloitte Access Investment Monitor in March found that there were \$102.9 billion in projects underway in Queensland when Labor left office, with another \$91.7 billion in the pipeline. Back then we had an unemployment rate of 5.5 per cent and there were 26,600 more jobs in the Queensland economy. The Deputy Premier has provided no evidence that these priority development areas will increase gross state product or set new records of private investment. All we get from the Deputy Premier is more 'don't you worry about that' statements.

I also found it a bit curious that this bill changes the title of 'significant projects' to 'coordinated projects'. The justification provided is that it allows proponents to present their project to investors as more advanced than it actually is. To me this seems a bit incongruous with the Deputy Premier's talk of growing the economy and attracting foreign investment.

The legislation also curiously removes matters for consideration for the Coordinator-General in declaring a coordinated project. These include the potential effect on relevant infrastructure, employment opportunities, the level of investment and strategic significance of the project. This will lead to fewer projects being declared coordinated projects. The department advised—

The intention of the amendment is to ensure that only projects that are regarded as truly significant, are consistent with government policies and plans and are likely to happen are declared.

While I understand the need to support only projects that are viable or likely to proceed, there has not been any evidence of the existing criteria leading to nonmeritorious projects being declared of state significance. There has been no evidence provided to support the removal of these matters of consideration for the Coordinator-General in declaring a coordinated project. Nor has there been any acknowledgement of the committee's recommendation that public notification requirements for draft terms of reference for an EIS are being removed. This removes the ability for stakeholders to engage early in the EIS process.

The criticisms of this bill come from all quarters—from AgForce and the Farmers Federation, from local governments and from environment groups. The concerns raised are genuine and they should be listened to, much like the concerns of some of the government backbenchers in this parliament. To conclude, when the Deputy Premier introduced this legislation he said—

It is very appropriate that this bill not spend a long time before the committee. It is not a bill that requires those types of examinations. It is not a bill that requires the detailed public submissions and detailed opportunities for public input that some of the other bills that are currently before the House do.

What a laughable statement. Not only is the Deputy Premier wrong; he failed to learn his lesson. If the Deputy Premier were genuine about listening to anyone but himself he would refer his amendments back to the committee for proper consultation and consideration. But this Deputy Premier will not listen. He will not listen to his own backbench or the recommendations of the committee, let alone the concerns of Queensland's agricultural industry, local community groups and certainly not the opposition. The opposition will not be supporting this legislation. It strips away community and local government appeal rights. It is ill-considered, has been pushed through with minimal consultation and has the potential to create a perception of sovereign risk.