



Speech by

Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Tuesday, 31 July 2012

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREENTAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.25 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate of the Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. As the shadow minister and member for South Brisbane has already stated, this is a Labor bill. The genesis of this bill preceded the minister sitting opposite and even preceded the former minister for environment, Vicky Darling. The idea and subsequent consultation for this piece of legislation was commenced by the former member for Ashgrove and former minister for environment, Kate Jones. The reason I make these remarks is to put on the public record that this bill did not somehow appear overnight. It was not an idea or a bill based on an election commitment by the now government; it was a Labor generated idea and a Labor generated bill.

As previous speakers have outlined, this bill will streamline the application process for environmental activities. Whilst I will not go into the technical details, I would like to put on record that this Labor generated bill is estimated to save 150 pages and an average of 68 days in processing time per application. In addition to this, this bill will provide a streamlined and flexible approval process; allow operators at multiple sites to amalgamate different environmental authorities onto one document, to allow one reporting date; and allow a more streamlined approval process for mining and petroleum applications. These improvements, coupled with many others contained within the 283-page bill, will allow the operator to operate within a less regulated, flexible environment whilst keeping the environment at the fore.

It is no secret that every bill that has come before this parliament can be constantly amended. That is why I will be supporting the amendments moved by the shadow minister and member for South Brisbane. One of the main issues the opposition has with the bill is the lack of time allowed for consultation during this session of parliament. During the public consultation period and hearing—

Mr Powell: Your version had 10 days.

Mr MULHERIN: I am talking about the parliamentary committee process. During the public consultation period and hearing undertaken on Wednesday, 6 June 2012 it was apparent that further finetuning could be done to make this great Labor bill into an excellent bill. But what did we see? We saw the LNP government rush through the consultation phase, with key groups such as the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Queensland Law Society stating that the bill had been rushed, allowing insufficient time for its impacts to be assessed. One of the main concerns that came out of the public hearing was the apparent lack of public submission time set aside for community members to have their say on major projects within Queensland but predominantly within the south-east corner of the state.

During the committee process there were a variety of submissions on this issue, but the main one was from the Environmental Defenders Office, which indicated that 20 days was too short and 50 days should be allowed for public consultation. This is something which is supported by the opposition and something that the shadow minister and member for South Brisbane has foreshadowed in her speech. As I travel the state—most recently up north in Cairns, Bowen, Mackay and Townsville—people are talking about the lack of consultation that this government provides, which was evident during its public

consultation for the current bill. Therefore, I was surprised when I heard the minister on ABC Radio on 23 July 2012 stating that he agreed with the Environmental Defenders Office that the community deserved more time to lodge a submission against a project and raised the days to 30 business days for small developments and 40 business days for large scale operations, with the ability for appeals on top of this. This is the same Environmental Defenders Office that the minister cut funding to only weeks prior, devastating the organisation and removing a vital source of information and advocacy service from the public domain.

Although this is a step in the right direction, we believe that we can go further than this and better empower our communities to have a say in activities that could last years, if not decades, into the future. Unfortunately, the minister could not help himself and continued playing politics with an important issue by implying that under the Labor government the public only had 10 business days to lodge an objection when, at the conclusion of the interview, he said that that certainly gives them longer than the 10 days previously had under the Labor government. The minister unfortunately was being a bit tricky with the truth, as Jo Bragg from the Environmental Defenders Office pointed out after the minister's interview that the community has always had 20 business days to lodge a public submission under the current legislation. It just goes to show that the minister is not serious about the important issue of the environment and would rather play politics with the issue to score cheap points. I table a copy of the *Courier-Mail* article which outlines this event.

Tabled paper: Courier-Mail article, dated 24 July 2012, titled 'Untangling green tape gets tricky' [\[610\]](#).

This Labor bill will form the foundation for positive environmental change within our state. It will allow business to better engage in our economy by cutting the burden of red tape and streamlining the process it has to go through whilst not compromising environmental standards. I look forward to supporting the shadow minister and the member for South Brisbane with regard to her amendments to better strengthen the bill. I commend this Labor bill to the House.