




Speech By
Hon. Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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**REGIONAL PLANNING INTERESTS BILL; PROTECTION OF PRIME
AGRICULTURAL LAND AND OTHER LAND FROM COAL SEAM GAS MINING
BILL**

 **Hon. AC POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection) (9.43 pm): It is with much pleasure that I also rise this evening in support of the Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013. Again, this bill is a clear demonstration of how the Newman government takes a common-sense approach to land use planning across the entire state of Queensland but particularly within our specific Queensland regions. I start by warmly congratulating the Deputy Premier on this bill and on the outstanding effort that he and his team in the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning have undertaken in bringing it forward. I also congratulate them on working with my department, the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, as well as Minister Cripps's and Minister McVeigh's departments as we look to restore a level of balance among the vital four pillars of our economy, particularly our resources and agricultural industries, our living areas and our environmental areas. Again, it has been a pleasure to work with the Deputy Premier on the development of this bill as well as the new regional plans that underpin it.

It is those regional plans that actually epitomise what this bill is all about. Labor took a 'one size fits all' approach to managing the state, whether it was the Wild Rivers Act, the Vegetation Management Act or the Strategic Cropping Land Act. Regarding those bills, Labor took a 'one size fits all' approach to the entire state. This bill and these regional plans take a regional focus. They acknowledge that our regions are different and diverse and that in different regions the competition between conflicting land uses is different. It may be agriculture and resources, environment and resources or living areas and the resource industry and/or agriculture. What this bill allows us to do is get that balance right.

The bill introduces a framework that will see the preparation of that new generation of regional plans. As part of those regional plans, four new areas of regional interest have been identified. They include the priority agricultural areas, the strategic cropping areas, the priority living areas and, of particular interest to me, the strategic environmental areas. As I said, Queensland is a vast and contrasting state. From the cape to Coolangatta, our state has 13 diverse bioregions, each with their own characteristics, each with their own communities and each with their own opportunities for how they will contribute to the state as a whole and how as a piece of the state they contribute to the Queensland jigsaw.

The Regional Planning Interests Bill seeks to identify preferable land uses for our state's diverse communities. As Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, I am particularly pleased that the bill recognises the importance of these strategic environmental areas to our regional communities and, might I add, to their economies. One of the first of these new plans being prepared is for the Cape York area. As members of the House will know, a key priority of the Newman government has been to enable sustainable, economic development opportunities on the cape—well

led by the member for Cook, Assistant Minister Kempton—balanced with the protection of environmental areas. That is why before the last election we committed to reset that balance by repealing those emotive ‘one size fits all’ wild river declarations on the cape and replacing them with a statutory regional plan in consultation with local communities.

The preparation of the Cape York Regional Plan together with this bill will provide local communities with greater control of their own economic future while ensuring that iconic natural areas and areas of high conservation value are appropriately protected. It provides a process to manage the impacts of resource activities on environmental areas and provides for their co-existence with other users of the land in that region. It goes without saying that Cape York is a pretty special place. We could speak at length about some of the environmental values there as well as the economic values and opportunities that are presented to the communities on the cape. I will focus briefly on some of those environmental values.

Cape York has one of the most extensive and least disturbed areas of active parabolic dunes in the world at the Shelburne Bay dune fields. The major rivers of Cape York are definitely the lifeblood of the region’s rural, tourism and other industries and have contributed to the development of this region. These rivers are also an intrinsic feature of the region and significantly affect how, where and under what conditions the communities of the region go about their lives. These rivers also have significant recreational value, both in their own right and in how they contribute to the environmental value of the area. These characteristics do need to be protected, but it is these same characteristics which often provide opportunities for economic development through sensitive development of this beautiful region.

Any conflicts between mining and areas for residential development, agricultural use or special environmental areas such as Cape York must be managed in a coherent way. I stress the importance of the fact that this bill will be underpinned by these new regional plans that allow us to take a local and regional focus in consultation with communities, individuals, interest groups and industry bodies to get that balance right. This bill requires that these areas are mapped, and where there are overlaps between these areas and resource activities such as mining or coal seam gas operations, particularly in the Darling Downs and further west in the Channel Country, these operations must consider and align with the land use policies in those new generational regional plans. This bill will therefore ensure that land use conflicts are considered and resolved through a regional planning decision again taking into consideration that local knowledge.

It was with great pleasure that I stood alongside the Premier and the Deputy Premier when we declared that Queensland’s first strategic environmental area would be the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve. Despite all of their green grandstanding, Labor’s wild rivers legislation would have allowed mining to occur on the majority of that reserve. Under this new framework, the entire reserve will be protected. It is important to note here that it was not the Wilderness Society, the greens or the Labor Party who set aside this reserve in the first place. The John Howard federal coalition purchased this property as a tribute to Steve Irwin and the work that he did, and the LNP government here in this state will again give it the protection that it rightly deserves for that reason.

While this is just the first example, we heard from the Deputy Premier that consultation is still continuing around what the regional plan will look like for Cape York. I anticipate that there will be other strategic environmental areas in the Cape York plan but, importantly, there will be areas where economic development is actively sought and encouraged and, in essence, given the green light to proceed. Those opportunities will be extensive across the Cape and will include the resources industry, the agricultural industry, the tourism industry, community development and, obviously, property construction. It will be exciting to see that process unfolding in the coming months.

Obviously in tandem with the finalisation of that plan and the work that Minister Cripps has been doing in the Channel Country, we are undertaking the revocation of the wild rivers legislation in those areas. That has been put out for public consultation. Consistent with the legislative requirements, submissions have been received and are currently being considered by myself and the department. I make the point that the protections will not be removed until the regional plans are in place, because under this bill we will ensure that we get the balance right. We will ensure that we get the correct balance between economic development, agriculture, the resource industry, the tourism industry and the environment. We will get that right and have them in place through a far more sensible and regionally focused piece of legislation through regional and local plans that are developed in partnership with the communities that they represent and which truly reflect the diversity of this great state that is Queensland.