




Speech By  
**Fiona Simpson**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)**

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (2.39 pm): I rise to speak to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2015. As has been mentioned, this bill amends the City of Brisbane Act, the Local Government Act, the Local Government Electoral Act, the Sustainable Planning Act and the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail) Restructuring Act.

Firstly, I would like to address amendments as they pertain to the Sustainable Planning Act and particularly infrastructure charging. The planning and delivery of infrastructure is a vital responsibility of government and requires more than wish lists; it requires funding pipelines. Local government often rely upon being able to charge developers for infrastructure to ensure that that infrastructure is able to support the local communities. It has been a contentious area in years past and not always handled well. That is the reason why the LNP brought in a strong framework of reforms. It was to address this contentious area and to ensure that frameworks were put in place so that there was accountability when it came to infrastructure charging.

The state government, through these amendments, is giving local governments more time to complete their infrastructure plans, with up to a two-year extension until the middle of 2018, by which time if they do not have a plan they will no longer be able to charge those particular infrastructure charges. So this is an extension. As the Deputy Premier has noted, it is not a *carte blanche* extension; however, it is an extension of up to two years. The concern we have in regard to this extension is that, if there continues to be a pushing out and a failure to deliver these plans in a way that is accountable to the local area, it can put a brake on appropriate investment in that local area. It certainly does not aid transparency.

I note that there have been requests from some local governments for this extension and that there will be worthy reasons for putting those forward, but it is vitally important that the deadlines for the delivery of these plans are not allowed to keep blowing out. The plans need to be in place in order to appropriately and transparently level infrastructure charges with the appropriate investment that underpins those plans. We are talking about infrastructure such as water supply, sewerage, stormwater, transport, parks et cetera.

Local governments do need to be able to appropriately charge developers for infrastructure required by those developments to support the local community. These plans are also important for the cost-effective delivery of infrastructure, with industry knowing what work will be available and being able to plan accordingly. As we know, recently the Civil Contractors Federation released its *Building our future: 2015 update* for Queensland and pleaded for greater investment in infrastructure projects amid fears of a looming backlog over the next five years. Certainly recent construction statistics show that there has been a slump in the civil construction industry.

It is important at all levels of government that plans are clear, that there are not only wish lists but also pipelines of funding and, in respect of local government, that there is transparency for the charges they seek to levy on those who are being asked to pay. This is important not only for

communities but also for investment in local jobs and for housing affordability locally. State legislation should facilitate local government's ability to grow their local economy, and housing and construction, through appropriate development, is a key part of that. The LNP recognises that local governments are the elected bodies closest to Queensland communities; therefore, it is appropriate that the department provide support as planning reforms continue to be put in place.

We also know from feedback from local government and industry that in this previously contentious area of infrastructure charging there was a lack of transparency in some areas and certainly a lack of consistency. That is why in government the LNP established a long-term local infrastructure planning and charging framework for Queensland that sought to address that, that sought to address the shortfalls of the previous system. Following extensive stakeholder consultation and engagement, the LNP implemented reforms to the Queensland local infrastructure planning and charging framework. I wish to acknowledge my colleague the former deputy premier and minister for infrastructure, Jeff Seeney; the assistant minister at the time, Ian Walker; and also the subsequent assistant minister, Rob Molhoek, who were extensively involved in working up these changes.

These amendments to the Sustainable Planning Act were to support local governments in delivering a framework to provide confidence to industry when planning and developing projects that ensured industry had a better understanding up-front of what they would be expected to contribute to local government, as well as the water distributor-retailer in terms of trunk infrastructure. This is so important to help create jobs and boost the economy and to deliver more affordable housing for Queenslanders, as well as being reflective of the communities' aspirations and requirements in their local environment.

As mentioned, our reforms aimed to provide greater consistency to the development industry when planning and developing projects to ensure they were clear about what they were expected to contribute to local infrastructure. Our reforms also provided local governments with the legislative tools to better plan and manage this process so that they could meet the needs of their growing local communities. It was important that local governments be able to properly plan with the full knowledge of what their revenue from such activities will be so that they understand what revenue will be coming in and the infrastructure that can be supplied.

One of the key features of our reforms was that levying infrastructure charges and conditioning development approvals for infrastructure were intended to be more consistent across local government and distributor-retailer entities. We were critical of the way that the previous Labor government rolled out priority infrastructure plans, as they were more about bureaucracy than delivery, and local governments just had to live through it while the subsidies for their water and sewerage infrastructure were slashed. The process for these priority infrastructure plans was expensive, full of red tape and cumbersome. At the same time, as mentioned, local governments lost subsidies for water and sewerage. Previously, these priority infrastructure plans made it nearly impossible for local governments to effectively prepare and deliver infrastructure plans and policies and charging regimes such that they could provide certainty to industry. In contrast, there was a lot of effort put into this area by the LNP to find a way forward, commence new funding avenues for local governments and encourage new infrastructure.

The LNP opposition is pleased to see that the Labor government in this case is not undoing worthwhile LNP reforms; therefore, we will not be opposing the amendments to the Sustainable Planning Act and South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail) Restructuring Act. As I have mentioned, I do have concerns about the extension and that certainly needs to be assessed with rigour. We do need to see accountability with any level of government but certainly with our local government as well—that the infrastructure plans are being put in place, that they are transparent, that they are accountable and that costs can be appropriately levied against developments to ensure the infrastructure is put in place.

The accountability of these plans is important for the communities served by the infrastructure, for the industry which invests in them and also for local jobs. It is fundamental that local governments have these plans in place as soon as possible. As noted by the Property Council and the Shopping Centre Council of Australia, it needs to be made clear that no further extensions will be provided if a local government does not meet the proposed new deadlines, and certainly where extensions are provided under this legislation, as I have mentioned, there has to be great rigour.

I wish to note that the Shopping Centre Council of Australia opposed the extension, as they do not want to see concession to the local government sector result in an unaccountable and expensive process which sees no improvement in the delivery of local infrastructure across Queensland. The Property Council opposed the proposed two-year extension, as to them it meant that local governments were not being held to account in meeting statutory deadlines associated with infrastructure planning.

I turn to some of the other provisions in the legislation that are uncontroversial. An amendment will allow the exhibiting of election material such as how-to-vote cards to take place during the caretaker period for local government elections. It is a reasonable amendment and one that we do not oppose. We will be supporting it. The amendment will remove inconsistency and permit an accepted how-to-vote card to be available for inspection at a local government's public office during the caretaker period for a local government election.

There is also a redundant provision that is being removed from the legislation where it makes reference to mayoral first-past-the-post voting in undivided local governments to appropriately refer to it as optional preferential voting. To clarify, there have been quite a few changes in recent years in this area. In order to make the voting system for mayors the same across all local governments and consistent with the method of voting for members of the Legislative Assembly, last year the LNP changed the voting system for mayors in undivided local governments from first past the vote to optional preferential voting. This is making sure that some of those redundant provisions are removed from the legislation.

To bring this to a close, I reiterate that I am pleased that some of the reforms that we were able to put in place in government essentially remain in this legislation. It makes a refreshing change because most of the time we spend in here is the Labor government undoing a lot of LNP legislation, but in this case they are only minor amendments and ones that have been requested by local government. We do stress, though, it is important there is accountability. There is some concern that there is another potential two-year extension, but it is important these infrastructure plans are put in place in a timely way so communities can know what infrastructure they are getting, there is accountability as to what people can be charged to deliver that infrastructure and there is no second-guessing.