




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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PLANNING BILLS (COGNATE DEBATE)

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (10.10 pm): It is my pleasure to rise in the House tonight to speak in respect of these bills that are before the House. I want to say how relieved I am that we are finally debating what was originally the planning for prosperity bill, which was all about establishing a new planning act to simplify planning arrangements. Tonight, we have heard a lot of rhetoric about neighbourhood disputes and people's concerns about neighbourhoods. Earlier, the member for Springwood said that this is a government that meets, listens and consults. I can tell members that the former deputy premier, the former assistant minister for planning, Ian Walker, and I spent a lot of time consulting and travelling all over Queensland. We conducted 30 workshops in about 12 months with, on occasions, up to 100 participants from all sorts of industry groups from across the state. I can recall visiting 20 regional centres across Queensland and meeting with local planning groups, local councils, local community groups and local action groups. I was out there listening to the people of Queensland. I heard what they had to say about the current planning legislation.

I can tell members that back in 2012 we inherited an absolute basket case. We had a planning system that put layer upon layer of cost and unnecessary regulation and delay over every land assessment approval and over every development approval. The cost of that, which was put on the cost of building houses, was absolutely unsustainable.

Tonight, I rise to speak in support of the bills that the LNP introduced. Some 3½ years we began work on those bills. Their primary purpose was to drive down the price of land to make housing more affordable, to streamline the development assessment system and to restructure planning legislation to remove superfluous procedures, detail and redundant provisions. Frankly, previously we had a planning act that the people of Queensland could not afford. This legislation is not about us. This legislation is not about our generation—and I note that most of us here are in that 30- to 54-year-old age group. This legislation is about providing a future for our kids so that our kids can afford to have access to sustainable housing, so that our kids can have access to housing that is well located. Most importantly, this legislation is about making sure that we have a planning system that supports affordability.

I note that the planning minister spoke earlier about the need to meet and consult, and referred to the fact that housing affordability is so important. Yet in Logan we have seen delay after delay in a major revitalisation of public housing and the opportunity to build new affordable housing and develop housing to help make the whole project self-funding so that thousands of people in South-East Queensland can have access to housing with support from the government. Again, we see this Labor government frozen at the wheel, conducting review after review. I note that it has been 14 months since Labor came to government and we have had to labour over this legislation. I am pleased that we are finally debating it, because the people of Queensland deserve to have planning legislation that will speed up the planning process and, in the process, reduce unnecessary costs.

This issue is not just about the development assessment processes, property developers and other people wanting to make a buck; it is about councils throughout this state. Earlier, we heard the member for Burdekin talk about some of the smaller councils in regional Queensland that, as a result of the previous legislation, were required to make a new town plan every five to 10 years whether they needed one or not. But we had the crazy situation in places such as the Gold Coast where areas were growing rapidly and the Gold Coast City Council was tied to a plan and there was no flexibility to make changes as needed through temporary planning instruments and other instruments so that it could adapt to the changing marketplace and the demands of the market at that time.

I am pleased to have been part of the previous LNP government that commenced this planning process. Earlier, we heard the former deputy premier speak about the fact that we inherited 14 separate planning policies and departments fighting between themselves, point-scoring over ridiculous minutiae, which made it difficult for councils, developers and the industry to understand the requirements that the government wanted them to meet. The former LNP government undertook a significant review of the Queensland planning provisions. Earlier, we heard the former assistant minister for planning and now the shadow Attorney-General talk about the introduction of SARA—the State Assessment Referral Agency—which was a great initiative that won both state and national awards. That agency was about getting the process moving. It was about unblocking the gridlock that was caused through 14 different state government departments fighting with each other.

There were challenges that came with a planning act that was subordinate to a regional plan, that was not quite sure how it interrelated with the planning provisions. Not only were the development industry and mum-and-dad applicants confused about what was required but also the legislation itself was quite confusing and somewhat onerous. We had legislation that was subordinate to planning provisions that were brought in after the legislation. It was an absolute basket case.

I say again that I am so pleased that we are finally here tonight, after some 3½ to four years of hard work. We have seen further delays over the past 14 months, but Queenslanders deserve to have better planning legislation. Queenslanders deserve to have legislation that is simpler, succinct and contains much cleaner and simpler assessment procedures. Previously, there were seven different areas of assessment. The legislation that we have introduced streamlines those procedures down to four or five, making that process much simpler.

In my time as a member of the Gold Coast City Council as chair of finance and a member of a number of committees in that boom period from 2004 to 2008, I cannot tell members how frustrating it was trying to get amendments to the town plan and having to go through state interest check after state interest check only to have the documents returned, only to have to revisit them again, causing further delays. I can tell members that some of those delays, particularly in respect of the review of infrastructure charges, cost the Gold Coast millions and millions of dollars in lost revenue while people in Brisbane sat on their hands, delaying the state interest reviews into infrastructure charges at a time when construction costs were going up at some 14 per cent to 20 per cent per annum. In the space of two years we saw planning and assessment costs on the Gold Coast go up from \$19 million to \$43 million for no reason other than just trying to tap dance through the myriad changes and layers of increased bureaucracy and requirements that came from the previous state Labor government.

I am pleased that we are finally here, that we have legislation before us that we can consider that will simplify the planning processes for Queenslanders, that will be about driving forward one of our most important industries, the construction industry, and that will position us to take advantage of the growth that is yet to come as we see more and more interest in Queensland as a great place to come to live, to work and to play. I cannot stress enough the importance of these reforms.

As we have previously heard, the new legislation is all about better strategic planning for councils. It is about ensuring effective public participation and engagement—there has been plenty of that over the last few years—and it is also about creating an open, transparent and accountable planning system that delivers investment and community confidence. Above all, it is about getting Queensland going. It is about supporting our local economy. It is about making housing more affordable for generations to come and providing jobs for our young people.