




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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LAND, EXPLOSIVES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (12.57 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill before the House. I want to start by adding to a couple of issues which the member for Burdekin had addressed. He touched on the viability of the Aboriginal land-holding corporations in the cape. When we were in Cairns for our hearings we met a lot of the office holders from these corporations. I was very impressed with the professionalism of these office holders and these corporations. They were professional, they were well aware of their responsibilities and they had a range of staff with them as well. I was quite impressed with their level of professionalism. They would be a model in many ways to many volunteer organisations throughout the state.

In touching on the issue of not putting a burden on these volunteer organisations, I point out that this bill lessens the burden on those organisations. We want to avoid extra bureaucracy and extra duplication being put on to these organisations, having to create new bodies to be responsible for land that does come under their ownership. I think this bill lessens the burden on those organisations which are still essentially volunteer organisations.

The issue of Indigenous housing was touched on by the shadow minister. Once again, the provisions in this bill will help provide a greater degree of social housing throughout the area. One of the provisions talks about how we can make flexible the process to negotiate the sale of social housing between the trustees and the state government. That can only lead to better outcomes and help provide more secure housing outcomes for residents in this area as well.

This was one of the first bills that our committee looked at. As I said, it gave us the opportunity to travel up to Cairns and that was great. I found listening to a lot of the traditional owners was quite instructive and illuminating, and I think we all learnt a lot from those public hearings as well. In the hearings in Cairns there were two major issues that we needed to deal with in respect of this bill. One was in regard to mining on the land that is transferred through to the land-holding organisations.

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (4.03 pm), continuing: As I was saying previously, when the committee travelled north to listen to submitters on this particular bill we heard from the traditional owners, particularly Mr Ross from the Olkola people, about the businesses they are conducting on the land that will be transferred to them. It was quite enlightening to hear about the tourism business that is based on the land there and also the carbon farming business. He emphasised that if mining or mining exploration takes place on these sensitive parcels of land it can be disruptive. The tourism operations are based on the golden-shouldered parrot. It is an endangered species, an iconic species, and many people travel there to see them. Some of the areas he talked about were dreaming sites—sites associated with the creation stories, the kangaroo rat and the golden-shouldered parrot. It is very important that these lands with high cultural values are protected.

With mining exploration comes more roads, bringing people onto the land. People in four-wheel drives come onto the land shooting, camping, leaving their rubbish around and disturbing the birds as well, which is quite disruptive to their business. One of the issues was ensuring that the prohibition on

mining on the land that is returned to them continues. That is one of the reasons we have been asked by many corporations about the possibility of keeping some mining prohibitions, and that is being addressed through the minister.

One of the other issues we faced in this particular bill that was talked about at great length was the process of land transfer. Until now when land is transferred to an Aboriginal landholding entity the corporations had to set up another corporation, essentially another body of office holders, even if the land that was coming under their jurisdiction was attached to a lot next to them. As I said before, that can be quite onerous; there is a lot of bureaucracy in that. It makes sense that if there is a body that can hold the land and title there, it should go to them. There was some concern, clearly. Some bodies had concerns about that land being transferred to a body they did not feel comfortable with. It was very clear from the briefings we had that there was enough oversight to meet the concerns of these particular office holders.

There is a three-level process to ensure oversight. Firstly, in relation to the land to be transferred, the minister must be satisfied that there are no other interests in that land and that it can be transferrable state land. Secondly, a process of public consultation must be conducted. Thirdly, there is an anthropological authentication which involves Commonwealth processes as well. Hearing all of those things gave us confidence that there are enough oversights in the bill to ensure that land that is transferred goes to an appropriate body. At the end of the day that meant we were satisfied with what the bill was proposing with regard to the transfer of Aboriginal land.

We had a couple of other issues, and I will quickly touch on those. For example, once this bill is passed a modern compliance regime will be attached to the department whereby officers can stop or remove vehicles or motorbikes causing nuisance or damage on state land. The departmental officers will be able to deal with inappropriate structures on state land, for example, retaining walls or abandoned buildings that have asbestos. Another excellent part of this bill provides for marine leases to be turned into rolling or perpetual leases if they are supporting infrastructure on island resorts such as a pier or a jetty—very important pieces of infrastructure.

We have touched on the electronic conveyancing reforms we are seeing. We started the move to electronic conveyancing in 1994 and the provisions in this bill continue those reforms to make it quicker, easier and more accurate when title is being transferred.

I have talked about the improvements to Indigenous housing we will see. I thank the member for Burdekin for his concerns. However, if we are concerned about this, we really need everyone on board to talk to the federal government about supporting the national partnership on remote housing. We all need to go down to Canberra and make sure our voices are heard. We need to make sure the federal government is hearing what needs to be done in this area. I invite the LNP to jump on that bandwagon as well.

One of the other things we have touched on is the explosive part—literally—of this bill. It is quite gratifying to see that we are implementing one of the *Not now, not ever* recommendations, probably one of the last ones to be done. That means a person who has been convicted of a domestic violence offence cannot hold an explosives licence. That is really gratifying to see as well.

Finally, in the case of abandoned operating plants on state mining leases, the state will now be authorised to remove that particular plant. This happened in the case of Linc Energy where the liquidators abandoned title to all equipment on those leases.

We have a range of measures that will help us better regulate and manage state land. This bill will also help Indigenous communities with housing issues on the cape achieve better outcomes in relation to their land. I commend the bill to the House.