




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (12.08 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Economic Development and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I will begin by addressing a couple of issues raised by the member for Glass House. In this House we have seen that one of his chief jobs seems to be backing up his LNP mates in the Brisbane City Council, protecting Mayor Adrian Schrinner's team and all their bad planning decisions. If that is the member for Glass House's job then he is on a hiding to nothing. Performing hatchet jobs for his mates will not end well. He had the wherewithal to raise the issue of the Oxley PDA. He talked about this great community concern, but who was the author of the website? The great web developer himself, the member for Glass House!

It will not end well for him if he is going to spend his time protecting the Brisbane City Council. Here is a hint: if you are going to talk about consultation and doing things in a true partnership, make sure you are not a former Campbell Newman government minister when you do it. Honestly, we are going to be asking for years, 'What is the depth of the process of consultation and partnerships?' Between 2012 and 2015 those opposite could not even say the word 'consultation'. They ran away from it. Consultation? I think not. The member should not go there; it will not end well for him.

I want to focus on the amendments to the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Act 2011. I want to talk about this particular part of the bill because Queensland is the most disaster impacted state in Australia. Since 2010 our state has been impacted by 70 natural disaster events, resulting in loss of life and billions of dollars of damage to infrastructure. That includes nine events that assailed the state in 2018 and 2019—bushfires, floods and cyclones. We all saw the devastation of the 2019 floods in Townsville and on farms out west. Let us not forget that in November and December 2018 the Central Queensland bushfires devastated 35 communities and burnt out 1.4 billion hectares of land.

Through the QRA Act, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority is responsible for coordinating and managing the rebuilding and recovery of communities affected by disasters such as these. The QRA was established as a temporary entity following the 2011 floods and Cyclone Yasi. Its role has expanded remarkably since then. In 2016 the Palaszczuk government endorsed the appointment of the QRA as the state's lead agency responsible for disaster recovery, resilience and mitigation policy in Queensland.

In light of the 70 natural disasters since 2010 the QRA Act has been reviewed, and we have identified amendments required to reflect this new and expanded role for the QRA. These amendments will ensure the QRA can undertake resilience, mitigation and betterment activities outside of disaster events. They will allow the QRA to support areas in Queensland to build resilience, to make infrastructure and services stronger and for Queensland to be better able to withstand disasters.

The QRA assists and supports the delivery of reconstruction projects through the ongoing assessment of eligibility—it provides grants payments—but the QRA Act currently limits the scope of the QRA's reconstruction functions to only facilitating flood mitigation, recovery and resilience. Communities impacted by other natural disasters such as bushfires are potentially not covered. That certainly needs to be addressed.

While ensuring the QRA can undertake resilience activities in a wide range of settings, it is important that this is not limited to communities affected by a previous disaster event. The proposed amendments will allow resilience activities to be undertaken pre-emptively across the state, before a disaster occurs. Further, to effectively implement its mitigation and resilience responsibilities, the scope of the QRA's functions should capture betterment. That means the repairing, rebuilding and replacing of community infrastructure to a standard that will mean it is less impacted by future events. In infrastructure terms, this may mean making significant improvements to the asset—making it stronger, more elevated or perhaps in a different location. It is very clear that we need the QRA to have that legislated mandate to make the appropriate decisions in these cases.

Our communities also need funds to build their own resilience. The QRA Act currently includes a function for the QRA to coordinate and distribute financial assistance for only affected communities—those directly impacted by a disaster event. This bill will enable the QRA to manage the distribution of funds for locally led community resilience outside of disaster events, as well as for communities impacted further afield by a disaster event.

The roles and responsibilities of state agencies in relation to disaster management have been defined and captured in the Queensland State Disaster Management Plan. The proposed amendments to the QRA Act will reflect these definitions.

There have been questions about the QRA's engagement with local government. The QRA Act already includes explicit requirements in relation to consulting with and giving information to local government.

Overall, the amendments to the QRA Act will ensure the QRA can undertake an all-hazards approach to its responsibilities, lead the coordination of resilience and recovery policy in Queensland and facilitate the delivery of mitigation and betterment activities outside of disaster events. Queensland is the only state in Australia to maintain a permanent disaster recovery agency and is the most advanced in the disaster resilience space nationally. The QRA Act as amended by the bill will reflect the role the QRA has in the recovery, resilience and mitigation space, and the improved QRA Act will help ensure Queensland continues to be the most disaster resilient state in Australia. I commend the bill to the House.