




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPIT MASTER PLAN BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (2.01 pm): The Spit is a precious place for many Gold Coasters. It is a place known for its recreational and environmental value, somewhere that provides space to enjoy some of the best water access we have and the natural beauty that comes with it. There are not many things better than heading out there late on a summer afternoon, picking up some Pete's fish and chips from up the road, parking my ute alongside the rock wall, sitting in the tray and eating the fish and chips while the sun sets. I doubt there would be a dog on the Gold Coast who has not enjoyed running around the off-leash section of the beach there. There is also an incredible array of marine life you can see whilst snorkelling off some of the diving platforms on the rock walls.

This plan outlines some much needed investment into the future of this precious public space. I applaud my colleague, the member for Surfers Paradise, whose electorate covers the vast majority of the master plan area for continuing to call on the government to provide clarity over many years. I believe he was one of the first to call for a master plan back in 2015.

This process, however, has taken far too long and many of the ideas in the plan are not new. Gold Coasters want certainty and they want ideas like this to become a reality, not just to be proposed and slowly progressed. We desperately need the almost 2,000 jobs promised by this plan. The area that I represent, particularly Labrador, has the highest unemployment rate on the Gold Coast with it sitting electorate-wide at 9.6 per cent. That means I represent over 3,000 people who do not have a job. They need projects like this to happen much sooner than on the current time frame.

Delays like this are nothing new. This same minister has carriage of the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct, a similar big-picture, state development project with a similar delivery time frame set by the government of several decades. 'Delivery' is a generous word to describe what is now strangely called Lumina. Two years on, the precinct remains empty. The only deal they have locked in for a site within the precinct is with Griffith University from across the road for the ADaPT building. There are no agreements for every other site. Labor always bring out grand plans with claims that it will create thousands of jobs, but there is never any follow-through. We cannot allow the Spit Master Plan to be a repeat of that by this minister. We need development like this and the jobs that come with it.

The concerns many people feel about the government's ability to carry this through in an economically viable way is also evident from the report into this bill. On page 12 of the committee's report, we read—

Submitters raise concerns that the bill does not outline a guaranteed ongoing minimum source of funding beyond the initial \$60 million for the Gold Coast Waterways Authority to carry out its ongoing community infrastructure and public realm works and associated duties.

There is an opportunity to raise significant revenue from the different elements of the plan, particularly the superyacht marina, but that needs to be managed appropriately and used to further the development of the plan and not just have it go into state coffers. Millions of dollars have already been raised from

lease arrangements on and around the Spit, let alone the huge amount of registration fees collected from vessels that use the Broadwater. The growth in leases and other revenues from this area should be reinvested into managing these extraordinary assets.

What we see at the moment is not a good indication. The Gold Coast Waterways Authority's budget was cut from \$8 million in 2018-19 to \$6.3 million in 2019-20. This important body is under-resourced. That budget is a pittance for the job they have to do. They have only 30 full-time staff. I note there is talk of them getting extra staff for this new role that they are undertaking, but it will not be enough.

We need more dredging to make navigation safer and easier for boats. Greater resources are required for the Gold Coast Waterways Authority to manage unseaworthy vessels. You cannot and should not dredge the whole Broadwater, but the navigation channels are becoming more and more silted which severely undermines the recreational value of these waterways for boaties.

The designation of Curlew Island as an environmental reserve is a necessary step to protect this significant habitat. I thank the committee for the recommendation and the minister for following up on that. It is a little misleading, though. The sandbanks next to the island, just off the Labrador shoreline, are the important roosting areas for these endangered birds. They have been there far longer than any person. Long before the seaway was completed and Wave Break Island was constructed, the sandbanks existed, as is evident in aerial photographs of the Broadwater from decades and decades ago. The island has formed over the last decade or so as vegetation has taken hold and sand has gathered around it. The debate on the merits of whether or not to name this island is separate to protecting this important part of the Broadwater. I note the minister has indicated that it is now an environmental reserve with the trustee arrangements being worked out. I hope that it takes into consideration the sandbanks and not just the island.

It is not an area that requires dredging as it is not a thoroughfare. Granted, a lot more work is required to be carried out on the surrounding channels, but these particular sandbanks need to be protected because they have high environmental value.

I recently caught up with the Gold Coast Waterways Authority CEO, Hal Morris. I urged him to install signage on the island as soon as possible, as is outlined in the master plan, so that visitors will be aware of how important this site is to birds listed as critically endangered by the federal environment department. These areas fall just within my electorate and I have been vocal for the need to protect the animals that call these sandbanks home in the warmer months of the year. Alongside local species like gulls and pelicans, there are a number of migratory birds that travel thousands of kilometres along flyways from the other side of the world. These include double-banded plovers, whimbrels, bar-tailed godwits and the world's largest shore bird, the eastern curlew.

The curlews are about a metre long with a 110-centimetre wing span and a distinctive 20-centimetre bill shaped like a new moon, as their scientific name indicates: *Numenius madagascariensis*—'*Numenius*' meaning 'new moon'. They breed in the Arctic and travel over 10,000 kilometres to get to Australia's east coast, including to our little part of the Gold Coast where, according to current estimates, about 60 to 100 roost. On their way here, they will only stop and rest every few thousand kilometres at places like the Yellow Sea's mudflats in China and Korea, the Philippines and parts of Papua New Guinea. These birds are very shy. When they are disturbed they will fly away, either to another feeding site or they will circle above until what they perceive as a threat has left. That includes dogs, people fishing, kayakers, paddle boarders, boaties and some of the daily tour groups that visit the area.

When these birds have to fly unnecessarily they burn energy. That gives them less to use on their migration which, on a long journey of thousands of kilometres, can be the difference between life and death. I first became aware of these birds and their habitat when I met local conservationist and birdwatcher Bob Westerman a couple of years ago. I have gone out with him twice to see this area for myself in his little tinnie. Bob is a retired TAFE teacher and passionate birdwatcher. He has been doing it for around 20 years. He first noticed this roost while he was out with the Southport Volunteer Marine Rescue. He knew immediately just how special it was.

I asked him why birdwatching became so important to him. Why did he care so much about this little part of our Broadwater? He told me it was as he was grieving the death of his first wife. Watching our local birdlife helped him to get through that because it showed him that life was still going on. It literally gave him a reason to live. He has been advocating to protect this important part of our local environment for a decade since then. Even just this morning Bob reported to me that his colleague had spotted 200 birds around Curlew Island but within 20 minutes a woman had brought her dog onto the island and scared the majority of them off. When those birds are disturbed they end up in the air in a holding pattern between South Stradbroke Island and Curlew Island which, as I mentioned, really cuts

into their energy reserves. Global numbers are declining, but Gold Coast numbers are holding strong. That makes it so important for us to protect this important habitat so that their numbers do not follow the same trend as we are seeing at other sites.

Our Broadwater and the Spit are a stunning part of the Gold Coast and Queensland. We need this investment to happen sooner rather than later to ensure that their future is preserved for generations to enjoy.