




Speech By
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BUILDING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (6.48 pm): I rise to speak briefly on the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 as a former member of the committee. I am always happy to talk about solar. This government has always promoted the installation of photovoltaic energy systems. When a home owner installs solar panels on their roof, we know that they reduce their energy bills and that the energy generated by the panels contributes towards the government's 2030 renewable energy target.

Under the leadership of this government we have increased the uptake in solar on rooftops in Queensland to roughly one in three homes. Queensland is indeed the solar state. Roughly 21 per cent of our energy in Queensland comes from renewable sources. Rooftop solar—the solar panels on the rooftops of people's homes—is a massive contributor to that. I think we all remember that the former energy minister was fond of saying that rooftop solar is the largest source of energy in Queensland. We are now at the point where one in three homes in Queensland has solar on their rooftops. Most of the solar popular postcodes are in Queensland. I know we have a few in regional Queensland too. I seem to recall Bundaberg being one of those places.

This rate is up from about seven per cent or so when we came to government in 2015. The huge uptake of solar in our communities since 2015 sees us at the point where one in three homes has solar. That is incredible. We are the solar state. In the years since solar came on the market, the cost of a unit has dramatically decreased. People can make their money back on their energy bills in much less time now. When purchasing a unit 20-odd years ago it was a substantial financial outlay and it could potentially take years for people to get their money back. It costs a lot less now. People are paying \$3,000 or \$4,000 for units. That means people are making their money back quicker, they are saving money on their energy bills and they are also contributing to our 2030 renewable energy target. People can save even more if they are savvy about how they use that energy. They can optimise their daytime usage to save even more money and draw down on their solar even more.

I applaud the government's commitment to restore the original intent of the 'ban the banners' provisions in the Building Act. As other speakers have elucidated, the 'ban the banners' provisions were introduced in 2015.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms PUGH: It is a big word. The 'ban the banners' provisions were intended to prevent developer covenants from restricting the installation of solar hot-water systems or solar panels on roofs because the systems or panels would affect street appeal. A recent court decision reduced the effectiveness of the 'ban the banners' provisions. The court ruled that as long as a covenant did not completely prevent the installation of panels it was lawful.

In this case, a covenant aimed at protecting the appearance of a housing estate prevented panels being installed on the northern part of a roof that faced the road. As members of this House would know—I am sure a lot of us have panels on our rooftops—the location of the panels is critically important. If they are put on the wrong side of the house they are not as effective. They need to be exposed to sunlight. They cannot be in the shade. In this particular case, the panels were less effective.

We know that north-facing panels capture much more energy from the sun than south-facing panels. North-facing panels capture 20 to 33 per cent more energy than south-facing panels. That could be a lot of money off someone's power bill. Putting aesthetics ahead of energy efficiency is obviously inconsistent with the original intent of the 'ban the banners' provisions. It is also inconsistent with current community expectations.

One in every three houses in Queensland has solar panels installed. As I mentioned earlier, I believe a big part of the reason for that is the dramatic decrease in the cost of these units. Solar panels are now so common that most people do not even notice them. That is unless people are like me and drive through their neighbourhood counting all the houses that have solar panels. I think the Mount Ommaney community might have a bit higher than one in three houses with solar panels, but maybe I am biased.

Ironically, covenants that required panels to face south increased the potential for glare to affect neighbouring properties. This is important. Obviously we need to consider the neighbouring amenity. It might sound peculiar, but my office has dealt with this issue. It is certainly very frustrating for neighbours if they have glare coming into their house. It can significantly brighten the interior of a person's home if those solar panels are not correctly placed on a person's rooftop. That is why it is important that people have a reputable person install those solar panels—someone who knows what they are doing. I am sure the member for Kurwongbah would agree with me on that because he is passionate about this subject.

Not only are more home owners installing panels, the systems they are installing are also getting bigger. Most systems include around 20 panels—that is roughly the size of the unit I have at home—with a total capacity of around six kilowatts. These systems usually require at least 40 square metres of rooftop space. Restricting panels to the southern part of a roof is likely to result in smaller, less productive systems being installed. That is a waste of money for the home owner.

The government is concerned that the covenants are having an impact on solar panel installation rates. We are also concerned about the impact that the court decision has had on home owners who relied on the original 'ban the banners' provisions. This bill will address these issues by strictly limiting the validity of developer covenants and body corporate by-laws for solar infrastructure. The covenants and by-laws can only restrict the installation of solar infrastructure on a roof that is common property such as the roof of an apartment building. Such covenants and by-laws can only restrict the installation of solar infrastructure in limited circumstances that have nothing to do with aesthetics. For example, they can restrict the installation to the extent necessary to preserve the structural integrity of the building. This commonsense approach acknowledges the shared interest that arises in apartments and strata title buildings.

Finally, to protect owners who relied on the original 'ban the banners' provision to install panels with optimal north-facing orientations, the amendments will apply to existing covenants. Developers will not be able to withhold consent and home owners will be empowered to install panels on the part of their roof that makes the most sense. These are commonsense provisions.

As I said earlier, I was previously a member of this committee. I know all members of the committee are incredibly passionate about energy. I know that the chair is incredibly passionate about all forms of energy, but especially solar on rooftops. When I was a newly elected member of this House he talked me through some of the finer points of PV, and I thank him for that. I know that it is a subject close to his heart.

Roughly 21 per cent of energy in Queensland comes from renewable sources. The largest single source of power in this state is our state's rooftops. It is absolutely fantastic to see the gains that we have made in solar in such a short time. It is up from roughly seven per cent in 2015 to over 20 per cent now. We cannot stop those gains now. We are at one in three houses with solar. I think we can do even better. We are Queensland. We are the sunshine state. There is room for more solar panels. This government will be adding solar panels to schools to ensure we have smart cool schools. We will be encouraging Queenslanders to take up PV panels wherever possible. I commend the bill to the House.