




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (12.52 pm): I support the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill will importantly support industry and streamline administrative processes by cutting red tape, and this is something that businesses are always calling for. I was listening to the member for Whitsunday's contribution about the Tassal prawn farms and I am sure she would like to join with me in thanking Minister Furner and the department for the amount of work that they did across Queensland in terms of mapping all of the suitable places across Queensland for aquaculture. It was due to the work that the minister and the department did that big companies set up in Queensland. That was another gain by the Palaszczuk government in setting up more industry in Queensland, so I thank the member opposite for raising that issue. I also want to thank both Minister Scanlon and Minister Furner for the amount of work that they have done across industry to dispel all of the concerns that have been raised with this bill and any confusion where there were instances where it was transposing some of the requirements for mining on to non-mining businesses. I thank the ministers for the work that they have done there.

This bill will also better protect the environment and include improved community input and transparency by requiring public notification for all major amendment applications to environmental authorities for resource activities. This bill provides for a stronger, more effective environmental regulator. The bill amends the Environmental Protection Act 1994 to ensure that environmental values continue to be protected through contemporary and efficient regulations while also amending the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993. It is important to keep these precious areas clear from industry that may cause damage like mining. These proposed changes will ensure that the environment and the community continue to be protected through effective and efficient environmental regulatory management.

The bill will also support industry by resolving a range of technical implementation issues with the mine rehabilitation framework, specifically the process for estimated rehabilitation costs and progressive rehabilitation and closure planning. The amendments are needed because there are some potential scenarios where there is ambiguity about whether the transitional provisions can apply. The bill will remove this uncertainty and ensure that all relevant existing sites can operate under a progressive rehabilitation and closure planning framework.

In my area I have witnessed extensive progressive rehabilitation being carried out on mine sites in the Bowen Basin. When done well, the former mine sites are turned into useable land, whether it is for grazing or nature reserves. The rehabilitation provides a range of work and training opportunities for locals. Some of the best rehabilitation sites that I have seen have involved the traditional owner groups and now those lands are covered in native grasses and trees and native animals are returning and providing a very healthy ecosystem. The mining industry will be with us for many years to come. The tailings of metallurgical coalmines in the Bowen Basin are showing traces of rare earth critical minerals, so these sites could be mined a second time to extract a different type of mineral to the original mining.

Therefore, we need to ensure that there is a balance between industry and environmental protections and this balance needs to be right. The Department of Environment and Science has committed to reviewing the major and minor amendment guidelines to provide greater certainty for operators and this will relieve a sense of uncertainty that has been expressed currently by some operators.

Our weather systems over the past few years have been large and unpredictable compared to what we have been used to. No matter where you are in Queensland, people tell you how different the weather is. We are living with climate change. To assist Queensland businesses and individuals to meet environmental requirements in an emergency, the bill allows the issue of temporary authorities where deemed reasonable because of an emergency situation. These amendments enable temporary authorities to be granted to ensure that operators that are faced with an emergency can meet their environmental requirements so that they can do what they need to do to deal with the emergency such as floods and cyclones, which are quite prevalent in my area. They will not need to go through the full environmental authority application process, which can be quite long, and this is a win-win for the environment and for business because some of these disasters come upon us quite quickly.

The development of a new operation can be time intensive and costly in order to meet all of the regulatory requirements. When I talk to developers of industry they talk about the long and intensive process of obtaining an environmental impact statement, an EIS. Businesses are willing to go through this, but they talk to me about how long and expensive it can be. This bill will allow the chief executive officer to refuse to allow the EIS process to proceed. This gives businesses some certainty around what they are doing. They know whether they need to change what they are doing. By stopping the process, it does not mean that they cannot continue at a later time. If they are able to come back to the process and show that they can change their practices in terms of what they are planning to do, they would be able to fit within the provisions that would allow them to get their proposal across the line. Some businesses and operations in my area have stopped going through the process because of things that they had noted themselves. I support the bill.