




Speech By
Amy MacMahon

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Record of Proceedings, 16 April 2024

**HOUSING AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY (PLANNING AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; BUILDING INDUSTRY FAIRNESS
(SECURITY OF PAYMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (4.40 pm): I rise to speak to the so-called Housing Availability and Affordability (Planning and Other Legislation Amendment) Bill, a bill that is in no way about housing availability or affordability. It would be more accurate to call this bill the ‘Open Season for Rich Developers Bill’ or the ‘Favours for Labor’s Developer Mates Bill’. This bill takes powers that the government already has to take land, override planning laws and fast-track the planning process—powers that currently are only used for public benefit like building public housing—and it duplicates those powers, not for public benefit but for the benefit of rich private developers. The bill goes as far as allowing the minister to compulsorily acquire land and gift it to developers. Nowhere in the bill are these powers limited to a public benefit requirement, a requirement to build housing that is genuinely affordable or even a requirement to build any housing at all. Instead, these powers could be applied to any and all kinds of private development: casinos, marinas, luxury hotels or high-end retail. It does not seem that Labor is interested in housing the Queenslanders who cannot afford housing at the moment; Labor is more interested in looking after their wealthy mates and big donors.

If Labor cared about affordable housing they would be building enough social housing. Despite having the power to acquire land and build public housing, and a record \$14 billion surplus to do it, Labor is not building enough public housing. In the past eight years Labor has added just 1,800 homes to the public housing stock. That is 220 homes a year. Compare that to the nearly 25,000 applications for social housing—over 40,000 people in dire straits, many of them in tents, cars, insecure housing and unaffordable rents. Instead, this bill gives developers tax cuts, handouts and a pen to write their own planning rules. Then the government is telling ordinary people who are struggling to afford housing that these for-profit entities—developers—with their fancy boardrooms and expensive lunches with politicians, who exist to make themselves as much profit as possible, will build affordable housing out of the goodness of their hearts. It is a fantasy that the real estate industry, that makes more profit the more expensive housing is, will make housing more affordable if we simply give them more money or more control or cut regulation.

The bill introduces a new approvals pathway for developments under the Planning Act and state facilitated developments. There is almost no limit on what can be a state facilitated development so long as the development is for an urban purpose. Within 11 days of application a private developer can receive priority status, be given immunity from a lot of planning regulations and have its entire approvals process largely hidden behind closed doors. What will constitute a priority is entirely up to the government and its developer mates. We know what Labor’s priorities are. Just look next door: the \$3.6 billion Star casino being built on public land that Labor has given away in a secret 99-year lease; the previous plans to spend \$2.7 billion to knock down the Gabba stadium and East Brisbane State School to build what would have been one of the world’s third most expensive stadiums—at least that was the plan until the community spent three years saying no; or the government’s approval of Walker

Corporation's plan to build shopping malls, yacht moorings and expensive apartments on 40 hectares of Ramsar listed wetland at Toondah Harbour; and its handout to developers to build luxury apartments like the one the Premier owns that is listed for a whopping \$850 rent per week. Remember that just a few months ago the Premier said that it is affordable for a nurse to pay \$520 of their weekly wage to landlords like him. I will be very interested to see just how many state facilitated luxury apartments end up in the property portfolios of Labor and LNP politicians.

This new pathway is supposed to make it easier for developers to obtain approval. Are developers really struggling to get things approved? Let us look at the data. Last year the Brisbane City Council received 5,785 development applications and issued 5,100 approvals. There is hardly a bias against approvals. The only people holding back supply of housing are the developers, who know that they can make more money the more scarce and expensive housing is. I refer members to a quote from the founder and director of property developer Meriton who laid out his strategy explicitly. He said, 'I am holding a lot more than I am selling at the moment, and as the value of property goes up the value of what I have kept rises'. Developers know that, as long as the government continues to drive up property prices with \$39 billion a year in tax breaks for rich investors, it is more profitable to hold onto land—to land bank—than it is to build housing.

The bill also gives the minister the power to acquire land and gift it to developers. The only requirement is that the minister is satisfied it is necessary for development infrastructure. The rationale for this is a review of under-utilised urban sites which that a lack of infrastructure was a barrier to development. However, the review has not been made public for scrutiny. It is not clear how a power to acquire and gift developers more land fixes this problem. There are also no safeguards on this power. There is no public benefit requirement, as I have mentioned. There is not even a requirement that these developments would include housing—nothing. It is just as likely that these powers will be used for fancy shopping malls, like the one the government has already approved at Toondah Harbour, than it is for housing. The government could stop outsourcing housing to for-profit developers and instead invest in beautiful, publicly owned and managed housing.

Finally, the bill amends the Planning and Environment Court Act to remove community appeal rights for state facilitated developments. Why would we want pesky local community members getting in the way of generous gifts to wealthy developers? We could already have thousands of new homes built by the government for ordinary people to rent and buy, facilitated under existing government powers—powers that this government does not use or rarely uses because Labor is not interested in building enough social and affordable housing. If Labor built social housing at the same rate as the Australian government did in the postwar period then we would have built 46,000 social homes since 2015. Instead, the actual number is about 5,000. Rather than doing that work, the government's solution is to gift land to developers, abolish consultation, cut the community out and turn neighbourhoods into development free-for-alls while showering them with handouts.

We know how these laws are going to play out because they are very similar to existing laws the state government already uses to ram through controversial projects for developers. These are priority development areas, or PDAs. Just look at the Toondah Harbour PDA. For three years Labor has used a PDA to support Walker Corporation's application to dredge 40 hectares of Ramsar listed wetland in order to build marinas and luxury apartments for yacht owners that are well beyond the budget of most of the people impacted by the housing crisis. It is no surprise that Walker Corporation is strongly supportive of this bill. This bill is essentially PDAs on steroids. This bill will be the birth of 100 Toondah harbours. With cash-for-access meetings continuing and loopholes for developer donations to the major parties, communities across Queensland can have no confidence that these powers will not be used to further shut them out and advance the interests of big developers.

There are plenty of things that the government could be doing to actually make housing more affordable. We have been calling for things like vacancy levies, inclusionary zoning, freezing rents, expanding QBuild and building tens of thousands of new, beautiful, affordable public homes. This bill is a ruse by Labor and their mates to say that the only way to make housing more affordable is for developers to make more profit. The Greens will be moving amendments to this bill—which I would like to table now—that say that in order for a development to become a state facilitated development private developers need to enter into an agreement with the government that actually benefits Queenslanders.

Tabled paper: Housing Availability and Affordability (Planning and Other Legislation Amendment) Bill 2023, amendment to be moved by Dr Amy MacMahon MP [573](#).

Tabled paper: Housing Availability and Affordability (Planning and Other Legislation Amendment) Bill 2023, explanatory notes to Dr Amy MacMahon's amendment [574](#).

Tabled paper: Housing Availability and Affordability (Planning and Other Legislation Amendment) Bill 2023, statement of compatibility with human rights contained in Dr Amy MacMahon's amendment [575](#).

(Time expired)