Speech By

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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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LAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

Mr BERKMAN (Maiwar—Grn) (12.16 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2023. The Greens will not oppose this bill. It makes a raft of changes to detailed land tenure provisions that are not, on their own, problematic. But the impact of these changes will be dictated by the government of the day, so I am compelled to speak on this bill because frankly I do not trust in this government, and certainly not those on the opposition benches, to protect and promote the use of public land for purposes that genuinely enrich our local communities and the lives of residents. Instead, time and again, governments led by the two major parties have sold out their local communities and residents so that private companies can reap enormous profits from public land.

The government admits that the changes, intended to streamline the grant of unallocated state land, would make it easier to repeat the handover of public land to multibillion dollar corporations for example—even where those companies are criminally implicated gambling corporations like Star Entertainment Group across the way here. We are told to just trust that there is some undisclosed public benefit to a mega corporation occupying beautiful riverfront land here in our capital while it leaches off our communities. If this is the kind of 'essential project' that is expected to benefit from removing limitations to granting land in freehold title, then I think we all have reason to be seriously concerned. That project should never have been approved but, at the very least, Labor should have cancelled Star's licence after the revelations of its role in criminality, money laundering and corruption. If they care about public confidence, they should release the details of the deals with Star and its consortium partners, including the casino licence—the 99-year lease—community impact statements, consultation reports, cost benefit analysis or business case and probity checks.

The bill broadens powers and erodes checks and balances in relation to the authorised use of land so that the minister may dedicate reserves for any purpose to address an apparent community need that is in the public interest. The state or statutory bodies can approve use of trust land that is inconsistent with the dedicated purpose without ministerial authority. That is accompanied by the codification of the general practice to include economic considerations as part of an assessment of public interest. That in itself begs the question: whose economic benefit are we talking about? Because right now it does not feel like the wallets of everyday Queenslanders are a priority to the major parties. We instead see state and local governments championing the interests of private corporations, including by handing over public land that should be open and available for use by all Queenslanders.

I am reminded of the debacle in relation to the old Sandgate fire and rescue station that was promised to the local community back in 2021 and now, at a sale price well below its valuation, has been turned into a flooring showroom by the Catholic Church and will generate income for the parish. Do we really trust their judgement on what is in the public interest? When is it appropriate to override the dedicated purpose of land held in reserve for the benefit of the public, on trust for the public? Is this really about coffee carts on sports days or is it just going to be manipulated to the advantage of corporate interests and major donors?

Another useful example in this context is the failed zip-line project on Mount Coot-tha that would have seen 28 hectares of vital inner-city bushland cleared. This is land that, under a deed of grant in trust, is to be used as a site for a public park and for no other purpose whatsoever. That is stipulated in the DOGIT for Mount Coot-tha. Mount Coot-tha is an iconic part of Queensland's capital, providing habitat for a raft of species, beautiful walking trails and opportunities to engage with nature as well as having cultural significance for First Nations peoples. This speech was written before it featured in what might be the ultimate episode of *Bluey.* I am really glad Mount Coot-tha finally got a guernsey on that most iconic of shows.

It was only the sustained and concerted efforts of the local community that prevented the disastrous zip-line from going ahead, but it should never have been on the cards. Now the mountain is at risk again with the LNP-led Brisbane City Council granting approval for a permanent commercial outdoor light-and-sound show in the Botanic Gardens. The Lumina Night Walk, as it is being called, would have major ramifications for the flora and fauna that rely on the gardens and local residents who live in the surrounding area. Local communities should not have to fight tooth and nail to preserve public land for public purposes and prevent the inappropriate privatisation of those vital spaces.

Speaking of vital and important places, I turn to the changes the bill makes around naming processes, including a restructured and broader list of issues to be considered when making placename decisions and dispensing with consultation in certain circumstances, especially when it relates to discontinuing the use of a name that is distressing to a community. We unreservedly applaud these changes, especially where they will enable the effective change of placenames that are racist and inappropriate, and a shift towards using Indigenous placenames where appropriate, which is a vitally important step in the service of truth-telling.

Finally, I have to comment on the amendments to the resources legislation that stipulate that the payment of local government rates and charges is a condition of various resource authorities in line with the current approach for mineral resource authorities. These are important amendments that we are very glad to see, but it is absolutely emblematic of the attitude of the petroleum and gas industry in this state that they are even necessary. The exploitation of state resources is not a right, as the fossil fuel industry has boldly assumed for generations now. The operations of those industries have come at an enormous cost, including the desecration of lands and waters without free, prior and informed consent of First Nations people and the manifold impacts of climate change both now and into the distant future. The payment of local government rates and charges is the absolute bare minimum and so, too, is the payment of royalties commensurate with the harm done and the benefit obtained by these mega corporations from supposedly state resources.

Increasing royalties on the super profits of coal companies alone, as the government has done, is just not good enough. In 2022 the state government neglected to reform the royalty structure for the gas industry which, like the coal industry, was experiencing enormous windfall profits from LNG exports that reached record highs in 2022-23. IEEFA estimated that the government could have gained nearly $5 billion in extra royalty revenue annually from the gas and LNG industries if it had adopted a scheme similar to that applied to the coal industry. We say the government could and should go even further and triple gas royalties and raise the royalty rate for coal and petroleum including LNG to a flat 35 per cent. It is indefensible for this government to throw its hands in the air and say, 'We couldn't possibly build more public housing, implement a rent freeze or fully fund our health or education systems, provide free breakfasts and lunches at school or free and frequent public transport because we don't have the money for it.' Raise royalties, make them fair across the board for the entire resources sector and fund the things Queenslanders need for a good life.