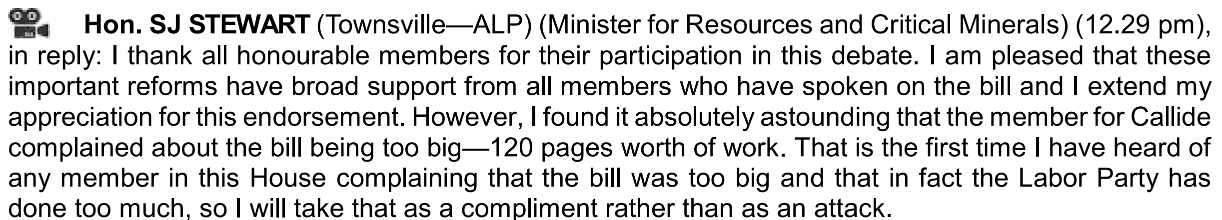
Speech By

# Hon. Scott Stewart

**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

Record of Proceedings, 16 April 2024

## LAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)



**Hon. SJ STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Resources and Critical Minerals) (12.29 pm), in reply: I thank all honourable members for their participation in this debate. I am pleased that these important reforms have broad support from all members who have spoken on the bill and I extend my appreciation for this endorsement. However, I found it absolutely astounding that the member for Callide complained about the bill being too big—120 pages worth of work. That is the first time I have heard of any member in this House complaining that the bill was too big and that in fact the Labor Party has done too much, so I will take that as a compliment rather than as an attack.

Sixty per cent of Queensland is state land administered under the Land Act and this land is allocated for a range of purposes from leases, permits and licences and it is trust land reserves and deeds of grant in trust. As many honourable members have noted throughout the debate of this bill, the amendments in this bill modernise the state land framework, making it responsive to contemporary and evolving community needs and ensuring it is administratively effective. The government consulted widely on the Land Act components of the bill prior to its introduction. This consultation included industry groups such as AgForce Queensland, the Queensland Farmers' Federation, the Queensland Law Society and the Local Government Association of Queensland, or LGAQ. I understand the Department of Resources also met with representatives of the Brisbane City Council to discuss matters raised by that council during the inquiry by the Clean Economy Jobs, Resources and Transport Committee.

I am pleased that the Department of Resources will convene a Local Government Advisory Panel in partnership with the Local Government Association of Queensland. This panel will be an important forum for local governments to work with the department on the bill's implementation, whether they be large South-East Queensland councils or remote area councils from the far west to the far northern parts of Queensland. State land is an important resource to support the delivery of infrastructure such as Queensland's Big Build. The bill will also support the countless other initiatives that support economic and tourism development, First Nations outcomes and social and affordable housing occurring right across Queensland.

This bill removes regulatory duplication from land allocation decisions, supports appropriate diversification on state land and gives trustees greater autonomy to make decisions about the use of land. It should not be necessary for my department to require that another department use land for a public purpose. Efficiency for Queensland taxpayers is what I want to see more of. This bill is removing duplication and saving taxpayers' money.

There are more than 26,000 reserves in Queensland with an area exceeding one million hectares. Some 94 per cent of trustees responsible for managing these reserves are local governments or state government agencies. These reforms will support local governments as trustees of state land to respond to their communities and I look forward to hearing about the various initiatives that make better use of our reserves for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

A core objective of the bill is to give local government trustees the tools and decision-making authority to administer trust land in the interests of their communities. I note the general support indicated by the member for Burdekin and many other members in the debate for simplifying the approval process. Councils will be able to get on with using reserves to enhance their local communities. It is appropriate that we trust local governments to act efficiently, effectively and responsively to address the wishes of the communities in which they work. Some local governments will be eager and quick to start using their new powers under the bill while others will need more support. Importantly, the bill does not oblige local governments to utilise the additional powers and autonomy. Existing processes in the Land Act will remain for those councils that wish to involve the state in the management of land that they manage.

During the debate the member for Burdekin raised concerns about the risk of possible fires associated with electric vehicle charging infrastructure and community batteries on state land. I thank the member for Burdekin for providing an example that perfectly illustrates one of the many worthwhile policy problems that the bill addresses. Safe and efficient infrastructure is undoubtedly a matter for government. However, trying to use the Land Act to address safety issues regarding how electric vehicles are charged makes little sense. The location and safety of electric vehicle charging stations is best left to other regulatory instruments of government and not the Land Act.

I welcome the support from those opposite for the additional flexibility that the bill provides for holders of pastoral leases to add additional purposes to their leases. This will enable the diversification of farm income for these leases by removing any unnecessary and unfair restriction. By amending the Land Title Act, the bill ensures that land set aside as freehold for public purposes during subdivision does not revert to unallocated state land. Land that is allocated rather than unallocated is land that can work productively for Queensland. This measure will commence by proclamation to ensure that local governments and industry have time to adapt to these changes. Local governments will still have access to sufficient land for infrastructure networks.

The bill makes several changes to the Place Names Act to make it modern, flexible and efficient. I thank the member for Algester for her emotional contribution today. She actually taught me some history about some of these names, but I am again astounded by the member for Callide's contribution. There is a list of 41 offensive names, and I am happy to table that if necessary but I think it is in our information.

*Tabled paper:* Document, undated, titled 'Place names proposed to be changed without section 9—Place Names Act Public Consultation' 566.

After a quick calculation, there are 16 'Black Gin Creeks' that we want to change and there are seven 'Gin Creeks' that we want to change as well as various other names right across regional Queensland. I encourage any member that if they want to look at those names I do not think there would be too much opposition to what we want to do, but the member for Callide's contribution astounds me. I have provided this parliament with a list of measures that will help decision-makers navigate through sometimes complex and emotive naming issues. Under the proposed framework, decision-makers can turn their mind to socio-economic impacts, appropriate consultation periods and processes and the need for any transitional arrangements.

The member for Burdekin sought advice on what constitutes 'substantial interest' to the community or to any particular part of the community in deciding not to publish a placename proposal. Examples where substantial interest may be considered in determining not to publish a proposal might include minor changes to the boundary of a locality or a placename proposal dealing with a remote place. The views of key stakeholders, including the relevant local government, will be sought prior to deciding whether to use this provision. The member for Burdekin also sought advice on what would trigger the minister to release an unpublished proposal. This is a safeguard measure allowing the minister to ensure that the community is not being denied the opportunity to have input. As an example, a local government may advise the department that a placenaming proposal may have a level of sensitivity or awareness that would make an open consultation on the naming proposal beneficial.

I want decision-making to be more objective and transparent. These reforms I have described separate the roles of the minister and the chief executive to remove any potential conflict of interest. The decision-maker will no longer be responsible for developing a proposal. This is not about the minister abdicating their power, as the member for Burdekin has claimed, but is about providing better governance through more transparent decision-making processes. I reassure the parliament that this is not about politicising the decision-making process. Rather, it recognises the importance of government commitments and initiatives that promote an inclusive Queensland. The bill supports accountability, reduces duplication and provides for better governance by allowing the delegation of a minister's power, but only to another minister.

To support local governments and regional communities, the bill amends resource acts to ensure that resource companies pay their local government rates and charges. Many resource companies do the right thing, but there are instances where that goes unpaid. These amendments make the payment of those rates and charges mandatory conditions similar to the provisions of the Mineral Resources Act. Let me be clear: we are not changing the local government ratings framework. It is necessary for local governments to continue to have autonomy and flexibility to develop their own rating systems.