




Speech By
Bree James

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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PLANNING (SOCIAL IMPACT AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (9.05 pm): I rise today to speak in strong support of the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. A key objective of the bill is to amend the Planning Act 2016 to introduce a community benefit system into Queensland's planning framework. This bill is about making sure Far North Queenslanders have a real say in how major large-scale wind and solar projects affect their communities and ensuring they benefit, not just bear the burden of these visual monstrosities in their region.

I live and represent one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. The Chalumbin wind farm was a major wind farm development project which was proposed on the border of the Wet Tropics World Heritage area close to Ravenshoe on the Atherton Tablelands. Clearing forests to build wind turbines is an oxymoron. The Chalumbin wind farm would have cleared more than 500 hectares of forest next to the Wet Tropics World Heritage area. It would have murdered birds, bats and many other species of animals that accidentally flew into the turbines, let alone the ones that lost their habitat from the clearing. Thankfully, the community rallied, advocated and won but they should not have had to go through this fight and the stress of this. Thankfully, they did stand up for it and they won.

The community should have been consulted, and this is what this bill does. It makes it law that all new renewable projects are subject to the same rigorous approval processes that other resource projects have to go through. My community are not anti renewables; they are just anti rolling them out without consultation. This bill recognises that regions like Far North Queensland are no longer willing to be the silent host of large-scale projects while the benefits go south and the impacts stay local.

Wind farms are popping up in regional Queensland that are taller than a 40-floor building. That is higher than any building in Cairns—over 200 metres to the top of the blade. They are massive. No-one in Brisbane or South-East Queensland would want these forced on them in their backyard. The city Greens voters think these projects are great for the environment and that they are being good citizens, but they have no idea of the impact of these projects and what they do to regional Queensland. I have had many Greens voters in Far North Queensland tell me that they have switched parties as they realise how detrimental these projects are. This new legislation is for them.

This system will involve conducting social impact assessments and establishing community benefit agreements. Under this bill, developers will be required to engage with local communities before a single application hits a planning desk. They will be required to conduct a social impact assessment and they must enter into a community benefit agreement with local council. This gives councils across Far North Queensland, from Cairns to Cooktown, from the Tablelands to the Torres Strait, a real seat at the table. It means that the voices of our regional towns, our remote communities and our traditional owners will no longer be an afterthought. Far North Queensland has always done its part. We host industries that drive the economy, tourism, agriculture, resources and, for a long time, clean energy like the Barron River hydro. We are leading the state in renewable energy investment and we welcome it, but we want it done with us not to us.

This bill ensures that energy developers will no longer be able to drop massive projects into our communities without first building social licence. Developers will need to engage the Far North Queensland community up-front and negotiate community benefit agreements before projects can proceed. Local councils will have a greater leverage in negotiating outcomes for their communities. This is about working together as a community to achieve positive solutions for our region. Regional Queensland, including Far North Queensland, has hosted wind and solar farms for over a decade without a say in how these developments affect our communities. Labor had a decade to right these wrongs, and we have done it in our first 100 days. Communities like these across the Tablelands, Mareeba and the Cassowary Coast have been denied the basic rights of consultation and appeal. If the residents in Ravenshoe, Tolga and Dimbulah express opposition, the government must take notice, underpinned by the legislation.

This bill gives our rural communities a voice, a say and the power to stand up for what they want in conjunction with the government. This speaks volumes about our government. We do not just act; we plan, we consult, we listen and we act accordingly, and we deliver. We have seen too many communities wear the costs of developments with strained services, housing pressure and social disruption with little to show for it, and this bill gives us the tools to change that. It ensures renewable energy projects and developments contribute to infrastructure, community wellbeing and long-term legacy, not just short-term profit.

This bill is not just about wind and solar farms though; it is about planning and delivering our infrastructure in the lead-up to the games. It is about removing red, green and gaffer tape holding back progress so that we can get games infrastructure underway. Although the games venues will be concentrated in the south-east, the Crisafulli government's 2032 Delivery Plan guarantees infrastructure and tourism legacy across all of Queensland, including in Cairns. We have soccer and basketball Olympic Games proposed to happen in Cairns and upgrades committed to Barlow Park. Far North Queensland is also the prime humidity training location for pre-Olympics opportunities and additional competitions. Far North Queensland stands to benefit from the 20-year tourism strategy that will flow from the games and, under the amendments, planning laws are being streamlined to ensure that the entire state is part of the Olympic opportunity. Under the amendments, there will be transparency in planning decisions, enhanced administrative flexibility for Economic Development Queensland and they replace outdated groups with new games leadership and executive groups for unified decision-making.

After years of dysfunction and delays under Labor, we are delivering, not just planning. We are planning not just for an epic Olympic Games—the best the world has ever seen—but also for legacy that will serve Queenslanders for generations. The venues, the villages and the infrastructure we build will not be temporary showpieces; they will be lasting assets for communities, including Far North Queensland. In closing, this bill is about restoring fairness and trust in Queensland's planning framework because, as it is right now, it is not working. This bill serves everyone—local governments, the construction industry and the taxpayer. This bill ensures that our communities are not hosts to development but partners in shaping it. I fully support this bill and commend the tireless work of the Deputy Premier and his team.