Speech By

Hon. Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGEE

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

Hon. LM LINARD (Nudgee—ALP) (7.54 pm): The Labor opposition supports renewables, we support communities having their say and we support delivering the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games—games that we proudly secured for Queensland as a lasting legacy for our state. However, Queenslanders deserve better than what this bill puts forward. This is not about supporting clean energy or delivering the games efficiently or sustainably. It is about rushed lawmaking, political pointscoring and undermining Queensland's environment, our communities and the state's global reputation.

The Crisafulli LNP government has brought forward legislation that, in its current form, stakeholders have variously labelled as legally dangerous, environmentally reckless and economically short-sighted. It damages investor confidence in our state, sidelines local communities, strips away hard-won environmental protections and hands ministers extraordinary powers without proper checks or balances. Queenslanders deserve legislation that strengthens our future, not weakens it.

In respect to the Olympics, as I said earlier Labor backs the Brisbane 2032 games. Of course we do. These are games that our former Labor government secured for Queensland. We believe in their potential to bring lasting benefits to Queensland: jobs, investment, tourism, a platform to celebrate our state on the global stage and a platform to showcase our stunning natural environment. We live in a stunning country but Queensland is most definitely the jewel. It is the most biodiverse state in the country. It is no coincidence that we have the most World Heritage properties in the country.

However, this bill gives Olympic projects unprecedented legal exemptions, stripping away protections under Queensland's key environmental planning and cultural heritage laws. As rightly raised by key environmental stakeholders, the Queensland Conservation Council and the Environmental Defenders Office, which represent thousands of Queenslanders who are deeply committed to preserving our unique natural and cultural heritage, all infrastructure, even for the Olympics, must consider its environmental impact. No Queenslander voted for koala habitat to be bulldozed or for cultural heritage to be ignored. As rightly pointed out by the Queensland Law Society and the Queensland Bar Association, the courts may be silenced in the name of Olympic deadlines. No Queenslander voted for that either.

However, this bill gives Olympic projects unprecedented legal exemptions, stripping away protections under Queensland's key environmental planning and cultural heritage laws. This bill overrides cornerstone laws: the Planning Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Nature Conservation Act, the Vegetation Management Act, the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act and more. Those are laws that protect our natural environment, our cultural heritage and our communities.

The bill removes established assessment and approval processes, allowing developments associated with Olympic infrastructure to bypass safeguards without clear or transparent criteria, bypassing the rules that every other project must follow. This bill imposes a sweeping ban on civil

proceedings that might delay Olympic infrastructure. That means no legal action to challenge unlawful approvals. Of course that would be of concern to communities. Of course that would be of concern to the conservation sector, to the legal fraternity and to traditional owners.

Regardless of the protestations of the government that it is only for a limited purpose and it would not be misused, we are talking about a government that this week did not fund the independent community environmental legal service, the EDO, which could help to hold them to account on such matters. It is another example of saying one thing when in opposition and doing another when in government. Why would anyone have confidence in the government not to abuse these provisions and not to set a precedent from which they decide to conveniently build?

We all know that the LNP have no credibility on the environment and environmental protection, particularly given such notable quotes given in this place by the architect of this legislation, 'Dredge, baby, dredge!' or a personal favourite from the member for Burdekin, 'I'll sign. You drill.' We need all the robust environmental protections we can get with the LNP in government. The Bar Association of Queensland has warned that the rule of law must not be a casualty in the battle for the efficient development of Olympic infrastructure. That is what is at risk here.

Then there is the erosion of First Nations cultural heritage. The bill replaces genuine negotiated cultural heritage management plans with a rushed developer-led process. Traditional owners are given tight and inflexible timeframes, and if they cannot reach agreement the developer's plan is imposed by default. It strips away the right to seek injunctions to protect cultural heritage. It reduces access to the Land Court. It risks violating the Human Rights Act and the fundamental rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Environmental Defenders Office, the Queensland Conservation Council, legal experts and First Nations voices have all sounded the alarm. Queensland can deliver the games in a way that respects our laws, our environment and our First Nations communities, but this bill fails that test.

In respect of renewable energy, Queensland should be leading the global race for clean energy investment. We have the resources and the workforce, which positions us with ample opportunity to power our future with renewables. Make no mistake: it is only a strong renewable pathway that will allow Queensland to effectively reduce its emissions and to meet its emissions reduction targets—something this government claims it is committed to, but we know that it is not really.

This bill sends that message clearly. It imposes unprecedented red tape on renewable energy projects, forcing them to complete mandatory social impact assessments and community benefit agreements before they can even apply for development approval. Of course, social impact and community benefit are important factors—critical factors—but no other industry faces this barrier before a development application can be lodged—not coal, not gas, not mining and not large agribusiness. If the government is really genuine about community consultation and it believes this is the right and best way, it should provide the same opportunity to all industries to build equally strong social licence and level the playing field, as the member before me said.

The Queensland Renewable Energy Council, the Law Society and even regional councils have warned these provisions will delay projects, increase costs and drive investment interstate. Some 66,000 megawatts of renewable projects are in the pipeline. These projects are vital to meeting Queensland's emissions targets, creating regional jobs and securing cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy. Queensland families and businesses need cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy now that so many families have no energy rebate to call on.

Labor believes in community benefits, but these assessments must be made fairly, consistently and at the right time through proper planning processes. Requiring these before the project can even go through a development approval has the potential to cut a good project off at the knees before it can prove its worth. Look at the evidence: MacIntyre Wind Farm underestimated its workforce by hundreds of jobs; and the Aldoga Solar Farm created Australia's first solar supply chain using Queensland steel. These benefits emerged as the projects evolved, not before the sod was turned.

Locking in rigid agreements too early risks missing those benefits altogether and councils will be left to pick up the pieces. Smaller regional councils say they lack the resources and expertise to manage complex community agreements. They are being set up to fail—without funding, without training and without support. Queensland should be making it easier to build solar and wind projects to benefit our communities and the environment, not making it harder than digging a coalmine.

We back proper planning for renewables through renewable energy zones, coordinated state assessments and genuine community consultation. This bill delivers none of that. It is designed that way because this LNP government could not do much more to make it clear that they do not support a renewable pathway. They are ideologically opposed to it. Many on that side of the House are probably

still denying the science. I have stood in this House time and again calling on the government to tell Queenslanders what their plan is for energy transition, but we know they do not have one. They only have a plan for a plan.

Labor supports the games. We support communities. We support renewable energy. We support the rule of law. We certainly do not support stripping away protections under Queensland's key environmental planning and cultural heritage laws or the right of Queenslanders to have a say. Queenslanders deserve better.