




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (8.58 pm): It is hard to reconcile the completely contradictory components of this bill. In some cases, it provides for better community consultation and improved approval processes, which is welcomed, and in others it completely removes them.

First, the bill amends the Planning Act to introduce what is called a community benefit system to the planning framework for specific development uses. The specific uses are to be set out in regulations. However, as the Deputy Premier said in his introductory speech, they will be for renewable energy projects and no other form of development applications, or DAs. For these uses, the proponent must conduct a social impact assessment, or an SIA, and a community benefit agreement, CBA, before lodging a DA. This will require the applicant to engage and work with the community earlier in the process, not just at the DA lodgement point and later. This is really good news as our communities should be engaged early and often on large-scale developments.

We actually have good engagement examples of this in my community, such as the Lake Macdonald Dam upgrade by Seqwater. However, this example is not the norm and this legislative change is limited to renewable energy sites. The question is: what about other large-scale developments including where expansions occur, decimating safety, health and infrastructure in our peaceful communities? Should they not have the same legislated input?

Concerns were raised by RACQ that these changes would have unintended negative consequences as the present threshold fails to distinguish between utility-scale solar farms and commercial-scale installations intended primarily for self-consumption by businesses and local governments. Another issue raised was that it would only apply to wind and solar renewable projects and not large-scale battery energy storage systems. Not everyone is a good corporate citizen. Even though we have been fortunate in our community for feed-in on a storage facility, other companies may not do so.

Second, the bill makes some changes to the arrangements to the Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority, GIICA, streamlining the board by reducing state government appointees from four to one, federal government appointees from four to one and vice presidents of the board from six to one, and also removing the requirement that 50 per cent of nominated directors be women and that at least one of the independent directors is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Third is what the government calls streamlining the approvals process for Olympic venues and villages. These changes were supported by Brisbane 2032 and the Property Council of Australia, who stated they have long championed streamlined and efficient planning. However, this could also be called abolishing approvals required under the Planning Act and a range of other acts including the Coastal Protection and Management Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Fisheries Act, the Local Government Act, the Nature Conservation Act and the Queensland Heritage Act. As one submitter said, while the bill introduces stricter social impact scrutiny for renewable energy, it reduces oversight for

state sanctioned infrastructure. This contradiction sends a clear message: environmental laws will be enforced selectively, not uniformly, which undermines public confidence in planning integrity. Over half of the submissions addressed this issue, raising risks of impacts on wildlife, including koalas, and heritage values; bypassing scrutiny; reducing transparency; and removing the oversight of courts.

A law professor from the Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law submitted that they were deeply concerned as excluding the operation of certain laws is an affront to the requirements of equal and general applicability of the law to government that is fundamental to the rule of law. The department noted these issues and concerns, responding that the purpose of these amendments is to enable the timely delivery of games venues and villages. These do not allow for unchecked development with appropriate standards, and development impacts can be addressed during the design and construction, which is true, as all venues will be required to comply with necessary building and safety requirements. However, again, environmental and heritage concerns could be ignored.

Many submitters were concerned also with the impact of building a stadium in the green space of Victoria Park. One highlighted its history, which I found really interesting. The park was gazetted in 1875 as part of a global park movement which also saw the creation of New York Central Park and London's Hampstead Heath and represents the last remaining substantive inner-city Brisbane green space. Brisbane already has the lowest area of green space of any Australian capital city and a 63,000-seat stadium is going to massively impact the park. In response, the department simply reiterated that the stadium is in line with the 2032 Delivery Plan. Ex-Brisbane lord mayor Graham Quirk said earlier this year that Brisbane City Council has a policy of no net loss of green space in the city, suggesting you could potentially turn the Gabba into green space—an area much in need of it—to offset the loss. Hence, there would be a loss in one location and a gain in another.

Overall, this bill seems to be one step forward and two steps back. Without amendments, it is difficult to support it in its current form. That includes incorporating a community benefit system into all major developments, not just a selected sector. In addition, we need to see whether bypassing various acts for the Olympics passes the pub test, given it is not done for Queenslanders who have been desperately trying to provide critical accommodation for their families. This has included for our most vulnerable on private properties with examples of refusals coming constantly to my office, including not being in keeping with the streetscape. I could go on. Ultimately, I think honourable members would see why it would not pass the pub test.

My thanks go to the committee and the secretariat for the report and to the many Queenslanders who made submissions. Their input is always valued.