



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (EFFICIENCY AND STREAMLINING) AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (3.02 pm): This omnibus bill makes amendments to environmental legislation to adopt a risk-based approach to oversight, to reduce red tape and duplication and to streamline processes for activities deemed low risk in the resources and tourism sectors. As always, the devil is in the detail, and I am going to go through a couple of those.

Significant changes include environmentally relevant activities, or ERAs—identified as having lower environmental impact or risk, such as small-scale mining—transitioning from environmental authorities, or EAs, to codes declared through regulation. Whether an activity is suitable to be managed through an ERA code would be decided by the minister, with ‘low risk’ being poorly defined, as well as regulations and codes not yet finalised. Assessing anything as ‘low risk’ without clearly defined assessment criteria, finalised regulations or a mandatory centralised and easily accessible public register understandably raises concerns. Detail is needed on how these codes will maintain the necessary environmental safeguards, oversight and compliance.

Multiple submitters, including the Sunshine Coast Environmental Council and the Queensland Conservation Council, note that less oversight and no public register restrict the ability for government and communities to monitor the long-term, cumulative environmental impacts of activities. The Queensland Environmental Law Association cautioned that locally specific environmental concerns are also at risk with a uniform code. At a minimum, ERAs should be registered with DETSI and made public. The bill also removes public notification and consultation on draft terms of reference, or TORs, for environmental impact statements, or EISs. This is the initial opportunity for community input into major projects under assessment, with DETSI confirming that 100 per cent of cases—that is 100 per cent—are amended following this consultation phase.

The Environmental Defenders Office notes that this loss of notification and consultation risks issues being missed or needing to be raised as objections later. Therefore, intended efficiencies would not be achieved. Community participation and transparency, as we all know, are the foundation to credible environmental management. As the Queensland Trust for Nature submitted, this early consultation phase should be retained. I would like to add that community consultation and participation are foundational for everything we do.

Prioritising efficiency over environmental protection is evident with the proposed single integrated permit, or SIP. This sees a one-stop-shop permission issued for commercial tourism activity in protected areas, state marine parks, state forests and recreation areas, with DETSI stating that the intention would be ‘to get more businesses to apply and more permits issued’. This understandably rings alarm bells for communities and tourism operators in protected areas that seek strengthening, not weakening. Concerns were also raised that a lack of caps on commercial operators could undermine the sustainability for existing tourism operators, and we have many fabulous ones in Noosa.

The Queensland Conservation Council and the Sunshine Coast Environmental Council noted the insufficient detail around how intensified tourist activity would be managed including for cumulative impacts over the permit periods, which can be up to 15 years, and suggested measurable performance indicators be used. With sites such as the Cooloola Recreation Area, as I have raised many times, already impacted by government failures to manage excessive visitation during peak season and poor behaviours, they cannot be subjected to what has been labelled 'unfettered commercial activity' by Wildlife Queensland. Reducing red tape for our businesses is important but not without appropriate safeguards for our existing businesses, environment and communities.

Underground water impact reports are vital to safeguard our water and food security, with farming communities raising significant concerns including subsidence caused by coal seam gas activities. Although deemed 'out of scope', as I raised in my statement of reservation, there has been no progress on a framework to address this, and the former government did not reintroduce amendments in 2024 to manage these impacts. There was also opposition from almost all stakeholders to the proposal to extend to five years the UWIRs, indicating the current three-year period should be maintained.

Sufficient detail on how these issues will be managed and addressed is lacking and, even though I support greater efficiencies, as I have spoken about many times in relation to our parliamentary processes, I cannot support the bill in its current form.

I would like to thank our chair, my fellow committee members and our incredibly hardworking secretariat for their work. What I really appreciated during this inquiry was the productive and respectful manner in which it was undertaken.