




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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QUEENS'S WHARF BRISBANE BILL; BRISBANE CASINO AGREEMENT AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (8.37 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the consideration in this cognate debate of the bills that enable the Queen's Wharf Brisbane development. At the outset, I want to thank the members on this side of the House who have made some very flattering comments about my role in delivering this when I was the minister for state development and deputy premier. I note of course that those on the other side of the House could not bring themselves to acknowledge that a project like this had its genesis under our government and has not suddenly happened over the last 12 months. That is not surprising.

Perhaps the most gratifying thing for me is that the current Labor government has changed very little of the plan that the former treasurer, the member for Clayfield, and I put in place and the project that we worked on over a period of two years to make happen. The government has changed very little. That in itself is gratifying. They would have loved to have found fault. They would have loved to have constructed some sort of criticism in the same way they did with the Royalties for the Regions program, but they were not able to in this particular instance. They were not able to find any fault at all.

The only significant change is the one that the member for Mansfield referred to in relation to the theatre proposition that the government traded off, if you like, for additional dollars from poker machines. The member for Mansfield's summary of that particular part of the project is exactly right: the proposition for a theatre was always part of the Queen's Wharf project. It was originally suggested as part of the precinct here on this side of the river but, because there was no room, because we wanted to maximise the public space on this side of the river, the proposition then morphed, if you like, to one that was an expansion of the existing entertainment precinct on the south side of the river. An important part of that was the connectivity—the bridge that needed to ensure that connectivity between the south side and the north side of the river, between the entertainment precinct and the new theatre on the south side and what we would build on this side.

I sometimes sit here, member for Clayfield, and smile when members on that side of the House criticise us for rejecting the advice of the bureaucrats. If there was one issue where I rejected the advice of the bureaucrats on numerous occasions it was about the bridge to South Bank. Nobody wanted that. Nobody wanted to have a bridge to South Bank. We insisted. This was a project that the member for Clayfield and I took a very personal interest in, a hands-on interest. We used to have a meeting every Thursday afternoon when the bureaucrats would come along and more often than not their advice was rejected. When I sit here and listen to the Premier and the Deputy Premier criticise me for rejecting bureaucrats' advice and at the same time talk about how wonderful the Queen's Wharf proposal is, there is something of a contradiction there which gives me a degree of gratification.

The Queen's Wharf project required a number of very courageous decisions to make happen. It did not just happen without a lot of soul searching on the part of those of us who made those decisions. It required, first of all, a commitment to the Queensland tourism industry and an embracing of the integrated resort development concept. That was a new concept for Queensland. It meant embracing the proposition to include additional casino licences in those international resort developments that we proposed for Queensland. We proposed three of them for Queensland. It was obvious from our discussions with the tourism industry that that is what the Queensland tourism industry needed to be internationally competitive, to add to the attractions of the reef, the outback, the Gold Coast and Fraser Island.

It also became obvious that we needed to do what we could to make Brisbane an international city, to ensure that Brisbane ranked up there with Sydney and Melbourne as an attraction to international tourists, for Brisbane to become a destination in itself. For one of those IRDs to be built in Brisbane was certainly a desirable outcome, but it was a challenge to find a site. To find a site that was big enough in the centre of the city that would complement the already existing attractions of the mall, South Bank and the entertainment precinct was indeed a challenge.

At the same time we were dealing with the horrific legacy of years of Labor government that had not maintained the accommodation that was available to Queensland's public servants. The idea was hatched to use an abandoned piece of land at 1 William Street—a piece of land that had sat vacant for nearly 30 years—as a catalyst to make the Queen's Wharf proposal a reality. It was the height of absurdity and eye-wateringly hypocritical to sit here and listen to the Treasurer this morning describe 1 William Street as a debacle and then a parade of people in here tonight tell us about how wonderful Queen's Wharf is. 1 William Street was the catalyst. It was the enabler of Queen's Wharf. You cannot have one without the other. It was not possible. It just shows the horrific, peabrain decision-making skills of the government that sits in this House at the moment. We were determined to make those decisions one after the other in a logical, sensible way, and many of them were very courageous indeed.

The whole concept of priority development areas was an important part of enabling Queen's Wharf—a whole new concept that we put together as part of the planning reform process. It was never about taking away the planning rights of local governments. I understand the concern that has been expressed by local governments. It was about involving local governments in the planning process. It was about giving back to local governments the opportunity to be involved, an opportunity that had been taken away by the previous Labor government with their urban development areas, their UDAs. The PDAs were about involving local governments. We involved the local government. We involved the Brisbane City Council in the decisions that we took over that two-year period.

We were also determined to look after the heritage buildings. That in itself was a challenge. To suggest that we were going to demolish the Neville Bonner Building was in itself a courageous decision. We had to handle the issues around the Bonner building and the Bonner family in a way that respected the legacy of Neville Bonner. All of these things were difficult. All of these things were complicated and they were made possible I believe because we had two ministers—the member for Clayfield and I—who were prepared to take the responsibility, who were prepared to make the decisions, who took a hands-on approach with a weekly meeting every Thursday afternoon when we sent the bureaucrats away more often than not with a flea in their ear. It was made possible because we had the Property and Infrastructure Cabinet Committee, where we sat around the cabinet table with the ministers who were involved and the directors-general and the bureaucrats—and didn't they hate that because they had to go there and be subject to the scrutiny of their peers and the questioning of us as ministers. It was those mechanisms, those decision-making mechanisms, which made it possible to take those decisions that made the Queen's Wharf proposal a reality.

I can share with the parliament that the Labor government can take no great credit for signing off the deal. The deal was ready to sign off in December before the election. It was ready to sign off. We made a decision to delay it into the New Year, not knowing that the then premier would call an early election. It is interesting to see that the actual decision was delayed six months. It was delayed six months unnecessarily because we were ready to sign off on a preferred tenderer before Christmas in 2015.

(Time expired)