




Speech By
Hon. Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 20 November 2013

REGIONAL PLANNING INTERESTS BILL

Introduction

 **Hon. JW SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning) (3.34 pm): I present a bill for an act to manage the impact of resource activities and other regulated activities on areas of the state that contribute, or are likely to contribute, to Queensland's economic, social and environmental prosperity. I table the bill and the explanatory notes. I nominate the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013 [\[4094\]](#).

Tabled paper: Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013, explanatory notes [\[4095\]](#).

The Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013 is a clear demonstration of the Newman government's common-sense approach to land use planning across Queensland's regions. Fundamental to this bill are new generation regional plans that address critical issues affecting regional Queensland. These new generation regional plans have been compiled through extensive consultation with the regions that have been affected. The bill gives effect to the policies in those statutory regional plans to deliver diverse and prosperous economic futures for our regions.

Statutory regional plans deliver on the promise made by the Newman government to ease land use conflicts in regional Queensland, particularly between important resource projects and existing agricultural land uses. The first two of these new plans—the Central Queensland and Darling Downs regional plans—took effect on 18 October 2013. The regional plans restore equity for landholders and they allow for critical local input into planning for growth in all of Queensland's regions. The plans provide a framework for successful co-existence between the agricultural and resources sectors. With these plans we are creating an incentive for resource companies to arrive at an acceptable outcome with landholders. We have empowered landholders, giving landholders certainty through the planning process.

The regional plans influence planning and development activities under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, including the preparation of local government planning schemes. Currently, as statutory instruments under the planning act, it is not a requirement that regional plans be considered when assessing resource activities and other activities not regulated under the planning act. However, since the gazettal of these new regional plans, approvals are now being conditioned to comply with them. Consequently, I have prepared a bill to provide the necessary regularly framework to implement the policies in regional plans to activities not regulated by the planning act, as well as integrating regional interests contained in other legislation. That bill is the Regional Planning Interests Bill that I introduce to the House today.

The bill will manage the impact of resource activities and other identified activities on areas of the state identified in the bill as being areas of regional interest. Under the proposed act, a resource activity or other identified activities cannot occur in an area of regional interest unless a regional interest authority has been given for that activity. Four types of area of regional interest are defined in

the bill. These are: priority agricultural areas, priority living areas, strategic environmental areas and strategic cropping areas. The first three of these areas relate directly to policies included in the new generation of regional plans. The criteria is that a resource activity or other identified activity proposed in a regional interest area will be assessed against a regulation under the act.

The bill integrates the policy objectives of the Strategic Cropping Land Act 2011 by identifying strategic cropping as an area of regional interest. The Regional Planning Interests Act will repeal the Strategic Cropping Land Act 2011 upon commencement.

The bill provides for a regional interests authority to be obtained prior to or post the issuing of an environmental authority or resource tenement for a resource proposal. This enables the resource applicant to avoid potential delays in the approvals process, as in many cases it is unlikely that a regional interest decision can be made until the detailed information at the property level is available.

The bill also provides for an application to be referred to a third party to assess a particular aspect of an application. This is for use in the case of priority living areas identified in a regional plan where the application would be referred to the local government. Any conditions imposed by the local government must be added to the authority. This may include a condition that prohibits the resource activity in all or part of the priority living area.

These reforms initiated through the bill follow more than 18 months of consultation with the agricultural sector, landholders, the resources sector, local governments, and business and community groups. Each regional plan's policies were developed in close consultation with a regional planning committee made up of a broad cross-section of local people. The policies were subject to consultation and the consideration of submissions before the regional plans were finalised.

Stakeholders will continue to be involved in the development of these assessment criteria for inclusion in the Regional Planning Interests Regulation. In the case of the Cape York region, this public consultation is about to begin. Today I have released the Cape York Regional Plan, and formal consultation will commence and be available for public comment until 25 March next year. We are extending the consultation period from the standard 60 business days to 80 days to take into account the potential onset of the wet season and the holiday period.

As I have previously stated on a number of occasions, a key priority of the government in the Cape York region is to enable sustainable economic development opportunities, balanced with the protection of the cape's natural environmental areas. In committing to resetting this balance, we are repealing the emotive and arbitrary wild river declarations in the region, as we said we would, and are addressing the land use planning aspects through the regional planning process designed by local communities. Revoking these declarations will result in the removal of the current prohibitions, allowing proposals to be subject to merit based assessment.

The government's environmental impact statement process will continue to provide the most appropriate framework for assessing and mitigating impacts on an individual project and settlement basis. Yet to ensure that strategic natural areas such as the Wenlock River and the Steve Irwin Reserve are provided appropriate levels of protection from activities that may impact on their strategic conservation values, we need to ensure that state policy regarding land use planning applies to the resources sector. The Regional Planning Interests Bill and Cape York Regional Plan will ensure the land uses for the Wenlock River and the Steve Irwin Reserve, as decided by former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard, will continue.

They will do this by the declaration of a strategic environmental area—a new instrument that will be created by the introduction of this legislation. A strategic environmental area will be mapped under the strategic plan as a regulated area within which certain activities will be regulated. It goes without saying that activities such as mining and other activities that would threaten the environmental values of areas such as the Steve Irwin Reserve will not be allowed in the strategic environmental area that we will declare for that area. As the environment minister indicated in his ministerial statement this morning, we have sought to protect this area as the first strategic environmental area that our government will declare under this legislation.

The Regional Planning Interests Bill will give legal protection from open-cut and strip mining, and other activities that risk irreversible and widespread impacts to the ecological integrity of the entire Cape York, but we will begin with the Irwin property. Despite all its grandstanding, these types of legal protections were not afforded to this important area by the previous government. The Regional Planning Interests Bill is the culmination of a long process for the Newman government and brings to life planning concepts central to our philosophy that economic development and protection of the environment are not mutually exclusive outcomes. Unlike Labor, our government is not captive to the radical green movement. We do not make these decisions based on Greens preference deals.

We make these decisions based on common sense and close and extensive consultation with the local community.

The Cape York region has been subjected to numerous government planning processes over the decades that have failed to appropriately tackle some very difficult issues. The previous government failed to tackle these issues across the Darling Downs and in Central Queensland. But there is a determination in our government to ensure these issues are addressed in both cases. In the case of Cape York, there is a determination led personally by the Premier to do whatever we can to address the economic disadvantage in Cape York communities, especially for the Indigenous population of those communities.

My department has led the preparation of the Cape York Regional Plan in consultation with the local governments from the region, key industry and community representatives as well as state agencies. This, along with the preparation of a strategy by my colleague Minister Cripps to enable appropriate water resource planning and allocation, will open up more opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within the Cape York region and give local communities greater control of their own economic future.

But we will not be stopping there. The new South East Queensland Regional Plan is the next cab off the rank. Later this month I will be chairing the second meeting of the SEQ Regional Planning Committee, and I intend working towards having the new plan finalised by the end of 2014. Equally, we will be working on new generation regional plans for other areas in Queensland. This bill and our new regional plans are critical steps in our overhaul of Queensland's planning system. The preparation of the new regional plans and this legislation that gives them effect have been a long process. It has needed to be a long process because of the consultation that has been required with the communities that have been affected. It has also needed to be a long process because it has introduced some new concepts to the people of regional Queensland. The concepts of priority agriculture areas, priority living areas, a strategic environmental area and what those determinations mean have been worked through in a consultation process that has been extensive. But I expect that with the introduction of this legislation into the House it will provide an opportunity for further consultation and discussion about those concepts. They are new concepts. The introduction of land use planning in regional Queensland is a new concept, but the need for it is imperative because of the land use conflicts that originated on the Darling Downs and Central Queensland between the resources industry and the agricultural industry.

The concepts that we have developed and will be implementing in this legislation will have a far wider impact than in those two particular areas. While they will go a long way to resolving those land use conflicts that have caused such community disaffection with the rapid expansion of the coal seam gas industry primarily and the resources industry generally, the concepts that will become law with the passage of this bill will provide regional Queensland with a greater degree of certainty—a certainty that land use planning can protect our living areas in regional communities. Land use planning can protect our vital, high-quality agricultural areas from dislocation. Land use planning can also protect our important environmental areas and protect the environmental values that are unique to those areas through regulation that can be unique for each one of those areas.

This legislation has been the product of an enormous amount of work by a lot of people in my department. It has been something of a crusade for many of us on this side of the House. It was a proposition that began a long time before we won government to introduce statutory regional planning for regional Queensland to address these issues that had been causing grave concern for so many of our constituencies and so many of our communities. It gives me enormous gratification to introduce the bill into the House today. I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

Hon. JW SEENEY (Callide—LNP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning) (3.48 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee

Madam SPEAKER: Order! In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee.

Portfolio Committee, Reporting Date

Hon. JW SEENEY (Callide—LNP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning) (3.49 pm), by leave, without notice: I move—

That under the provisions of standing order 136 the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee report to the House on the Regional Planning Interests Bill by 17 March 2014.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.