



Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Record of Proceedings, 11 August 2020

FOREST WIND FARM DEVELOPMENT BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (4.59 pm): I rise to address the Forest Wind Farm Development Bill, which the LNP will not be opposing. The bill proposes to facilitate a major energy project to be developed across tens of thousands of hectares within the Toolara, Tuan and Neerdie state forests. Under the current legislative framework, the grant of tenure for this type of project is prohibited. The bill achieves this by exempting the proposed development from, or modifying the application of sections of, the Forestry Act 1959 and the Land Act 1994. The project area is the subject of the 99-year plantation licence that was sold to HQPlantations by the former Bligh Labor government for \$603 million in 2010, something that I recall vividly because of the impact on the electorate of Glass House.

The Forest Wind project is a major energy development on a scale that neither of the impacted Gympie or Fraser Coast local government areas have ever seen before. If undertaken, the project will have a significant and lasting impact upon residents, businesses and visitors. Such is the scale of the project, it will clearly be visible from the Fraser Island World Heritage site. As I said, the LNP will be supporting this bill, but we must raise a number of concerns.

It was revealed during the State Development, Tourism, Innovation and Manufacturing Committee's consideration of the bill that the government had been in secret discussions with the project proponent for three years, yet the first in-person community consultation session with residents was held only at the start of this year. Instead of engaging with the local community over a project that will have a significant and lasting impact upon their way of life, the Palaszczuk Labor government had chosen to hold secret meetings with the proponent for three years. Making matters worse for the local community, even though the first in-person consultation sessions were only held this year, the project proponent is expecting to commence construction at the end of this year, as stated in the committee report.

The consultation section of the bill's explanatory notes states that exposure drafts of the bill were provided to the proponent and HQPlantations on Christmas Eve 2019. That is right: 24 December 2019. There is not a single mention of consultation with the local community in the bill or the explanatory notes. Even though local property owners will endure significant and lasting impacts from the development that this bill enables, the Palaszczuk Labor government did not even consider it worthwhile to extend their Christmas Eve consultation to community members.

The Palaszczuk Labor government has also failed to announce details of where the transmission line corridor will be and what properties will be affected. The prospect of high-voltage lines cutting family properties is an ever-present stress for local residents. It is incumbent on the Palaszczuk Labor government to ensure landholders' views are heard and appropriate community consultation is undertaken. The member for Gympie and others in this chamber will have more to say on this point.

This is yet another example, one of a very long list, of the Palaszczuk Labor government riding roughshod over regional communities. Whether it is demolishing Paradise Dam, blocking the New Acland mine, downsizing Rookwood Weir or legislating anti-farmer laws, regional Queenslanders

always lose out under Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk. Indeed, it was Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk who sat around the cabinet table when the former Bligh Labor government sold off Forestry Plantations Queensland for \$603 million in 2010. The Wide Bay community was barely consulted then, and now, under the Premier's government, consultation with the local community is not even an afterthought on this bill.

During the bill's public hearing, one local resident, Ms Christine Olsen, revealed that her first face-to-face consultation was only held in February of this year. She said—

What horrified me most was the map that was put up ... I came to live here to look across the water to see Fraser Island and to watch and listen to the birds, not listen to or see wind turbines.

Not only did the former Bligh Labor government sell off the state forests that Ms Olsen neighbours in an asset fire sale; now the Palaszczuk Labor government is enabling development in the forest which would have previously been unimaginable. This previously unimaginable development is enabled by this bill establishing a legislative framework for the development to otherwise be undertaken in the state forest by exempting the project from certain provisions of the Forestry Act and the Land Act.

Timber Queensland's submission to the bill stated it supported the legislation on the condition that there is no net loss in forestry production. The government has so far failed to deliver upon this commitment for no net loss in forestry production. This uncertainty is yet another stress on Wide Bay's timber industry, which is already fighting for certainty before the regional forestry agreement ends in 2026. The Queensland forest and timber industry generates more than \$3.8 billion in value each year and supports 25,000 direct and indirect jobs. The hardwood sawmilling industry in the south-east supports 2,000 direct and indirect jobs and has a mill door value of more than \$200 million per annum.

Labor is deliberately dragging their feet on signing up to a South-East Queensland regional forest agreement with the express purpose of driving operators out of the industry. The current plan ends in 2026 for Wide Bay. The industry needs certainty now on their investments and future business prospects. As it currently stands, all logging of Crown native forest will cease by 2026. Instead of providing stopgap two-year extensions, the LNP will deliver Queensland's timber industry with the certainty needed to create more jobs by updating the 30-year industry plan.

The explanatory notes state that the proponent submitted a detailed proposal under the investment facilitation process for exclusive transactions. The minister also referred to this in her introductory speech and in a media release when the bill was introduced. This is the same process that was established after the monumental market-led proposal failure of former Labor minister and current Treasurer Cameron Dick. The name may have changed, but it is still the same opaque, inefficient and cumbersome process.

Under the former market-led proposals framework, even though the private sector submitted more than 160 proposals, the Palaszczuk Labor government delivered only one. Proposals like the Queensland Maritime Museum aquarium were repeatedly announced by Labor but then quietly shelved. Labor's market-led proposal program was slammed by the Queensland Auditor-General for creating undue pressure to push projects that have not cleared the most basic of hurdles. The Auditor-General found that one market-led proposal was stuck on a minister's desk for 622 days.

Mr Krause: A very business friendly government!

Mr POWELL: I take that interjection from the member for Scenic Rim. I assume he said it dripping with sarcasm.

Mr Krause: Absolutely.

Mr POWELL: I hope that Labor's mismanagement of this process does not turn the proposed Forest Wind farm development into another Brisbane aquarium—multiple announcements and media conferences that result in not a single job being created or dollar invested.

The Wide Bay region needs jobs. At 10.2 per cent, Wide Bay has the highest unemployment rate in Queensland. The Wide Bay youth unemployment rate is also the second highest rate in the state, increasing 5.8 per cent in the last year to a staggering 24.2 per cent. With the highest unemployment rate in the state and youth unemployment sitting in high double digits, the Wide Bay region desperately needs jobs, not hollow promises. Hollow announcements have already started to be issued, with the minister stating that the project could create—and I stress 'could'—440 jobs in construction.

Sadly, this story has played out before, not in Wide Bay but in Far North Queensland, another region which has been forgotten and neglected by the Palaszczuk Labor government. This time Minister Jones was promising 2,300 local jobs in Cairns from the Tropical North Global Tourism Hub. This promise turned out to be yet another broken commitment made to regional Queensland by the Palaszczuk Labor government.

It is no wonder the Queensland Auditor-General made the recommendation that Labor's market-led proposals framework needed clear protocols for communication about such proposals, ensuring that announcements occur once sufficient assessment has been undertaken to determine the project is suitable and sufficiently viable. It is certainly the LNP's hope that this project meets that criteria of being suitable and sufficiently viable.

With Labor already making job announcements for a project that is far from shovel-ready, it is obvious that the Palaszczuk Labor government has ignored the sensible recommendations made by the Queensland Auditor-General. It appears the exclusive transaction process referred to in the explanatory notes is no different to Labor's failed market-led proposal framework.

Unlike the Palaszczuk Labor government, the LNP will not simply re-badge failed initiatives that do not deliver jobs. Instead, the LNP has already announced it will establish Queensland Investment Partnerships. Queensland has huge potential, but it has been wasted for the last five years. To replace Labor's failed market-led proposals and exclusive transaction processes, the LNP will establish Queensland Investment Partnerships to work hand in hand with the private sector in delivering at least \$1 billion of signed and sealed new public-private projects by 2024.

Queensland Investment Partnerships will adopt the Auditor-General's recommendations to ensure consultation is undertaken early and that quality assurance processes are implemented to restore private sector confidence. Importantly, our Queensland Investment Partnerships will also establish communication protocols that restrict announcements to approved projects only. The Property Council of Australia strongly endorses the LNP's plan stating that 'a commitment to genuinely partner with the private sector is a big step in the right direction'.

As I said at the outset, while the LNP will not be opposing this aspect of the bill, we are disappointed that the Palaszczuk Labor government has chosen to progress this project in secret for three years without any engagement or consultation with the local community. Queenslanders have no faith in Labor's failed market-led proposal process or its subsequent exclusive transaction framework that this bill has originated from. Wide Bay has the highest unemployment rate in the state. We fear that instead of new job-creating projects all that Labor is delivering is more media announcements. Let us hope that that is not the case.

Moving to the new provisions for the Springfield Structure Plan—and I echo the words of the minister in introducing this part and again addressing it in her second reading speech—clause 75 of the bill inserts new provisions for the Springfield Structure Plan. These provisions enable the administration of the Springfield Structure Plan to ensure the Springfield City Group has sufficient input into the provision of infrastructure. These amendments are welcomed by the LNP. In essence they are re-establishing what was always the intent from the outset because, as we have already heard, Greater Springfield is a unique community. It has grown to now six suburbs, is home to 43,000 residents, supports more than 20,000 jobs and has a student population—possibly pre COVID—in excess of 10,000 with 11 schools. As the Property Council submission stated, the amendments will assist, preserve and ensure the efficient functioning of the Springfield Structure Plan and allow it to continue to provide certainty and achieve its intended outcomes for the community.

These amendments are required due to a decision from the Planning and Environment Court which had the consequential impact that the Springfield City Group no longer had sufficient input into the provision of required infrastructure. In its submission, the Urban Development Institute of Australia outlined that Greater Springfield is an important example of the results that can be achieved with an integrated planning and infrastructure framework in a critical growth area.

It is worth pointing out that, unlike the Palaszczuk Labor government, the LNP understands the importance of integrating planning with infrastructure. That is why we will insist that land use plans are paired with infrastructure plans. We will deliver Queensland's first fully funded infrastructure plan. To get developments like Springfield building again, the LNP will set new targets for the Coordinator-General to slash approval times for major projects and reinstate publicly reported performance targets for planning approvals. The LNP will move more quickly than Labor and more intelligently too. Instead of blocking growth, the LNP believes governments should drive the smart growth of our communities and economy. Only an LNP government will get Queensland working again and building again.