



- Speech -

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Member for Noosa

Shadow Minister for Climate Change & Sustainability

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Debate: South East Queensland Regional Plan

Mr ELMES (Noosa--LNP) (9.45 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek your indulgence to welcome to the gallery Richard and Lucy Pearson and Gus and Helen Hatter, both from Noosa, and also my wife, Lesleigh.

I am privileged to rise to speak again on behalf of my electorate of Noosa in this critical debate about our future. My community always worries when Labor starts to plan on our behalf. The forced council amalgamation process of 2006 and 2007 was hallmarked by stripping Noosa and the Queensland constituency of the right to a binding vote on council amalgamations as enshrined in state law.

Do you know why, Mr Deputy Speaker? It was because the Labor government knew that a vote would be defeated not by a small margin but overwhelmingly. We on this side of the House support the planning processes which would, in normal circumstances, lead to the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009 to 2031, but these are not normal circumstances. We know that all of the submissions in the world make no difference to this Labor government's approach to consultation. We know that all the wisdom subscribed by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council; the highly respected Sunshine Coast Environment Council; the influential OSCAR, which stands for Organisation Sunshine Coast Associations of Residents; the forensic Development Watch; the EDV Residents Group; as well as the wise council from the Noosa Parks Association, the Noosa Residents and Ratepayers Association and of course the Friends of Noosa, to mention but a few, simply fail to be taken into account by this minister and this Labor government.

How could we expect anything to be different? With a Labor government now more dependent for its political survival on donations from the property development industry than from its traditional labour trade union base and with a minister captive to that same industry for whom he was a consultant and advocate before coming into this place, how could we expect other than what we have got? But the minister monsters any notion of impartiality through the concept of investigation areas and sleight of hand expansions of the urban footprint to appease his constituent urban development lobby. The Sunshine Coast Regional Council opposed the 1,408-hectare Caloundra South extension investigation area on the basis of the loss of the interurban break and the nutrient and recreational use impacts on the Pumicestone Passage.

Others opposed other inclusions into the urban footprint as well, but still on he ploughs. But everyone was unanimous in their chorus for the permanent protection of the interurban break between the Moreton Bay area and the Sunshine Coast, for it to be set in concrete, to become an article of faith. This interurban break is prone to flooding.

There simply must be a ban on the continued development of flood prone or flood plain land. The current practice of raising the level of flood plain land above the flood level for development purposes simply makes flooding elsewhere more likely and more severe. It is a 'beggar my neighbour' policy. On the Sunshine Coast we do not want to see the incremental stripping away of the interurban breaks, as has occurred between Brisbane and the Gold Coast which is an interurban break in name only. I strongly oppose this minister having the power to gazette new growth areas without public consultation and the process for declarations to occur. These regulations will permit a wide range of

urban style tourist, recreation, sporting, hospitality and commercial developments to occur outside the urban footprint with limited code and impact assessment requirements and little guidance for local government. Further, I am also totally opposed to the proposed discretion for the minister to declare urban and future growth areas as a master plan area.

Given the current minister's strong links to the property development industry, I am greatly alarmed by this proposed power, unfettered by any guidelines or ability to be challenged. This has been fostered by changing the definitions in the dictionary. Long-held definitions have been turned turtle. What was forbidden is now at the bidding of the minister. Everyone has to go back to school and learn a new language. My constituency and their advocacy groups requested the state support regional and local planning based on sustainable carrying capacity which also considers and accepts character and amenity.

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council has a powerful electoral mandate for such planning and should be permitted to fulfil that mandate. The South East Queensland Regional Plan proposes 156,000 extra dwellings by 2031, a 39 per cent increase over the 397,000 of 2006. The plan envisages 497,000 people crammed into a sardine city by 2031, 68 per cent more than the 295,000 of 2006. The place we call home and love so much will be loved to death by such an onslaught.

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council sought assurance that dwelling allocations be qualified by assessment of development planning constraints--constraints extended by the Sunshine Coast Environment Council and others, all to no avail. The growth is uneven. Although the South-East Queensland population growth is 1.57 million, Brisbane will grow by some 39 per cent, the Gold Coast will grow by 68 per cent and the heaviest impact will be borne by the Sunshine Coast, with a 76 per cent growth in population. Analysis of state and regional population progressions to 2031 and 2050 clearly shows that these are not sustainable in ecological, economic, financial or social terms. With the population doubling every 25 years and with two-thirds of the population in South-East Queensland, one third in regional coastal areas and only one per cent west of the ranges, South-East Queensland will have a population equal to the present total state population by 2031 and 20 per cent of that population will be over the age of 65.

The state already spends twice as much per capita on infrastructure as the other states and is facing mounting budget deficits and a state debt with a lowered credit rating--it just does not add up. Here is a case for a state and regional population and settlement policy and strategy. Analysis of the drivers of population growth--which is natural increase, net interstate migration and net international migration--shows that the state has a number of policy instruments at its disposal to deliver a population and growth rate which is determined to be sustainable for the region and for the state overall. Managing international migration to Queensland is obvious, given this has been double the rate of interstate migration in the most recent decade.

The South East Queensland Regional Plan simply accepts population growth as a fact to be accommodated rather than managed. Strategies and then policies need to be developed and implemented by which growth is limited to no more than the sustainable carrying capacity of the Sunshine Coast. A key factor of sustainability in my view is provision of acceptable infrastructure proceeding or in conjunction with appropriate development.

I believe that the current government policy encourages this excessive population growth, and therefore policy change can reduce it. For example, concessional stamp duty for first home buyers in Queensland is a significant incentive for Victorian and New South Wales property owners to relocate to Queensland, particularly in retirement, rather than to relocate within their own state. Limiting the concession to first home buyers generally rather than first home buyers in Queensland, as now, would be a good first step in limiting growth and would send a clear message of intent that population growth for Queensland is not limitless.

It should be noted here that the Sunshine Coast Regional Council was elected almost two years ago with an overwhelming mandate from electors to preserve their quality of life, to nurture its unique communities, to manage population growth and development and to make the region the most sustainable in Australia. The electors who live on the Sunshine Coast have sent this very clear message

which should be informing planning and planning instruments such as the South East Queensland Regional Plan that replicating the Gold Coast on the Sunshine Coast is not acceptable to us. There is here potential for a clear identification of community areas in which modelling of desirable future living could be trialled.

I envisage the greater Noosa area as one which could be home to communities capable of ready adaption to important change. Booking the ClimateSmart Home Service--which is a state government initiative and which I wholly approve of--managing our carbon footprint, insulating our homes, installing hot-water systems and solar power generation, composting and recycling more of our waste, installing greywater systems and harvesting rainwater et cetera are a few examples of some of the myriad ways in which a small engaged community might model solutions to climate change and sustainability.

These solutions might then be rolled out across the state when it is clear which approaches work best and how they might be implemented. We residents of the Sunshine Coast advocate a much less intensive residential development for our area than the currently accepted urban norm of large estate development which requires water and energy to be captured or generated remotely and delivered to these developments and from which waste water and waste is transported to a remote site for treatment or disposal.

The current urban model is ultimately unsustainable and undesirable. Greater Noosa, with recognition from UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program, is, I submit, ideally and best placed to model a sustainable future. The truly monstrous failure of the Labor government has been in the provision of infrastructure. With our Bankcard maxed out, the capacity for future generations to work through the economic catastrophe facing the state, home-grown by sheer economic incompetence, is hamstrung. Both the plan and the South-East Queensland infrastructure program fail to commit to the provision of the necessary infrastructure to support proposed increases in dwellings and sustainable development. The teaching hospital for the University of the Sunshine Coast--a truly fantastic win-win concept for health services in my region, for infrastructure provision and for education as a hub for economic development--has been put off and put back until it is almost out of sight and out of mind. Why? Because the Labor government has given up even the faintest hope of ever winning a seat on the Sunshine Coast so those electors do not matter any more to Labor.

The Queenslanders in this region of the South-East know who they cannot count on. Redress the wrong, address increases in public and active transport spending, and bring forward as a matter of urgency the coast section of CAMCOS and CoastConnect. Many rural communities are home to those engaged in lower paid employment who are compelled to travel to work, often shiftwork, by private car. Alternative transport modes must be made available for these workers. It is not acceptable that bulk public transport solutions be provided only in the most heavily populated areas which are already advantaged by a wider range of services under competitive provision. There are other infrastructure failures which I will only touch on. Education has been failed. Schools are being built under a public-private partnership in my region. I am attending the opening of Peregian Springs tomorrow morning at 9.30, which in time will really max out the already maxed out bankcard. Health services fail every day. This is not the fault of the health professionals who struggle to meet the needs of those for whom they care, there are just too many of them to care for. Then there is water. What do Sunshine Coast residents see? They see paddock after paddock of enormous black pipes just waiting to be laid to suck the lifeblood from the region. Water will leave from where it was harvested via one-way pumps through the infamous water grid, off to Brisbane never to be seen again and for which the reward of recompense has been harvested by this broke Labor government also.

To most constituents, 'infill development' are dirty words but not everyone agrees. Displaying great courage and foresight, the Sunshine Coast Environment Council, for example, has proposed to focus on infill development to take advantage of existing infrastructure and services and achievement of a more compact urban form of incorporating sustainability principles. But this demands that location, scale and design must be sympathetic to the surrounding area and to community aspirations. In short, the local community needs to be engaged in the local solution. The local government's approach to planning did not even start from an informed position. There was no review of the performance of the previous plan despite the fact that the 2008 State of the region report showed declining trends in

almost all sustainability indicators, most noticeably biodiversity and liveability indicators, and many of the plans and strategies that the plan requires for implementation are still incomplete and not integrated. While growth, transport and climate change are acknowledged, no robust solutions are offered. It is almost as if they have conceded that they will not be around long enough to address these problems of their own making, but they do not effectively address or provide solutions to these issues. Finalisation of this plan should await a fundamental review of the carrying capacity of the region.

The dreadful lag in infrastructure and services has caught up with even the existing population, and effective performance monitoring, review, resourcing and accountability structures are incorporated. The South East Queensland Regional Plan will be informed by, and is subservient to, the Integrated Planning Act 1997 and the Sustainable Planning Act 2009. Accordingly, it is of particular concern that the act does not include a prohibition on development applications which conflict with local planning schemes. This deficiency requires any local council to assess an application despite the conflict. Consideration of such applications makes it very clear to the local community that their faith in the local planning scheme, developed following prolonged community consultation, is misplaced. It also highlights for them the significant waste of local rate revenues applied by council to the assessment process and the dilemma which councils face in defending their decision in the Planning and Environment Court should a developer appeal against a refusal.

It is essential that this wasteful, resource intensive and unnecessary activity is made redundant by appropriate amendment to the act. While we humans can speak for ourselves, it is also incumbent to protect those who cannot defend themselves, and I speak particularly of the koala, our native icon, threatened with extinction by development, by this Labor government and by this plan in particular. The koala is a key indicator for biodiversity. They will be a lost indicator at the present rate as community groups struggle to offset the failures of this Labor government. The mapping program is inadequate, incomplete and slow, while another aspect of growth is seen with this minister--that is, the growth in loopholes to aid and abet the developer constituency to find legal ways to destroy koala habitat with impunity. Another aspect that has been largely overlooked is the impact on food production from development. Productive land agricultural pursuits, particularly those close to major urban centres, need to be preserved. This is another failure of the Traveston Crossing Dam--that less than optimum water storage location which sought to flood farm land and deprive Brisbane of a source of food. Let us hope that the remedial work to repair the damage done to the Mary Valley, primarily by the Premier in this case, will focus on developing this food bowl and repairing the other major consequence, which is social dislocation.

There is strong objection to the amendment proposed into the regional landscape and rural production areas which has the effect of expanding the urban footprint and redefining activities which were previously urban. These areas should be afforded the highest level of protection possible so that food production for South-East Queensland's increasing population can be secured and, simultaneously, natural conservation areas protected. For the Sunshine Coast, we all hope for the sustenance of it being a community of communities. We do not want a sardine city. We want the places in which we live, work, play and grow our families to retain their uniqueness and their individuality. We want them to be the places in communities which attracted us to them in the first place. We do not want to morph into obscurity. We do not want to be harmonised. We want progress without oblivion. The vision for the future of South-East Queensland and the principles that underpin the plan are generally consistent with those supported and endorsed by Sunshine Coast constituents. However, one notes with concern that the plan and its regulated regulatory provisions have significant flaws which remain to be addressed. The major concerns remain the weak basis in the plan for determining how growth can be managed and the potential inconsistencies that arise between desired outcomes, the lack of infrastructure planning to underpin development and the powers to the minister, who always seems ready to do a sterling job on behalf of his developer mates. It does not bode well for a sustainable future for the Sunshine Coast or anywhere in South-East Queensland.
