




Speech by

Hon. Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GREENTAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. AP CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines) (5.27 pm): It is a pleasure to follow the member for Gympie in this debate on the Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. He gave those last comments to the House with such cogent accuracy and passion it was as if he has made that speech before in this House, as if he had previously canvassed those issues in this House! As I was saying, I rise to contribute to the debate and to support this bill. I want to congratulate my friend the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, the member for Glass House, on bringing forward this very important bill so soon after the state election in March. The bill will make inroads into reducing one of the most significant risk factors facing the mining and resources sector in Queensland—the loss of investment certainty created by the previous Bligh Labor government.

The previous government's fixation on green ideology and Greens preference deals rather than the principles of sustainable resource sector development saw a question mark linger over the state of Queensland's reputation as a reliable place to invest. As the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, I am regularly reminded of some of the long and involved processes that resource companies are required to go through to progress a project from early exploration through to the production stage. Just as regularly I point out to the leaders of the resources sector the necessity for Queensland to have a rigorous and thorough environmental approvals process that protects our precious natural resources and the local community which supports it in those areas.

I believe that the Queensland community expects the resources sector to maintain a very high level of environmental sustainability in pursuing their resource projects. But I cannot defend a cumbersome and time-consuming process that unnecessarily damages this jurisdiction's reputation in the international resources sector—a place where there is intense competition for investment in new projects. We must do better for certainty for investors in the resources sector. I have been asked to explain how Queensland companies seeking capital were supposed to inform international investors that it would take them possibly up to four years to secure approvals for a mining project—four years from when that capital is first ploughed into a project until the first sod is turned to go into production.

A recent Fraser Institute survey of global mining jurisdictions documented Queensland's decline as a destination of choice for resources sector investment. In less than a decade, Queensland has fallen from eighth preferred place in 2006 to 28th place just last year during the tenure of the former Beattie and Bligh Labor governments. This long-term decline in perceived exploration attractiveness has potentially serious consequences for the Queensland economy, particularly owing to the dire financial circumstances that the former government has left us. The problem is that Queensland is not unique in having an attractive geology for resource projects. Many companies have expressed the view that it is easier to explore in jurisdictions with attractive policies where there may be certain risks than to fight for better policies elsewhere such as in Queensland where previously we had irresponsible governments. For Queensland, the survey highlighted industry concerns about administrative uncertainty, environmental regulation,

wilderness protection and regulatory issues. While it can be argued that sometimes perceptions recorded in the survey may not always accurately reflect the reality on the ground, perceptions certainly influence investment decisions.

The Newman LNP government aims to change these sentiments and restore Queensland's sovereign risk rating. It is for this reason that I am delighted to see the green-tape reduction bill prioritised by the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and the Newman LNP government so early in its tenure. The resources sector earns \$40 billion—or 15 per cent of the gross state product—for the state of Queensland each year and supports about 58,000 full-time jobs in this state. This bill will help to rebuild confidence and investment certainty in this sector by streamlining application processes and reducing red tape without compromising the environmental rigour of the processes that assess the projects that come forward.

The green-tape reduction bill will address inefficiencies in the environmental regulations applying to the mineral and resources sector in the following ways. The bill removes unnecessary administrative processes around managing an environmental authority—or EA—such as the need to apply to transfer the EA when a tenure is transferred. Put simply, when tenure, or a resource authority, is transferred from one operator to another the environmental authority also transfers. It is estimated that this will remove over 250 transactions each year and save significant time and energy unnecessarily invested by resource operators, and indeed by my department and the government, without any diminution in environmental standards. The bill also allows for the public notification of proposed resource activities to occur much earlier in the process of consideration. Under the existing provisions of the act, members of the general public can make submissions on a project after an environmental authority is drafted. The green-tape reduction bill ensures that public submissions are considered as part of the environmental authority assessment process rather than afterwards. It is estimated that the change to the public notification process will reduce the application process by three months, again without any diminution of environmental standards. The bill replaces the current one-size-fits-all environmental assessment approach with a licensing model more proportionate to the risk posed by the activities being assessed. Environmentally relevant activities considered to pose less threat to the environment will now face a less onerous process than a high-risk activity. This is especially critical for small miners, who will now not need to prepare plans of operation, removing a 15-page administrative requirement for around 2,400 operators in Queensland leading to a total reduction of 36,000 pages of paperwork, once again without any diminution of environmental standards in the state of Queensland.

So I certainly commend the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection for this landmark bill that will secure strong environmental outcomes but rid Queensland business, particularly in the resources sector, of unnecessary and costly green tape. It has certainly been a pleasure for my department to collaborate with the minister's department to ensure that these amendments can be progressed as soon as possible. I thank both the departments for their cooperation in that regard.

In the time left to me, I might just comment on the contribution of the shadow minister, the member for South Brisbane. The member for South Brisbane had an extraordinary capacity to argue a totally inconsistent position in the course of one contribution to the debate. The member for South Brisbane came in here and first argued that the minister and the LNP government had simply reintroduced a bill that had been prepared and introduced by the former government and then promptly argued that, despite the bill having already been introduced, referred to a committee and reported on in the past parliament, the current committee in this parliament did not have sufficient time to scrutinise the bill—a bill that she had only minutes before claimed as the Labor Party's own and that the LNP was simply reintroducing the legislation for consideration by this parliament. The contribution of the member for South Brisbane in the second reading debate had all the structural integrity of a dropped meat pie and it had all the intellectual credibility of a slapstick comedy from Abbott and Costello. It was extraordinary.

In the second reading debate the member for South Brisbane also indicated that she was going to move amendments to this bill—a bill that she had only in the same speech said was largely the same as the bill introduced into the previous parliament by the former government and which had already been to a committee and which had already been reported on. I find that extraordinary. In the past I have given some new members of this House some advice not to listen to the contributions of the former government opposite, because they were absolutely irrelevant and full of nonsense. I am changing that advice. We have to listen to every single word that they say to keep an eye on them, because they are so irresponsible with the truth it is not funny and we need to hold them to account.