



Speech by

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INTEGRATED PLANNING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (7.35 pm): I, too, congratulate the minister on introducing this bill to the House. A number of members have already talked about some of the specific details of this bill, particularly the issue of councillors having to give reasons when they deliberately deviate from the advice of council officers. I think that issue has been covered very comprehensively. As such, I will not go over that ground.

I want to talk about the principles that underlie the Integrated Planning Act and the government's regional plan. That principle is that good urban planning is absolutely essential to good community life. In August last year in this place I made a reasonably major speech about the principles of good urban planning. I found that speech to be quite well received in the community and I want to build on that speech in my contribution tonight.

At that time the thesis I put to the House was that planning would be one of the defining issues of politics in the years ahead, just as the mistakes that have been made in planning to this point very much define our politics and the community in which we live now. In the past 50 years we have seen very much an increasing urbanisation in Australia. We have also seen increasing social dislocation. We have seen more and more people who do not feel connected to community. We have seen more and more people who live on the outer fringes who do not know their neighbours, who are not involved in the local P&C and who are not connected to what is going on locally. Sometimes we talk about that as a broad social trend. We contemplate the reasons for that decline in community. I put to the House that one of the fundamental reasons for that decline in social connectedness has been 50 years of, in many cases, very bad planning.

If we plan communities well, as the state government attempts to do both through this bill, with the IPA, which this bill amends, and with the regional plan, we can ensure strong communities and a strong quality of life for those people who live within them. Good urban planning depends on a number of things. It depends on shared public space. It depends on good public transport and, for that public transport to work, it depends on there being a level of urban density that makes both public space and public transport work, that is, a density of around 15 dwellings per hectare.

While they have achieved cult status in recent times and are agreed to by some and hated by others, the principles of new urbanism offer us a mechanism to develop that kind of good urban planning. The principles of new urbanism, as I said in my speech six months ago, are these: walkability so that people can genuinely walk from place to place; connectivity so that places are connected; mixed use and diversity so that we do not get the rich people living over here and the poor somewhere else and never the twain shall meet; mixed housing, preventing ghettos; and quality architecture.

While hardly adopting holus-bolus the principles of new urbanism, what the state is doing through the Integrated Planning Act and through the regional plan is ensuring some solid foundations for good planning and ensuring strong communities in the future. We get up in this place and we talk about those principles. I note that members opposite have broadly supported those principles as well tonight, with the exception of some differing views around load density in urban and rural areas. But I note that there is generally broad consensus that good planning is a good thing. I think it is easy for us as members of

parliament to fall into a trap in which we believe that this is something to which everyone is committed. I want to put to the House the view that that is not necessarily the case.

I recently read a long article by a fellow called Bob Day, who is the national president of the Housing Institute of Australia. In his article called 'In defence of urban sprawl', Bob Day argues a number of things. He argues that planning mechanisms which seek to rid our communities of what I see is the scourge of urban sprawl are a bad thing. He argues that for a number of reasons. Firstly, he argues that methods of preventing urban sprawl—that is, government instituted mechanisms to limit the availability of land in outer metropolitan areas—have had a really negative effect in Australia in that they have made housing, particularly for first home buyers, more expensive. So he argues that urban sprawl is the only way that young Australians will have the opportunity to buy a first home. I want to deal with that proposition first in that it is clearly lunacy.

We have in recent years seen a real blow-out in the cost of housing in Australia. I understand that since 1996, when the Howard government was elected, the average cost of a house has risen from six times average annual earnings to nine times average annual earnings, which means, of course, that the average first home buyer has 1½ times the mortgage that they might have had before the Howard government was elected. Bob Day's argument is that that is because we have deliberately limited the availability of land; we have made land less affordable. Bob Day, sadly, is wrong in that what has really caused Australian house prices to blow out is the fact that modern Australians, rather than desperately wanting to live in the far-flung outer suburbs, want to live in bigger houses.

Since 1955 the average size of a new house, in Australia has risen from 110 square metres to about 220 square metres of floor space—that is, the size of Australian houses has doubled. But in the same period the average number of people living in the house has decreased from 3.6 people per house to around 2.7 people per house. So, while Bob Day might want to argue that it is somehow governments that are causing house prices to blow out, what we see from those figures is that house prices are very clearly blowing out because Australians are living in far bigger houses.

Bob Day's second defence of urban sprawl is that far-flung outer suburbs are a haven of biodiversity and that we are better off having suburbs with cul-de-sacs, trees and greenery than we are having inner city, concrete jungles—I guess he would call them that—surrounded by farmland. Again, this argument is a complete fallacy because we are not necessarily looking at having a trade-off between rural areas and urban areas. He completely ignores that what we might choose to have, should we plan well, is urban areas, some farmland and deliberately preserved natural green space, which, of course, is where biodiversity exists to a greater extent.

Bob Day's third argument is that we have to have urban sprawl because we have to have roads because public transport does not work. This seems to be the most self-fulfilling of all of his arguments. He argues that public transport does not take people to the places they want to go. It seems to me that it is hard for public transport to take people to the places they want to go if we plan badly. If we fail to plan, people live and work in areas that are very much geographically dispersed. But, if we plan well, we can plan systems in which public transport will take people from the places where they live to the places where they work, and that is, indeed, what happens very actively in the world's great cities.

The reason I raise these points is not particularly to get stuck into Bob Day. The reason I raise these points is that I think sometimes in the parliament we exist in something of a vacuum. We can have a debate about this integrated planning bill and if we all agree we can kid ourselves that there is, in fact, a broad consensus in the community that good planning is a good and desirable thing. Sadly, that is not the case. Sadly, there are forces very actively rallied in our community to defend the vested interests in this case of the housing industry who want to see the builders and the James Hardies of the world making money out of building McMansions in the outer suburbs while the taxpayers pay for the infrastructure to get people there. My argument is that good planning is by no means a done deal. Good planning is something about which we all as members of parliament need to be consistently vigilant, and a number of members have raised very good examples of that when it has come to their own local areas and their own local councils.

Ipswich is, I think, perhaps the best example in Queensland of exactly that. Ipswich is growing at an enormous rate. We expect Ipswich's population to more than double between now and 2026. That could be a wonderful thing. We could continue to have the strong sense of community and the wonderful quality of life that we have always had in Ipswich into the future if we plan well. If we do not plan well, we will create the kind of urban sprawl that already horrifies people when they drive to the Sunshine Coast and they see Brisbane sprawling out. It is imperative for the future of Ipswich that we plan well. I want to outline to the House a number of ways in which I think we can do that.

The state government, with its regional plan, has very much led the way for us to plan Ipswich well into the future. We have done a number of things. We have committed to the infrastructure, particularly in roads and rail, that will make that work, and we need to ensure rail corridors so that there are public transport options into the future. We have, secondly, invested a lot of money in the redevelopment of the

Ipswich CBD. A good Ipswich will in the future connect people to the centre. In redeveloping the mall and with the River Heart project improving the inner-city reaches of the river, we will draw people back to the CBD. I spoke in this House in the last sitting week about how imperative it is to preserve the Flinders-Karawatha bushland so that we have genuine lungs for the western corridor and so that there genuinely is recreational open space. Finally, the federal government must fix the Ipswich Motorway if the Ipswich corridor is going to work into the future.

The future of Ipswich and the future of the western corridor absolutely hangs on good urban planning. We have an opportunity to preserve the sense of community, to preserve the quality of life and to share it with more people. But if the Bob Days of the world, the master builders who oppose sustainable housing measures and the vested interests succeed in opposing measures to ensure good planning then Ipswich will not work out well for the benefit of current and future residents. So we as a government need to be vigilant on issues around urban planning. We need to make ongoing change to update our legislation, as this minister is doing tonight, but we need to keep on the game. We need to know that there are enemies of good planning. We need to make sure that we are vigilant to them and that we are committed to good planning, every step of the way. That is what our people expect of us and that is what I hope to achieve as their representative.