NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard

Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Infrastructure and Other Planning Reform) Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Friday 27 May 2005.

Second Reading

Mr CRAIG KNOWLES (Macquarie Fields—Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources) [10.40 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Infrastructure and Other Planning Reform) Bill 2005. The wellbeing of our economy depends on business being able to work with certainty, a minimum of risk, low transaction costs, and appropriate levels of regulation. This bill demonstrates the Government's determination to take decisive action to achieve these objectives. By establishing greater certainty in the assessment of projects of State significance and major infrastructure projects, the bill further assists in the Government's desire to afford opportunities for the private sector to participate in the delivery of our infrastructure programs.

There is no doubt that this bill dramatically improves the climate in which to do business in this State. The bill implements important elements of this Government's planning reform program—a program which is overhauling our planning system and cutting red tape at all levels, whilst continuing to improve the high standards of environmental assessment and community participation that have been the hallmark of planning legislation in this State for almost 30 years. The bill introduces new mechanisms which will ensure that the Government delivers quickly and efficiently on its infrastructure programs—projects for roads and transport, schools, hospital upgrades, and water and energy projects are obvious examples.

The bill will introduce a number of important changes. A single assessment and approval system for major development and infrastructure projects will replace approval processes currently scattered throughout several pieces of legislation. The bill will also improve the co-ordination of major strategic projects as well as ensure that the State focuses properly only on those matters which are genuinely of State or regional significance. In that sense, this bill re-establishes the duality of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act by ensuring the appropriate level of assessment is applied to each matter considered under the Act and, in particular, by ensuring that there is proper delineation between those matters which are properly dealt with by the State and those which are properly dealt with by local government. For matters of State significance or major projects, the new single assessment process will strengthen the rigour, transparency and independence of the process of assessment, providing higher levels of up-front certainty for the proponent, the community and other stakeholders.

The bill will cut red tape by reducing time, cost and complexity in the assessment of infrastructure projects, projects of State significance and critical infrastructure projects. Together with the new State Environmental Planning Policy (State Significant Development) 2005, which was gazetted last Wednesday, the provisions contained in the bill enable the Minister to determine strategic sites, projects or programs of State significance and resolve issues associated with them decisively, transparently and expeditiously. These reforms not only are vital to the delivery of major infrastructure projects and to the economy of New South Wales but also underpin the Government's ability to implement strategic initiatives such as the Metropolitan Strategy. As part of that implementation objective, the bill introduces further legislative changes to support the necessary planning reforms to streamline the statutory planning system by reducing the number of planning instruments and ensuring those that remain are more consistent in their form and content, especially as they relate to local environmental plans.

I will now address the elements of the bill in turn. Schedule 1 deals with infrastructure and other projects amendments. It inserts a new part into the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act which will deals with projects, programs or sites which are determined by the Minister. The bill provides up-front certainty for major projects through the introduction of new concept approvals; removes the need for up to 15 different approvals and licences from nine separate pieces of legislation, replacing them with one assessment and approval process; removes the need for concurrences for major development; and abolishes the stop-the-clock provisions that currently add significantly to assessment times. For projects of major worth to the economy, we are compelling our government agencies to follow processes which will provide certainty at the front end of a proposal in order to reduce investment risk. Projects which will be considered major are projects such as the Pacific Highway in its entirety, plans like the freight strategy, and sites like the Royal North Shore Hospital or the Westmead campus. This new legislation will deliver those types of projects faster and with more certainty. For private sector projects or public-private partnership type projects, that increased certainty translates into real cost savings and bankable security.

A new part for major infrastructure and development is also proposed. Currently, the same set of rules applies to a house extension as to, for example, a $300-million commercial, residential and retail complex. This one-size-fits-all approach has resulted in delays and has significantly added to costs for major projects. The existing single-issue approach to managing particular aspects of the environment has also led to additional layers of approvals and unnecessary constraints on development and significant added costs. It leads to potentially poorer environmental outcomes. The bill will deliver a more interrelated system, focused on delivering major projects together with sound environmental and community outcomes.

There is new project assessment under the new part. The bill provides for a new part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act that will replace two different assessment and approval processes for major private and public projects. The new part will apply to the following major projects: development currently identified as State significant development under the State environmental planning policy; major State Government infrastructure projects, for example, projects which normally require an environmental impact statement under part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act; and other projects, plans or programs which are "declared" by the Minister because of their economic, social or environmental planning significance to the State or region.

The environmental assessment will be carried out under guidelines and protocols to be developed by a new Chief Executive Officers Forum. That forum will be made up of the directors general of the major regulatory agencies. Those guidelines and protocols will set the rules for assessment methodology, consultation requirements and performance levels, and will ensure that high environmental outcomes are achieved. The level of assessment will be tailored to the complexity and likely level of significance of the impacts of the project in question. The guidelines and protocols will be published and gazetted by the Minister and, in relation to legislation administered by the Minister for the Environment, following consultation with that Minister.

For each project, the Director General of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources will issue specific requirements for the assessment of the project, including the level of assessment, assessment methodology, any performance criteria, and consultation requirements, based on the guidelines. One of the requirements will include the preparation of a statement of commitments by the proponent. This is an important new initiative as it makes the proponent state clearly and up front to regulators and the community how it intends to manage the project to minimise the impacts on the environment. Prior to exhibiting the environmental assessment, the director-general must be satisfied that the assessment meets the specified requirements. The director general will seek advice from relevant agencies in making this decision. If the assessment is not adequate, additional information must be provided prior to the exhibition of the project. This initiative ensures that the community, not just the regulators, have access to all relevant information important in the assessment of the project. There will be no stop-the-clock opportunities for delays caused by requests from agencies for additional information later in the process.

The environmental assessment will be exhibited for a minimum of 30 days, with submissions invited from government agencies, councils and the community. Following exhibition, the submissions—or a summary of the issues in submissions—will be sent to the proponent, with a request to respond to the issues raised. The proponent may modify the project and the statement of commitments to minimise impacts on the environment. If significant modifications occur, a preferred project report, including a modified statement of commitments, will be made public. This initiative increases the importance of community submissions, as the proponent will need to respond to issues raised. For the proponent, this initiative provides flexibility by allowing modifications to the project to minimise impacts without having to go through the full re-exhibition process.

The director general then prepares an assessment report with recommendations for the Minister on the determination of the project. The director general will seek advice from other relevant government agencies in finalising the report and recommendations. The Minister will then make his determination public, and the bill contains requirements to make all key documents public. Appeal rights will generally continue to apply as if the project was being assessed under either part 4 or part 5 as is relevant. The proponent will continue to have the right of appeal against the Minister's decision. Third party merit appeals will continue to apply if the project is listed in schedule 3 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation, unless there has been a commission of inquiry, an expert panel hearing or a concept approval. Judicial review provisions will continue to apply under section 123 of the Act.

Integrated approvals have also been considered. New part 3A provides for integrated approvals that will consolidate 15 approvals under nine Acts into a single assessment process and approval given under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. The assessment and approvals will be actively co-ordinated by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. The provisions relating to the assessment and management of impacts on critical habitats, and threatened species, populations and ecological communities and their habitats under the Fisheries Management Act, the Threatened Species Conservation Act and the National Parks and Wildlife Act will be integrated into the assessment under this new part.

In addition, the environmental protection provisions under eight different Acts will be integrated into one

approval. Those provisions relate to impacts on waterways, riparian zones and coastal processes, including from the use of water, water management works, dredging and aquifer interference under the Rivers and Foreshores Improvement Act 1948, the Water Management Act 2000 and the Coastal Protection Act 1979; impacts on aquatic ecology, including from dredging, obstructions in waterways or disturbance of mangroves under the Fisheries Management Act 1994; impacts on terrestrial ecology under the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974; bushfire risks under the Rural Fires Act 1997; impacts on Aboriginal items or places under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974; and impacts on heritage values, including in relation to excavation under the Heritage Act 1979.

Projects may still require a licence for ongoing operations under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act, an approval under the Roads Act, an aquaculture permit, mining or petroleum production lease or approval under the Mine Subsidence Compensation Act as is relevant. In these circumstances, there will be a joint assessment with the agencies contributing to the one assessment. Once the Minister has determined the project, any subsequent approval must be substantially consistent with the Minister's approval. This requirement will also apply in relation to any appeal over those authorisations.

The chief executive officers forum will ensure that appropriate assessment and approval guidelines and protocols are agreed to and are consistently applied. These guidelines, together with initiatives like biodiversity mapping and Aboriginal heritage landscape assessments, will better inform proponents and improve the quality of environmental assessments. Concept approvals are also included. For the first time, this bill will introduce concept approvals into the planning system for major projects.

Concept approvals will have statutory force and are designed to provide up-front certainty for those projects or programs which are either long term or complex, or where overarching strategies require statutory endorsement so their component parts can proceed with bankable security. Concept approvals will also allow for a program of projects, such as upgrading of the Pacific Highway, or an infrastructure plan like the Freight Strategy, to be assessed in a transparent manner to provide an early sign-off of the various components of the project or the plan. Concept approvals will increase certainty up front and reduce environmental and investment risks and costs. They will allow the community to comment earlier in the development process, and for community views to be taken into consideration in the refinement of the projects.

Critical infrastructure is introduced in this bill. As another new provision, the bill will also allow the Minister to declare projects as critical infrastructure. For example, if the drought continues, infrastructure work to implement the Metropolitan Water Plan will need to be accelerated. Under the present planning regime, some of those components would normally require lengthy environmental assessments. The presumption underpinning such assessments is that they will determine whether work should proceed. However, for critical infrastructure, the environmental assessment process should not be about whether such projects should be approved, but, rather, how they will proceed. A concept approval will be required for all critical infrastructure projects, but no further planning approvals.

The bill provides that there will be no appeals against decisions on critical infrastructure and there will be no third party legal challenges under any environmental and planning statutes against those decisions. The bill will ensure that that the construction and operation of approved critical infrastructure projects cannot be stopped or delayed by other government agencies or local councils. It is important to note that infrastructure will only be declared critical where its speedy completion is considered essential to the social, economic or environmental welfare of the State. Further, once declared as critical infrastructure, these projects will be subject to appropriate environmental assessment and controls.

There will be independent hearings and assessment panels. To underpin these reforms, the bill will include another important initiative to strengthen the integrated assessment process. The bill will make legislative provision for independent hearings and assessment panels to provide additional expertise to resolve technical issues in a timely manner and strengthen the scientific basis for decision making. Panels will be appointed by the Minister, who will specify the make-up of the panel and the scope of the matters it is to investigate. The Minister may direct the panel to be involved in any phase of the assessment process.

A panel may be composed of independent technical experts, which is an expert panel, or a panel of government agency officers. The panel may hold hearings to assist in clarifying issues with stakeholders and to ensure that community views are appropriately considered. The panel is advisory and reports to the Minister with its findings, which must be taken into consideration by the director-general when preparing the assessment report and recommendations for the Minister. The bill makes provisions for regulations in relation to time frames, landowners consent provisions, exhibition and notification provisions, and assessment fees. The bill includes transitional provisions for projects already being assessed under existing provisions of the Act.

These reforms will provide additional opportunities for the community to comment. All major development will be advertised for community input and proponents will be required to respond to issues raised in submissions and, if appropriate, to modify the project. The new panels may also provide an independent mechanism for the community to raise issues and have them considered. The bill includes a requirement to make all assessment

documents public.

New part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act will strengthen environmental outcomes and provide for earlier consideration of environmental constraints. These changes will provide a more systematic approach to resolving environmental issues, replacing the current single issue considerations. Earlier consideration of environmental constraints will allow earlier and more effective influence over project design and location decisions. This provides better outcomes for the community and the environment without unreasonable cost to the proponent.

In summary, new part 3A will provide a more appropriate regime for the assessment and approval of major investment in New South Wales. It will provide up-front certainty for complex projects by introducing concept approvals with better opportunity for improved service delivery through public-private partnerships. Red tape is cut by replacing single issue assessment processes and approvals with one integrated process delivering better environmental outcomes. Rigour, transparency and independence are strengthened through the introduction of independent hearings and assessment panels, and enforcement provisions are strengthened to ensure the desired outcomes are delivered on the ground.

Allied to this bill is a new State-significant environmental planning policy, which has already been gazetted and will be one of the ways to access these new provisions. It will focus the Minister's consent role on significant projects and sites, enable the Minister to tailor planning provisions to suit particular sites of State significance and allow the Minister to amend the State environmental planning policy to add new sites. Under the new State environmental planning policy, decisions on local development will be devolved to local government. That will allow better use of State resources and speed up the approval process. The Minister for Infrastructure and Planning has always had the power to approve projects. However, over the past 25 years more than 85 different planning instruments, directions and declarations have been made for this purpose.

This new State environmental planning policy will provide a more systematic approach for nominating projects and programs as well as for sites. The State environmental planning policy will continue to nominate as State-significant development of major mines and industry, infrastructure and coastal development. Other developments have been added to the list. Construction projects worth $50 million or more will now be included where the Minister considers the project necessary to deliver State or regional planning objectives. The $50 million construction project criteria will not apply everywhere but only in selected strategically important locations. The Minister might, for example, declare a $50 million residential project to be of State significance where the project would assist the implementation of the Metropolitan Strategy by helping to locate people close to transport hubs. However, construction projects that are subject to the City of Sydney Act will continue to be determined by the Central City Planning Committee.

Major government infrastructure projects have also been added to the list to ensure that the State Government's infrastructure program can be delivered in an efficient manner. These include, for example, major hospitals, schools, TAFEs, university and medical research facilities, prisons and electricity generating plants. Once the bill is passed and commenced, State significant developments will be assessed as projects in the new part. Schedule 1 to the bill will remove all provisions relating to State significant development from part 4 of the Act. Similarly, the bill will remove all the provisions in part 5 of the Act relating to division 4 assessments as these will also be handled in new part 3A. The bill and regulations also provide for the transition to the new part for all such projects.

The bill also implements other elements of the planning reforms announced by the Government late last year. The Government is preparing new regional strategies in priority regions to align development with population growth and infrastructure needs and to protect our high-value natural resources. These strategies will provide the context for modernising the statutory plans in those regions. The amendments in schedule 2 to the bill will support those reforms to simplify and modernise statutory land use planning. The amendments do not involve a radical rewrite of part 3 of the Act and are limited to changes necessary for delivering the major elements of the reform program. The amendments are the outcome of several relevant task force reviews in 2004, involving experts and stakeholder representatives. The Government places on record its appreciation for their involvement over that period. Further consultation on the detail of these changes has also occurred with the development industry, local government, the legal profession and environmental groups.

The bill provides the critical drivers for the modernisation of local environmental plans [LEPs]. Our objective is to require every local council to bring in one LEP for its area, which means that over the next five years we will have moved from 5,500 planning instruments to 152. There is no reason there should be 5,500 local planning instruments around the State. Spot zonings and outdated orders going back prior to 1979 all add to the confusion and complexity of the system. The other goal of the planning reforms is to achieve greater standardisation and consistency of LEPs. The bill provides for standard instruments to be prepared for environmental planning instruments—namely, State environmental planning policies, regional environmental plans and LEPs. It is intended that this provision would initially be used for LEPs.

The Government has exhibited the working draft standard LEP template that seeks to standardise definitions,

zones and key provisions of local environmental plans. As a result of the exhibition and stakeholder input, especially from local government and industry bodies, the amended standard LEP will be re-exhibited in the near future for further comment. We believe that the standard LEP will substantially reduce the time it takes to prepare new LEPs by reducing the involvement of lawyers in the process, offering another time saving. The standard LEP will also revise the zoning categories from the present 3,100 down to around 25 and the 1,700 definitions down to fewer than 300. The bill includes amendments to streamline and enhance the process for making LEPs. These changes will ensure that local councils prepare new LEPs in accordance with the standard instrument.

The director-general will be obliged to ensure that the plan is consistent with the standard LEP before the draft plan is exhibited, and when making a report to the Minister for the approval of the local environmental plan. A further major element of the reform agenda is ensuring that new LEPs implement the State's strategic plans. The bill will enable us to ensure that these strategies are implemented through planning controls in LEPs. It does this by enhancing the existing power of the Minister to issue directions to local councils under section 117. The bill provides new powers for the Minister to ensure that the modernisation of LEPs occurs in a reasonable time. Section 33B provides for the creation of a staged repeal program for existing LEPs, which will require local councils to review and prepare new LEPs within a specified time period.

The staged repeal program may specify dates for the repeal of existing LEPs and key milestones for the preparation of new plans. The staged repeal program may also allow for the postponement of the repeal of an instrument in justifiable circumstances, and can also be used to establish requirements for the periodic review of LEPs. Local councils will be identified as requiring a new LEP within two, three or five years. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources recently wrote to all general managers of local councils in New South Wales providing initial advice to them of their priority status. It is intended that shortly after the bill is passed the list will be used to establish the staged repeal program. The draft priority list is also being used to inform the provision of the next round of financial assistance to local councils from the Planning Reform Fund.

The staged repeal program is essential to achieve the modernisation of LEPs within a reasonable time frame. For the first time in recent history the Government is offering local councils substantial financial assistance to assist them to prepare new plans. Around $5.8 million of the Planning Reform Fund has already been granted to 57 councils for work associated with modernising their LEPs, and further rounds of assistance will be provided. Transitional provisions have also been included to assist in the smooth implementation of these requirements for new LEPs. A number of local councils are already well advanced in preparing new LEPs, and have invested significant effort and resources into this process. Transitional provisions are included to allow councils in these circumstances to proceed with making a LEP that does not comply with the standard LEP. Generally, these councils will be required to transpose their plan into the complying format within five years.

The bill contains amendments to provisions regarding development control plans [DCPs]. These changes are aimed at rationalising the number of DCPs, clarifying their relationship to environmental planning instruments and enabling an owner of land to prepare a DCP instead of a master plan. The bill aims to achieve a reduction in the number of DCPs by generally allowing one only to apply to a site. This means that in future a DCP may cover the whole local government area, a precinct or a site. The bill also clarifies that a development control plan may not duplicate the provisions of an environmental planning instrument, be inconsistent with an instrument or contain provisions that prevent compliance with an instrument. The bill provides for development control plans to replace master plans. Master plans have become another layer in the planning system. To simplify the system, in the future master planning will be implemented through development control plans and staged development approvals. The bill delivers this by allowing an environmental planning instrument to require that a development control plan should be prepared by, or on behalf of, an owner of land before development may occur.

The provisions also allow for land pooling, by providing for an environmental planning instrument to specify that a number of landowners within a defined area must jointly prepare a development control plan before development can be carried out. This provision is likely to assist in the timely delivery of urban land releases as part of the Metropolitan Development Program. The provisions will prevent planning authorities from stopping development by refusing to make a development control plan. The provision allows developers to submit a development application where council refuses a development control plan or delays the making of the development control plan by more than 60 days.

The usual appeal rights will be available in relation to the development application. The provisions also empower the regulations to extend the 60-day time limit where the owner fails to provide requested additional information. Transitional provisions have been included to ensure that the new requirements apply only to new development control plans. Local councils will not be required to remake all DCPs within a set time, although it is expected that many councils will, in practice, review their DCPs at the same time as preparing their new local environment plan. A transitional provision also deems all existing master plans to be DCPs, and deems all existing provisions that require a master plan to require a DCP.

Schedule 3 to the bill provides for the existing provisions in the Act for staged approvals to be augmented with

the introduction of procedures for the lodgment, assessment and approval of staged development applications. This will enable developers to stage complex developments with clear procedures for obtaining approvals for the development. Section 83B provides that a staged development application may set out an overview of the proposal across the whole site, with the details of each separate component of the development to be subjected to subsequent development applications. Alternatively, a first stage development application may include both the concept for the entire site and a detailed proposal for the first component of the development.

Only the applicant can request that a staged development application be lodged. Where a development control plan is required for a site by an environmental planning instrument, section 83C allows a staged development application to be prepared and approved as an alternative. A staged development application is subject to the provisions of integrated approvals and designated development, and requirements prescribed by the regulations. While any consent on a staged development application remains in force, a determination on any further development applications for that site cannot be inconsistent with the staged approval. It should be noted that already more than 1,100 of the 3,000 concurrences and referrals in LEPs have been removed, and permits under the Rivers and Foreshores Improvement Act have been reduced by 60 per cent. This will assist in streamlining the approvals of local development with the removal of unnecessary red tape.

The bill also amends the following Acts to allow for regulations to be made that specify persons, activities or projects which could be exempted from the need for an approval under those Acts: the Fisheries Management Act 1994, the Mine Subsidence Compensation Act 19610 and the Rural Fires Act. Schedule 4 to the bill limits the duty on determining authorities to consider section 111 where the environmental implications have already been considered by another determining authority. The provisions also provide that a determining authority can be exempted from this duty where routine activities—for example, the maintenance of infrastructure—are being undertaken in accordance with a code approved by the Minister.

Amendments to the bill expand the role of the nominated determining authority from co-ordinating the exhibition of the environmental impact statement to include the co-ordination of the preparation and furnishing of the assessment report that forms the basis of a determination. This will ensure a better integration of all environmental matters relating to the activities and an upfront resolution of issues. The bill also provides for fishery management strategies to continue to be assessed under part 5, including in circumstances when the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning is the approval authority. In those circumstances a regulation will set out the appropriate procedures.

The enforcement provisions in the Act need updating and strengthening to ensure outcomes are delivered on the ground. Schedule 5 to the bill makes a new range of investigative, compliance and enforcement powers available to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources to ensure projects approved under the new part are carried out in accordance with their conditions of approval. In particular, the bill strengthens the monitoring, compliance and audit powers, and provides for offences where the monitoring or audit reporting has been inadequate, false or misleading. To achieve a more streamlined assessment process, the bill amends other legislation that requires permits and approvals for development.

The bill lists mining leases and petroleum production leases as integrated approvals under section 91 of Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. As a result, the Department of Primary Industries will be an integrated approval authority and will actively participate in the assessment of mining and petroleum projects under the integrated approval provisions. The bill also amends the Mining Act 1992 and the Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991 to remove provisions which suspend the operation of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. The repeal of section 74 of the Mining Act makes it clear that the environmental impacts of proposals such as expansions of mines into new areas must be assessed and determined. This is essential as these proposals may have significant impacts, for example, on river systems that are important for Sydney's drinking water supply.

Section 65 (3) of the Mining Act will also be repealed. This makes it clear that any conditions the Minister might impose on a mine to protect the community and the environment from its impacts must be complied with. It is important that the mining industry be treated like any other industry in New South Wales. The reforms will achieve that; they will ensure that new mines and expansions of existing mines are properly assessed and that the mining industry complies with the undertakings it gave to the community when it applied for a consent. Similar provisions in the Petroleum Act will also be amended or revoked. It is intended that exemptions would be progressively introduced for minor and low impact development.

Development that is addressed by environmental planning instruments may be satisfactorily assessed by local councils under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. It is important to note that the Government will not allow the repeal of section 74 to prevent existing mining operations continuing under their existing approvals. The Government undertakes to amend the State significant development State environmental planning policy [SEPP] before the mining-related provisions of the bill are commenced to ensure that planning instruments cannot prohibit mining and petroleum production activities carried out under existing leases. The SEPP will also provide appropriate transitional provisions for all existing mines. Regulations can also be made under the bill to ensure a smooth transition to the new regime for existing mines.

The Government has moved decisively with its planning reform agenda to cut red tape and provide the regulatory conditions to support a strong economy, jobs growth and both public and private sector investment. The competitiveness of New South Wales to attract sustainable infrastructure and investment opportunities depends on having an efficient and clear development approval system underpinned by an up-to-date planning regime. This suite of initiatives—the State significant development SEPP, the new part of the Act providing for the efficient assessment and approval of major development, and the reforms to the planning regime—continues our drive to cut red tape and deliver on our infrastructure commitments. I thank those in the various industry groups who have participated in the formulation of this legislation. I particularly thank the staff of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources and my ministerial staff who have contributed enormously to what is a very competent piece of legislation that will underpin the State's economy for generations to come. I commend it to the House.