

Legislative Council

Thursday 11 December 2025

Bills

State Development Bill 2025

Third reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

Hon Jess Beckerling (5:03 pm): To conclude my remarks from before question time, I put on the record my strong opposition to this legislation and also my gratitude to everyone who worked to oppose it and my pride to represent a party and a broader community of people who care extremely deeply about the legacy that we are leaving. For me, that is a shift from legislation that is written for the sake of big business and powerful industry to legislation that is written to benefit our kids, this extraordinary planet and a robust democracy.

As I have said throughout this debate, this is dangerous, anti-democratic legislation, and we at the Greens (WA) have done everything we could to limit its damage and ensure that the community is aware of its implications. I am pleased that, at the very least, we managed to secure a review clause that has been added to the bill, and I look forward to a thorough review of the outcome of this legislation in five years.

Hon Maryka Groenewald (5:04 pm): I rise to briefly acknowledge what the government says it is trying to achieve with the State Development Bill 2025, which is to strengthen our economy, reduce unnecessary delays and support major projects that are genuinely in the public interest. Of course they are things that we want to support. I recognise that the WA economy and the national economy relies heavily on the resources sector.

The reasons that I support my crossbench members in voting against this bill are perhaps not the exact same reasons that they are voting against it, but I feel it is important to address that nonetheless. This is not a straightforward development bill. Its intent is absolutely understandable but, of course, some of the mechanisms are quite troubling. It is also a short cut around acts of Parliament—the very acts that were created in the first place for deliberate reasons. Those acts were created to protect our environment, develop planning processes and provide accountability frameworks. If the government believes that those acts are no longer fit for purpose, as has been mentioned during the debate on the amendments in the Committee of the Whole, the proper path is to amend those acts. That is how good governance works. As several members said during the committee stage, and as Hon Dr Steve Thomas kindly explained those amendments to me as I was working through them, I have always

maintained that I am somewhere in the middle on this bill. I am supportive of industry and open to hearing which laws need to be amended to improve the approvals process, but for me, at the heart of the Westminster system is the principle that power should be balanced, checked and accountable. Allowing one person—any person—to direct decision-makers and to modify how existing legislation applies to designated priority projects undermines the basic principles of good government, transparency and stewardship.

Perhaps members did not have the time to properly interrogate this bill. It has far-reaching implications. If the government is unwilling to subject its own proposal to serious scrutiny, it gives me less confidence in granting it all this additional power. Although it will not change the outcome, I think there are times when it is important to stand with my crossbench colleagues. I might not have the same reasons for voting against the bill as they do, but, again, I am somewhere in the middle. I am definitely pro-accountability and pro-transparency, and I believe that our role in Parliament is deeply important. Responsibility for decision-making in this place must never be handed over simply because the executive finds it inconvenient. For those reasons, I cannot support the bill.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas (5:07 pm): The State Development Bill 2025 will, and should, pass the house today, and it deserves to pass the house today. I will take a little bit of time to explain why. For those who wonder why we are debating these things, the approvals process in Western Australia and Australia is not only broken, but also becoming more broken as time goes by. We saw a decision in the federal Parliament not long ago that made the situation far worse whereby the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act will now be imposed upon Western Australia. That is a federal takeover of Western Australia's constitutional right to manage its lands and waters. The term "unholy alliance" might come up a few times today, but in an unholy alliance between the Labor Party and the Greens—

Point of order

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt: My point of order is that the third reading debate is not about introducing new information. It is quite clear in the standing orders. If we are to be consistent about this, I am just calling it out. Introducing new information about a bill that was not discussed previously is not appropriate.

The Deputy President: I am dealing with the first point of order, thank you, if you would not remind resuming your seat. There is no point of order. The honourable member had barely started his contribution. Let us see where that takes him.

Proceeding resumed

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Thank you, Deputy President. The argument federally about the approvals system being broken can, of course, be divided into two parts: those who want to develop and those who want to stop development at almost any cost. We had a similar debate in the house over the last couple of weeks. We also divided similarly.

There are those who want to allow development and build the jobs for the next generation of Western Australians and want their children and grandchildren to be able to perhaps partake in the kind of economic boom that has provided this government with the most wealth that any government of any jurisdiction has ever had. Perhaps it has not appropriately spent the largesse, but it has that largesse nonetheless. This bill has divided us between those members who want an economic future and those who largely oppose development. It has been interesting to watch the house divide between those who are pro-development, those who are anti-development and those who are pretty keen to have a foot in each camp, and there are plenty of those! They say they want development, but they do not want any development really. There have been a few unholy alliances around that process as well.

Let me start by saying that I congratulate my friends in the Greens. I actually thought their contribution to the committee stage of the bill was very good. It was not always perfect, but they raised some very pertinent points. I commend them on their passion. I understand their passion. I understand they are opposed to development and that they take that view, but I think they can take credit for the way in which they presented themselves. I appreciated the contributions made by the Greens members. I think they were good. I mean, they were often wrong, but the passion with which they demonstrated their commitment was good to see. We get the best outcomes for Western Australia when we debate these issues passionately and from a position of knowledge and strength. I appreciated the contributions the Greens made.

The suggestion that this legislation was rammed through the Parliament, though, does them no credit, because that is not true; that is an absolute lie. The Leader of the House and I had this conversation over a number of days in the last week and we agreed that we would both sit here, and I think we sat here pretty much the entire time. I do not remember the Leader of the House stepping out. Maybe he did briefly, but I do not remember it. I did not step out. We stayed here for the entire debate. We agreed that we would stay here until the questions finished. To suggest that it was rammed through, curtailed or somehow cut off is absolutely not true. We were here at three o'clock this morning. If we had not gone home and we were still here, it might have been a problem doing the third reading speeches but we would still be here! It is not true that it was rammed through. We stayed for every question and I think we tried to contribute to every question. We tried to make a contribution. I got up a lot of times and said, "This is why I don't agree with the amendment proposed by the Greens." It was not the case that this was rammed through the Parliament.

We have to approach this on the basis that no changes to this legislation would have convinced the Greens to support the legislation. I know that because I said that during the debate on the motion to refer the bill to the committee. Hon Jess Beckerling not only confirmed that in the debate, but also repeated it. I appreciated the honesty. I appreciate the way she conducted herself in the debate; I thought she was very good. Particularly for a first-term member, her contribution was very good. And I loved the honesty. Nothing would have made the Greens support this bill because they are ideologically opposed to what this bill is trying to do, which is to push through the approvals process in a timely manner.

Hon Jess Beckerling: You could still have agreed to some good amendments to improve the legislation.

The Deputy President: Order!

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: I will come back to the amendments in a bit.

The Deputy President: Order, member! The point of the third reading debate is to hear the member's view on whether the bill should be read a third time, so I am not entirely sure that another party's position on the bill is entirely relevant.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Thank you, Deputy President, for your guidance. The reality is that nothing would have appeased the various members of the Greens that this bill should proceed.

The opposition thinks that the approvals process has fallen in a hole and actually needs to be improved. The amendments that were put up by the opposition were designed to increase the efficiency of the approvals process, with some accountability. I am pleased to say that the government accepted some of the opposition's amendments.

Hon Stephen Dawson: They were the ones that didn't go too far.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: The Leader of the House and I might disagree about whether they went too far. The government was given the opportunity to really drive the approvals process into the positive, but it did not take that up. I am not morally offended; I understand that the government could go only so far. If the government really wanted to improve the approvals process, it might have picked that one up too. The contribution on that amendment by Hon Tim Clifford was outstanding. Thank you for that. I really enjoyed that reference to Joh Bjelke-Petersen. The government might have accepted that and could have taken it further.

None of the amendments the opposition put forward to make this bill better were designed to slow down the approvals process or undermine certainty. The government's one amendment around review of the bill was acceptable because it is a completely normal process to have a five-year review of bills. The opposition and everybody else supported that process. Almost every amendment proffered by the Greens, which were the only other amendments, were almost all designed to slow approvals, and make sure that community campaigns could be mounted to slow or stop approvals. They were by far directly designed to undermine the intent of the bill. For those reasons, those amendments entirely failed. Every Greens' amendment failed because they were designed to undermine the intent of the bill. The opposition occasionally has to make a sensible decision for the benefit of the state of Western Australia. Occasionally, unfortunately for us, that means agreeing with the government and that is what we did in this case. This bill was designed to drive the approvals process forward and make it more efficient. We had no choice but to agree with the government and that is why the third reading of the bill should be supported. It is absolutely essential that it does so.

I have said repeatedly during the debate that we have very little confidence that the Cook Labor government will actually be able to deliver an improvement in the delivery of major projects. I think the house almost universally, with the exception of the Labor Party, agrees with that. If the house were surveyed, it would be found that everybody is in furious agreement, except the government, that the government is pretty average at delivering approvals processes. As I have said repeatedly, this is the government's seventh attempt to try to make the approvals process better. It has had six failures out of six. We are rather hopeful that the seventh attempt might be better. I have to be hopeful—I am an Eagles supporter! I have to be optimistic. I am optimistic that, just maybe, the government might actually improve its performance in approvals.

The state government will have the federal government hanging over its head and making things worse. The government has my sympathies for that. It absolutely does. Of course, with the unholy alliance of Labor and the Greens federally, there are enormous issues. But, just maybe, this government might be able to make some improvements to the approvals process in Western Australia. If there is no other reason for the house today to support this legislation and the third reading of the bill it is that, just maybe, the government might actually make some improvement to the approvals process. Possibly. Maybe. The opposition stands ready to help the government and hopes that it succeeds. We have no confidence—we have watched Labor's performance over the last eight years. It is pretty hard to have confidence when we have seen that in place. The reality is that we hope that this bill will give the government the capacity to make improvements that we have not seen to date. To oppose the bill would be, in my view, churlish. This is not referring to the people who—do not take insult—oppose it on philosophical grounds. That is their position and I understand that. However, from an opposition perspective, if we were to oppose the bill when we believe in improving approvals, a more timely approval sense, and that the government should lift its game in this regard, that would have been churlish. That needs to not happen.

The opposition will, obviously, support the third reading. I have to say that some parts of the debate were really interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed enunciating support for uranium mining in Western Australia. Can I repeat, particularly to my friends in the Greens (WA), that nothing in this bill, whether it got up or not or whether members could block it or not, would actually stop us delivering on that agenda if we had the opportunity. Be assured and comforted that members' failures to make amendments to this bill has made no impact on our agenda. I hope that is of some comfort. We want to deliver those things anyway. The argument that I heard the most during this debate as to why this bill and its third reading should not be supported was about whether this bill is only and exclusively dedicated to renewable energy. I made some comments. I listened carefully to contributions to the third reading debate of Greens members. I really want to make mention of that because it was said that nothing in this bill is about renewable energy or uranium. All of that is true. Do you know what?

The President: Order, member. Before you put the next part, can I just remind you that a third reading speech is not about re-prosecuting your argument; it is simply about reasons the bill should pass the third reading stage or not.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Thank you for your guidance, President. I am nearly done. It is absolutely true. This bill is not purely about renewable energy. The suggestion that it is is not true. The bill does not say this. It was great. It was said that nothing in the bill relates directly to renewable energy. It is true. It is not just about renewable energy. The repeated suggestion that this bill is about only renewable energy and the government has failed if it is not purely about renewable energy is a fallacy. It is a furphy; it is not true. This bill is about development, one part of which is renewable energy. I suspect renewable energy will play a role in this. Other parts will relate to the mining sector. As much as the Greens hate it, it will relate to the gas energy sector as well. I live in hope that it will one day apply to uranium as well. It is not the case. To suggest that the bill should not pass because it was not exclusively about renewable energy is a lie. It is not true. This bill was never exclusively about renewable energy. The government probably gilded the lily in its second reading speech. To be honest, if members of the Greens are not used to this government gilding the lily in its second reading speeches, I am not sure how long they need to be here to be used to it. Second reading speeches are not delivered under oath; they are delivered under parliamentary privilege, which means they are even less likely to be true. The fact that the government talked about renewable energy does not mean the bill is exclusively about renewable energy. To suggest the bill should not pass because it is not exclusively about renewable energy is an absolute nonsense.

As much as I would like to extend the debate tonight, I am going to finish with this.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: Cruel bastard!

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Yes, I am.

The reality is that this bill should pass if members believe in an improved approvals process that will allow the projects that will underpin the wealth of the next generation of Western Australians to be delivered. Some of those will be renewable energy and some will not. Some will be gas, some will be critical minerals, some will potentially be iron ore and some will be other things. All those things will be important to the next generation. I am not suggesting that the next generation will manage to be as rich as this generation. I am not suggesting that the future governments of this state will have anything like the money in the money bin that the Labor Party has had over the last seven years. The absolute wealth—the plethora of funds—it has, dare I say, Hon Philip Scott, lucky Phil over here. The money it has! If those in the next generation might want to buy a house at the prices that are being imposed upon them, they will need reasonably well paying jobs, and that means they need this legislation to pass to deliver the jobs of the future to afford the future that they deserve.

Hon Stephen Dawson (Leader of the House) (5:24 pm) in reply: I thank all those members who made a contribution on the State Development Bill 2025. I also want to thank the advisers who have been here for the last few weeks. I acknowledge the Coordinator General, Chris Clark and my namesake, Steve Dawson who sat next to me. It is not often you get two "Stephen Dawsons" in the house, and it is probably just as well we do not. I acknowledge Tahlia Rose, Adrienne LaBombard, Hayley Blight, Sophie

O'Keefe and Amy Bracegirdle. It has been a busy few days and I also acknowledge the contribution that all members made last night in the marathon sitting. I, too, have the same view; this bill was not rammed through this place. We would have sat as long as we needed to, but I acknowledge that we answered all those questions that were asked of us and we ended up voting to send this bill to a third reading.

This bill really is about transforming the way that we develop industrial land and deliver transformational projects for Western Australians. It will drive economic growth and job creation across Western Australia and it will support the state's ambitious energy transition and decarbonisation goals. This bill should be passed at the third reading because it will also support the government's Made in WA vision, supercharging our focus on a range of areas including advanced manufacturing, clean energy products and the delivery of major infrastructure projects. This government remains committed to driving these outcomes through the Coordinator General and the powers established under this bill. These powers are significant, but they are not unprecedented. They have been drawn out from our own statute books and statutes successfully rolled out in similar jurisdictions. They will complement our existing approval system and the planning powers under this bill will integrate seamlessly with the provisions of the Planning and Development Act. This is a significant milestone for Western Australia's journey to decarbonise and diversify its economy. I urge honourable members to pass this bill through the third reading stage.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result:

Ayes (26)

Andric, Hon Klara
Boylan, Hon Michelle
Caddy, Hon Dan
Carr, Hon Sandra
Dawson, Hon Stephen
Doust, Hon Kate
Ehrenfeld, Hon Simon
Freeman, Hon Julie
Goiran, Hon Nick
Hirst, Hon Klasey
Hofmann, Hon Michelle
Jarvis, Hon Jackie
Kaur, Hon Dr Parwinder
Makur Chuot, Hon Ayor
Martin, Hon Steve
O'Donnell, Hon Andrew
Rowe, Hon Samantha
Sibma, Hon Tjorn
Spagnolo, Hon Anthony
Stratton, Hon Dr Katrina

Swinbourn, Hon Matthew
Thomas, Hon Dr Steve
Thomson, Hon Neil
Twiss, Hon Phil
Yang, Hon Pierre
Cayoun, Hon Lauren (Teller)

Noes (9)

Beckerling, Hon Jess
Caddies, Hon Rod
Dorn, Hon Amanda
Groenewald, Hon Maryka
McNeill, Hon Sophie
Pettitt, Hon Dr Brad
Scott, Hon Philip
Walker, Hon Dr Brian
Clifford, Hon Tim (Teller)