



SEATH HOLSWICH MP – STATE MEMBER FOR PINE RIVERS

QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE – ESTIMATES HEARING 10th October 2012

BILATERAL DECISION MAKING

Mr HOLSWICH: Deputy Premier, what - - - - - making been to date and have there been any roadblocks to this approach?

Mr SEENEY: Certainly the issue of bilateral decision making is one that the Premier explored very vigorously at his first COAG meeting. To his credit I think he instigated a process which has moved the issue forward since then. We are very keen to get a resolution with the Commonwealth. The Premier has certainly continued to have discussions at his level and I have had a number of meetings with Tony Burke, the federal environment minister, about it. I know that the Coordinator-General is working closely on the technical details with SEWPaC, the Commonwealth agency.

We are working towards a situation where there is a bilateral approvals process so that there is one approval that satisfies the legislative requirements of both the state and federal government. There are a couple of models. There is a bilateral assessment process, which we undertake now, which involves a single assessment where the Coordinator-General makes an assessment of the EIS that a proponent may put in. That single assessment is then used for two separate decisions. That is the model that you saw become something of a controversy with the Alpha Coal Project. But since the Alpha Coal Project did become controversial, we and the Commonwealth have worked through a process to make that bilateral assessment -- B -- expectations were of the state and to ensure that there were indicators along the way to indicate any dissatisfaction from either party.

So we negotiated a new agreement in relation to that bilateral assessment process with Tony Burke after the Alpha Coal Project assessment project to try to ensure, as much as we are able, that that sort of politics is not played again with these major assessment processes, because there was a lot of politics played with the Alpha Coal Project in my view. But we have moved to try to deal with that. The ultimate goal though is to achieve this bilateral approvals process which will allow one approval to be made that satisfies both the state and Commonwealth, and we are doing that across the whole state.

We are also engaged in the strategic assessment process for the Great Barrier Reef catchment. It is a special body of work because the Great Barrier Reef and the catchment that is associated with it is undoubtedly and unquestionably a very special area. So anything that we need to do or anything that is proposed in the Great Barrier Reef catchment area receives special consideration, and so it should. But it is a reality of living in Queensland that most of what we do in Queensland falls into that category. We live here, the Great Barrier Reef is in our backyard, and everyone who lives in Queensland knows and understands that. Everyone who lives in Queensland knows their responsibility to protect the Great Barrier Reef and is determined to protect the Great Barrier Reef. What we are doing is reflecting that determination to protect the Great Barrier Reef but also taking into account the reality that this is where we live and this is where we have to build our economy. Those bilateral approval and assessment processes are an important part of making sure that we are able to grow our state economy and satisfy the Commonwealth, which also has an interest through the EPBC Act, that its requirements and its responsibility to all Australians are also being met in a very appropriate way.