

An Analysis of the Land-Use System in Queensland: Multiple Problems and the Benefits of Constructive Reform

The capacity and even the desire of the public service to deliver long-term societal good has dramatically declined.

State government planning units now regard the project-by-project promotion and approval of economic developments as their sole primary function.

Scientific advice is increasingly ignored or not even sought by planners.

The decision-making process is opaque, even secretive.

The national land-use coordination bodies have been disbanded.

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Current status: Advanced. Estimated release date: early 2024

The Land-Use System: Status of Stages

Stages 1 and 3 (Data Capture and Information Creation) have withered away.
Stages 2, 4 and 5 (All decision-making) are secretive and development-driven.

- **Strategic Data Capture** (Stalled)
[Key natural resource datasets underpin the modelling, mapping and monitoring necessary for sustainable NRM.]
- **Goal-setting** (Public excluded)
[Strategic objectives are established. Community aspirations are articulated.]
- **Land Resources Assessment** (Stalled)
[The means by which land resource information is produced.]
- **Land Use Evaluation** (Opaque to the Public)
[Determine the most appropriate use of the land or resource.]
- **Land Use Decision-making** (Flawed, Skewed)
[Determine the final land-use of properties and conditions of approval.]

The End of National Participation

Political interference has ended national participation in data assembly, coordination with state bodies and data sharing.

- **The National Land and Water Resources Audit (NLWRA)**

[The Audit was established to coordinate the collation and assessment of Australia's land, water and biological resources in forms suitable for decision-makers. The intent was to support *sustainable* development. Abolished in 2008.]

- **Land and Water Australia (LWA)**

[LWA was established as a statutory research and development corporation to achieve the *sustainable* management and use of Australia's natural resources. Abolished in 2009.]

- **National Water Commission (NWC)**

[The NWC was established to provide *independent* assurance of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) national water reform agenda, assess the implementation of water reforms by all jurisdictions, provide strategic guidance and information, and provide *independent* guidance. Abolished in 2014.]

The Rise of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)

In the 1980s and 1990s, ESD [with sustainable Natural Resources Management (NRM) as a subset] emerged as a powerful new planning paradigm in Australia.

- ESD demanded an integrated approach over large study areas.
- ESD involved sophisticated analysis of the complex interactions of a multiplicity of landscape processes.
- ESD gave paramount consideration to the long-term societal good.
- Under ESD, the societal value of open space was recognised as a major planning consideration.
- Under ESD, planning decisions would no longer be piecemeal, uncoordinated and inconsistent. Instead, they would be strategic and broad-visioned.

The Fall of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)

In the 1990s, new pro-development economic theories emerged and were adopted by governments. Economic development progressively became the *only* major objective of strategic planning, as illustrated here.

- The soberly titled, forward-looking “South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031” was followed by the PR-titled focus-on-the-present “ShapingSEQ: South East Queensland Regional Plan 2017 ”.
- The 2009 Plan had 60 references to NRM. The 2017 Plan had 5.
The 2009 Plan had 30 references to Ecosystem Services (ES). The 2017 Plan had 6.
- The 2009 Plan had an NRM section on the principles and policies of NRM, and aspects of the SEQ NRM Plan. The 2017 Plan had no NRM section and downgraded the SEQ NRM Plan to an entry in a table of 29 implementation actions.
- The 2009 Plan had an ES section on the principles and policies of ES, and aspects of the SEQ ES Framework. The 2017 Plan had no ES section and never mentioned the SEQ ES Framework.

Neoliberalism and the Public Service

A succession of neoliberal Queensland governments (Labor and LNP) have imposed their ideology on the Queensland Public Service, and so created a land use planning system that is blatantly-biased, secretive, short-sighted, dismissive of dissenting views, and a travesty of what a decent land use system should be.

- The Planning function is now embedded in a mega-department (Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning), whose sole focus is economic development.
- In the Priority Development Areas (PDAs) declared by DSDILGP to fast-track development projects, environmental considerations and even environmental legislation can often be over-ridden or ignored.
- In the Prescribed Projects (PPs) declared by DSDILGP to facilitate the planning and delivery of infrastructure, DSDILGP can over-rule Development Approval rejections by Local Authorities and transfer decision-making to the Coordinator-General, who is tasked with facilitating the planning and delivery of infrastructure, and resides in – DSDILGP.

First Steps Along the Road Back to a Sustainability-Focused Planning System

- Define in detail how the land use planning systems presently operate.
- Determine the structural and legislative deficiencies in the process.
- Determine the causes of bad decision-making.
- Determine the damage done by specific past bad land-use decisions.
- Determine the barriers to major positive reform.
- Postulate the possible ways of overcoming the barriers.
- Widely disseminate the information gained.
- Form groups to formulate the land use planning system best suited to create a desirable sustainable future.

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