Queensland Decarbonisation Hub

State Planning and Decarbonisation: Reviewing the Queensland State Planning Policy 2017

This policy brief reviews the Queensland State Planning Policy 2017 (SPP) in the context of the State's decarbonisation goals and aspirations. The SPP is Queensland's primary state planning instrument. It sets out a framework for development across five themes, covering 17 state interests, each supported by sub-policies (Queensland Government [QG], 2017). There are significant opportunities for state planning to drive cross-sector decarbonisation and guide future-focused investment in people and infrastructure. This review therefore examines whether the SPP's current structure effectively supports Queensland's legislated decarbonisation goals, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and its alignment with the ecological sustainability mandate of the *Planning Act 2016* (Qld).

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Decarbonisation context and policy framework

Queensland has signalled an ambitious move towards decarbonisation through the *Clean Economy Jobs Act 2024* (CEJ Act 2024), while Australia continues its path to net zero by 2050 through its *Climate Change Act 2022* (Cth.). The CEJ Act 2024 legislates Queensland's emissions-reduction targets of 30% below 2005 levels by 2030, 75% by 2035, and net zero by 2050. It also establishes annual reporting, sectoral planning, and an expert advisory panel to guide progress. Six priority sectors have been identified by the Minister: energy, agriculture and land, transport, industry, the built environment, and resources. These broadly align with Commonwealth sector work and will be addressed through sector roadmaps, with the Energy Roadmap scheduled for release on 10 October 2025 and additional roadmaps due by September 2026. The CEJ Act 2024 is framed as a mechanism to support economic outcomes including job creation. State planning interests intersect with these sectoral priorities and can support delivery of Queensland's decarbonisation goals (Planning Institute of Australia [PIA] 2023; UNCCD & UNFCCD 2023).

The SPP is Queensland's primary planning instrument. It should articulate the State's long-term vision in a way that is consistent with related legislation, including the *Planning Act 2016* (Qld) and the CEJ Act 2024. At present, however, the SPP is not well aligned with Queensland's decarbonisation agenda and risks undermining the aspirations set out in the State's Net Zero Roadmap.

The *Planning Act 2016* (Qld) seeks to establish a system for land use planning and development assessment that advances ecological sustainability, understood as balancing environmental, economic

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and social considerations (QG, 2015). It seeks to provide an efficient, effective, transparent, integrated and accountable framework, with expectations that plan-making and development assessment will deliver strategic planning, high-quality development outcomes and meaningful participation. In practice, however, reconciling environmental protection, economic growth and community wellbeing has proven difficult. Globally we have seen human pressures on nature undermine the functioning of natural habitats and ecosystems, further eroding the health of air, water and land that underpin essential life-support functions for present and future generations (Lambertini et al., 2025).

Projections indicate that Queensland will face more frequent hot days, sea level rise, ocean acidification and extreme rainfall events as the climate changes (Department of Energy and Climate, 2024). These trends compound existing pressures on land, water and ecosystems, intensifying the challenge of maintaining ecological sustainability in the face of population growth and economic development. Queensland's downscaled climate modelling provides spatial projections of these threats, confirming that some regions will face particularly severe impacts, including catastrophic storm damage (Bureau of Meteorology & CSIRO, 2024).[1] Queensland is already experiencing warming, with state-average annual temperature increasing by around 1.5 °C since 1910 (Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation [DETSI], 2025). In terms of biodiversity, the *State of the Environment Queensland 2024* report shows that by 2021 about 22% of habitat for threatened fauna species had been lost relative to pre-clearing extent, with ongoing habitat decline especially affecting invertebrates and reptiles (DETSI, 2025).

These combined climate and ecological pressures affect every sector and community, highlighting the importance of embedding climate adaptation and mitigation within planning frameworks. The Planning Institute of Australia (2020) has declared a climate emergency, recognising the unique role of planners in responding to these pressures, while the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2023) emphasises the interdependence of climate, ecosystems, biodiversity and human societies. Taken together, these findings underscore the urgency of reforming the SPP to ensure that climate adaptation and mitigation are embedded across all state interests.

Queensland is both the fastest growing and the most energy intensive state in Australia (Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, 2009). In 2023, Queensland's per capita GHG emissions were 43 tonnes, the highest of any state. In addition, Queensland is experiencing devastating biodiversity decline due to clearing and climate change (QG, 2022). The latest IPCC AR6 reports (IPCC, 2023) and the latest global stocktakes (UNFCCC, 2023) indicate that significant structural moves across economic, social and environmental sectors must occur without delay. Given the scope and influence of the SPP, its state interest framework must therefore be updated to support decarbonisation of Queensland's economy, housing and infrastructure, and to embed climate change adaptation and mitigation across all areas of planning.

This review identifies four critical risk areas where the SPP falls short and where reform is urgently required:

1. Climate change

The SPP fails to recognise climate change as a major driver of disruption and adaptation across all state interests, leaving Queensland without a coherent planning response to its multifaceted impacts.

2. Land clearing and Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF)

Extensive land clearing remains poorly addressed. This undermines decarbonisation by reducing carbon sequestration capacity, releasing CO_2 and methane (QG, 2021), and eroding ecosystem services such as climate regulation and biodiversity integrity. Queensland continues to record some of the highest rates of deforestation in Australia, with weak regulatory guidance in the SPP compounding the risk.

3. Integrating renewable energy and sustainable design

The SPP lacks a coherent framework to embed renewable energy projects, sustainable planning design, resource efficiency and pathways to a decarbonised future within the planning system.

4. Balancing economic growth and conservation

The SPP provides little guidance on reconciling economic growth with environmental and social priorities. In practice, development approvals tend to favour short-term economic gains, such as resource extraction and vegetation clearing, over long-term sustainable outcomes, perpetuating carbon-intensive industries and delaying essential economic transition.

These four risks frame the remainder of this review. The next section outlines the policy and institutional context of the SPP before examining its state interests in detail.

SPP Context

The SPP operates within a complex, multi-layered framework of international commitments, Commonwealth legislation and Queensland statutes (see Figure 1). As a statutory instrument under the *Planning Act 2016* (Qld). Within this system, the SPP is nested alongside 12 regional plans and local government planning schemes, all of which must be aligned with and give practical effect to the SPP.

Under the Planning Act, the State government's central role in planning is to define and safeguard state interests. These are broadly defined as any matter the Minister considers as affecting Queensland's economic or environmental interests, or to be relevant to the objectives of the Act (*Planning Act 2016* (Qld), s.28). This broad scope gives the State significant authority over planning and development control (England & McInerney, 2019). In the SPP, state interests are grouped into five themes comprising 17 areas of focus:

- Liveable Communities and Housing (2 state interests)
- Economic Growth (4 state interests)

- Environment and Heritage (4 state interests)
- Safety and Resilience to Hazards (2 state interests)
- Infrastructure (5 state interests)

Research shows that strong alignment between national and state policies is essential for effective decarbonisation and climate adaptation (Stechemesser et al., 2024). Within this context, the SPP and regional plans play a critical role both because of the breadth of issues they cover and their direct influence on planning and development outcomes. Despite this, the current SPP does not explicitly embed decarbonisation or climate change across its state interests. This omission weakens Queensland's capacity to:

- address climate change (Risk 1);
- manage land clearing and ecological pressures (Risk 2);
- create consistent pathways for renewable energy and sustainable design (Risk 3); and
- resolve tensions between economic growth and conservation (Risk 4).

FIGURE 1 ALIGNMENT OF THE SPP WITHIN THE BROADER POLICY LANDSCAPE

Overview of SPP state interests related to decarbonisation and ecological sustainability

The purpose of this review is to evaluate whether the current structure of state interests and associated policies in the SPP provides effective support for Queensland's decarbonisation goals as set out in the CEJ Act 2024, and whether the policy framework has the capacity to address climate impacts through adaptation and advance the ecological sustainability purpose of the *Planning Act 2016* (Qld). In addition, because the *Planning Act 2016* (Qld) defines ecological sustainability as the overarching purpose of Queensland's planning system, the review also considered the potential impacts of state interests on ecological values, identifying whether policies pose risks, cause harm, or contribute positively to ecological sustainability.

Overall, 104 policies were classified against the following criteria:

- Decarbonisation relevance: not directly related, directly related, or decarbonisation-focused
- Ecological sustainability impact: for those directly or focused on decarbonisation, policies were assessed on a five-point scale from high risk (1), risk (2), no harm or benefit or unclear (3), benefit (4), to high benefit (5).

The analysis found that approximately 70% (73 of 104) of the SPP policies were relevant to decarbonisation in some form, and 17% (18) were specifically decarbonisation-focused. Two examples illustrate the distinction (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 EXAMPLES OF POLICY ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

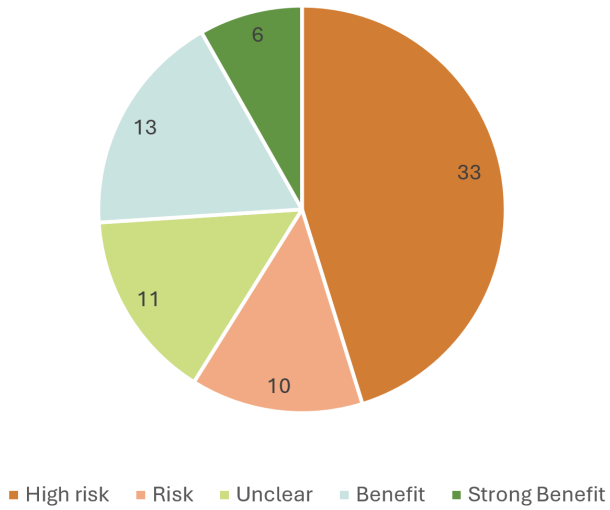
Theme	State Interest	Policy	Decarbonisation
Economic Growth	Development and Construction	policy (6) requires that land uses are consistent with the purpose of the zone	Not directly related
	Mining and extractive resources	"Extractive resources are protected and mineral, coal, petroleum and gas resources are appropriately considered to support the productive use of resources"	Directly related

In this case, Development and Construction policies were classified as not directly related to decarbonisation because they primarily regulate the alignment of land uses with zoning purposes, rather than addressing emissions or energy transitions. In contrast, Mining and Extractive Resources policies were classified as directly related, because the extraction and use of fossil fuels and minerals are major

sources of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and thus central to decarbonisation pathways.

The next step in the desktop analysis was to classify those policies directly related to decarbonisation by their possible risks to ecological sustainability (see Figure 2). Policies associated with land use change or clearing, emitted GHG, high energy use, or risks to remnant vegetation and habitat were assessed as high risk. For example, policies that enable large-scale land use change, vegetation clearing, or energy-intensive activities were assessed as high risk because they both generate emissions and degrade ecosystems that underpin sequestration capacity. Policies that encourage protection or restoration of natural assets, by contrast, were assessed as offering benefits for ecological sustainability. In contrast, policies encouraging the protection or restoration of natural assets were assessed as beneficial for ecological sustainability.

FIGURE 2 LEVEL OF POSSIBLE RISK OR BENEFIT TO ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY (N=73)



A small proportion of SPP policies explicitly and proactively address decarbonisation goals or ecological sustainability (n=19). However, a key issue is the absence of a clear mechanism for resolving conflicts between state interests. For instance, the state interest in Biodiversity, Policy 5, which seeks to enhance koala habitat extent and condition, may conflict with state interests in mining, development or agriculture where land clearing is permitted. Without a framework to reconcile these tensions, economic growth interests are likely to dominate (Risk 4: balancing growth and conservation). Similar conflicts are foreseeable for renewable energy projects, which may advance decarbonisation but still impact habitats or cultural landscapes. In its current form, the biodiversity state interest therefore does not provide a coherent mechanism to integrate ecological sustainability with Queensland's decarbonisation agenda. While the SPP is designed this way, not prioritising one state interest over another at a statewide level, (see QG, 2017, p. 10) it creates a significant challenge for managing interests that do not align.

Further, while risks and adaptation measures for climate change are acknowledged in the guiding principles of the SPP and in contextual statements for some state interests, they are not embedded in the policy statements themselves (with the exception of Natural Hazards, Risk and Resilience). This omission is out of step with research showing that climate change effects all aspects of society, from prolonged heatwaves and extreme storms to bushfire, flood, coastal erosion and inundation. This gap reinforces Risk 1, the failure to embed climate change as a cross-cutting driver across all state interests. Treating climate adaptation narrowly as hazard management risks undermining Queensland's ability to deliver long-term decarbonisation and ecological sustainability.

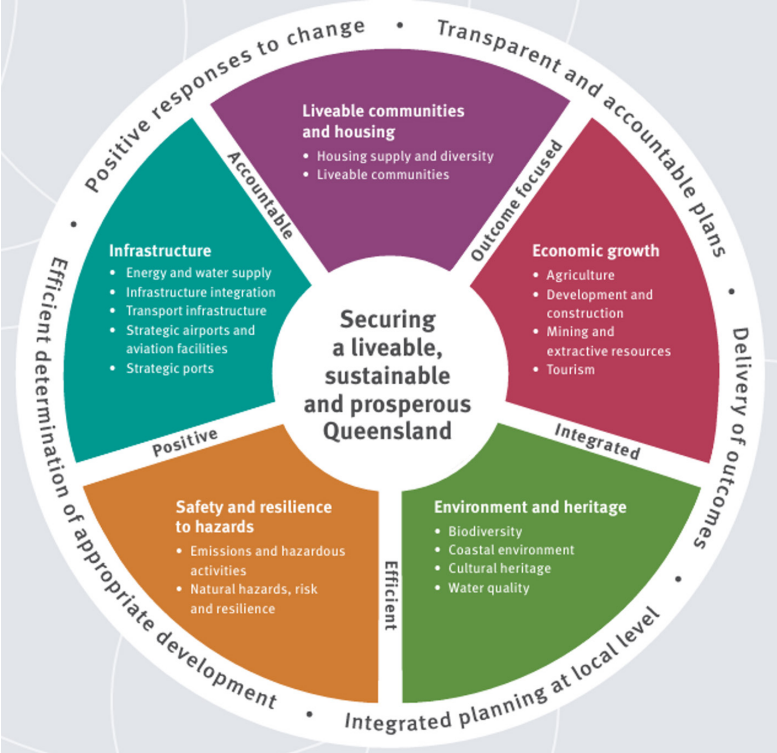
How First Nations' cultural heritage is managed also has implications for ecological sustainability and decarbonisation, particularly where heritage landscapes overlap with land and resource use decisions. In the SPP, the cultural heritage state interest requires the conservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage in line with relevant legislation, and the protection of world, national, state and local heritage places from adverse impacts. Local heritage must also be identified, safeguarded, and where possible, adaptively reused so that cultural values are retained even when development occurs (QG, 2017).

While these policies emphasise conservation and impact avoidance, they are framed largely in terms of statutory compliance and heritage protection mechanisms. The SPP does not explicitly require or encourage consultation with Traditional Custodians in planning or decision-making processes relating to cultural heritage or other land use matters. For First Nations peoples, meaningful consultation is critical if land use and resource management are to respect traditional knowledge and rights (Lane, 2006; Morgan & Cole-Hawthorne, 2016). The absence of this perspective means that the cultural heritage state interest, as currently framed, contributes little to the broader objectives of ecological sustainability or to aligning land-use planning with Queensland's decarbonisation goals.

Challenges with the SPP for decarbonisation

This section examines how the Economic Growth theme of the SPP illustrates the broader weaknesses of the policy framework in supporting Queensland's decarbonisation agenda (see Figure 3). While the SPP aspires "to secure a liveable, sustainable and prosperous Queensland" (QG, 2017, p. 13), these aspirations are not translated into enforceable or future-facing policy directions. Instead, many provisions reinforce historical economic priorities that are inconsistent with a low-carbon transition. Unless reshaped, the SPP's economic growth policies risk embedding carbon-intensive pathways and weakening the State's capacity to meet its legislated climate commitments.

FIGURE 3 SPP THEMES AND POLICY AREAS



Economic growth captures the state interests of agriculture, development and construction, mining and extractive resources and tourism with a total of 21 policies sitting under these state interests. Of these policies, the analysis identified 90% to be relevant to decarbonisation and as posing high risks to ecological sustainability. References to "sustainability" appear in several policies, but the dominant emphasis is on enabling growth or processing efficiency, typically without mechanisms to secure biodiversity or decarbonisation outcomes (Risk 2: land clearing, Risk 3: weak integration of sustainable design). As an example, Development and Construction (5) states: "Efficient delivery of development is facilitated by the adoption of the lowest appropriate level of assessment for development that is consistent with the purpose of the zone" (QG, 2017, p. 32).

In particular, policies for mining and extractive industries reflect a long-standing view that these sectors are central to Queensland's economic growth. As the SPP itself notes, "the resources industry is a key driver of the Queensland economy and one of the state's largest export earners" (QG, 2017, p. 33). While the industry generates substantial export revenue, research shows that benefits are unevenly distributed, with local governments and communities often bearing environmental and social costs without equivalent financial returns (De Souza et al., 2018). Recent analysis also suggests that externalities associated with coal production can outweigh local benefits when ecological and long-run economic costs are included (Williams et al., 2021).

Jericho (2024) further observes that, relative to its scale, the sector delivers comparatively low employment

and tax revenue to the State compared with other industries such as hospitality. While the current framing of the SPP may have been historically accurate, it does not align with the requirements of a post-carbon economy. Continuing to emphasise mining as the foundation of prosperity risks entrenching carbon-intensive development and delaying diversification, thereby exacerbating Risk 4: weak mechanisms to balance economic growth and conservation.

These issues highlight how the SPP's Economic Growth theme remains misaligned with Queensland's legislated decarbonisation agenda. The CEJ Act 2024 provides a roadmap for transition across six priority sectors: energy, agriculture and land, transport, industry, the built environment and resources. Yet, the Economic Growth theme of the SPP largely reaffirms historical pathways rather than supporting these sectoral transitions. For instance, extractive resources policies prioritise the long-term protection of coal and gas reserves, even while the previous Labor Government's Energy and Jobs Plan signalled a rapid scaling of renewables. Similarly, agricultural state interests focus on promoting productivity and protecting land from fragmentation, but without embedding emissions reduction or carbon farming opportunities essential to that sector's decarbonisation efforts. In tourism, policies support growth around Queensland's natural assets, but without safeguards against overuse or climate vulnerability. Without explicit integration, the SPP risks working at cross-purposes with the CEJ Act 2024.

Where sectoral roadmaps are intended to drive structural change, the SPP still embeds policies that lock in carbon-intensive development. This gap underscores the need for alignment if Queensland is to meet its legislated targets. Revising the Economic Growth theme would therefore be a critical first step in ensuring that the SPP actively supports decarbonisation, ecological sustainability and the structural shifts outlined in the CEJ Act 2024.

The SPP promotes agricultural productivity within the Economic Growth theme, which includes land-use changes (including clearing) that contribute to emissions and loss of carbon sequestration. While there are attempts to balance environmental considerations, the focus on increasing productivity may lock in land-use practices that are not aligned with emissions reduction goals. The legislative framework in Queensland has resulted in periods of 'panic clearing' or 'mass clearing', corresponding with relevant changes in government, or the tightening/loosening of restrictions (Simmons et al., 2018). This has left ecological sustainability, and associated decarbonisation benefits, highly vulnerable to political cycles and shifting regulatory priorities (Risk 2: land clearing) (Evans, 2016). Greater policy stability, improved monitoring, and more integrated long-term planning are needed to embed consistent decarbonisation outcomes.[2]

At the same time, there are opportunities for agriculture to support decarbonisation, such as through carbon farming or changing practices. However, the agricultural sector is on the front line of climate change impacts. It is well documented that Queensland's agricultural sector must adapt to a changing climate paradigm characterized by more frequent and severe droughts, floods, heatwaves, and fires, which now pose increasing risks to productivity, ecosystems, and farmer livelihoods (QG, 2019; Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee, 2024). The SPP should articulate a forward-looking vision for

agriculture in this context, rather than maintaining a narrow productivity focus.

Equally, the development and construction policy set in the Economic Growth theme has significant decarbonisation implications. The population of Southeast Queensland is expected to grow to 4.4 million by 2031 and extensive development is required to accommodate the forecasted increase in housing and employment. Rapid urban expansion and vegetation clearing are major contributors to biodiversity loss, habitat loss and increasing GHG emissions (Rolfe, 2002). The SPP mentions that "a sufficient supply of suitable land for residential, retail, commercial, industrial and mixed-use development is identified" (QG, 2017, p. 32), yet provides little guidance on integrating biodiversity or decarbonisation into achieving this outcome (Risks 2 and 3).

The SPP does not adequately consider the long-term implications of land clearing and the loss of biodiversity, carbon sequestration loss and GHG emissions. Historically, many natural areas and remnant vegetation were cleared for greenfield development because clearing was cheaper and oversight weak. In recent years, land clearing rates have somewhat declined but remain significant; mapping between 1997 and 2021 shows about 2.49% (~4.3 million hectares) of remnant regional ecosystem vegetation has been lost in Queensland (Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, 2024). In this context, innovations such as infill redevelopment, higher density design, transit-oriented development, and zoning reform deserve stronger support. Furthermore, planning can set performance-based requirements for housing to encourage uptake of household or community solar, green roofs and energy efficiency, all of which would support decarbonisation.

Key opportunities to improve the SPP for decarbonisation

Adding Climate change as a policy concern across the themes and state interests

As outlined above, Queensland already faces escalating climate pressures, from rising temperatures to biodiversity decline, which compound risks across every sector. Climate change should be elevated to an explicit and cross-cutting policy concern within the SPP (Cole et al., 2021). Currently, it is acknowledged in general terms and addressed directly only within the state interest of *Natural Hazards, Risk and Resilience* which states "[t]he risks associated with natural hazards, including the projected impacts of climate change, are avoided or mitigated to protect people and property and enhance the community's resilience to natural hazards" (QG, 2017, p. 51). This framing is too narrow for contemporary risk; climate change should be recognised as a systemic driver shaping every state interest, from communities and economies to agriculture, mining, infrastructure, and environmental heritage (Risk 1).

The IPCC (2023) emphasises that the interdependence of climate, ecosystems, biodiversity and human societies demands strong, coordinated strategies and plans that operate at state, national and global levels. For Queensland, this means that local development decisions, whether a housing estate or a new mine, must be assessed within a coherent state-wide framework, rather than through incremental or isolated approvals. Without such integration, the SPP risks locking in short-term projects that undermine

the State's capacity to transform its economy and achieve a decarbonised, climate-resilient future. Accordingly, the SPP should embed climate change mitigation and adaptation requirements across all state interests and link these to regional plans and local schemes through clear assessment benchmarks.

Adding Decarbonisation into the State Interests

Decarbonisation should be explicitly integrated across the themes and state interests of the SPP. Planning systems are not neutral: by shaping land use, infrastructure and development approvals, they have a direct influence on GHG emissions and on the capacity of communities to adapt to climate change. While localised planning decisions may appear beneficial in isolation, their cumulative impacts often undermine climate objectives (Gurran et al., 2011). For this reason, the state level is the critical scale for embedding a coherent vision and ensuring local decisions align with long-term decarbonisation goals.

The SPP in Queensland is therefore positioned to be a champion for decarbonisation. Explicit recognition of decarbonisation across the SPP would provide certainty for projects that deliver significant emissions reductions; for example, renewable energy generation and transmission, new low-carbon housing developments designed around walkability and transit, and climate-resilient infrastructure. Without such recognition, these projects may face unnecessary hurdles, while carbon-intensive development proceeds by default.

Progress has been made. In 2010, barriers to renewable energy deployment in Queensland were identified across financial, infrastructure, technical, regulatory and informational domains (Martin & Rice, 2012). While many of these challenges remain, renewable energy has expanded rapidly: in 2023, renewables contributed around 25% of Queensland's electricity generation, particularly from large- and small-scale solar and wind (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 2024). Building on this trajectory will require a revised SPP that embeds decarbonisation as a guiding principle across state interests, providing alignment with the CEJ Act 2024 and ensuring that planning decisions accelerate, rather than delay, Queensland's transition.

Updating and refining state interest policies to support decarbonisation

The SPP provides an important opportunity to reframe existing state interests, so they actively support Queensland's decarbonisation goals. Incremental but strategic updates to housing, infrastructure, energy and water state interests could reshape long-term planning trajectories. This section highlights three priority areas where adjustments are needed: housing supply and diversity, energy transition, and water security.

Housing supply and diversity constitutes a critical state interest with the capacity to reshape patterns of living in Queensland for a post-2050 transition. The opportunity here is to signal and lead a change from land-intensive, developer-driven designs towards developments that use diverse and smaller homes, have a public transit orientation, support walking neighbourhoods and better incorporate nature and biodiversity. As housing drives both embodied and operational emissions as well as land-use change,

the SPP should set clear design and location principles (for example, density near transit, energy-performance standards and green infrastructure) to reduce lifecycle emissions.

Energy security, affordability and transition should be repositioned as an integrated state interest within the Infrastructure theme. Historically, Queensland's energy strategy has been anchored in energy security and affordability, but with the state's growing commitment to reducing emissions and increasing reliance on renewable energy, the need for a well-planned energy transition is now paramount. Queensland's abundant solar and wind resources provide an opportunity to achieve energy transition and compete as a global exporter of clean energy. Queensland's abundant natural resources, including solar and wind, provide a unique opportunity to not only achieve energy transition but also position the state as a global exporter of clean energy. Achieving this transition while ensuring energy security and maintaining affordability requires careful planning and policy coordination.

Renewable energy sources are inherently variable, necessitating robust energy storage solutions and infrastructure upgrades to maintain security. Affordability must remain at the forefront of energy planning, particularly as households face cost-of-living pressures. Policies should support equitable access to renewable energy and protect vulnerable communities from disproportionate impacts. As Queensland transitions, regional and infrastructure planning must ensure projects are integrated into broader regional development goals. This is particularly important for rural and remote areas, where renewable projects can stimulate local economies but where energy, water and infrastructure needs vary significantly. Planning also needs to anticipate export-oriented projects such as green hydrogen, which require port infrastructure and international trade linkages, and ensure that these do not undermine ecological or community sustainability.

Water supply and quality should be treated separately from energy under the Infrastructure theme and established as a distinct state interest. Queensland's water resources are under increasing pressure from population growth, agricultural demand, and climate change (Lam et al., 2016). As renewable energy projects expand, particularly bioenergy, hydrogen, and hydropower, water will become an even more contested resource (Rezaei et al., 2024). Effective water planning is therefore essential to balance competing demands across energy, agriculture, and urban supply.

Planning must also account for the uneven geographic distribution of water resources alongside climate projections. For example, northern Queensland has relatively abundant water but limited energy infrastructure, while southern regions face increasing water scarcity yet host many large-scale energy projects. By elevating water as a standalone state interest, the SPP would ensure it receives the critical and strategic focus needed, while still requiring integration with energy and other sectoral planning. This forward-looking approach aligns with IPCC modelling, which indicates a potential drying climate in eastern, western and southern Australia by mid-century (IPCC, 2024). Together, these refinements would reduce Risks 2–4 and align the SPP with the CEJ Act 2024.

SPP to provide better guidance on managing conflicting goals

Beyond the specific inclusions proposed above there is a need for clearer guidance to help industry, regions and local councils manage trade-offs between competing state interests. Currently the SPP "does not prioritise or give more weight to one state interest over another at a statewide level" (QG, 2017, p. 10) and state and local governments must manage competing state interests when designating land and resources for infrastructure, community, the environment and development. In practice, this means reconciling goals that are sometimes in tension, such as promoting economic growth while safeguarding biodiversity or enabling development while reducing emissions.

Without clear decision-making principles, governments risk defaulting to short-term economic priorities, with potential costs to biodiversity, emissions reduction and ecological sustainability. A broader framework that more holistically considers benefits and costs, and includes climate change alongside natural capital, is needed. These frameworks are being widely developed, including for financial disclosure through the Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures and the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), and could provide the basis for bringing climate change and nature considerations explicitly into planning decisions (IFRS, 2024; TNFD, 2024). Queensland should adapt these concepts for planning (for example, requiring transparent articulation of climate and nature impacts in plan-making and development assessment) and provide assessment benchmarks to manage trade-offs consistently across the State.

The challenge for Queensland is to provide a coherent decision framework that balances competing interests transparently, rather than allowing trade-offs to be resolved implicitly in favour of short-term economic growth.

Conclusion

Overall, the SPP is outdated and requires urgent reform if Queensland is to achieve a decarbonised future. While the SPP was originally designed to secure a "liveable, sustainable and prosperous Queensland," (QG, 2017, p. 3) its current configuration does not adequately align with the State's legislated decarbonisation goals or with the ecological sustainability mandate of the *Planning Act 2016* (Qld).

Queensland's decarbonisation goals hinge on the State's ability to simultaneously achieve energy security, affordability and transition to ecologically sustainable development. However, these goals cannot be pursued in isolation. They require integration across regional and infrastructure planning, water and land resource management, and bioregional strategies, all underpinned by a coherent state planning vision. The state's unique natural resources and ecosystems present both opportunities and challenges, but with coordinated planning and a long-term vision, Queensland can lead the way in net zero development.

This review has also highlighted four persistent risks that undermine the SPP's effectiveness. These risks,

and the reforms required to address them, are as follows:

- Risk 1: Climate change is not recognised as a cross-cutting driver across state interests.
  - Reform priority: Explicitly embed climate change mitigation and adaptation in policies across all themes.
- Risk 2: Land clearing and LULUCF emissions remain poorly addressed.
  - Reform priority: Integrate decarbonisation and long-term (to 2050) planning into state interests, ensuring protection of carbon sinks and biodiversity.
- Risk 3: Weak integration of renewable energy and sustainable design into planning frameworks.
  - Reform priority: Update state interests such as Housing Supply and Diversity, and introduce a combined interest for Energy Security, Affordability and Transition.
- Risk 4: Inadequate mechanisms to balance economic growth with conservation.
  - Reform priority: Provide clearer guidance on managing conflicting state interests and establish a separate state interest for Water Supply and Quality to reduce trade-offs.

By embedding decarbonisation and adaptation across the state interest framework, and by providing clearer mechanisms to reconcile competing objectives, the SPP can become a central tool for steering Queensland's transition. In doing so, it can help remove regulatory, infrastructure and social barriers that currently hinder progress and support achievement of the ecological sustainability outcomes envisaged by the *Planning Act 2016* (Qld). Importantly, aligning the SPP with the CEJ Act 2024 (Qld) and Australia's *Climate Change Act 2022* (Cth.) would ensure that Queensland's planning system both reflects and actively enables the State's legislated pathway to net zero.

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Endnotes

1 For Queensland-specific downscaled climate projections, see QG (2025), Queensland Future Climate Dashboard. For long-term monitoring of land cover change and vegetation clearing, see QG (2021), Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS).

2 For example, Queensland's vegetation management framework has been repeatedly tightened under Labor governments and relaxed under LNP governments, contributing to cycles of rapid land clearing in response to anticipated policy changes (see Evans, 2016; Simmons et al., 2018).