

The State Development and Public Works Organisation Act

The Coordinator-General's history in boosting economic development in Queensland

FACT SHEET

The distinctive role of the Coordinator-General, as created by the Queensland Government in 1938, is to coordinate the development and planning of public works and semi-public works across the state.

From this initial role, and through the changes in function which have occurred over the years, the Coordinator-General has always been an influential agency in the planning and economic development of the state.

This document reviews the role of the Coordinator-General - which has been accurately described as evolving from a 'superman role' into 'an influential facilitator role'¹ - and its achievements in delivering major infrastructure projects in both the public and private sectors.

Early Days (1938 – 1960s)

The Coordinator-General as a central authority

In the 1930s, less than one third of Queensland's population lived in Brisbane.² For such a vast and yet sparsely populated state, stimulation of rural industries and investment in inland settlements was seen as vital to the state's continued growth.

With high unemployment rates brought by the

depression, promoting economic growth through capital works was seen as the best way forward to boost employment opportunities.

The Queensland Premier at that time, William Forgan Smith, believed the most effective way to achieve the greatest economic benefit to the state was through a central 'authority with the power to marshal and coordinate public works'.³

This combination of social, economic and political forces resulted in the enactment of the State *Development and Public Works Organisation Act* (SDPWOA) and the creation of the Office of the Coordinator-General of Public Works (as it was then known) in 1938.

The Coordinator-General had its own department and reported directly to the Premier. The Coordinator-General possessed a clear mandate to create employment through the coordination of works.

Completion of Brisbane's Story Bridge, the buildings for the University of Queensland St Lucia and Wivenhoe Dam are examples of public works that have been constructed or developed through the use of the Coordinator-General's powers.

At that time, the Coordinator-General was involved in preparing a coordinated works plan (the Works Program) for the whole state which aimed to promote employment, new housing and major infrastructure.

As part of this role, the Coordinator-General influenced and controlled public expenditure on a wide range of public works undertaken by state and local governments.

The Works Program listed public and semi-public works for each department and the approved expenditure. Some say the Coordinator-General's influence was even higher than that of Treasury.⁴

During World War II, the Coordinator-General played a critical role in reducing general expenditure and boosting defence for the war effort.⁵

Through the late 1940s, the Australian Government was focused on post-war reconstruction and development and the Coordinator-General was made a construction authority in order to design and construct works of high priority.

1960s to date

Decentralisation and a shift to a facilitator role

In the 1960s and 1970s, with changes to the legislation the Coordinator-General's role as a central construction authority was reduced. From 1971, under the new SDPWOA, the emphasis shifted to planning, environmental control and coordination roles, although there were still effective powers to deal with special projects.

The Coordinator-General became responsible for the administration of state and regional planning in Queensland while retaining the function of coordinating the state's capital works through his annual Works Program.

The Coordinator-General also played a major role in creating agencies and resolving interagency conflicts, particularly where line departments were unable to agree or where complex issues were not clearly the responsibility of any one department.

The Coordinator-General's department built up technical expertise that enabled the

implementation of policies until other departments had built up their own capabilities.

For example, in 1977 the Coordinator-General's annual report listed 75 technical, professional, coordinating and inter-governmental committees on which he was represented.⁶

The Coordinator-General's department employed highly-qualified engineers and was seen as a good avenue for pursuing environmental technical investigations.

This expertise enabled the Coordinator-General to concentrate on effective coordination of state activities, competing land use proposals and environmental management.

In the new role, the Coordinator-General was responsible for coordination of environmental control activities across Queensland through the Environmental Control Council – an advisory body under the chairmanship of the Coordinator-General.

The Environmental Control Council had a power to determine whether an environmental study was required for major works (private or public).

This resembles the current role of the Coordinator-General in declaring coordinated projects and determining the level of environmental assessment required.

The current functions and duties of the Coordinator-General as set out in section 10 of the SDPWOA are very wide. It includes all the tasks necessary for the 'proper planning, preparation, execution, coordination, control and enforcement of a program of works, planned developments, and environmental coordination for the state'.

These powers have been used to assess the environmental impacts of more than 60 projects of state significance including in the mining and petroleum/gas industries, aviation, tourism, water infrastructure and transport.⁷

In addition to evaluating the environmental aspects of such projects, the Coordinator-General's powers are also used to facilitate tenure for projects through land acquisition and to streamline

planning requirements and approvals through the declaration of state development areas (SDAs).

There are currently ten SDAs declared across the state. They can be declared for diverse purposes including large scale industrial hubs; infrastructure corridors that enable the co-location of rail lines, water and gas pipelines, and electricity transmission lines; and major public infrastructure sites such as the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital.

Each SDA is subject to a development scheme prepared by the Coordinator-General. Where the SDA development scheme overrides the local planning scheme, the Coordinator-General becomes the decision-maker for development applications within the SDA.

Other projects of significance that the Coordinator-General has played a major role in the development of include:

- The Goodwill Bridge
- The South East Queensland Water Grid
- Liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities on Curtis Island
- Several water and gas pipelines proposed by the private sector.

These projects have delivered significant economic outcomes and employment opportunities across the state.

The changing role of the Coordinator-General reflects a shift in the Australian public sector and a reduction in direct intervention in public works and increased collaboration with the private sector to boost economic development.

In this context the Coordinator-General continues to promote, plan, coordinate and drive economic investment across the State but increasingly coordinates with private industry to achieve this aim.

The Coordinator-General's Historic Projects (from 1950s)

- University of Queensland Buildings and Grounds
- St Lucia Bridge
- Griffith University Buildings and Grounds
- Townsville University
- Mater Hospital Building
- Tully Falls Hydro Electric Power Station
- Acquisition of Rocklea Depot
- Surveys and resumptions for North Pine River Water Supply
- Goondiwindi and Yelarbon-Inglewood Transmission lines
- Weipa Housing Power and Government Services
- Wivenhoe Dam
- Somerset Dam resumptions and leases
- Albion Overpass
- Goodwill Bridge
- Bribie Island Bridge
- North Pine Dam
- Land resumptions for new Victoria Bridge
- Riverside Expressway
- Story Bridge
- Land resumptions for the Brisbane Airport
- Story Bridge and Wharves
- Yeppoon Flood Plain.

¹ J. Minnery, Planning outside 'planning': the changing role of the Coordinator-General, *Planning Perspectives*, 15 (2000) 68. The reference to the role of the COORDINATOR-GENERAL as 'superman' was first used in parliamentary debates in 1938, *Official Record of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly* (Hansard). Vol.CLXXXII, 1938, Brisbane, 256.

² J. Minnery, Planning outside 'planning': the changing role of the Coordinator-General, *Planning Perspectives*, 15 (2000),57 with reference to data sourced from C. Forster, *Australian Cities: Continuity and Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995,Table 1.2, 15.

³ *Official Record of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly* (Hansard). Vol.CLXXXII, 1938, Brisbane, 124.

⁴ A. Parkin, *Governing the Cities: The Australian Experience in Perspective*. South Melbourne: Macmillan (1982) 94.

⁵ J. Minnery, Planning outside 'planning': the changing role of the Coordinator-General, *Planning Perspectives*, 15 (2000) 62.

⁶ J. Minnery, Planning outside 'planning': the changing role of the Coordinator-General, *Planning Perspectives*, 15 (2000).

⁷ See

<http://www.coordinatorgeneral.qld.gov.au/assessments-and-approvals/coordinated-projects.html>

For more information about the role of the Coordinator-General and his current projects visit www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/coordinator-general/ © State of Queensland, September 2016. Published by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, 63 George Street, Brisbane Qld 4000, Australia. While every care has been taken in preparing this publication, the State of Queensland accepts no responsibility for decisions or actions taken as a result of any data, information, statement or advice, expressed or implied, contained within. Any references to legislation are not an interpretation of the law. They are to be used as a guide only. The information in this publication is general and does not take into account individual circumstances or situations. Where appropriate, independent legal advice should be sought.

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