

# Examiner

## Major Projects Bill elicits strong views from community



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Conservation and community organisations have come out swinging against the state government's proposed Major Projects Bill, which would give the government the ability to take approving big developments out of the hands of councils and into those of a panel appointed by the Tasmanian Planning Commission.

East Coast Alliance is a group opposed to proposed development Cambria Green, an \$140 million resort that Chinese developers want to build near Swansea.

Rezoning for Cambria Green was approved by council but is going through a protracted process currently being heard by the Tasmanian Supreme Court.

Alliance president Anne Held said the organisation feared the legislation could be used to fast-track Cambria Green.

"The ECA's legal opinion is that Cambria Green can be nominated a major project under the proposed legislation," she said.

"Community groups from around Tasmania, including the East Coast Alliance, are calling for the withdrawal of the Major Projects Bill. They have significant criticisms of

the bill including its potential to give the Minister for Planning unprecedented power to declare major projects.

"The new laws would give the Planning Minister the power to take a development away from local councils. The ECA believes removing councils, and through them local communities, from local planning decisions is unnecessary, unfair, and political."

Peter McGlone, president of the environmental group Tasmanian Conservation Trust, said it had received 1100 submissions against the legislation via its website.

He said the legislation would give developers "a special fast-track process" and that there was no requirement for foreign investors to be identified.

"Although virtually any project could be taken through the major projects pathway, entirely at the minister's whim, it is likely that the government will use it to remove any project from the normal planning process that has caused significant community opposition or has struggled to meet planning rules," he said.

He listed Cambria Green, Fragrance hotels in Hobart and Launceston, Lake Malbena, and cable cars at Mt Wellington, Mt Roland and Cataract Gorge as recent controversial developments that could potentially be assessed by panels rather than local councils under the bill.

However, Local Government Association of Tasmania president Christina Holmdahl said the local government sector was satisfied with the bill.

"There were some concerns initially about community input, but there is actually a venue for people to be able to make submissions - private individuals and community groups. On the whole, LGAT is satisfied that the bill will actually do what it's supposed to do.

"LGAT's position is that there are still avenues for community members and groups to respond and object to any major projects that this legislation applies to."

Property Council executive director Brian Wightman said that "complex planning processes have become politicised by the local government sector," and welcomed any legislation that would streamline development approvals.

"It is undeniable that Tasmania requires significant planning reform to ensure that much needed investment and development is delivered without delay," he said.

Bass Liberal MHA Sarah Courtney said the proposed legislation was about providing certainty.

"It's not about fast-tracking, it's not about shortcuts, it's about ensuring a clear, consistent process so that proponents can have certainty, and to encourage investment here in Tasmania."

The bill will likely be brought to parliament in August.