

PROVISIONAL PRIORITY DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Queensland’s third PPDA makes Varsity Lakes the Gold Coast’s first.

25 September 2026

OVERVIEW

This Insight discusses Queensland’s latest provisional priority area declaration, made on 24 September 2026.

It marks a significant expansion of the State’s use of accelerated, State-led planning mechanisms to unlock government land for housing and mixed-use development.

Importantly, the declaration includes Varsity Lakes, making it the Gold Coast’s first PPDA . It signals that this tool is becoming an increasingly important part of Queensland’s planning and land activation framework.

In this Insight we provide a comparative overview of the differences between a PPDA and the more familiar PDA mechanism.

DECLARATION OF QUEENSLAND’S THIRD PPDA

Queensland has declared its third provisional priority development area (PPDA), extending the State-led planning pathway to seven government land precincts under Tranche 2 of the Land Activation Program. The declaration includes Varsity Lakes, the first PPDA on the Gold Coast, and marks a further use of the PPDA mechanism to unlock underutilised government land for housing and mixed-use development.

The *Economic Development (Land Activation Program (Tranche 2) Provisional PDA) Amendment Regulation 2026* was made on 24 September 2026. It amends Schedule 1AA of the *Economic Development Regulation 2023* to declare the **Land Activation Program (Tranche 2) PPDA**, in the company of the Port Hinchinbrook PDA and the Land Activation Program (SEQ Tranche 1) PPDA. The LAP Tranche 2 PPDA declaration covers seven precincts:

Land Activation Program (Tranche 2) PPDA	Land Activation Program (SEQ Tranche 1) PPDA	Port Hinchinbrook PDA
Bundamba (Ipswich)	Banyo (Brisbane)	
Hervey Bay (Fraser Coast)	Meadowbrook (Logan)	
Highgate Hill (Brisbane)	Montague Road (Brisbane)	
Mango Hill (Moreton Bay)	Turbot Street (Brisbane)	
Pimlico (Townsville)		
Varsity Lakes (Gold Coast)		
Wynnum (Brisbane)		



KEY PROPOSITIONS

- The PPDA model was considered preferable to the conventional Planning Act pathway because it provides coordinated, State-led framework that supports accelerated planning, assessment and delivery outcomes for managing complex government landholdings.
- There are key differences between a PPDA and the more familiar PDA mechanism.

The inclusion of Varsity Lakes makes this the first PPDA declaration affecting land on the Gold Coast. It is a significant local application of a statutory mechanism that has only recently begun to be used as part of the State's planning and land activation toolkit.

Why has the PPDA been declared?

The Land Activation Program (**LAP**) is a Queensland Government initiative directed at unlocking and activating underutilised government land for housing and mixed-use development.

The explanatory notes for the LAP Tranche 2 PPDA acknowledge that development could proceed under the *Planning Act 2016*. However, the PPDA model was preferred because it provides a coordinated, State-led planning and delivery framework considered better suited to complex government landholdings and the objectives of the Land Activation Program. Identified benefits include improved use of government land, facilitation of housing and mixed-use outcomes, streamlined development assessment, efficient use of government resources, and economic and community benefits.

PPDA v PDA comparison

While there are many Priority Development Areas (**PDA**s), including on the Gold Coast (Southport and Parklands), and the mechanism for a PPDA has existed in the *Economic Development Act 2012* since its commencement, the first PPDA was only declared in November 2025 for Port Hinchinbrook.

Conceptually, PPDA's are well suited for discrete sites and projects that must progress quickly. They are intended to deliver early certainty for investors, the community and government by providing an immediate planning and assessment framework.

In comparison, a PDA is used for larger, more complex sites (often with land parcels under disparate/multiple ownership) that require a longer-term planning instrument (a Development Scheme) and greater community engagement. We have summarised the key differences between the PPDA and PDA mechanisms in the table following.



PPDA and PDA COMPARISON

	PPDA	PDA
Declaration	Made by the Minister for Economic Development Queensland (MEDQ).	Made by MEDQ typically for larger, complex sites.
Local consultative committee	MEDQ must establish a local consultative committee, comprising the CEO of EDQ (or nominated senior executive), CEO of the local government (or nominated senior executive), and at least 1 (but no more than 3) person/s MEDQ considers can appropriately represent the interests of the local community.	N/A
Plan-making	<u>Draft</u> Provisional Land Use Plan (draft PLUP) comes into effect immediately on declaration. Provides the planning framework for development in the PPDA. Public consultation of 15 business days for submissions. PLUP must be finalised within 60 business days. Once finalised, the PLUP governs all development for the remainder of the three-year period. PLUP can be amended.	Interim Land Use Plan (ILUP) effective immediately on declaration. ILUP valid for up to 12 months (extendable to 24 months). During this time, a comprehensive Development Scheme is prepared and publicly consulted on (minimum 30 business days). Development Scheme takes effect once gazetted and then remains the statutory planning instrument. Development scheme can be amended.



	PPDA	PDA
Development assessment	Applications assessed against the PLUP. Decisions made within 40 business days once all requirements (information requests, notification if required) are met.	Applications initially assessed under the ILUP. Once Development Scheme takes effect, under the Development Scheme. Decisions are subject to 40 business days period.
Assessment entity	MEDQ unless delegates to local government.	MEDQ unless delegates to the local government (for example, for the Southport PDA there is an instrument of delegation to the local government).
Appeal rights for PDA development applications	No third-party appeal rights. Note that the PLUP can provide for public notification but there are no third-party appeal rights. The PLUP would only do this if it was considered there should be further ability for engagement for matters MEDQ/the local government see as important to the community. Applicant can only appeal in relation to nominated assessing authority conditions.	No third-party appeal rights. Note that the ILUP/Development Scheme can provide for public notification but there are no third-party appeal rights. The ILUP/Development Scheme would only do this if it was considered there should be further ability for engagement for matters MEDQ/the local government see as important to the community. Applicant can only appeal in relation to nominated assessing authority conditions.
Duration	The PPDA automatically expires after three years. At that point, responsibility returns to the Planning Act framework, and the planning scheme usually needs to be amended to reintegrate controls. There is no mechanism to extend this three-year timeframe.	Ongoing. The Development Scheme remains in force until revoked by MEDQ.



KEY PROPOSITIONS

- Because a PPDA is a form of 'priority development area' under the Economic Development Act, development within a PPDA is treated as PDA-related development and benefits from the associated statutory framework and exemptions.
- The Varsity Lakes declaration provides the Gold Coast's first practical example of the PPDA model and may foreshadow future use of the mechanism for projects such as the proposed Miami Creative Industries Precinct, accelerated housing supply and other catalytic development initiatives on the Gold Coast.

By definition, a PPDA is still a 'priority development area' as defined in the *Economic Development Act 2012*. This is important for the relationship with the *Planning Act 2016* and *Planning Regulation 2017*, as it means development in a PPDA is by definition 'PDA-related development' which features in numerous exemptions/exceptions in the *Planning Regulation 2017*.

What this means in practice

Varsity Lakes is now part of a State-led planning initiative focused on activating government land for housing and mixed-use outcomes. For the Gold Coast, the declaration is important not only because it establishes the city's first PPDA, but also because it will demonstrate how the mechanism operates locally as a coordinated alternative to the conventional planning framework.

The Varsity Lakes declaration also provides a useful point of comparison with the proposed Miami Creative Industries Precinct. Earlier this year, the Council of the City of Gold Coast endorsed Invest Gold Coast proceeding with a PPDA as the recommended planning pathway for that project, referred to in the earlier material as the Miami Arts Depot. Varsity Lakes is therefore the first Gold Coast PPDA to be declared, but unlikely to be the last, given the need for housing supply and catalytic economic development, where timely delivery is a priority.

The declaration confirms that PPDA's are becoming an active part of Queensland's planning toolkit. The draft PLUP will be critical, setting the development intent, assessment framework and infrastructure arrangements for the Varsity Lakes precinct. Early attention to delivery and transition arrangements will be essential within the PPDA's three-year statutory life.



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