

Still waiting

Star News Group

By Michael Esposito

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PEOPLE on the outskirts of metropolitan Melbourne will spend Christmas in limbo after debate on the Victorian Government's controversial land tax was postponed - 12 months after it was introduced.

The Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution (GAIC) was expected to have been blocked in the Upper House on Thursday but the government sent the bill to a dispute resolution committee, deferring debate until February next year.

Objectors to the tax, have argued that a proposed \$95,000 should only be payable when land is developed and not on the first sale after its inclusion in the urban growth boundary.

In parliament on Tuesday, Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Northern Metropolitan MP Jenny Mikakos said that Planning Minister Justin Madden had indicated he would not proceed with the bill if it was voted down.

"It is important that parliament deals with this bill before Christmas so that the government can give certainty to landholders and industry."

Opposition planning spokesman Matthew Guy said: "To propose further changes to the GAIC bill after consulting no one shows just how arrogant and out of touch this government is."

Pamela Clune's Wollert property is under investigation for the tax said the trauma of the Black Saturday bushfires combined with the financial worries brought upon by the GAIC proposal was taking its toll on people in parts of Mitchell and Whittlesea councils that faced inclusion in the urban growth boundary.

"I hear and see the enormous stress and pain felt within many communities dealing with the aftermath of this year's Victorian bushfires," she said. "Living within a community where the landowners are now in a place of uncertainty, which is creating a financial void that will last for 10-20 years, I am hearing and seeing similar emotional stress on families. There is so much heartache within our communities and the government needs to be aware they are inflicting some of it unnecessarily."

Ms Clunes questioned the need for change.

"Why change something that is and has worked within the state of Victoria and all other states within Australia?" she asked.

"Many have chosen to invest life savings in their properties as a safe choice for their families' future superannuation planning, which under the current GAIC proposals will be wiped out financially, forcing landowners in a void to face long term financial survival."

Michael Hocking, chairman of the anti-GAIC action group Taxed Out, said the amendments to the bill were superficial and left landowners "in limbo".