



FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms DE Farmer MP (Chair)
Miss VM Barton MP
Mr MJ Crandon MP
Mr CD Crawford MP
Mr DA Pegg MP
Mr PT Weir MP

Staff present:

Ms D Jeffrey (Research Director)
Dr M Lilith (Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2015

Brisbane

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Committee met at 3.30 pm

ANDERSON, Ms Mandy, Acting Executive Director, Queensland Catholic Education Commission

ANGHEL, Mr Mark, Legal Officer, Queensland Teachers' Union

BEHRENS, Mr Nick, Director Advocacy and Workplace Relations, Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland

DEVLIN, Mr Brian, Assistant State Secretary, Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union

EDMONDS, Ms Thalia, Industrial Advocate, Queensland Teachers' Union

GAFFY, Mr Darryn, Senior Industrial Officer, Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association

GILBERT, Mr James, Health and Safety Officer, Queensland Nurses' Union

PEVERILL, Mr Dermot, Industrial Officer, United Voice

SPRECKLEY, Mr John, Senior Industrial Officer, United Firefighters Union

TODHUNTER, Dr Liz, Research and Policy Officer, Queensland Nurses' Union

WATSON, Ms Lara, Field Officer, Queensland Council of Unions

CHAIR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I declare open this public hearing of the Finance and Administration Committee's inquiry into the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I am Di Farmer, the chair of the committee and the member for Bulimba. The other members of the committee are: Mr Michael Crandon, our deputy chair and the member for Coomera; Miss Verity Barton, the member for Broadwater; Mr Duncan Pegg, the member for Stretton; Mr Pat Weir, the member for Condamine; and Ms Leanne Linard, member for Nudgee, who is standing in for Mr Craig Crawford, the member for Barron River. The purpose of this hearing is to receive additional information from submitters about the bill, which was referred to the committee on 3 June 2015.

This hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament and is subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind you that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. Thank you for your attendance here today. We appreciate your help. You have previously been provided with a copy of the instructions for witnesses, so we will take those as read. Hansard will record the proceedings and you will be provided with the transcript. This hearing will also be broadcast. I remind witnesses to speak into the microphones. Obviously, we have quite a number in the group here today and it is particularly for the purposes of Hansard that we ask you to think about that.

I remind all of those in attendance at the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. We are running this hearing as a round-table forum to facilitate discussion. However, only members of the committee can put questions to witnesses. If you wish to raise an issue for discussion, I ask you to direct your comments through the chair. I also request that mobile phones be turned off or switched to silent mode. I remind you that no calls can be taken in the hearing room.

The committee is familiar with the issues you have all raised in your submissions and we thank you for the detail that you have put into those. The purpose of today's hearing is to further explore aspects of the issues you have raised in the submissions and we do have a number of questions that we wish to put to you. I now invite each of the organisations to make a brief opening statement. We will be strictly limiting this to three minutes, given that we have a number of organisations here today. Of course, you do not have to avail yourself of that opportunity if you do not want to. I ask United Voice to start.

Mr Peverill: Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. In terms of our submission, we have filed a response. United Voice is a proud Queensland union. United Voice has a large representative membership group. There is no reason for United Voice to not support this bill. We commend this bill to the committee. We support the bill for a number of reasons, not least of which is the tradition in which the Labour Day public holiday has been generally recognised for over 100 years. We think the recognition of the Labour Day public holiday is fundamental to Queenslanders. Growing up as a Queenslanders, the Labour Day tradition is well recognised. We made a submission based on that. We support and commend this bill to the committee.

There is the additional change to the Queen's Birthday public holiday as proposed by the bill. We see this restores the Queen's Birthday public holiday from the second Monday in June to the first Monday in October and reflects the then Labor government's movement of this public holiday in 2012. For both of those reasons, United Voice, as a proud union, believes that this tradition should be restored. We commend the passage of this bill to the committee.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Brian Devlin of the AMWU?

Mr Devlin: The AMWU has no further submissions to make.

CHAIR: The Queensland Council of Unions?

Ms Watson: The Queensland Council of Unions definitely supports the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which will restore the historical relevance of Labour Day, which will be observed in May. In Queensland we have celebrated Labour Day since 1891. It is a day when we remember the sacrifices of workers that were made to build and protect the freedoms and rights that we enjoy today. We celebrate mateship, loyalty and the determinations to preserve working conditions. Across the globe, workers celebrate this day in May. In Queensland, as we have seen, workers will continue to celebrate it in May. We have seen it changed to October, but workers still cherished the historical significance behind it and celebrated in May when that occurred. When Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk recognised the historical and cultural significance of Labour Day, she acknowledged Queensland workers and their commitment, and the significance attached to that day as well.

Queensland has a proud history of celebrating Labour Day and has a loyalty to celebrating the day in May. This is only strengthened when we can actually celebrate it on the day it was originally formed. In 1891 over 1,000 shearers went on strike here in Queensland. That is where it all started. Every year since, we have remembered those shearers and all the campaigns that came afterwards. We did actually celebrate workers' day prior to 1891. I would like to share, from the Brisbane *Worker* editorial of 1890—

CHAIR: Thank you, Lara. I do have to stop you at three minutes, although you are not there yet. If you would like to submit that to the committee, we would love to see it.

Ms Watson: Yes.

CHAIR: Is there anything else you would like to say? You have a little time left.

Ms Watson: It will take only a couple of seconds to read this out. I think it is historically significant and should be noted. It states—

May Day, this is our May Day, the bygone jubilation of our forefathers for the reconquering of the bright sunshine of the bitter northern winter ... the new-born celebration of the passing of the workers' winter of discontent.

In Germany, in Austria, in Belgium, in France, all through Europe, in the United Kingdom, in the great English-speaking republic across the Pacific, millions of workers are gathering at this hour to voice the demands of labour for fair conditions of labouring. Never in all history was there such a meeting and we continue that meeting today.

CHAIR: Thank you. The SDA?

Mr Gaffy: Once again, we commend the change to the Labour Day public holiday. In our submission we also made recommendations for changes to Easter Sunday. In that regard, Easter Sunday is a very significant and important day for retail workers in Queensland. We represent 32,000 workers—

Mr CRANDON: Madam Chair, a point of order. That particular matter is outside of the scope of this hearing. I wonder whether it is appropriate for us to be hearing, in an opening statement, about that particular matter.

CHAIR: I do not think it is a point of order. However, could we hear your views on the bill before the committee? We have read your submission about Easter Sunday, which was very comprehensive. I am happy for you to finish that point, but if you would like to give us your views on the matter contained in the bill as well, that would be great.

Mr Gaffy: I was instructed to advise you of that. That was going to be the rest of the submission at this stage. We accept that and refer you to the matter that was presented to you from the SDA submission.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. The CCIQ?

Mr Behrens: Good afternoon. The Chamber of Commerce & Industry appreciates the opportunity to appear before the committee this afternoon. At the outset, the chamber would like to recognise the valuable contribution that the Queensland union movement makes to our proud state. Indeed, we support Labour Day being celebrated as a public holiday. The chamber has a primary principle and secondary principles when it comes to public holidays. In respect of the primary principle, we support 11 public holidays being celebrated each year, which is in alignment with other states. I think Victoria is having a bit of a crack at trying to add a public holiday, which is drawing the ire of the business community and, accordingly, we would counsel this state government to continue to resist that temptation. The secondary principles really relate to national consistency of public holidays with other states and an even spread of holidays across the calendar year. For reasons that will come to light upon questioning, we actually favour existing arrangements.

In relation to the streamlining process for high-risk work licences and in terms of its application and renewal, we think this is a fantastic opportunity that has been identified by the department and, accordingly, receives strong support from the chamber. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The Catholic Education Commission?

Ms Anderson: Thank you for the opportunity to appear on behalf of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. We are a peak strategic body representing the 299 Catholic schools in Queensland. We have consulted across the 22 schooling authorities that run those schools.

The prime intent of our submission and the key point that we wish to highlight is the spread of holidays across the school year and the evenness of that spread. The early part of the school year, especially from late March to early May, is vested in a number of holidays. Very often those holidays are on a Monday. In the interests of student learning and teaching, we would like to see those holidays remain spread, with both the June and the October holidays recognised. The nomenclature of those holidays is not of primary importance to us; it is how those holidays are spread for children in schools everywhere in Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you. The Queensland Teachers' Union?

Ms Edmonds: Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. The Queensland Teachers' Union represents 42,000-odd teacher members across the state. We support the bill and note the cultural and historical celebrations and significance of the bill. The bill, in fact, remedies disconnect between the celebrations conducted in May by various labour movements and the actual public holiday in October. As such, we support the bill. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you. The Queensland Nurses' Union?

Mr Gilbert: The QNU thanks the committee for the opportunity to appear at today's hearing. Our state secretary, Beth Mohle, unfortunately sends her apologies. She is not able to attend, although she would have liked to. Our submission only relates to the changes to the Holidays Act in respect to restoring Labour Day to its rightful place in May. The committee will recall the previous government amended the act to move this public holiday to October. We assume the committee is aware of the origins of the historic day and the dissatisfaction or the disaffection that this move made or caused to the Queensland labour movement. We have concerns that that change was a symbolic decision. Labour Day is Queensland's oldest public holiday. It has been a day celebrated across the state and internationally in May in recognition of workers' rights achieved by so many who have gone before us. Their spirit must endure and Labour Day is in May. We ask the committee to recommend the bill be passed by the parliament. Thank you.

Mr Spreckley: Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to speak today. Most of what we want to say, which we hope will inform and assist the committee, is in our written submission. For

the purposes of today, I would like to, in particular, echo the point made by the Teachers' Union that there is a disconnect between the actual holiday and the dates on which the traditional observance of Labour Day processions and family celebrations are held.

The traditional processions are held in May and the traditional family get-together and celebrations are held in May. We have a disconnect when there is a public holiday which is in October when in fact the processions and the celebrations are held in May. We think this bill would remedy that by restoring the public holiday to May so the public holiday actually coincides with the procession and the family celebrations. We hope that the rest of the written submission we provided assists the committee in its consideration of the bill.

CHAIR: We will go to questions now. I would like to ask a question broadly of all organisations here today. Some of you have referred to this a little in your opening statements. Can I ask you to make comment on the effect of the previous amendments and the existing arrangements? What effect have they had on your organisation or the members of your organisation?

Mr Spreckley: Following on from what I said before, we noticed in terms of our traditional family part of the event that we normally held in the park where families get together that the numbers who attended were down from previous years, when there was a public holiday on the day after the procession and the family get-together. There was an effect in that way. That is the most measurable effect that we could report to the committee.

CHAIR: Would anyone else like to comment?

Ms Edmonds: I agree with my colleague John Spreckley. We had a significant reduction in numbers. That is partially because of the timing of it and where events fall within the school year, which is what my colleague from the Catholic Education Commission was saying. Where events fall within the school year has an impact, whether it is reporting time or assessment time. That changes the ability of people to really appreciate it as a family get-together. I certainly bring my children along to it. From my experience as German-Greek and seeing it in Germany and having worked in Croatia for a significant period of time I can say that it is of cultural significance. This is certainly the way that we treat it within our family and the broader QTU family. It is sad it had such an impact.

CHAIR: Would anyone like to comment on that at all?

Mr Behrens: The other side of the coin is that, unfortunately, there has been play on public holidays in recent years. Quite simply, you cannot move New Year's Day, you cannot move Anzac Day, you cannot move the Easter holidays, you cannot move Christmas Day and you cannot move Boxing Day. No-one wants to touch the Ekka holiday. So in terms of days that you can move, you are only left with Queen's Birthday and Labour Day.

Back in 2011 Queen's Birthday was transferred to the latter part of the year. What that did, to our mind, was take us out of alignment with New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, with the exception of Western Australia. It did have implications for the flow of commerce across interstate borders, particularly for those businesses that operate on the Tweed. There were issues there.

We recognise the complexity of the issue, but I think we do need to be mindful of business. Consistency of public holidays for the business community is certainly an aspirational goal that we would like the committee to be aware of.

CHAIR: That opens up a whole other series of questions which I am sure some of my fellow committee members will ask.

Mr CRANDON: I heard your comments in relation to the traditional day in Queensland. What do the other states do? Can anyone tell me what the other states do? I was having a look at the list that the department provided to us. I see that Labour Day in New South Wales is the first Monday in October. It is the second Monday in March in Victoria, interestingly—some six weeks before. In Tasmania it is the second Monday in March as well. In South Australia it is the first Monday in October. In South Australia it is the first Monday following 1 March. Great, in the Northern Territory it is the first Monday in May. In the ACT it is October. There is only one then. Only Queensland and the Northern Territory actually celebrate in May, the rest of Australia appear to celebrate in October and March from the look of this. What do the other states do?

Ms Watson: Different states in Australia go by different names as well. You will find that in the Northern Territory it is May Day, in Queensland it is Labour Day and in Tasmania it is the Eight Hour Day. Each state has their own events that are relevant to them. It is my understanding that some states moved that date after World War II. But we do not live in any other state; we live in Queensland. We celebrate it and have always celebrated it in May.

Mr CRANDON: Does anyone else want to comment?

Mr Gilbert: I assume the business community is seeking consistency. If you want to consider that, then consistency would require you to move it to 1 March, when most of the other states have it. We do not want that. I do not think it is necessarily—

Mr CRANDON: Can I bring you back to the question that I actually asked. What do the other states do in relation to the Labour Day holiday? What do they do? Do they celebrate it in May or celebrate it on another weekend? What do they do? That is my question. Does anyone know?

Mr Gilbert: Queensland has traditionally always had the biggest Labour Day march.

Mr CRANDON: My question is: can anyone tell me what other states do in relation to that?

CHAIR: Do you mean in terms of what they physically do to celebrate—whether they have a march and a family day and that sort of thing?

Mr Gilbert: That is what I was trying to get to. Queensland has traditionally had the largest march and has tended to celebrate it with more vigour than the other states. Clearly there is a reason for that. That is because the labour movement in this country started in this state. That is why it is very important that we maintain that tradition.

Mr CRANDON: I appreciate what you are saying. I understand that. I have heard what everyone has said. My question is specific: does anybody here know what the other states do in relation to Labour Day? The reason for this question is that you said that even though the holiday in Queensland is in October currently you still celebrate in May. Do the other states celebrate in May or do they celebrate on the dates that are in place in their states? That is my question. Does anybody know?

Mr Spreckley: I can assist with respect to what South Australia does. I have some direct knowledge of that. We need to bear in mind that the states do not combine. It is not a nationally consistent position; everybody does their own thing. I am aware from living in South Australia that South Australia has a procession for May Day and a dinner for May Day. It is nothing like the commemorations in Queensland. It is on a much smaller scale than here. On the actual proclaimed holiday they did not do much at all for many years. It used to be fairly big in the 1960s or 1970s. Probably about a decade ago they resurrected a race day. They have held Labour Day races, which they are trying to build up. They observe both. That is the only direct knowledge I have.

Mr CRANDON: Are there any thoughts on the other states?

Miss BARTON: My question is to Nick. In the CCIQ submission you detail that there is going to be a cost to business. Could you expand on that in terms of what the cost to business would be—both the financial impact on the economy and businesses and the productivity impacts?

Mr Behrens: We actually congratulated the state government for resisting the temptation to create two Labour Day holidays for 2015. There was a little bit of a thought bubble at one moment from the union movement that we should quickly move the holiday back to May and also celebrate it again in October because there are plans already underway or in place for October. The previous work that the chamber has done in relation to the costs of public holidays for the employer community in terms of additional penalty rates and productivity that is forgone was estimated at \$342 million for 2011.

CHAIR: Could you clarify: that was the impact of which particular thing?

Mr Behrens: The cost of one public holiday. The cost of the day is \$342 million.

CHAIR: Could I just take you back. I missed what you said before. You were saying that the union movement had wanted an extra public holiday. I do not recall any public statement about that and you got a few puzzled looks along the table. Can I clarify whether that is a fact?

Mr Behrens: I do not wish to drop the individual in harm's way, but John Battams from the Queensland Council of Unions on ABC 612 certainly mooted that Labour Day be celebrated twice for 2015. The point he made was that Anzac fell on a Saturday and there was not a public holiday in lieu on the Monday. Our belief was, 'Don't do that because it doesn't do anything.' I think everybody agrees that the challenge at the moment is jobs. Creating another holiday does not do anything to create jobs. It actually costs jobs. We actually called out the state government and congratulated them on resisting the temptation to accommodate that request. We felt that that was a good sign from the government that it was prioritising jobs over the union movement. We were quick to—

CHAIR: If I could just interrupt there since I interrupted the SDA before. I think there is no submission from anyone here and there is no-one at this hearing today who is actually suggesting that there be an additional public holiday in 2015. I think we should probably move on.

Miss BARTON: I go back to the productivity question. In terms of the cost through the loss of productivity by having a cluster of public holidays in the first quarter of the year, is that something that the CCIQ has looked at? Has it looked at the cost to business and the loss of productivity having Easter and Anzac Day and potentially Labour Day so close to each other?

Mr Behrens: It is a good question. We have some theoretical understanding on the advantages that occur, if you can indulge me for a few moments. We think you can only achieve two out of the three following outcomes. One is honouring the commitment to the union movement to bring the public holiday back to May. Two is getting national consistency with respect to the Queen's Birthday. The practical implication of this bill is that it takes away alignment of the Queen's Birthday in June with all the other states, with the exception of Western Australia. It creates a holiday in May which does not align with the other states, which is the member for Coomera's point. Three is the spread of holidays across the year.

The concept behind that is there is a clustering of holidays in the beginning of the year. It is thought that Queenslanders are less inclined to take an extended break because they have Easter and all the other long weekends. Their budgets mean that they can only at a point in time afford to go on a long weekend. The concept behind having an even spread of holidays across the calendar year was to encourage Queensland families to perhaps take a mini trip or holiday over a long weekend that would benefit independent Queensland tourism operators. That was the concept behind it. There was no research to my knowledge that puts a number to that.

In respect of the consistency of holidays with other states, then it is this concept of if you are on the Tweed it creates significant dislocation issues and if you are a business that does commerce with businesses in other states it creates dislocation there as well. To the best of my knowledge, there are no dollar estimates around the impact that it has on Queensland business productivity.

CHAIR: Do you have any research around the impacts on business of having a lack of national consistency? Do you have any figures around that?

Mr Behrens: No, we do not.

Mr PEGG: I have a question for Ms Anderson. It is just about your submission in relation to public holidays in semester 1. Forgive me, it has been a while since I have gone to school. For this school year effectively term 1 started after Australia Day.

Ms Anderson: Yes.

Mr PEGG: Then Easter coincided with the term 1 break. Then in semester 1 Anzac Day was observed as a public holiday, as was the Queen's Birthday. In semester 2 there is a show holiday.

Ms Anderson: A show holiday in Brisbane only.

Mr PEGG: Yes, and in some of the other areas it falls into semester 2. Then you also have the current Labour Day holiday in October. Under these proposed changes, there will be a Labour Day holiday in May and there will still be a public holiday in October which will become the Queen's Birthday public holiday. There is a five-week gap between the proposed Labour Day public holiday and the Queen's Birthday public holiday as it currently stands. How does that make a difference in terms of the spread of public holidays?

Ms Anderson: In terms of being able to spread both the impact on student learning with days out of their timetable and I guess the opportunity for rest and recreation for both teachers and students, the May holiday comes in fairly close succession to Easter—and admittedly it moves depending on where Easter falls—and Anzac Day, which is quite properly fixed on a set date. But you have the Easter holidays, the Anzac holiday and Labour Day in May following in fairly quick succession. There is a gap if the June holiday is celebrated as opposed to the May holiday. I am not using Labour Day or the Queen's Birthday holiday in reference to either of them, because that is not the critical issue for us. It is the capacity to spread the holidays so that there is some recognition of the latter part of the year in that holiday spread. The work that was done in balancing the length of terms and in spreading holidays previously when these issues were under consideration was excellent work to get that degree of balance. But having a holiday in June and October is certainly preferable.

Mr PEGG: I would like to ask the Queensland Teachers' Union representatives their view on that particular issue and how they see it?

Ms Edmonds: I think on a practical delivery basis, the Australian curriculum is delivered in 10-week blocks and the English curriculum within that is delivered in five-week blocks. So it really depends on where the holiday falls and the number of holidays within that period as to how it is going to affect student learning. So that is the gravamen of the issue to me. If each term is a 10-week block,

it depends on where the holidays fall in that term. For example, the traditional Australia Day public holiday can be blocked out from the beginning. It sits right at the beginning of the first 10 weeks. Generally, the Easter vacation period sits either at the end or at the beginning of the next one, and then you might have two holidays in between. The next block is term 3, where in the south-east corner we will have the show holiday, and then having one of the holidays in the last term certainly makes the Australian curriculum able to be delivered successfully.

Mr PEGG: So you do not think it will cause any problems.

Ms Edmonds: That is my view around curriculum, although I am not a curriculum expert. That is my understanding around it.

CHAIR: From both QUT and the Catholic Education Commission, have you noticed much of a difference over the last couple of years when the existing arrangements have been in place in terms of those issues you referred to?

Ms Anderson: Our schooling authorities would tell us that they appreciate that spread of holidays in terms of relief both for students in school and for teaching staff.

Ms Edmonds: In terms of the spread of holidays certainly for the second half of the year, as my colleague said, around relief for teaching staff. But in terms of actual delivery of curriculum, I would have to seek advice on that.

CHAIR: That would be anecdotal evidence that you are referring to.

Ms Anderson: That is the written advice we have received back from our schooling authorities, yes.

Mr WEIR: I probably know the answer to this question but I will ask it anyway. It is to do with the holidays in the beginning of the year. Obviously that is when all of our public holidays are concentrated. So there really are only two that could be moved. In the area that I come from, that is show season as well. So nearly every council area or town has a show holiday as well in that period. Oftentimes they are struggling when these long weekends come up. Would tradition overrule any possibility of Labour Day being moved? In your opinion, probably apart from the CCIQ, would that overrule any moving of the May day, given the concentration of those holidays or, as far as you are concerned, is it only the Queen's Birthday that should be moved?

Dr Todhunter: As our colleague from the CCIQ said, there is really only a choice between Labour Day and the Queen's Birthday. We have just made a very sound case for historic reasons why Labour Day should remain. We cannot see any reason why you would not just move the Queen's Birthday public holiday as was originally done. It existed for 111 years beforehand.

Ms LINARD: I had a quick question for Nick. I just wondered whether the greater issue for CCIQ is national consistency of the Queen's Birthday holiday in June rather than whether Labour Day is celebrated in October or May.

Mr Behrens: That is correct. The practical implications of this bill are that it nets itself out in terms of the movement of holidays to the second half of the year, because simply all we are doing is taking Labour Day and putting it back in May and we are taking the Queen's Birthday and putting it back in October. So that neutralises itself. The practical implications of this bill to our mind are that it takes the Queen's Birthday out of alignment with all other states in June, so we lose consistency with those states in June. Then we lose consistency with other states in May, because we are putting a holiday in May. The issue for us—and the reason that we favour the retention of existing arrangements—is that we lose consistency of those holidays with other states.

Ms LINARD: In regard to consistency, given Queensland has the Ekka show day and different states have different show days, what is your comment around that?

Mr Behrens: We would love to see that utopic world where all 11 holidays align with other states. I am not too familiar with the show industry, but I do believe that there is a lot of interstate involvement with the Ekka itself, and it would be hard to achieve that outcome. So, as an aspirational, we would love to see 11 holidays across Australia all celebrated on the same days. From a practical point of view, I think that is not achievable.

Ms LINARD: James, I believe you made the comment, and Lara may have also, about the relevance of May Day, particularly as celebrated in Queensland—and Liz, you mentioned 1901. Can you extrapolate on the importance of that history and why it is so important to the unions? Each of you has spoken today quite emotively about May being so important.

Mr Gilbert: It is emotional, especially if you have a strong connection with your union. We have over 50,000 members in our union. They do not have to join; they choose to join. It is important to

celebrate the achievements that have been made. People do not get given pay rises. People do not get given rights. People fight for those things and struggle. For instance, our union, after negotiation and discussion with the new government, has achieved the ability to get ratios for our nurses in hospitals. That is an incredible achievement, and that is something that we would look to celebrate on Labour Day with our members. It is really important.

All of the other unions have their own issues that they have struggled for, like the fires—I do not want to speak on behalf of John—in terms of workers compensation changes that are going to come to fruition around occupational cancer. That is something that they can quite rightly celebrate. So it is the building blocks that unions have put in place. We have achieved things step by step and they are very important to our members. It was not so long ago that when a nurse was married she had to leave the profession. That is in our memory. So these changes have occurred through the struggle of other people, and we need to celebrate that.

Ms Watson: I will second that, but I add the fact that I am Aboriginal and I am heading up the stolen wages case at the moment. So there is quite a significant attachment to celebrating Labour Day in May, I think. My friend here has all the dates of public holidays that cannot be changed. I would think that Labour Day holds that cultural and historical significance that it would actually fall into that category. I understand the possibility of moving the Queen's Birthday as monarchs change. I have not been able to find any guidelines or policy or anything in there that states that it has to be on a certain day, but that would certainly be a thought from me.

Ms Anderson: The Queen's birthday is actually 21 April. It would put us in a greater pickle all together to follow the actual monarch's birthday.

Ms Watson: That is right.

Miss BARTON: In terms of the historical context, my understanding is that the Queen's birthday is celebrated in June because that acknowledges when George V's birthday was. Then when Edward became king and then George VI, they did not change it. Subsequently, it has not changed since then. So the monarch's birthday has been celebrated since 1788.

Mr Behrens: The only solution to the business community minds is really to encourage New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania to see the light and adopt the Queensland way.

CHAIR: That sounds very sensible.

Mr Devlin: For my members, the significance of the day is the struggles over things like the eight-hour day. For my people who work in construction and that sort of thing, that base day is just so important because all of those wage rates and those conditions are built from that very block. If you start shifting things around then we are worried that those things will be under fire as well. We cannot afford to give up on those things, because it is the health and safety of our members to go to work and come home in the same condition. We should not be going backwards to working longer hours.

This is what that day is about. It is about celebrating those things. This state has a magnificent workers compensation system. Let's celebrate it. If we get the changes that the fires are seeking, that will be an even better improvement and something else that our workers can go and celebrate and be rightly proud of when they go out on the world stage, because our march does go out on the world stage. I regularly go to Vietnam and they can tell me about our march because they watch it and they are proud of it. They want to know how we get our people out there on the streets to actually celebrate those sorts of things.

For us it is vital, and our members do believe that it needs to be on that Monday. If you look at what has happened in Gladstone over the last two years, my members working on those construction projects refused to have the march on Sunday. They went to their employers and said, 'We are taking Monday. We are going to have our march in this community on Monday for those workers that are on those islands doing their job.' So that was a significant move where they went back to their employers and said, 'This is when we want our day.'

CHAIR: I would like to move on to the issue of the Queen's Birthday weekend. I would like to get your thoughts on this generally across all organisations. Some of our local councils have suggested to us that they would like to have major tourism events around their councils in the cooler months, and they are actually asking that we consider that maybe everyone could celebrate the Queen's Birthday or the October holiday on different days to suit them. So some people could have it in June and some people could have it in October. I am interested in people's comments about the impacts of that on your members and your general thoughts.

Mr Behrens: I can assure you that the commerce that occurs between SEQ and regional Queensland is far more significant than the commerce that occurs across interstate borders. If we start to break down the consistency of public holidays in this state, we start to impose a significant burden on the business community from an intrastate point of view. We would not support that proposal at all.

CHAIR: Would anyone else like to comment on that?

Ms Anderson: We are conscious because the Brisbane exhibition days in August are accompanied by an additional day in a different point of the week for children in schools, and that can create some quite significant dilemmas for parents in terms of child care and arrangements for looking after their students. There would need to be great caution that in having different holidays across public holidays similar upheaval were not created.

Ms Edmonds: We stand in distinction from that. It used to be that different regions in the south-east area would have an extra day attached to the show day. If you were in Logan you might have the Monday or if you were in the Caboolture area you might have the Thursday. That is no longer the case. If you are in the south-east and you are able to access that Wednesday show day, what we have negotiated previously with EQ and the government is that all student-free days are now attached to Easter. It used to be a student-free day for teachers so they would do professional development and things like that. That is now attached to Easter to get the two-week consistent holiday period where the option is either to do PD at the school, if that is mandated, or to have a flexible arrangement where it is attached outside. So, in that instance, it would not affect our members.

CHAIR: Would anyone else like to comment on that?

Mr Gilbert: We have talked about tradition and so forth. On some of those we would have no view one way or another other than perhaps those councils consider it a tradition in terms of their work and their area, and I would not want to stifle their ability to have that.

Mr Behrens: Just to clarify, the proposal is specific to the Queen's Birthday; is that correct?

CHAIR: There seem to be a number of events around June, yes.

Mr CRANDON: Following on from that, James brought up an interesting point before. I brought up the fact that we had some in October and some in March and he commented that we would all need to move Labour Day to March because the greatest number of people live in those states. You got me thinking so I did a quick whip-around and I would call this lineball. For the record, there are 9.65 million people around Australia who celebrate in October, excluding Queensland, versus 8.97 million who celebrate in March. I regard that as lineball. Do not get me wrong: I am not saying that you were wrong and this is the number. That is lineball in my view, but it brings me to another question concerning the June weekend, which we have just been discussing.

In contrast to that, we have 14.25 million people in Australia celebrating the Queen's Birthday in June. I am being a little loose here with the date, and I will explain in a moment why, but only 7.35 million celebrate the Queen's Birthday in October. It is not technically October. Queensland would be in October. Western Australia, for whatever reason, celebrates it very late in September but it is within a week of that October date. The reality is that two-thirds of Australians—this is if we exclude Queensland—celebrate the Queen's Birthday in June versus one-third in October. If we add Queensland back in, it is more like three-quarters. I would like some comments on that disparity. As I said, James, just for the record, I was not trying to prove you wrong; I was looking at the numbers.

Mr Gilbert: No, not at all. I raised it not as the arbiter of where public holidays should move to; I was just choosing to make the point. My view is always that the tradition of maintaining Labour Day on a day that it commenced should be the primary motivator. We do not live for business. We have a life, and it is important that we have traditions. We are developing traditions around State of Origin and things like that. You develop traditions; you do not just throw them away. It is very important.

Mr CRANDON: Would anybody else like to make a comment on the situation that currently two-thirds of Australians, excluding Queensland, are celebrating Queen's Birthday in June?

Ms Edmonds: It would be interesting to hear from tourism and hospitality. Nick, I am not sure whether or not you have access to that but I can certainly say that anecdotally when Queensland came on par with other states with the 40-week academic year—this is from a teaching perspective—and it is starting to fall in line with New South Wales, when you would go to restaurants in Noosa or you would try to book accommodation, tourism and hospitality are despairing of the fact that there is that consistency. Although clearly I represent the Teachers' Union, I am aware anecdotally that there are flow-on effects for tourism and hospitality. Although I cannot answer it, I can certainly put that as a potential issue or a question.

Mr Behrens: I have taken the time to read the Queensland Tourism Industry Council's submission to this committee. It surveyed its membership on the preference between retaining the consistency of the Queen's Birthday in June or having an even spread of holidays across the year, and I am certain that its membership favoured moving the Queen's Birthday to October over the retention of consistency of the Queen's Birthday. To my mind, what that indicates is that it is a greater priority for tourism operators to have an even spread than it is to have that consistency of holidays with the other states.

Mr CRANDON: Was that to do with the previous survey?

Mr Behrens: That piece of research came about with the Treasurer's meeting with all the industry associations, and QTIC undertook to sound out its membership on this issue.

CHAIR: You are right; they did note that in their submission.

Miss BARTON: This is more of an open question to everyone. Lara, I do not think anyone would doubt your passion. Well done on your first appearance before the committee. You talked about the history of Labour Day and it being a date that should not change. I do not know whether you were intending to, but I think you were almost making a comparison between the religious significance of Easter and the cultural significance of Anzac Day. Certainly the Queensland Nurses' Union in its submission made some comparisons in terms of the cultural significance between Labour Day and Anzac Day. I wonder what the panel's thoughts are on maybe not having an arbitrary day, whether it be the second Monday in October or the first Monday in May. If it is such a historically significant day, why not set a date, whether it be 1 May or 2 May, depending on when the strike happened in 1891? Set the arbitrary date and have it on that day rather than have it on a set Monday in May or a set Monday in October to create a long weekend. Surely the opportunity is about being able to celebrate what it is that you want to celebrate as a labour movement and having the opportunity to do that rather than it necessarily being the second Monday in May. It is about the opportunity to celebrate in the first place.

Ms Watson: It is about the historical background of May Day. My grandfather was an Anzac, and I march on Anzac Day every year. I carry a photo of him as an Aboriginal man. He was not recognised. I am very proud of that history. I am very proud of my labour history. I do not think any date or any holiday that has cultural and historical significance to the people in Queensland should be changed. If they are passionate about that, governments will recognise that and it shows good governance that that is what they will do—that they will support the people of Queensland, what they are passionate about and what is historically significant to them.

CHAIR: Would anyone else like to comment? I think we have pretty well canvassed the historical significance of the day. Duncan, do you have any questions?

Mr PEGG: Yes, I do, Madam Chair. I think you are correct to say that the historical significance of the day has been canvassed. My take on that has been notwithstanding when Labour Day is gazetted there will still be a procession and festivities in May in any event. I know in Brisbane it happens on a Sunday and in other places the days can differ. I want to ask a question about the logistics of when those processions and festivities happen on a non-public holiday because obviously there are street closures, use of local parks and all of that kind of thing. I wanted to hear from some of the committee members about the logistical challenges of having it on a weekend as a non-public holiday as opposed to a recognised gazetted public holiday.

Mr Spreckley: We have found that some individual family logistics are impacted by there not being a public holiday. As far as the broader challenges of setting up children's entertainment and all of that, I could not assist with that but I know it is a considerable task that occupies a lot of diligent people to pull it all together. Whether it makes a difference on a holiday or not I am afraid I could not help, but it does affect individual families.

Mr WEIR: We are running out of time. The other issue was the high-risk work licences going online. Does anyone have any input or concerns that they would like to express about that before we finish?

Mr Behrens: When it comes to reducing the regulatory burden on business, it is process driven. Essentially you have three pillars. The first is that you deregulate wherever possible, and opportunities in that area are few and far between. The second is that you stem the flow of new regulation coming on board, which is a work in progress. The third pillar is that you streamline whatever regulation you are left with after those first two pillars. This is a very good example of streamlining regulatory obligation and requirement for business and its interaction with government.

We have always been of the belief that each of the departments is the gatekeeper to their own portfolio's regulatory burden and that departments are best placed to identify what can be done to ease the burden of their portfolio's regulatory burden on business. Sitting on the Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland's regulatory reduction board, this initiative was identified by the department. We think it is a very good example of how you streamline compliance to make it easier for business. Accordingly, I cannot see how anyone would possibly have anything untoward to say about this initiative.

CHAIR: It does seem to have been very well received. The time for this part of the public hearing has expired. If we do have any questions, we will be in touch with you quite soon, but we would like to thank you very much for your written submissions and for taking the time to appear today.

McMAHON, Mr David, President, Goondiwindi and District Historical Society

CHAIR: I welcome Mr David McMahon via teleconference to the public hearing of the Finance and Administration Committee inquiry into the Holiday and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I am Di Farmer, the chair of the committee and member for Bulimba. I will introduce you to the rest of the committee: Mr Michael Crandon, the deputy chair and member for Coomera; Miss Verity Barton, member for Broadwater; Mr Duncan Pegg, member for Stretton; Mr Pat Weir, member for Condamine; and Ms Leanne Linard, member for Nudgee.

The purpose of this hearing is to receive additional information from you about the bill, which was referred to this committee on 3 June 2015. This hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament and is subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind you that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

Thank you very much for taking part today. We appreciate your help. You have previously been provided with a copy of the instructions for witnesses, so we will take those as read. Hansard will record the proceedings and you will be provided with the transcript. This hearing will also be broadcast. David, would you like to make a brief opening statement of no more than three minutes?

Mr McMahon: Thank you very much. I will just reiterate what I said in my initial submission. I think on balance the public holidays that we do have at the moment are a fair spread of holidays across the whole 12 months, and the proposed bill to bring Labour Day back to May is probably a little detrimental to us where I stand personally in Goondiwindi. We have lots of holidays stacked into the first part of the year and then we would not have any holidays until October.

The other point I made in my submission is that the June event that we have—the Planes, Trains, Automobiles and Bikes weekend—was an outstanding success, and we rely on long weekends to drive tourism to our regions. You will find too that the weather in May and June is vastly different. May is quite mild, and in winter it has that winter feel about it and that is what people like. People will not travel east to west at certain times. We have trouble trying to get people out here in summer, and we have to concentrate all of our efforts during that peak tourism time, which is probably between April and October.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, David. I want to ask you about the Planes, Trains, Automobiles and Bikes event. Could you tell us how long that event has been held in June and what sort of income you get from the event?

Mr McMahon: That was our first attempt at the Planes, Trains, Automobiles and Bikes and it was an outstanding success. We had 30 Model Ts come out, and we had the great train race between a steam train and the Model Ts. The MG Car Club of the Gold Coast came out as well. We had it as a good event. It created enormous publicity and it was a great weekend. We had steam train rides out to Toobeah, which is 50 kilometres out to St George. Our caravan parks were full. We had visitations from the day. I would hate to put a dollar value on it. I think we got some great promotional activity. If you know anything about events, Madam Chair, you would know that they do not start off big in the first year. You need that momentum and word of mouth to grow these events. It would be great for us out here in Goondiwindi to have a regular event in June.

CHAIR: Given that it was your first time, and I know you referred to the cooler months being conducive to a good event, if these amendments go through, would you consider staging the event in October and still expect some success with that event?

Mr McMahon: No. As I alluded to before in relation to October, there is a perception from people east of the Great Divide—and one of your fellow committee members who is from west of the Great Divide will know this—that as soon as it gets into those warmer months it is too warm out here. The perception is that they will not come from east to west in those warmer months, so we need to maximise the cooler months when we can. The other thing is that, because the steam train spits out embers as it drives along and because it is terribly dry in October, it could start a bushfire. When you have it in June, you have the dew and there is less chance of fires catching behind the train. So that is where I am coming from in terms of, no, it will not work in October.

It also will not work in May because that first Monday in May is around our show. The Friday of that weekend is our show holiday, so we have the show holiday on the Friday, the show on the Friday and Saturday, there is the Sunday and then if the Labour Day holiday goes back it will mean you have a four-day weekend. People historically do make the most of that mild weather and, again, I suspect we would be doing the show society a disservice by putting on an event that competes with the show in terms of trying to get local involvement.

Mr CRANDON: Thanks for the overview that you have given us. When does this June long weekend event commence—what day and what time—and when does it conclude? I assume it finishes on Monday, but I am not going to hold you to that. So when does it start and when does it finish?

Mr McMahon: This year it actually started on the Saturday. We had the big event on the Saturday afternoon where we closed off some streets and had a street party on the Saturday afternoon. On the Sunday was the steam train race and the rides out to Toobeah, so the focus was on the steam train and the old vehicles. Then on the Monday we find that you need to let people from further away and in slower vehicles have time to get home. So there was nothing specifically planned on that Monday because we realise that people need to get home and presumably scrub up and get back to work on the Tuesday. To get people out from Brisbane or the Gold Coast for a weekend, they are spending half their day driving to a place like Goondiwindi and spending half a day driving back, so if you have one spare day it works in our favour.

Mr CRANDON: So they are driving out on the Friday, which is not technically part of the public holiday weekend.

Mr McMahon: Some are, and some are driving out on the Saturday morning as well.

Mr CRANDON: Okay. What I was leading to with this question is: wouldn't it just be a successful day anyway because of the type of people you are attracting? They would just have Monday off just to find their way back home, wouldn't they? They would take one day of their annual holidays if they are working, and if they are not working it is not an issue for them anyway. Wouldn't they just drive home on the Monday in any case?

Mr McMahon: They may do but—

Mr CRANDON: They are a unique group. The point I am making is that they are a unique group, aren't they, in that they have these—

Mr McMahon: We need to grab as many people as we can. If they say, 'I can't take Monday off,' we need to give them a reason to drive back in a leisurely way, rather than having to say, 'I need to take Monday off because I need to drive back.' If that Queen's Birthday was there, they would be able to drive back anyway at a leisurely pace and recharge their batteries for work the following day.

Mr CRANDON: Thank you.

Mr WEIR: Since Goondiwindi is a border town, do you notice a difference in public holidays, whether there is one in New South Wales and not in Queensland, or vice versa? As you would know with these Labour Day holidays, in New South Wales it is celebrated in October and traditionally in May in Queensland. I was wondering if you notice any effect of those different holidays on your border town.

Mr McMahon: I think the October long weekend is great because it lines us up with the rest of the states. Being a border town, of course historically our traffic has been north-south, especially in the cooler months. No, I really cannot say that there has been a significant difference. What I can say is that when southerners do get the chance to drive up during school holidays, they do not miss the opportunity to drive through Goondiwindi and head to the Gold Coast and places like that. We do have significant through traffic during holidays, per se. You might find that for long weekends people at Moree and Narrabri, rather than heading to Sydney, might decide to head to the Gold Coast or someplace like that—or even Goondiwindi if we have a significant event on.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, David. The time for the hearing has expired. We do thank you very much for your submission and for coming on the line with us today. If we need any more information from you, we will come back to you about that quite soon.

Mr McMahon: I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee.

OWEN, Mr Bob, Chief Executive Officer, Carpentaria Shire Council

PASCOE, Councillor Fred, Mayor, Carpentaria Shire Council

CHAIR: I declare this public briefing of the Finance and Administration Committee's inquiry into the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 open. I am Di Farmer, chair of the committee and member for Bulimba. Also present are: deputy chair Mr Michael Crandon, member for Coomera; Miss Verity Barton, member for Broadwater, Mr Duncan Pegg, member for Stretton; Mr Pat Weir, member for Condamine; and Ms Leanne Linard, member for Nudgee.

The purpose of this hearing is to receive additional information from submitters about the bill, which was referred to the committee on 3 June 2015. This hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament and is subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind you that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. Thank you very much for taking part today; we appreciate your help. You have previously been provided with a copy of the instructions to witnesses, so we will take those as read. Hansard will record the proceedings and you will be provided with the transcript. This hearing will also be broadcast. Fred, would you like to make a brief opening statement of up to three minutes?

Mayor Pascoe: I will, Madam Chair. I assume that you have received our submission?

CHAIR: Yes, and we have read it in detail.

Mayor Pascoe: Carpentaria Shire has the Normanton rodeo and campdraft, which has traditionally been held over the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June. This year was our 40th anniversary, so it has been going for 40 years. This event brings a significant crowd to our town, and obviously small businesses and local businesses benefit. This year crowds were up to around 3,000. To give you an idea, the population of Normanton is 1,500, so the town more or less doubles in size. Having the rodeo and show at that time of the year is excellent because it is obviously in the cooler months. A lot of our competitors travel quite some distance, and some of them travel over 1,000 kilometres to get here. Our event goes for three days on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday, so the Monday gives them time to head on home and also gives our people time to recover and whatnot.

We would not be able to hold it in October. By the time October comes around, for us temperatures are normally in the low 40s and the heat stress alone on the cattle and the horses would be devastating. So it would not be possible to hold it at that time.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Fred. Was there anything else that you wanted to add?

Mayor Pascoe: The proposal that we submit for your consideration is that the committee can suggest to local governments that they have the option of either holding the Queen's Birthday holiday in June or October, but we fully support the government's decision to move Labour Day back to May. That is fine. But we think we should be given the option of holding it in either June or October, or perhaps we could have two public holidays with maybe a proposal to call the one in June Outback Day. That is traditionally a time when a lot of the grey nomads and the tourist trade come through our area and the outback, and maybe we can call the holiday in October the Reef and Rainforest Day to recognise the three unique characteristics that Queensland has. They are a couple of options.

CHAIR: Fred, we have obviously read your submission. We have had a number of people appear before us, and one of them was the Chamber of Commerce & Industry. We asked all of them what they would think of that proposal about allowing local governments to choose the days, so one local government might have it on one day and one on another. They were quite concerned about that because they felt that that would have a big effect on business if there was inconsistency across the state. What would you say to that?

Mayor Pascoe: I think it is no different to school holidays. Every town has a different show holiday. We are not saying open it up to every day of the year on the calendar; we are just saying either have it on the first Monday in October or the first weekend in June. It is not as if it is many different dates; it is only two.

Mr CRANDON: There are two parts to my question, and one of them is a supplementary question to the one that the chair has just asked. How would that help you? If June or October were optional and you guys selected June and all of the people that come from various places selected October, then they do not have a public holiday on the Monday of the June weekend. That is the first thing. I do not see that that would be of assistance to you with regard to your numbers and what have you.

The second question that I have follows on from that: why not the first weekend in May instead of the first weekend in June? Why would that be difficult? You support the first weekend in May for the Labour Day weekend, so why not have it then instead of June?

Mayor Pascoe: In relation to the first part of your question, most of my visitors are from properties, not from actual towns—my shire is the size of Tasmania and we have 55 cattle stations in my shire alone—and from surrounding shires, obviously. Most of my visitors are rural people working on properties, and they see it as probably the one big weekend in the year that they come to our town.

In relation to the second part of your question, May is a little bit early for us because in our big wet it is still quite moist out there to move cattle. As I said, the shire is the size of Tasmania. A lot of our road network is unsealed, so in the big wets you are just starting to move, if you know what I mean, and people are just starting to muster cattle. May is probably a little bit too early for us.

CHAIR: Does anybody have any other questions? That was the main thing we wanted to talk to you about, Fred, just to sort of expand on that particular event. If the committee does want to ask you further questions, though, we will write to you very shortly. We do appreciate your assistance today, but I will declare this briefing closed now.

Mayor Pascoe: Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.

Committee adjourned at 4.55 pm