

07/10/2019



Dear Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Summary Offences and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019.

I am writing to express my deep concern and opposition to these new laws.

This is a harsh crack down based on flawed evidence that restricts my civil liberties to work in the public good and to push for social change.

The basis given for the drafting of these laws, that activists are using “lock-on” devices to attempt to injure police and safety officers, is not backed up by evidence. These devices have been used for decades, yet the Queensland government has not offered examples of police being injured, or anybody being charged with setting “booby-traps” inside lock-on devices; only speculation.

The law gives police extra powers to search without a warrant. Police already use “stop and search” powers as a way to intimidate and hinder protesters who have not broken any law, and this law will give them more justification to do so.

Under the guise of safety, the government is bringing in laws which are really about stopping protest activity. The right to protest is a recognised pillar of democracy, and this right should include not just tokenistic free speech but actual effective protest activity as developed by historical protest movements.

Australia has a proud history of successful protest movements using civil disobedience. These have advanced the rights of workers, gender and sexual equality, indigenous rights and environmental protection. Many of our national parks today are the result of protest activity, which used devices of the kind prohibited under this law. Queensland Labor, which traces its origins to one such illegal protest (the 1891 shearers’ strike) should recognise this.

Similar laws attempted in Western Australia in 2015 drew extensive criticism from a number of human rights and advocacy groups, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who released a statement opposing the legislation for its attempts at ‘criminalising lawful protests and silencing environmentalists and human rights defenders’. It was later abandoned.

Protesting is a necessary mechanism for civic engagement and pressuring change when governments are no longer listening to their constituents. Civil

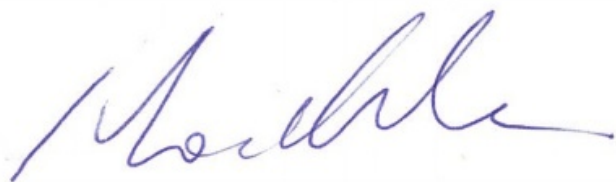
disobedience, including the actions this Bill targets, is an important form of protest. Most activists undertake such actions not to cause harm, but to raise necessary alarm, and signal that they do not consent to the status quo. The suggestion that the government should decide when people protest and what they should get to protest about is inconsistent with strong democratic protections.

The rise of peaceful protests about the climate crisis should be cause for the Queensland Government to review their climate policy, not demonise peaceful citizens that are speaking up for the majority of Australians and Queenslanders who want serious and urgent action on climate change.

I urge the committee to reject this Bill.

Sincerely

Dr Moira Williams

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Moira Williams', is written over a faint, light blue grid background.