

05/10/2019



Dear Members,

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

I am writing to you to express my deep concern and opposition to these new laws, which are disproportionate, overreaching, and appear to have no evidential basis.

I live in Stanthorpe, Queensland, which is currently suffering from the worst drought in living memory and also has recently faced the very real danger of an out of control bush fire. Australia already has an extreme climate and we cannot afford an increase in frequency and severity of these events, as we are warned of by a global consensus of scientists if we do not act immediately and decisively to eliminate greenhouse emissions. This is the reason there is a global movement of civil disobedience taking place to disrupt the continuation of business as usual and ensure a future for our children on our planet. Traditional permitted protest marches have been increasing also over the last 30 years because of this, however, these protests are easy for governments to ignore. Non Violent Direct Action is not so easy for governments and corporations to ignore. It has been a crucial tool for the successful protection of our environment for over 40 years in Australia

- 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 legislation in fact misrepresents the devices by including sinister-sounding terminology like “sleeping dragon” and “dragon’s den” which is not used by the activists themselves.
- If it was the case that activists were trying to use lock-on devices to injure police, that would already be illegal and the law has sufficient power to punish that.
- 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.
- To bring in superfluous laws, with limited evidential basis, to restrict protest is very dangerous. Not only does it erode our democracy, but it suppresses one of the vitally needed tools we have to address the climate crisis we are currently facing – something which, unlike lock-on devices, actually is a genuine threat to health and safety.

With my deepest concern,

Heather Simpson