

6 October 2019

From: Laura Portaro, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 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.

As a first generation Australian, I have a deep appreciation of the opportunities and freedoms afforded to the citizens of this country. The proposed laws will be a blight on our progressive way of life, and in direct conflict of life my family sought when they migrated to Australia after the Second World War.

Politics encroaching on the freedoms of citizens to protest and demonstrate compromises our rights and our egalitarian society. 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, and in fact, the Labour Party itself 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.

The bill is rudimentary and hyperbolic. It misrepresents the devices by including sinister-sounding terminology like "sleeping dragon" and "dragon's den" which is not used by the activists themselves. 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.

Clearly, 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.

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.

Sincerely

Laura Portaro

