



Speech by  
**Mr DENVER  
BEANLAND**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPIILLY**

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Hansard 6 August 1998

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS**

**Mr BEANLAND** (Indooroopilly—LP) (6.01 p.m.): I move—

"That consistent with the Premier's commitment to the Member for Nicklin dated 25 June 1998 in relation to Private Members' Bills, to allow adequate opportunity for their debate, that there be a new Sessional Order to enable a Bill introduced by a Member, who is not a Minister of the Crown and which has laid upon the Table of the House for a period exceeding 60 days and has not passed all stages, that Bill will be brought on for debate on the following sitting Wednesday evening.

The House will continue to sit on the following Wednesday and if the Bill has not been finalised, further consideration of the Bill will take precedence over Government business on subsequent sitting days until the Bill has been finalised.

On those Wednesdays the House will break for dinner between 7pm and 8.30pm with the adjournment being moved at 11pm followed by a 30-minute adjournment debate."

On 25 June this year, the Leader of the Opposition—now the Premier—gave a commitment to the member for Nicklin to ensure that Standing Orders allow adequate opportunities for all members of Parliament to move private members' Bills and have them debated. That is exactly what this motion seeks to do—nothing more and nothing less. It certainly does not seek to take over the Government's time and take away from the Government the ability to have a legislative program. Members on both sides of the House recognise that there must be time for the Government's legislative program.

However, there is also a need to ensure that, if we are going to have that commitment to private members' Bills, a procedure is put in place to have those private members' Bills debated. That is what this motion seeks to do. It proposes to put in place a sessional order to allow adequate opportunities for private members' Bills to be fully debated in this place.

This commitment to private members' Bills was recognised last week by this Parliament in the motion of confidence in the minority Labor Government, when the motion was amended to recognise commitments given by the new Government to the member for Nicklin. However, provisions for private members' Bills are useful only if these Bills can be brought on for debate. After a private member's Bill has been introduced and been allowed to lie on the table of the Parliament for a suitable period, there must be adequate time for debate to enable sufficient public scrutiny.

This Parliament comprises a far different cross-section of the community than has previously been the case throughout this century—certainly since 1915. The 89 members of this Parliament comprise two Independents, 11 One Nation members, 32 National/Liberal coalition members and 44 Labor Party members. Therefore, it is important that members have the opportunity to have their private members' Bills debated and a decision made on those Bills. It is not simply a matter of introducing a Bill and allowing it to lie on the table and sit on the Notice Paper. Taking into account the Government's legislative program, it is important to ensure that there is time within that program to adequately cater for this aspect of the parliamentary participation of all members who now make up what is a very different Parliament from what we have seen in the past.

If we simply set aside a certain period once a week when the House is sitting during which private members' Bills are debated—and that is what has been proposed by the Government, namely, two and a half hours on Wednesday nights during sittings—it is possible that one private member's Bill may take up the whole year or even a year and a half, which would mean that we do not get very far debating private members' Bills. That could easily happen if a majority of members wanted to speak to the second reading of those private members' Bills and wanted to participate at the Committee stages. We could easily face the difficult situation in which a Bill with a large number of clauses was debated by a large number of members.

There has already been discussion in the media that citizen initiated referenda Bills could be introduced. I imagine that a large number of members would want to speak to that sort of Bill, including the clauses. I can well understand that. However, with that type of Bill and that type of debate, 18 months or two years of sitting time on Wednesday evenings could be taken up by one Bill, whereas another very straightforward Bill might be processed, including a debate on the clauses, in one evening without many problems. So the type of Bill that comes into this place will dictate the type of debate and the length of the debate that is going to ensue.

If we are to set aside a particular period for debate on private members' Bills, there must be some kick-in provision. The Bill should not be allowed to sit on the Notice Paper for too long, because this would cause frustration to members on both sides of the Chamber. There may very well be Government backbenchers who want to make use of this particular provision and they, too, will feel frustrated if they do not get an opportunity to debate their private members' Bills.

When one looks at the proposed parliamentary sitting dates, one finds that we have the Budget coming up, Estimates committees and then three weeks of sittings. With the best will in the world, that does not allow much time this year for a great deal of debate on private members' Bills. We might get one Bill through, or perhaps none. If the debate was very quick, we might get two Bills through. But debate on one or maybe two private members' Bills could easily flow through filling up all of next year and, without too much exaggeration, spill over into the following year.

We have seen members debating Government legislation for many hours, week in and week out, without much difficulty. What we propose is very simple: if a private member's Bill has laid on the table for 60 days, that Bill will be brought on for debate for two and a half hours on the following sitting Wednesday evening; if the debate is still proceeding, it will be continued on the next Wednesday evening; and if the debate is still continuing after that, debate on the Bill will then take precedence over Government business. At that stage the Bill would have been debated for five hours. I would think that the vast majority of Bills would have been debated fully in that time. Nevertheless, there are other Bills—legislation in relation to citizens initiated referenda comes to mind—on which there might be a large number of speakers. The debate could go on for many, many weeks.

Of course, the current Standing Orders do allow for private members' Bills, but they have no provisions for debating those Bills. That has always been the problem in this place under the Standing Orders. There has been no problem moving private members' Bills, but those Bills have not been debated because the Standing Orders have provided no opportunity to debate them. The Government has control of the Standing Orders and control of this place. No-one is arguing about that. However, within the Government control of the legislative program, there should be adequate and appropriate time provided for private members' Bills to be debated.

The importance of this motion today is that the Leader of the Opposition has already brought into this place the first of the private members' Bills. Therefore, now that these Bills are being introduced, we believe that there is a need to put in place sessional orders to handle them. Were a motion along these lines not to be passed, that would indicate a lack of genuine commitment, because time will not be provided for appropriate debate of private members' Bills. I look forward to the support of the member for Nicklin on this issue. He has gone to great lengths to point out the importance of this matter and that he—as do the other Independent, the member for Gladstone, and the members of One Nation and the other members on this side of this House—wants to ensure that an appropriate period is set aside to allow adequate debate of private members' Bills.

Time expired.

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