



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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QUEENSLAND BUILDING SERVICES AUTHORITY AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (3.20 p.m.): Honourable members have made the points that are worth making, but I, too, in representing many subcontractors as well as building companies in the far north wish to add my several points. There is no more important legislation that will come before the House than the Queensland Building Services Authority Amendment Bill 1999. In a week when we have spent much time discussing the politics of perception and politics of some superficiality rather than substance, it is a fine thing that this afternoon members are conducting the business of the House in such an area of importance to people right around Queensland. Whilst I am proud that it is a Labor Government that is leading this legislation, I am also very pleased to grant recognition to all honourable members who have worked cooperatively with us in wishing to see these changes made so that we may have a better building industry.

Despite the extensive consultation that has occurred over a number of years that has enabled us to reach this position, it is amazing that so many parties, nonetheless, are pleased with the legislation. There are several, of course, who will not find it good enough, and that is to be expected. I want to give recognition to a fellow who is well known in the far north, namely Ron Crew, who has been a crusader for subcontractors. The support that he has given to subcontractors in times of strife is to be commended. However, he has given us only a grudging tick on the report card. He will not be satisfied until, he says, there is guaranteed security of payment. He is one-eyed, and understandably so. Neither he, subcontractors, nor anyone else in the private sector of our economy can be given guaranteed security of payment. It is a dream. It is not a reality.

This legislation goes a long way towards protecting subcontractors so long as they do the right thing, just as much as the building companies involved must do the right thing. The raft of changes is quite complex, but the parts on which I would like to comment in this debate concern the ways in which subcontractors, particularly, will need to do their business a little better than they have in the past.

In Cairns, I am aware of subcontractors who have tremendous skills in their own trades but who have often not been trained in business management. They have perhaps been motivated by the desperate need to get a job—get some work—and have taken on work for a price that is too low. Perhaps they have taken on work for a company that has not been prepared to sign a contract and may have made arrangements and variations which are not in black and white. They thereby put themselves and their families at risk.

I suppose the message to those people from this Bill is that that is not the kind of work that is worth having in the first place; that, instead, there need to be some basic standards for us all in the private sector in conducting business beyond our particular expertise. What this Bill is really saying to contractors, in the best possible way, is, "Of course, make sure you are licensed. Of course, make sure you have a contract in black and white. Of course, make sure variations are agreed in writing. Then, demand your payment assertively; require it on time and we, the Government, will support you."

I am pleased that the legislation attends to exempting shonks from the industry, ensures that companies have a sound financial basis, and ensures that the building industry in Queensland—from top to bottom—can hold its head high and regard the problems that have been recently apparent as being increasingly problems of the past.