



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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SUBCONTRACTORS' CHARGES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (4.24 p.m.): I rise in support of the Subcontractors' Charges Amendment Bill 2001. I believe that this bill enhances the Better Building Industry reforms already put in place by this government. These reforms have delivered unprecedented protection to subcontractors and improved service and certainty for consumers.

The next task for our government is to significantly reduce the confusion and difficulties surrounding subcontractors' charges. This bill should achieve that. This bill makes a number of important amendments that will advance the cause of security of payment for subcontractors. It will also aid the ease of interpretation of the act, which has been the subject of stringent criticism for its complexity and loopholes by the judiciary, legal profession and industry.

Members should be well aware that the Subcontractors' Charges Amendment Bill 2001 is the result of industry stakeholders representing contractors, subcontractors, legal specialists and government all working together to further improve security of payment within the building and construction industry. I agree with members who have mentioned that better education of subcontractors and others to assist them through these issues should be looked at and improved on over the years. We should never be too critical of subcontractors or others in the building industry. They have a trade and they know their job, but often they may not be able to run their business very well. With the changes to the tax system, we know all too well that they often have more paperwork than they can handle. They do need to be guided through many of the issues that they face.

All parties who have cause to use the act will benefit from this bill that will assist the judiciary and lawyers in interpreting the rights and obligations of the various parties to a claim of charge. Likewise, subcontractors, superior contractors and employers will have their rights and obligations made clearer to them under the act. Most importantly, subcontractors will be significant beneficiaries under the bill, with their rights clarified and their claims on moneys expanded to include securities.

The Sunshine Coast has a vibrant building industry and I have many good friends who, along with their dependent families, are reliant on the building industry. Subcontractors, suppliers and even developers proudly generate much business and prosperity not only on the Sunshine Coast but right across Queensland. It should be realised that, along with tourism, development and the building industry provide a huge benefit to many Queenslanders.

On 12 December last year I attended an information evening for the Sunshine Coast members of the QMBA. Obviously the Sunshine Coast Queensland Master Builders Association provided input. The information evening was held for members to receive information on what is happening in the industry at present. Aptly, it was held at the Homemakers Centre at Maroochydore.

The chairman of the Sunshine Coast division is Michael Crocker and the Sunshine Coast regional manager is Robert Dunbar. Both men have put a lot into the industry and they should be applauded for putting their own and the industry's points on many issues, both to me and no doubt to other members. I encourage them to continue to network through their industry, comparing issues and gaining access to this state government and, in fact, all levels of government.

Following the information evening, my office and I have been in constant contact with many of those present. I pledge to do everything I can to ensure that all Sunshine Coast residents have access to the Beattie Labor government and its ministers. The opinion of the people will be heard.

I wish also to mention Brendan Battersby LLB of Garland Waddington, well-respected solicitors and notaries on the Sunshine Coast. He was also present on that evening. I thank him for his advice on various matters, including this bill, and on other issues over numerous years.

As an electrician by trade, I know that those in the building industry are well aware of the serious issues they continually face. I have always said that members on this side of politics have an open door and we welcome suggestions on how we may be able to assist in addressing concerns relating to the building industry. To continue to be a prosperous and, indeed, a Smart State, it is pivotal that we assist those in this industry.

Recently, Minister Schwarten visited the Sunshine Coast, as the previous speaker mentioned, to meet with many of those affected by the collapse of a local group formerly known as Imagemaster. I apologise for not being able to attend the delegation due to the lateness of notification, but my office was contacted by many people who asked me to make it known that the deputation was appreciated. The previous speaker mentioned that all members from the Sunshine Coast would have had constituents affected by this collapse in their area. The minister and I both share a genuine concern for workers.

In conclusion—and I hope people take this in the right context—I wish to refer to a cartoon character who over the Christmas period received a bit of criticism, namely, Bob the Builder. Bob the Builder takes the attitude: can we fix it? Yes, we can. It is a very positive attitude that is mirrored by this government's can-do government attitude. Bob's show has various characters and appeals to my three-year-old son. I mention it because I cannot remember ever coming across other cartoon characters who represent the building trade well. Bob is a good role model. He reflects good workmanship and honesty—traits found in many people I know within the building industry. I hope he encourages young children to take an interest in gaining trade qualifications just as I, my father and my two uncles did.

Tradesmen and blue-collar workers will continue to assist in Queensland being the Smart State and will continue to build this great nation. It is all right to talk about universities, and I would never take anything away from those who can get a university or equivalent standard of education. However, we will always need apprentices and workers. The Irish always claim proudly that their nation built the world. I do not think there is a building site anywhere in the world without an Irishman on it. I thank the minister for his positive input into my electorate and into the issues on the Sunshine Coast that I have raised with him. I commend the bill to the House.