



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

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REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.04 pm): In rising to speak to this debate, I would like to note that we always support taxation reform where it has a sensible approach to recognising that people can be overtaxed and can burden businesses and the average person. Governments have a responsibility, as it balances the budget and seeks to provide essential services, to ensure that the taxation it collects is not onerous or detrimental to the community to which it is supposed to provide a service. However, in speaking to this legislation, it is appropriate that I note that this government is actually renegeing on earlier agreements in regard to time frames for the abolition of certain duties. A lot of members opposite vehemently opposed GST, but when the cash started to roll in they could not have been smiling more broadly. An example of that is the Premier himself.

This state has been one of the greatest beneficiaries of GST, yet the conditions of this state signing up to receive GST dollars was to reform its state based taxes and to abolish a raft of taxes. This legislation is going to remove some of those taxes but will do that very, very slowly. In fact, this legislation seeks to push out the time frame for the abolition of taxes that this government had agreed to abolish in exchange for GST dollars. Perhaps it should be renaming GST in regard to the way that this state government has taken the income. It is more of a take-the-cash-and-run approach to taxation because Queensland has benefited with a 70 per cent increase in revenues from GST since it started to receive those new income streams. It has been extremely beneficial for the revenue and the budget bottom line for Queensland. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the reform of other taxes has been very slow.

This bill covers a number of duties, such as mortgage duty and hire duty, which were agreed to be abolished by July 2006 as part of that agreement and taking the GST revenues in 1999. This bill puts in place the abolition of the higher duty from January 2007 and seeks to continue charging mortgage duty until 2008. Other states that have not been as lucky in the receipt or the size of GST revenues have actually moved far quicker in reforming some of those state based taxes to get GST revenue but, no, not Queensland. It has been a case of take the money and run and, unfortunately, has squandered the opportunity to invest a lot of those funding streams into the very needy areas of this state, such as infrastructure—and don't we see the results of that today!

The shadow Treasurer has an amendment to move in relation to this legislation because we are opposed to seeing these time lines pushed out. We believe that the agreement for abolishing these taxes must be timely. It should not be delayed. It should be in keeping with the commitment, spirit and intention of the original agreement, which was to move in regard to the abolition of state based taxes that have been mentioned.

I mention another aspect of this legislation that deals with amendments pertaining to the Auditor-General's role. I note that this legislation says that the Auditor-General is going to have the greater opportunity of auditing and scrutinising the performance of government agencies. Unfortunately, it does not go far enough.

This state opposition, the coalition, has been calling for some time for real performance auditing to be introduced. The crazy thing is that in this state a government can propose a budget, bring down a

budget, say what it is going to do, run over budget, misspend in a number of areas and still not essentially have the powers for the Auditor-General to scrutinise areas of poorly spent or overspend of budget because there is not a real performance auditing standard that has been provided. This legislation does not go far enough. It does not, in fact, bring in that greater accountability which has, in fact, been introduced in other jurisdictions in Queensland.

Earlier in my contribution I outlined how this government has been willing to take the money and run in regard to GST but has been very slow in regard to reforming the state based taxes and removing those it had agreed to remove and even slower in regard to providing the very necessary powers of scrutiny for the Auditor-General to ensure that the money that it has and it says it will spend is spent properly.

Today in Queensland the legacy of this government is a lack of timely infrastructure to meet totally expected population growth. This government acts as if population growth were some sort of surprise. I once again refer to library research which clearly shows that the population growth, not only in the state of Queensland as a whole but also south-east Queensland, was entirely predictable. It is a poor excuse for the government to say that it has failing infrastructure because it just did not know.

I flag to this House that the state coalition will certainly be pursuing the issue of accountability, how those moneys and those taxes that are collected from the people of Queensland are actually spent and the appropriateness of the infrastructure and other services upon which it is spent and how well it is spent. What a tragedy that we see money going into the police having to watch failed infrastructure out the front door of Parliament House instead of being out catching criminals because this government does not know how to manage its resources and the good infrastructure and services of Queensland.