



Speech by  
**Ted Malone**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2007

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## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (2.52 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill. Firstly, I want to congratulate the member for Clayfield and shadow minister for the excellent way in which he has gone through the technical detail of the bill.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr MALONE:** Quite frankly, without the comments from those up the back, it is easy to see that he is across the issues contained in the bill and certainly has a good handle on the technical aspects of the bill.

**Mr Lawlor:** Is it the mutual admiration society over there?

**A government member:** There's only two of them!

**Mr MALONE:** We can handle that. I will not speak for any length of time on the bill, but it is important to reflect on the history of workers compensation in Queensland. If we think back to the Goss years, obviously Kevin Rudd was involved—

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr MALONE:** Here we go! But it was during that time that we saw a situation under Matt Foley whereby the workers compensation system was something like \$320 million in debt, and it was almost impossible to get out of it without some very difficult intervention. I have to congratulate Jim Kennedy on the work that he did for the coalition during that time. We all threw our hands up in the air and wondered where we were going to go with it because, as everybody realises, workers compensation is a very important aspect of employment with regard to safeguarding our employees and employers in terms of generating business in Queensland. Quite frankly, it was just a hell of a mess and we were very fortunate to be able to turn it around at that time.

The workers compensation scheme in Queensland is in good condition as we understand at this time. I do not have the actuary's reports or Jim Kennedy's recent report—and I am not sure if they are available—but obviously, from the opposition's point of view, it is very difficult to make a real assessment of where workers compensation is right now. We have to take on board the comments of the minister. The shadow minister indicated that we are supporting the bill, because it certainly gives extremely good benefits to employees in the industry. However, it comes at a time in Queensland, particularly in my region, when the cost of doing business is extremely high. Even though there is a reasonably small reduction in premiums and Queensland has the cheapest workers compensation scheme in Australia—

**Mr Hinchliffe:** Hear, hear!

**Mr MALONE:** I am happy to acknowledge that interjection. However, Queensland is probably the most expensive place in Australia to do business. When a pensioner wants to get electrical wiring on their house repaired or there is a need to do some plumbing work on a building, we have to remember that part

of that cost—and it is really exorbitant—is workers compensation. It would have been nice for there to be more of a reduction in premiums but, all in all, the opposition is very supportive of the bill.

As I said earlier with regard to my electorate, most areas in Queensland are in boom times. In terms of the actuary's report and the reasons for increasing the benefits, as the shadow minister indicated we have to take into account the fact that the return rate currently being enjoyed by superannuation funds is high and we are locking a return rate of seven per cent, eight per cent, nine per cent, 10 per cent and possibly even more than that in to future estimates. I have some real concerns that in the future that may not be achievable and that may lead us back into a situation we had previously. It has to be said—and we would all acknowledge this, even those opposite—that Labor has had a bad record of dealing with money, one way or the other. The workers compensation scheme in Queensland is one example. Federally, Labor left \$98 billion of debt when it walked away from government.

I take on board the second reading speech of the minister and the notes that have been provided. I accept that the scheme is healthy and that we can afford the benefits that are being proposed. Jim Kennedy did an excellent job for the coalition when he did his first report, and I am sure that he has done a similar job in respect of this report for the government. I do not want to speak at any great length on the bill, other than to say that it is a very important part of employment in Queensland not only for employers and employees but also for all Queenslanders who rely on service people to do work in their homes or places of business. With the mining boom, Queensland currently has a huge service industry, and the cost of workers compensation is certainly a tangible part of the cost of employment. I support the bill.