



Speech by  
**Simon Finn**

**MEMBER FOR YEERONGPILLY**

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## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

**Mr FINN** (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (12.24 pm): The year 2009 has been a year of delivery and achievement for the government's Industrial Relations portfolio. Along with a huge national industrial relations agenda, this year we have seen advancements in workplace health and safety, solid management of public sector wages enterprise bargaining delivering real wage growth, and very low levels of industrial disputation.

The Rudd government's national industrial relations agenda has been driving reform of Australia's industrial landscape and rebuilding harmony and balance after the divisive ideological approach of the previous LNP government. Last sitting week this House passed legislation to refer Queensland's private sector employees to the federal industrial system and delivered on a key plank of the Rudd government's election commitment providing for a stable national system and bringing certainty to employees and employers alike.

I was surprised by the LNP opposition to this legislation to deliver a stable national system, which is supported strongly by business and employer groups including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Mines and Metals Association. I accept that there have been concerns about issues of states' rights, and that is why this has been at the heart of negotiations between the states and the Commonwealth. That is why the intergovernmental agreement requires two-thirds support by the referring states for Commonwealth amendments affecting the referral—a change to the original draft that was led by the Queensland minister at the Workplace Relations Ministers Council.

Protecting Queensland workers and upholding states' rights is also at the base of the Queensland legislation that enables a withdrawal of the referral should the federal government introduce industrial laws contrary to the agreed National Employment Standards. This is a protection against a future Work Choices and may be the real reason the LNP opposed the Queensland legislation.

Now we see the LNP in the Senate threatening to block the federal legislation that implements the new system. This threat can only be an attempt to stop the creation of a stable and balanced system. The Deputy Prime Minister has written to the federal LNP opposition outlining the significant consequences of the Senate blocking the passage of the legislation. I table the letter in the House.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of a letter, undated, from the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, to Mr Michael Keenan MP regarding the national workplace relations system [[1466](#)].

These consequences include causing state referring legislation to lapse; delaying the commencement of the national system causing confusion and uncertainty for business and small business and jurisdictional limbo for many employees; and wastage of public funds expended in developing and enacting referring legislation, conservatively estimated by the Commonwealth to be in excess of \$5 million nationally.

Additionally, LNP blockage of the legislation and a resultant lapse of state referrals and failure of the national system will see employers in the pastoral industry currently covered by transitional awards facing a return to state awards across Australia. That is why the National Farmers Federation has strongly urged

that the legislation be passed without amendment or delay and, if for no other reason, why the National Party members here in Queensland, if they are true to their heartland and truly believe in preserving states' rights, should be contacting their senators and urging them to pass the legislation.

The Queensland government has taken a leading role to protect the interests of workers and Queensland in negotiations over IR referral. We have strengthened the state's power to block future amendments affecting referral; we have preserved Queensland's unique apprenticeship and training systems; we have retained local government workers in the Queensland system as part of the public-private sectoral coverage; we have protected superior worker entitlements awarded through Queensland pay equity cases; and we have brought legislation through this House enabling the referral to be withdrawn.

The LNP blockage of the federal legislation is out of touch with the Australian electorate that voted so strongly against the divisive Howard government's Work Choices in favour of a stable national system. It is out of touch with business and employers and denies the essential state protections guaranteed in the Queensland and federal legislation.

This leadership role in negotiating IR referral reflects a year of achievement and reform for industrial relations in Queensland including implementation of Zero Harm at Work programs; implementation of safety standards for swing stage scaffolding; employment of additional electrical safety inspectors; implementation of strategies targeting health issues in the construction industry and other outdoor workers; implementation of Clean Start conditions bringing improved employment conditions for cleaners in government buildings; successful conclusion of public sector enterprise bargaining delivering real wage growth and job security for public sector employees during the global financial crisis; initiating a task force to improve conditions for workers in the contract traffic control Industry; and reducing the average time to decide a WorkCover claim to five days, down from 7.2 days last year, enabling injured workers to return to work sooner. This government is committed to protecting the safety and working conditions of all Queensland workers.