



Speech by

Steve Wettenhall

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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TRADE MEASUREMENT LEGISLATION REPEAL BILL

Mr WETTENHALL (Barron River—ALP) (8.37 pm): I rise to speak in favour of the Trade Measurement Legislation Repeal Bill 2009. I begin my comments by congratulating the minister for bringing this important and interesting legislation before the House tonight.

One of the key parts of this bill is the way in which it safeguards Queensland's interests. A major review of the national arrangements for the administration of trade measurement has informed the government's commitment to the nationally agreed reforms. Queensland officials have been extensively involved throughout the review, including providing input to the preparation of a public discussion paper and a regulatory impact statement. The review found that all stakeholder groups experienced fundamental problems with the current administrative arrangements. These include legislative differences across jurisdictions, different approaches to compliance and enforcement, a lack of a national policy focus and multiple licensing systems. These problems have a significant impact on Queensland traders operating in the national market.

The subsequent COAG agreement to establish a single national system of trade measurement, funded and administered by the government, is regarded as the best way to overcome the problems in the system. Ongoing input by Queensland officials is ensuring that the state's interests, including those of Queensland trade measurement employees, business and the community, are being fully addressed during development of the new regime.

Queensland government officials are members of the national transition forum, which is facilitating ongoing consultation between the states and the Commonwealth on all aspects of the transition to the national regime. Queensland officials are also represented on nine working groups, providing consultation on specific areas of trade measurement. They are: the Business Processes Working Group, which is addressing IT based systems; the Communication Working Group; the Human Resources Working Group; the Inspectorate and Compliance Working Group; the Laboratories Working Group; the Legislation Working Group; the Licensing Working Group; the Property and Assets Working Group; and the Training and Competency Recognition Working Group. Senior Queensland Treasury officials are members of the COAG Business Regulation and Competition Working Group, which is monitoring implementation in accordance with the agreement.

I am pleased to see that the national agreement also includes a Commonwealth commitment to maintaining the same level and standard of trade measurement services as are now currently provided by the states and territories. The Queensland trade measurement branch is highly respected for its professionalism and expertise and, like so many other areas, is regarded as the leader in the national arena. I am also pleased to see that arrangements are being made to ensure that existing staff will not be disadvantaged by the move to a national regime. The Commonwealth has offered positions to all trade measurement staff for employment in similar roles and locations with similar salary scales. Protecting this important resource will help to safeguard the interests of our community.

I want to conclude by briefly sketching some of the benefits of these trade measurement reforms. Perhaps this is not something we think about every day as we go about our daily business, but since this

legislation was first discussed it has been something that I have given a lot of thought to because trade measurement plays a vital role in our community, providing a legal framework that ensures weights and measures used in trade are accurate—in other words, ensuring that we get what we pay for. Its economic value in Australia is estimated to be \$400 billion per year.

A sound system of trade measurement is vital to fair competition and the protection of producers and suppliers trading raw materials and manufactured components as well as products. Seventy-five per cent of trade measurement transactions—that is, where goods are sold by a reference to weight or other measurement—are business to business transactions. This bill will progress the government's commitment to nationally agreed reforms to the administration of trade measurement.

As I mentioned before, these reforms are the result of a comprehensive review commissioned by COAG, culminating in an agreement by all Australian jurisdictions at the April 2007 meeting of COAG to establish a national system. For many years, the states and territories have administered trade measurement law in Australia, but the review that has been undertaken has shown that all stakeholders experience fundamental problems with the cross jurisdictional administrative arrangements that I mentioned before.

New national law passed in December 2008 has adopted the state and territory trade measurement law. Building on the uniform trade measurement law currently administered by states and territories, it will provide for a consistent approach to enforcement across Australia starting on 1 July 2010. Businesses trading goods across borders will be able to simplify their compliance practices as they will be subject to one set of rules and will be dealing with only one regulator. Also, where goods are traded overseas by reference to measurement, a uniform approach to regulation will enhance Australia's international reputation. This is particularly important with Australia being a major supplier of bulk goods such as coal, wheat and sugar.

Organisations that are licensed to verify the performance of trade measuring instruments will also comply with only one set of national requirements, and their workforces will be trained to one national competency standard, thus allowing for the national deployment of staff. Where there are charges for trade measurement services provided by government, they will be uniform, removing current inequities for businesses in different states. A single national regulator will be able to provide a framework for consistent and timely adoption of new technologies and processes by industry. It will provide a single technically sound, policy platform on which to enter into international agreements.

I am sure all members will be pleased to hear that, based on data supplied by the states and territories, the Commonwealth will set aside \$24 million per annum to fund ongoing national trade measurement operations. Central administration of trade measurement will be a win-win outcome for businesses, consumers and government. It enables the development of consistent and timely policies affecting the adoption of new technologies and processes used by industry. Many producers, agents and carriers rely on trade measurement and operate in the national market. Compliance with a single set of rules is expected to result in cost reductions and efficiency gains, particularly for businesses trading goods across borders. These benefits will flow on to the wider community. I commend the bill to the House.