



Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Thursday, 17 May 2012

**PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT
BILL**

Mr BYRNE (Rockhampton—ALP) (10.41 pm): I rise to speak to the Parliament of Queensland and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2012. This is my first day in parliament and I have found it quite a revelation to witness the debate in this House this afternoon and this evening. If anybody here had bothered to listen to what I said and to what other members have said in their maiden speeches—

A government member interjected.

Ms TRAD: I rise to a point of order. I find the comments made by the Premier offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I did not specifically hear the comments. I was listening to the member for Rockhampton.

Ms TRAD: He said—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! However, the member has asked that the comment be withdrawn. I never heard where it specifically came from.

Ms TRAD: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. A number of people on this side of the House heard it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member will take his seat for a moment, please.

Mr BLEIJIE: I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will deal with this point of order first. I was listening to the member for Rockhampton. I did not hear specific comments nor where they came from on this side. I have asked for it to be withdrawn, but I do not know the individual who made the comments.

Ms TRAD: I named him.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I did not hear specifically who it was, so I allow the member for Rockhampton to continue. But should I hear a specific comment from someone, I will ask them to withdraw the comment. There is another point of order.

Mr BLEIJIE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I was watching the honourable member for South Brisbane. The honourable member did not hear the comment. It was from a third party. So how on earth can the member find a comment offensive when she did not hear it?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is a point of view, not a point of order.

Mr BYRNE: As I said, today is my first day of witnessing the parliament in play. If anybody had bothered to listen to my maiden speech and to the speeches of many other members of this parliament,

they would have been horrified by what they have seen here this evening. So far the behaviour in this House is back to the worst days of the last parliament.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr BYRNE: This is an example of what I am talking about. How members are supposed to convince the community that this House represents anything adult and civilised is beyond me. It is like we are a room full of jackals carrying on. I ask members to exercise some judgement in these matters.

Mr STEVENS: I rise to a point of order. There is no relevance to the bill that is before the House in what the member is talking about. I would ask that he return to commenting on the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Rockhampton to address the bill, and I am sure he was coming to that.

Mr BYRNE: I certainly am. So far in the debate this evening the member for Gladstone has probably been the most sensible in terms of some of the things that I have heard. There is certainly an amount of agreement, and this debate seems to be around a number things that are on the margins. When I look at the bill itself and at its various parts, I do not see that the great majority of it is in direct contest. It seems to me to be an argument about the numbers on the committees themselves. If we want to put it all down to one issue, we are looking at a committee structure that has an overwhelming majority of government members. Whether the membership is principled or otherwise, the look and perception is one of a stack. On that basis and based on the behaviour that we see evident in this House itself, the notion of bipartisan, sensible, adult conduct in those committees cannot be assumed.

I urge the House to take considerable caution in relation to supporting this bill in its current form. The reality is that we, as the opposition, suggest that the stack is on, that the committees will be compromised and that the notion of bipartisanship will not be evident, as we see witnessed in this chamber today and this evening. I think the member for Gladstone made the point very succinctly. That is the key issue that I have an objection to. That is why I will not be supporting this bill. As far as I am concerned, if it looks like a stack, it is a stack.

I have 10 minutes of quotes from senior members of the government who are on the record supporting the committee system as it was introduced last year. From what I have heard, no-one in this chamber is contesting that. Also, from what I have heard no-one is contesting the reinvigorated role for the Speaker. So to me, essentially, in simple terms the issue comes down to a stack in the committees. I do not understand why the government insists on making the membership eight members and not five. If we are talking about efficiency in the work of the committees, we could achieve the same outcomes far more dynamically with three government members and two non-government members. Why have eight members? Why is there such an overwhelming stack in these committees? Why is that message being put out into the community? It can only be what it is. If it looks like a duck and it quacks, it is a duck. That is the reality.

I think the member for Gladstone is quite right. Out of this structure we will see an overwhelming increase in the number of dissenting reports. Sure, this bill will go to a vote in due course. Sure, the bill will go through. Sure, it will be a victory as such from the government's perspective. But the real measure will be how these committees operate, and from the attitudes I have seen in this chamber today, I can only see this thing ending in tears for all. I could read another 10 minutes of quotes of the views of senior government members, but that is not going to change the dynamic. I would encourage those in the government across the chamber to look at this bill and ask, 'Why are we going for eight members on these committees?' It is not about workload. As anybody who has worked on a committee of any substance would know, having more members is more difficult. If we have five members on the committees the ratios can be retained, we can still do the same work and we can get an outcome.