




Speech by

Michael Crandon

MEMBER FOR COOMERA

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (FAIR WORK ACT HARMONISATION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (4.25 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Industrial Relations (Fair Work Act Harmonisation) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. As committee chair, I will spend some time informing the House of the process the committee undertook in providing an opportunity to witnesses to properly inform the committee of their respective positions and views. I will leave it to others in this place to debate the various aspects of the bill.

Following referral of the bill, we acted quickly in calling for written submissions and used an extensive database in this action. The committee received a total of 14 submissions, and I refer members to appendix A of the committee's report, report No. 14. I will not go through them all, but some of those organisations who were able to provide submissions to the committee in just a few days included the Queensland Nurses Union, the United Firefighters Union of Australia, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland, Together, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, United Voice Queensland, the Australian Workers Union and others. There was quite a significant response in the time frame that was given. All of those submissions were then carefully considered by the committee.

Further, we called for witnesses to attend a public hearing on Wednesday, 30 May 2012. I refer members to appendix B of the report for a list of those who attended that public hearing. I will read from the list of attendees. Although it is not numbered, it would appear that in the order of 14 people attended the public hearing. Attendees included such people as Ms Thalia Edmonds, Industrial Advocate, Queensland Teachers Union; Mr John Oliver, State Secretary, United Firefighters Union of Australia; Mr Nick Behrens, General Manager, Advocacy, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland; Mr Ron Monaghan, General Secretary, Queensland Council of Unions; and the list goes on. So once again there was a significant range of witnesses who attended the meeting that was called by the committee to take witness statements.

The committee also had officers of the department attend a public hearing on that same day. We had four members of the department attend: Dr Simon Blackwood, Deputy Director-General, Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General; Mr Tony James, Executive Director, Private Sector Industrial Relations, Department of Justice and Attorney-General; Mr Michael Anderson, Manager, Industrial and Employee Relations, Public Service Commission; and Ms Candice Jacobs, Senior Policy Officer, Private Sector Industrial Relations, Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

The purpose of the departmental officers attending was for the committee to take the opportunity to, if you like, ask them questions that were raised not only during the written submission stage by various organisations. We timed the departmental briefing to occur after the public hearing to give us an opportunity to consider the witness statements from those who attended that public hearing and then ask the department questions to help us to fully understand the ramifications. That was a very important aspect

of the whole process. The timing of that was very important and it certainly worked very well for the committee.

Appendix C outlines the witnesses at the public hearing, as I just read out. Having taken full account of all the written submissions and witness statements, the committee discussed and developed the report. This was done over the next few days in the full knowledge that Friday, 1 June was the deadline for the committee to table the report. I am happy to say that the deadline was met and we did manage to table the report. I will provide a little more information as to how that came about.

I make the following points regarding the process. I suppose to this end I am somewhat refuting some of the comments that have been made by the opposition in relation to the time frame. Opposition members as well as the Leader of the Opposition had unfettered access and unrestricted opportunity to ask questions of all witnesses in those two public hearings. I believe they availed themselves well of those opportunities. As the chair of the committee, I certainly worked hard to ensure that opposition members had more than adequate opportunity to ask whatever questions they wanted of all of the witnesses during the process, as was the case for the other members of the committee.

Throughout the process the committee resolved to put four recommendations as well as an overview of the issues raised by each of the submitters and witnesses into the report mentioned above. I note that the opposition members lodged a dissenting report which indicates that there was insufficient time to consider the legislation. I refute that assertion. Although the time frame was tight—there is no doubt it was tight—there was adequate time for witnesses to prepare full submissions, as is evidenced by the report and the number of submissions provided to the committee. There was certainly adequate time to pull their troops together to attend a public hearing and to provide us with a response to our questions, having absorbed what we had received from them in the written responses to our request.

So we have taken the responses that we called for from the various groups—unions and associations. We went through them with a fine tooth comb. We considered the contents of them. We asked various questions as a result of those submissions. We have sought clarification from the various witnesses that were in attendance. Following that we went back to the department at a further meeting and asked for further clarification and put other questions to the department to ensure that the committee had a full understanding of the position of all of those.

It is an industrial relations bill. Let us face it, it is going to be contentious. We are not going to have everyone coming along as happy as Larry with big smiles on their faces, shaking hands and saying, 'All of this looks hunky-dory, let's go forward together.' But the point is this: the opportunity was there. We took the opportunity to ask the tough questions. We gave opposition members, including the Leader of the Opposition, the unfettered opportunity to ask any questions. All of those questions were asked and taken into consideration in the development of our report.

As a result of developing that report, we then came to four recommendations, as I mentioned a moment ago. I thank the Attorney-General for taking the time to outline his response to those four recommendations. I note that he was overjoyed to accept the first recommendation—the first recommendation being that the bill be passed by the House. He seemed very happy with that recommendation. I believe he gave a full and honest response to recommendation 2, which states—

The committee recommends that the bill be amended to include transitional arrangements ensuring that all processes which have already commenced be concluded under the previous arrangements.

I believe that in citing various aspects of the act he has given a full response to the reasons why he has not accepted that recommendation. Recommendation 3, I am pleased to note, has been accepted by the Attorney-General. It will be included in the act in an amendment that will be put forward. In so doing, I think it really shows us that the committee system is an important part of the process that we go through as legislators in this state. The fourth recommendation states—

The committee recommends that the bill be amended to allow for additional ballot methods if the ECQ considers these other methods to be appropriate.

I take on board the Attorney-General's comments that he does not want to cause confusion in the marketplace under the current situation but that he will have another look at that particular aspect if an electronic voting system is developed by the ECQ at some time in the future.

It is pleasing to see that the opposition agrees that the committee system works. That was another comment by the opposition leader. I read into those comments that the opposition agrees that the committee system is a valuable tool for this parliament to scrutinise legislation with a view to improving its usability by the wider community. When this new committee system was introduced last year—I think it came into effect on 1 July—I was well and truly on board. There was bipartisan agreement right across the House at a time when Labor was in the majority, but we all agreed that this new committee system was essential to allow future parliaments to properly scrutinise legislation, to properly take the opportunity to put the legislation out to the marketplace, out to the people of Queensland for comment and to then bring it back so that adjustments and changes could be made in a timely fashion, as has been done.

In closing, I thank my parliamentary colleagues for their efforts in committee. I look forward to their contributions today in debating this bill. It is a great opportunity, with the in-depth understanding they now have of this particular bill, because they have been thrown in at the deep end to come to grips with it in no short order. I look forward to their insightful views on the bill.

Most importantly, I would like to thank the Finance and Administration Committee's secretariat, in particular—and I know she will be embarrassed—Deborah Jeffrey, the research director, for their hard work in pulling together this report. I know that some of my committee lay awake on Thursday night waiting with bated breath for the draft of the report to come through. I know because I was one of those people and I received an email from Reg at about 2.15 in the morning saying, 'I agree with all of these recommendations.' So he was keen and I was certainly keen. I managed to read the draft report over the next four hours, having little naps in between. The point is that we managed to get it together and pull it together, and at nine o'clock on Friday morning we had a teleconference meeting where we agreed on all of the pages with some slight amendments for typographical errors and what have you, and the report was printed and presented to the parliament on Friday afternoon. I commend the bill to the House.