



Speech by

**Michael Hart**

**MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH**

Hansard Thursday, 2 August 2012

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## **CRIMINAL LAW (FALSE EVIDENCE BEFORE PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (11.22 am): I rise today to speak on the Criminal Law (False Evidence Before Parliament) Amendment Bill 2012. The aim of this bill is to amend the Criminal Code to reintroduce the repealed section 57, 'False evidence before parliament', with amendment, to make it an offence to knowingly give false evidence to the parliament or its committees. The reputation of parliament and its MPs has suffered over the last 20 years. Politicians, unfortunately, are now seen like car salesmen, and I must apologise to car salesmen for the comparison. We are also compared to snake oil salesmen, and we all remember those people from years ago. Unfortunately, we are perceived as being dishonest and that is something we are seeing regularly come through in the newspapers and the SMS sections of our papers. There is a perception that politicians are overpaid, underworked and, in some fashion, dishonest. That is a real shame for our schoolchildren who come through parliament because they look down on us in here and they go away wondering whether we are telling the truth and think that maybe we are not. That is something we really have to tackle, and I think this bill puts us back where we should be. Bills like the one that were introduced by the Labor Party in 2006 have added to that perception.

The public expects more from its members and its representatives as far as accountability goes. The Queensland community expects its parliamentarians to act responsibly and with the highest integrity. It is a special privilege to be a member of parliament and that comes with responsibilities, including honesty, integrity and hard work. As I said before, in politics I think perception is everything and politicians are perceived at the moment as being dishonest. For over a century, Queensland was the only state in Australia that had a safeguard, small as it was, against members in parliament telling lies. It was little known and little used, but it was section 57 of the Criminal Code. As I said, it was little known and little used but it was there as a much needed deterrent. Section 57 provided for a possible seven years in jail for any member of parliament or indeed any person who told lies before a committee or the parliament.

In 2006 the Labor government were thrown into panic—absolute panic—by the possibility of one of their own members ending up behind bars, and we all know where that particular member ended up. So what did they do? Did they let due process take place? No, they did not. They recalled parliament, as we have heard other members tell us during this debate, and they firstly judged the minister themselves before introducing legislation into this place that made it okay for members of parliament to lie. As we have heard from the speeches by members now, the Labor government at the time hid this legislation—that is, the abolishment of section 57 of the Criminal Code—behind the fantastic news and the media frenzy surrounding the eventual release of the Beaconsfield miners. By doing this, the Labor government legalised lying to parliament and once again reinforced that very important public perception of politicians being dishonest.

Is this how the MPs in this place want to be perceived? I know that is not the way I want to be perceived, and it is not the way I want the children who live and go to schools in my electorate to perceive me as their member. I doubt whether any member in this place would like to be perceived that way. I congratulate the Attorney-General on bringing this before parliament as quickly as he has in response to

our election promise to do exactly that. I congratulate the previous leaders of the opposition who tried with their private members' bills to have this section reinstated.

I looked through *Hansard* to put together my speech for today to see exactly what happened in 2006 with regard to the bill and the voting sequence on it. I do not think anybody here would be surprised to know that, of the five members of the then Labor government who spoke in support of this bill, four of them retired and one lost his seat at the last election. The member for Kurwongbah, who was the minister for justice and Attorney-General at the time, moved this piece of legislation, and she has now retired. The Hon. Rob Swarten, the member for Rockhampton, retired. Dean Wells, the member for Murrumba, lost his seat and we now have a wonderful new member for Murrumba. The Hon. Peter Beattie, the former Premier of the state, retired. And Terri O'Sullivan, the member for Stafford, retired, surprisingly enough. All of these members obviously did not plan to stay in parliament very long so they did not mind getting up and speaking about this particular piece of legislation because they knew it was a piece of rubbish.

On the other side of the chamber, honourable members of the opposition stood up and spoke against this piece of rubbish legislation. We had the honourable member for Southern Downs, the honourable member for Currumbin, the honourable member for Gladstone, the honourable member for Warrego, the honourable member for Moggill, the honourable member for Callide, the honourable member for Burdekin, the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, the honourable member for Nicklin, the honourable member for Gregory, the honourable member for Gaven, the honourable member for Mirani and the honourable member for Darling Downs. If you add those people up, you realise that a few more members spoke against it than in favour of it. We also heard the member for Currumbin speak very passionately on this issue yesterday.

On 24 March the people of Queensland had the opportunity to look at our members and see which way they voted on particular pieces of legislation and then judge accordingly. If we look at who in the 51st Parliament actually voted in favour of this piece of legislation we see that on Friday, 26 May the former member for Mount Ommaney spoke in favour of it. Where is she now? She lost her seat. The people of Queensland voted against her. The former member for Capalaba voted in favour of this particular piece of legislation. He lost his seat and we now have a wonderful new member for Capalaba. The former member for Broadwater voted in favour of this particular piece of legislation and we have a new member for Broadwater. Can honourable members see where I am going with this?

**Ms PALASZCZUK:** I rise to a point of order. We are discussing the Criminal Law (False Evidence Before Parliament) Amendment Bill. The member just said that the former member for Mount Ommaney lost her seat. The former member for Mount Ommaney did not run at the last election. He may want to correct the record.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Dr Robinson): Order! I am listening—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Members will cease interjecting. I am listening to the member and I would ask that the member focus his comments on the bill.

**Mr HART:** Certainly, and I would like to correct the record in that fashion if I could. Let us focus on the members who are sitting opposite now. We see five members over there who voted in favour of this piece of legislation: the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Manager of Opposition Business, the member for Woodridge and the member for Bundamba. I say shame on them for voting in favour of that particular piece of legislation.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Those on my left will cease interjecting. The member has the call.

**Mr HART:** I say shame on them for voting in favour of that particular piece of trashy legislation that allowed members of parliament to dishonestly represent themselves in this place. This bill implements the Liberal National Party's pre-election commitment to introduce amendments to make it illegal to lie to the parliament. I commend the bill to the House.