




Speech by

Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2012

HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.20 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate. In the great state of Queensland, we enjoy the majority of our public holidays in the first half of the calendar year, predominantly around April and May. Those public holidays include the important and sacred Anzac Day, the Christian holiday for Easter and the acknowledged Labour Day holiday. The amendments proposed in the bill reverse the previous government's decision to move the Queen's Birthday public holiday from the second Monday in June to the first Monday in October and, instead, move Labour Day from May to this date.

The decision to keep the Queen's Birthday public holiday is consistent with all other states and territories, with the exception of Western Australia. The Queen's official birthday is the selected day on which the birthday of the monarch of the Commonwealth, currently Queen Elizabeth II, is officially celebrated. The sovereign's birthday was first officially marked in the United Kingdom in 1748. Since then, the date of the King's or the Queen's birthday has been determined throughout the British Empire and later the Commonwealth according to either different royal proclamations issued by the sovereign or governor, or statute laws passed by the local parliament. The exact date of the celebration varies from country to country and, except for coincidence, does not fall on the date of the monarch's actual birthday. In the case of the present monarch, that date is 21 April 1926.

The changes to the Queensland public holiday schedule will come into effect in 2013. Moving the Labour Day public holiday to October will break up the concentration of public holidays that generally fall in the April-May period and provide a break to workers during the second half of the year, because of a more even spread of public holidays. The October date falls almost halfway between the dates of the Brisbane RNA holiday and Christmas Day. Therefore, moving Labour Day to the October date would result in a very even spread of the three public holidays between Anzac Day and Christmas, with seven weeks to the Queen's Birthday, nine weeks to the Brisbane RNA Show holiday, six and a half weeks to Labour Day and 11 and nine and a half weeks to Christmas. In Queensland, the Labour Day public holiday now will be at the same time as it is in New South Wales, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. A review of the 2011 amendment to the Holiday Act 1983 found that most people were in favour of Labour Day being moved to the latter part of the year instead of the Queen's Birthday public holiday. In the review, 95 per cent of the respondents supported the move of the public holiday to the second half of the year.

The reinstatement of the Queen's Birthday public holiday to June will boost tourism at a traditionally quiet time of year. Having the Queen's Birthday long weekend in early June makes sense from a tourism perspective as it will encourage people to make the most of the extra day. This supports the government's objective of boosting one of our four pillars of the economy, tourism, which is very important to my electorate. This change should result in little, if any, additional costs to businesses in relation to penalty rates or paid days off, as the number of public holidays per year has not increased. It is simply changing the time of year during which Labour Day is observed.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry has welcomed and supported the state government in creating a more even spread of public holidays. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland is also supportive of the national consistency in regard to public holidays to ensure minimal disruption to

Queensland businesses, particularly for those who operate across the state and territory borders. Ultimately, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland takes the view that the economy and jobs should take precedence over the timing of a specific public holiday.

Previously, unions have argued that Labour Day should remain on the traditional day as Queensland's first Labour Day was held on 1 May 1891 in Barcaldine. The first Labour Day parade in Australia was held in Barcoo in the state's west, when striking shearers gathered under the Tree of Knowledge in 1891. The Queensland Council of Unions President, John Battams, has labelled the government's changes as 'petty', saying that in Queensland Labour Day has been celebrated on that day for more than a century. I feel that, unfortunately, unlike those opposite and the unions, few people recall what this day is about. While most of us enjoy the statutory holiday and miss work or school, few are even aware, much less remember, the importance of rituals and traditions associated with this event. In Queensland, the traditions began with the shearers' strike, which was one of Australia's earliest industrial disputes. The dispute was primarily between union and non-union workers. It resulted in the formation of a large camp of striking workers and there were minor incidents of sabotage and violence on both sides. The strike was poorly timed and when union workers ran out of food they were forced to come to terms. The outcome is credited as being one of the factors in the formation of the Labor Party.

Labour Day commemorates the achievements of the Australian labour movement. The celebration of Labour Day has its origins in the eight-hour day, as spoken about here today, which advocates eight hours of work, eight hours of recreation and eight hours of rest. In 1856, stonemasons and building workers on building sites in Melbourne stopped work and marched from the University of Melbourne to Parliament House to achieve an eight-hour day. Their direct action protest was a success and they are noted as the first organised workers in the world to achieve an eight-hour day with no loss of pay, which subsequently inspired the celebration of Labour Day and May Day. With all that said, I congratulate the minister on the legislation, I congratulate my colleagues who have spoken on the legislation and I commend the bill to the House.