



Speech By
Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (MANDATORY CODE OF PRACTICE FOR
OUTWORKERS) REPEAL NOTICE: DISALLOWANCE MOTION**



Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (7.30 pm): I move—

That the Industrial Relations (Mandatory Code of Practice for Outworkers) Repeal Notice 2012, subordinate legislation No. 193 of 2012, tabled in the House on 13 November 2012 be disallowed.

I am proud to speak tonight to stand up for some of the most vulnerable and at-risk workers in Queensland. On behalf of the Labor opposition I am seeking to disallow the government's regulatory change to abandon the code of practice for outworkers. This government has a shameful record on jobs and workers' rights. We have seen the attacks on the independent umpire, the QIRC; we have seen moves to make it harder for people to join unions, destroying employment security for government workers; massive outsourcing across government services, including health; not to mention the sacking of more than 14,000 hardworking Queenslanders.

Mr Choat: You're still pushing that nonsense.

Mr Bleijie: What's this got to do with this?

Ms PALASZCZUK: But not only are the LNP making life harder for their own employees, they are also attacking the rights and working conditions of workers in the private sector.

Mr Choat: Rubbish!

Ms PALASZCZUK: Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Bleijie: But what you're saying's not true.

Ms PALASZCZUK: If you want to speak in the debate you are more than welcome to stand up and speak in the debate.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Watts): Order! You will address your comments through the chair. I didn't hear where it came from, I'm sorry.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In government Labor worked with the textile union workers' representatives, FairWear Australia coalition and business and industry representatives to deliver an outworkers industry code to protect workers in our community. The code of practice was introduced to help protect some of the most vulnerable workers in Queensland: outworkers in the clothing and textile industry. It covers people who work at home producing textiles, clothing, footwear and related products. Historically there have been many cases of abuse and exploitation in this industry and that has not been highly regulated in the past. The core of the code of conduct is to have transparency in the supply chain so that business and consumers can have confidence that products being sold were not produced through the exploitation of workers. It operated to use market factors by introducing transparency and increasing business and consumer knowledge about the products they are purchasing.

The Labor government started a review of the code whilst in government to ensure it was implemented effectively. Let us make it clear that the purpose was to continue the protection of outworkers and maintain the code with analysis of how it was being implemented. Despite the serious

issues this code addressed and the importance of protecting their conditions, this government, without a word of justification, has stripped workers of this protection. There was no word of it prior to the election. In fact, the LNP, and the now Attorney-General I believe, did not even at the time oppose the code when it was introduced in the last parliament. Why is the position of the government so offensive? I believe that attacking the rights and decency of any worker is purely unacceptable. But it is even worse that in this case the government is deliberately targeting some of our most vulnerable workers in Queensland. Low-paid workers out there by themselves, often from migrant communities, almost exclusively women, often do not have the language skills, the education or other support to protect themselves and enforce their own rights.

I would like to add to the debate evidence from representatives of the FairWear Campaign, a community campaign run and supported by a coalition of churches, community groups, unions and women's groups. The reality is that there is exploitation in this industry. Make no mistake of that. The FairWear Campaign submit that—

Outworkers are among the most vulnerable and low-paid workers in Australia. They are almost all women, and mostly migrants. They do skilled work for which the award wage is over \$17 per hour. They are lucky if they receive as much as \$7 per hour.

This is what we are dealing with here tonight. The opposition moved a motion of disallowance to ensure at least some public scrutiny and debate on this important issue. We wanted to wait until the new year to move this disallowance motion within the appropriate parliamentary time frames to undo the hurtful decision of this government. We have worked with workers, their representatives and members of the FairWear coalition to raise this issue and to force a public debate.

On Monday I had the privilege of meeting with a delegation from the FairWear Campaign to Parliament House. We met outside the gates of Parliament House. I heard from real outworkers who told stories of their industry and their day-to-day experiences. I appreciated the language difficulties they had and there was a Vietnamese interpreter on hand so that we could hear about their experiences first hand. I discovered when I was meeting with some of these women that one of them actually comes from my own electorate. She is a Vietnamese person living in my electorate and doing this work. Essentially she sews uniforms at home with some of her other family members. Without this code there is absolutely no protection for these workers. The real danger is that these workers will be open to exploitation. At the meeting out the front of Parliament House one of the workers presented me with a handmade pillow. That handmade pillow said on it 'wake up to justice for outworkers'. That pillow was presented to me to pass on to the office of the Premier for the Premier. We are in the process of making that available to the Premier. It was hand sewn. They just wanted the Premier and the government to be made aware of their plight and the fact that they believe that this code is essential for them into the future. They told me of the lack of power balance in their contract circumstances. They told me of the significant costs in sourcing their production material and covering power bills. They told me of the below-minimum wages they take home at the end of the day. We took the time to speak with these people, but they are just a selection of people. There are thousands of workers in our community that many members here may not even know are operating within their own electorates. Under this government I do not recall, and the Attorney-General may clarify, any public consultation in relation to the removal of this code.

Mr Bleijie: We said we'd get rid of Labor's red tape.

Ms PALASZCZUK: This is not red tape. This is the protection of workers. This is the protection of some of the most vulnerable workers in our society. It is not about cutting red tape. This code is about protection of their rights.

Mr Bleijie: Union protection, that's all it's about.

Ms PALASZCZUK: It is not about union protection. You have just shown your complete and utter ignorance for the understanding of these issues.

Mr Bleijie: I'll get my 20 minutes in a minute.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I note you have your time at the end, Attorney-General.

Mr Bleijie: I will have my time.

Ms PALASZCZUK: And you can express your wise words in this House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Watts): Order! Attorney, Leader of the Opposition, will you please address your comments through the chair not across the chamber.

Ms PALASZCZUK: The Attorney will have his opportunity later on this evening to explain to the House why he is tearing away a code that protects the conditions of some of the most vulnerable workers in our society. I am more than happy to listen to that, because I do not think he can explain this one away tonight.

If the government is suggesting there are legitimate policy issues at stake, it should discuss the matter publicly and involve genuine community input. If this government was serious about this policy area and had legitimate concerns, it would deliver its own code of practice, which would enhance these workers' rights. The Attorney-General needs to place on the record tonight several key points. Who did he speak to before repealing the code? Did he speak to business and industry representatives? Did he speak to workers, unions, church groups or community campaigners? What confidence does he have that exploitation is not occurring in the outwork industry and what, if anything, does he think the government should do about it?

It is clear that the government does not care about the conditions and wages of vulnerable workers. It does not think they deserve a voice in this debate. Tonight, I am determined to make sure that this government cannot silence the voices of those Queenslanders. While the Labor Party stands in this parliament, we will continue to be the voice of those workers. They are working Queenslanders who are just trying to work hard and do the right thing for themselves and their families. They often come from low-income areas. Often they are working hard to provide the basic necessities for their families, to make sure that there is food on the table, to make sure that the electricity bills are paid and to make sure that their kids get the opportunity to go to decent schools.

Every member of parliament here tonight has a responsibility to stand up for those vulnerable workers. I am sure many backbenchers may not even know that the Attorney-General removed the code of practice through the regulatory practices. Now that this matter is on the floor of the parliament, all members of parliament have the chance to make their voices heard. I call on members to ask themselves whose side they are on. Do they want to side with dodgy dealers in an industry that does the exploitation? Have they considered that those workers are in their own electorates, working from homes in their own suburbs? I ask members to side with workers, community representatives and church leaders to ensure this code is maintained.

I know that members of parliament and their electorate officers have been contacted by a range of representatives from unions, church groups, community groups and women's groups. To ensure their voice is heard, I would like to read into the record a letter from FairWear representative Jane O'Sullivan. She states—

Dear Members,

Without the Code, exploitation of outworkers goes undetected, as industrial officers have no means of knowing where work is done and on what terms.

There is no doubt that exploitation is rife in this industry. Even with the Fair Work Bill and the Code in place, lack of effort to police the industry has limited progress to clean it up. Removing the Code will not correct this failure, it will remove any possibility of correcting it.

The Attorney-General's review of the Code has not consulted outworkers, and has not provided any public evidence that employers have real grievance. Similar codes have been in place in NSW and South Australia for several years without disrupting the industry there. Clearly the repeal is intended to shelter exploitation.

Outworkers are among the most vulnerable and low-paid workers in Australia. They are almost all women, and mostly migrants. They do skilled work for which the award wage is over \$17 per hour. They are lucky if they receive as much as \$7 per hour.

The repeal of the Code was a shameful act by the Newman Government. Tonight there is an opportunity to redress it. Please stand up for outworkers.

Yours sincerely,

Jane O'Sullivan

FairWear Campaign, Queensland.

In conclusion, I reinforce to all members here that this code took many years to come into place. It was warmly received and it is a protection for some of the most vulnerable workers in our community. Like other members here, I was not aware that there were a large number of migrant women working in my community, in my electorate, basically in my own backyard, who would suffer exploitation if this code is removed. Tonight, please think seriously. This is a very serious issue and it will have grave consequences. It will see women and people from migrant backgrounds disadvantaged. Many of those women need the help of interpreters. When the code was produced, I understand it was also produced in other languages to help those workers understand the code in full detail. This is a very serious issue. I urge members to think very seriously before voting. This is about the protection of the most vulnerable workers in our society. I do not want to see them exploited.