




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE: REPORT NO. 28, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (11.17 am): As deputy chair, I would like to start by commending the members of the Finance and Administration Committee for the hard work that was involved in preparing this detailed report. I congratulate the government members and also the member for Gladstone on the all-party approach taken here. We should thank the former chair, Mr Michael Crandon, the member for Coomera, for his leadership—and it was very much stellar leadership under very difficult circumstances—while, of course, welcoming the member for Capalaba as the new chair. I also thank the committee support staff, the secretariat, for their many hours of hard work.

This inquiry involved many in-depth submissions and public hearings with stakeholders right across Queensland in this policy area. We heard from employers, unions, employer organisations, representatives from Q-Comp and many legal representatives who have worked in the field of workers comp for decades. We were able to have substantive decisions and discussions throughout the hearings and engaged in meaningful analysis of Queensland's very robust scheme. We also held regional hearings so that stakeholders could be involved in this process right across our great state.

The committee delivered a detailed and well considered report. Importantly, unlike many committee reports that are often divided across the lines of government and opposition, our report was unanimous in its recommendations. One would think that in these circumstances it would be obvious and very straightforward for the government to implement the recommendations.

The cross-party committee agreed that Queensland has the best workers compensation scheme in Australia and Queensland's system is fair, sustainable and efficient. Key recommendations included that journey claims stay in. There is a need for workers to be covered for journey claims and the inclusion of these claims in the scheme is a small proportion and is well and truly sustainable. There is to be no change to the definition of 'worker' in stark contrast to the Attorney-General's pre-emptive strike and pre-empting of the committee's findings. There is to be no whole-of-person injury threshold imposed for access to common law and recommended improvements to the use of the reasonable management action defence that employers often try to get away with.

Despite these clear recommendations, it seems that this arrogant Attorney-General and Premier are determined to thumb their nose at the committee and to ignore their own LNP members. We have already seen that the Attorney-General ignored not once, but twice, two LNP dominated committees. The government ignored the Finance and Administration Committee and the legal affairs committee, which both recommended that the definition of 'worker' not be weakened but in fact strengthened. He knew that this was not going his own way, and that is why he moved ahead of the committee's findings. This is a real shame for the parliament, and it is certainly a slap in the face for our very robust committee system.

On Tuesday I specifically asked the Premier about journey claims regarding workers compensation. I would ask the Premier to note that the Finance and Administration Committee's

inquiry into the Queensland workers compensation scheme recommended that the current provisions for journey claims be retained. I asked the Premier to guarantee that the government will retain these important provisions. The Premier refused to rule it out. He had a clear opportunity—this should be a no-brainer—but he refused to rule out the stripping of these rights from injured workers.

We have also been informed by good sources that the cabinet may be considering this issue. That may not be unusual, given the report has been handed down by this committee and it is fair enough for the government to be considering the contents of that report, but one must question the timing of this. I think we all need to be very concerned about the timing, which we all know is about making sure that this Queensland LNP government does not tip its hand in terms of the role it will play with regard to a potential Abbott government in Canberra. We know that they have already talked about a so-called 'sensible centre' when it comes to industrial relations, and we certainly know that they have moves afoot when it comes to the workers compensation scheme. The ministers involved here will be considering journey claims as part of their cabinet deliberations, but we know that this is in direct contrast to what has been happening here in this committee and what it reported.

This goes against the interests of workers and decent public policy in Queensland. The response and the early strike from the Attorney-General go against the processes that we have here in this state in terms of committees. An all-party committee unanimously made recommendations, a second committee made sure that they reiterated the findings of the first committee, and this Attorney-General says, 'I do not care what you think. I have made a decision, and I am going to go through with that decision.' That just goes to show the respect that this government has for the importance of workers compensation and the men and women right across our state who suffer injuries because of their work.

The Labor opposition will not be turning its back on the men and women in our workforce who require these protections. I commend the committee yet again for their strong work in ensuring that a fair and balanced approach was taken to this. It is a shame that the Attorney-General has not learned his lesson yet. Let us hope he makes the right decision when it comes to keeping journey claims in.