




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

TREASURY AND TRADE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (12.52 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Treasury and Trade and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013. I will say at the outset that the opposition will not be opposing this legislation. I note that the Treasurer has introduced additional amendments on behalf of the Attorney-General. I will take his explanation of that at face value, but we will look at those prior to summing up and consideration in detail.

This bill removes the requirement for quarterly Consolidated Fund statements to be gazetted under the Financial Accountability Act 2009, with publication in future to be on the Treasury department's website. With the move from gazettal to online publication, the opposition shared the Finance and Administration Committee's concerns as to how the quarterly Consolidated Fund statement will be preserved for public access on the historical record. These concerns have now been allayed by advice from the Treasurer that all previous quarterly Consolidated Fund statements will be made available on the Treasury website. I note that the legislation still requires the quarterly Consolidated Fund statements to be published online as soon as is practicable, as currently applies for the gazettal requirement.

This omnibus bill repeals eight acts and amends another 12. I cannot even begin to imagine what the Treasury CLO made of it! That is a conversation for another day. In the Treasurer's second reading speech and the explanatory notes it sets out that this bill is part of the government's red-tape reduction initiative. I hope that this is not part of the Treasurer's cynical return to counting pages as his way of cutting red tape. In the last sitting of parliament the Treasurer was gloating about the latest estimated count of pages of legislation, based on the false belief somehow that the more pages of legislation there are, the more impacts there are on business. Next, the Treasurer will probably tell the parliament that the repeal of the Government Stock Act 1912 will be a panacea for the regulatory burden of small business in his electorate of Clayfield.

For the Treasurer's benefit, this is what his own Office of Best Practice Regulation says about this page-counting formula for measuring red tape. It says—

The number of pages of regulatory acts and statutory rules is considered to be too crude a measure and it is proposed it not be used.

That is what the Treasurer's own advisers are telling him. They are saying that a methodology of counting pages of legislation has 'severe limitations'. It is disappointing that the Treasurer rejected this advice and instructed the Office of Best Practice Regulation to include page counting in the government's measures. I am assuming that this instruction was provided so that the Treasurer could continue to roll out meaningless numbers to try and score cheap political points.

As Queensland Treasury have stated publically in the past, these page counts include the generous use of white space, footnotes and separation of provisions. The Treasurer will probably try to tell us that the removal of the blank fourth page of the Government Inscribed Stock Act 1920 will provide urgent red tape relief to small businesses in Clayfield. What does the Productivity Commission have to say about this methodology? The Productivity Commission, like Queensland

Treasury, the Office of Best Practice Regulation and the Queensland Audit Office, all say that it is a poor proxy or measure for regulatory burden. The recent book by Arie Freiberg entitled *The Tools of Regulation* also states—

... a simple count of legislation does not necessarily mean that the regulatory burden has increased. Not all acts necessarily create new offences or set up new regulatory agencies.

It seems that the only person who is concerned with this measure is the Treasurer, and we will leave it for other people to consider whether that is purely for his own political gain.

While the opposition does not oppose the repeal of the acts in this bill, it is important to make these points because we are focused on real regulatory outcomes that improve productivity and efficiency, not on time-wasting, page-counting exercises. We are concerned with the real state of the economy and business conditions, not with taking cheap shots by calling an economy that was growing faster under Labor a 'basket case' while insisting that slower growth under the LNP is 'solid'. In framing the debate in this dishonest way, the Newman government does a disservice to this parliament and does nothing to cover itself in glory.

I will now make a few broad comments about some of the amendments made in this bill. I note that the submissions from Suncorp and the Australian Lawyers Alliance to the Finance and Administration Committee argue that witness information for insurance claims should be available through CITEC, as it was prior to the introduction of the Information Privacy Act 2009. These submissions claim that this system is faster than gaining access to this information through the Queensland Police Service. The committee has concluded, on the basis of advice from Queensland Treasury, that privacy should be protected by not including witness information on CITEC. The opposition is comfortable with this approach.

The Finance and Administration Committee also sought clarification on whether motorised scooters will be included in the definition of 'motorised wheelchairs' for gratuitous insurance applied by the Nominal Defendant. I note the advice from the Treasurer and his comments again today that motorised scooters will only be included where they are being used to assist people with mobility impairments. I thank him for leaving some wriggle room there in case further work is required.

The opposition has no concerns with the amendments in this bill to have a single minister responsible for the Queensland Competition Authority. However, what would be nice is if just one of the LNP members in this parliament took responsibility for the record increase in electricity prices of 22.6 per cent, or \$268 on average, determined by the QCA for this financial year. It would be great to hear the Premier apologise to Queenslanders for this, after promising a \$120-per-year saving at the election. Instead, all we have is the Premier hiding from the issue while blaming everyone but himself.

It is worth noting on the record that the Premier excused himself from being a shareholding minister for the Queensland Competition Authority as previous premiers had been in the past. This was all about abdicating political responsibility for his failures on electricity prices. Now he has given the responsibility of holding this position to the Attorney-General. The Treasurer is sitting in the Attorney-General's chair, but my question is: why don't they like the Attorney-General? They took SPER away from him, and now he has been given the responsibility for prisons, even though he does not believe that sexual assaults actually happen behind those walls, and he has certainly had a very poor record of overseeing the failed boot camps, with all of its occupants escaping from its first iteration.

I note that this bill will make amendments so that subordinate legislation is no longer gazetted, but published online. This will allow the government to upload subordinate legislation on days when the gazette is not published, with the tabling requirement of 14 sitting days applying from the date of the online publication. The bill also provides the Parliamentary Counsel and parliament with discretion over the form of documents provided as evidence, for example, to allow the provision of electronic copies of parliamentary proceedings and legislation rather than only printed copies. The bill further implements changes to the Statutory Instruments Act 1992 to provide effect to recommendations of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, including the provision of a year's notice from Parliamentary Counsel to departments of expiring subordinate legislation instead of six months.

The QTC Act is amended by this bill to remove a performance dividend on QTC's liability management activities. The opposition is comfortable with these amendments. The opposition also has no issue with amendments to the Statistical Returns Act 1896 to broaden the scope of the government statistician to collect statistics in the areas of energy, environment and construction, as long as these statistics are made publically available in a timely manner.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm.

Mr PITT: Unfortunately, just before lunch I was cut short. I thought I had all of my material out just in time, but here we are again.

Mr Bleijie: We are waiting for the punchline.

Mr PITT: You just wait, Attorney-General. We are coming to you.

Before lunch I was talking about amendments to the Statistical Returns Act 1896 and about the areas of energy, environment and construction being included in the scope. I also spoke about the fact that some amendments had been foreshadowed by the Treasurer on behalf of the Attorney-General. I note that the Treasurer circulated those amendments. I did say that I would speak to them during consideration in detail, but as the Attorney-General is here I might speak to them now.

The foreshadowed amendments seek to amend the Industrial Relations Act 2009. They seek to amend a section inserted by the Attorney-General in the Industrial Relations (Transparency and Accountability of Industrial Organisations) and Other Acts Amendment Act 2013. While the opposition will not be opposing these amendments, it is worth noting that those provisions took effect on 1 July 2013 and already they require amendment. That would not of itself warrant comment but for the fact that this is not the first time the Attorney-General has had to scamper back into the parliament with amendments. At the last sitting, amendments were moved during consideration in detail of the Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill to amend amendments made by the Criminal Law Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2012 passed in August.

Both those amendments and these have had to be retrospective. That certainly flies in the face of the Attorney-General's declared view that retrospective legislation is abhorrent. I guess it is not abhorrent when it is correcting a bungle! You can add the latest instance of the Attorney-General scampering back into this place to his boot camps, to his big talk about transferring industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth, to his talk about potential courthouse closures. The list goes on and on. After the tabling of Keelty review report today, I look forward to seeing just how the Attorney-General goes looking after our prison system. I think that will be a cracker! Let's just wait and see exactly how he manages that process.

Earlier I spoke about the areas that will be coming into scope. I note the Treasurer's track record when it comes to the State Accounts and the Annual Economic Report. It is poor in terms of the release of economic data. The Treasurer refused to release the State Accounts when the data was negative but then decided to release some of the data again when it was positive. Worse than cherry-picking, this nonrelease of data is unbecoming of the Treasurer.

To conclude, while the opposition is comfortable with this legislation I look forward to the Treasurer's clarification and assurance about how quarterly Consolidated Fund statements will be preserved on the public record and how that will work in practice. I think there has been insufficient clarification provided in that space.