Speech By

Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (12.17 pm): I rise to speak to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013. Queensland has the best workers compensation scheme in Australia. All Queenslanders should be proud of it. Queensland's scheme is fair, it is sustainable and it is efficient. It works well for businesses and workers alike by providing low premiums, efficient processes and basic human decency for injured workers and their families. It provides Queenslanders with the care and support that they deserve in what can often be the most challenging times of their lives. I say all Queenslanders can be proud of the existing scheme because it is an issue that should be above partisan politics. I was the deputy chair of the parliamentary committee that undertook an extensive inquiry into the scheme. I worked closely with the committee chair and other LNP and Independent members of the committee. After months and months of hearings and deliberations and in-depth analysis, the LNP dominated committee delivered a unanimous report. This issue should be beyond politics. It is just common sense. Unfortunately, it appears that the ideological extremity of the LNP cabinet has overruled the recommendations of its own LNP members of parliament.

Shamefully, this is not for any decent and genuine policy issue but rather because the Attorney-General is putting deals with big business ahead of common decency. As has been articulated already in this debate, the inquiry into the workers compensation scheme conducted by the Finance and Administration Committee had been most detailed and comprehensive. As the then chair, the member for Coomera, wrote in the forward of the unanimous report, the inquiry—

... received 246 submissions, held public forums in Mackay and Cairns, held 14 public hearings in Brisbane, including five in-camera hearings, and held three public departmental briefings.

We heard from businesses, employer organisations, unions, individual workers and legal experts who have extensive experience in this area. The overwhelming position of those submissions was that Queensland should maintain its strong workers compensation scheme.

After this extensive review the committee declared unequivocally that the existing scheme was fundamentally strong and that the core structure of the system should not be undermined. The findings of the committee and its unanimous recommendations were vindicated by the annual report of WorkCover. The report, which was tabled only on Monday evening after a six-week delay, confirms beyond any doubt that the scheme remains well run and premiums are still the second lowest in the nation. The number of common law claims is stable and the cost of those claims is well under what was expected. Net claims incurred reduced by $99.9 million. Annual profit more than doubled—from $199 million to $517 million. So there is scope for the government to consider premium relief if it chooses. The annual report confirms that the scheme provides employers with the stability and competitiveness that they require. It is a ringing endorsement of the existing scheme that boasts strong financial health and stability.

The timing of the tabling of the annual report is suspicious at best. Even after the delay the Attorney-General promised, through media outlets, to release the report last week. But he did not do so. Instead he waited until late on Monday to table the report—a report that he had had for some time—less than 24 hours after he had introduced legislation that flew in the face of the recommendations of his own committee and in complete inconsistency with the clear and irrefutable evidence contained in the independent WorkCover annual report. They confirmed that there is no need for this LNP ideological assault on workers' rights. In short, the annual report proves that the scheme is strong and efficient. There is no financial justification to remove the core element of the scheme's structure. The changes proposed by the Attorney-General will not only reduce people's rights unnecessarily but also jeopardise the financial health of the scheme.

Crucial to the unanimous report delivered by the Finance and Administration Committee was the recommendation that the parliament should not impose restrictions on injured workers accessing their common law rights. The notion of a threshold being placed on an injured worker before they access their common law rights would significantly harm workers and their families, lead to more sick days that had to be covered by employers and would reduce effective return to work of employees. Making it harder to get injured employees back on the job is not good for workers or their bosses.

Let me remind the House of what the LNP, Labor and Independent MPs unanimously agreed after many months of consideration. Section 6.8 of the committee spells it out very clearly. It states—

After considering all of the arguments for and against imposing an impairment threshold, the Committee considers that an impairment threshold should not be imposed.

The Committee believes that the extent of the 2010 amendments in addressing the increase in common law claims is yet to be fully realised as common law claims can be lodged up to three years from date of injury. As such, the Committee believes that there should be no changes to the current system.

The Committee considers that the fact that in order to have a successful common law claim, employer negligence needs to be proven in the courts, provides some protection.

The Committee recognises that imposing thresholds on accessing common law rights would improperly remove rights from one group of citizens that are available to other citizens. Imposing thresholds on WPI would break the nexus between workers' compensation and the ability of injured workers to perform their pre-injury employment. The Committee recommends retention of the existing provisions relating to access to common law.

The Committee notes that the term zero impairment has created a perception that claimants are being paid when it is suggested there is nothing wrong with them. This is not the case, however, because zero WPI does not mean the claimant is not suffering from some disability or pain. The Committee has found that there is confusion over the terms which provide an inadequate explanation or representation of loss incurred by the claimant.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends that the existing provisions relating to access to common law be retained.

The Law Society could not be clearer. In its submission titled 'Workers' Compensation Under Threat' it stated—

The Society is deeply concerned at reports that the Government may be giving consideration to a fundamental change to Queensland's workers' compensation scheme by introducing a 5% permanent impairment threshold in order to access common law claims. We understand that the desired outcome is to reduce premiums.

The society went on to say—

The Society opposes the change.

Introducing a threshold would change the scheme from a short-tail to a long-tail one. It would cause serious damage to a currently financially sustainable and fair scheme. It would disadvantage employers and employees alike.

It would be completely inconsistent with the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Workers' Compensation Scheme that states '*The Committee recommends retention of the existing provisions relating to access to common law*.'

Our workers' compensation scheme enjoys the second lowest premiums in Australia—in fact we're on par with Victoria when you consider they pay a higher employer excess. Our scheme has enjoyed the lowest average premium over the past decade.

Our common law claims numbers, claims rates and payments are decreasing.

The scheme is in excellent financial health—making a reported profit in 2011 with sufficient reserves to meet its liabilities, unlike comparable schemes in other states.

…

Any move to change our workers' compensation scheme is an issue of great concern to all Queenslanders.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Ms Trad interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Miss Barton): Order! If the members for Lockyer and South Brisbane would like to have a debate, they can take it outside the chamber, not across the chamber.

Mr PITT: The submission states—

Employers will see their premiums increase as the costs to the scheme escalate as has been the experience in other jurisdictions with long-tail schemes and limited common law access.

Queensland's current 98% return to work rate will be under threat.

We can also expect it to act as a disincentive for Queensland to attract business as we will no longer have the nation's best practice workers' compensation scheme. Any short term benefits resulting from the introduction of thresholds will quickly be eroded by increased scheme expenditure.

We consider that imposing a threshold is a very blunt instrument to achieve an outcome of lowering premiums. From the experience in other jurisdictions, the advantage is likely to be short-lived. There are other options available to achieve this outcome without fundamentally altering the existing, very successful scheme.

We strongly encourage interested members to raise these issues with their local MP as a matter of urgency.

Those opposite simply do not have an adequate response to counter the very detailed and articulate points made by the Queensland Law Society, an organisation with more experience than the Attorney-General and better placed to know the workings of the existing scheme. There is good reason those opposite do not have an adequate response and that is that, quite simply, many of them believe wholeheartedly with the position put forward by the Queensland Law Society—and not only the members of the Finance and Administration Committee, who took a genuine approach to the policy analysis and delivered the unanimous comprehensive report but also the members of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, who endorsed the recommendations of the Finance and Administration Committee of the definition of 'worker' and others in the LNP who know that this legislation is simply going too far. There are those who, I assume, have been proud members of the Queensland Law Society and who know full well that it is not a radical browbeating organisation. So when it makes such a clear and strident statement in relation to law reform, I am not surprised that it makes many members opposite justifiably uncomfortable.

Let me read some more evidence into the record. This is an open letter to all parliamentarians titled 'Why All The Fuss Over WorkCover?' It states—

The legal profession and the Queensland Law Society have always worked with Government to assist wherever possible in the formulation of good policy and the implementation of good law. In relation to workers' compensation the profession and the Society have always worked with Government to address the concerns of business as to premium increases and frivolous claims.

The premium increase after 2008 was a necessary correction as a result of the global financial crisis, failing returns of the WorkCover and the premium having been artificially depressed.

After the Government review in 2010 the legal profession recommended changes which address concerns raised by the Government and by business.

In 2010 legislative amendments were made which implemented the recommendations of the legal profession, with the major amendment being the implementation of the lnjury Scale Value scheme which has been used very successfully in Queensland's Motor Accident lnsurance Scheme.

The Motor Accident lnsurance Scheme for the last 10 years has refused to follow the unsuccessful attempts to contain premium increases by the unfair and ineffective method of thresholds which is used in other States.

All other States which implement thresholds have had big premium increases.

It is clear over the last 10 years that thresholds don't work and are unfair.

The legislative changes in 2010 recommended by the legal profession and first introduced into the WorkCover scheme have been successful like the Motor Accident scheme in containing compensation payments. The injury scale value scheme is effective and fair and operates to ensure that premiums do not increase.

Workers' compensation premiums have now stabilised and will start to decrease. WorkCover Queensland made almost $200 million profit in 2012 and it is anticipated that the 2013 result will be similarly favourable.

When the full beneficial effects of the 2010 amendments flow through into the Scheme Queensland will have the lowest premiums in Australia. This is an ongoing process over the next 12 to 18 months.

It is a myth that the legal profession is anti-employer. The profession supports good and fair policies which result in good laws. Our long-term low premium environment evidences that, as the legal profession has always been a key stakeholder.

The Queensland Law Society has always attempted to work with Government and employer groups to achieve the Government's desired policy outcomes. There are options which the Government could exercise which would result in premium reduction which do not involve thresholds. The Queensland Law Society would welcome the earliest opportunity to discuss these options with the Government and other stakeholders.

All parliamentarians have a duty to understand the laws they pass. This requires parliamentarians to understand the facts and the evidence. The Annual Report already released by QCOMP confirms that claim numbers, claim frequency and claim sizes are reducing. Statements that there is an explosion in claims or are otherwise out of control are simply not supported by the evidence. These claims are false and misleading and if acted upon as the basis for introducing thresholds will be bad policy which results in bad laws.

The legal profession has always provided balanced solutions focussed recommendations to address perceived problems with the WorkCover scheme as the profession represents lawyers for both business and employees.

Queensland Government please talk with the Queensland Law Society as there are solutions to achieve the Government's desired policy outcomes without the need to introduce thresholds which do not work and are unfair.

Who have I just been quoting? A so-called union thug that those opposite keep carrying on about? No, I am quoting Mr Kerry Splatt, principal of KM Splatt and Associates law firm, and also long-term LNP member. I understand that overnight he has resigned from the LNP's legal policy committee and from the LNP itself. I understand he was a member of the LNP for 16 years—since the Attorney-General was in school. But his advice was not heeded. I would like to read a little bit from his letter of resignation. Mr Splatt writes—

I had no choice, having regard to the utterly unjustifiable vandalism being visited upon the best workers' compensation scheme in Australia.

There is no economic basis for the changes. When combined with the attack on the judiciary and the wilful disregard of the separation of powers doctrine, I am gravely concerned that we have an Attorney-General and Premier who do not listen. Many of my friends and colleagues, lawyers, LNP members and otherwise, share my concerns.

He went on to say—

... the broad church ... of people and organisations concerned about the vandalism, will ensure that constituents know that the government spent this week ripping away rights, flouting the separation of powers, undermining the rule of law and embarrassing us in the eyes of any person of sound moral fibre.

Mr Splatt wrote to all MPs and I urge all members to listen to his advice. I table a copy of his letter of resignation.

Tabled paper: Open letter (email) to parliamentarians from Kerry Splatt—resignation from LNP Law and Justice Committee and from the LNP [3795].

I urge those opposite to raise their concerns with these extreme moves by the Premier and the Attorney-General. It is embarrassing that such an obvious and widely held position of the legal community is being blatantly turned on its head by this inexperienced Attorney-General. Make no mistake, it will be the LNP backbenchers who will rightly pay the price. It is up to them to hold the Attorney-General in check and it is up to the Premier to show some leadership and say enough is enough. The Premier's lack of leadership will mean that a shoddy piece of legislation will go through not only hurting decent Queenslanders but also risking the financial strength of the system.

At the core of the problem with imposing a threshold on common law access is the issue of whole-person impairment—WPI. The fundamental principle about allowing injured workers access to their legal rights is that imposing a threshold based on WPI breaks the nexus between the compensation given and the ability of an injured worker to return to fulfil pre-injury work. That is, if I hurt my foot I can still come to work and speak in parliament, but if I work on road construction and I have the same injury to my foot I may not be able to go back to work. Both injuries would receive the same measurement for WPI but have very different impacts on a person's ability to complete the work. Consider the impact on you or me of breaking a hand in contrast to a carpenter. Consider the impact on you or me of having ongoing back pain compared to a labourer, nurse, wardie or a stockman. The issue of imposing a threshold is not an esoteric debate about where on a pendulum certain payouts should occur. It is not about hypothetical cases like the ones I have just touched on briefly. These changes will strip thousands of injured Queenslanders of their rights, with real impacts on real people.

Let me detail some real impacts that highlight the offensive nature of these changes. I will not give the full details of the individuals, but I have permission to use the real details of the cases. A woman from the Ipswich region was working on a gas line project. Her job was as a leasehand or driller's offsider. She was assisting a driller with the testing on some gas piping and had plugged an air hose into a pipe to test pressure, commonly known as drifting the tubing with air. Drifts are placed into the drill pipe with wire rope attached to a hook at the end of the drift. The pipe had a cap on it. The caps are modified for air filling. Caps are required to be certified but her worksite had been fitted with inferior, uncertified caps. The pipe could not hold the pressure and as a result of the defective cap it exploded and it hit her left hand. Despite wearing approved safety gloves she has been left with an ongoing hand injury. As a consequence of her injury she has ongoing pain in her hand and bruising. She can no longer do the manual component to her job. Her injury meant she could not do the repetitive tightening of caps in other parts and equipment, the manual lifting of drilling equipment, which often weighs 20 kilograms or more, and operate grinders. She now works in an administration role doing data entry. It is unlikely she will be able to return to her pre-accident work as a driller's offsider or eventually as a driller, which she had aimed to do.

Following medical review by an external medical officer her injury was assessed as zero per cent whole-person impairment. That is, on the measurement of WPI her assessment was zero per

cent even though her injury has a direct impact on her not being able to return to her pre-injury work. I want those opposite to consider this woman's case. If she was injured after these laws were introduced she would have no entitlements to recover compensation for her lost wages and for the ongoing pain and suffering that she has now and will continue to suffer into the future as a consequence of the negligence of her employer. Her case highlights the injustice that will occur to a person with a low WPI who has lost out and will continue to lose out significantly in the future.

I hope that the Attorney-General can hear the rally that is going on outside. It is all for the Attorney-General, who unilaterally seems to think that he can change Queensland despite the wishes of Queenslanders. It is astonishing. I am aware that many members of the legal community have written to members to give examples of how this legislation will hurt Queenslanders. I want to read some of these cases into the record to remind members of this evidence and to record the information that was so obvious to all at the time of this debate. I will refer to four actual case examples provided by Gouldson Legal law firm. The first involved a brickie's labourer. The client was employed as a brickie's labourer and sustained injury to his lumbar spine in January 2011 in the course of his employment and a further aggravation of this injury in February 2012. He had worked his whole life in the field of manual labour and is now prohibited from returning to any such work due to his injuries and associated disability. He is 47 years of age and is now dependent on a Centrelink pension and faces fundamental difficulties in attempting to re-enter the workforce in any capacity due to his injuries, age and lack of experience in any other area of work. He was assessed by WorkCover Queensland as having a two per cent work related whole-person impairment and conveyed an offer of $5,752.10. He has not worked since February 2012. He is on Centrelink benefits and supporting his family. He would have no access to common law damages under the proposed amendments to the scheme.

The next example is a road construction labourer. The man is a 30-year old male who worked as a labourer for WorkPac Pty Ltd. He sustained a lumbar spine injury on 3 September 2011. Prior to the accident he had enjoyed a net weekly wage of $1,381.90. As a result of the incident he was unable to return to labouring work and returned to lighter work. He was assessed as sustaining a zero per cent WPI and was offered a zero dollar lump sum by WorkCover Queensland. Even with the lighter work he required intermittent periods of time off work and sustained a total loss of net earnings of $50,110.40, averaging $508.37 per week over 98.57 weeks. He will suffer permanent weekly loss of income. He received significant compensation at common law because his employer was negligent in causing his injuries. He would have no access to common law damages under the proposed amendments to the scheme.

The third example is that of a concreter employed to work on site for a construction company. On 10 September 2012 he sustained a lower back injury when he was required to lift a number of 70 kilogram concrete boxing planks by himself from a work truck onto a building site. For all of his mature working life he had worked as a concreter. He is now prevented from undertaking this employment or any other employment due to the pain symptoms associated with his injury. The client is a 41-year-old father of three children who is now dependent on his partner's part-time income. He was previously receiving WorkCover benefits. However, having been assessed at zero per cent work related impairment his lump sum offer is $0. He would have no access to common law damages under the proposed amendments to the scheme.

The fourth example relates to a 26-year-old process worker who sustained an injury to his lumbar spine and left lower limb during the course of his employment from July to August 2012. He had only ever worked in the area of unskilled and manual labouring and will now suffer significant restrictions in returning to any such work due to his injuries and associated disabilities. The man has been unable to obtain alternative employment since sustaining the injuries and is currently struggling to support his young family. He was assessed under WorkCover for a permanent impairment assessment as having a one per cent work related whole-person impairment and was conveyed an offer of $2,160. He would have no access to common law damages under the proposed amendments to the scheme.

Those cases show that this LNP legislation is unfair and unjust and will harm decent working Queenslanders who are injured at work due to the negligence of their employers. Imposing a threshold is unfair. It is illogical when you consider the nature of workplace injuries. Injured workers, their families and communities will be left to pick up the pieces.

On another issue in the legislation, I ask the Attorney-General to address in his reply exactly how the new standard will be implemented regarding psychological assessment. Will the medical assessment tribunals issue a new evaluation guide? How will that guide be evaluated? Who will be consulted and what is the avenue for input? Another area of serious concern with this legislation relates to the new requirements imposed on prospective employees and the correlation of a central

database that can be accessed by employers in certain cases. There are serious concerns about the privacy of applicants when trying to get a job. There are serious questions as to whether this legislation breaches federal privacy and antidiscrimination legislation. I ask the Attorney-General to address that issue. What advice did the Attorney-General receive on the implications for privacy and antidiscrimination requirements? Will he commit to providing that advice to the House, especially as this legislation has not gone through a committee process or been made available for the appropriate scrutiny?

There are several serious concerns. In relation to the insurer denying coverage to an injured worker based on the nondisclosure of previous injuries, the legislation as written appears not to make a distinction on the issue of intent. That is, the legislation appears to suggest that workers could be denied coverage whether they innocently forgot a minor issue that subsequently became a contributing factor in an injury or if there was a deliberate fraudulent intent. The drafting also appears not to impose any restrictions on the employer using that information in consideration of appointment. Significantly, there appears that there is no requirement that the previous claims or existing injuries have any direct link to the work required of the position for which they are applying. Again I ask the Attorney-General to address this issue and provide the House with details. Is it the deliberate intent of the legislation that employers are entitled to use any information provided by prospective applicants about former claims or injuries in deciding whether or not to appoint that person, even if the previous history has no link to the duties to be performed in the role for which they are applying? I await the Attorney's response before raising these issues further in consideration in detail if required.

After the serious issues are laid bare, the question must be asked: why are they doing it? When the evidence is so clear, when the legal community is speaking as one, when even well-known LNP figures are begging for the government to reverse its course, why are they doing it? Despite protestations from the Attorney-General for months and months that no decision had been made, this week the cat was finally let out of the bag by the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Speaking on 612 radio with Steve Austin, the CCIQ's Nick Behrens confirmed that this whole legal reform process had been a charade from the start.

This parliament asked the Finance and Administration Committee to undertake a comprehensive and detailed inquiry. We held hearings right across Queensland. We had days and weeks and months of hearings, research, testimonies and discussions about submissions and our recommendations. Committee staff worked tirelessly. Committee members, including LNP members of parliament, took it seriously and those organisations that made submissions participated genuinely and did a great deal of work. However, we were all treated like mugs because we were told this week that this reform was not actually intended to be based on the most comprehensive review that this parliament has conducted. Instead, it was confirmed that this was a secret election commitment made by the LNP at the last election. So that everyone in the chamber can be cleared about how this Attorney-General has treated his own colleagues, I will quote the Steve Austin interview with Nick Behrens from the CCIQ, aired on Tuesday this week on 612 ABC. In relation to lobbying the LNP government on this issue, he said—

… I believe we even secured a commitment from them in the state election that they would restore balance to the scheme from an employer perspective—and we really believe that the changes that have been announced last night—

Monday night—

are delivery of that promise that the LNP made to the business community.

The arrogance of this is breathtaking. We have got to the point where the LNP and business are now blatantly admitting that they are playing the parliament, members of parliament, research staff, stakeholders and the public for fools, because this was stitched up before the last election and nobody was told about it. Now we know why the poor LNP backbenchers are being rolled once again. Are there that many of them that they feel that they can use them as cannon fodder? It also explains why the Attorney-General wanted to force this review through as urgent legislation in the same week as the bikie legislation, pay rises for members of parliament and his 'Judge Judy' legislation. It is just like when he pushed through draconian industrial relations changes during the State of Origin in budget week. This Attorney-General talks big and acts out on a limb, but he does not have the courage of his convictions to stand up to public scrutiny and defend his extreme changes.

It is an absolute joke that the Attorney-General claims that he has negotiated broadly. In the debate on the urgency motion, the Attorney relied on the fact that the committee had considered the issue since last year, except, of course, that the core elements of the legislation do the complete opposite of what the committee, including his own LNP members, recommended should be done. Time and time again, including under questioning in this parliament, he claimed that no decision had been made, but—lo and behold—he had legislation the day after cabinet. He claimed Queenslanders had 18 months to consider the issue because the inquiry was underway, but he tabled the WorkCover

annual report only on Monday evening of this week and the legislation on Tuesday afternoon. It is just beyond the bounds of credibility that we have an admission from the CCIQ that this was an election deal, delayed tabling of the annual report that confirmed the fundamental strength of the current system, legislation introduced the day after and an urgency motion so that it could not go to a committee or receive widespread attention, yet the Attorney-General maintains that the whole inquiry and decision process was a genuine exercise. It does not stack up.

In his response I ask the Attorney-General to answer these specific questions: what undertaking was given to the CCIQ at the last election about making changes to the workers compensation legislation? What gave the CCIQ the impression that a commitment, in fact, had been given and was being delivered by the Attorney-General's decision to overrule his own members of parliament? The Attorney-General owes it to the people of Queensland, everyone involved in the inquiry and certainly his own colleagues on the committee a direct and fulsome answer on this point.

The legislation is being rushed through against the advice of the Queensland Law Society, the Bar Association, the Lawyers Alliance, the WorkCover annual report and the LNP's own committee members. The parliament is being asked to back this legislation based only on the judgement of the Premier and the Attorney-General. However, on this issue and others, those opposite should not blindly trust this Premier and this Attorney-General. All backbenchers need to seriously consider how to stop the extremities of the Premier and the Attorney-General. They will be the ones who will face the backlash from their communities, and rightly so. The reason this legislation should have more scrutiny is that the alternative being presented today is the Attorney and the Premier saying, 'We know that the committee investigating this received an overwhelming body of evidence that the scheme is the best in Australia, we know that our own LNP members considered this evidence and unanimously decided that the scheme should not be restructured, but trust us: we are the Premier and the Attorney-General!'

Imagine being one of those backbenchers who is putting their faith in the Attorney-General before the obvious interests of their own constituents. Are they really comfortable with trashing the rights of their constituents based on the judgement of this Attorney-General? How did the boot camps work out for them? This is the same Attorney-General who is known in the legal community as 'the articled clerk'. The Attorney-General is so poor at delivering effective legislation that he had to amend his bikie bill after the Labor opposition picked holes in it even though we had had it for only a couple of hours. The electorates of those opposite deserve better. They demand representatives who will stand up for their rights, not members of parliament who blindly support the Premier and the Attorney-General in doing over fellow LNP members and stripping Queenslanders of their rights. Providing a sustainable and fair workers compensation scheme is a basic decency for all Queensland workers. Here is the bonus: it does not cost the taxpayer. The scheme itself is self-sufficient and is the most profitable in the country.

As I said earlier, this issue should be beyond politics. It is basic human decency and it is just common sense. But it seems that the ideological extremities of the LNP—their leadership team—have destroyed that prospect. It is clear to the people of Queensland now that the only way to ensure—

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Miss Barton): Order! Mr Attorney, the member for Mulgrave is not taking your interjections. I am struggling to hear him, particularly with the addition of the noise outside. The member for Mulgrave has the call.

Mr PITT: It is clear to the people of Queensland now that there is only one way to ensure that we have the fair and equitable and sustainable workers compensation scheme that Queenslanders deserve. We need to get rid of this arrogant, out-of-touch Attorney-General and the entire Newman government that comes into this place and laughs, jeers and carries on like spoilt children all the while tearing away the rights of vulnerable Queenslanders and injured workers who need their support more than ever.

The Labor opposition has worked very hard to ensure that all Queenslanders are aware of this legislation and what the government is doing to their rights. They are eroding their rights and they are stripping away protections.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Attorney, the member for Mulgrave is not taking your interjections and I have made that clear. I am struggling to hear the member for Mulgrave because of the noise outside the chamber. I would ask that he be allowed to continue his contribution in silence. The member for Mulgrave has the call.

Mr PITT: I want to make sure I get on the record that the Labor opposition worked very hard to ensure the committee process was undertaken in a fulsome way. It is important to note that that committee process was undertaken with a great deal of respect for the iconic Queensland workers compensation scheme. There were no dissenting reports or statements of reservation. Maybe everyone did not get every aspect of the report the way they wanted it, but the report was agreed in a bipartisan way. It was based on a range of submissions and based on evidence provided by submitters, by Queenslanders.

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mulgrave is clearly not taking interjections and I would ask that members allow him to make his contribution.

Mr PITT: The rally outside is just a small sample. Most people may not realise what this will mean until it is too late. When it is too late—

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mulgrave has the call!

Mr PITT: There are people outside attending the rally today. There is one in Cairns today too. It is being held outside the office of the member for Cairns.

This is a very important issue for this government leading up to the next election. They have the opportunity to pull the pin on this. They have not taken it until now. If they are clever they will have a hard look at what they are going to do. This maybe a short-term fix in their view but it is going to have lasting ramifications and will make a material difference to people's lives in this state. Injured workers should be afforded the protections that the most comprehensive and sustainable scheme in Australia currently affords them. Sadly, this Attorney-General and the Newman cabinet have made it clear that they are quite prepared to toss those rights completely out the window.

To suggest that keeping journey claims is somehow absolving them of any responsibility is ridiculous. It was thrown out as a red herring. They may well have never intended to get rid of journey claims. It was thrown out as a red herring to say that they gave a little bit. We have seen this before. We saw this when the Premier talked about a reduction in Queensland's workforce of 20,000. He said, 'Look at me, we have only sacked 14,000 people. I have saved 6,000 jobs.' What a load of rubbish. Again, it is more about expectation management than real government here in Queensland.

This government has a terrible record, only 18 months in, of ignoring Queenslanders and not allowing them to put their views on the record by bypassing the committee system. They are now stripping away workers' rights in a way that we have not seen for some time. They are ignoring their colleagues and essentially abandoning them. What we are going to see at the next election is a backlash against these changes. This is a very important issue. They have completely underestimated how important worker protection is in this state. Quite frankly, they deserve to cop it with both barrels at the next election.