




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

QUEENSLAND CIVIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (JUSTICES OF THE PEACE) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (5.12 pm): I rise in support of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill. I commend the Attorney-General and his team for their work on this bill. This is a sensible piece of legislation—a great framework for the realistic reduction of the costs and time involved in hearing minor civil dispute applications.

This bill also fulfils yet another LNP commitment. That is recognising the voluntary contributions made by our justices of the peace and expanding their role, should they wish to do so, while reducing the burden on our courts and the tribunal system. Currently in Southport minor civil disputes are heard by QCAT adjudicators and there is a considerable wait time involved as the adjudicators struggle to meet the demands for hearings. This bill will see a six-month trial initiated at Southport, allowing two justices of the peace, one legally qualified, to constitute the tribunal. The JPs will hear and decide minor civil disputes with a value of less than \$5,000 and non-urgent residential tenancy matters.

This will have a considerable impact on the Southport courthouse and the number of minor civil dispute hearings scheduled. This bill recognises the valuable contributions by JPs and facilitates the expansion of their role, significantly increasing the capacity of QCAT. At the conclusion of the six-month trial, the results will be evaluated and decisions made about whether the program should be continued.

I join the Attorney-General and my colleagues in recognising the fantastic contribution of JPs across our state. We have over 80,000 registered JPs and commissioners for declarations in Queensland. These are 80,000 honourable community members volunteering their time to contribute to the Queensland justice system. I am told that in my electorate there are just over 1,000 people who volunteer to contribute their time as JPs.

I particularly want to acknowledge the wonderful work of these volunteers around my electorate. Every week in shopping centres and community centres around the electorate of Southport you will find dedicated teams of JPs making themselves available. There are JPs at places like Arundel Plaza, Australia Fair, Southport Park and Ashmore City Shopping Centre all hours of the day and all days of the week, allowing the community access to their services when it is most convenient to them. It is a great service that these people provide.

I am also amazed at the number of nomination forms I have been asked to sign for constituents of my electorate volunteering to be JPs or commissioners for declarations. It is encouraging to see the level of interest out there in the community. It is encouraging to see that people are wanting to step up and take responsibility and provide this important community service. So I commend them for that and thank each and every one of them.

Speaking of some of these volunteers, I would particularly like to thank Laurie Stokes, a wonderful community member from Arundel who has given up so much of her time at so many levels of community service. Particularly, she makes her time available every Thursday morning at my office. She pops in every Thursday for three or four hours. She makes herself available for people from the

Chirn Park area, indeed from right across the electorate of Southport. Some people feel it is important to have a set time or appointment to come and meet with a JP.

Laurie is typical of so many JPs. She is courteous and professional in all her work. Even when she might have a queue of people waiting impatiently for her she deals with them courteously and treats each and every one of them with respect. When she leaves my office she heads to the Southport courthouse to continue providing the same service there as a volunteer JP. Laurie, like so many others, plays a valuable role in the justice system and in our community. I am very grateful for her ongoing support and help.

The Attorney-General has already explained to the House how this bill also meets the government's preelection commitment to revitalise the JP branch. I support his comments about the proactive role that the JP branch is now playing with JPs in electorates around Queensland. With the help of the JP branch and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General we have just started to put plans in place for a JP workshop and refresher course for JPs in my electorate. This will be the first of these courses run for some time. We will be running it in August which is the first available date for such a workshop. I am told by my office that we are expecting between 200 and 250 people to come along to this workshop. I am delighted that that will be happening.

JP trainers are out in the community across Queensland every week working with and engaging with JPs and commissioners for declarations. I acknowledge the ongoing role and the great contribution that these trainers provide, not just to the electorate of Southport but right across Queensland. The outsourcing of training to registered organisations is another great step in revitalisation of the JP branch. This is already helping alleviate the wait times for JP training courses and allows the JP branch to focus on the appointment of and ongoing engagement with JPs and commissioners for declarations.

This is an excellent piece of legislation from the government. It introduces some well needed changes and additions to our justice system. I have great pleasure in commending this bill to the House.