




Speech By  
**Rob Molhoek**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT**

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## EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.21 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Education and Care Services Bill 2013. This bill presents huge benefits for those smaller education and care services in regional and rural Queensland that are not provided for under the Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) Act or the current Queensland Child Care Act 2002. The changes that will come from this new act represent important reforms for families and young children who will benefit from them. I commend the Minister for Education, Training and Employment for his work on this legislation.

I note that 98 per cent of education and care services for children in this state have been regulated through the national law. The remaining two per cent of services, including limited hours care services, services that cater for people with a disability and occasional care services, are regulated under state legislation. Stand-alone services are not regulated under either the state law or the national law. To ensure high-quality care for the 66 services captured under this new legislation, the government decided to adopt a model that keeps the best elements of the old Child Care Act but is consistent with the national law.

The reduction of the red-tape and compliance burden, particularly for those small service providers in regional communities, will greatly increase the efficiencies of those services. This bill will see a significant reduction in licensing costs for some 2,500 education and care services. Sensible amendments to the Child Care Act will see the reduction of unnecessary red tape and the publication of registers of approved providers and services. These are all changes that will provide tangible benefits for education and care services and the families that rely on them.

Under the current legislation, a Queensland service approval must be obtained by an approved provider at each education and care service that they operate. Services currently pay \$500 per licence application and a \$300 renewal fee every three years. The changes proposed in this bill will mean lower upfront costs for service providers, as well as more manageable licensing fees paid annually. This represents a \$300 saving over the same licensing period. The bill also provides for a perpetual approval system, removing even more costs and red tape from the licensing process. Although the onus of the licensing process will be lifted, minimum three-yearly inspections of each service will still ensure quality safety requirements are maintained.

In order to bring Queensland into line with national legislation, the bill allows services to seek service or temporary waivers. This common-sense amendment will mean services can apply for a temporary exemption from a particular requirement in the bill or regulation. During our recent natural disasters, education and care services across the state were damaged and, in many cases, the process for the relocation of those services was long and arduous. By allowing for an expedited approval process for relocation, we ensure disruption to child-care services is minimal.

During the early disasters of this year, it was my pleasure to spend some time not only in Bundaberg but also travelling through some of the worst hit areas with the Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Minister Davis. We visited centres in Gin Gin, Gayndah and Mundubbera where the community services staff had done an outstanding job of getting those

communities up and running, and getting out there and supporting the families and children in those areas that needed access to those sorts of services. It was great to see the lack of disruption that occurred because of the efficiency of the department and the great work that the department undertook at that time.

In his submission to the Education and Innovation Committee, the Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian strongly supported this proposed legislation. I quote briefly from Acting Commissioner Barry Salmon's letter to the Education and Innovation Committee. He says—

The commission supports the Bill which establishes a new regulatory framework for Queensland education and care (QEC) services administered under the *Child Care Act 2002* and makes consequential amendments to the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000* (the Commission's Act).

The amendments to the Commission's Act will maintain current safeguards and protections for children participating in QEC services by requiring providers and employees to hold a blue card and preserving notification requirements when the Commissioner becomes aware that a QEC service provider or an adult occupant of a home in which stand-alone child care is provided is a disqualified person under the blue card system.

As the former assistant minister for child safety, I am pleased to see that this legislation has the support of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

I note that during the committee process, the member for Waterford raised the issue of staffing requirements and the differences between those under the national law and under the Child Care Act. Quite rightly, he raised concerns about that. It was pleasing to hear that, even though there is a minor reduction in the level of qualification, there is still a qualification level suitable to meet the needs and the standards that we would require, while being sympathetic to the needs of regional and rural Queensland. Having married into a family that essentially lives out west and in Central Queensland and having spent quite a bit of time in places such as Charleville, Charters Towers, Biloela, Baralaba and Theodore, I can assure the House that that relaxation will be very welcome in many of the communities where they have trouble attracting people with unnecessarily high or onerous qualifications. I am pleased to see the practicalities for those communities being properly met through this legislation and in the considerations that have been made by the committee. It has done an excellent job in addressing those concerns. I feel very comfortable with the recommendations of the committee in that respect.

Finally, I want to speak about child safety. Last Friday it was an absolute pleasure to attend the annual White Balloon Day lunch with Minister Davis. We were there as guests of Hetty Johnston. I know that Bravehearts and many other child safety organisations across the state are looking forward to the outcomes of the Carmody inquiry and the hard work that the department is still to do in respect of working through those recommendations. Attending that function last week and reading through the committee report on this particular legislation highlighted to me the incredible commitment of the Newman government towards improving the lot of children across the state of Queensland and its practical approach in regard to reducing red tape without watering down any of the safety concerns or the practical issues around the protection of children. Of course, a great example of that sits in some of the earlier legislation that this government has passed and approved in regard to sexual offenders and those who would seek to sell drugs to some of our most vulnerable.

I believe the changes contained in this bill are just another reflection of the great work that this government is doing to really support families. They also take into account the diverse nature of the large state of Queensland. The needs of a metropolitan community like Brisbane or even the Gold Coast where we have fully staffed child-care centres and some amazing child-care facilities are different to those of smaller communities in regional Queensland that do not have access to that level of service. This is an important safeguard and an important piece of legislation in meeting the needs and taking into account the needs of those communities.

This bill increases the efficiency and quality of smaller and regional education and care services by decreasing red tape. I have touched on that. I am pleased that it also alleviates some of the licensing costs. I believe that this legislation is sensible. I commend the minister on the work that he and the department have done. It provides clear benefits for the service providers and the many families across Queensland. It is my pleasure to stand in the House and commend this bill to the House.