




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

**HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGISTRATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (12.29 pm): I rise to speak to the Health Practitioner Registration and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As we have made the sensible move towards a national registration regime for our health practitioners, the continued registration of speech pathologists and dental technicians in our state makes little sense. This bill removes the regulatory burden for those practitioners in line with our broader goal of removing unnecessary red tape throughout the government.

As a registered nurse of some 30 years, it was a long time coming that we had harmonisation across the states for the registration of nurses. I well recall coming to Queensland to work at the Tweed Heads Hospital at New South Wales. I not only had to get up an hour earlier to get to work an hour later but also had to register in two states even though I lived within 10 kilometres of the boundary of both states. So it is great that we have this harmonisation to cut down on red tape.

Regulatory burdens on business, individuals and organisations draw resources from their core business and it leads to increased costs, which are inevitably passed on to those who seek to take advantage of the services provided. We need to continue on this path in the interests of employment, economic growth and providing relief in regard to cost-of-living pressures. Of course, with the budgetary pressures that this state faces—the legacy of the previous Labor government—we need to reduce the cost of government. Unnecessary regulation inevitably costs government more to administer.

However, this bill will not affect the ability of patients to make complaints against their practitioners. This bill will not reduce the high standards that we expect of our medical professionals. The Health Quality and Complaints Commission will consider complaints regarding dental technicians and speech pathologists and will maintain its capacity following the passage of this bill. As a former member of the Health and Disabilities Committee, which the Health Quality and Complaints Commission reported to, I know that when Minister McArdle was also on the Health and Disabilities Committee with me we certainly made sure that the Health Quality and Complaints Commission was accountable to the government as well.

This is also an area where the national harmonisation of regulation makes a lot of sense. The increased mobility between the states of these health professionals is a welcome benefit of this change. As I mentioned before, as a registered nurse, at one stage I was registered in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. I am sure many other health professionals had to put up with that onerous red-tape burden.

Queenslanders should be thankful that health policy in Queensland has returned to a position of common sense. We should not forget the extraordinary list of failures in the health area under the Beattie and Bligh Labor governments. Yesterday's sentencing of the fake Tahitian prince should be a reminder of what can happen when a tired, incompetent and arrogant government takes its eye off the ball. The \$16.6 million in spoils purchased at a cost to Queensland taxpayers represents a

government that really did not know what was going on. It was either unable or unwilling to deliver the oversight that was required. It took an IT auditor 10 minutes on a Sunday to discover the fraud that had gone on right back to 2008. It was right under the nose of former Queensland Health staffers. It could have been picked up back in 2008. Obviously, in 2008 he dabbled for a while, got about \$110,000, and got away with it because no-one went back to check. In 2009, he took somewhere in the vicinity of \$200,000 and kept going.

Mr Minnikin: Proof of how hopeless they are.

Ms BATES: Exactly. I take that interjection. I thank our new Minister for Health, who has made sure that he has tightened up all of those issues so that the Tahitian prince incident cannot happen again. Every one of those luxury items that was sold at the recent auction of his belongings represents a failure of the Bligh government. Considering the cost to the government of these items, they could also represent a medical procedure that could have taken place sooner rather than later.

The previous government was so ashamed of its record that the waiting list to get on the waiting list for surgery—a process that could add years to a patient's time in the health system queue—was a deep, dark secret. We have put that list on the public record. It makes it clear that there is still much more work to do and we are committed to getting it done. Who could forget the Queensland Health payroll debacle—a complete disaster that cost Queenslanders over \$1.2 billion. That is an extraordinary amount of money to simply misplace. With a health system that was clearly failing to deliver the outcomes that Queenslanders rightly expect, \$1.2 billion could have made a significant difference to patients throughout the state. More than 50,000 staff were affected. Of course, this figure does not take into account the families who relied on Queensland Health for their income.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the fantastic nurses and doctors who we have working for Queensland Health, even without the assistance of the Queensland Nurses Union. We all know that our minister is battling the QNU at the moment. It would be great if the QNU put on record that at least one per cent of the union dues that nurses pay—and nurses only join a union for malpractice insurance—goes to fund the Australian Labor Party's campaigns here in Queensland. I think it is \$86,000 every year that goes from hardworking nurses into the coffers of the unions to then be reallocated to the Labor Party for its campaigns. It is disgusting and it needs to stop. Almost 400 speech pathologists who work for Queensland Health were also among those affected by this payroll disaster. We are still looking for answers as to how it all happened. I look forward to the outcome of the inquiry into the Health payroll.

Both speech pathologists and dental technicians make significant impacts on the quality of life of Queenslanders. Our dental technicians repair dentures and other dental appliances, including bridges, crowns and mouthguards. The importance of dental health to one's overall health should never be underestimated. I recall well before the election that I had many dental technicians from the Gold Coast coming to speak to me about the bullying and intimidation that was occurring at the Gold Coast Hospital. I passed that on to the minister to look at. We need to encourage these people to stay in the system, not bully them out of the system.

The ability to communicate is one of those abilities that many of us also take for granted. We should not forget the impact that losing or never developing the ability to communicate effectively can have on someone—on their relationships, their career prospects and their overall development. Additionally, speech pathologists assist people in our community who have difficulties swallowing food and drink, particularly after strokes. In addition to those working for Queensland Health, almost 150 speech pathologists are also employed by Education Queensland. So we should never forget that people of all ages are assisted by a speech pathologist in our state.

I am very pleased to now be on the backbench committee for health with Minister Springborg. I look forward to bringing my health and medical expertise, and particularly my nursing expertise, to assist him in making this great state much better than what it is. I commend the bill to the House.