




Speech By
Hon. Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

TREASURY AND TRADE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. TJ NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Treasurer and Minister for Trade) (3.26 pm), in reply: I thank all members for their contribution to the debate on this bill. I know some of the topics covered by it are a little dry. Some of them are a little challenging for people to understand—the Government Inscribed Stock Act, the Government Stock Act and the Statistical Returns Act. But I do thank those members who have sought to find the highlights in each of those bits of legislation, and on the whole they have done a pretty reasonable job in doing so. So I thank them for their efforts in that regard. Hopefully they are a little bit better educated on at least the history of some of the more essential parts of legislation that have been developed by this House over its 150-plus-year history.

I want to address a couple of issues raised by the shadow Treasurer in relation to his comments about red-tape reduction. I reflect on the comments made by my assistant minister, the member for Nanango, who has in fact had primary responsibility in my portfolio for driving red-tape reduction. It is somewhat ironic to be lectured by the member for Mulgrave on red-tape reduction when it was his government that actually abandoned the Red Tape Reduction Task Force in Treasury prior to this government being elected—it disappeared off the end of the planet. They were so desperate, in fact, that prior to the election they were calling for tenders from private accounting firms to provide them with advice on how to go about reducing red tape. It was the talk of the town in terms of what the former government was doing and how far they had lost their way that they themselves did not know how to go about it.

We did know how to go about it, we do know how to go about it and we are going about it. We have established the Office of Best Practice Regulation, which is in itself best practice regulatory reform. That is what is done in Canberra. That is what is done in other jurisdictions around the world, particularly if you go to places like British Columbia and look at the process that they use to measure red tape, to stop the burden of red tape becoming even greater and also to provide reports to parliament about how they are going in terms of measuring red tape. So we are setting standards, we are setting targets and we are reporting back to this House on those standards.

We have a very rigorous procedure, as the Attorney-General will testify. He is, of course, a great fan of the Office of Best Practice Regulation and the requirement for new regulations to be reviewed by the Office of Best Practice Regulation to ensure that unnecessary regulation or regulation that has not been appropriately thought through is actually not brought forward in the first place. So, on top of reducing what is already there, we want to slow down the accumulation of red tape. The Attorney-General, of course, is someone in the department who has a fondness for red tape, so he looks with a great degree of kindness on the Office of Best Practice Regulation in order to slow down the effects of his department's ongoing charge for more of it.

The member for Mulgrave also talked about our use of the page count. We highlighted during the election campaign the 90,000 pages of red tape that were put in place by the former government—90,000 pages according to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland. We said that we want to reduce the amount of red tape by 20 per cent. We went to the Office of Best

Practice Regulation and said, 'Here's what we said we want to do. Can you tell us how we can improve on that?' The Office of Best Practice Regulation produced a report which said, 'You shouldn't just use one measure. You shouldn't just use the page count. You should use a number of measures. You should use the measures of page count, regulatory count and a dollar cost.' That is best practice, and that is what this government has adopted.

What we accept is that, much like the road toll—if you want to save lives you need to slow down the speed at which people travel but you also need to increase the training and you need to improve the roads that people travel on—it is the same with regulatory reform. If you want to ease the regulatory burden, you must reduce the page count—of course you must. But you must also look at the burden—that is, whether it is good regulation or bad regulation—and the dollar count. These are all things which this government has accepted and has agreed to report on.

When it comes to having in place a plan, when it comes to having thought through the processes for reducing the burden of red tape on small business, this government has promised and it is delivering. The assistant minister has already indicated how we are doing that. Whether it is in the pork meat industry, whether it is in the general run of the mill for other legislation, we are reducing the burden of red tape across-the-board here in Queensland. It is remarkable that the member for Mulgrave has the temerity to stand here in this House after being part of a government that rushed headlong to introduce new regulations at almost every opportunity to tell us how we are doing it when we are in fact using the best evidence based system that is available, that is used and that is recognised around the world.

I want to reflect on a comment made by the member for Gladstone when she spoke about the Queensland Competition Authority and monopolies. I think the member for Gladstone just does not have it right. The Queensland Competition Authority regulates the prices that are charged by a monopoly—that is, when there is no competition to keep that provider of services honest and to make sure they are providing services at a realistic cost. That is what the Queensland Competition Authority does. When there is no-one else to provide that service, the Queensland Competition Authority keeps the monopoly honest. That is what it does. It establishes a cost that otherwise a market would tell you is the right price. When the member for Gladstone said that the Queensland Competition Authority should be regulating a market rather than regulating a monopoly, it strikes me as a fundamental misunderstanding of what the Queensland Competition Authority is about. It has done a tremendous job. I want to put forward as an example its regulation and monitoring of water prices by water retailers. In its review of the provision of those services, it stripped millions of dollars from the costs that those water providers would otherwise have charged consumers. The Queensland Competition Authority said, 'There is no justification for you charging that. You are a monopoly provider. You are charging too much. You must charge less.'

The Queensland Competition Authority has been meeting its goal of making sure that monopoly providers do not gouge people in circumstances where there is no competition available. Under its new chairman, Dr Malcolm Roberts, with a new charter and a new lease of life it continues to do that. One of the most recent referrals I made, which I am particularly proud of, relates to the provision of disability aids to people with disabilities. At the moment there is a limited market for the provision of disability aids and people are paying a very high price. The question is: is that the appropriate price for the delivery of those disability aids or is there a better market available that people can use to access them? It is something that the former government failed to deal with and condemned people, particularly people with disabilities who have high expense needs, to paying higher prices than they might otherwise need to pay.

I want to reinforce that the Queensland Competition Authority's job is to ensure that monopoly providers, be they government owned or otherwise, are doing the job. As the Commission of Audit report recommends, I intend to ensure that the Queensland Competition Authority—soon to be the Queensland Competition and Productivity Authority—continues to drive those opportunities.

With those few words, I again thank everyone for their contribution. I note that the opposition will not be opposing the progress of this bill through the House. I look forward to it being passed in the very near future.