Speech By

Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

LIQUOR (RED TAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WATTS (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.40 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution as someone who has been a licensee under legislation here in Queensland, has had his RMLV, has had his RSA, and has been absolutely put through the ringer by Labor's knee-jerk legislation in this area that had very little effect apart from to drive good people out of the industry and encourage fewer and fewer people to even consider being involved in the industry because of the amount of regulation and the compliance cost of that regulation. The life was just choked out of small businesses. My colleague from Gregory talked about hairdressers. How many people on a Saturday morning before their wedding go and get their hair and make-up done and want to have a glass of champagne? Lo and behold the killjoys in the Labor Party would have that outlawed. It would be against legislation to do that without having training, a register, an RSA, a licensed manager on the premises, a liquor licence application and many, many other pieces of regulation. It was absolute nonsense they came up with. Knee-jerk regulation was the Labor way when it came to the liquor industry. We are now trying to reduce that red tape with the Liquor (Red Tape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill.

I think the Attorney-General has done a good job in getting the balance right and ensuring that low-risk businesses, such as restaurants and cafes that are opening and closing before midnight, where people might want to have a couple of drinks with a meal, are not put through the ringer. The industry that I was involved in, the nightclub industry, does need some higher thresholds of regulation and training and everything else. When I was involved in that industry I would have to go and do my responsible management of licensed venue course, which would be renewed on a different time schedule to my responsible service of alcohol, which of course was included in the other qualification.

You would find yourself constantly taking days off work to go and do qualifications that you have done maybe 12 times before, and at the same time the following year you would have to go and do a different qualification that included the first one, pay for the course, take time off work, so that you can responsibly serve alcohol which, of course, the first course covered. I know it sounds like I am talking double-dutch. The reason for that is simply because that is the legislation that Labor put together. It was absolute double-dutch. Small business owners out there trying to interpret it and do the right thing would often find themselves in breach of legislation for no other reason than the legislation was so inconsistent and so confusing for them to follow.

We have a sensible situation now where a small community club, such as a small RSL or a small bowls club, has a lower threshold of regulation than a nightclub. Clearly that is common sense. A few people having a few drinks after bowls—they are all members, they all know each other—why would they have to go through some of the ridiculous red-tape protocols that were put in place for these small community clubs? It was strangling small business. The bars at these community clubs are often manned by volunteers. I had situations at the university where we would be training 20 to 30 people every quarter to do their RSAs so that they could volunteer to man a bar for an hour or two at a particular function that might come up annually or bi-annually at a small sporting club.

I am not saying that people should not be sensible with alcohol. They absolutely should. I am not saying people should not be trained with alcohol. They absolutely should. I am not saying we should not have regulation in high-risk areas. This piece of legislation identifies some low-risk areas. It removes the double-dutch that was put in the legislation, quite frankly, by people who I do not think have ever left the south-east corner or ever understood what it takes to serve a drink in regional Queensland. The one-hour threshold they had for arriving at businesses for the registered licensed venue manager was just absolutely ridiculous for some of the businesses in Western Queensland where they might have a race day or something like that and they cannot even attend because they own a pub that is too far away. They have no concept of what it takes to make legislation that is appropriate for the whole of Queensland and certainly no understanding of what it takes to run a small business. If they did they would not have strangled them to death with overregulation, compliance costs and training costs that just made it more and more difficult for people to provide the services that their community wanted such as a little drink at a community club that wants to have a little bit of a fundraiser or a P&C that wants to operate a bar for a short period of time.

I think the Attorney-General is doing a great job in attacking the red tape in the liquor industry. It needs to be done in a very considered manner, which is in stark contrast to some of the knee-jerk and reactionary legislation that was put out by the Labor Party that basically had no effect in addressing any of the issues that they were trying to address at the time, all it did was choke good operators out of the industry. I think the Attorney-General is doing a good job in this area and I will support him going forward looking for other areas of low risk where we can reduce red tape, compliance costs and training costs on the industry. It is a great industry that people in Queensland should be able to enjoy in a safe and measured way. It is great for our tourism industry and I am sure the cafes and small community clubs in my area will greatly appreciate what the Attorney-General has done here. The only thing I would say is that I am not sure that it will help any maritime vessels in my electorate because there aren't any. But thank you very much, Attorney.