




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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**PAYROLL TAX REBATE, REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (7.40 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Payroll Tax Rebate, Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Whilst this is an omnibus bill and there are many elements to it, many of which, if not all, have been covered by the shadow Treasurer and member for Surfers Paradise, I want to spend my time focusing on two of them. One is of particular interest to me as the former minister for environment, and that is the amendments to the Environmental Protection Act. I was in the chamber just before the dinner break when the member for Mount Isa spoke about the benefits of these amendments for his community. It takes me back to a day earlier this year, 18 January, when we stood alongside the mayor of Mount Isa, the Hon. Tony McGrady, and the then member for Mundingburra, the Hon. David Crisafulli, and we announced that we would be drafting this amendment to ensure that more than a thousand jobs in Townsville and Mount Isa would remain in place.

Mr Cripps interjected.

Mr POWELL: I say to the member for Hinchinbrook that it was a very good day, a very hot day as I recall, standing there in the Glencore copper refinery in Townsville, but a very good day for the people of Townsville.

On 19 January an article in the *Townsville Bulletin* stated—

MORE than 1000 jobs will be saved in Townsville and Mount Isa under an LNP pledge to change laws to allow mining company Glencore to extend their copper operations.

Environment Minister Andrew Powell has promised to amend legislation to let Glencore renew its existing environmental licensing.

Glencore had previously announced its intention to phase out copper smelting and refining operations in Mount Isa and Townsville by the end of 2016 but after finding access to more copper concentrate—

as the member for Mount Isa pointed out this evening—

raised the prospect of continuing operations until 2020.

On that day I said that we would lock in Glencore's existing environmental gains in areas including air quality to allow the continuation of smelting and refining. It really only came about through the concerted efforts behind the scenes of the former member for Mount Isa, more prominently, the mayor of Mount Isa and former ALP member, Hon. Tony McGrady, and the then member for Mundingburra, David Crisafulli. They were constantly in my ribs—I think it is quoted that way—about this issue, ensuring that we actually drafted this amendment. It is great to see that Labor has been forced to do the same. I find it rather ironic that they are introducing this amendment given that they were the ones who basically put Glencore on the path to shutting down its copper smelter and copper refinery come 2016 because of the onerous conditions they placed on it.

Glencore have made significant gains. More importantly, it is a case of balancing the environmental gains with the economic gains that Glencore offer. As the member for Mount Isa also pointed out this evening, not only is Glencore going to benefit from this, but the phosphate mining operation up the road, Incitec Pivot, is also going to benefit in terms of jobs because they take the sulphuric acid from the copper smelter at Mount Isa and use it as a raw material. So there is a gain all round for the Mount Isa community and for jobs in the state of Queensland.

It is interesting that this change will benefit environmental management more broadly across the state. When we got to looking at this issue when it was raised with us by Glencore, the member for Mount Isa and the then member for Mundingburra, the department and I had a really good look at it and we realised that there is a shortfall in the Environmental Protection Act. We get industries and companies to embark on transitional environmental programs, TEPs, or what are now called transitional environmental licenses, TELs, but we find that there is no capacity for us to cancel those, even by agreement. So this amendment is necessary for us to be able to cancel a TEP or a TEL, particularly by agreement, ideally when the company reaches the gains that they require. If other unforeseen circumstances also dictate, this provides the capacity for the department to negotiate with the company to ensure that they get the right outcome.

This will be a very sensible amendment. It certainly has the support of the LNP, given that it was our amendment in the first place. It has literally been carried over into the legislation. It will be a very good win for the communities of North Queensland, particularly the communities of Mount Isa and Townsville. I do want to pay particular respect and acknowledgement to the former members for Thuringowa, Mundingburra and Townsville, Sam Cox, John Hathaway and David Crisafulli, who fought hard for this to be here in the chamber this evening.

The only other matter that I briefly want to touch on is one that a number of my colleagues have touched on previously, and that is this ludicrous idea that those opposite us, the government, want to repeal changes—sensible changes—that we made to the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act and the Plumbing and Drainage Act just last year. I have listened to a number of speeches in the House, including from the member for Morayfield, who talked about downpipes and essential plumbing. Quite seriously, water meters are not classified as essential plumbing. They are a fairly simple instalment that can be put in place by someone who is suitably trained.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr POWELL: I say to the member for Brisbane Central that this was brought forward by utility companies and local governments around the state because they saw it as an impediment to getting necessary utility work or water connections done. It was holding up construction and housing development and it was adding an unnecessary cost to residential consumers in particular as well as commercial consumers. What we see here is nothing more than payback for the support that the unions provided those opposite during the election campaign. I do not think I am the first to do so, but that is fairly evident in the headline on the front page of today's *Courier-Mail*, which states, 'Treasurer's "outrageous" new law to help key factional union ally exposes Labor's plumber cracks'.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Elmes): Order! Member for Glass House, no props, thank you.

Mr POWELL: This really has exposed what we have come to expect from those opposite—

Mr Pitt: Why don't you do some research?

Mr POWELL: I will take that interjection from the member for Mulgrave. If the member for Mulgrave had done his research, had read the committee's report, had seen the responses from the Local Government Association, had seen the responses from a number of local governments, he would know that this amendment that he is moving this evening is absolutely ridiculous, is unnecessary, is all about paying back his Plumbers Union mates and is not about passing on cost-of-living relief to the residents of Queensland. It is quite simple. I refer the member to the committee's report—

Mr Pitt: I've read the committee's report.

Mr POWELL: He has read the report? It is surprising that, having read the committee's report, the member opposite continues to persist with this crazy amendment. The LGAQ used the example of the Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council, which confirmed they pay \$60 per hour for a licensed plumber from Cooktown or Cairns. Typically, there is a three-week wait—and I am sure that, as he is also the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, he would be concerned about this—so the Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council batch a number of jobs at once. The council pays for all expenses and travel time on top of wages. For example, a three-day visit for a total of 24 hours would cost approximately \$2,900 including travel, meals and accommodation. If there is an urgent

single meter installation it would cost in excess of \$300 for three hours labour plus expenses. Guess who is going to end up paying that cost: the ratepayers of Wujal Wujal.

Mr Pitt: Guess how many ratepayers there are there. There's not that many.

Mr POWELL: So you spread that across even fewer ratepayers. Again the member for Mulgrave has not done his own research. He has worked out that his own amendment is going to cost the ratepayers of Wujal Wujal even more because the rate base is not that great. He is imposing an unnecessary amendment on the people of Queensland just to appease his plumbing union mates. What we have seen tonight is a sham consultation and a sham excuse to make a legislative amendment under the guise of occupational health and safety when all of the excuses they have given relate to issues that, we here in the LNP do not disagree, require a plumber's attention. But this is certainly not one of those examples. It is a bad amendment and we will not be supporting it.