




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA**

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Record of Proceedings, 4 June 2015

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (RESTORING FAIRNESS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (5.44 pm): It is an honour to rise and speak on this vitally important bill tonight. All those workers and battlers who voted for a Labor government are relying on us to deliver protections for their working life. This bill helps deliver those protections. This bill restores fairness. Voters chose to have a Labor government because they wanted the protections in this bill. They never again want to see a government that oversees the loss of 24,000 jobs. They never again want to see laws that leave them open to attacks by employers and laws that strip away their pay and conditions. They never again want to live in fear about whether they or their family can ever have a secure job again during their working life.

Where have we seen one of the most concerted attacks on workers under the LNP and Campbell Newman government laws? The Queensland local councils, led by the LGAQ. All those hard-won pay and conditions built up by generations of local government workers are under risk if we do not introduce this bill. Under the LNP, the LGAQ and local councils embarked on a policy of stripping back pay and conditions. The LGAQ—this champion of local governments—has been a leader in this charge to wind back those conditions enjoyed by Queenslanders.

Let me give the House an example of what local government workers at Mackay Regional Council were facing if their agreement proceeded under the Campbell Newman laws. In recent enterprise bargaining negotiations, the Mackay Regional Council set up a corporation called Northern Australia Services. There is some secrecy surrounding Northern Australia Services, but this is what I have been informed. Northern Australia Services is 50 per cent owned by Mackay Enterprises, a council company owned 100 per cent by council. Reportedly, the other 50 per cent is owned by Partnership Australia which is 50 per cent owned by the LGAQ. Yes, the LGAQ would form a company that would benefit from the Campbell Newman laws.

The crucial thing for workers is what the council wants to do with Northern Australia Services. Northern Australia Services will perform council services and ostensibly look for contracts across Northern Australia. Services at Mackay Regional Council that would go across to NAS would include IT, client services, rates, accounts, procurement, debt collection, administration support, payroll, HR and software systems. Reportedly, 650 workers from council would go across to this new company out of a workforce of 1,400 people. Now this company—part owned by the LGAQ—is a game changer for local government workers across northern and western Queensland. It is a potential threat to the workforce of all the local councils in those areas. It wants their outsourced business. No wonder the LGAQ opposes these new laws that prevent this contracting out. We could say goodbye to our white-collar workforce in council if this kind of set-up was introduced by councils.

The member for Maroochydore said earlier that the local council complained that the entry level for council workers is 20 to 30 per cent above the private sector. She also said that the council complained that they cannot contract out to the private sector. The real complaint is that wage levels

are too high for local government workers. That is the real complaint. The crux of it is that they do not want to pay more for local government workers than what they are paying them now; they want to pay them less.

The council workers in Mackay—the ones not in Northern Australia Services—are facing this if the restoring fairness bill does not get up. Under the proposed agreement, they would lose an extra week of leave and their locality allowance. No-one would be disadvantaged with regard to their base pay, but they would lose their allowance in favour of a new reduced allowance. Under this proposed agreement under the LNP laws, existing conditions would be preserved in a separate document. These are the non-allowable matters that we have heard about tonight. These are the crucial working conditions that would not be in their new award. What is more, a worker can only enforce the conditions in this document through a civil action, not through the commission. They have to say to their employer, 'I'm going to take you to court because you're not giving me these conditions.'

**Mr Pyne:** Who could afford that?

**Mr WHITING:** Who could do that? No-one. New employees under the Campbell Newman award get no 'preserved' conditions. New employees go on to substandard and lesser conditions. That means people who are doing the same job may have up to \$10,000 a year difference in pay. They would not get the new allowance. What I find particularly offensive under these LNP laws is that in order to save their own conditions, workers are forced to trade off the conditions of new workers. They are told that if they do not vote for these agreements, their conditions are not going to be put into this preservation document and they also would not get their pay rise.

Let me touch on a couple of other issues. This issue was raised by the LNP: why get rid of agreements that have already been passed by overwhelming agreement? They know why: we saw some employers rush to use these unfair laws, deliberately doing deals before a Labor government came into power. They got these deals up through a vote because the workers felt they had no choice—sign up or lose out. These workers are telling us that agreements made under these unfair laws will have to go.

Another issue we have heard from the other side is that they have listened to the mayors and CEOs; they have listened to their fairyland claims that 1,500 jobs would be lost and that this is just about 'managing' their workforce, not reducing their wages bill. I say that members opposite should go and listen to the workers. They should listen to how many of their fellow workers have gone under that mob in the last couple of years. Listen to how the councils have saved untold millions already by 'restructuring' and reducing staff. My advice to them is to not just go into the CEO's or the mayor's office, but to walk in through the staff car parks and talk to the ordinary workers about what they have suffered. They should go to the coffee shop over the road and sit down with a couple of workers having a coffee and ask them what they have been through.

Another issue they have talked about is the union bosses being in control. I will tell them to whom we are beholden, and that is the ordinary worker: neighbours, friends and family, other mums and dads at the footy matches. They are who we have to face each day. They look to us to protect their jobs, conditions and wages, and we never forget that huge responsibility. Those opposite will never understand that and they will stay on that side until they do understand it.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to all those workers who have contacted me and told me how important it is to get this bill passed. I have listened to three tele-town hall sessions run by the Together union and I received numerous emails. I say thanks to Alex Scott, Irene Munro and Neil Henderson, who have helped give their members a real voice. I especially acknowledge the members of the ASU Together union who have been in contact. They wanted us to 'bring on the vote' and we have.