




Speech By
Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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PAYROLL TAX REBATE, REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (4.08 pm): I rise today to speak in favour of the Payroll Tax Rebate, Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, currently before the House. As a member of the Finance and Administration Committee of the 55th Parliament I am delighted to stand to speak in support of this bill. The Treasurer, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships introduced the bill on 27 March 2015 and the bill was referred to the Finance and Administration Committee.

The committee conducted a public departmental briefing on the bill with officers from Queensland Treasury, the Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland, the Department of Housing and Public Works, the Department of Energy and Water Supply, the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Office of the Treasurer. In order to better understand the bill and matters relating particularly to the subject of farm-in agreements and the duties tax, the committee held an additional private meeting with Queensland Treasury officers so that we could better understand the bill. This bill is of a similar nature to the lapsed Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 that was referred to the former Finance and Administration Committee in the 54th Parliament and our committee recognised that some of this work had already been undertaken. The committee conducted a public hearing as well as sought additional written information from various stakeholders.

The bill will amend the following acts—the Payroll Tax Act 1971, the Duties Act 2001, the Taxation Administration Act 2001, the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000, the Financial Accountability Act 2009, the Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013, the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008. The bill covers these multiple areas and, like others before me, I will try to move through them one at a time using the relevant clauses as a logical guide. Clauses 3 and 4 refer to amendments made to the Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013 to delay for a period of 12 months legislation that was aimed at excluding motorcycle gang members from working in particular licensed occupations including those covered by the Electrical Safety Act 2002, the Queensland Building and Construction Commission Act 1991 and the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

Reviewing and addressing organised crime in Queensland is something that this government is committed to. The Attorney-General has reaffirmed this through a task force to review various 2013 legislation. However, this bill concentrates specifically on the concerns of the Treasurer in which he describes potential delays in processing licence applications and renewals. Any benefit arising from the implementation of the legislation will be outweighed by the cost to workers in restricting Queenslanders' ability to commence or continue to earn a living in their current licensed occupation.

Clauses 6 to 14 focus on amending the Duties Act 2001—namely, the introduction of electronic conveyancing in Queensland. In short terms, this amendment allows for the introduction of the ability to perform conveyancing without the requirement for representatives to attend in person at the titles

office, but of course the present system remains as an option, essentially giving us two systems that can operate. The committee was satisfied that the proposed amendments provide the appropriate framework to support the introduction of electronic conveyancing. This is simply just a sign of modern times and I think anything that we can do as law-makers to make processes simplified for Queenslanders is a good thing.

Clause 15 refers to the transfer duty concessions for farm-in agreements. This clause seeks to make amendments to the Duties Act 2001 to include concessional treatment for agreements for the transfer of exploration authorities. This will assist with the development of exploration authorities throughout Queensland. The discussions on farm-in agreements and the duty date back to 2011-12 with various statements and various ideas, but generally it all moved in one direction—that is, we needed to provide a framework to support what is referred to as the junior exploration sector and the small operators who are out there without the large scale backing, either financially or by multinational offices and advisers. It is always good to back the little bloke, the small industry, the small crew who have an idea, a truck, a small budget and the opening to make something good. The subject of farm-in agreements is something that most Queenslanders have little or no knowledge of. You never read about it in the news. It is unlikely to be on the front page and most likely will be in the financial section of the newspaper, but this is an important part of Queensland. This is one of our biggest industries.

In January 2012 the government announced that exploration authorities would be made liable to duty. The objective at the time was to raise additional state revenue of around \$30 million per annum. Following submissions from the Queensland Resources Council and with consultation with the Office of State Revenue, the government announced in September 2012 that a concession would be provided for farm-in agreements. During this parliament's committee hearings and submissions on this bill, there appeared to be some concerns or misunderstanding as to how the process works. In reality, unless you work in the Treasury field, sometimes it can seem like they are speaking a different language. Our committee had a further hearing with Queensland Treasury just so that we could actually try to get our heads around exactly what a farm-in agreement was, what a farmor was, what a farnee was and how it all worked together. I challenge anyone to have a good understanding of that without jumping onto Wikipedia or Google on their iPhones. Essentially, as I said before, this is about providing the junior exploration companies with the ability to be able to get out there and do the work that they need to do and as a government obviously we need to get behind them and support them. The committee spent hours on this area and in the end there was consensus reached that this was the right amendment, but we also agreed—and we heard the Treasurer talk about it earlier—that the sector needs some degree of education and in particular the junior exploration companies so that they can spend more time out in the field and less time on their iPhones trying to research what it is that they have to do from a compliance perspective so they can work with Treasury.

The next section of the bill refers to clauses 47 to 51 in relation to amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 1994 to allow for the cancellation of transitional environmental programs, or TEPs, or a temporary emissions licences, known as a TEL. In brief, a transitional environmental program is a tool which allows for a transitional period for environmental authority holders not operating in accordance with their licence to reach or return to compliance and a TEL, a transitional emissions licence, is a tool that is available for authorising emergency situations which would otherwise be unlawful. An example given in the explanatory notes is the release of water from a tailings dam during flood events. Clauses 47 to 51 outline that the current provisions provide for the TEL or the TEP to occur and that they allow for the TEL or the TEP to be amended, but what they do not allow for is for either of them to be cancelled due to them no longer being required or the holder of the approval has decided on other measures to achieve their compliance with the Environmental Protection Act. Feedback to our committee from the Queensland Resources Council was positive and it stated that feedback to it from its sector was that the amendment was of benefit. Therefore, the committee had no issues with the amendments.

Clauses 52 to 58 refer to changes to the Financial Accountability Act 2009 and deal with some procedural matters in respect of Treasury and the delegation of powers by the Treasurer to the appropriate officers inside Queensland Treasury. The committee was satisfied with these amendments and noted that they were essentially of an administrative nature. Clauses 59 to 61 refer to the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 and the capacity of the Commissioner of State Revenue to vary the period of, or exempt an application from, the residence requirements which form part of the eligible criteria. The committee was informed that the applicant for a first home owner grant must occupy the home to which the application relates as the applicant's principal place of residence for a continuous period of at least six months. The proposed amendment will allow the commissioner to give an approval or exemption at any time, even if the period to which the approval or exemption relates has ended. During the committee hearings there was much interest in the definition of a new

home and discussion as to the ruling around whether a relocatable home should be considered the same as a new home. However, we felt this was not inside the scope of this bill nor of this committee. Clauses 62 to 70 refer to implementing the government's 2015 election commitment of providing a payroll tax rebate for apprentices and trainee wages. To quote the Treasurer—

This government recognises that apprenticeships and traineeships provide a great employment pathway, particularly for young Queenslanders. This in turn contributes to the development of a highly skilled workforce to permit delivery of projects to ensure Queensland's economic growth into the future.

This commitment will deliver a 25 per cent payroll tax rebate on the wages of apprentices and trainees funded over three years in addition to the existing exemption for apprentices and trainees. Irrespective of the location, the message is the same. Whether it is from jobseekers or employers, at present employment opportunities and employment assistance is paramount in Queensland.

Clauses 71 to 74 of the bill amend the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002. I accept that we have had quite a bit of discussion in relation to this part of the bill from those who have spoken before me. In 2014 the former government introduced a bill in relation to this matter. It found that an ambiguity existed between the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002 and water supply act 2008 as to who installed water meters in Queensland. Section 35(1) of the water supply act 2008 provides that a service provider is allowed to install or approve the installation of a water meter whereas the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002 required that plumbing work defined as 'installing, changing, extending, disconnecting, taking away and maintaining drainage' must be undertaken by a person holding a plumbing licence. Under the Plumbing and Drainage Act, it is an offence to undertake plumbing work without a licence. In 2014, a report of the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee noted that the two acts could not be read easily together and that it could be argued either way that a person needs either a plumbing licence to install a water meter or that a person need only to be authorised to perform this work.

Essentially, clauses 84 to 87 of this bill make the same changes to the water supply act 2008 and amend the definition of 'plumbing work' to make it clear that the installation of a water meter is defined as plumbing work and can be performed only by a licensed plumber. Through the committee's hearings, discussions and submissions the following was observed: plumbers, as well as the Master Plumbers' Association of Queensland and the Plumbers Union Queensland, supported the idea of qualified plumbers installing water meters. Queensland Urban Utilities advised that it was pleased that the bill—

... clarifies that the role of a plumber relates to meter installation and not to repair, maintenance or replacement of a meter.

The LGAQ claimed that the amendments will have an impact on councils and water service providers. It argued that in some rural and regional council areas there are no or few licensed plumbers who are either employed by the council or in the private sector. The issue of a plumber shortage in our regional, remote and rural areas is certainly one of great concern to me. The electorate of Barron River borders the massive electorate of Cook to the north, which comprises some of Queensland's most remote regions. The committee was presented by the LGAQ with a map and a chart listing Queensland councils. That chart spelt out how many plumbers existed in the various shires and councils of Queensland. The chart was quite alarming to look at with respect to some of the regional areas. I want to focus on one area in which we were able to cross-reference the data, the most remote council located at the top end at the Torres Strait. The submission accompanying the chart provided by the LGAQ explained that there was one plumber in the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. However, when the committee interviewed the council on another matter—

Miss Barton: Between one to 10. Four and a half—

Mr CRAWFORD: I will take that interjection. The map that the LGAQ provided said one to 10 and then there was an additional chart attached to that in the same submission from LGAQ that listed that there was one plumber in that council. The question was asked of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council by the member for Coomera—and I think he beat me to the question by a couple of seconds. He asked—

How many plumbers do you have?

The response was—

We have two full-time plumbers who are employees at the moment. We also have four apprentice plumbers and all of those four apprentices live and work in the outer Torres Strait Islands.

Two plus four equals six. Where does the LGAQ get one? Six is not one. So I cannot rely on a chart which was clearly proven to be incorrect by the first council that we spoke to, which we selected randomly. Therefore, I can only regard the evidence given by the LGAQ as being unreliable.

But let us look past all of that. Let us look at the opportunities and what is right for Queensland and that is right from our workers. Why train someone to fit water meters when you can have them trained to perform a whole range of plumbing roles to the benefit to council, the benefit to the employees and the community? That all makes sense. I was flicking through some of the submissions that we had received and I saw one that came from a plumber by the name of Brad Morris. In that submission he states—

As a plumber it is positive to see that this government is proposing to overturn the legislative amendments made by the previous government regarding water meters.

Plumbers like me protect the health and safety of the community in Queensland every day and it is so important that the installation of water meters must be performed by a fully qualified and licensed plumber. Legislative changes were made in 2014 which removed this requirement allowing water service providers to engage an authorised person (not a plumber) to install water meters.

He then went on to say—

Any work to do with the quality of our water supply and the health of our Queenslanders needs to be handled by licensed plumbers.

A plumber can do more than just install water meters. So why should we train them just to do that? A plumber can do things like read drawings and specifications to determine the layout of water supply, waste and venting systems; detect faults in plumbing appliances and systems and correctly diagnose their causes; install, repair, maintain domestic, commercial, industrial plumbing fixtures and systems; locate marked positions for pipe connections, passage holes and fixtures in floors and walls; measuring, cutting, bending, threading pipes using hand tools and power tools and machines; joining pipes and fittings together using soldering techniques, compression fittings, threaded fittings and push-on fittings; testing pipes for leaks using air and water pressure gauges; an awareness of legal regulations and safety issues; and ensuring that safety standards and building regulations are met. Why would those opposite oppose training people to this higher standard? Our remote communities need these people. There are benefits to having qualified plumbers on staff not only through the pride of employing and training a young person to have a trade that could take them on for the rest of their career but also as they benefit the community around them and the employer through having an employee or group of employees who proudly call themselves plumbers. We do not train mechanics to merely be qualified to replace the differential of a 1986 Ford Falcon. We train them to be a motor mechanic—a mechanic who uses their skills and qualifications on Datsuns, Peugeots, Ferraris, Commodores—and I could go on forever. Their training provides employment opportunities. Our workers living in these remote areas of Queensland need opportunity. That opportunity will be provided to them by this Labor government. This amendment to the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002 and the water supply act 2008 will ensure that water meters are installed by a licensed plumber. That will not only benefit locals and local government but also grow our workforce of qualified tradespeople, which will be a positive benefit to Queensland.

Finally, I refer to the following statements of the Master Plumbers' Association of Queensland—

The repeal of this section of the Bill will restore high standards in the industry ... Plumbers undertake a nationally recognised four year apprenticeship covering 64 units of competency ... prior to acquiring their plumbing licence; this qualifies them not only to install, maintain and replace water meters safely, but to deal with any installations issues.

Let us be the only state in Australia that requires licensed plumbers to install water meters. That is something that I support, that is something my colleagues support and, therefore, I support the bill.