




Speech By  
**Hon. Curtis Pitt**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2015

### **HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (12.35 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I would like to thank the Finance and Administration Committee for its report tabled on 10 August 2015 and those who made submissions to the committee about the bill and also those who appeared as witnesses as part of the committee's inquiry.

The bill contains two major components: firstly, changing the Queen's Birthday and Labour Day public holidays; and, secondly, implementing changes to the way high-risk work licences are administered under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. I note that the committee agreed that the proposed amendments to the high-risk work licences be supported but was unable to reach agreement on the proposed changes to public holidays.

The committee made only one recommendation which was that, should the bill pass, the minister work with community and other groups to alleviate any inconvenience caused by the movement of public holidays. I am pleased to table the government's response to the committee's report.

*Tabled paper:* Finance and Administration Committee: Report No. 6, 55th Parliament—Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, government response [\[1370\]](#).

The government accepts the recommendation of the committee and notes that the changes to public holidays made by the bill do not commence until 2016. It is appropriate that the proposed changes do not commence until 2016 so that the community and other groups have sufficient notice and opportunity to make appropriate adjustments for events in 2016 and beyond.

The bill, from 2016, returns the Labour Day public holiday from the first Monday in October to its rightful place on the first Monday in May and moves the Queen's Birthday public holiday from the second Monday in June to the first Monday in October. While the name of the public holiday in October will change, it is important to note that there will still be a Monday to recover after footy finals weekend. As a very proud North Queenslander, I can say that I needed that Monday to recover.

It has been necessary to reinstate the date for Labour Day and change the Queen's Birthday public holidays because of the spiteful actions taken by the former Newman LNP government. After extensive public consultation in 2011, the former Labor government responded to the overwhelming preferences expressed by the community by moving the Queen's Birthday public holiday to October in 2012. From 2013 the former LNP government, without any community consultation and without taking it to an election, shamefully moved the Queen's Birthday to June and moved the Labour Day public holiday from the first Monday in May—which had been a long tradition having been celebrated for over 100 years—to October.

In 2013, while in opposition, Labor made a commitment to honour Queensland's history and reinstate Labour Day to the first Monday in May. In addition, Labor supported a public holiday in the

second half of the year by shifting the Queen's Birthday public holiday to October. We are doing what we said we would do and we are delivering on this historically significant election commitment.

There is a great deal of cultural and community significance attached to the celebration of Labour Day in Queensland on the first Monday in May. One of Australia's first Labour Day marches was held in Queensland in 1891, when striking shearers in Barcaldine marched with flags and banners. The day has been consistently celebrated as a public holiday at that time since 1901. It is the significant history of events such as these in May in Queensland and the subsequent achievement by the labour movement of the eight-hour working day, collective bargaining, fair and safe working conditions and minimum wages for modern society which are recognised by observing Labour Day on the first Monday in May.

There is no corresponding historical or cultural significance attached to the celebration of the Queen's Birthday in June, with the date of our current sovereign Queen Elizabeth II's birthday being in April. The bill reinstates arrangements introduced by the then Bligh Labor government from 2012 to celebrate the Queen's Birthday public holiday on the first Monday in October which responded to overwhelming community support for a public holiday to occur in the second half of the year and specifically on that day. I note the Queensland Tourism Industry Council reported to the Finance and Administration Committee during examination of the current bill that there was a strong preference by their members for the movement of the June public holiday to October—a preference which was indicated to them through an extensive statewide survey.

The movement of the Labour Day and Queen's Birthday public holidays as proposed by this bill also spreads public holidays across the calendar year similar to other states and territories. Western Australia, New South Wales, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory all observe a public holiday in the second half of the year around October. Victoria already celebrates Melbourne Cup Day in November and a public holiday for the eve of the AFL grand final in October. The proposed amendments, however, do not affect public holidays in 2015. Making them effective from 2016 delivers certainty and stability by giving prior notice to business, community organisations and local governments of the changes.

Under work health and safety laws across Australia, a high-risk work licence is required for persons operating certain high-risk equipment such as cranes and forklifts, or performing scaffolding duties. High-risk work licensing ensures those who operate this type of equipment or perform these duties can do so safely and competently. There are approximately 260,000 high-risk work licence holders in Queensland, with around 30,000 new high-risk work licences granted each year.

This bill will change how the Office of Industrial Relations delivers its high-risk work licence services by leveraging off the Department of Transport and Main Roads' existing licensing system. The bill includes amendments to transport legislation administered by the Department of Transport and Main Roads to set up a framework that will allow workers to apply for a high-risk work licence through an online process, rather than in person at an Australia Post outlet. The amendments extend the Department of Transport and Main Roads' existing scheme for taking, keeping and using digital photographs and signatures for transport licence products to allow the Office of Industrial Relations to use these records and the department's card production processes for the purposes of issuing, replacing or renewing a high-risk work licence.

Implementing an online application system will have a number of benefits for workers, employers and government. For workers it will make it easier to apply for a high-risk work licence, especially for those living in rural or remote areas or for those people who might be fly-in fly-out workers. Further it will allow workers to apply for their licence 24 hours a day, seven days a week at any location. For example, a person holding a current driver's licence and who has recently completed training and assessment in operating a forklift will simply be able to apply online for their high-risk work licence from their workplace or using their smart tablet at home without the need to attend Australia Post or have their photograph taken. Similarly, if a person renews their driver's licence and they have recently had their photograph taken for a high-risk work licence there would be no need to attend a Department of Transport and Main Roads licensing customer service centre to have their photograph taken again.

For employers it will save both time and money as workers will no longer need to attend an Australia Post outlet or be required to purchase a passport sized photograph. In fact, the Office of Industrial Relations in Queensland Treasury anticipates that workers and employers will save approximately \$1.6 million per annum. Government will also benefit from the Office of Industrial Relations using the Department of Transport and Main Roads existing licence processing capabilities. In particular, it is estimated to result in savings of up to \$750,000 per annum. In addition, the proposed online service is expected to reduce delays in processing applications, facilitating a faster and more efficient service along with more robust identification verification processes which significantly reduce the potential for identify fraud.

Importantly, the amendments in the bill and the enhancements to the Department of Transport and Main Roads information system to accommodate high-risk work licensing establishes reusable infrastructure. This will allow for additional departments and agencies to transition their licensing application process to the system and have licences produced under similar arrangements, yielding an increasing return on investment for government. This is what this bill is about. I encourage all members to have their say, particularly as it relates to the holidays component of the bill. I am very proud to stand in this House and be overseeing a bill which is about restoring Labour Day to its rightful place in May.