




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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

 **Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.44 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Payroll Tax Rebate, Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I thank the committee for their comprehensive report of 95 pages. The committee is led by the member for Bulimba and the member for Coomera as the deputy chair. I know they have had a significant amount of legislation to deal with in the 55th Parliament, but it is a comprehensive report and on behalf of the parliament I want to thank them for their work.

I note what the honourable minister had to report in terms of tabling the government's response. There are five recommendations, four of which relate to the Duties Act. The fifth recommends that the minister consider investigating additional methods of increasing the employment opportunities for apprentices and trainees. That concerns the payroll tax rebate, and I will deal with that recommendation later in my contribution.

This is an omnibus bill that, as we have heard already from the minister in his introductory speech, amends the following acts: the Criminal law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013; the Duties Act 2001; the Environmental Protection Act 1994; the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000; the Financial Accountability Act 2009; the Payroll Tax Act 1971; the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002; the Taxation Administration Act 2001; and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008.

The purpose of the amendments include: the provision of a payroll tax rebate on the wages of apprentices and trainees; giving support to electronic conveyancing in Queensland; providing legislative support for the duties concession on farm-in agreements; delaying the commencement of the provisions aimed at excluding motorcycle gang members from working in certain licensed occupations; requiring plumbers to install water meters; and a number of other administrative amendments.

I note that many of these provisions were introduced by the former treasurer and member for Clayfield, who is here beside me in the chamber, and that is a bill that has subsequently lapsed. There are some significant changes with the addition of the amendments to the Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013 and the amendments to the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008, which the Treasurer has just referred to, and we will not be supporting those elements of this legislation. I will focus on those aspects of the bill that were not in the original Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 before turning to those amendments that have remained the same.

First and foremost is the change amending the Payroll Tax Act 1971 to give effect to the Labor Party's election commitment of a payroll tax rebate for apprentices. In introducing this legislation the Treasurer said—

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.

But quite clearly this bill does not go far enough, and quite patently the majority of businesses in Queensland will not receive any benefits from this commitment. I note the Treasurer's comments in his second reading speech that, whilst it will not be the majority of businesses who benefit, the businesses that are going to benefit make up the majority of those who actually employ apprentices and trainees. I would like to make the point that the previous LNP government's commitments in this area were to give employers who were not necessarily caught under the payroll tax provisions a \$6,000 incentive to put on an apprentice. That was \$36 million for 6,000 and it was fully subscribed. On the advice that I received as the responsible minister at the time there is no doubt that, when you look at all the statistics, those sorts of incentives would lead to a spike in employment of apprentices and trainees. My concern is that the rebate in this bill is only payable to those businesses that pay payroll tax in Queensland.

The current payroll tax exemption threshold is \$1.1 million, having been lifted by the Treasurer from \$1 million under the previous Labor government. That was certainly acknowledged as something that, as business has mentioned, is a tax on jobs. Whilst there were things that we would have liked to progress at a greater rate, we were unable to do so because of our commitment to responsible fiscal management.

We certainly made a 10 per cent increase to the payroll tax concession to make it \$1.1 million. The important issue when it comes to the rebate as it is affected by this bill is that this rebate is only available to businesses that have payrolls above \$1.1 million and therefore have a payroll tax liability. As the committee noted in its report, the CCIQ highlighted in its submission that at present only 11,000 Queensland businesses are required to pay payroll tax. As I understand it, there are about 400,000 businesses in Queensland, and the CCIQ estimates that only three per cent of businesses will be eligible to benefit from this commitment. Essentially, this bill ignores 97 per cent of Queensland businesses. Remember that many of those businesses had taken up our LNP government's commitment of 6,000 apprenticeship and traineeship rebates of \$6,000 and as such the program was fully subscribed. So we doubled that as part of our Jobs of Tomorrow promise at the election campaign.

**Mr Pitt:** And slashed Skilling Queenslanders for Work. And you talk about skilling and training.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I can hear the Treasurer speaking about Skilling Queenslanders for Work. That is a significant commitment that the government has made—duplicating, I note, the federal government commitment in its budget of last week as it has put over \$300 million into those sorts of training packages. Sorry, they are not training packages. Skilling Queenslanders for Work was actually duplicating federal provisions, so I am glad to see that the federal government has listened to our exhortations. Whilst this state was spending over \$100 million on Skilling Queenslanders for Work, the federal government, in its budget of last week, has returned \$300 million into this area.

I acknowledge that the state government is putting money into Skilling Queenslanders for Work. The important thing is that many of those programs did not actually lead to real jobs. They were leading to people getting better qualifications and skills that would enable them to get the job.

**Mr Pitt:** Did you read the Deloitte report?

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I did read the Deloitte report, which said that it would return \$7 for every dollar spent. We came in with a commitment to maximise the use of our dollars, to make sure they went where we were trying to get real results in apprenticeships and traineeships. No-one could question that giving rebates of \$6,000 each, a program which was fully subscribed, had a better benefit than doing something in the area of federal government responsibility, in the area of Skilling Queenslanders for Work. Queensland was the only state that was doing that at the time. Whilst Queensland was spending \$100 million a year on it, South Australia or Victoria was spending \$6 million on similar programs. Yes, they were tough decisions.

The important issue is that this bill ignores 97 per cent of Queensland businesses. The CCIQ submission to this bill states—

... with only a minor proportion of Queensland's business community eligible to benefit from this payroll tax rebate initiative, the opportunity to meaningfully impact apprentice and trainee numbers is significantly diminished ...

CCIQ's comment is that Queensland's small business community stands ready to also assist in providing our State's youth an entry into the workforce, if only offered incentive to do so.

As I have already mentioned, they had taken up our government's offer of \$6,000 with great gusto and the program was fully subscribed. That is why it formed an important tranche of our commitments for Jobs of Tomorrow, which we took to the last election.

It is clear when looking at the recommendations of the committee that this simply does not go far enough. The government's own policy of only giving it to businesses that are required to pay payroll tax has led to the recommendation of the committee that the Treasurer referred to, which states—

The Committee recommends that the Minister consider investigating additional methods of increasing the employment opportunities of apprentices and trainees.

Let us contrast what we are seeing from this Labor government with what the LNP offered at the last election. We took to the election a policy that would have enabled small businesses right across this state to take on more apprentices and to employ more Queenslanders. First and foremost, we pledged to increase the payroll tax exemption threshold by \$100,000 every year for the next three years—

**Mr Pitt:** You did not deliver that when you were in office.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** The reason we did not is the situation we inherited from those opposite. That is always the case. It is always about inputs from the Labor Party. We were going to take the threshold from \$1.1 million to \$1.4 million.

The important issue is that under the previous Labor government the payroll tax threshold was \$1 million. We made it \$1.1 million. That is what the LNP was and is about: lowering payroll taxes for small businesses. This would have reduced the number of businesses having to pay payroll tax in Queensland. Instead of paying payroll tax, these businesses would have had more money to reinvest in their businesses or been able to employ more people. It would also have had the flow-on effect of reducing the payroll tax liability for medium sized businesses with payrolls above the exemption threshold.

A significant issue that is raised often with those of us in parliament is the exemption threshold being reached through bracket creep, as it were. The commitment, which was strongly backed and supported by Queensland's business community, was fully funded and factored into the budget. That is an important point. This money was built into the budget. Tax relief for small business was built into the Queensland budget, yet what did the Labor Party do? The Treasurer is here in the chamber and he is quite proud of it. It canned this promise. It has taken these cuts away from small business. In the words of CCIQ, which represents all small business across the state—

Lifting the payroll tax threshold was designed to address two flaws with the tax.

Firstly, because of wages creep many small businesses were inadvertently growing into having to pay a tax on giving their existing employees a job.

Secondly, many small businesses are presently structuring their workforces to sit just under the threshold. By lifting the threshold we are allowing those small businesses to grow their workforces.

By walking away from lifting the threshold 4,000 jobs are now jeopardised—20,000 Queensland small businesses will directly lose from the Queensland Labor announcement.

It is interesting to reflect on this point. At the same time that the federal government is easing the tax burden on business to stimulate activity and boost confidence, the Labor Party in Queensland is making it tougher for them. It is slashing tax cuts that were factored into the budget to pay for its uncosted election commitments. Instead, Queensland businesses are getting a tired, old commitment that is just a rehash of an old policy that existed under Andrew Fraser and Anna Bligh—a policy that does nothing to help almost 400,000 businesses across Queensland.

The Labor Party is essentially relying upon three per cent of the business community to do the heavy lifting with regard to apprentices and trainees. With reasoning like this, is it any wonder that business confidence has dropped so sharply since the Palaszczuk government's election? The recent CCIQ pulse survey showed—

**Mr Pitt:** Why don't you talk about the NAB survey or the Westpac survey? You never refer to more than one survey.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** If I can hear the interjection I am happy to decide whether or not I will take it, but I cannot when the Treasurer is mumbling over there half-heartedly. I am happy to take the interjection and say that all of the Queensland business surveys to which I am referring are ones that literally refer to Queensland businesses. The Treasurer is referring to a survey that I think was taken after the federal budget in which people actually said that they had an increase in confidence because of the federal budget and because of the small business tax concession.

**Mr Pitt:** Wrong. Wrong on both counts.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** The important issue is that the policy being given effect to by the Treasurer does not help about 400,000 businesses across Queensland. The CCIQ pulse survey, which the Premier has said she rejected, shows that business conditions have dropped to their lowest levels in a decade. The Sensis Business Index of last week also shows a huge drop in confidence amongst Queensland businesses. In the last quarter of 2014, under the LNP, Queensland was leading the nation. After one quarter of this government we have dropped 30 points, to the second lowest in the country. I think the only state behind us is a seven per cent state, that is, South Australia. This drop in confidence is a direct result of Labor's anti small business policies.

Let us look at the apprenticeship pledge. We want to consider other policies that we took to the last election. They were fully funded and factored into the budget. As I have mentioned, the \$91 million Jobs of Tomorrow package would have helped about 26,000 young Queenslanders get into work. I have mentioned that part of that package was \$36 million to double the apprenticeship pledge. It was a hugely popular program. It provided employers with up to \$6,000 for each additional apprentice taken on. I think we started in about July last year and it was fully subscribed by September. We initially announced 6,000 placements under the scheme but made the decision to double it to 12,000 due to its popularity. As I have mentioned, this initiative was open to all businesses across Queensland, no matter how big or small. It was an incentive to say that if you took on a new apprentice—it could not be based on your apprentice numbers in previous years; it had to be an extra one—if you provided a pathway to a high-skill trade for a young Queenslander, we the government would support you. We gave businesses that extra incentive to employ young Queenslanders. It is exactly the type of initiative Queensland businesses are crying out for.

Again I refer to the submission made by representatives of the CCIQ as part of the committee's consideration of this bill. It states—

... CCIQ strongly supports the provision of incentive payments to employers to encourage them to take on an additional apprentice, trainee or cadet.

Despite this policy being fully funded and factored into the budget, despite this policy gaining wide support amongst Queenslanders, Labor again shelved it. It is no coincidence that the LNP's policy is closely aligned with what the small business community actually wants, because we actually listened to them and their concerns and implemented policies that we knew would stimulate growth. As I have mentioned, measures that have been put forward by the current Labor government and which are in this bill ignore 97 per cent of the Queensland business community.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** The point I was making before the lunchbreak was that the measures being put forward by the current Labor government are measures which ignore 97 per cent of the Queensland business community. It is interesting for us to look at how much businesses might expect to receive under this new rebate. Working out one's payroll tax liability can be quite complex, but the Office of State Revenue, OSR, website provides a brief explanation of how businesses might be able to calculate their rebate under this bill. A business with a payroll tax liability of \$10,000 will stand to save less than \$600 under Labor's scheme. Under the LNP's scheme any business stood to receive up to \$6,000 as an incentive to take on a new apprentice and under the ALP's scheme a small portion of businesses could save approximately \$600. So the contrast is stark. Whilst any tax relief is welcome, for a business making the decision whether to employ a new apprentice, this scheme has marginal benefits. It is interesting that the ALP costings document released before the election shows that it was planning to save \$255 million from abandoning the staged increase of the payroll tax limit at which payroll tax would kick in from \$1.1 million to \$1.4 million. Therefore, it had booked a saving of \$255 million.

It is obvious that there will be nothing like that expenditure on this program and the concern is that the payroll tax rebate misses the mark. It will not have any meaningful impact on increasing apprenticeship numbers in Queensland. In fact, it is a carbon copy of something that former treasurer Andrew Fraser brought in in about 2010 or 2011 in the 53rd Parliament and it did not make a difference then. When I was the minister for education, training and employment and had briefings about what makes a big difference to employers in terms of putting on new apprentices and trainees,

it was the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government that stopped rebates after one budget and stopped them particularly quickly. Immediately after that the rebates, which were valued by employers and then they were gone, meant that those numbers started to drop significantly. That is why we had a significant election commitment in the lead-up to the 2012 election that we would create another 10,000 apprenticeships and that is why \$6,000 each was an important part of that, which was well taken up last year. I am very concerned about the fact that the payroll tax rebate that is part of this bill misses the mark and will not have a meaningful impact on increasing apprenticeship numbers, as I have mentioned. It is especially concerning because Labor was elected on a mantra of jobs, jobs, jobs, but it does seem that it is intent on increasing payroll taxes on small businesses despite the fact that small businesses employ more than one million Queenslanders.

It is obvious, as I have already mentioned in my contribution, that the committee does not have any faith that the payroll tax rebate will in any meaningful way improve the employment outcomes for young Queenslanders, and that is evident from recommendation No. 5 in the committee report, which states—

The Committee recommends that the Minister consider investigating additional methods of increasing the employment opportunities of apprentices and trainees.

I would put it to the House that there was a way of increasing employment opportunities and that was new apprenticeships at \$6,000 each in terms of a rebate to employers. Given that the first tranche was fully subscribed very quickly, it would have been a great way to get more people into employment—something this government has said that it is going to do but has yet to prove that it is going to do it. That is why the committee made the recommendation for the Treasurer to investigate ways of doing more, because the payroll tax rebate is simply not enough. It did not make a difference in 2010-11 and I am concerned it will not make a difference in 2015-16.

I turn now to the Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013 dealt with in clauses 3 and 4. The Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013 extended the previous government's commitment to prevent criminal motorcycle gangs from participating in or unduly influencing legitimate business activities in particular industries. Among other things, amendments were made to a number of acts to prevent identified participants in criminal organisations from obtaining or holding a licence, permit or authority as provided for under various industry acts—the Electrical Safety Act 2002, the Liquor Act 1992, the Motor Dealers and Chattel Auctioneers Act 2014, the Queensland Building and Construction Commission Act 1991, the Racing Act 2002, the Second-hand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act 2003, the Security Providers Act 1993, the Tow Truck Act 1973, the Weapons Act 1990 and the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

The commencement of amendments to the Electrical Safety Act 2002, the Queensland Building and Construction Commission Act 1991 and the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 was originally deferred until 1 July 2015 to allow sufficient time for the government to consider the outcomes of the federal government's Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption. This bill proposes delaying the commencement of these provisions for another 12 months until July 2016. I note that there was a difference of opinion on the committee with regard to this amendment. Page 10 of the committee report states—

The Committee did not agree on the proposed amendments to the *Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013*.

...

The non-government Members of the Committee indicated their concern with the amendments to delay for a further 12 months certain not yet commenced amendments in the *Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013*. The non-government members of the Committee were of the view that while the legislation remains in place the provisions provided for in that legislation should be enacted. They noted that the government has indicated they will avail themselves of the opportunity to conduct a review of the legislation later in the year; however, in the interim the non-government Members of the Committee are of the view it is appropriate for the provisions remain in place lest their delay predicate or influence the outcome of the review.

Given there was a significant difference of opinion on the committee with regard to this amendment, it gives us a chance to reflect on the actions taken by the LNP in the 54th Parliament to stop the influence of criminal motorcycle gangs. As a member from the Gold Coast—I note that the member for Broadwater is here and will no doubt speak on this particular issue given that she is a member of this committee, as will the member for Coomera, whom I understand will not be taking the same direction in terms of the specific interest from his perspective as deputy chair of the committee—the LNP did take a strong stance in this area in our geographic part of the state. Being the member for Surfers Paradise, it had become obvious in the years leading up to us coming into

government in 2012 that we needed to take effective action to effectively police the bikies. That is why we introduced other legislation to remove their influence in certain licensed trades in not only my electorate of Surfers Paradise but also Broadbeach and other parts of the coast—the massage industry, locksmiths, tow trucks, tattoos and the proliferation of drugs throughout the nightclub industry and throughout general society leading to things like extortion and, in fact, violent incidents happening in our suburban streets on the Gold Coast.

They were the sorts of things that were happening and they were happening because there were not enough police resources and we believed that the legislation needed to be changed. I note that over the years in this place the member for Mermaid Beach has made these points a number of times. One only has to look at the statistics—and they are publicly available—of the number of people who can be identified as being members of bikie gangs. I think the total number was about 1,600 and up until now about 1,100 of those members have been charged with various offences, and significant offences, and numerous charges. They are the things that led us to the amendments in the legislation that we brought in that were supposed to come into effect in 2015 and which this bill will delay for another year. The members of the opposition are concerned about whether the new government is as committed as is the LNP to ensuring that links to bikies are removed from workplaces and that their influence wanes.

We have had acknowledgement by jurisdictions in other states about the effectiveness of our legislation and our strong response to the concerns that came out after that September 2013 incident at Broadbeach in my electorate. Our subsequent reaction to that event has meant that these bikie gangs have moved elsewhere. Last week, in a significant court case in Southport—not covered by the legislation that we had brought in—an offender was found not guilty. As he walked out of court he said, 'I can't wait to get out of this state back to Victoria,' which is where he had moved to. The people of the Gold Coast would say, 'Good riddance. We're glad that he is not on the Gold Coast anymore' as he was identified as being part of a criminal gang. Any watering down of the legislation that this government is now reviewing would be viewed very dimly by the people of the Gold Coast. They are greatly concerned that those criminal elements will come back into their community. That affects the people who live in our suburban streets where some terribly abhorrent activities have occurred and it gives people concern for both their safety and their children's safety as well as the safety of people visiting the Gold Coast. We are very concerned that this provision in the bill is a delaying tactic to make sure that the provisions are never enacted. Even the department in its response to the committee emphasised the following—

... the delay in commencement of the ... act will allow for the government's review of these provisions to occur, including—

and this is very salient—

an assessment of whether these provisions are required.

The opposition puts it to the government that these amendments are required. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The jurisdictions in New South Wales and Victoria have said that these are not the sort people whom they want to be welcoming to their states. South Australia as also seen the strong deterrent effect of our legislation and they do not want to see bikies coming to their state. We are certainly happy to be rid of them and we think it is imperative that we make sure that they are not employed in those areas that I identified, which are covered by those other acts. In that regard, I note that the non-government members of the committee had a view that was different from that of the government members.

As evidenced by many of the government's actions taken since coming to government, we know that the government is beholden to the unions. In relation to the provisions of this bill, the government's actions could be linked to union influence, because many of the industries that are subject to this new legislation are heavily unionised. I turn to the amendments to the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008. I note that today in the media a lot has been said about these amendments. I note the *Courier-Mail* article titled 'Union deal taps water pressure', which discusses the amendments in this legislation and whether they have been fast-tracked as some sort of factional deal between the Treasurer and the head of the Plumbers Union, Brad O'Carroll. This morning, the Treasurer came into this place and gave an explanation about these matters. He reassured the House that there is no connection between the faction that he represents and this particular union and its representative. All I would say is that that information did not come to light because of the opposition's great forensic abilities. So it begs the question as to whether the Treasurer is being done over by someone on his own side.

The article makes these statements—

Labor insiders have accused Mr Pitt of trying to pass the laws in time to boost Mr O'Carroll's re-election prospects before the ballot closes this weekend.

The article quotes Mr O'Carroll as saying—

Yes we did get what we wanted.

As I say, the Treasurer has already come in this morning and reassured the House that the two events have no connection at all. All I would say is that he doth protest too much.

**Mr Hinchliffe** interjected.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I say to the Leader of the House that this has not come from our side. Therefore, the Treasurer must be being done over by someone on his own side. So when government members stand here and argue for the changes, perhaps using quotes from members of the Plumbers Union, they should keep that information in mind.

The background to these changes go back to a bill that was introduced by the LNP government in 2014 that removed the discrepancy between the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008, the WSA, and the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002, the PDA, relating to the lawfulness of certain persons installing water meters. Section 35(1) of the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act provides—

A service provider may install, or approve the installation of, a meter ... on infrastructure supplying water to premises.

The act states further—

The meter is the property of the service provider even if it is installed inside the boundary of the premises.

The act empowered an authorised person to read, maintain or replace a water meter. At the same time the Plumbing and Drainage Act required that plumbing work, which was defined as 'installing, changing, extending, disconnecting, taking away and maintaining plumbing' must be undertaken by a person holding a plumbing licence. It is an offence under the Plumbing and Drainage Act to undertake plumbing work without a licence. Section 121 of the Plumbing and Drainage Act provides for certain exemptions to this offence. The 2014 bill sought to rectify this discrepancy by amending section 121 of the Plumbing and Drainage Act to include an offence exemption for—

- (e) the installation, and any work relating to the installation, of a relevant water meter by an authorised person under the Water Supply Act, section 35.

The amendments before the House mean that the installation of a water meter is plumbing work that can be performed only by a licensed plumber. Although groups such as the Plumbers Union were in favour of these changes, other stakeholders were not. The LNP is concerned that these amendments could increase costs for Queensland families, particularly for people living in rural and remote parts of the state. The LGAQ's evidence showed that in many areas within Queensland people do not have access to licensed plumbers. That could lead to significant costs placed on people living in those areas because of the requirement to get a plumber to undertake such work.

Interestingly—and I know the member for Coomera, the deputy chair of this committee, will go into this matter in more detail—there is no evidence that this provision in the Plumbing and Drainage Act needs to be reversed, except for the question that it is a payback for the Plumbers Union. Since this provision was introduced, there have been no specific examples of the installation of a water meter being done in such a way that risked health and safety. I note that New South Wales and Victoria already have provisions in their legislation that mean that people do not have to be a licensed plumber to install a water meter. I am not aware of any issues arising out of the situation in those states that the committee would have taken into consideration to say, 'It is time to change this provision.'

I refer to the submission made by qldwater, which states—

The policy objective clearly supports the re-establishment of a protected market for plumbers for work which is more appropriately managed by water service providers. It has been developed under the false premise of improvement to public safety. By adopting this position, the Queensland Government is ignoring industry best practice in Australia and internationally.

This is not the opposition saying this; it is qldwater. It is saying that the principles of this provision in the bill have been developed under the false premise of improvement to public safety and that we are ignoring industry best practice in Australia and internationally.

**Mr Cripps:** Why would they be doing that?

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I take that interjection. I say to the member for Hinchinbrook that I think it is obvious.

I also want to refer to the following comments of the general manager of advocacy of the Local Government Association—

The justification for the change to the current legislation as claimed by the industry relates to ensuring high standards are achieved through the engagement of fully qualified and licensed plumbers. But what is the public interest to be secured here? Frankly, we are not sure there is any.

...

Whilst the association is aware of claims about a risk to public health if water meters are not installed by licensed plumbers, the LGAQ and its partner organisation, qldwater, believe any risk to be non-existent given current legislative requirements associated with drinking water quality. At no time in this debate has it ever been established that the current arrangements have resulted in adverse outcomes impacting on public safety, water quality or water supply security. Indeed, the examples of cross-connections and incidents involving the installation of water meters put forward previously were during a time when only licensed plumbers were permitted to do the work. In the current environment, both authorised persons and licensed plumbers are expected to have the same high standards of work, with the former receiving specific training and more frequent experience in regard to installing meters.

As we have already asked a number of times, are the amendments to the Plumbing and Drainage Act as identified in this bill being made for another reason? Is this another example of the new Labor government making good on a promise to their union mates? They are ignoring the potential increase in costs to Queensland families, particularly those Queenslanders living in rural and remote parts of the state.

I want to turn now to what are, from the opposition's perspective, the non-contentious parts of the bill. The amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 1994 are an LNP commitment not yet brought into legislation. These amendments to the Environmental Protection Act allow for the cancellation of transitional environmental programs, TEPs, or temporary emissions licences, TELs. They are changes that were previously flagged by the former LNP government. The changes are well explained in the explanatory notes. I note in the committee recommendations that the industry has no issues with these amendments. TEPs are a tool available under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 which allow a transitional period for environmental authority holders not operating in accordance with their licence to reach or return to compliance with their approval. TELs are a tool available for authorising in an emergency situation what would otherwise be unlawful activities, such as urgent releases of water from tailings dams during flood events. There is currently no power in the Environmental Protection Act 1994 to cancel a TEP or a TEL in the event of changed circumstances even if it would result in enhanced environmental outcomes or the approval is no longer required. There is a very specific example in the explanatory notes in relation to the copper smelter in Mount Isa extending its life beyond 2016 under a TEP.

**Mr Cripps:** Well done, Andrew Powell!

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Exactly. Congratulations to the former minister for environment, Andrew Powell, the member for Glass House. The smelter operates under a TEP that authorises operating parameters different from the environmental authority during a transitional period. It is comprehensively explained and supported. The LNP will not be opposing these aspects of the bill.

I turn now to other changes in the bill which mirror the legislation introduced in 2015. The Taxation Administration Act is amended to support electronic conveyancing for transfer duty in Queensland. Further amendments to the Taxation Administration Act 2001 provide for the payment of interest on refunds to taxpayers by the commissioner resulting from a reassessment giving effect to the commissioner's decision on an objection. This will bring Queensland in line with all other states and territories and provide fairer treatment of taxpayers by compensating them for the loss of use of their funds while their objection is being determined. It will also ensure consistency with existing provisions for the payment of interest on refunds arising from court or tribunal decisions and orders. There is also a minor amendment to the Taxation Administration Act 2001 which corrects a cross-reference.

The Financial Accountability Act 2009, which Madam Deputy Speaker will remember from our time on the public accounts committee when she was last in this place, is amended so that it reflects modern financial management practices and streamlines certain procedural matters. Specifically, the amendments will increase the number of administrative powers that the Treasurer is able to delegate to officers within Queensland Treasury and the Queensland Treasury Corporation; clarify the ability of the Treasurer to enter into derivative transactions on behalf of the state and when this is appropriate; allow a non-public servant to be a department's head of internal audit; clarify that a department does not enter into a derivative transaction if it merely takes over the administration of a derivative transaction; require the appropriate minister to be given a report on, and to monitor, derivative transactions administered by the department—a department administers a derivative transaction if it enters into the transaction or if it takes over the administration from another department; and specify the requirements when ownership of a company moves between departments.



The First Home Owner Grant Act is amended to ensure that the statutory discretion given to the Commissioner of State Revenue to vary the period of or exempt an applicant from the residence requirements which form part of the eligibility criteria under the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 can be exercised at any time. This amendment benefits applicants and will apply retrospectively in accordance with existing administrative arrangements. This is an interesting amendment. I think many of us have had constituents who were not always aware of the requirements under the First Home Owner Grant Act about their residence requirements and have been caught out and sometimes appeal. This is something that deals with that particular issue.

Amendments in relation to the Duties Act 2001 are the subject of four of the recommendations of the committee. The Treasurer has tabled the government's response to those. The amendments to the Duties Act 2001 provide an appropriate transfer duty and administration framework to support the introduction of electronic conveyancing as enabled in Queensland through the provisions of the Electronic Conveyancing National Law Queensland Act 2013. Other amendments to the Duties Act 2001 give retrospective legislative effect to a number of taxpayer beneficial administrative arrangements. These amendments provide a transfer duty concession for resource sector farm-in agreements as defined, correct the operation of a transfer duty exemption in section 145 of the Duties Act 2001 so that it also applies to land vested under statute law in the state for a purpose specified under that section and extends the vehicle registration duty exemption available to charitable institutions by reducing the period that charitable institutions must use a vehicle for a qualifying exempt purpose to nine months. Further amendments to the Duties Act remove redundant provisions and update an example for the calculation of vehicle registration duty to reflect current transfer duty rates.

I note the committee's recommendations as they relate to the amendment regarding the transfer duty farm-in agreements. Some concerns have been raised through the committee process from different stakeholders regarding these arrangements. As I have already mentioned, I note that the Treasurer has tabled the government's response where recommendations 1 and 2 are accepted and there is a significant response from the Treasurer to the recommendations and especially recommendation 4. These changes are quite technical and detailed and I would be interested to hear the Treasurer's comments in consideration in detail as to how he is going to adopt the committee's recommendations or if he wants to expand on the tabled government response which we have only just received.