




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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ENERGY AND WATER OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.46 pm): I also rise to speak in support of the bill and the minor amendments that have been proposed by the ombudsman and subsequently the minister. During the inquiry process the committee received four submissions: one from the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland; another from the office of the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland; and further submissions from Master Electricians Australia and the Energy Retailer's Association of Australia.

The objective of this bill is quite simple, and that is to amend the Energy and Water Ombudsman Act 2006 to allow non-residential electricity consumers consuming between 100 and 160 megawatt hours of electricity per year access to the dispute resolution services of the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland. It also extends the functions of the Energy and Water Ombudsman to allow it to become a recognised external dispute resolution provider, and it also allows the ombudsman to disclose customer-identifying information about complainants to their respective energy and water entities for billing purposes.

This is essentially an amendment that is about helping small business, and that is why I am particularly keen to speak in support of the bill and that is why we are supporting these amendments. The sorts of businesses that will benefit from these changes are smaller, privately owned businesses like bakeries, laundries, small supermarkets and small production and manufacturing businesses who are dependent on high amounts of energy consumption. It also includes a lot of community organisations like surf clubs and junior Rugby League clubs which are using extremely large amounts of electricity for the supply of lighting or for the operation of some smaller licensed clubs.

The review found that some of these high energy-using customers experienced difficulties similar to those of residential customers when speaking to their energy retailer. Many have a relatively poor understanding of contracts and tariffs because they are busy running their businesses and perhaps do not pay enough attention to the detail. Many also experienced long waiting times and delays when making phone calls and attending to inquiries and disputes over services and bills.

I am particularly pleased to support this bill. It means that some 5,000-plus small businesses across Queensland will have access to the services of the ombudsman. It will not create an onerous workload on the ombudsman's office. They estimate that it may add only about an extra 200 cases per year. The thing I particularly like about this is that no extra budget funding from the state government is required in order to support this because the claims are fundamentally paid for and dealt with by the energy providers under the current program of dealing with normal retail customers.

I am pleased to commend the bill to the House. I particularly want to thank the secretariat of the Utilities, Science and Innovation Committee for their support in working through the various challenges of reviewing this legislation.