




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2015

GUIDE, HEARING AND ASSISTANCE DOGS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (10.09 pm): I rise this evening in support of the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Amendment Bill. Until the first reading of the bill I had very little knowledge of the impact the legislation had upon the lives of the people who depend upon it the most. I have learnt that guide, hearing and assistance dogs are working dogs specially trained to facilitate people with a disability to actively participate in various aspects of society that we take for granted. While I knew that guide dogs supported a person with a visual impairment, I had limited knowledge about the hearing dogs that support people with a hearing impairment and, likewise, that assistance dogs supported people with mobility impairments and assisted them in tasks such as carrying and picking up items or even pulling a wheelchair. But what was more astounding than the array of tasks and functions that these dogs perform to alleviate some of the effects of a person's disability was the current legislation that was so caught up in red tape making it almost discouraging for people to obtain the support that these amazing animals provide.

This bill simplifies and streamlines the process by reducing red tape, providing more flexibility to users and, perhaps more importantly, trusting people. This bill achieves this through four key points. We have heard all of them tonight, but perhaps the most significant one to me is that the bill will relax legislative requirements to provide proof of a person's disability every time a person renews their identity card. I grapple to understand that the existing legislation required a handler to consistently verify their disability every time they had to renew their identity card. What seems like a simple amendment to an existing piece of legislation in turn ends up being a major reform to the way the rights of people with a disability are recognised in our state. These changes will make the life of people who rely on guide, hearing or assistance dogs one of independence. It will reduce the need for support but, more importantly, it is empowering. I commend the bill to the House.