




Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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**HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.18 pm): I rise to add my contribution as a committee member and to give my support to the government's Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. The bill looks at a number of issues from fast-food labelling and tackling obesity to amending the Health Ombudsman Act. I wish to follow up on comments made by the member for Caloundra in regard to the HHSs and temporary board positions. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Caloundra, who certainly has a good awareness of the health setup in Queensland.

I think that the HHSs were a good initiative of the former government. It sounds like decentralising was the way to go. Labor did that many years ago and it is not a bad thing. In relation to the initiative regarding the boards, the member mentioned the Hunter review. The idea of having temporary appointments was that (a) you need someone on the board to undertake a clinical role; and (b) vacancies come up from time to time. Boards cannot operate without the positions being filled. Therefore, this is a practical amendment that came from the department, not the minister. It is necessary so that temporary appointments due to vacancies can be filled. It is not, as the member for Mudgeeraba mentioned, to encourage union participation. I cannot see how that comes close to the functioning of a HSS. We need the boards that are in step with what is going on in the community.

I turn to some of the other amendments in the Health Legislation Amendment Bill. Queensland has a problem. We are aware that a staggering 65 per cent of Queenslanders are considered overweight. That means approximately 2.3 million adult Queenslanders are overweight or obese. There is no doubt that this is a very serious issue and one that I am pleased to see that our government is addressing. We know that being overweight or obese leads to chronic health concerns such as diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke and a range of other health issues. The cost to our health system is enormous. Being overweight or obese causes not only economic damage but also physical and social damage. Economically, obesity costs us from increased absenteeism or lost days from work and often expensive and ongoing medical costs. Social impacts include a lower quality of life, discrimination and lower wages. Of particular concern is the increased likelihood of children being bullied. I am encouraged to see that evidence suggests that rates of obesity have slowed. Notwithstanding that, we must continue to make changes to address the issue. That is why this bill is important.

This bill will establish a menu-labelling scheme to assist consumers to make better informed and healthier choices when purchasing fast food. The amendments will require food businesses licensed under the Food Act to display for consumers the average energy content of each standard food item. The average daily energy intake is 8,700 kilojoules. Armed with that information, I am confident that consumers will begin to make healthier life choices when purchasing fast food.

I am pleased to see that our key health organisations are backing the scheme, with support from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and Diabetes Queensland. I want to mention what an

outstanding organisation Diabetes Queensland is. Last year on Walk to Work Day, the member for Greenslopes and I walked to its headquarters across the river. I was in my Cowboys gear and we went via Suncorp Stadium. I wish we had a stadium like that in Townsville. Diabetes Queensland is a fantastic organisation. The staff shared with us stories of not only what they deal with involving previously diagnosed patients but also the alarming numbers of newly diagnosed diabetics.

I also say 'well done' to the Heart Foundation Queensland. They do an outstanding job in educating our community about the associated increased risks of heart disease. They too are rightly concerned about the growing number of overweight individuals in Queensland. In its submission to the former Health and Ambulance Services Committee's inquiry into this bill, the Heart Foundation Queensland noted that, in a recent Queensland survey, more than 90 per cent of surveyed participants supported the introduction of a kilojoule menu-labelling system in fast food and snack chains. This bill will give Queenslanders the information they need to make those correct choices.

Of course, a conversation about being overweight leads to the important need for us to support a menu-labelling system. The evidence is in: we all know that unhealthy eating is a leading cause of excess weight and chronic diseases and we know that more than half of Queensland's population is obese or overweight. We know that takeaway food and eating out often means bigger portions and more calorie-dense foods that are high in fat and sugar. In 2014, 30 per cent of Queensland adults consumed takeaway food at least once a week. A large portion of those Queenslanders were young people aged 18 to 24. Unfortunately, fast food options are not always healthy food choices, putting people at a greater risk of a range of health issues including type 2 diabetes and heart disease, as I have said. Assisting consumers to make better and informed healthier choices when purchasing is essential to combatting those problems.

The bill will require chains that sell ready-to-eat food to provide that nutritional information at the point of sale. This includes fast-food chains, snack food and drinks chains, bakery chains, cafe chains and supermarkets. The display requirements will have to apply to food businesses required to be licensed under the Food Act that have more than 20 outlets in Queensland or 50 outlets in Australia, ensuring that small businesses are not unduly impacted. For consistency and to prevent confusion, food outlets that are not captured by the scheme but voluntarily display nutritional information will be required to comply with the display requirements. Businesses must clearly display the average energy content in kilojoules for each standard food item. As I have said, to give context to that, businesses will also be required to display a statement that 8,700 kilojoules is the average adult daily energy intake.

The bill gives food businesses plenty of time to ensure they are meeting these requirements, with the provisions applying only 12 months after the bill comes into force. I have been pleased to see some businesses already voluntarily displaying this information. Applying the scheme across Queensland will help to ensure that consumers receive consistent messages about the nutritional content of fast food. A 12-month transitional period will also allow time for the Queensland government's community education campaign to take effect. This campaign is designed to help Queenslanders better understand and correctly use nutritional information on menus. The labelling scheme will allow consumers to consider the complete picture and take into account their own daily energy requirements before they buy.

I will speak briefly about the amendment to the temporary appointments, which I mentioned in reference to the speech of the member for Caloundra. The panel plays an important role in disciplinary proceedings relating to registered health practitioners. Assessors from the public and professional panels provide assistance to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal during those disciplinary hearings. Professional panel members provide technical assistance to QCAT, while public panel members represent the community's values and the expectations of health professionals. That is why it is important to ensure that we have enough assessors at any given time to meet demand. Currently, the act allows for the temporary appointment of an assessor to the professional panel. However, there is no equivalent provision for the public panel. The amendments maintain appropriate safeguards. The minister can make a temporary appointment only on advice from the principal registrar of QCAT. The minister will not be able to direct that a particular assessor be involved in a disciplinary matter. The principal registrar will remain in control of determining which assessors sit on particular panels. These amendments will help to ensure that there are sufficient assessors on the public panel at any given time to deal with disciplinary matters fairly and promptly. I commend the bill to the House.