




Speech By  
**Hon. Curtis Pitt**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2016

**CRIME AND CORRUPTION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Sport) (6.06 pm): I move—

That all words after 'apprentices in Queensland' be deleted and the following words inserted—

'and supports the Palaszczuk Labor government consulting with key stakeholders during the Ergon-Energex merger process, including Master Electricians Australia and relevant electrical contractor associations, to discuss the opportunities that exist for the merged Ergon-Energex to work with electricians and retailers to grow the industry.'

I rise to defend the principle on which this government was elected and that is that public assets remain in public hands. At the last state election the people of Queensland were very clear in their rejection of the member for Clayfield's Strong Choices campaign, which was to try to sell off \$38 billion worth of assets. This government is committed to strengthening these publicly owned electricity distribution businesses by merging Ergon and Energex. As part of this merger a new energy services division will be created, which is going to be about positioning Queensland to embrace the emerging technologies and the changing energy industry.

We are only able to do this because we have these energy assets remaining in public hands. Imagine if those energy assets were not in public hands? What would the member for Clayfield be arguing about then? He would be arguing about who was going to be taking the business. He is worried about the government taking the business through these GOCs. A private company would have been flooding the market and other companies would be trying to compete. This motion that has been moved is an absurdity.

When the merger was announced at the midyear review, we made it very clear that the new energy services division was about creating the types of government owned energy businesses that Queensland would need over the next 30 years. It is likely that the focus of the energy services business will be on new and innovative products and services to grow the overall market, particularly in regional Queensland. The energy services division will look at how the energy network as a whole can embrace new technologies such as battery storage, smart metering, large-scale commercial solar and other renewables. The energy services division is going to be delivering up to 500 new jobs over the next decade, the vast majority of them in regional Queensland.

The business will look at offering new services where there are limited offerings. I heard the member for Clayfield rattle off a list of names. There are gaps in the market for a range of energy services, but we are not looking to compete with mum-and-dad electrical service providers. That has never been the case. It is scaremongering by the LNP. That is typical, because it lost the fight at the election and now it is trying to regroup and garner some support for what it wants to do and that is to partially privatise—and in many respects fully privatise—those businesses, which it did not get away with doing at the last election.

It is not our intention to take work from existing licensed electrical contractors who do solar or electrical work at the household level. I love how the members opposite are jumping to conclusions before we have even finalised the merger and released the business case. They expected us to be worried about their scare campaign. We are getting on with the job of creating a \$24 billion energy company that all Queenslanders can be proud of.

We greatly respect the work of the master electricians. They have been at the front line in rolling out hundreds and thousands of solar installations over the past several years across all parts of Queensland. Why? That is as a result of Labor's proactive approach to putting in place incentives for solar uptake and growing a new industry for Queensland. That was opposed by those opposite, particularly the member for Clayfield, who called people who took up the government's offer 'latte sippers'. Not everyone who has solar is a latte sipper.

This work that existing licenced electrical contractors do at the household level will continue, their relationship with the merged Ergon and Energex will continue, as will the other valued electrical work they do in the homes of Queenslanders. This government is committed to working with stakeholders, including Master Electricians Australia and other stakeholders, and talking with them during the merger process. I have a meeting tomorrow with Malcolm Richards from Master Electricians Australia.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr PITT:** We have been negotiating. We are a government that consults. Those opposite are the government that went off and did its own thing. That is what they became known for: the know-it-all Newman government. It clearly has not changed under the member for Southern Downs.

Importantly, the final direction of the merged entity is still being finalised. I want to be clear about that. A parent company for the merged group is expected to be in place by 1 July 2016. We have legislation before the House that deals with that so I want to be careful. The merger of Energex and Ergon was an election commitment of the Palaszczuk government. We are getting better than expected savings through that process over five years. We expect that we will create this new energy services business which is not about competing with existing electrical contractors. That is a scare campaign by those opposite; clearly it is out of desperation. In question time this morning half of their questions were ruled out of order and the rest of them were nonsensical. I think the member for Hervey Bay and the member for Toowoomba North were the only two members who asked a sensible question. Those opposite have no idea what they are doing because they are absolutely floored that they lost. They are still not over it. We are working hard and will continue to work hard until this merger is a success.