




Speech By
Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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PUBLIC HEALTH (MEDICINAL CANNABIS) BILL

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (9.54 pm): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in support of this bill. This is not a ‘grow your own dope’ bill for recreational users. It is about a carefully produced, consistent medicinal cannabis pathway for those who have a genuine need. The Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2016 establishes a regulatory framework for the therapeutic use of medicinal cannabis prescribed by a medical practitioner or a specialist doctor. I note the evidence to support the possible therapeutic benefits of medicinal cannabis products for a range of conditions when used to complement traditional treatments. This bill is supported by Epilepsy Queensland, MS Australia, MS Research Australia, the Cancer Council Queensland, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the Queensland Nurses’ Union and the Australian Medical Association of Queensland. I also note that the bill in no way allows people to grow their own cannabis, even for therapeutic purposes.

Although I know that some people have advocated for the right to grow their own cannabis and for its use to be decriminalised, that is not what this bill is about. I believe that it is important to state clearly that cannabis is still a dangerous drug that must not be used improperly or without close medical supervision. If obtained illicitly from a criminal supplier or homegrown, it is potentially harmful owing to a lack of certainty about the concentration of active ingredients or any contaminants to which plant products may have been exposed. For just some of those reasons alone I believe that the use of medicinal cannabis must be carefully and properly regulated.

The bill provides a regulatory framework—a carefully considered framework—of controls around who can prescribe, dispense and possess medicinal cannabis products. Patients will be able to obtain medicinal cannabis treatment through one of two pathways: either being prescribed by a medical practitioner with approval from the chief executive of Queensland Health to prescribe the product for the patient, or being prescribed by a specialist doctor, such as an oncologist, who has an as-of-right authority to prescribe specific medicinal cannabis products for patients suffering a specific range of conditions.

The bill provides for applications for a medicinal cannabis approval by a medical practitioner to be decided on a case-by-case basis by an expert advisory panel assisting the chief executive to decide whether an application should be approved and what conditions should be imposed. For example, the panel may provide advice on the appropriateness and safety of treatment based on medical evidence about the patient’s condition and symptoms, the opinion of a specialist medical practitioner and the patient’s history of drug dependence. The framework will ensure that appropriate powers are available to help prevent misuse and the risk of medicinal cannabis being dispensed, supplied or issued to a person not authorised under the bill.

This bill will be reviewed after two years of operation to ensure that it meets the needs of patients, health service providers and enforcement agencies and complements related developments in this rapidly evolving space, particularly with regard to the proposed domestic cultivation, production and manufacture of medicinal cannabis.

I also wish to acknowledge the committee members in particular for the excellent work that they have undertaken. I think it shows that, in addition to the processes of government and the many people in the community and advocates for this new framework, the parliamentary committee process is able to appropriately deal with the many heartfelt submissions from those who have a very real need to see alternative pathways provided. Such a committee process has been an excellent way to not only enable people to have a voice in this process but also have access to expert clinical advice as to what is the best way forward in regard to assessing appropriate treatments. I commend the bill to the House.