




Speech By  
**Glenn Butcher**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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### **HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (3.07 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Health Legislation Amendment Bill. It is of great concern to me when reading this bill that over 2.3 million Queensland adults are overweight or obese. As a percentage, that is close to 65 per cent of our actual adult population in Queensland that is in this category. This is a very serious issue and one that I am pleased that the Palaszczuk Labor government is addressing, along with the Minister for Health.

Obesity not only causes physical and social damage but also economic damage. This can be through work days lost, medical costs in our health system and lost wellbeing. One of the leading causes of excess weight gain and chronic disease is unhealthy eating. For a busy family a quick takeaway is sometimes an option for lunches or dinners. It is a known fact that these fast-food options are not always healthy food choices and it often means bigger portions and more calorie dense foods, higher in fat and sugar. Studies have shown that consumers greatly underestimate the amount of energy, saturated fat, sugar and salt in this unhealthy food. The bill amends six health portfolio acts to support policy initiatives of the government and to improve the effective operations of the acts.

I will focus today on the proposed amendments to the Food Act. Specifically, the bill will require fast-food chains, snack food and drinks chains, bakery chains, cafe chains and supermarkets to display nutritional information and to authorise disclosure of confidential information for limited public health and safety reasons. The businesses included in the menu labelling scheme will apply to businesses that have either 20 outlets in Queensland or 50 outlets nationally. As I said, these include fast-food chains, snack food and drinks chains, bakery chains, cafe chains and supermarkets. These businesses sell ready-to-eat food such as pizzas, burgers, hot chips, cooked chickens, pies, kebabs, sandwiches, salads, ice-creams, juice, soft drinks, coffee, doughnuts, cakes and muffins—no doubt many of those have been eaten at one time when on a big night out. The amendments will not apply to convenience stores, cinemas, service stations, dine-in-only restaurants, catering services, mobile food vans, not-for-profit home delivery—companies such as Meals on Wheels—or patient food services in health facilities.

In the Gladstone region there are in excess of 50 food outlets that will be captured by this bill. Alarming, of those 50 outlets I mentioned above, we have 20 separate fast-food stores. You do not have to drive far in Gladstone to get your fix, with many takeaway stores to choose from. In June 2015 the Queensland Government Statistician's Office reported the population of the Gladstone region to be 67,905. Many people in my electorate talk to me about the proportionally high number of fast-food outlets that we have. With the boom we have had in Gladstone, we have seen an increase in the number of fast-food stores in Gladstone.

This bill will allow people to make more informed decisions about the food choices they make not just for themselves but also for their families. It is well known that the widespread availability, marketing and consumption of these unhealthy foods are key factors in developing obesity. Studies have shown that consumers greatly underestimate the amount of energy, saturated fat, sugar and salt contained in these unhealthy foods.

This bill establishes a statewide menu labelling scheme to assist people to make informed and healthier fast-food choices by providing them with easily understood and nutritional information at the point of sale. The amendments implement the government's 2015 election commitment and demonstrate this government's commitment to a nationally consistent approach for food labelling. As committee members have noted, submissions largely indicated support for the menu labelling scheme, particularly for a nationally consistent approach and a community education program to support the introduction of this legislation.

The National Retail Association broadly supports the amendments in the bill as it is consistent with New South Wales and because of the government's commitment to an education scheme. The Heart Foundation of Queensland made a submission that this bill would not only allow Queenslanders to make healthier food choices but also encourage food outlets to give some menu items a healthy makeover, which I look forward to.

In addition to food labelling, the proposed amendments to the Food Act 2006 will allow Queensland Health to better protect Queenslanders in relation to food safety issues. At present the legislation does not permit Queensland Health to disclose information that is defined as confidential. There are some exceptions to the restriction on disclosing confidential information such as where a person consents or where the disclosure is for the purpose of ensuring public health or safety and the information is being disclosed to certain entities. However, these exceptions do not go far enough and arguably the Food Act, as it stands, protects the reputation of commercial entities at the expense of public safety.

Queenslanders have the right to be fully informed when it comes to food safety, and as such this bill proposes an amendment to ensure confidential information may be disclosed where disclosure is reasonably necessary to prevent or reduce the possibility of a serious danger to public health or to mitigate the adverse consequences of a serious danger to public health. An example of the current lack of protection was evident in 2015 when Queensland Health was not able to issue warnings to the public to not consume certain brands of eggs known to be linked with outbreaks of salmonella. This bill will protect Queenslanders by permitting Queensland Health to issue these important public safety messages in the future. I commend the bill to the House.