




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (3.14 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and, in particular, the new food menu-labelling system. I have been a vegetarian for many years—this is sort of personal but we are all one big, happy family—and I recently learnt that my cholesterol levels were slightly elevated. This led me to do some research and to find out what I needed to do to get my cholesterol down. What I learnt led me to abandon all animal products and pursue a vegan, plant based diet. This was about three months ago and I have never felt better.

An honourable member: And you look all right, too.

Ms HOWARD: Let us hope that this wellbeing translates to a healthy cholesterol level. I will not lecture or bore members with the virtues of veganism, as I can see everyone's eyes glazing over. I do not intend to convert anyone sitting here, but I feel I would be remiss in not sharing with members just how healthy a change it has been in my life. As I said, I will not bore members with the details but switching to veganism has taught me many lessons, one of which is you really need to know what goes into your body.

Members would be shocked to find out how much processed food and fat appears in ostensibly vegetarian and vegan food, especially when eating out. Whether it be animal stock, animal rennet or random flecks of meat, you do require a certain sense of vigilance when it comes to your food. I am not alone in making these choices as there are many among us who choose to follow this way of life. However, there are even more who have it thrust upon them. Diabetics, coeliacs and those who are lactose intolerant, to name a few, do not get to choose but, rather, have their diets forced upon them. These people are given no options and the severity of some cases can leave them bedridden for days, or worse, due to an accidental intake of the wrong type of food. Therefore, I commend the Minister for Health for taking the initiative to establish these new amendments, specifically the amendment to the Food Act 2006 to give people the knowledge they deserve to make the right choices when it comes to food.

The Palaszczuk government has always been a government that puts the wellbeing of its constituents front and centre. After landmark bills passed on smoke-free places and alcohol fuelled violence, we have consistently shown that we are a government that puts the health of Queenslanders first. That is why it is of paramount importance that we, as a government, make the effort to assist all Queenslanders in their journey to ensure they and their families are making the right choices when it comes to their food.

Queensland is a state of big eaters, something I am sure many members can sympathise with. However, when 30 per cent of Queensland adults consume takeaway at least once a week, we have to ask ourselves how much we know about what we are putting in our mouths. While many fast-food chains such as McDonald's are providing their customers and our constituents with the nutritional information they require on many fronts, there are still some that have not taken the initiative. This is a

gamble with our health that we cannot afford to take. That is why I applaud the minister for taking the bold step to consult with industry leaders and draft some much needed amendments to the Food Act 2006.

The bill will require chains that already sell ready-to-eat food to provide nutritional information at the point of sale. This will include everything from fast-food chains to bakery and cafe chains and even supermarket chains. This will provide the average Queenslanders with the necessary knowledge to make an informed choice on their food. These restrictions will be applicable only to licensed food outlets that have 20 or more outlets in Queensland or 50 outlets in Australia, leaving small businesses like the local cafe or bakery with the choice to follow suit. Queenslanders are on average well-informed people. However, I can understand that there may be some confusion over not just what is healthy but also how much on average they can and should eat.

That is why I am proud that this government has taken a comprehensive yet simple approach to teaching Queenslanders what is what when it comes to their meals. The daily average intake of an adult is considered to be about 8,700 kilojoules, give or take. By making sure that businesses across the state are prominently displaying this labelling information in their stores, it is our belief that Queenslanders will be given a chance to look at this from a wide perspective and make it easier to approach this topic and consider their own daily energy requirements.

It is time that we as a state take responsibility for what we put in our mouths. With around 2.3 million adults classified as overweight or obese—close to 65 per cent of our population—we need to take a long, hard look at ourselves and ask what we can do to help. This amendment put forward by the Palaszczuk government is a positive step in the right direction for our state. This bill will not just have a positive impact on the health and lives of our people, but will get the ball rolling on a serious discussion about Queenslanders' eating habits. I commend the bill to the House.