




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.50 pm): I, too, would like to make a contribution to the debate of the Heavy Vehicle National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. I will start with what is probably one of the biggest changes in the taxi industry in Queensland. This legislation is about assisting taxi and limousine operators after the minister's handling of the Uber invasion.

In the seat of Gregory, taxis are the only public transport option and therefore are essential—they are not a luxury; they are essential—especially for our elderly, disabled and ill. When an industry plays such a key role in your society, government has an obligation to approach change with a great deal of caution. When a new operator arrives on the scene, the government must enforce its own regulations. That is all Uber is: a new operator in an old business. The app is just a shiny bauble to distract. As a father of three children, safety aspects concern me when the operator is now a legal operator. As a country Queenslander, machine safety aspects also concern me.

We must treat this issue with a great deal of caution because we are dealing with a lot of families. As the member for Whitsunday outlined, this impacts real people and real businesses. People have invested a lot of money in taxi licences in the taxi industry. For many of them, those licences were their superannuation. That was going to be their retirement fund. That was going to be what they needed when they retired from the industry to be able to live out the rest of their life. That was their superannuation.

I was fortunate enough to meet a lot of taxi operators throughout Queensland when the infrastructure committee looked into the issue. What I can say is that this issue has affected a lot of people. I was listening to the member for Redlands and the member for Logan when they talked about that person who fronted their committee. There was not a dry eye in the committee or in the committee room. I can understand that because this has turned people's lives upside down with no clarity and no assurity on where they are going.

I will talk about some operators in my electorate of Gregory—good people like Ben and Cecilia Hooper from Emerald who own Emerald Taxis. They are hardworking, family people. Their youngest son, Harry Hooper, goes to school with my daughter. Harry was just selected as the vice captain of Marist College and also represented Queensland in schoolboy Rugby. He is a fine young gentleman and comes from a very fine family—a family that plays an active part in the Emerald community. They not only provide a taxi service but also play an active role in the community. They have been a strong Emerald-Central Highlands family for a very long time and this has had a major impact on them.

Ben Hooper, who has always been very good to me and is always happy to pass on some advice, whether it is about taxis or any issue, is always happy to see me. He is always happy to pick me up if I need a taxi. This has had a major impact on him, his wife, Cecilia, and their family in not knowing the future of taxis. They have licences and those licences were not cheap. They have a few taxis and they have people who work for them. The people who own taxi licences also employ people who also have to pay mortgages. They have an income from the taxi industry and this will impact them as well.

I want to talk about Judy Tanks, who owns the Longreach taxi service. The Tanks family is a well-known family in Longreach, and this has had an impact on them as well. Out there the taxi service is essential. It is the only public transport we have in the town. If you are an elderly person in Longreach and you need to get to the local IGA or Foodworks, or you need to get to a doctor or to the hospital and you are living by yourself and you do not have transport, you rely on the taxi service. You rely on Judy Tanks to come and pick you up, and they do a lot of that. If you have a disability and you need to get around town for an appointment, they rely on the taxi service. It is not a luxury; it is an essential service for those people.

What is worrying them in regard to this legislation and in regard to Uber in regional Queensland is that if someone decided to start up an Uber service in Longreach or in Emerald it would make the taxi services provided by Ben and Cecilia Hooper and Judy Tanks unviable. Let us say that someone starts up an Uber operation in Emerald, Longreach or any small regional town and after seven or eight months they decide they want to leave town. In that time the taxi service that had been there for a long time has gone. Who is going to come into those towns and provide that essential service for a person who has a disability or for an elderly person who relies on transport when there is no longer a taxi service in town? Who is going to pick them up? What is their solution to ensure that people living in those communities have adequate transport?

I have looked at the parliamentary committee review of the legislation. Even Labor Party committee members were concerned that the minister was seeking to create a head of power for compensation without the detail of who will be eligible. I would like to say quite clearly that this \$100 million industry adjustment package in no way matches the scale of the injury that has been done to the property rights of the taxi licence holders. \$20,000 per licence goes nowhere near to being of any assistance, compensation or adjustment. As those on the other side said, this is about adjustment, not compensation. The fact is that licence valuations have decreased significantly. When the infrastructure committee was on the Gold Coast looking into this issue we had taxi owner-operators come to our committee meeting. Before all of this happened, those taxi licences were valued between \$400,000 to \$500,000.

Mr Stevens: Six to seven.

Mr MILLAR: I take the interjection from the member for Mermaid Beach—\$600,000 to \$700,000. When they decided to leave the industry, that money was what they were going to retire on. They are hardworking, blue-collar people. They work hard. They work—

Mr COSTIGAN: Big hours.

Mr MILLAR:—big hours.

Mr COSTIGAN: And they sacrifice.

Mr MILLAR: And they sacrifice; I take that interjection from the member for Whitsunday. I believe that the compensation is nowhere near enough.

I support this bill only with reservation and regret that it is even necessary. Given that it is not just necessary but urgently necessary, I ask the minister to take the committee's recommendation with the utmost seriousness. He must urgently legislate new licensing schemes. He must urgently provide clarity around cameras in vehicles. He must urgently introduce an interim CTP classification and training for wheelchair accessible vehicle drivers. He must look at those issues very seriously.

I can tell the House that it has been a very hard and heartbreaking issue for Queensland. We have seen mum-and-dad operators right across Queensland, particularly regional Queensland, from Cairns down to Coolangatta, and their hearts were breaking. They had no clarity and they did not know what their future was. The taxi industry is a strong industry. It is an industry that deserves to be supported. We must do everything to ensure that they continue to operate, because they are an important part of what is a very well regarded industry which transports people around, especially in regional areas. Like I said, in regional areas like Emerald and Longreach, those services are essential. They absolutely play a critical role for our elderly and the disability sector. They also pick up schoolkids sometimes and get them to school. The taxi industry where I come from is not a luxury; it is an essential service, and we need to maintain it.