




Speech By  
**Hon. Leeanne Enoch**

**MEMBER FOR ALGESTER**

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**ELECTRICITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy and Minister for Small Business) (10.21 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Electricity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. The Palaszczuk government has made no secret of our commitment to supporting small business and promoting innovation. The Electricity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 facilitates the merger of the electricity distribution businesses of Energex Ltd and Ergon Energy Corporation Ltd. Significant savings will be realised by consolidating two government owned corporations in the energy sector and preparing the distribution business for the challenges of a rapidly changing energy industry. As part of the arrangements, a new energy service business is intended to create opportunities for collaboration with electricians and help grow the renewable energy sector.

Into the future, a key focus will be on looking at new and innovative products and services that can help small businesses and communities make better energy decisions, particularly to deliver better outcomes in regional and remote communities. I have been advised that the Department of Energy and Water Supply is finalising the details of the proposed new energy services business company. I am also advised that the company will work with electricians to develop new products and to grow the sector.

The Palaszczuk government has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to consult with and support small business. Our government has demonstrated this commitment through our \$405 million whole-of-government accelerated Advance Queensland program that is creating jobs now while preparing our state for the jobs and industries of the future. Part of this included a new commitment of \$22.7 million to deliver the Palaszczuk government's Advancing Small Business Queensland Strategy through an office of small business. This is intended to help small business create jobs, drive business growth, harness innovation, build digital capacity and employ more Queenslanders. In a further commitment to support small businesses, the Palaszczuk government will appoint a small business champion as a voice for Queensland small business at both the state and the federal level.

Collaboration with small business is a key part of this proposed merger. As the Treasurer has previously stated, what we have seen from the LNP with regard to the impact on small business of the proposed merger has been nothing short of a scare campaign. The new energy services business will not compete with solar installers or electrical contractors in established markets. It is likely the focus of the energy services business will be on new and innovative products and services and on growing the overall market, particularly in regional Queensland. The business will look at offering services where there are limited resources or capacity available to customers, such as in remote areas of Queensland including Indigenous communities. In the spirit of innovation and collaboration, what we expect to see from this proposed merger are opportunities for electrical contractors to work together with the new entity to provide new services and products to customers. When you consider that the LNP still does not have a policy on innovation, it is unsurprising to see it not recognise the opportunities this proposed merger offers small businesses.

The Palaszczuk government is also committed to ensuring that our income-generating assets are kept in public hands. We stand firm on this commitment to the people of Queensland—unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who has flip-flopped on this issue and now refuses to state his position. The Queensland government uses the dividends we receive from our publicly owned power companies to subsidise the cost of electricity for regional Queenslanders—something that is only possible because we kept our assets in public hands. We will continue to subsidise regional Queensland electricity prices, with nearly \$600 million last year to ensure that 700,000 regional Queensland customers pay a similar amount for their electricity as do those in South-East Queensland. This is required due to the vast scale of Queensland’s electricity network, serving such a decentralised population. We have also allocated \$170 million in 2015-16 to provide a range of energy concessions including emergency assistance for customers who are experiencing financial strain and cannot pay their bills. To maintain those subsidies and concessions we need to keep our power companies efficient, well run and poised for the future. That is what this merger will deliver.

The Palaszczuk government is also committed to ensuring that remote communities are properly serviced, particularly when it comes to food security. Part 2 of this bill contains amendments to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (Justice, Land and Other Matters) Act 1984. The amendments will provide for a more secure future for the government’s retail activities in Torres Strait island communities and in the Northern Peninsula region of Far North Queensland. They address membership, governance, operational and administrative provisions currently applying to the Island Industries Board. The amendments propose removing the geographic limitations currently in place, resulting in the Island Industries Board becoming Community Enterprise Queensland.

It is important that this retail service network is able to adequately respond to remote retail needs, taking advantage of opportunities on the basis of sound business planning. This will assist Community Enterprise Queensland to mitigate possible future risks and cost to government while continuing to deliver essential services to the remote communities in which it operates. By making these changes the bill ensures that crucial services and food supplies remain readily available in remote communities. I commend the bill to the House.