




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 1 December 2016

HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (6.00 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Heavy Vehicle National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill has two main parts of consideration: amendments to the Heavy Vehicle National Law, which are uncontroversial and have been dealt with previously, and the introduction of a head of power to enable the Palaszczuk Labor government to regulate for the proposed taxi and limousine industry assistance package. The Heavy Vehicle National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 seeks to introduce this head of power, and we look forward to further negotiations tonight during the consideration in detail debate.

The Transportation and Utilities Committee made a series of recommendations—from both the ALP and the LNP members—that some of the government's changes be introduced as soon as possible. The committee also made recommendations raising concerns about restricting eligibility of those receiving assistance payments. I acknowledge the minister's speech today highlighting further amendments because the industry expected more. Those in the regions, where they are hurting, are waiting for their expectations to be met.

I want to assure my electorate that I and the LNP are not adverse to competition, innovation and new entrants into the taxi industry, but we must ensure that our laws are safe, fair and efficient. The foremost priority should always be passenger and driver safety and fairness. We appreciate that the personal transport industry in Queensland has undergone significant change with the Palaszczuk government's personalised transport reforms. These issues have been well canvassed and debated today and through the committee process. With some devastation now inevitable for these small business operators in Queensland, the compensation package is ready to flow and it must flow before Christmas, as I know the minister is endeavouring to do.

The Queensland Labor government introduced the first part of their policy via regulation. We on this side in the LNP opposition, after much consultation with many stakeholders, have successfully opposed and disallowed provisions in the government's regulation. We are glad we have moved forward with these well-reserved amendments that were proposed by the minister tonight. These provisions allowed for former taxis to be sold without identifying their features, something that we all thought was important.

This bill currently before the House will enable the government to create its proposed industry assistance package. Members of the parliamentary committee made recommendations suggesting the government provide clarity to the package. Again, I acknowledge the minister's speech where those things were addressed. I look forward to the minister responding to these concerns during his closing remarks tonight.

We have, unfortunately, had to advise many operators across Queensland and in the Bundaberg region that the LNP opposition is not able to change or direct compensation funds through amendments to the bill as it is regarded as an appropriation. The Speaker spoke about that and our proposed

amendments earlier. We certainly understand the strain faced by taxi licence owners—and I notice operators tonight are included—and know that the government needs to act quickly to provide the industry assistance package.

The LNP will continue to consult with all stakeholders, including the taxi industry, to make sure the changes are in the best interests of Queenslanders. In a recurring theme of the Labor government, unfortunately, the minister still has not identified how the \$100 million compensation package would be funded. Under this government, it is always the taxpayers who end up footing this bill.

I turn to local issues which are really important to me in the Bundaberg region. The taxi industry has fought for many months to seek local representation. I refer to a local meeting with the member for Bundaberg in regard to the desire of local operators to seek resolutions—

Mr Whiting interjected.

Mr BENNETT: I will take that interjection. We talk about the taxi industry and the lack of representation. We listened for three days while you guys went on and on and on. How about you just pull your head in and listen and maybe you will learn something.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Miss Barton): Order! I remind the member for Burnett to direct his comments through the chair, not at individual members.

An honourable member: Unparliamentary language.

Mr BENNETT: I withdraw the unparliamentary language. I turn to a local issue about the local representation in the electorate of Bundaberg. I refer to a local meeting with the member for Bundaberg in regard to their desire to have local restitutions about this issue—whether it was the 30 operators who stood outside the office, seeking a meeting that was ignored. We have been advised that they posed three questions to the local member. Firstly, ‘If you had a million dollars, would you buy a dairy farm?’ They received no response to that. Secondly, ‘If you had a million dollars, would you invest it in the fishing industry now that you have closed down the area where our local fishermen cast their nets?’ That industry is effectively destroyed. She said that she probably would. Really? Thirdly, ‘If you had a million dollars, would you invest it in the taxi industry, now that you have sold us out to ridesharing and indirectly deregulated our industry without satisfactory compensation?’ The response was that she really did not understand the taxi industry. The industry was at least content that she was honest about that.

The submissions to the parliamentary inquiry consistently highlighted for many across Queensland the sentiment that wrong does not become right just because it may be legal or popular. Taxi licence owners, operators and drivers articulated clearly that there must be compensation in order to pass the ‘fairness test’. It has been widely reported that the current mention of a possible \$20,000 ‘adjustment’ for some taxi licence owners is not justice nor is it fair. It does not achieve a level playing field. It does not even cover the cost of providing a taxi for one year—with rego, insurance and radio dues—much less any compensation for loss of licence value, or loss of income or bank payments for borrowing money for the licence.

We heard this loud and clear over the last six months from the operators in Bundaberg who clearly have real concerns about their futures. That is why the compensation must be meaningful and in the vicinity of the lost capital value prior to rideshare entering into Queensland. It does not even mention drivers or others involved in the provision of the taxi industry, but I note that the minister is including operators, which is a welcome reform.

The operators in my region have clearly articulated that it appears that the Queensland Labor government have not considered the benefits to the consumers and wider community. The committee was concerned that the minister is seeking to create a head of power for compensation without outlining any eligibility criteria for those receiving payments. We are sure that the QRAA recommendations will resolve that today. Regardless of the inadequacies in this government package—and there are many—it is clear the process means this bill must be passed because the longer we wait, the longer struggling taxi owners will wait for access to their hardship payments.

I note again the lack of competence and commitment to our local community by the member for Bundaberg, who I note is not even making a contribution to the debate. I suspect like most stakeholders in my region she refuses to meet or stand up for a fair deal. That is not a problem because we will ensure that our new candidate for Bundaberg, who will be selected next week, will have a consistent approach on how to deal with local stakeholders.

The cap on compensating only two licences should be removed, as should the restrictions on who will be compensated. Licence owners have varying reasons for having their licences in different financial structures, whether they be a small company or a trust. They still bought and paid for their licences, fair and square.

It is recommended the application, assessment, payment and reporting for the compensation be handled by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority rather than the minister's own department. We support QRAA administering this assistance package. The LNP supports the committee's recommendations for the minister to urgently introduce legislation to bring in his new licensing scheme, provide clarity around cameras in vehicles and introduce an interim CTP classification and training for wheelchair accessible vehicle drivers. I look forward to the availability of the compensation to those hardworking small business owners in Bundaberg and the region. The taxi owners and operators certainly deserve this compensation. They will look forward to this being resolved tonight and for their compensation to be payable.