



Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

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PUBLIC HEALTH (MEDICINAL CANNABIS) BILL

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (9.16 pm): I am proud to stand in support of this bill that will allow the delivery of medicinal cannabis to people suffering in Queensland. There is evidence to suggest that medicinal cannabis can help patients with multiple sclerosis, arthritis, chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting, epilepsy and severe seizures, HIV and AIDS related symptoms, and chronic pain. For people who are suffering with unrelenting pain, this bill is good news. All I can say is that it is a shame we did not do it sooner.

Human beings around the world have used cannabis as medicine for thousands of years. Even in Australia medical marijuana was legal until the 1950s. The problem we have now is that until very recently, research has been directed towards the hazards of its recreational use rather than the benefits of its medicinal use. Australians already benefit from the medical use of drugs such as morphine, ketamine, cocaine and amphetamine. It is illegal to use these substances recreationally, but there are medicines that contain all of them. Medical professionals have oversight of these patients but not the patients who are turning to marijuana secretly. We do not know how many Queenslanders with serious health conditions use cannabis medically because their prescribed medications have not worked.

Cannabis may not be a miracle drug, but there are well documented benefits. It is often very effective in relieving distressing symptoms, especially in cases where the usual drugs have not proved effective or safe. The side effects appear to be uncommon and pretty mild, especially when compared with other medications such as opioid analgesics—think morphine and oxycodone. The risk of becoming dependent on medicinal cannabis is much less than those commonly prescribed pain medications and even much less than alcohol or tobacco. Some research suggests it may even be a wonder treatment for obesity. I know that sounds counterintuitive, but it shows how little we know about cannabis. THC is the chemical that gets people high, but other chemicals in the plant such as THCV actually block certain receptors, reducing appetite and the tendency to store fat, so we could see some very exciting things in this field of research.

There is also an opportunity to create thousands of skilled jobs and generate tens of millions of dollars in foreign investment from farming and harvesting to research and innovation. Most importantly, Queenslanders overwhelmingly support the introduction of medicinal cannabis, with more than 96 per cent of respondents to a public survey conducted earlier this year supporting its use.

In December 2015 Queensland became the first state in Australia to permit patient access to medicinal cannabis products through amendments to the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996. This bill builds on these important first steps by providing a more comprehensive and robust regulatory framework to manage the use of medicinal cannabis products in the longer term. The bill also establishes controls to ensure that these products are used safely and only for lawful purposes, which is why Queensland Health will work with the Therapeutic Goods Administration to support the safe and

appropriate operation of Queensland's medicinal cannabis scheme. It does not make sense to let people live with chronic pain when there is a ready remedy, and it does not make sense to limit any genuine medical inquiries into new treatments just because of outdated movie stereotypes. The medicinal use of cannabis is now permitted in more than a dozen countries including Canada, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Israel. It is time that Queensland did the same. I commend the bill to the House.