




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (7.38 pm): I rise with keen interest to contribute to the debate on the Heavy Vehicle National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. Over the last 18 months I have had numerous taxi and limousine owners and operators approach my Chatsworth electorate office and they have all felt totally betrayed and abandoned by the Palaszczuk government. For many, their world collapsed on 5 September this year with some of the taxi industry changes introduced by the transport minister. If this was an attempt to introduce a level playing field, heaven help any of us! This minister has presided over the rail-fail debacle and his handling of the taxi industry since coming into office in early 2015 has been nothing short of a textbook example of how to keep honest small business people in the dark.

As the shadow minister has outlined, the LNP supports the Heavy Vehicle National Law changes. Members would know that the Heavy Vehicle National Law reforms have had bipartisan and industry support for many years and I acknowledge that the former Bligh government initially signed Queensland up to the intergovernmental agreement and the former LNP government introduced the national law in 2012. As the former assistant minister for public transport, I have followed the handling of the Heavy Vehicle National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, but of the bill two main parts of consideration come into play: firstly, amendments to the Heavy Vehicle National Law; and, secondly, the introduction for a head of power to enable the Palaszczuk Labor government to regulate the proposed taxi and limousine industry assistance package. I want to concentrate my contribution to this debate mainly on the head of power for a taxi and limousine industry assistance regulation.

In relation to the taxi and limousine industry, let us clear up some of the myths from the economic illiterate tyros and rewriters of history opposite. When the Newman government was first elected in 2012, ridesharing operators like Uber were hardly even heard of here in Queensland. It is true that towards the end of 2013 and most particularly throughout 2014 we knew of the ever-growing tension between the traditional taxi industry and pressure from new rideshare market participants. I acknowledge that there was a huge issue brewing and, despite efforts to increase cease and desist notices which had limited efficacy, the policy framework required to introduce a level playing field was a priority for any government as we headed into 2015.

For some inexplicable reason, the incoming Labor government in early 2015 put this issue out to pasture and simply tried to adopt the attitude of, 'Move along. There's nothing to see here at all.' All they did in blowing out the reporting time frame of the Varghese report was to frighten many fine hardworking small business operators. The level of anxiety of the numerous taxi and limousine industry contacts I had meetings with was staggering. Their concerns centred on the introduction very simply of a level playing field and industry assistance. Eventually, as has been said earlier by previous speakers, the Transportation and Utilities Committee agreed that an independent agency, the QRAA, should assess the payments associated with the industry assistance package. I note that the \$100 million industry assistance package consists of \$60 million via a one-off payment of up to \$40,000 for existing

taxi licence holders—\$20,000 per licence capped at two—and \$10,000 per licence for existing limousine service licence holders, a \$26.7 million hardship fund, \$4.3 million in waived fees, \$5.6 million to incentivise wheelchair accessible taxis—a very important point—and \$3.75 million for business advisory help.

In relation to the general taxi ridesharing changes, members on this side of the chamber have always supported a fair and level playing field for the taxi industry, with passenger safety always being the priority of paramount importance. We are the party of free enterprise and pro small business and not adverse to competition, but fundamentally this Palaszczuk Labor government has bungled the process from the get-go. Let us be very clear on behalf of the numerous taxi and limousine operators that I have spoken with, along with many members on this side of the chamber and also on that side. The minister has been dismissive of those affected by the changes—dismissive absolutely of their bundle of property rights and dismissive of the effect the uncertainty has caused business, almost paralysis. The Palaszczuk Labor government has been totally asleep at the wheel in relation to the taxi industry and spent nearly 12 months on a review—the Varghese review—into ridesharing and leaving the existing industry and passengers in limbo, absolutely in limbo. No doubt it knew about this with the incoming ministerial brief in 2015, so when it was flagged—and we have all seen them before—when the folder came through for Minister Hinchliffe and it pertained to taxis, what was the issue? Uber rideshare. It was always there, absolutely from the moment he took office.

When the next tranche of the changes come through, the LNP will look thoroughly at the government's proposal and consult with the stakeholders, because that is what Queenslanders expect us to do. Regardless of the inadequacies of this government package—and there are many—it is clear the minister's bungling of the process means that this bill must be passed because the longer we wait the longer struggling taxi owners and their families wait for access to hardship payments. The cap on compensating only two licences should be removed. I welcome, however, amendments regarding who will be compensated. That is at least a breath of fresh air. Indeed, the committee made it clear that it does not have confidence in the minister to handle the industry assistance package as it recommended the application, assessment, payment and reporting of the compensation be handled by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority rather than the minister's own department, and the LNP supports the QRAA administering this assistance package.

Furthermore, the LNP supports the committee's recommendations for the rail-fail minister to urgently introduce legislation to bring in his new licensing scheme, provide clarity around cameras in vehicles, introduce an interim CTP classification and training for wheelchair accessible vehicle drivers. I, too, want to express my sincere respect for the countless taxi and limousine owners and operators who have maintained their professional standards over the last few years despite the upheaval and unfair pressure that has been placed upon them.

In good faith they purchased a piece of paper from the state government which assigned them a bundle of rights. Now, with the industry changing rapidly, we owe it to them to redress the imbalance in market competition forces and to recompense them in a fair manner. Multinational companies have been the beneficiaries of many new market entrants and, while it is true that you cannot live in the past, we owe it to law-abiding small business operators and self-funded retirees to give them an opportunity to compete fairly. You cannot have a 'sort of' deregulated industry for some market participants and not for others. Property rights and the prevention of sovereign risk need to be taken seriously, Minister, and I will continue to fight at every opportunity for these fine men and women who are genuinely scared of their financial futures, and they are.

In closing my contribution to this debate, this is about making sure there is a fair and level playing field. It has been said by most speakers. The lack of information forthcoming from the minister is astounding—simply astounding. How can he expect an industry—seriously—to adjust when he produces no certainty, no dates, no deadlines, no details? I end my contribution with a quote from a recent letter received from one of my constituents from Wakerley by the name of Bill, who says—

Imagine if the Minister owned three investment properties on Old Cleveland Road at Capalaba and the properties were compulsorily acquired by the government for road widening. How would he feel if his investment properties were resumed and he was offered a token price of \$20,000 per property and only reimbursed for a maximum two properties? How would he react to his retirement assets being greatly diminished in this fashion?

The minister's level of compensation truly is an insult.