




Speech By  
**Verity Barton**

**MEMBER FOR BROADWATER**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2016

**ELECTRICITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Miss BARTON** (Broadwater—LNP) (10.12 pm): I rise this evening to make a contribution to the Electricity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In doing so, I join my colleagues on this side of the House in opposing this government's attempt to create a large government monopoly.

The government talks about how this is a government commitment, but we know that the only commitment they have made is to pay back the unions for the support they have given them over the years. If this government were concerned about jobs, they would be concerned about the jobs of the small business owners and they would be concerned about the employees of the small business owners. What we have clearly seen, not only in this bill that we are debating this evening but also in many other bills before this House, is that this government is merely focused on its payback to the unions.

I had not intended to make a contribution to this debate; however, I was compelled to rise to speak in defence of small businesses not only in my electorate, but across the Gold Coast and across Queensland. As we on this side of the House know, small business is the powerhouse of the economy. It is the backbone of the Queensland economy, and on the Gold Coast in particular we appreciate the importance of small business. That is why it is a shame that we have a government in this state that is wholly and solely determined to rip the guts out of mum-and-dad electricians and rip entire businesses out from underneath sparkies across Queensland. We have seen this government force everyday Queenslanders to compete with a government monolith.

The LNP stands ready alongside the CCIQ and the Master Electricians to defend the interests of not only small businesses and mum-and-dad electricians but also the consumers of the product that those electricians provide. We need to ensure that the well-established small businesses that are more than capable of continuing to serve their communities are able to do so. What we have seen is a wrecking ball of Labor come through and smash small business out of the way as they attempt to destroy electricians' businesses. As I say, we stand ready with the Master Electricians and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry who have both been incredibly vocal as peak representative bodies for electrical contractors and small businesses in this state. They have been very vocal in their opposition to the attempts of this government to destroy local electrical contractors and small businesses in this state.

We have heard the government talk about the savings that they are going to achieve, and the member for Toowoomba North has touched on this a bit, but we do not hear the government talk about how any savings they are claiming are really only achievable because of determinations that have been made by the Australian Energy Regulator and not as a result of any action by this government. One of the other things that has been touched on in a very astute way by the member for Hinchinbrook is the lack of scrutiny with respect to the consideration of these bills. The non-government members of the committee, led ably by the member for Southport as the deputy chair, were very vocal—not only during

the committee process but also in their statement of reservation—about the fact that the government refused to provide any detail to them on significant aspects of this bill even though it had been mentioned in the introductory speech of the bill and the explanatory notes. We have consistently seen—not only on this bill but also on the National Injury Insurance Scheme—the government try and hide away and refuse to answer or provide detail to any questions.

The other thing that I think is worth noting, particularly given that the government talks about how they are going to establish the new entity up in Townsville, is that when non-government members of the committee attempted to ensure the committee would travel to Townsville to give the Townsville community an opportunity to have a say about what they thought was the best thing to do, whether it was to merge or not merge, it is really disappointing that this government, which says that they want to establish this in Townsville, did not give the committee an opportunity to travel to Townsville, nor did they give the people of Townsville an opportunity. When we think about this, it is absolutely galling that we have had no scrutiny given that this is a government that is not only about to create an incredibly large government monopoly which will be the largest electricity distributor in Australia but also claims it is all about openness, transparency and accountability. We have seen clearly, not only through the consideration of this bill but also the consideration of other bills—and again I highlight the National Injury Insurance Scheme—that this is a government that is scared to provide answers because they know that they do not stack up. They know that the people of Queensland will not be happy with their answers.

We often hear members on that side of the House talk about how they have a mandate to do things, but I think what many members on that side of the House forget is that more Queenslanders voted for the LNP than voted for the Labor Party. They forget that they do not have the mandate they speak of, and they forget that Queenslanders—particularly in areas like the Gold Coast, where small business is the heart of the local economy—have overwhelmingly put their trust and faith in the LNP.

A number of electricians in my electorate approached me during the committee's consideration of this bill while this bill was before the parliament. I was struck by one of the things that one of them said to me when he approached me at a mobile office in the Paradise Point park. He said, 'If I am not able, Verity, to work in their space, why should the government make it okay for them to work in mine?' He said, 'I do not want any special treatment from the government. I just want to be able to get on with it, do my own thing and run my own business, but it is really, really hard when the government are stacking everything against me and making it difficult for me to compete. The government is going to come in, they are going to rip business away from me and they are going to undercut me.' Having spoken to a number of my colleagues from rural and regional Queensland, I know that they are particularly concerned about the government coming in and taking business away from local electrical contractors. I know they are particularly concerned about the impacts that that is going to have on their communities.

A number of members on the government benches spoke about the fact that this will get rid of duplication. I know the member for Pine Rivers did in her contribution. It is very easy to get rid of duplication when you are creating a government monopoly. There is nothing to be duplicated against because nobody else has an opportunity to be in that space, so nobody has an opportunity to compete. The member for Toowoomba North spoke about how, even if we assume for the purposes of the argument that the government has a mandate, they are not even living up to the pledge they took to the people at the last election because they have not been able to merge the generators as it would be considered anticompetitive.

I put it to the House tonight that an attempt to merge Ergon and Energex is indeed, of itself, also anticompetitive because what we are doing is creating a large government owned monopoly. Potentially, as the member for Hinchinbrook has said, the reason they are doing it is to fatten up the pig for market. The member for Hinchinbrook has had an esteemed career in this House and was here between 2009 and 2012, when the Labor Party misled the people of Queensland.

Members of the government have said that, depending on how we vote, this is a sign of what the LNP believes and will do with respect to the lease or sale of assets. I say very directly to the members of the government and I reiterate the comments of the member for Hinchinbrook: we were honest with the people of Queensland. We were not the ones who misled the people of Queensland. We were not the ones who said to the people of Queensland that Queensland Rail was not for sale the day before the then treasurer announced that it was going on the market. That members of the government come into this House and tell us that the way we vote on this bill expresses our particular opinion on a particular issue is absolutely galling. Those opposite have a track record when it comes to misleading the people of Queensland. They have a track record when it comes to ignoring the people of Queensland, to not considering the people of Queensland.

Ultimately, I stand with my LNP colleagues, the CCIQ and the Master Electricians. We need to protect small businesses because they are the powerhouse of the Queensland economy. They are the backbone of the Queensland economy. In spite of the best attempts of this Labor government to pull the rug from underneath them, to tear apart their businesses, they will fight on. We will support them and continue the fight to save our sparkies.