




Speech By
Hon. Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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**PUBLIC SAFETY BUSINESS AGENCY AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. WS BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services) (4.17 pm), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to the debate in what goes close to being a uniform position of most members of the House on most aspects. I thank the members of the opposition for their commentary and I want to reflect on some of that. I was unaware, having read the committee report, that the opposition had any concerns about this bill or about the mechanisms that it underwrites. It is not beyond the realms of normality for those concerns to be raised either through the committee or indirectly in other ways so as to have them addressed prior to a bill that is fundamentally supported coming before the House. I am somewhat disappointed that that was not able to be achieved, but the very nature of the commentary that has been given by the opposition about the blue card needs to be specifically addressed.

The member for Everton first raised concerns about blue card services transferring to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. That is the first I have heard of those concerns. The Working With Children (Risk Management and Screening Act)—as amended under those opposite, I might add—contains a provision which states that blue card services must be administered by the PSBA. I assume it is clause 56 or thereabouts that those opposite are going to oppose. The Clerk did not know five minutes ago what clause was actually being opposed. Without that clause the PSBA will continue to administer blue card services. All of the commentary that has been given here has been about PSBA being administered under the Queensland Police Service. I can assure members that, by opposing clause 56, blue cards will not be administered by the Queensland Police Service; it will remain in PSBA.

An honourable member: Well, move amendments.

Mr BYRNE: That is what they are opposing. They support retaining blue card services in the PSBA, which is a totally unsuitable location. Again, that would impact on the core business of providing corporate support to front-line officers in the public safety portfolio. Let us follow that through: if there was a genuine desire to see this worked through in some fashion, they would not simply oppose it; there would be a notice to the Clerk, amendments would be tabled and they would be talking about amending the bill in order to see the sort of arrangement that they espouse put forward, but no. I can only think that the opposition is simply too lazy to do that work or is ill-prepared and looking for a reason to have a blue over something. By opposing this element of the bill, they mean to retain blue card services in the PSBA, which everybody recognises is not a satisfactory location for blue card services. The PSBA review recognised that the PSBA is not an appropriate place for blue card services to be administered. In fact, on page 56 and 57 of that report, it is noted that the PSBA was not an appropriate place for blue card services to be administered. It was the Liberal National Party that put it there through the creation of its own arrangements.

The PSBA review examined where blue card services could be administered, which included the Department of Justice and Attorney-General; the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services; and, as the member for Everton discussed, the Queensland Police Service. The PSBA review made two conclusions in that respect: it is a matter for government to ultimately decide where blue card services are administered and, importantly, that the most appropriate place for the administration of blue card services is the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The review highlighted that this arrangement would utilise the Department of Justice and Attorney-General's existing systems and the process that they use for other areas of licensing—that seems self-evident to most normal people—including the Office of Fair Trading and the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation.

The PSBA review also highlighted that closer connections between blue card services and the Office of the Public Guardian, which sits within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, may result from this arrangement, which is a good thing. Those are all positives for the administration of blue card services and will result in far better administration than is currently occurring in the department, where blue card services just do not fit. The key aim of this bill is to support the QPS to focus on front-line services. Transferring blue card services to the QPS would place on it a significant burden that is not a front-line focused requirement. As this is again a machinery-of-government issue, the government believes that blue card services can be administered correctly, efficiently and appropriately by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

At the end of the day, if members opposite oppose the relevant clause, which I think is clause 56, we may be stuck with blue card services sitting in an agency where we all acknowledge it does not fit. If the future of a national approach to working-with-children checks is established and recommends a different approach to blue card services, clause 56 will allow that to occur. The bottom line is that DJAG is experienced in licensing and regulation through the Office of Fair Trading and the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation. The key aim of the PSBA Bill is to support the QPS to focus on front-line services. Transferring blue card services to the QPS would create a significant administrative burden on police. The rationale in supporting the need for this bill is simple and rests with the fundamental commitment that the government made to the community.

I can remember when nine of us sat on the other side of this chamber, talking about this bill. Everything that I predicted and said on the record in the last parliament has come to fruition through the creation of the PSBA. The Palaszczuk government always will support our emergency services personnel so that they can continue to perform their essential work for Queenslanders. Our emergency services personnel deserve that support. They do a wonderful job, sometimes under the most trying of conditions. They do not deserve to be hampered by inefficient managerial structures and arrangements that result in making the job harder.

This bill responds to widespread concerns raised by front-line officers, police, fire and emergency services officers, unions and other associations about the creation and subsequent performance, more importantly, of the PSBA, which was established in haste by the former government. The previous government built a bureaucratic monolith for the purposes of outsourcing. I have said that previously and I restate it. When I came to this ministry after 12 months or so in other portfolio areas, the first question I asked was, 'How many new bureaucratic senior positions of AO8 level and above were created in the PSBA?' That was a reasonable question to ask about the apparently great and efficient machine that was created and called the PSBA. The answer was, 'We think it's somewhere around 40.' The previous government created the PSBA which was supposed to generate greater efficiencies, but then they created 40 new positions of AO8 level and above simply for the exercise of machinery-of-government changes. I might add, that was right up to SES 2 and 3 levels, meaning very substantial employee expenses for no dividend whatsoever other than to fill up the top end of the bureaucracy.

The Labor government made an election commitment to review the Public Safety Business Agency and we strenuously opposed key elements of it while in opposition. We lived up to and delivered on what we said we would do. That review outlined the challenges and frustrations that staff within the agencies experienced under the former government. The agencies suffered from a lack of purpose and direction and insufficient integration with the core business of other agencies in the public sector portfolio.

In previous parliaments I have made crystal clear my thoughts on the Keelty review that led to the formation of the PSBA under the former government. It is interesting to note that some of the members here—and I think the member for Coomera in particular—talked about Mr Keelty being an eminent Australian. I think that is in the eye of the beholder. All you need do is google 'Keelty criticism' and you will be overwhelmed with the number of people who do not share that view. The fact is that when the PSBA was created it effectively delivered a train wreck for those support elements and many

other important operational elements of the emergency services and the Police Service. At the time the Keelty review was published I commented that about one-third of it made sense to me, about one-third of it was pure commentary and speculation, and about one-third of it was absolute abject nonsense.

After all of that work and I think a considerable amount of money that changed hands to prepare the report, I am probably the only member of this House who has read the report from cover to cover on numerous occasions; I can guarantee that members opposite have not. It was simply a cut-and-paste and you can see that there were different authors for different sections, because they could not even get the language or definitions consistent.

Even more embarrassingly, sections had been deliberately cut and pasted from the Defence Reform Program. The Defence Reform Program was clearly the model used to create the PSBA. The report even contains phrases such as 'defence support'. They did a cut-and-paste from the parent document, which was plagiarised essentially—I suspect some of the co-authors had Defence experience at Canberra—and we ended up with the final report, which is a massive document, sections of which quoted 'defence support'. The entire ideology came straight of the Defence Reform Program. That program continues to roll out in Australia and is a disgrace in terms of cost-benefit analysis, as anyone who knows anything about it will say. I have opposed it since day one. Therefore, despite all the nonsense that we have heard today about the Keelty review and the Keelty report, I can guarantee that no-one opposite has actually read it in detail, has any idea or had any idea at the time, or actually understood what the implications would be. All I can say is: I told you so.

When we were in opposition, the one unifying force in all of the uniforms from top to bottom, in all of the services—whether it be Fire and Emergency Services, Emergency Management or the Queensland Police Service—was a complete and utter rejection of the implications of the PSBA. When I was in opposition and subsequently every single person I spoke to, from top to bottom, was highly critical of the PSBA for reasons that should have been self-evident to anybody who understood what was going on.

Those on the other side do not even know what the implications of opposing a particular clause in this bill are. They do not know that it is not going to mean that that responsibility goes to the Police Service. It is going to stay in the PSBA, which everybody recognises is completely unsuitable. They did not even have the courtesy to tell the Clerk of the Parliament what clauses they would be opposing. This is complete and utter amateur hour from those opposite. It is the way they ran government for three years. It is amateur hour.

If the opposition want to make a direct contribution to this debate and they believe in what they are advocating for where is the amendment? There is no amendment. There are no comments. They did not even have the courtesy to put any of this in the committee report. We have a committee report. There was nothing on this in that. They supported it with no problem whatsoever. They would have spoken to stakeholders in the background who would have said that they want this to happen.

They went through the process and then come in here to debate the bill. They cannot tell the Clerk what clause they are opposing. They do not even know what the implications are of opposing the clause. They expect to stand up in here and fly the flag of the opposition and say that they are attuned to what is going on.

All we have seen is amateur hour, again. There is a lack of attention to detail. There is a lack of appreciation of what the bill is actually about. They have frankly made fools of themselves this afternoon. That is something they did not need to do. They could have presented themselves in a far more professional and coherent fashion than we have seen today.

The former government's agenda in terms of creating the PSBA was to drive outsourcing and privatisation—a la the Defence Reform Program. There was no other rationale to support this move. They smashed everything together so they could get this out to the private sector as soon as they possibly could. That is what it was all about.

We have repeatedly heard concerns about this from front-line workers, unions, senior officers and stakeholders. Every single person who has been spoken to about this is highly critical of the opposition's approach. The opposition could not come in here and oppose this bill because there is not a single person or stakeholder out there who would back them in—nobody. It is very generous of the opposition to come in and say that they will support this bill. I defy them to do otherwise.

The bill is about revitalising and restoring public safety support services and importantly returning those services to where they should have always been and where they belong—that is, in the Queensland Police Service and the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. I told them that over and over again when there were nine of us in opposition. They did not take the slightest notice because they did not know what they were doing. They had no idea what they were doing.

Mr Ryan: Still don't.

Mr BYRNE: They still do not. They still cannot debate a bill. What we are doing here is what should have always been done as a result of the review. As was said in the Public Service Commission report and other commentary, there are elements of the PSBA that are worthwhile. One-third of what Keelty said made sense to me. That is the part that we are supporting. That is the part we are creating with the PSBA—and so it should always have been from the very start because there are certain opportunities within such arrangements and such considerations. As was the case with everything the previous government did, it was over-the-top on steroids in terms of the bill they put before the House.

We have come to this point. The result was that we had the Keelty review. Lots of money went out on that. They plagiarised bits and pieces from other reviews, notably the Defence Reform Program. We have seen the sort of carnage that came from that. The Public Safety Business Agency was established, as has been pointed out by other speakers, in November 2013 and it was formalised by the commencement of the agency act in May 2014.

Again, for the record, I did not support the original bill or the Public Safety Business Agency model. The Keelty review provided no sound reasoning or rationale to support that model. The same applies to that as applies to the opposition's commentary about the blue card. There was no argument put by those opposite as to why the blue card responsibility should not go to the Attorney-General's department. There was no contest to the recommendations provided other than a pre-existing set of recommendations that were taken into consideration by the Public Service Commission. The credibility of that line of argument was seriously depleted.

In my speech to the House on the original Liberal National Party bill I spoke about this. One of my colleagues has referred to what I said in that speech. I stand today validated in terms of what I was saying in opposition. Unlike anyone else, I have lived through a process in the defence department and from a distance still observe that process destroying things. Those points that I made then remain validated and consistent to this point.

That is why I am so proud to stand here today honouring a commitment we made from opposition. The set of arrangements that the bill proposes are supported top to bottom by every single person that I have spoken to in either the Police Service or Fire and Emergency Services. There is uniform and universal support for the arrangements that we are bringing in, and so there should be because what was done in the first place was bad.

This is about returning control of the relevant resources and processes to the likes of the Queensland Police Commissioner and the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner. One thing that has not been reflected upon and one thing that I recall very clearly from my time in opposition was that while Keelty was doing his thing the Queensland police commissioner at the time put forward a proposal to the then government—I do not know what was in the proposal but we knew there was one—about what should occur with these sorts of services. One day I would love to see what that proposal was. The notion that Keelty was widely regarded and that the previous government took any notice of its principal advisors on these matters is simply false. They never took any notice of anybody when they were bringing these sorts of measures into Queensland. That is one of their failings.

I am convinced that the bill, in conjunction with other administrative measures used in this government's reform of the public safety portfolio, will establish the best outcomes for all agencies within this portfolio and allow our emergency services to focus on their paramount task of keeping our community safe. I will summarise with some final observations. This bill should be supported 100 per cent. There has not been a single point of debate put forward today that counters that position—nothing. There is simply a desire by the opposition to oppose something—that is, to have some sort of argument, conflict or friction on a Tuesday afternoon. It is an ill-considered approach. It is one that is not informed by the evidence and by the material that has been put forward.

I think that it is an indictment on the opposition that they have chosen this matter to try to exploit when the matter has already been properly tested through the Public Service Commission review. I am very proud to be part of a Labor government undertaking this reform. It is something that I have been committed to since day one and something that I am very proud to be in the House presenting.