




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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**HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (4.50 pm): It is wonderful to hear bipartisanship from the member for Caloundra in support of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017. I fundamentally support this bill. I will take members on a journey to explain why.

The bill amends the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law as agreed by the Council of Australian Governments Health Council in response to the final report of the independent review of the national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals commissioned in 2014. The bill amends the national law in a number of areas, including something I am very passionate about, interested in and supportive of, and have been for many years—that is, the national registration of paramedics.

Ambulance has come a very long way. There will be people in this House who remember the yellow ambulances of the QATB, the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade. In 1990 I joined the QATB or, as I fondly refer to it, 'quick at tying bandages'. Back then, all you needed in order to become an ambulance officer—not a paramedic—was a driver's licence, care and compassion, and a first-aid certificate. Over the next 25 years we grew to the point that we now have critical care paramedics going out to scenes; managing people with skills like intubation, cardioversion, external pacing and chest decompression; and stabilising people in varying situations. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge every single paramedic who dons the uniform, whether they are in the communications rooms or whether they are patient transporters, managers or on the front line. They all make up a wonderful service. As the minister said, in the last financial year there were over a million interactions by paramedics across the state. They do a wonderful job.

The bill includes the establishment of the Paramedicine Board of Australia. Queensland is leading the way in terms of the national registration of paramedics, being the first cab—or, if you take my pun, the first ambulance—off the rank. It is not before time. Finally, paramedics will not be seen as the poor cousins of health. I say that with the greatest of respect to all nursing and midwifery colleagues, who of course have been registered professionals for many years.

It is with a great sense of pride that I speak to this particular bill, with my own previous history of working in the prehospital area for over 25 years. The role of paramedics is something I have been passionate about. As an honorary officer in Kirwan station, I give a shout-out to anyone who might be listening there. I am sure that Queensland Ambulance Service staff will be watching this particular debate. While I cannot practise or credentialise the critical care skill set as an honorary officer, in just the past couple of months I joined some staff out at Kirwan. It was a great day. We still see the evolution of professional skills in the Ambulance Service.

I acknowledge all ambulance services across the nation, although I might be a little biased towards Queensland because there are so many dedicated individuals in the Queensland Ambulance Service, which this year celebrates 125 years of delivering care to Queenslanders. In fact, next week is Ambulance Week, so there will be celebrations throughout the state. All Ambulance Service members have been a dedicated and passionate part of this journey towards paramedic registration.

The National Council of Ambulance Unions is to be commended and acknowledged for its continued professional work in this space, particularly Mr Steve McGhie. I mention other professional bodies such as Paramedics Australasia. Some 20 years ago I was a board member of the Institute of Ambulance Officers (Australia). Guess what we were talking about at that time? We were talking about paramedic registration. It has been quite a journey—along with the advancement in skill sets—to get here. That organisation is the peak professional association for paramedics and it does an excellent job in professional development. I also acknowledge Ambulance Employees Australia—Victoria and United Voice, my union—the only union and registered industrial body that has represented ambulance professionals for many years and has also been a significant part of this journey from the beginning.

The bill will see nearly 14,000 paramedics across the nation finally become registered professionals, with over 3,500 in Queensland finally to be seen in the same light as other health professionals. It will indeed be a great day when this comes into effect.

In regard to registration fees for paramedics, the national scheme is self-funded from fees paid by registrants. The fees are set down by the national board and AHPRA, with fees varying between professions and dependent on factors such as the size of the profession and the risks associated with practice. During the consultation period Maurice Blackburn Lawyers supported the national registration of paramedics—

... because they will improve the quality of service and increase patient safety. It will also increase public confidence in the profession.

Similarly, Health Consumers Queensland supported the bill 'as a way to increase consistency of the safety and quality of service delivered by paramedics across Australia'. Importantly, registration protects the title 'paramedic'. There will be no more of these overnight, one- or two-day courses after which people can be deemed a paramedic. People undertake a significant program in a university to become qualified paramedics. Protection of title is absolutely paramount.

I acknowledge the minister, my fellow committee members and the secretariat for their support on this particular bill. Other clauses of the bill make amendments to the OHO Act. These proposed amendments were widely distributed to stakeholders in Queensland, including professional associations. Importantly, the bill also amends the national law to recognise nursing and midwifery as two separate professions, rather than as a single profession. Both will continue to be regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. I commend the bill to the House.