




Speech By
Brittany Lauga

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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LABOUR HIRE LICENSING BILL

 **Mrs LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (3.26 pm): I rise to speak with respect to and in favour of the Labour Hire Licensing Bill. This bill is about one simple thing: making sure that working people are paid according to the law and are treated with respect in the workplace so they can have security for their family's future. The LNP members, however, have come in here, one after the other, and tried to confuse this debate. They have regurgitated the rhetoric of big business, rhetoric which attacks workers' rights and entitlements, the same rhetoric we hear from dodgy labour hire companies. There can be no confusion that companies that this bill cracks down on are dodgy scam artists. This bill targets those disreputable labour hire companies that underpay their workers, scrape away dignity in work and leave working Queenslanders and their families with deep uncertainty. Jobs are going overseas and local jobs are no longer secure. We need good jobs here in Australia. We need permanent secure jobs that families can rely on. We need good Australian jobs for the benefit of working people, their families, local businesses and local communities.

Urgent changes are needed to the Fair Work Act to stop big business from blatantly sacking permanent workers and replacing them with contract and labour hire. We need the federal government to regulate labour hire, to re-shore work that has gone overseas, set mandatory local minimums for all major work, use local workers first, allow casual workers to become permanent and to save our penalty rates.

This bill introduces mandatory licensing of labour hire companies in Queensland in a bid to crack down on rogue operators who are exploiting and mistreating vulnerable workers. This is the first licensing arrangement of its kind in Australia and Queensland Labor is leading the way. While Malcolm Turnbull and the federal LNP repeatedly turn a blind eye to labour hire rorts, the Palaszczuk government is cleaning up their mess to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation and mistreatment. The Leader of the Opposition and all of those opposite in turn have also refused to support this critical reform.

There has never been a starker choice for Queenslanders. On one side you have the Leader of the Opposition and the LNP rallying behind dodgy labour hire companies that refuse to pay workers correctly and on the other you have Queensland Labor introducing historical legislation aimed at protecting workers and their families from the plague of insecure work. For far too long and far too often we have all heard the stories of vulnerable workers being exploited at the hands of unscrupulous labour hire companies.

Mr Minnikin interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order! Member for Chatsworth, you have had a go. I suggest you stop your interjections. You were warned earlier today. While that warning does not continue at this point, if you continue interjecting you will be warned again.

Mrs LAUGA: For far too long and for far too often, we have all been hearing the stories of vulnerable workers being exploited at the hands of unscrupulous labour hire operators and cases of wage theft and unauthorised deductions, sexual harassment, workers housed in overcrowded and

substandard accommodation, a lack of proper safety equipment and training, systemic tax avoidance, sham contracting and phoenixing of companies leaving workers stranded without their entitlements. Those labour hire rorts are fast becoming a national disgrace.

I am proud that the Queensland Palaszczuk Labor government is leading the way by becoming the first jurisdiction to introduce a labour hire licensing scheme. A national licensing scheme for labour hire would be the better outcome, but with the continuing absence of leadership on this matter—in fact, recently the Deputy Prime Minister confirmed that they want nothing to do with it—the Queensland government is determined to do all it can at a state level. We will not sit on our hands and do nothing when Queensland workers are under siege.

The two core elements underpinning the whole scheme in this bill are, first, a requirement that all labour hire providers must be licensed to operate in Queensland and, second, that businesses that use labour hire must only engage a licensed labour hire provider. The bill sets out strong penalties for operating without a license or for using an unlicensed provider. The other major penalty provision in the bill is targeted at avoidance arrangements, which are designed to circumvent or avoid an obligation imposed by the bill.

This week, Senator Pauline Hansen voted in the federal Senate with the LNP against changes that would stop dodgy labour hire companies from ripping off workers. Best buddies, the LNP and One Nation voted against Labor's amendments, which would have stopped dodgy labour hire companies from rorting workers' wages. Labor's amendments were defeated by just two votes in the Senate. If One Nation had voted with Labor, the amendments would have been passed. Because of One Nation's deal with the Turnbull LNP government, labour hire workers will continue to be ripped off and big companies will get away with it. It was very interesting to follow that vote in the Senate on Monday evening. The One Nation candidate for Keppel resorted to a mocking post on his Facebook page, alleging that I am a liar, using silly memes with photos of me and making the sorts of personal attacks that are typical of One Nation, despite the fact that the truth and the facts are in the *Hansard*. We know that, across Australia, thousands of labour hire workers are being ripped off by unscrupulous employers and that often there is little that can be done about it.

In Central Queensland, labour hire companies are not only ripping off vulnerable workers; they are driving down the wages and conditions of skilled local workers, particularly in the mining industry. Corporate employers are increasingly engaging workers through labour hire and washing their hands of any responsibility to ensure the workers are paid correctly and treated fairly. That is why, on Monday, federal Labor moved amendments to government legislation that would have made the companies take responsibility for underpayments by the labour hire firms that they engage. I table a copy of the amendments.

Tabled paper. Amendments to be moved by Senator Cameron, on behalf of the Opposition, in the Commonwealth Senate to the Fair Work Amendment (Protecting Vulnerable Workers) Bill 2017 [\[1618\]](#).

Sadly, Pauline Hansen and her One Nation senators all voted with the LNP government to defeat Labor's amendments. I table a copy of the *Hansard* that clearly shows that Senator Hansen and her One Nation senators voted with the LNP to defeat the amendments.

Tabled paper. Commonwealth Senate *Hansard*, dated 4 September 2017, p 114 [\[1619\]](#).

Big companies should not be able to escape liability for underpayments simply by blaming a labour hire firm. In Queensland, One Nation says that they are all for Queensland battlers, but down in Canberra One Nation has voted against working Queenslanders' interests. They have done it on penalty rates, they have done it on pensions and now they have done it on labour hire. From where I am standing, as a Central Queenslander it is pretty clear that the LNP and One Nation are not in it for working Queenslanders doing it tough: they are in it for themselves, they are in it together and they are in it for their dodgy mates.