




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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STATE PENALTIES ENFORCEMENT AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (10.25 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the State Penalties Enforcement Amendment Bill 2017. This bill was introduced as a way of amending the State Penalties Enforcement Act 1999 to modernise the management of penalty debts by the State Penalties Enforcement Registry, SPER. Since the establishment of SPER, there have been major changes to what now exists within its current operating environment. These changes include an increase in fine volumes as well as customer service expectations, together with significant technological advancements and new approaches for the management of penalty debts.

One of the objectives of the bill is to provide improved non-monetary debt finalisation options for people experiencing hardship. It is important to note that, overall, SPER debt is nearing \$1.18 billion. That goes to demonstrate that new strategies are needed to tackle this issue. The introduction of a work and development order scheme, which would replace the current fine option orders, could increase the number of options Queenslanders have available to them to work off their accumulated debt through non-monetary means. For that to become operational, the eligibility criteria would need to be expanded. That eligibility criteria could include those who have a mental illness, cognitive or intellectual disability or a substance use disorder, who are homeless, or who are experiencing domestic and family violence. A similar system was implemented in New South Wales in 2009. Under this system, a work and development order can be made only if an application is supported by an approved organisation or, in the case of medical or mental health treatment, via a health practitioner qualified to provide such treatment.

It would come as no surprise to both sides of the House that Queenslanders expect that infringement notices that are issued are, indeed, then paid. It is also no surprise that there are a small number of people who are in receipt of a fine that they are simply not able to pay and finalise. There is also the other side of the coin, where people who have the ability to pay refuse to enter into arrangements to do just that. There are those offenders who simply ignore the rules, and that is not acceptable.

Since the Palaszczuk Labor government was elected in January 2015, SPER debt has increased substantially. This is just over two years. At this time I would like to contradict what the Treasurer claimed in his introductory speech—that the LNP made a decision to automatically refer all toll fines to SPER. What the LNP did, and today has continued, is to propose a system whereby after three days of a person going through a toll without paying for it they receive an invoice. Then a second notification is sent after 14 days. Then a final demand notice is sent a further 30 days on. If after that period no action is taken, the matter is referred for the issuing of a penalty infringement notice. It is only after it not being paid 30 days after that notice that the matter is then referred to SPER.

When in government, the LNP took steps to enhance debt collection at SPER by setting in place a comprehensive SPER reform package. It was a dual plan that required enforcement for debtors who can pay but will not pay as well as the management of those who simply cannot pay. Like many of the reforms that were delivered by the previous LNP government but which were discarded by this Labor

government, the LNP's SPER reforms were also discarded. Now, after two years of waiting for the Labor government to outline its strategy to fix this issue, SPER debt has ballooned past \$1 billion. Only now has the member for Mulgrave introduced legislation to try to reduce this ever-growing SPER debt.

We on this side of the House do not oppose the bill. There are some clauses that we will not be supporting. The shadow Treasurer, my good friend the member for Indooroopilly, will be moving an amendment in relation to the work and development orders. The LNP members agree on the need for an efficient and effective fine collection agency as an important part of due diligence and oversight responsibility by the Queensland government. With that in mind, it is incumbent on all of us to ensure that appropriate steps are taken so that SPER has the powers to do what is required and that it also has adequate resources available.