




Speech By
Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2017

STATE PENALTIES ENFORCEMENT AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Trade and Investment) (10.30 pm), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to this debate on the State Penalties Enforcement Amendment Bill 2017. I will express our concerns with some matters that have been raised and address some issues, specifically in relation to the work and development order scheme, which will no doubt be a topic of discussion during consideration in detail.

The Queensland work and development order program is based on the highly successful work and development order program in New South Wales which does not fund sponsors to participate in the scheme. That should be made clear. Sponsors are already servicing clients who will benefit from the scheme. As I said earlier tonight, there has been no compelling case in the New South Wales experience. The absence of additional funding has not proven to be a barrier to participation, with some 2,000 organisations now registered in the New South Wales program, up from 200 in 2011. What the sponsors want are efficient, streamlined processes that are easy to administer. The Queensland scheme will deliver that.

For SPER the scheme is a new way of doing things. It will need to recruit and support sponsors who in turn will provide services to SPER debtors. The scheme is part of a broader transformation agenda that will see SPER reviewing and allocating its resources to be able to deliver on the entire agenda. Let me make it clear that SPER will not be going soft. Strict criteria apply to the WDOs. A person is eligible if they cannot pay because they are homeless, a victim of domestic or family violence, have a substance use disorder, have a mental illness or cognitive intellectual disability or are in financial hardship. Furthermore, the activities under the scheme make a direct contribution to changing behaviour. This is the just outcome that we should all be striving for. I think there is agreement on that in this chamber.

I would also like to thank the SPER team from within the Office of State Revenue for undertaking extensive consultation on the proposed work and development order scheme. SPER met with 30 peak non-government organisations and government agencies. Fifty submissions were received and all parties consulted were overwhelmingly in favour of the introduction of the work and development order scheme. That has informed the work that has gone into this bill which provides a comprehensive set of strategies to address the issues we acknowledge we face. Everyone in this place recognises that taking action is critically needed. It is necessary, as we have seen now the total debt balloon to almost \$1.2 billion. We have worked hard and managed to reduce the number of tolling fines significantly by working with the Department of Transport and Main Roads and Transurban to improve up-front collection of tolls. This has significantly reduced the need to issue tolling fines, reflected in an 85 per cent reduction in tolling debts now coming into SPER.

This is not a controversial bill, nor should it be. This is a bill that will make things fairer for Queenslanders and have practical outcomes. It was time to take a fresh look at how SPER operates. The bill makes amendments in a number of areas that will support a contemporary risk based approach to debt recovery. This government acknowledges that there are some in the community who are in

genuine hardship and cannot pay their debts. There are currently only limited non-monetary options for these people to finalise their debts. The bill establishes the work and development order scheme to provide Queenslanders who are experiencing genuine hardship a way to reduce or pay off their SPER debts.

At the end of the day, giving Queenslanders a fair go is what those on our side of the House are all about. The reforms in this amendment bill deliver that goal. To sum up, I again thank members of the Finance and Administration Committee and the staff of the committee for their work on the bill. I also wish to put on record my thanks to Treasury staff who have worked tirelessly to progress the bill and the reforms within it. I thank again, as I mentioned earlier, staff of the Office of State Revenue. The State Penalties Enforcement Amendment Bill 2017 contains the necessary reforms to improve how SPER works and to provide those experiencing genuine hardship ways to work off and reduce their debt. I commend the bill to the House.