




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 7 September 2017

LABOUR HIRE LICENSING BILL

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (12.49 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Labour Hire Licensing Bill so that I can relay some of the effects that an out-of-control labour hire system can have on a community and individual workers. At the outset, I would like to put on the record that not all labour hire companies out there have been behaving like cowboys; some have been fair to their workers.

Last night I was really gobsmacked at the lack of understanding shown by those opposite in their contributions on the effect that uncontrolled labour hire is having in the regions. The men and women are given no option but to engage them if they want to work in the mining industry. It would be interesting for members opposite to come to my community and give the speeches they gave last night. They need to come up to Central Queensland and get a real understanding of what it is like for families in my region who are working under labour hire. These are regional Queenslanders, not just backpackers out there picking fruit. These are mums and dads and families. We need to make sure that we put a stop to this debacle.

As the trend to use labour hire has increased, the number of people with insecure work in my community has increased. I know of workers who have had at least 13 years of casual contracts in the mining industry. It is not just large mining companies that are opting to use labour hire; smaller businesses are also starting to take up the option. One business owner of a smaller restaurant under a franchisee agreement told me they were directed by the franchise to use labour hire to circumvent the fair work arrangements.

When labour hire first raised its head in my community, wages and conditions for workers were not too bad. There was no secure work but the pay and conditions were livable. As more labour hire companies jumped on board and they competed for contracts at mining sites, they drove wages and working conditions into the ground to the point where we could start to think there was wage theft and worker exploitation in the mining industry. There have been cases where a labour hire firm has changed the time frame for which a contract can be ended. For example, the agreement once was that they would be given two weeks notice, then the next agreement they needed to sign was that it was the end of the tour, and I now know of many workers who are under threat that the contract could be terminated at the end of any shift. This places workers under enormous pressure. There is no consideration given by labour hire firms to the fact that the worker is a person.

I want to talk about safety, which is very dubious on some sites. I have been told by workers when they go out to sites that the permanent workforce are supplied with quality PPE but contractors from labour hire get nothing. There is no responsibility for their safety. There is no-one to report unsafe practices to. I have also noticed that the number of apprenticeships being offered by large companies has dropped off. A lot of the larger companies leave it to the labour hire firms to go out and find their skilled workers. They are not taking up their responsibility to our communities to put on trainees. They are just hoping somebody else will do it. This is a shame for everyone in Queensland.

On Monday I noticed in the Senate in Canberra that the Liberals, Nationals and One Nation could have supported Labor's amendment to the Fair Work Amendment (Protecting Vulnerable Workers) Bill 2017 but they shamefully failed to do so. They had an opportunity to ensure the protection of workers' wages from dodgy labour hire firms across the country. Those opposite need to send a message of disgust to their federal colleagues to let them know that they have let down Queensland workers. We deserve better. There was an opportunity for a national approach to protect vulnerable workers and we have all been let down. The LNP always seem to side with the big end of town over workers' rights. One Nation have nailed their colours to the mast showing where they stand, and it is not for workers. Shame. Only Labor stands up for Queensland workers. I commend the bill.