





Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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RAIL SAFETY NATIONAL LAW (QUEENSLAND) BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.58 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to this bill. I pay tribute to the member for Whitsunday. What a passion he has for the rail network across Queensland! His knowledge and commitment to understanding how important the railway industry has been in Queensland is absolutely amazing, whether it is for the tourism sector all the way up to the Cairns but, most importantly from where I come from, for the Bowen Basin and the infrastructure that has been put in place for our coal industry. I will talk about that a little bit later tonight. I thank all the people who work in the rail industry. They are absolute champions. They keep Queensland moving. They play a significant role in making sure that we have a sophisticated export industry.

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (7.40 pm), continuing: This bill is necessary in order for Queensland to join national rail safety regulation and investigation reforms and to establish the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator as the rail safety regulator in Queensland. I would also like to pick up where the member for Whitsunday left off with regard to rail history across Queensland. It would be remiss of me not to mention that last Sunday marked the 56th anniversary of the Bogantungan railway accident, which was one of the worst rail disasters in this state. On Friday, 26 February 1960, while on its way to Rockhampton the *Midlander* had an accident at Medway Creek just west of Bogantungan, killing seven and injuring 43. The night before the accident an uprooted gum tree weighing 12 tonnes impacted and damaged the pylons under the railway bridge. As the train crossed the bridge just after 2 am the bridge collapsed, causing the first engine to derail on the other side and the C-class second engine and three sleeping cars to fall 7.6 metres into the creek. Peter Henderson was four at that time and travelling with his mum, thankfully seated in one of the back carriages. As quoted in the *CQ News*, he said—

I don't remember a great deal ... I can remember giving my clothes from my suitcase away to other children.

I can remember the carriage and the water and the people.

It must have been an extraordinarily frightening time for those people, and I pay my respects to and remember those people. It is a disaster that everybody in regional and Central Queensland knows and has heard about, and it is time to remember those people who lost their lives and those who were impacted by it.

I welcome the cost-benefit analysis provisions in this bill, which will ensure proper consideration of the changes which may be imposed under the national reforms. These are intended to prevent the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator from introducing changes that may impose significant costs on a rail operator with little benefit in terms of operational safety. If only we could wind back the clock and have the Aurizon contracts for western rail freight properly considered as well. This is important, because Queensland Rail and rail freight out to western Queensland is very important to the electorates of Gregory, Mount Isa and Warrego, who are hugely impacted by this. When the Labor government privatised Queensland Rail, it is pretty clear that absolutely no thought was given to ensuring that western rail freight services were maintained. These services are key to the ability of people in the west to earn a living, and they are key to our quality of life in the west.

Mr Power: So help us bring them back.

Mr MILLAR: I take that interjection from the member for Logan. It was the Bligh Labor government that sold Queensland Rail to Aurizon, and this is why we are having these problems. In the first instance, bulky goods and dangerous freight deliveries that were once reliably provided by rail are now sparse and unreliable.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr MILLAR: Mate, they are unreliable. You got out there once: that's great! This has a direct impact on all of the small businesses in the seat of Gregory who should be able to stock those goods and the consumers who wish to purchase and use those goods.

In the second instance I am talking about the ability to shift livestock out of the west by rail. This is a key product of Western Queensland, and transport access to these markets is fundamental if we are to be productive and competitive. The loss of these services is absolutely devastating to Western Queensland. People out in Western Queensland in the seats of Gregory and Warrego know that Aurizon plays games while paying lip-service to these issues. Meanwhile, on the ground Aurizon provides a service so poor that it is not competitive, not reliable, not frequent and not up to the freight tasks required. It is a Clayton's service—the service you provide when you are not providing a service—and this is why the Labor government is doing nothing at the moment. They both fuffed about so much that the government then felt the tender period would need adjustment. In essence, the Labor government rewarded Aurizon's performance by extending their contract until December 2017. This shows a complete lack of proper oversight. The west has been left unserved and uncertain for two years. The new contract will not commence until January 2018. Tenders for the contract closed in October 2016.

Only last week I was talking to Peter Ballard, who has been a freight carrier in Longreach for over 30 years. He relies on good, reliable rail services. He told me that his business has been devastated by the Aurizon contract, and every time he hears the government talk about getting freight off the road and onto rail it is a mockery given that they do not see rail services out there. Given this woeful record on the oversight of rail services, it is a good thing that the Labor government will no longer be overseeing rail safety and that that important responsibility will be vested federally.

I also welcome the improvements the bill will make in terms of worker safety so that it will be an offence for rail safety workers—including train drivers—to work with a blood alcohol level above zero. While this may sound tough, we must remember that rail disasters can be large in scale and have a widespread impact on victims and their families. This reduction in blood alcohol from .02 to zero recognises this fact. I commend this bill to the House.