




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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LABOUR HIRE LICENSING BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (8.55 pm): Another day, another Palaszczuk Labor government union-serving Trojan horse legislation. It should come as no surprise that this blatantly union-serving legislation has come before the House at this time. What better way to halt declining union membership than to create a political excuse driving greater union participation in the growing labour hire industry.

I should put out a shingle as a psychic. Indeed, I previously rose on 15 September 2016 following the farcical inquiry into the labour hire industry—a precursor to this bill's announcement in the House—as it was obvious to me and my LNP colleagues that a licensing arrangement for labour hire firms would not assist or solve the difficulties caused by a small number of rogue operators. The percentage identified to the committee of rogue operators in the industry is in the single digits. We have brought in this legislation which is a sledgehammer to crack a walnut under the guise of trying to build greater union membership. I table in the House a copy of an article in today's *Australian* of the unions building a \$1.5 billion war chest.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Australian*, dated 6 September 2017, titled 'Unions build \$1.5bn war chest' [\[1588\]](#).

They also have a disposable income of \$900 million per year to fund the political campaigns for those opposite. I do not see that much coming to this side of the House, but that is what this legislation has been generated to support.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! I realise this is a topic that excites people from both sides of the House, but I think that Hansard may be finding it hard to hear the member for Mermaid Beach.

Mr STEVENS: Unscrupulous operators that I and other LNP members of the House do recognise exist in the labour hire industry and have no doubt are causing problems—

Mr Power: What are you going to do about it?

Mr STEVENS: I take the interjection from the member for Logan because the minister herself has declared to the House very successful prosecutions that we have had throughout the year. As I said before, the only way we will address these dodgy rogue operators and phoenix operators is to put in a regime that is well funded with plenty of inspectors to take these operators out of the system.

These terrible practices will continue to exist. That was a comment from departmental officers in relation to this legislation in answer to a question on notice that I put to them. They will continue to abuse good Queensland workers and this legislation will not stamp them out to any significant degree. What this sledgehammer to crack a walnut legislation will provide is an added layer of bureaucratic paperwork, delay and obstruction, with more jobs for Palaszczuk Labor government's union mates.

One alarmed business operator contacted my office to express his concerns relating to the broadly defined labour hire services and the possibly detrimental impact this bill could have by not dealing with the consequences should an existing good-practising operator not have their licence granted, renewed or suspended or stayed by QCAT. We would be faced with workers being suddenly unemployed and out of a job.

I note that the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland have absolutely and blatantly come out against this particular piece of legislation. They represent literally hundreds of thousands of workers in Queensland and some 40,000 members in the small business industry in Queensland. They are totally against this legislation. How can the minister for jobs and employment go forward with this legislation? I can tell the House how this minister goes forward with this legislation. I remember the days when the current Hon. Grace Grace was one of the union heavies out there—

Ms Grace: And proud of it.

Mr STEVENS: She was very proud of it then and she is proud of it now. She is bringing the union legislation into the House now under her new guise as a politician rather than a union heavy. It does not wash. She is still a union heavy and she will always be a union heavy. She loves the union heavies and she is very proud of it.

As I am sure those opposite in the chamber will mention, there is a waiver provision. I remind them that, more importantly, as identified in our statement of reservation—

... there is still an undetermined "catch-all" philosophy that may impact on disabled employment groups and other yet to be determined groups that will fall under the umbrella of this wide-reaching labour-hire definition.

Further to this, trade unions and other third parties, as part of the third party rights review in the bill before the House, will allow for them to delay and potentially overturn decisions in a relatively unrestrained manner, to which they should not expect to have purview or influence of. This is opposite to what this bill is purported to be about. Instead of protecting labour hire operators, we are exposing them to more possible harm while not significantly impacting on the abhorrent practices of those unscrupulous rogue operators. While the effectiveness and cost competitive nature of the labour hire industry currently provides great advantage to good employers, it does restrict the dwindling union memberships and the ability of their associated union affiliated workforces to control matters as they might wish.

This control will be granted, through this troubling bill, through imbuing inspectors with broad powers to enter the premises, with or without consent, and, among other activities, seize items that could be a requirement of completing that job. While some employer groups unwittingly expressed support for a licensing regime under this legislation during the committee process, it is obvious to my eyes that they are unaware of the likely longer term consequences this legislation will bring—through overbearing union demands to meet to satisfy licensing requirements as well as the continuing ongoing fees.

All of those employer groups thought, 'Yes, it will be wonderful. I'm a good employer so I'll get a licence very easily and it won't cost me any money because the government will pay for that.' The rude shock will come with the implementation of this scheme when those licensing fees ratchet up to almost electricity prices for licences. There will also be a long delay to get them and they will have to conform with all union matters, requests and demands to get that licence.

This is one of the worst pieces of legislation I have seen in this House. I am very fearful of the longer term consequences of where this legislation will lead us. It is very disappointing that, in the dying days of this Palaszczuk Labor government, they are bringing this union-building legislation into the House—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr MINNIKIN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Would you please direct the member for Pine Rivers that she should be in her rightful seat if she would like to interject.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): The member for Mermaid Beach has the call.

Mr STEVENS: It is another additional cost to Queensland businesses brought about by the Palaszczuk Labor government and her union mates. For a government that has been promising jobs, jobs, jobs, putting in further obstacles and more bureaucratic hurdles feels more like jobs, jobs, jobs for their union mates. Clearly, the Palaszczuk Labor government is focused on dancing to its union puppetmasters. I understand that the union did a great job in getting them into this House in the first place in the election that it was not expecting to win. I think that is a fair comment. I note the member for Bundaberg and others had a lot of union support at the last election. I understand why they have to go forward and pay the piper to the union—

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister and member for Kawana, please cease your debates across the chamber or I will issue both of you with a warning.

Mr STEVENS: It is a tough gig up here tonight. Clearly, the Palaszczuk Labor government are focused on dancing to their union puppetmasters' tune, as made evident by the creation of this legislation. It was identified in the earlier inquiry prior to its creation as being unnecessary and it would

be much better addressed by supporting federal legislation across all the states. A lot of these labour hire companies are interstate companies so they will come into Queensland for the licensing regime that they do not have in any other part of Australia and they will be subjected to the heavy demands. I am sure unions will get mentioned in relation to when they apply for their licence to see how many employees will be part of their union roster, if you like, in terms of getting a swift resolution to the licence application.

The sole recommendation from the report into the practice of the labour hire industry in Queensland was that the minister progress this issue through COAG meetings to work together with the federal government. This was a sensible approach that would allow for the production of legislation that is uniform and complementary to the Commonwealth or another state.

However, what we have witnessed instead is typical of the Palaszczuk Labor government's approach of creating more burdens on our Queensland businesses and more opportunity for the lessening of work practices throughout Queensland. Increasing policing of existing fair work inspectors and the funding towards the associated national laws would benefit Queenslanders far more. It would undoubtedly achieve greater results in eradicating dodgy operators than this politically inspired, opportunistic legislation to generate more fees from an emerging industry and promote union membership to the benefit of the Palaszczuk Labor government's union overlords. To put it more bluntly, the minister as the former union boss has brought in legislation to help out her union mates at the cost of further crippling Queensland so that industry cannot get on with the job of fixing Queensland's parlous state.