




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 2 March 2017

LIQUOR AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.45 pm): The Bundaberg region is again in a policy vacuum created by indecision and flip-flopping on this very serious issue, the lockout laws. Considering the promises that were made to the electorate in 2015 regarding the safe night precincts and the lockout laws, this is a major policy backflip from Labor. The issues have been clouded ever since, leaving almost everyone scratching their heads, wondering what will be next. People in my region want leadership, not thought bubbles. Examples of a lack of leadership continue to be raised time and time again, such as the lack of leadership to deal with unemployment. One in four of the youth in Bundaberg cannot find work. Job security is not good. People are concerned about their very survival—‘Can I get a job?’ ‘Can I afford to feed the kids and keep them at school?’

Ms Grace: So you sack them.

Mr BENNETT: I take the interjection from the member for Brisbane Central. A Fair Work Commission has made a ruling—a Labor set-up committee—and now the members opposite do not like it. Move on.

The people of Bundaberg are sick of the politics being played with very serious issues. This legislation is a complete policy bungle. Across the regions in Queensland, no wonder youth unemployment is spiralling out of control. For example, why would a business owner invest in my region when there is such policy uncertainty and instability created by those opposite? My region needs very clear messages to allow understanding and policy engagement. With all the bungling of this issue—

A government member interjected.

Mr BENNETT: Was there an interjection where a member asked about my future or past employment? I was very happy where I worked. I was engaged in the Public Service for 23 years, providing great services across Queensland. I am very proud that that agency continues to grow, providing more services to Queenslanders. It is now the best point of interest and a centre of excellence across Queensland. When you have good management, you can make things great. I thank the member who made that interjection. I am glad we can clear that up.

As a result of the bungling of this issue, the lockout is scrapped as well. Despite the interim evaluation report being done before the lockout had commenced, it said that it was unlikely that the lockouts would alter the current trends. If the members opposite had listened to the evidence given in relation to that issue last year, rather than trying to grab a cheap headline or make a cheap comment from the cheap seats, they would have saved themselves having to do this unbelievably embarrassing backdown.

The people in the regions get lumped with the indecision. Whether it thinks it does or not, we are all affected by this out-of-touch government, which is unable to make decisions. I acknowledge that these issues are not without complexity, but we did all the work in 2012 and 2013 and it should not have been that hard.

As I travel around speaking to constituents about the liquor laws, I am continually asked to simplify the process and to take a common-sense approach. The issue is also about identifying ways to ease the cost burden on the pubs, clubs and the mum-and-dad businesses while maintaining a high level of accountability in the industry.

The main objective of this bill is to address the findings of the Tackling Alcohol-Fuelled Violence Legislation Amendment Act 2016 interim evaluation report. That report recommended the repeal of the lockout and the 3 am safe night precincts, the winding back of trading hours, the tightening of the temporary late-night extended hours permit region, and an extension of the banning order sentencing regime to prescribed drug offences. The bill also clarifies the issue of licensees of regulated premises with approved regular extended trading hours beyond midnight.

We have heard loud and clear from those stakeholders involved that they do not support changes to the process for temporary one-off late-night extended hours permits which are being done retrospectively. How do you think the industry feels when attacked by this government with wild allegations, for apparently gaming the system, when the system was put in place by the government in the first place? It is just another bungle. What was working was the plan that should never have been attacked or politicised—the \$44.5 million comprehensive strategy with 60 initiatives that was developed in consultation with Queenslanders in 2013.

Key elements of the strategy included compulsory drug and alcohol education in Queensland—we are not even talking about kids here today and I think that is a big mistake; establishing 15 safe night precincts across Queensland, one in Bundaberg, to ensure popular nightspots have coordinated prevention and support initiatives in place to keep patrons safe; a new offence of unlawful striking causing death, which will carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and require the offender to serve 80 per cent of his or her prison sentence; increased penalties for other violent and antisocial offences such as serious assault of public officers, public nuisance, refusing to leave a licensed premises, obstructing police, failing to obey a move-on order and urinating in public; empowering police to issue banning orders and ensuring police have the resources to have a presence and the ability to respond quickly to alcohol and drug related violence—that was key to the reforms that were already in place; stronger and better coordinated action to ensure licensees provide a safe environment and comply with liquor licensing rules, including mystery shopper style tests, which were working; and an awareness campaign, including advertising, to promote clear standards of responsible behaviour for patrons, licensees and police.

Our position, and that of Queenslanders, is that the Safe Night Out Strategy should have been given a chance to work given all the time and consultation that was involved in putting it all together. It was a comprehensive strategy that took the right approach to addressing the issue of alcohol and drug related violence. The early results were very encouraging. Initial police data indicated that overall assaults had decreased by nine per cent, sexual offences by 18 per cent, property damage by 10 per cent and drug offences detected by the police had increased by 26 per cent across the 15 safe night precincts in the 2014-15 financial year. This indicates that targeted intervention and a high-visibility policing strategy is clearly improving the general safety of patrons who frequent Queensland's most popular nightspots.

Those opposite elected to trash the success, and by doing so in effect have trashed Queenslanders. For too many years politicians from all sides, but especially Labor, have spent too much time meddling in people's lives and not enough time doing their job. This is another case of reviewing, not doing. The LNP has been the only party with a consistent position on this issue. We opposed the laws because they are bad laws. Labor went to the last election promising a lot, including the 1 am statewide lockout as part of its plan to reduce trading hours to 3 am across Queensland.

The list of broken promises continues to grow. Queenslanders cannot trust Labor. The confusion continues to reign. There was a 1 am lockout in safe night precincts if traders wanted to trade to 3 am. The statewide closing time was changed to 2 am. The Premier and her Labor government could have saved everyone a lot of time, money, concern and stress if they had listened and implemented evidence based policy this time last year. We heard reports that the Safe Night Out Strategy was a world-leading strategy, developed in partnership with all stakeholders. If that had been allowed to continue we would be in a better place than we are in today. There was ample evidence that the introduction of a 1 am lockout was in no way reducing alcohol and drug related violence. There have been very mixed results in other jurisdictions as to its effectiveness.

Despite the media spin and rhetoric, there is no other way of saying that this is not only a major policy backflip but also, more importantly for Queenslanders, another broken election commitment by this government. The LNP has been consistent in its position. We introduced the Safe Night Out Strategy. Queenslanders could be forgiven for being confused if they thought that Labor's new policy looks very similar to the LNP's policy. Non-government members also fail to see how licensed premises

can be blamed for gaming the system of extended trading hours permits, a system that was established and managed by the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation under the current legislation, when that very same Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation provided its approval of every single extended hours permit issued under the current legislation.

Non-government members do not support the changes to the one-off temporary extended trading hours permits. These venues will have to re-evaluate their business model and forecasting because of the retrospectivity of this policy. The fact is that this legislation is full of retrospective policy decisions. Retrospective legislation makes it very difficult for business to succeed in Queensland. The opposition has maintained a very consistent view on this issue. I acknowledge that the government is finally straightening out the mess it created, but it is too late for the employees who have lost hours, too late for the venues that have lost live music acts and too late for the tradies who would have gained work on upgrading and refurbishing venues that have either shut down or decided not to proceed with renovations due to the uncertainty brought on business by this government. Attacks on business are nothing new from those opposite.