




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2017

TRADING (ALLOWABLE HOURS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.54 pm): Many constituents have grave concerns with the Trading (Allowable Hours) Amendment Bill 2017 currently proposed by the state government that will make it easier for major retailers, particularly Coles and Woolworths, to dominate local community run and owned supermarkets and convenience stores in regional communities like Bundaberg and its surrounds. Problems were identified early with smaller hardware stores and motor and caravan traders in my region. I note that many submissions to the committee review were opposed, with many claiming that the government plans were anti community, anti consumer and anti competitive and worked solely in the interests of the major national supermarket chains. There were concerns that the only sectors driving this policy agenda were some union stakeholder groups and large multinationals.

Locally in the Bundaberg region, many concerns were raised. The region is on its knees under this government. The policy agenda that will affect jobs in my community in rural Queensland should not be taken lightly. I thank Dale from Takalvans Caravan, Brad Solomon from Bundaberg Motor Group, Ross Gray from Ross Gray Holden and Ben Searle from Searles RVs for standing up to this regressive legislation as they know that seven-day trading will kill their family run car and caravan businesses. These small businesses know that they will be taken for a ride.

Back in May we called on members around Bundaberg, particularly the member for Bundaberg, to stand up for our small business operators over the big end of town like Coles, Woolworths and the unions. Predictably, nothing happened—not a murmur—providing more evidence that once you are funded and supported by unions you can never really stand up for your region and against bad policy. I always had concerns about this legislation as it dictates which retailers can open their doors and who would be disadvantaged; namely, those local family run small businesses. Labor's policy is all about backing big business over small business and, in the end, it means that consumers lose out and jobs will be lost, despite the claims of those opposite. Bundaberg family owned small businesses tell me that the changes would lead to a loss of quality licensed staff who do not want to work all weekend. It would also force an increase in overheads in businesses already facing increased finance regulation and running on tight margins.

When all of this started, the legislation was based on recommendations made last year that were not totally independent. Regardless of what Labor claims, the fact is that former union official the Hon. Grace Grace has botched this review of trading hours. The process of appointing a former Labor MP to run the review should always sound alarm bells and raise concerns, like those raised during the committee process; namely, giving the green light to major retailers, particularly Coles and Woolworths, to open longer hours makes it even harder for independent community based businesses to compete.

Community driven, family owned businesses provide vital support and are the heart of our communities. If they are forced to downsize or close their doors, a direct adverse impact right across our communities will be felt. As local businesses close, consumers have less shopping choice. Especially in regional Queensland, this is a reality. As local businesses close, there are few options for consumers in our regions. More market dominance means that it is easier for major operators to

increase prices. History has shown that it especially occurs with fresh produce, something on which my region depends. Queenslanders lose jobs because jobs lost in the independent stores are replaced in the major chains, sometimes paid at half the penalty rates. One would think those opposite would be concerned with that.

When we shop in our local community supermarkets our money stays in our communities' economy rather than goes off to head office in a multinational office. Keeping money local supports our local businesses and community ventures. As we know, there are nearly 800 independent supermarket operators employing near 21,000 staff. Nearly \$3 billion is spent in Queensland alone. This is seriously under threat and should not be ignored.

We hear that regional Queensland and the people of the Bundaberg region do not want another Brisbane based solution forced upon them as it happens too often. Regional voters are wise enough to see the negative impacts of the removal of longstanding regulations. They are much more concerned about maintaining real competition, about real choice and about keeping jobs local. In their submission the motor traders raised trading hours considered as a single industry policy and made good submissions. Of course, we welcome the foreshadowed amendments and look forward to them being debated at the consideration in detail stage.

Failures across-the-board really concern those motor traders and the caravan staff. Particularly in the motor industry, this affects retailers and staff. Many opposed Sunday trading, raising issues such as impact on family life, driving up costs and reduced staff satisfaction. The public has more than enough time to buy cars now with internet sales and the available trading hours. There will be an impact on the wages bill. Dealers cannot afford overtime rates for Sundays. The new vehicle market is limited and extending trading hours will not increase their sales. In Queensland approximately 1,000 motor dealers would be affected by this.

Competition in the motor vehicle sector is now regional, national and in some cases international, due to online trading and internet trades. The original proposal to deregulate trading hours has the potential to risk the viability of these dealers, threaten livelihoods and destabilise employee arrangements. The single largest group of employees in the motor vehicle sector that would have been affected by the proposed changes to trading hours were motor vehicle sales persons. Business managers, finance and insurance salesmen, after-market salespersons and administrative staff would all be impacted. Thankfully, the LNP stance has facilitated amendments that exclude the application of the new extended hours to motor vehicle and caravan retailers. We look forward to further amendments from the minister during the consideration in detail.