




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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TRADING (ALLOWABLE HOURS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (11.08 pm): I rise to make a small contribution to the Trading (Allowable Hours) Amendment Bill. As we all know, this bill was poorly drafted to try and do a favour for some union mates, and it has been sitting in here on life support for some time now as they tried to cobble a deal together to allow this to be passed today. We do not know what kind of deal has been done, but what we do know is that the bill is now in a lot better shape than when it was originally going to decimate small business in regional communities and cause my motor dealers a great deal of pain.

I spoke to the Armstrongs, David at Wippells, the people at Toyota and Hughes Car Sales in Toowoomba and got their opinion of what the original bill was going to do to their business given the complete lack of understanding that had gone into preparing this bill. I heard the interjection earlier that the minister listens. Maybe if the minister had listened a little bit at the start we could have saved an awful lot of time in terms of parliamentary process because we could have come up with a much better bill.

Ms Grace: That's the process, mate!

Mr WATTS: It might be the process, but let us face it: you would have to consider it a complete and utter failure if you walk in here with 32 amendments to fundamentally change the majority of the bill just so that you can bludgeon its way through the House. Motor dealers in my area were very concerned that they were going to be unable to attract decent staff if they were forced to work on Sundays. They were very concerned that it would destroy the families and family lifestyle of their staff. The committee finding that motor dealers need to be taken out of this consideration was a good thing. It is a shame that that could not have happened from the start and that people had to get very anxious and obviously we all had to spend a lot of time trying to ensure—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr WATTS:—that the voices of regional motor dealers were heard over and above the squawking of the member for Logan. We know that the bill was fundamentally flawed. We know that now we have 32 amendments that have been rushed into the House to try to resuscitate this bill to please the union lord and masters to ensure there is something in it for them, but the deal has been cobbled through. I spoke to Debbie Smith, who runs a couple of Foodland stores in my area, and she said that the original bill would have basically shut her business down, it would have destroyed her business and it would have handed over those local jobs to Coles and Woolworths so that they could sign up those people to their union membership and flick their fees to fund the member for Brisbane Central's campaign.

We all know the original intention of this bill. We also know that it has been a disaster as it has been going through the process in that there has been compromise after compromise and 32-odd amendments now to get it to the point where obviously some deal has been done to cobble its way through the House given the compromises that have been made. When I spoke to Debbie today after I had a good look at the amendments I said, 'What do you think?' She said, 'It's not really a very good

deal for us, but it's better than nothing because my options are that my business is shut down and I sack all my workers or we look at these amendments and we try to work out how to survive against the monolith of the duopoly and the low wages deals that have been done to get a deal with the union.'

I am disappointed that hardware stores are not going to get the same kind of consideration. In my area at the moment there is a massive Bunnings being built. Make no mistake: I like Bunnings as a men's toy store just the same as anybody else, but for convenience and service those little hardware stores have been supporting my community for a long time and they needed a niche to allow their businesses to survive and provide those services for people who maybe have to use public transport to buy a bag of nails rather than drive their car. There are a lot of retirees and other people who are dependent on that in parts of my electorate, so losing some of those smaller stores and having a situation where they have to get down to the big monolith maybe difficult for some of those people. As I said, I am disappointed that hardware stores have not received the same consideration.

We know that this bill was poorly thought through and was a deal for the union lord and masters to be able to help the duopoly to get more union membership so that they can expand, collect that money and give it to the Labor Party. We know that that is what the bill was primarily about and we know that in regional communities the bill affects families. The member for Maryborough said that he worked about 25 hours a day and around about eight days a week.

Mr Cripps interjected.

Mr WATTS: Yes, which obviously was some kind of luxury. Even from his own words we know that small business is tough. I have been in small business for a long time and you put in a lot of hours. When you have put in all of your hours dealing with the public on the retail side, then you have the privilege of sitting down and filling out your BAS statement and making sure you spend time getting your PAYG done and sending off cheques to superannuation and doing a whole bunch of tax collection for the government. That is the joy of small business and I am sure many small businesses would enjoy that just as much as I have through my lifetime. Realistically, a small business needs the ability to be able to compete and it needs to be able to find a niche where it can compete, and often that niche is on service. We know that sometimes products might be a little bit more expensive, but they come with some advice, they come closer to home and they come with some more availability.

If the only retail model that is ever going to work in this country is a massive big box, massive turnover, small margin and lack of service, that may well work in the middle of a big city. To be honest, in parts of Toowoomba that may work as well. However, as you get to the outlying towns it does not work and you end up with people in communities who have to travel 10, 20, 30, 50 or 100 kilometres to be able to find those big box shops because all of the little retailers have been unable to find that niche in the market any longer. They have been unable to compete against the profits and the lower wages that have been negotiated with the unions for the workers and the distribution advantages that some of those big box retailers have. It really places small retail in regional areas under a great deal of pressure.

Whilst I think there are a lot of bad things in this bill, some of these amendments have got the bill to the point where, as Debbie said, it might not be very good but it is a whole lot better than what she was terrified would come in and then she would see all of her life's work torn down as she tried to compete with unfair advantages that have been given to her competitors. What can I say? Ultimately, the bill is not great for small retail. We certainly know that in its original form it was diabolical for motor traders. We know that it was ill conceived, poorly executed, fumbled its way through the parliament and has had to be negotiated, and I do not know what kinds of deals have been done with various crossbenchers and others to get to the point where all of a sudden this cobbled together mess can become the new governance for retail and trading hours in Queensland. That is the situation we find ourselves in given that there may be a little lifeline for some of the small retailers that were really going to struggle under the initial form of this bill.