




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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**DISABILITY SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WORKER SCREENING)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (3.24 pm): I rise to support the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Working Screening) Amendment Bill 2018. As chair of the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee, it indeed gives me great pleasure to speak in support of the committee's first bill for this term of government in this important area. It is good to see this body of work finally come to the chamber where we can sign off on it.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme, or NDIS, is transforming the way Australians with a disability obtain support services. Once again, Queensland is leading the way in being the first state to sign up to the scheme. I am proud as chair of the committee to recommend to the House that this bill be passed as, as I said, one of the first pieces of work coming to our committee.

Following on from the member for Moggill and his comments, it is worthy to note that there is genuine bipartisanship in supporting this particular piece of legislation. For me, in putting the team back together from the 55th Parliament with the deputy chair, the member for Caloundra, we worked together in a bipartisan fashion to see this through. We have some new members and I acknowledge their contribution as well. We cracked on as if we had not even had a break. We just got on with it. This bill has been sitting in the draw ready to go, and I am very happy to report on it today.

The NDIS is ambitious, major national reform jointly governed and funded through a partnership between the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments. Moving to the NDIS involves changing a service system that has been in place for 70 years. It is simply the largest reform since Medicare. Because of the work in the previous term of parliament by the Minister for Disability Services, the member for Mundingburra, Coralee O'Rourke, I was so pleased to see the trial sites of Townsville, Palm Island and Charters Towers up and running and to see so many people in our part of the world transitioned. Transitioning was never going to be easy, but we are getting there.

The NDIS will give people choice and control over the supports they need. It is a new way of providing support for Australians with disability, their families and their carers. Under the NDIS, people who meet the eligibility criteria will have access to reasonable and necessary supports that enable them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

On 20 March 2018, the Minister for Communities and Minister for Disability Services and Seniors introduced this bill and referred it to our committee. We were required to table our report, which included examination, consultation and recommendations, on 8 May 2018 to the Assembly. It has taken a little while to land it but we got it here.

During our examination, we undertook to invite stakeholders and subscribers to make written submissions on the bill. Our committee accepted four submissions. We did receive oral briefings from the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, and we held a public hearing on 16 April to hear evidence from Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia. Our committee also invited the Queensland Family and Child Commission and Queensland Advocacy Inc. However, both organisations declined the invitation.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework was agreed by the Council of Australian Governments, or COAG, on 9 December 2016. Under the framework, all jurisdictions agreed to a nationally consistent approach to worker screening including the assessment of an expanded range of criminal history information. To put it simply, we want the best people looking after those with a disability in Queensland. The Commonwealth will be responsible for the development of national policy settings for the screening of workers, and the states and territories will remain responsible for operating worker-screening units under state based legislation.

At its core, the bill seeks to amend the Police Service Administration Act 1990, which is to enable Queensland to participate in the national information-sharing obligations for the NDIS worker screening under the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguarding Framework and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Nationally Consistent Worker Screening; and to amend the Disability Services Act 2006 to clarify beyond doubt screening requirements for sole traders during the transition period until the full scheme implementation, which in Queensland will be on 1 July 2019.

A key tenet of the NDIS is that participants will have choice and control over their disability supports including being able to choose the providers who give support, how that support is delivered and managed and, importantly, paying for those supports.

I would like to note that in regards to consultation our committee received only four submissions. Departmental officers advised that the development of this bill was built upon the extensive consultation the Commonwealth undertook in early 2015 including 16 public meetings in capital cities and regional locations, and written and online submissions in relation to the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework. We note that the Queensland Disability Advisory Council was also consulted on the changes in this bill by the department.

Our committee sought feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland, or ATSIDNQ, through Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia, or ADA Australia, about aspects of the bill and potential impacts it may have in regional and remote Indigenous communities. This was in particular regard to the yellow card process for those in remote and Indigenous communities who provide disability services and in circumstances where carers might otherwise not be available within a community, and the community is best placed to consider issues of past criminal histories.

These questions were raised for discussion at a meeting with ATSIDNQ of local champions on 20 April 2018. Their response to the committee made the following points which are supportive of the policy intent of the bill in that workforce-screening processes should be adapted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and that safeguards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability need to be of the highest standards. The committee notes that the ATSIDNQ was unable to engage with regional, rural and remote communities on the topics raised by the committee in the limited time frame available.

I would like to thank the committee secretariat. They are doing an enormous amount of work in other areas. I want to acknowledge the team under Rob Hansen, the department, submitters and all my fellow committee members who all agreed and made one recommendation—that the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill be passed. I commend the bill to the House.