




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.12 pm): I rise to speak to the Termination of Pregnancy Bill. Today, we have a great responsibility. What we say and do today will affect the lives of thousands of Queenslanders for many years to come. Unfortunately, it will affect the lives of many thousands of unborn children as well. Today especially, political allegiances count for little. Like members on both sides of the chamber and on the crossbenches, I have received phone calls, emails and letters imploring me to vote one way or another on this bill. However, today we meet in this place as the elected representatives of our constituents. We must uphold the spirit of this place and truly represent those Queenslanders who empowered us to represent them.

I will be voting against this bill. The reason for that is simple: the overwhelming feedback from my electorate is to not support the legislation. My vote is about representing my constituents and it is about refusing to accept bad legislation. This bill will allow adults to put their unborn babies to death at up to 22 weeks gestation on demand, no questions asked. Advances in medical practices and procedures mean that unborn babies as young as 22 weeks have a chance of survival, that will only improve in line with medical advances.

Today, many will rise to speak about rights: the rights of mothers, the rights of the children and even the rights of the medical practitioners. My constituents also have rights and among them is the right to representation in this parliament. The key objection that I have heard from my constituents relates to late-term terminations. The overwhelming message from my constituents is that termination after 22 weeks is not acceptable unless it is absolutely necessary to save the mother's life.

What horrifies me is that, for a woman who is more than 22 weeks pregnant, a termination may be performed by a medical practitioner where the specified ground is satisfied and there has been consultation with another medical practitioner who concurs. The single broadly expressed ground is that the medical practitioner considers that the termination should in all the circumstances be performed having regard to all relevant medical circumstances, the woman's current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances, and the professional standards and guidelines that apply to the medical practitioner in relation to the performance of terminations. I note an exception to strict compliance with the requirements for a termination after 22 weeks is made in the case of an emergency to save the woman or, in the case of a multiple pregnancy, another unborn child's life. I shudder to think that a woman and perhaps her partner would consider terminating a life because it is the wrong sex, their relationship has dissolved, it is no longer convenient to have a baby or the mother has lost her job. To me, that is nothing short of murder.

Like members on both sides of the chamber, I have heard the emotive arguments. My office has received the letters and the emails from both sides of this campaign containing horrific material. Many have said that termination of pregnancy should not be a criminal matter and I agree. However, it also should not be a political issue driven by ideology. To use such an emotive issue for political gain or newspaper headlines should be condemned by all of us in this place. Why? Because it is well and truly condemned by the majority of the public who want their elected representatives to get on with the job

of listening to them and representing them in this place. To attempt to wedge Queenslanders against each other for political gain is simply abhorrent. To taunt and throw around accusations illustrates perfectly why many in our communities are disillusioned.

Personally, I admire people who are passionate about issues that are important to them; people who can give their point of view and also listen to the alternative arguments in a respectful way. I have no admiration for those who dismiss civility and respect just because another person disagrees with them. As elected representatives, we should be setting the standards. We should be illustrating that we must listen to those with opposite opinions and consider their arguments, to ensure that our arguments and opinions are sound.

There can be no greater debate than a debate about health, a debate about life and death. However, we must be careful that the debate is an accurate debate. To argue for this legislation on the grounds of preventing prosecution is a petty argument to say the least. While many Queenslanders will raise concerns about our judicial system, I have faith that the Queensland judicial system does not and will not prosecute a woman for terminating a pregnancy when it is done in the right way and for the right reasons.

As I mentioned earlier, feedback from my constituents is not to support this legislation, but it must also be noted that this is flawed legislation. To allow late-term abortions without counselling provisions shows a lack of respect for women and their partners, where applicable, when making one of life's toughest decisions. Not including guarantees that women are not being forced or coerced into these procedures is, again, disrespectful to women and fraught with danger. As leaders of our community, we should be ensuring that there is support for women and their partners during such a difficult time, but this legislation does not do that.

We must strike a balance between ensuring access to safe health services and the expectations of the community. We can ensure the rights of women whilst ensuring there are protections in place for those women who are deliberately misled about these procedures. I can respect women who make a conscience decision while, at the same time, supporting those who are coerced or threatened into seeking to terminate a pregnancy. This legislation does not achieve any of those things.

Earlier I mentioned that issues like this must be debated in a respectful manner. I would like to especially pay tribute to those who provided submissions to the committee, whether it be in writing or in person. It takes great bravery for you to share your stories. Even though I may not agree with your point of view, I do want you to know that I admire you for having the courage to make your voice heard.

This legislation is not in line with community expectations and certainly not that of my electorate of Burdekin. My constituents have told me that they do not support late-term abortion regardless of any claim that it is rare. This legislation does not provide the support and safeguards that women in Queensland deserve. Put simply, this legislation falls well short of the mark and for these reasons I will not be supporting it. I urge all members of this House to do the same.