




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.22 pm): There is no more difficult or divisive issue than abortion. When I say ‘divisive’, I do not simply mean that this issue turns parties and people against each other; it also divides us as individuals. Our feelings are torn when we try to balance the rights of women with the rights of unborn babies. The arguments on all sides of this debate are powerful and they are highly emotive.

If you cannot understand both sides of this debate then you are not looking hard enough. If you are not moved by the arguments of both sides, you are not listening hard enough. Given this issue is so emotive and so personal, the discussion often descends into animosity. I do not want to divide Queenslanders. I do not want to divide men and women. I want to bring people together, not drive wedges between them. I believe any government that decides to raise an issue as divisive and emotive as abortion reform should have a convincing and pressing case for doing so.

The government’s case is weak. It argues that this bill is simply about decriminalising abortion in Queensland. The implication is that women in Queensland in 2018 risk punishment for having an abortion. That is simply not true. Women’s rights are not under attack from the police or from the courts, and suggesting otherwise may stop some vulnerable women from seeking the help they need.

Terminations supervised by doctors and carried out for medical reasons are entirely legal in Queensland. That has been the law under both a Labor and an LNP government. As the Law Reform Commission report states, as many as 14,000 terminations are performed in this state every year. No woman has been convicted of terminating a pregnancy. If vulnerable and desperate women were being dragged before the courts then I would be the first to defend them. This bill is not about protecting women from persecution.

Why is this legislation before the House? It is before us because of politics—pure and simple. After the last election the left faction took control of Labor and Labor controls parliament. We now have the most ideologically driven government Queensland has ever seen and it is determined to destroy the consensus that has emerged on this issue over many years. Political posturing and politic advantage is what matters to the left.

As the first woman to lead the LNP, I have been consistently and cynically targeted on this issue, but I have not reacted to those taunts. My position has always been that the LNP party room would consider the bill after it had been examined by the committee. At that meeting I moved a motion—a motion that was unanimously supported—that the LNP members be given a conscience vote on this bill.

My own view is that medically supervised terminations for medical reasons should be remain legal. I believe that it is essential that terminations are medically supervised to protect women from serious risks to their physical and mental wellbeing. I do not believe that abortion should be available on demand. As a woman and a mother, I could never support abortion on demand at 22 weeks. That is

almost the end of the second trimester, which is a time that experts say a baby is fully formed and growth continues.

I remember the joy that Jason and I felt when we had scans when I was pregnant with each one of my children. I remember watching our babies moving on the monitor, seeing their heartbeat and feeling them kicking inside me. Nothing was more precious to me than feeling those tiny kicks grow strong, knowing that a new life was growing.

I cannot go along with the pretence that abortion at 22 weeks should be coldly regarded as a simple clinical procedure. I certainly cannot support provisions that will allow abortion for social reasons between week 23 and full term. That is what this bill will allow. I am sure the bill's supporters will say that late-term abortions would be exceptionally rare. That is not what this bill states. My conscience cannot allow me to support it.

Instead of allowing termination in the final trimester of pregnancy, we should be offering more support to women. The government's framework does not provide any counselling services. It includes absolutely no protections against women being pressured into having a termination. The framework supposes that every woman will somehow have all of the information and all of the support she needs to make an informed choice and that women are never pressured into abortion. Those assumptions are wrong. This framework is flawed. This badly crafted bill seems to push women towards terminations. Once taken, that decision can never be undone.

Although I cannot support this bill, I am not in principle opposed to reform. I would support extra provisions for counselling and greater safeguards against abortion coercion. They would require much wider consultation that has not been undertaken by this government. In fact, the consultation we have seen has quite simply been inadequate. It is unacceptable that this government has relied on the committee processes for the examination of previous private members' bills—bills that were not even debated in this House.

There are other aspects of the current framework that could be reviewed, including amending the Criminal Code to explicitly protect medically supervised abortions for medical reasons. I have also been appalled by the conduct of some individuals around abortion clinics in Queensland. No-one seeking medical treatment should be harassed or intimidated. However, there are serious questions about the validity and the appropriateness of the proposed access zones. A better approach would be to consider offences aimed at preventing the harassment of anyone seeking medical support.

In summary, I believe this bill has been flawed from the beginning. Its aim has never been to help women, doctors or babies. Its aim has been to create a political wedge and to sow division in our community. Sadly, it may just have that effect. Hopefully, it will never become law. I urge all members to think hard, carefully and calmly before reaching their own conclusions.