




Speech By
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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (6.37 pm): I rise in the House to make a contribution to the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018. I would like to start by saying I understand that this is a very emotive and personal issue and that this debate arouses a great contrariety of passions. I would like to pay tribute to the member for Hervey Bay, although he is not in the chamber, for his marvellous speech earlier this evening. I felt that he spoke with sincerity and passion. I do not think his contribution will be soon forgotten.

I represent the people of Southern Downs, and that is my foremost duty in this House. I am happy to say that my own conscience, and I believe the majority of my own party's conscience, and also the wishes of my electorate are happily in symmetry on this matter. My staff—and I must pay tribute to them—Emily McKechnie, Ian Jackson and Virginia Marsden, have taken a great deal of phone calls, emails and letters concerning this bill. I am sure that most of the members in this House are in the same boat.

Like other members on my side of the House I have found that the vast majority of contact I have had through my office and as I travel around my electorate has been opposed to this bill. I would say perhaps two per cent have come to me and said that they want this bill to be supported. That should be no surprise because the electorate of Southern Downs is a relatively conservative place and the people of Southern Downs, by and large, hold conservative views and strong family values. I oppose this bill also because it is, in my view, flawed, divisive and, importantly, unnecessary and extreme. It is unnecessary because of the obvious fact that there has not been a single conviction in the history of the current law, which is over a hundred years old, for procuring an abortion.

In effect, abortion is currently legal. It is available now. Women who seek to have abortions are able to get them; however, it is also extreme. When we think about the idea of terminating a pregnancy up to 22 weeks as proposed under this bill it is effectively open slather, and that is quite alarming. Even worse, in my view, post 22 weeks there is only a requirement to have two doctors support the decision. It has been said by a number of speakers today that a baby born at 22 weeks, and sometimes even 20 weeks or less, can be viable. There are stories of children who have survived being born at that particular stage, so I think that the 22-week mark is a disturbing one.

It is also extreme in that it proposes to attack the rights of those who object to abortion or this bill and prevent them from being able to effectively enunciate their objection in public. It is an attack on the rights of people to speak their mind and draw attention to their views on the matter.

I repeat that at 22 weeks a baby can be viable. We have heard about the case where a pregnant woman was murdered and the perpetrator was charged with two counts of murder: one for the lady herself and one for the child she was carrying, which I am told was at 10 weeks gestation. If we need legal recognition of the fact that that is a person, then I think we have a pretty persuasive one right there. Of course it escapes no-one's notice that at 20 weeks a stillborn child is entitled to have a death certificate, so at the very least there is formal recognition in the law that we are talking about a person at 20 weeks.

I have listened closely to the speeches. I spent most of the day in the chamber because I am interested to hear exactly what everyone has to say on this matter. I listened to the health minister this morning. In his second reading speech he gave a great number of assurances to the chamber like sex selection will not happen and late-term abortions will not increase. How can the minister say this? How do we know that? If the law permits it, then I believe it will happen. We do know for a fact that there are cases where foetuses are aborted because of their sex. Perhaps it does not happen in Queensland, I do not know, but we know that these things do happen. In my view this bill would make that easier, and I think that is repugnant.

This bill is all about decriminalising abortion. Well, I do not think that that holds water because, as I have said, there has not been a single conviction in 100 years under the current law. There are many things that are illegal which perhaps people are not convicted of. Perhaps the existence of the law itself serves to moderate the behaviour of those who might cross the line. It is all about the health of women, but what about the health of the unborn child? There needs to be a balance between the interests of the mother and the unborn child, but this bill shifts the entire emphasis to the rights of the mother. I heard that it was necessary to legalise late-term abortion in order for babies with foetal defects to be aborted. In the same breath the minister said that he had been advised by a doctor that she has already been performing abortions in the case of foetuses which have birth defects and which may not be viable, so I cannot see that there is any necessity indicated there.

We also heard the chestnut that we ought to respect the wonderful work of the Queensland Law Reform Commission and swallow what they have given us in relation to this bill. I have great concerns about that. I am not the first member to speak in the House today about my doubts about the impartiality of the Queensland Law Reform Commission in this matter. I draw the attention of the House to the lamentable public utterances of those within the Queensland Law Reform Commission concerning the bill, which I believe was most improper and portrayed a lack of impartiality.

To return to the question of safe access zones, as the Leader of the Opposition said, these are going to be censorship zones. In a free and democratic society we have to balance all sorts of rights. On the one hand, we talk about the right of people to draw to the public's attention their concerns in the form of a public protest. On the other hand, we have the competing right of people to go about their daily business unmolested by violence or menace. A happy medium needs to be achieved, but this bill proposes to go right to one side and eliminate the rights of those to make their feelings known in favour of those who attend an abortion clinic.

That is not right, and I draw the attention of the House to the Fitzgerald report. I know that the Labor Party is very keen to quote the Fitzgerald report to us from time to time, but on the matter of public protest Mr Fitzgerald said—

The right of public assembly has traditionally been regarded as analogous to the right of free speech, and a touchstone of the respect given to other civil liberties within a society. In these days of a mass media, it holds an even greater significance since the main way for groups within the community to gain the attention of the media and therefore the public is by "creating" news events by holding rallies and marches.

Well, there you go. That is damn right. It seems what is really happening here is that the left is saying, 'We do not like what you have to say, so you will be prevented from saying it in a way which effectively gives voice to your concerns.' That is what that is about, and it is wrong. I believe that we should prosecute those who misbehave in their protests, not stop them from speaking. That works both ways, of course, because if the CFMEU has a violent protest, ignores court orders to desist or threatens to rape the children of those who wish to work, then they should be prosecuted as well. We need to balance the rights of the unborn with the rights of mothers, and this bill goes way too far. It is extreme. It does not recognise the rights of the unborn, and I will oppose it.