




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (5.03 pm): I rise to speak briefly on the Plumbing and Drainage Bill. I applaud the Palaszczuk government's commitment to strengthening the plumbing and drainage industry in Queensland. Queensland should be the envy of other states and territories, as it maintains a very high standard for public health and safety and protection of the environment through its plumbing and drainage regulatory framework. This bill introduces the third instalment of reforms under the Palaszczuk government's Queensland Building Plan and is the result of this government's consultative and collaborative approach with industry. The bill further delivers on our commitment by introducing a new suite of plumbing laws, which includes a modernised act and provides for a new regulation and a revised Queensland Plumbing and Wastewater Code.

Strong plumbing and drainage laws that protect the health and safety of Queenslanders are what this is all about. We have responded to calls for a reduction in the regulatory burden. We have responded to the industry's concerns that the laws were difficult to understand. The bill has been revised and modernised to make it easier for industry, licensees and consumers to interpret and implement. By increasing the practitioner's understanding of the rules, an increase in compliance is expected to be achieved. As a consultative government, we have responded to calls to enhance protections for consumers by introducing a stronger penalty framework to increase deterrents for performing unlicensed and noncompliant work.

As stated by the minister, we not only met the standard; we set the standard and this bill is a testament to that. Once again we lead the nation. This bill provides for the government to act swiftly to prohibit any plumbing product, including WaterMark products, if they are found to be defective, not fit for purpose or if they pose a public health risk. Complacency is not an option.

Another critical aspect of the Plumbing and Drainage Bill 2018 is the introduction of a new approval process that will result in savings in cost and time for the majority of residential homes. I applaud that the bill will provide for the regulation to prescribe a new fast-track approval process that will reduce the time frame from the existing 20 days to two business days for local governments to process lower risk applications.

The bill speaks to the government's ongoing commitment to leaving no stone unturned when it comes to reducing the cost of living for Queenslanders. While the possible savings that this reform brings may not seem considerable to the opposition, we know that they will make a difference to the many Queenslanders who have realised the dream of home ownership and save them several hundred dollars. Specifically, Queensland home owners could see a saving of approximately \$640 in holding costs by being able to commence plumbing work 18 days earlier for an indicative house block costing \$255,000.

The new fast-track permit system builds upon the experience of several local governments, including the Brisbane City Council, the Logan City Council and the Moreton Bay Regional Council, which have already implemented fast-track models for domestic dwellings that are considered low risk.

This government wants the possible savings being reported by those local governments for their ratepayers made available to all local governments so that all Queenslanders can benefit. This is a win-win situation for industry, licensees and consumers, as those savings will not negatively impact on safety standards. All permit work will continue to be inspected by local government to ensure that the health and safety of the community and the environment is maintained. No longer will the wait for a plumbing and drainage approval hold up the construction of a new home.

The new permit approval process legislated in the Plumbing and Drainage Bill will provide savings in cost and time for the construction industry and its employees. The bill recognises the importance of the construction industry for the Queensland economy. The legislation will respond to the growing and changing needs of the construction industry by establishing a new compressed application system that will reduce by half the current time frame for local governments to approve standard commercial applications from 20 business days to 10.

The building and plumbing industry has expressed overwhelming support for that cost and timesaving initiative, which will result in a reduction in holding costs for large and complex construction projects. The reform will allow workers and their employees to commence and finish large construction projects faster than ever before. Not only will that benefit hardworking plumbers and drainers; it will provide benefits to all tradies, including carpenters, tilers, electricians and bricklayers who can now complete more work every calendar year.

All Queenslanders can take comfort that there will be no change to the existing inspection process as a result of the reform. All stages of plumbing and drainage work which require a permit will continue to be inspected by local government inspectors to ensure compliance with the plumbing laws and codes. This bill ensures that the high standard of plumbing and drainage work in Queensland will not only be maintained but strengthened.

Another important feature of the bill is the introduction of provisions to clarify the licensing requirements where an occupational licensee, such as plumber, also holds a contractor's licence. In 2014 the functions for licensing, compliance and disciplinary action relating to plumbers and drainers were transferred from the Department of Housing and Public Works to the Queensland Building and Construction Commission, the QBCC. At the time, it was intended that the licensees would benefit from only having to pay for one licence. There was overwhelming support for this initiative across the plumbing and drainage industry.

To give effect to the policy intention, the QBCC issued pro rata refunds to licensees who held both a five-year occupational licence as well as a trade contractor's licence. In addition, the QBCC did not enforce the requirement for plumbing and drainage trade contractors to also hold an occupational licence. However, legislative amendments were not made at that time to formalise the decision.

This bill will provide that contractor licensees who did not hold an occupational licence on or before 10 November 2014 are taken to have held the occupational licence while they held that contractor's licence. This amendment is required to overcome a legacy issue of the former Newman government. The amendment will commence on proclamation to ensure the earliest application of the retrospective benefits to licensees in line with the government's election commitment.

I asked to speak on this bill because I have constituents who have been adversely affected by the loophole that we are moving to close today. I am the proud member for Mount Ommaney, an innovation hub right in the heart of south-west Brisbane. A few months ago a local plumber met with me about this very issue. He lives locally and his business employs 10 people. He is one of the many small businesses that form the backbone and spine of our Queensland economy. I promised to raise this issue with the minister on his behalf.

As a former business manager I am incredibly passionate about making sure our small businesses have the opportunity to be innovative and expand with confidence and have the legislative framework that supports them. I place on record my thanks to the minister and his team for being so helpful in assisting me to navigate this issue on behalf of my constituent. I was absolutely thrilled to be given the opportunity to speak on this legislation today because I owe it not just to this particular constituent but to all of the hardworking small business owners in Queensland to ensure that they are operating their businesses with the support of the Palaszczuk government. Today that means closing this loophole.

I am incredibly proud to support this legislation because I know it is going to make a difference in my community—a difference to the small business owners and mums and dads building their first home and those maybe building their second home. At the end of the day, what each and every one of us in this House is here to do is improve the lives of our community. That is what this legislation does. I commend this bill to the House.