




Speech By  
**Julianne Gilbert**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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**PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE BILL**

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (5.18 pm): I would like to contribute to the debate on the Plumbing and Drainage Bill 2018. There is nothing more important than the role played by our plumbers in public and environmental safety than clean potable water and an efficient sewage system. I come from a family of plumbers. My father and my nephew are very fine tradespeople. I am pleased to see that there are many young women in my area taking up the trade as well. When people travel overseas they certainly appreciate our clean and efficient services. We need to ensure that our plumbers and drainers are suitably qualified and the regulations for their industry support rather than hinder their work.

There were some issues raised in my community regarding the mechanical services reforms. I would like to thank Kim Willson for his contribution to the consultation process. The introduction of a mechanical services licence was included in the Queensland Building Plan, which was the subject of significant statewide consultation from November 2016 to March 2017. The consultation identified some broad concerns about the mechanical services licence based on the Victorian model, as we have heard from others, where only plumbers can do this work. Translating this model to Queensland may have resulted in air-conditioning and refrigeration contractors being displaced, and that is where the issues were raised in my community.

The government has listened to this feedback and a new mechanical services licence will avoid this. Rather, the amendments will allow the licence to be divided into classes that recognise the specialised trades that perform this work. Stakeholders have already provided feedback through the parliamentary committee process about the technical qualifications and scopes of work that should be set out by regulation. This detail will be finalised in close consultation with industry which those in my community are looking forward to.

For current licensees, the bill includes transitional provisions aimed at minimising disruption to their businesses by recognising their existing qualifications and experience. The transitional period will also allow people who are currently working unlicensed, including employees of contractor licensees, time to complete the necessary qualifications or demonstrate that they have the appropriate skills and experience to obtain a licence. The mechanical services licence reforms will enhance the health and safety of the community while providing flexibility to ensure the industry is prepared for the changes and it can move on seamlessly to the new licence.

There has been wideranging consultation on this bill to ensure that we get it right. We want to maintain being in front of all of the other states and territories by having the best and strongest regulations in Australia. Our new suite of plumbing laws will include a modernised act that provides for a new regulation and a revised Queensland Plumbing and Wastewater Code and will ensure that we remain at the peak of leading regulation.

We do not usually spend too much time thinking about plumbing regulations in our lives until there is a problem with water quality or a sewerage backup. We need to let our tradespeople get on with the job. That is why this bill reduces and addresses concerns where the laws were difficult to

understand. This bill has been revised and modernised so it is easier to understand. When everyone understands their responsibility, there is an expectation that compliance will also increase—better services for all. The bill increases the ease of use of tradespeople. It also increase protections for consumers. This is a real win-win for the industry. When consumers want to begin construction, they do not want to be held up with time delays with the approvals process. As we often hear, 'Time is money.'

There has been overwhelming support from industry for the cost savings that are contained in this bill. This bill will reduce the process and fast-track a new approval process that will reduce the existing 20 days down to two business days. This is good news for local governments like those in my region—the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday regional councils. It is important to get low-risk applications processed in a timely manner.

In my region developers and home owners are beginning to dip their toe into the construction of new homes. We have had a construction drought for the last five years. This bill is timely for my region and ongoing economic development. For many Queenslanders building a home and saving a couple of hundred dollars in any area of construction makes a big difference to their build. I have been told that Queensland home owners could see a saving of approximately up to \$640 in holding costs. This is fantastic for home owners.

Some of the large South-East Queensland local government authorities have already reported savings to consumers through fast-tracking of permits. I am looking forward to seeing fast-tracked permits in the regions to ensure home owners and consumers in my region enjoy the same savings. Our local authorities currently inspect plumbing and drainage work and will continue in this role to ensure the quality of work for the community and for environmental safety. This will be a new era for home builders in Queensland. Their homes will not be held up waiting for permits.

We all know how important it is to have a regulated, streamlined process so our tradies can get on with the job. Plumbing and drainage is a highly skilled profession. On those DIY shows you never see people rolling up their sleeves and doing their own plumbing. That is why we can have confidence in our ability to turn on the tap and get potable water. Having quality, well-trained tradies improves the quality of work for all trades. Having qualified tradies makes it easier for the tilers, painters, carpenters and electricians who have to work alongside them.

This bill enhances protection for the community against those who show disregard for the safety of our community and the environment at large. I support increased penalties for performing unlicensed plumbing work, particularly for offences that endanger public health and safety. Under this new framework, a first offence for unlicensed plumbing work will incur a maximum penalty of 250 penalty units or \$31,538. Second offences will incur up to 300 penalty units or \$37,845. Persistent offenders who are convicted three or more times will be liable for 350 penalty units or \$44,153. This sliding scale responds to feedback from industry that unlicensed people continuously flout the current laws and perform unsafe and dangerous work without a licence.

When tradespeople select their products to complete a job, we want them and consumers to have confidence in those products. Consumers and tradespeople need to be confident that the products on the market will withstand everyday use. When a plumbing product fails, the damage to households and other buildings can be catastrophic, with damage to cabinetry, floor coverings, internal walls and the loss of personal items due to water damage. The reputation of a company's brand does not matter. We expect a high standard for all products or they will be taken off the shelf if they do not meet the standard.

I would like to commend the committee, the minister and the department for their work on this important bill for the health and safety of all Queenslanders. This bill reflects that we are listening to Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.