




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (11.59 am): In making a contribution to this bill, I am respectful of the deep-seated dichotomy of views surrounding this issue. For me personally, it stirs me very emotionally to think of the rights of the unborn and defenceless life that I believe we are charged with protecting at all costs. I see it as the pinnacle of civilisation that we have the medical advancements to preserve life and sustain life outside the womb, as they say, from as early as 22 weeks, compared to other cultures which are not as advanced and where there is a slim chance of survival. That is great progress that we have made.

I reflect on the very strong part in my life that a disabled child I am very close to has played, and the fact that those lives that are different now have a greater chance of being cast from the gene pool. I am sure that is not everyone's intent here, but certainly it opens the door. These children are certainly a gift to us and they have personally enhanced my life and their parents' lives so much that I cannot get my head around why they are now going to have a slimmer chance of experiencing life outside the womb. I would like to expand on that point later to explain where I am coming from. These are some of the dark thoughts that I have had surrounding this legislation.

I cannot pretend to know how confronting it must be for a pregnant woman to face personal stress in a relationship, financial hardship or any number of these adverse scenarios—what an impact on a person's life to contemplate. However, the default option of terminating a life under these scenarios completely ignores the rights of that child to live. It is like a presumption of guilt—that the child's life is the barrier to that mother's chance at health and happiness.

I am bemused by the fact that there is so much talk of women's welfare—which I think is a very important thing to recognise—yet we are not considering all of the evidence properly around the psychological wellbeing of the mother before or after any termination of life. For such a far-reaching piece of legislation around this issue, there should be a commensurate level of support and consideration for things like the cooling-off period, welfare support being mandatory and other options such as adoption.

Defining the issue is very important; it certainly is to me. To me, there has been a very misleading narrative around this debate in limiting it to primarily a health issue. Certainly, there are very strong health elements to it, but this is either ignorance or outright deceptive behaviour. There is undoubtedly a large health dimension to this issue; however, we cannot ignore the moral and ethical components, which are a large part of what everyone here has to consider very carefully.

This should not simply be an empirical analysis of quantifiable data. It is not a scientific exercise. We are discussing the ability of people to take the life of another, which draws on some enormous moral and ethical issues. In that way, the advice of the legal fraternity and the AMA, while relevant, is not a comprehensive endorsement of this bill. This also leads me to the point that, curiously, in the introductory speech and in all subsequent commentary I have heard from the government there is no reference to the rights of the child or the consideration of their wellbeing. I fully recognise the rights and

the wellbeing of the mother, but there is no mention of the child. That I guess leads into the definition of a life.

The government's position on this is that they want to primarily give those rights to the mother to terminate the life of a child right up to full term in those extreme cases and at 22 weeks under those other conditions. Even if you do not believe that the child does not represent a life form at any arbitrary point from the point of conception through development and right up until the point they are outside the womb, you must at least acknowledge that when the law treats them as a life or they are capable of sustaining life outside the womb then they are a life. It is pretty hard to argue that is not a life at that point.

Notwithstanding the trauma facing the mother, I am confused as to why we spend so much time in the House enhancing the safety of Queenslanders to preserve life, and here we are legislating to make it easier to terminate life. In that sense, it is a great contradiction of the primary purpose of what we are trying to achieve here in parliament.

I am under no illusion that taking the time period for termination to 22 weeks will allow gender selection of children. I know there has been commentary that does not say that and that that is a lie, but it is still implicit, even though there is no reference to it. Many people will not do it for that reason and will do it for other varied reasons, but I think it is very naive to think it will not occur and it will not be easier under this legislation.

I have heard many stories from people, even now with the existing laws, where doctors have suggested and encouraged the termination of a child's life on account of their defects. Then I ask myself these questions. Where does this stop? Is it Williams syndrome, Down syndrome, blue eyes, brown eyes, male, female? Where does this lead? That draws me back to the point I made earlier. I know from firsthand experience of pushes within lobby groups and people associated with causes like Down syndrome and Williams syndrome about providing data to remove that gene from the gene pool. To me, that in itself raises very high moral issues because that is saying that is an inferior form of life which we would prefer not to have. I would like people to reflect on that. I am sure that is not the intention of people but, inadvertently, we are moving into a position where people will have more of an opportunity to do that.

Unfortunately, people may not be given advice and they may not be fully aware of the consequences of their decisions. A lot of these people are in vulnerable positions when they make these decisions—the mother and the father—and they are not fully aware. We can then slip into this malaise where, 10 years down the track, we are selecting on all sorts of things. That disgusts me because I think of some disabled people in my life who I love, and they have every right to have a chance at life. They have created wonderful lives for the people around them. I think there is a very dark risk of this enabling those people to be wiped out of the gene pool.

I make particular reference to the AMA submission. I am very disappointed with their support of the legislation. There was no survey made to the doctors. They represent about 30 per cent of the industry in their membership. Without acknowledging the enormous moral and ethical dimensions of that endorsement, I think many peak lobby groups are pandering to the government of the day and I believe that is a real fault. I say that on the evidence of also the coal industry and other curious elements that are endorsed. I was very disappointed with that fact.

I would also like to discuss another economic dimension in this, and that is private practices. Whether we like it or not—and people will disagree with this—there are orthopaedic surgeons out there now recommending that people get shoulder surgery so they can drum up business. This is unfortunate but there are people doing it. There are private practices that operate their business in that way. We have seen evidence right throughout the medical industries of unethical people operating like that, and this would not be excluded. If it was easier for them to perform any sort of procedure, they could gain that economic incentive. That is a very dark thought to raise but I think it is a very real thing to consider.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that most of the debate I have heard here has been pretty respectful, which I appreciate. I thought a lot of the things that were said earlier were a bit unfair. There was one comment made that we need to acknowledge—that if you are against this bill then you are against women. Just as the member for McConnel said before—'I am not for killing babies because I am supporting the bill'—it is the same with the women. We are acknowledging both sides of the argument but this is central to our principles and what we believe. For us, life is sacred and we should be doing everything we can to give them a chance of a life outside the womb. There are women who have not been born who deserve the right to live.

The bulk of the amendments revolve around changing 22 weeks to 16 weeks. We are not accepting of that. We do not want to compromise on this. This is a principled issue that we feel does

not lend itself to compromise. I respect both sides of the argument, but we are firmly of the view that this issue should not lend itself to compromise.