




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

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MOTION

Remote Area Tax Concessions and Payments

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (11.49 am): It is quite hypocritical of those opposite to stand up and accuse the Palaszczuk government of not being friends with the regions or to say that the Palaszczuk government is desperate in what we are trying to do to support the regions. From where I stand, the only side that does not support the regions is those opposite, which I think is appalling, shameful and disgraceful. I do not think those opposite know the first thing about supporting the regions. Why else would they not support this motion, which simply supports regional Queensland? I rise in support of the Deputy Premier's motion.

On 4 September the Productivity Commission released its draft report on remote area tax concessions and payments which, among other things, recommended the abolition of the zone tax offset. The zone tax offset is a tax concession offered by the tax office to people engaged in private and public sector jobs who live in remote areas of Australia. The zone tax offset is critical to attract the right professionals to resource schools, hospitals and police in the regions. It is designed to assist Australians with the higher cost of living, amenities and other factors associated with life in regional and remote Australia.

The many public sector workers I have met in the Cook electorate understand the challenges that regional and remote communities face. They chose to move to the regions in order to give back to their communities because they believe in building stronger communities. Adopting the proposed changes is a huge slap in the face to private and public sector workers, and I can tell you now, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it will be detrimental to services in my communities. Currently, the zone tax offset is claimed by 69,000 Townsville residents, 60,000 Cairns residents and 34,000 Mackay residents. To put this into perspective, a senior constable in Cooktown would lose \$8,300 per year and a nurse in Weipa would lose nearly \$7,000 per year.

We are talking about communities such as Saibai Island in the Torres Strait, four kilometres away from Papua New Guinea; Pormpuraaw in Cape York, which is completely cut off during the wet season; and Mareeba on the Tablelands. I fully support public and private sector workers in all of my communities because of the benefits they bring. My good friend Robyn White, who has been a nurse for over 25 years in the Torres Strait, has given so many years to service the communities of Yam Island and Masig Island in the Torres Strait. I take my hat off to Robyn. The Torres Strait is not home for Robyn, but she has given back to the community. It is because of the zone tax offset and the support given to the public and private sectors that Robyn was able to continue her good work in the communities.

In its draft report the Productivity Commission says that 'there is no clear role for government to compensate taxpayers for the disadvantages of life in remote areas' and that remote living is 'largely a matter of choice'. Abolishing the zone tax offset has LNP written all over it. As a matter of fact, it sounds, looks and smells like the LNP. Why? Because the LNP does not care about the regions. We need to

have a good, hard think about how we support the regions. Sitting here listening to those opposite week after week, I am losing patience with them accusing the Palaszczuk government of not doing good work in the communities.

I know the challenges. I know the hardships that people in my communities face. I also know the difficulty of attracting workers to the regions. The zone tax offset is an incentive that brings people to the regions. It supports people staying in the regions. Most importantly, it benefits local people in communities who will gain educational achievements and health outcomes. We want to see positive health outcomes into the future. We want to see safety and security for our communities. The people who come to our communities are the ones who will influence positive change in our communities. I fully support this motion and I ask other members to support it as well.