




Speech By
Daniel Purdie

MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

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HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (12.14 pm): I rise today to express my deep concern for the far-reaching negative impact that the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 will have on the hundreds of thousands of small and medium sized businesses that work hard to keep Queensland's economy afloat. Before I begin I would like to thank the members of the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee for their consideration of this bill and for allowing me to join the committee for a short time as a substitute for my LNP colleague Jann Stuckey, the member for Currumbin.

This bill proposes the introduction of yet another public holiday in Queensland, albeit a part day, at the busiest time of year for many retail and hospitality businesses. Queensland already has the second highest number of gazetted public holidays in the country. The estimated public and private wages cost of the Christmas Eve part-day holiday is unjustifiable. Labor's blatant dismissal of industry advice that the legislation will simply cut jobs and hurt businesses and families just shows how out of touch this Labor government is.

The committee received 14 written submissions, 10 of which categorically opposed the introduction of the part-day public holiday despite—or maybe in spite of—Labor insisting on rushing through a 2019 introduction with little regard for the time required for retail, hospitality and tourism businesses, community services and aged-care facilities to prepare. With less than one month to go before Christmas Eve, all of these industries have already finalised rosters, confirmed bookings and locked in events—events that will now need to triple their turnover just to break even.

The 14 formal submissions were received from large stakeholder groups that represent the vast majority of Queensland's small to medium sized businesses. In fact, as reported by Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland—the CCIQ—SMEs make up 98 per cent of Queensland businesses and employ 66 per cent of private sector employees. Unlike big businesses, SMEs are not protected by enterprise bargaining agreements, leaving them to feel the full brunt of 300 per cent wage hikes as a result of public holiday penalty rates. The additional annual wages cost to the private sector is estimated to be between \$31.9 million and \$115.8 million.

As is often the case, Labor's legislation is South-East Queensland centric, based on dodgy research, union bias and an appalling grab for city votes, leaving the rest of disaster ravaged Queensland to take yet another blow. In the words of the CEO of the Queensland Hotels Association, which represents 88 per cent of general licence holders in Queensland, 100 per cent of members polled indicated that a part-day public holiday will reduce staff hours and negatively impact the workers of Queensland by reducing shifts.

Where will exhausted, drought-stricken, struggling country families who look towards Christmas for hope and companionship go when their local pub shuts on Christmas Eve and the heart of their town stops? Labor has pulled the wool over the eyes of Queenslanders yet again with ridiculous claims that 70 per cent of all submitters supported the bill. This is neither a fair assessment nor a true reflection of what the committee heard. There were just 1,271 benign one-line sentences and signatures from

individuals and unionists recorded over a four-week period as part of the consultation process that supported the holiday. This, along with four written submissions from unions, is the figure on which Labor bases support for the bill.

There was a groundswell of opposition to the bill from people whose livelihoods are at risk by this bill. Submissions were received from Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland, the National Retail Association, Queensland Hotels Association, Clubs Queensland, Master Grocers Association, Baking Association of Australia, Restaurant and Catering Industry Association and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council who all opposed the bill. These peak stakeholders provided lengthy, informed and measured submissions both in writing and to the hearing itself, representing a collective total of 498,000 members who resoundingly opposed the bill. This is close to half a million industry member businesses that think this bill will hurt Queensland, cut jobs and increase prices for consumers.

Once again, what we see from this government is all smoke and mirrors. In the words of the Australian Retailers Association's Mr Zimmerman, the bill is flawed at best and baseless at worst. It seems Labor stalwart John Mickel would have agreed with him. Following his review in 2016 into potential impacts of a part-day public holiday, he recommended against it. In order to protect SMEs and tourism operators from economic hardship and to appease the unions, the Mickel review recommended a compromise—that large retailers such as Coles, Woolworths and Aldi must close at 6 pm. These laws were passed in 2017. It was surprising to me, then, to hear two Coles workers and two Woolworths workers say at the committee hearing that they support the bill because it will protect their rights not to work Christmas Eve.

Not only are big business employees already protected; according to Clubs Queensland CEO Doug Flockhart, a reasonableness test is already imposed to protect staff, meaning that any employees who do not want to work are typically not rostered and staff are rostered on only out of operational necessity, thereby satisfying the reasonableness test.

Our retailers currently face the biggest fight of their lives since the GFC, thanks in part to nine new or increased taxes imposed on them by this government. The economy is now in the worst shape, with unemployment the highest and business confidence the lowest in Australia, but Labor thinks now is a better time for the change than three years ago, when the economy was in slightly better shape.

I challenge those opposite to ask the 177,000 unemployed Queenslanders if the opportunity to work less is good economic policy. The negative impact of penalty rates and payroll complexities for small businesses was surveyed by CCIQ, with 48 per cent of businesses planning to close under these proposed changes and 26 per cent of mum-and-dad owners forced to send staff home and work themselves. Nearly every hotelier I spoke to last night here at parliament said they would now be forced to close on Christmas Eve, so staff who are currently rostered on and who are relying on that shift to assist with their Christmas expenses will be left short.

Inevitable mass business closures and underemployment of casual staff destroy Labor's argument that wage boosts from penalty rates would stimulate spending. Businesses would have to triple their turnover just to break even, which is no small feat in South-East Queensland with population buffers but impossible outside of it. The Australian Retailers Association's Mr Zimmerman said in his evidence—

... this idea promises an unwarranted and unjustified hit on retail businesses and those in ... tourism and hospitality that belies either a disregard for or an ignorance of the commercial parameters of those businesses.

In its submission the CCIQ also reported that the introduction of the part-day holiday will take \$116 million off the private sector bottom line and is dismissive of the concerns of Queensland SMEs. Regardless of the committee process, the legislation remains in its original form as proposed by Labor. Despite the private sector overwhelmingly rejecting Labor's claim that a part-day public holiday on Christmas Eve would be good for us, the backbone of our economy—small and medium sized businesses—will experience the greatest impact and foot the largest bill, proving Labor is anti business. Our SMEs are not the only losers: taxpayers will be hit twice, with increased taxes to pay public servants or the loss of community services at holiday time, and with exorbitant costs that will mean their holiday budget is stretched beyond repair.

The Local Government Association of Queensland, also a significant voice for the regions, dismissed any suggestion that this legislation would be grounded in social reform and went on to add that the introduction would be detrimental to local communities and economies. The LGAQ submitted—

... the case for the granting of an additional part-date public holiday has not yet been made.

The peak body Restaurant & Catering Australia said—

This Bill is neither workable nor reasonable to restaurant owners in QLD.

CEO Mr Lambert said—

... the true impact of this—

proposal—

is that workers in nearly a quarter of Queensland's restaurants would not be compensated at all ...

He concluded that the proposal puts small business at a competitive disadvantage. That is what Labor do time and again. I will finish with the words of the ARA's Mr Zimmerman. He said—

Half a holiday on Christmas Eve isn't about looking after people or 'properly compensating' them, which is why our view is that the government's Christmas Eve vision extends no further than a date with the ballot box on 31st October next year.

I will not be supporting this bill.