




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

Record of Proceedings, 2 April 2019

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Wage Theft; Federal Budget, Fair Work Ombudsman

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (9.53 am): I also acknowledge yellow for World Autism Awareness Day today.

Protecting the rights of workers is in the DNA of every Labor government. When high-profile cases of wage theft involving companies like 7-Eleven, Caltex and Domino's were brought to our attention, the Palaszczuk government acted swiftly and decisively. We tasked the parliament's Education, Employment and Small Business Committee to undertake an inquiry into wage theft in Queensland, and I would like to again thank the committee's chair, the member for Nudgee, and its members for their work. In its report, the committee made 17 recommendations aimed at eliminating wage theft, and the government has accepted in principle or fully all of the recommendations.

I have written to Minister Kelly O'Dwyer to inform her of our government's response to the inquiry and to seek a commitment from her for a national response to this issue. For example, we have called for the introduction of a national labour hire licensing scheme, more Fair Work inspectors on the ground in Queensland and a full, independent review into the Fair Work Ombudsman.

The federal LNP government has watered down laws and allowed employers to exploit workers. The members opposite voted against establishing the parliamentary inquiry, and just last Thursday those opposite described it as a political stunt, clearly not understanding the impact wage theft has on workers and their families. The report found that 437,000 Queensland workers were affected by wage theft last year, costing more than \$1 billion, but the LNP fought the inquiry every step of the way.

The Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government has been asleep at the wheel on the issue of wage theft. A recent audit of hospitality businesses in Fortitude Valley found that 60 per cent were complying with their requirements—only 60 per cent. Tonight's federal budget is their last chance to show that they take this issue seriously. Tonight's budget must include our fair share of funding for the Fair Work Ombudsman in Queensland. The number of Fair Work inspectors in Queensland has been slashed. There are currently just 38 inspectors in Queensland to cover over two million workers—compared to 71 inspectors in 2005 before the hostile WorkChoices takeover. Even the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has called for more Fair Work inspectors to address what it calls the 'serious problem' of wage theft. It is very unusual for the union and employer groups to come together on this issue. A comprehensive national strategy, combined with a serious increase in funding and resources for the Fair Work Ombudsman, is necessary to ensure our fair share for Queensland and to ensure workers get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.