




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 26 February 2019

LIQUOR (RURAL HOTELS CONCESSION) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.54 pm): I rise to speak to this bill with pleasure. I will not oppose it. It is a very good bill and it has been a long time coming. These pubs and clubs are not grand affairs like the bars in the Valley or the gourmet pubs like the Breakfast Creek Hotel or the Regatta. They have nowhere near the marketing pull of larger hotels in cities and towns. In many regional towns these pubs have a core of local customers and the benefit of a limited pool of visitors. Their profitability is actually limited by their locality, yet the central role they play in their communities makes them far more essential to those communities than city hotels could ever be.

In some cases the country pub is the town's main centre. When I say that many people think of the iconic Birdsville Hotel in the seat of Gregory. Of course, it is not the only one in that position. We have many pubs in the seat of Gregory. Often they are the only place where meetings can be held for community groups and the only option for dining out. They are a place of joy and grief—celebrations, weddings, anniversaries, christenings and wakes. Some pubs even act as the petrol retailer or post office. In small towns in my electorate of Gregory there are publicans like Ken and Anne Tanner of Isisford who run the Great Western and Chris and Gerry Gimblett of the Yaraka pub. There are many other pubs like the Union Hotel in Blackall, which we visited. We saw the struggle that people like Chris Turner were facing when it came to being able to pay the bills.

However, the same remote locations mean they all have very high fixed costs. For publicans in regional and remote Queensland, Ergon is still the only supplier of electricity. I am talking about the input costs of these pubs because they are significant. They have to keep the coolroom on; they have to keep the beers cold if they want people to come and have a beer at their pub. Of course, the Labor government likes to talk about the subsidy it pays to ensure regional Queenslanders can access electricity. However, I can tell honourable members that the money they have paid in subsidies is a droplet compared to the buckets of dollars the government keeps in profits. I can tell them that some of the electricity bills of these pubs that I have seen are absolutely sky high. I do not know how they pay for them when they have three or four people that come into these pubs on a daily basis—or they might get five people. The input costs that they have to pay would scare anyone. We need to do everything we possibly can to ensure that these pubs continue to operate.

These pubs play a significant role in the community. They are an important part of not only the local community but also people outside the community. They are meeting places. If we look at the three or four most important pieces of infrastructure in a small town like Yaraka, Isisford or Ilfracombe, it usually starts with the pub; it is the place where people meet. I would say the second would be the post office; it is important. The third, and another important one, is of course the newsagent. Those three businesses play a key role in making sure that those small towns have connectivity and the community continues to have some sort of opportunity to not only have a beer and a feed but also a venue for a wedding, a christening, a wake. They ensure that people continue to come into town.

Finally—and I do not want to take up too much time—I fully support this bill. My only concern is that it has taken too long to come to this House. This bill was before this House in the previous term and now it is before it again this term. If we look at the amount these pubs are paying—\$3½ thousand—

I am estimating that in the time since this first came to parliament they probably would have paid another \$10,000 in licensing fees when it could have been only \$1,000. There is \$9,000 that could have been injected back into the local economy. We need to get this bill over the line so we can provide relief to small pubs in regional Queensland.