




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 12 June 2019

DISABILITY SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION (NDIS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.43 pm): I am pleased to make a contribution to this debate on this important bill. This legislation makes the urgent amendments that are required to ensure the commencement of the NDIS on 1 July 2019. The LNP does not oppose this bill. Indeed, the LNP welcomes the start of the NDIS commission. However, I have learned that it is smart to pay attention to what is happening to my constituents in terms of on-the-ground outcomes.

As a country member, my concerns about a successful transition to the NDIS have been focused on issues of service delivery—capacity for our inland regional communities. This is what will dictate the outcomes. The intention of the NDIS is to give our disabled people agency and choice in how they utilise the support. It is hoped that that will help our disabled Queenslanders live their lives to the fullness of their potential and with the dignity of choice that the able-bodied take for granted.

The problem for disabled Queenslanders in inland communities is that their choices are severely restricted by the range of providers and services that are available. Under the old model of the state department of disabilities, there was at least some guarantee of minimum service delivery, so it is understandable that people and their families in inland regional Queensland have experienced anxiety about the transition to the NDIS. The underlying fear is that they will lose what services they have had under the department and that there will be nothing to replace them.

Then we had the taxi debacle. The Palaszczuk government decided that it would cut the Taxi Subsidy Scheme on 30 June. Of the more than 40 towns and settlements in my seat of Gregory, not one has any form of public transport, except for Emerald and Longreach. These two towns have a taxi service, making it feasible for the disabled and the elderly to have some independence. Without outstanding operators like the Hooper family in Emerald, many disabled people would be imprisoned in their own homes. Cutting the Taxi Subsidy Scheme would have had the same effect.

The Taxi Subsidy Scheme provides half the cost of a taxi up to a maximum subsidy of \$25 per journey as well as a \$20 lift payment for drivers of wheelchair accessible taxis, which is what makes taxi travel a feasible form of transport for our disabled communities. To axe it under the cover of the transition to the NDIS, even though the NDIS does not replicate the subsidy, was disingenuous or incompetent—take your pick. No other state cut its scheme. Maybe it was just an attempt to make savings. After the public outcry by the community, the LNP and disability advocates, the Treasurer extended the scheme for another 12 months. I welcome that. That gives some immediate relief, but it is a short-term bandaid. On behalf of my constituents, I remain concerned. This is a perfect example of the very real grounds for anxiety across the communities in regional Queensland as they wonder what else will be taken from them as part of the transition and how it will be replaced.

How people will fare under this new regime will depend on service capacity, be it transport options, independent living accommodation, day and holiday respite choices, or carers and employment opportunities. A single bowl does not make a buffet, but it is better than an empty bowl. Services for the

disabled in regional Queensland are like that. It is not quite an empty bowl, but it is certainly not a buffet. I believe that the Queensland government must accept the ongoing responsibility to develop service capacity across our decentralised state to give our disabled communities secure choices.

The contribution of the Queensland government should not start and end with the state's financial contributions to the scheme. To ensure that our disabled Queenslanders enjoy the full fruits of the NDIS, the Queensland government needs to continue to assist communities to develop their service capacity. I have seen firsthand what is involved. The wonderful not-for-profit organisation Yumba Bimbi Support Services, of which my wife is a board member, was one of the first service providers in Queensland to operate under the NDIS. That was because Charters Towers was a trial site but the lack of service capacity in the bush meant that Yumba Bimbi was delivering services to clients in Charters Towers from its Emerald base. Indeed, Yumba Bimbi delivers services right across the west and it does a fantastic job. While transitioning to the NDIS model has been expensive and even harrowing, the chair of Yumba Bimbi, Gai Sypher; the board; and the CEO, Rachel Freeman, have never faltered in their commitment to make the leap. They want the very best for their clients and their community.

There is a strong feeling that leaving services to be delivered from outside the community will leave the community vulnerable to losing services altogether when times get tough and funding is cut back. Among the things Yumba Bimbi has to do is work with CQUniversity to ensure training programs for the new workforce of carers. Yumba Bimbi has had to figure out how to access accommodation for independent living, as this is a frequent aspiration for disabled people and their parents. As Yumba Bimbi has found its way through myriad issues, it has provided collegial support and leadership to similar organisations transitioning to the NDIS. I commend all the people involved in Yumba Bimbi for their efforts and I ask the state government to observe their example.

Far from signing off when the NDIS commences, the state government has a moral obligation to make sure that disabled Queenslanders receive the full benefit promised by the NDIS. The state government can do this best by assisting organisations such as Yumba Bimbi to develop and thrive under the NDIS. The Longreach community is trying to develop independent living options as well, but it needs the government's help. For the NDIS to truly work in Queensland it will require a community driven approach that is supported by the state government.

The track record of this government in foreseeing and dealing with NDIS related issues does not reassure me. As Queensland reaches its full rollout, fewer than 60 per cent of people eligible to be in the NDIS program are likely to be enrolled when it kicks off. Despite this low coverage, Queensland is locked in to paying its full contribution of \$2 billion a year. There is a real sense of fear that our disabled Queenslanders will be left worse off than those of other states.

There has been a failure to understand the situation in regional and rural settings. There has been a failure to develop a plan to ensure that the NDIS will work for settings right across our decentralised state. When it comes to disability services we need to make sure that we cover the entire state, not just up and down the coast but also inland in places such as Emerald, Longreach, Stonehenge, Boulia and Bedourie. Those places need support to ensure living conditions are acceptable and that people with disability can continue to be part of the community. The NDIS is incredibly important for regional and rural Queensland. We need to make sure that we care for all Queenslanders.