




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 23 October 2019

SUMMARY OFFENCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (3.58 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Summary Offences and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. I think all reasonably minded people have been shocked and appalled at the recent behaviour of protesters, both on private properties and public lands, in their attempt to generate publicity and attention for their various causes. I think that all in this place would agree that anyone has the right to protest and have their voices heard as long as it is done within the confines of the law and does not unduly impact the general public's ability to go about their day-to-day activities or impact any legally operating business owners or employees. Indeed, I myself participated in a march upon this parliament in support of landowners' rights, opposing the government's draconian vegetation management laws.

Mr Millar: Good on you, mate!

Mr WEIR: Member for Gregory, you were there!

Unfortunately, what we have seen in recent times has been done to cause the greatest inconvenience and disruption to the general public and to surrounding businesses. Those groups strive only to feature on the nightly news. The greater the disruption, the more publicity they receive, which means that the behaviour of the groups becomes more and more extreme to secure that attention. In turn, that causes more danger to the general public, our hardworking police officers and other emergency services personnel called in to manage the deliberate disruption. Indeed, on occasions the protesters put themselves at risk during some of those actions, sometimes deliberately and sometimes unknowingly. They are protesting in high-density traffic situations, on train lines, in industrial areas and agriculture settings in which they have little to no knowledge of the dangers that may be present. That pattern of behaviour needs to be curtailed and suitable laws and penalties imposed. Both sides agree on this.

The LNP will not be opposing the bill, but we do have concerns that these amendments in themselves will not be enough to deter hardened protesters. The objectives of this bill are to introduce two new offences to address the use of dangerous attachment devices to disrupt lawful activities; authorise police officers to search a person or vehicle without warrant in relation to dangerous attachment devices; and allow police officers to deactivate, disassemble or seize and dispose of dangerous attachment devices.

The bill provides a further definition of 'dangerous attachment device' to mean an attachment device that reasonably appears to be constructed or modified to cause injury to a person who attempts to interfere with the device; or reasonably appears to be constructed or modified to cause injury to a person if another person interferes with the device; or incorporates a dangerous substance or thing, such as asbestos or poisons. A sleeping dragon, dragon's den, monopole and tripod are each a dangerous attachment device. A 'dangerous substance or thing' means anything likely to explode, when struck or compressed, causing injury to a person; or anything likely to cut a person's skin; or any substance or thing that requires a person to wear protective clothing to safely handle, cut or break up that thing.

Section 14C(1) proposes to prohibit a person from using a dangerous attachment device to unreasonably interfere with the ordinary operation of transport infrastructure, unless the person has a reasonable excuse. It is proposed that this offence provision will carry a maximum penalty of 50 penalty units, \$6,672.50 or two years imprisonment.

No-one is immune to that behaviour or the use of those objects, not even in the seat of Condamine. On 28 June 2018, two protesters from Brisbane, from an anti-coal action group, positioned themselves on the rail line just outside the town of Jondaryan. They locked their arms together inside a 44-gallon drum filled with concrete. Their intent was to stop trains loaded with coal from the nearby Acland coalmine, which they did for several hours. That action also stopped all traffic along the rail line, and tied up our police and emergency services personnel for many hours. The two protesters were charged and received a small fine, despite the enormous cost to business and emergency services. The punishment was certainly no deterrent, as the young lady involved in the incident has featured in many of the protests that have been occurring in recent times in the Brisbane CBD and has been arrested many more times.

That brings me to the concern that I have with this bill. The bill addresses one area of the protesters' activities, but it ignores the other dangerous activities of those groups. We have seen those protesters glue themselves to some of the busiest roads in the city. We have seen them erect tripods and suspend themselves from bridges. Surely if you are going to address one area of dangerous protest activity, you should also address those other equally dangerous activities.

I note that amongst the objectors to the bill are the Environmental Defenders Office, Greenpeace and the union movement. Perhaps they see some activities by the protesters that they would like in their next round of protests or industrial action? Why else would you possibly object to the bill?

The only problem with the bill is that it gives false hope, as it does not go far enough. It does not address all the dangers that the protesters' actions cause. At this stage, the actions of the protesters have not resulted in loss of life or serious injury. That is only because of the efforts of our emergency services personnel, and good luck, as this will not last forever. The day is coming when a protester, a police officer or an innocent member of the public will be killed through the irresponsible actions of protesters. It is not a case of if but when. Whilst I do support the bill, I strongly urge the government members to support the amendments to be moved by the member for Toowoomba North.