



Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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LIQUOR (RURAL HOTELS CONCESSION) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (5.49 pm): I rise in the House today to support the passing of the Liquor (Rural Hotels Concession) Amendment Bill 2018 and recommend the private member's bill be passed. On behalf of the committee I would like to take this opportunity to thank the previous legal affairs and community safety committee for its work in relation to this bill. The recent floods and bushfires in regional Queensland and North Queensland make this a timely piece of legislation. Whilst I acknowledge that this passing of the legislation will not undo the devastation of the floods and fires, I hope it is some recognition that remote Queensland has not been forgotten by the Palaszczuk Labor government. As the Premier stated in the *Sunday Mail* on 10 February, the legislation has been expanded to cover clubs. She said—

It's especially important, in this Year of Outback Tourism, that we support the viability of these hotels and clubs, as they are a critical part of the social fabric in our remote towns ...

The Premier went on to say in the same article that hotels 'often provide a diverse range of services such as accommodation, meals, petrol, general stores and postal services. They face very real financial pressures from small and declining local populations, difficult access during wet months, the small amounts of liquor some sell and the cost of freight.'

The changes to the fees is also supported by publican Frank Wust, who is the owner of Walkabout Creek Hotel in McKinlay. In the same *Sunday Mail* article he said the change was needed as the high fees and exorbitant costs that remote pubs also copped were behind the closure of many remote hotels. The editorial in the *Sunday Mail* of 10 February said that we should raise a glass and toast the good news decision to slash licensing fees for Queensland's remote pubs and clubs. As most commentators have said, the editorial also commented that these watering holes in the outback are often a veritable oasis for travellers, as well as a vital gathering place; they are the heart of their own communities. They add so much to the fabric of small towns and are frequently crucial to their economies. Without them, some small towns would simply die.

The editorial went on to say that nothing defines the image of country Queensland more than the charm of old pubs, and the timber and tin of drinking spots such as the Walkabout Creek Hotel in McKinlay between Winton and Cloncurry, made famous in the *Crocodile Dundee* movie. These pubs are magnets for grey nomads and other visitors, and it is entirely fitting that the Palaszczuk government has moved to extend a helping hand to this part of quintessential Queensland in what has been declared the Year of Outback Tourism.

While speaking in support of this private member's bill I would also like to use this opportunity to thank those individuals and organisations that contributed to the report on the 2017 bill. Many individuals and organisations provided written submissions. They also gave evidence at the hearing and participated in the roundtable discussions. Many of the individuals took time away from their businesses and travelled long distances to participate. I know I can speak on behalf of the previous committee and the current committee when I say that we appreciate the sacrifices that were made to assist the committee in its consideration of the issues.

A report in the *Sunday Mail* on 10 February summed up the bill as providing a lifeline to rural hotels and clubs. The inclusion of clubs means that concessions will be extended to RSLs, bowls clubs, golf clubs, social and recreational clubs that fall within the definition of a rural and remote licensee. As we know, this is a private member's bill introduced by Katter's Australian Party to reduce fees for remote pubs. As the *Courier-Mail* stated, remote pubs and clubs will no longer be paying the same as their city slicker counterparts. The reduction in fees for the 112 pubs and 42 clubs will be a reduction from about \$3,757 a year to \$376. The reduction in fees after the passage of this legislation this evening will cost the government about \$395,000 in lost fees.

As set out in our report, the committee recommended that the Liquor (Rural Hotels Concession) Amendment Bill 2018 be passed. The bill is substantially the same as the Liquor (Rural Hotels Concession) Amendment Bill 2017, which was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 23 March 2017 and was referred to the legal affairs and community safety committee of the previous parliament. The bill proposes to amend the Liquor Act 1992 to introduce a concessional commercial hotel licence fee for hotels located in 'very remote Australia'. I commend the bill to the House.