




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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LAND, EXPLOSIVES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (5.05 pm): I rise today to support the bill. This bill proposes to amend the Explosives Act 1999 to regulate the manufacture, sale, handling, storage, transport and use of explosives in Queensland and to provide for the safety of person and property from the misuse of explosives.

The port of Townsville is the largest commercial port in North Australia, and there is no debating that. There are 32 different commodities that come through that particular port. It is the largest sugar exporter in the Southern Hemisphere. Bitumen, cement, zinc and cars also come in through that centre. Particularly with the floods writing off some 3,000-plus vehicles in our city, I am sure a lot more cars will be coming in through that port. Following a cyclone or a flood event as we have experienced in recent times, petrol tankers are the first into our city. Due to the mining industry and the north-west minerals province in this state, supply to this industry comes through that particular port. This includes explosives, and the transport of these explosives through the port into the mines comes with its own hazards.

We are seeing larger ships traversing our seas and bringing those vital supplies like explosives to our shores through ports like Townsville. That is why we need to widen the channel of the port of Townsville and bring those larger vessels into our city. The Palaszczuk government has committed \$75 million to widen that port channel over the next five years. It will employ local contractors to ensure work stays local and that keeps our money local. Heaven knows that we need to keep our money in our own town given the impact of the recent floods. As we all know, many businesses have been affected.

The port has a 50-year plan that will see the expansion of the port and an additional five berths added to the existing nine. The handling and transfer of these products in and out of the port are critical in maintaining the efficiencies of the port. If we are not competitive, then ships will sail past us and rail those products back north. In considering this, we need to ensure the safety of our workers—those stevedores who work the wharfs—and we need to ensure the safety of our transport operators. Safety is paramount in that planning. This legislation does exactly that. It addresses the safety concerns of transporting explosives across our state and, more particularly for me, our city.

We have heard today from the member for Traeger about recent deaths of truck drivers on the Mount Isa to Townsville road. It is essential that we consider the transportation of explosives along the routes to the mine sites and ensure mine operators provide the necessary safeguards and safety procedures to keep people safe. For example, my brother was an executive in the mining industry based in Mount Isa for a period of years. We would often discuss workplaces and what safety procedures they would have in place to ensure that workers not only felt safe but were safe and got home safely after every shift. Part of those conversations was around explosives and explosives handling. The 'powder monkeys', as they were called, had some of the highest training methods and safety regimes on that particular mining site. Accountability and safety was their motto. Everything was double-checked and then checked again. There are no second chances when it comes to explosives, particularly on a mine site.

The amendments in the bill will introduce an explosives driver licence for the transportation of explosives, require a security-sensitive explosives plan to identify security risks, adopt processes to deal with the risks and provide for this plan to be reviewed annually.

As I have already highlighted, the port channel of Townsville will undergo a widening process due to the increased size of ships traversing our seas. Had we not undertaken this process, ships would travel past us down to Brisbane and products like these explosives would be put on the back of trucks to travel back up north to the mine sites. This process significantly increases the risk of transporting explosives up and down the Bruce Highway. Do not get me wrong: I am not insinuating that truck drivers are the problem; however, there is no doubt that sharing the road at all hours of the day and night puts all road users at risk. There are countless stories of road users driving excessive hours up and down our highways as they try to meet the irresponsible deadlines placed on them by truck business operators. This legislation will provide a security-sensitive plan that addresses possible risks and minimises those that place the public at risk.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to share a story. In the mid-1990s my wife and two kids and I lived in Mackay.

Mrs Gilbert: It's a great place!

Mr STEWART: It is a great place. It is a lovely place. It is a great place to raise your kids. As we all know, it is a community that is heavily involved in the mining industry. In our neighbourhood alone I would estimate that about 30 per cent of the men who lived in our street worked in the mines. They were obviously attracted by the high wages and the ability to work days on and days off, which seemed to work really well for them. One Sunday afternoon there was a really loud explosion that rocked our neighbourhood. Our home and windows shook. Without going into too much detail, one of those mine workers had access to explosives, and during a domestic violence event he detonated those devices, killing him and injuring his partner.

This legislation will address some of those concerns. It will streamline administration by including processes around the application for, and transferral of, explosive licences. In addition, it will improve the consistency of safety regulatory provisions to improve information provided to the explosives inspectorate around the notification and investigation of explosive incidents. The amendments support the Queensland government's *Not now, not ever* report by prohibiting persons who are the subject of a domestic violence order from holding an explosives licence. Using the example I just mentioned in Mackay, had this legislation been in place at that particular time it could have saved a life. No doubt it would have aided in that particular situation. It would be great to have a crystal ball, but of course we do not. This legislation is the next step along that road.

The amendments will also enable the declaration of transport routes, areas or times as approved or prohibited for the transportation of explosives, ensuring community safety on the roads. I have already alluded to what that means when it comes to travelling up and down the Bruce Highway. If we do not widen that port, ships will come down to Brisbane, cargo will be unloaded onto trucks and it will go back up the highway, putting lives at risk. We need to make sure that everything we do is aimed at keeping our community safe. That is what this legislation is about.

I read through the committee's report. I would like to thank the committee for all the work they have been doing around this. I know that it was introduced during the last parliament, but unfortunately it was held over until this one. I read in the committee's report that at the public briefing the committee asked the department to clarify what is defined as an explosive and what quantity of explosive would trigger this legislation. The department provided the following advice as stated in the committee's report—

Assuming you have a weapons licence, obviously you are entitled to have all of those ingredients that you are talking about. There is no impost on that particular use of propellant powders if you load your own ammunition associated with security. There is adequate security in place to handle those, as they stand.

And ...

We have a definition in the act around products that are security-sensitive explosives. For instance, in the case of propellant powders we regard that as a security-sensitive explosive because it could be adapted for misuse or a criminal or terrorist activity. Therefore, there are stricter controls around those particular types of items. There are exemptions in various parts of the act, in the schedules, that allow people who have a legitimate need, such as a weapons licence or a shotfirer licence, to go about their business without excessive burden.

For farmers and those on the land who have a weapons licence, you will be able to reload your own ammunition. You will not be affected by this legislation. It is good to know that, not only for those on the land who have weapons licences but also for several of my extended family and friends who have gun licences. They compete in shooting events and therefore reload their own ammunition, because it is certainly much cheaper to do that. That is part of that particular sport. Every time I have witnessed them load ammunition they do it in a safe way. This bill will not affect those gun licence holders. It is designed to keep our community safe. I commend the bill to the House.