




Speech By  
**Hon. Yvette D'Ath**

**MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE**

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Record of Proceedings, 26 February 2019

**LIQUOR (RURAL HOTELS CONCESSION) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (5.36 pm): I rise to speak to the Liquor (Rural Hotels Concession) Amendment Bill 2018 introduced by the member for Traeger. The Palaszczuk government acknowledges the challenges of living in very remote Queensland and the role that certain licensed premises play in maintaining the social fabric of the community. In this the Year of Outback Tourism, we also acknowledge the contribution of these businesses and communities to tourism in this state.

The government supports the intent of the bill to introduce a licence fee concession to licensees in very remote Queensland who provide vital services and social support to their communities. To further assist these communities, I will be seeking to move amendments to the bill during consideration in detail to extend the concessional fee framework to also include community clubs with 2,000 members or fewer located in very remote Queensland.

I note during the committee's consideration of the bill, the member for Traeger stated that he would not object to the inclusion of small community clubs in the concessional fee framework. I welcome that. While not recommended by the committee, it is considered appropriate that these small community clubs be included as part of the concessional fee provisions. Under the amendments that I am proposing to move, these small Queensland community clubs located in the area classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 'very remote Australia' would pay the same amount as a commercial hotel in the same area. For the 2018-19 licence period, this would have equated to \$376.

Without these small clubs, very remote towns would struggle to provide the sporting clubs and facilities that these towns thrive on—no bowls in Winton, no golf in Boulia, no tennis in Bollon. Every dollar counts for these communities, and these amendments will serve to support them and acknowledge their fundamental role as social hubs in their towns along with the many hotels.

Currently, 42 small Queensland community clubs are within the boundary of the 'very remote Australia' classification. Combined with the 112 commercial hotel licences that will be eligible for the concession, the annual projected revenue loss to government is approximately \$392,100 based on the current fees.

I will briefly speak to the opposition's proposed amendments that have been circulated to include all licences in a drought declared area. For a party that talks about reduction in red tape, I am surprised by this amendment. It is quite absurd to have a framework to have the annual payment of liquor licensing fees tied to something that fluctuates like drought declared areas. When taking into account pro rata assessment of fees, the task facing the regulator and licensees becomes very bureaucratic. When there are natural disasters such as floods and drought, there are already mechanisms through the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation to support those licensees in those difficult times. This is about a permanent structure being put in place.

We want to support our drought declared and flood-affected communities. I acknowledge all of those hotels and clubs in those very remote areas that have been affected but also those in the broader drought affected areas in Queensland. It has been recognised that the best method of assistance is to

provide immediate relief to those most affected by the drought—being the farmers. Through assistance to them, other businesses affected by drought will also benefit. Part of the challenge of conducting business in very remote Australia is the ability to obtain supplies. Part of the challenge is a lack of choice in terms of services and businesses due to small populations in vast areas. Part of the challenge is being the only business providing social opportunity in a town. This bill and our amendments go directly to this and the bill put forward by the member for Traeger.

In the amendments that have been put forward by those opposite, what we are being asked to now consider is that we include pubs that are only 120 kilometres away from CUB's brewery at Yatala and pubs in areas like Toowoomba with a population of over 115,000—the sixth largest city in Queensland with plenty of social outlets for the populous. They would be covered by the LNP amendments. I will say that 58.1 per cent of Queensland is a drought-declared area. That shows how many licensed venues would be included if this amendment were supported. Places like Toowoomba do not share the same challenges as very remote Queensland which is the purpose of the bill.

The opposition would have you believe that circumstances of a small pub—such as Chillagoe hotel, supporting a population of 251, or Muttaborra Golf Club, supporting a population of 88—are comparable to venues such as the Spotted Cow Hotel in Toowoomba or the Grand View Hotel in Bowen. The original bill recognises the vital services these businesses provide to the local community that go well beyond what is normally associated with these types of venues due to their isolated geographical location from service centres. Cities like Toowoomba, Bowen, Dalby, Gatton, Kingaroy and Warwick are service centres.

I will also be seeking to move amendments on behalf of the government to ensure that the concessional fee framework can be more effectively integrated into the existing regulatory framework. This involves clarifying that the concessional fee will only apply to the base licence fee for the affected licensees and not the risk criteria and fees relating to extended trading hours or poor compliance history.

It is important to note that the concessional fee does not apply to the fee for detached bottle shops. I believe this amendment aligns with the intent of the bill as outlined in the explanatory material. The opposition's amendments are not limited to the base fee. This means that licensees who pay a higher fee because they have been in constant breach of liquor laws would have a significant 90 per cent discount on that fee, even though it is risk related.

**Mr NICHOLLS:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I have been listening very carefully to the Attorney. The amendments have not yet been moved for debate. The standing orders of the House require that the second reading speech contain only matters raised in the committee report or amendments recommended by the committee. Amendments are subject to proper debate when consideration in detail occurs. I ask you to rule on the Attorney-General's comments.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Whiting): Member for Redcliffe, the debate is on the general principles of the bill and should not go to the foreshadowed amendments. Having said that though, I invite you to continue with that in mind.

**Mrs D'ATH:** I am happy to speak to those amendments in consideration in detail. It is important that we ensure that detached bottle shops are not included in this as well. Detached bottle shops are not there providing a particular community service or giving back to the community or being used in any way other than as a liquor store. They have a higher fee attached to them and they are detached from the hotel or pub or club. We believe it is important to clarify that in the bill.

The other issue we seek to clarify is when this will apply. The licensing system applies from 1 July each year. We believe this should align from 1 July. If the Australian Bureau of Statistics comes out with new boundaries as to very remote areas and they change during a financial year, then they will still retain that lower fee for that full financial year until 1 July each year when they are assessed. Depending on the passing of this bill, we would hope that this could come into effect on 1 July 2019 to provide that support to those venues as soon as possible.

On behalf of the government, I support the bill. I do believe it is important to have the amendments to clarify that it should apply to the base and not the full fee. It should extend to clubs, as was flagged before the committee, because small clubs as well as hotels and pubs do important work in supporting the community in very remote areas. We should make it clear, when this assessment is done and when the fees will be paid, to align with the current licensing system to make the administration of it as simple as possible. I ask that members support the bill and ask them in consideration in detail to support our amendments as well.