




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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**ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

CO-OPERATIVES NATIONAL LAW BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (4.14 pm): I rise to speak in support of this bill—in particular, to address the parts of the bill which present an act to apply a national law that regulates cooperatives. Queensland has had a strong history of support for cooperatives, with over 150 registered cooperatives in the state. They exist across industries, creating jobs for many Queenslanders and providing immense benefits to their communities.

At their core, cooperatives are democratically controlled, jointly owned enterprises created for common economic, social and cultural needs and goals. The bill aims to modernise and improve the regulatory framework for cooperatives in Queensland through nationally harmonised cooperatives legislation and reduce the associated regulatory costs.

It is undeniable that COVID-19 has dramatically altered our communities and our society. Thanks to the leadership of the Premier and Deputy Premier, Queensland has had one of the world's best health responses. We have never been luckier to be Queenslanders. However, what we are confronting right now is just as important. It is crucial that we get the economic recovery response right. We have a plan for Queensland: Unite and Recover for Queensland Jobs. Adopting this national regulatory framework for cooperatives will help support the businesses and jobs that use this model.

In such a crisis, sadly, disproportionately, the hardest impacts are often felt by some of our state's most vulnerable. It is exactly these people that some of our state's fantastic cooperatives provide employment and support to. In my capacity as the Minister for Employment and Small Business, I have worked with some of these incredible cooperatives in the development of Queensland's first Social Enterprise Strategy. Social enterprise across our state provides pathways that help lift Queenslanders out of poverty and out of cycles of violence and provides families with the dignity that comes with work.

I was pleased to launch the strategy at the Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative with the member for Nudgee, who I know is a big supporter of social enterprise and cooperatives. They provide sustainable jobs and training opportunities for people with cognitive and/or psychosocial disabilities. While I was there I met Allan Duffy. Allan could not have been happier to be working at the Nundah co-op. He told me that what he loved most was working with such a great team and giving back to his community. If we are to weather this economic crisis, we need to do whatever we can to keep people like Allan connected to the labour market and connected to their communities. Co-ops can provide that glue.

The main objective of the bill is to repeal Queensland's current Cooperatives Act 1997 and in its place apply the act and its regulations as a law in Queensland. More significantly, the bill simplifies the financial reporting and auditing requirements for small cooperatives, reduces costs for small

cooperatives, modernises directors' and officers' duties, and provides a new way for cooperatives to raise all-important funds.

In relation to funding, this act allows the introduction of a unique and flexible financial instrument that allows co-ops to raise funds from external sources without diluting member control and ownership. It is a fantastic tool to help the sector scale up in some cases. These reforms will ensure the ongoing viability of the sector, particularly small co-ops and those in regional Queensland.

I want to acknowledge the advocacy of the Queensland Social Enterprise Council, who have raised the importance of this issue with me, and their continued advocacy for the sector. Our cooperatives will help ensure that some of the state's most vulnerable people continue to be able to access employment and training pathways, along with the support they need. It makes it easier for them to scale up and run their businesses by reducing regulatory burdens.

This pandemic shows us the importance of communities coming together to support one another. Cooperatives turned this approach into a business model. It is great that today here in this House we can support them. I commend the bill to the House.