




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Record of Proceedings, 10 March 2021

MOTION

Australian Building and Construction Commission

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (5.31 pm): I rise to oppose the motion moved by the member for Kawana and support the amendment moved by our excellent industrial relations minister. I really have to hand it to the opposition for staying true to form on union bashing.

Mr Bleijie: Protecting workers.

Ms HOWARD: They care about workers now. What about the 14,000 workers they sacked when they were in government?

It is nice to take a bit of a stroll down memory lane today as we go about the union bashing again and revisit some old ground. They are nothing if not predictable. Isn't it a little 'been there, done that'? They have nothing new and nothing to recommend them.

I assume that the brains trust opposite had a meeting and tossed around some ideas for today's motion: 'Will we privatise QR? Will we privatise Queensland Health? Boot camps for single teenaged mums? I know!' The member for Kawana wins again, dragging out the old ABCC/CFMMEU union-bashing card again. I am not sure how many times those of us on this side of the House have to say this, but let me make clear that we do not support an organisation that has been granted broad, unchecked powers for one section of the workforce.

Just as a little refresher for those opposite, the ABCC's powers are disturbingly far-reaching and invasive. For example, workers are required to attend an examination before the ABCC Commissioner and answer questions or provide information under oath or affirmation. There is no right to silence and no right to representation by a lawyer of the worker's choice. Workers also face a penalty of six months imprisonment for failing to comply with requirements to produce documents or information or attend to answer questions—ordinary workers, doing their jobs, being hauled in and interrogated with no representation of their choice and no right to silence. This is not the Australia I want to live in.

These powers impact on the basic rights of ordinary individuals who work in the industry, and that is around a million workers in this country. Even the Law Council, way back in 2006, observed that the ABCC laws are contrary to the rule of law. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights said that the ABCC legislation breaches fundamental human and legal rights. Even the trade union royal commission found no case for the construction industry to be overseen by a specific organisation.

Workers in the construction industry should be subject to the same laws as all other Australian workers. It is as simple as that. Existing enforcement and intelligence authorities, including the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate and the police, are more than capable of ensuring the law is upheld. There is absolutely no need for a separate entity and certainly not one that has been provided with millions of dollars from the federal coalition government. It is a rort. Couldn't that money be put into existing law enforcement resources or spent on something else? This is nothing but ideological fanaticism on the part of those opposite, with no consideration for the facts.

Contrary to what the member for Kawana is spruiking, the ABCC laws are actually bad for safety at work, as we heard from the member for Capalaba. Workplace injuries actually soared under the ABCC, according to the independent safety body Safe Work Australia. In 2007, during the ABCC's first iteration, worker deaths on construction sites hit a 10-year high and 51 workers were killed. That is 51 workers who did not go home to their families. There is also no credible evidence that the ABCC did anything to improve productivity. The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that productivity in the construction industry was worse under the ABCC. It is another furphy pushed by the LNP.

Finally, industrial disputation remains at historically low levels, with disputation not increasing when the ABCC was abolished, despite what those opposite continue to push out. We do not, and never will, accept or tolerate illegal or corrupt behaviour of any kind in any industry, but construction workers should not be treated differently to other workers. Many of these workers reside in my electorate of Ipswich—good, hardworking construction workers who want to go to work and do their job and not have the threat of the ABCC's presence hanging over them.

(Time expired)