




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Record of Proceedings, 10 March 2021

MOTION

Australian Building and Construction Commission

 **Hon. LM LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.41 pm): The more things change, the more they stay the same. Union bashing Thursday is now union bashing Wednesday. Next month it will be union bashing Tuesday. Here the opposition is back flogging the dead horse that is the ABCC—a body which will go down as one of the most ideological and politicised public bodies we have seen in the history of this country.

Here we have the member for Kawana trumpeting the so-called achievements of the ABCC and demanding we support its continued operation. You have got to be kidding! This is a body that focuses almost exclusively on pursuing unions and workers for things like flying the Eureka flag and wearing union stickers on their hard hats—flags and stickers. Talk about focusing on the things that matter. They are nowhere to be seen in dealing with the real problems in the industry—the endemic problems of wage theft, poor workplace health and safety and sham contracting.

As revealed in Senate estimates a year ago, the ABCC had spent \$3.2 million of taxpayer funds in three years prosecuting unions, union officials and workers but had not prosecuted a single employer for sham contracting—not one. In June 2020 the ABCC released its own report which found 79 per cent of businesses in the industry did not meet workplace laws, including not paying their workers correctly, not keeping proper records and not providing pay slips. Again, not one was prosecuted.

A PWC report found as much as \$320 million a year in wage underpayments in the construction sector. But wait, it is all okay because the member for Kawana tells us that the ABCC is really a friend of the worker because they have recovered nearly \$600,000 in unpaid wages since 2016. Let us look at that. That is \$600,000 in five years. Some \$320 million per year in wage underpayments times five years. So \$600,000 as a component of that means 0.03 per cent of unpaid wages recovered. Talk about an overachiever. What a success.

In the last two years alone construction industry unions in Queensland have recovered 50 times that amount for their members—upwards of \$30 million in unpaid wages. We know what it is actually delivering for the workers, do we not? This is the sort of great work that unions do day in and day out. They can do without the help of the ABCC, thanks very much.

Those opposite do not understand any of this. It is embarrassing the lack of understanding. They come in here with the same old tired union bashing diatribe, bleating obsessively about the unions and wasting the time of this parliament debating the discredited ABCC. Meanwhile we hear nothing positive from those opposite on issues that actually have an impact on people's working lives—decent wages and conditions and safety at work. Yet they have the audacity to pretend they are the friend of the work. Whether in government or opposition, workers cannot trust them and they know it.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Pause the clock. Minister and member for Kawana, you will stop your conversations across the chamber. Member for Gregory, I remind you that you are sailing very close to a warning.

Ms LINARD: We have to remember that those opposite who have moved this motion are the party that voted against labour hire licensing, voted against even having an inquiry into wage theft, voted against industrial manslaughter laws, cut the rights of injured workers, sacked 14,000 public servants and stood by silently as penalty rates for Queensland workers were cut and the federal coalition failed to act to stop it. Now again they do nothing as the federal government tries to ram through its antiworker IR omnibus bill. They are hardly the friend of the worker.

When workers need someone to stand up for them, the LNP are nowhere to be seen. They are always ready to bleat about the unions, but have nothing to say about workers' rights. As we know, they had nothing to say in the Queensland wage theft inquiry about recovering the millions or billions of lost wages and lost superannuation of Queensland workers. Only a Labor government does that. We stand up for the workers.