




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 17 November 2021

JUSTICE LEGISLATION (COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE—PERMANENCY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (4.07 pm): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response—Permanency) Amendment Bill. I would firstly like to thank the committee, particularly the committee chair, the member for Bancroft, and all the other members of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee for their work on this piece of legislation. This bill will firstly make commonsense improvements to the way aspects of our legal system operate.

One thing the COVID pandemic has taught us is the way we make changes in our day-to-day lives in how we go about things and how we engage with others, whether it be stakeholders or people in general. It has taught us that there are other ways of embracing technology. As a state, we have truly embraced the digital age. More meetings are held via teleconference or Teams virtually, rather than face to face. Certainly in my portfolio of agriculture, we were conducting regular meetings during those difficult days via teleconference or Teams with our stakeholders through the agricultural coordination group meetings, connecting with the whole food supply chain to make sure they understood the challenges ahead of them. The Palaszczuk government worked hand in hand with them, as we do with all our stakeholders, to make sure it was a seamless exercise of getting through those times of lockdown.

In September 2020, as an example, I hosted the first Queensland virtual trade mission with one of our biggest trading partners—Japan. We export the majority of our beef to Japan. That country is one of our largest, if not the largest, importers of our beautiful beef. It involved meeting with Queensland agribusinesses here in Brisbane and virtually with major buyers in Japan.

I want to commend also the previous Consul-General Tanaka for his involvement in making sure that engagement with Japanese businesses and his people in Japan worked very well. We saw from those engagements further opportunities for growth in produce, not only in beef but also vegetables. Kabocha pumpkin is one of those examples: we see for the first time the Japanese pumpkin grown in the Lockyer Valley and exported to Japan. There are plenty of examples around of what we have been able to achieve through this pandemic, not only furthering our interests and opportunities for agriculture but also the continual engagement with strong trading partners. I am looking forward to hosting the next virtual trade mission with some of our other important agriculture trading partners as well.

Last year the Palaszczuk government introduced temporary measures to make it easier to make, sign and witness legal documents. This made it easy for people to have affidavits, statutory declarations and other documents to be witnessed certified over video link or electronically. There was broad support from the legal community. In its submission to the committee the Queensland Law Society noted—

There are significant savings in cost and environmental impact. Electronic processes are more convenient, more efficient and ... more accessible. Regional Queensland is not as burdened by the tyranny of distance, or the paucity of services. Records are often more accessible, secure and reliable, as it is easier to store and locate documents executed electronically.

The last 18 months have shown that these measures can work. That is clearly the finding of the committee and those who provided evidence to the committee.

Queenslanders lead incredibly busy lives. Enabling them to witness or sign certain legal documents electronically or via video link can also improve efficiencies in our legal system. As the Minister for Rural Communities, I can only see benefits for the rural areas across our very diverse and large state. It reduces the need for people in rural areas, for instance, to travel large distances to make those legal documents.

Similarly, the bill's provision to allow nurse practitioners to sign certificates which form part of advance health directives reflects the important role they play in our health system, especially in rural and remote areas. In its submission to the committee inquiry, the Australian Medical Association Queensland said—

... having a nurse practitioner complete this certificate is useful in rural and remote Queensland where it may not be possible for patients to access a doctor in a timely manner to complete this task.

The AMAQ raised concerns whether nurse practitioners have the necessary training to sign these certificates, but the Department of Justice and Attorney-General has pointed out that nurse practitioners are nurses who have completed a masters level program and have the equivalent of three years full-time experience at a clinically advanced nursing level. I think that satisfies the concerns the AMAQ raised. The Queensland system for making advance health directives has more safeguards than any other jurisdiction in Australia. The Palaszczuk government simply wants to make the lives of Queenslanders easier. These measures will do that.

This bill further enshrines protections for victims of domestic and family violence. Temporary changes introduced last year allowed for applications for emergency temporary protection orders or changes to domestic violence orders to be verified by a magistrate rather than through a statutory declaration. It also gives magistrates discretion to conduct all or part of proceedings via video or audio link. The bill will seek to make these changes permanent. That has my full support as a White Ribbon ambassador. For victims of domestic and family violence, having to confront their perpetrators in court can be extremely distressing and overwhelming. Giving magistrates the ability to use audio or video links for proceedings eases that burden on applicants seeking temporary protection or domestic violence orders.

The Women's Legal Service Queensland in its submission to the committee inquiry on this bill noted that this measure 'will facilitate increased accessibility to court services and make the court process safer and more convenient for women experiencing domestic violence'. That is a very positive step forward in this respect. This is especially pertinent to the rural communities of Queensland. In small regional communities, domestic violence victims often do not have the same access to privacy. They may not speak out because of what others in their town may think about their accusations against a perpetrator. The ability to attend court proceedings remotely can go some way to easing these concerns, allowing victims to apply for temporary protection orders or domestic violence orders in a more efficient and dignified way.

Domestic and family violence is definitely a scourge across our nation. As I mentioned earlier, as a White Ribbon ambassador I have sworn to speak out for victims of domestic and family violence and I always will. As a way of doing that and supporting domestic violence victims, on 3 December a team of people from my department and my office will be having our heads shaved. We have raised more than \$37,000 to date. We intend to raise a hell of a lot more. Every member in this chamber can contribute and support the Save the Children Refuge in South West Queensland to make sure they have appropriate funding to provide support to victims and their children who attend that shelter. Prior to 3 December we will be sharpening the clippers and doing a trial run. I am not suggesting it will be me; I am leaving myself for the 3rd. It will be an opportunity to see how it goes. The member for Logan can shave his beard at the same time, if he wishes. I encourage him to join us.

While I am talking about that event, I want to put on the record my appreciation of some of the team. I put on the record my appreciation for my director-general, Bob Gee, along with Wayne Hall, Stephen Smith and Annette from the department. I also acknowledge my team: Ron, a fellow who calls himself Regis, and Michelle. They will all be participating in raising funds to support victims of domestic and family violence. The provisions we see in this bill will make life easier for them in terms of how they deal with and raise concerns about matters with regard to perpetrators who violate them.

Another key measure is the temporary arrangements for licensed hospitality venues to sell up to 2.5 litres of alcohol with takeaway meals. This positive measure was well received in my area of Ferny Grove. I know that other members in this chamber have spoken about the benefits of that. There has been a sensible approach of reducing the quantity. Ultimately, the Commissioner of Liquor and Gaming will be able to vary permits with respect to that. I commend the bill to the House.