




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (2.29 pm): I thank the member for Hill; I thought that was a fantastic contribution! I am happy to enlighten him in a few areas in relation to this bill. Naturally, I rise to speak in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill. There are a few things I would like to clarify, but I will do that as I work my way through my notes.

First and foremost, this bill will implement a range of debt reduction and savings measures identified as part of the Palaszczuk government's savings and debt plan. These include: establishing the legislative mechanism to transfer the Queensland Titles Registry to the Queensland Future Fund; and abolishing or restructuring a number of public entities. Therein lies the purpose. The bill implements public sector efficiency and modernisation measures including: allowing digital advertising to replace print advertising; and establishing a fee unit model to manage government fees in the future. The bill also includes amendments to the Medicines and Poisons Act 2019.

This legislation provides the mechanism for the Queensland Titles Registry to be transferred to the Queensland Future Fund through the Debt Retirement Fund. The inclusion of the Queensland Titles Registry in the Debt Retirement Fund will improve the state's debt-to-revenue ratio when assessed by rating agencies and demonstrates the Palaszczuk government's measured and responsible plan to invest today to pay down state debt into the future. Together Queensland Industrial Union of Employees and Titles Registry employees have been consulted on provisions contained in the bill relating to employee transfer.

The Queensland Law Society has reviewed a consultation draft of the bill and has not raised significant concerns. QLS's primary interest is in ensuring certainty regarding the integrity and security of the Titles Registry under the new arrangements as the safeguard of landownership under Queensland's Torrens system of landownership and transfer by title.

The bill abolishes and restructures a number of public entities as part of the Palaszczuk government's ongoing commitment to deliver savings and improve efficiencies in government. The amalgamation and restructure of public entities into existing government departmental structures means their specialised expertise, roles and, most importantly, responsibilities will be transferred to relevant departments to better drive outcomes for the community and for the public sector.

This bill abolishes the Queensland Productivity Commission as the statutory entity, allowing for the integration of QPC's functions into Treasury as the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction to support the government's productivity agenda. Treasury has consulted with government agencies and appropriate unions. This bill reintegrates the Public Safety Business Agency into the Queensland Police Service and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Due to the nature of these amendments, widespread community consultation was not undertaken; however, extensive consultation has been undertaken with affected employees and their respective unions.

This bill abolishes Building Queensland and its board and integrates Building Queensland's staff, assets, resources and records into the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. The associated amendments to the Queensland Industry Participation

Policy Act 2011 enable the integration of Building Queensland into the department. The bill does not change the substance of existing provisions within the Queensland Industry Participation Policy Act. This presents an opportunity to streamline processes, reduce administrative overheads and, more importantly, provide a more coordinated infrastructure advisory and assurance function within government.

Consultation has been undertaken with relevant government agencies, Building Queensland and the Public Service Commission. The bill effects changes to the governance arrangements of the agency by abolishing the board of the agency and transferring the board's existing functions, reporting and accountabilities to the Insurance Commissioner as the chief executive officer of the agency, therefore replacing the current chief executive officer on commencement of the bill.

The important work of the National Injury Insurance Scheme in providing lifetime treatment, care and support for hundreds of participants who have been seriously injured in motor vehicle accidents will continue unabated. Further savings will be realised by allowing digital advertising to replace print advertising in terms of legislation that requires advertising by proposing amendments to the Financial Accountability Act 2009. The measure is intended to reduce the quantity of print advertising and publications by government agencies and to reduce associated advertising and publication costs to government agencies. This amendment is necessary to modify the operation of existing print publication and advertising requirements, and authorisations are set out in the legislation.

I make it clear—I note the member for Hill has departed—that there are exemptions to the advertising changes. These changes include: communities served by regional newspapers—it does help if people read the information to allay their concerns as a lot of these issues have been addressed; public health and safety matters; matters relating to courts and tribunals; firearms amnesties; and matters relating to specific locations or people.

The amendments to the Acts Interpretation Act 1954 will introduce a fee unit model which will streamline the annual process of indexing regulatory fees and reduce administrative inefficiencies for agencies and the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel. A fee unit model for regulatory fees will save considerable time by enabling these fees to be indexed in a manner similar to penalty units.

Government indexation seeks to maintain the value of the fee over time relative to the anticipated increase in associated costs. The principles for fees and charges policy outlines the government's indexation policy and applies to fees set by departments and statutory bodies or agencies, except for specified exemptions. The fee unit model will streamline this annual process, providing for indexation of the fee unit rather than amending hundreds of pages of regulation.

From 1 January 2022, all in-scope agencies will be required by government policy to display their regulated fees as a fee unit, not a dollar amount, unless they have received an exemption. This will require all agencies with regulated fees to amend their relevant regulations to reflect the change ready for the next fee indexation, being 1 July 2022 for most agencies, or, for those with an alternative indexation date, their first occurrence post 1 July 2022. Removing these administrative inefficiencies for all agencies will realise substantial financial savings across government as hundreds of hours of staff time and effort can be fully redirected to focus on service delivery in other areas.

The bill provides for millions in direct savings which arise from savings in board costs, office accommodation and ancillary costs. These direct savings are only one part of the Palaszczuk government's broader \$3 billion savings agenda. These are measured and calculated initiatives focused on reducing our state's debt. This approach highlights one of the major disparities between the Palaszczuk government and the LNP.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that you would be very keen to hear that in government the LNP told workers there was absolutely nothing to fear. Some 14,000 public servants were sacked. Around 4,400 health workers lost their jobs, including 1,800 nurses and midwives. The LNP slashed \$288 million in employment programs, including the very successful Skilling Queenslanders for Work, and then delivered the worst year for jobs growth in Queensland since the early 1990s.

The LNP axed \$368 million in grants to the department of communities to support Queenslanders in need, particularly in regional areas, and removed another \$120 million in funding to vitally important community groups. Some \$60 million in grants and subsidies to local government was cut. The LNP axed the essential Tenants Advisory Service. The cutting of air subsidies to Cape York was absolutely fatal to so many opportunities up there. There was a \$14 million cut to business development programs, particularly in regional areas.

Whilst these are just a fraction of the appalling initiatives employed by the LNP, they highlight one of the major disparities between the Palaszczuk government and the LNP: the LNP believe in destroying the economy and people's lives whilst attempting to rebuild it; the Palaszczuk government employs sensible, measured and calculated responses to debt reduction while maintaining the essential services fundamental to Queensland's positive growth.

I acknowledge the hard work of our Treasurer, the member for Woodridge, and thank the Economics and Governance Committee for its work in relation to this bill. I commend the bill to the House.