




Speech By
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RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.53 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. First I would like to thank Deb and Zac, who do an enormous amount of work making sure the committee keeps on track. I would also like to thank my committee colleagues.

It is disappointing that we have to come into this place and fix up pieces of legislation because gaps have been caused by processes that have been missed by the executive. This really is a tidy-up bill. The fact that this went on for so long and was eventually highlighted by a Land Court action is concerning. It is concerning that the executive of the Labor government for years and years did not pick this up.

What I find most interesting is that something that is, in fact, before the Land Court can come into this place and be retrospectively changed. I was under the impression that the government would not touch anything that was before the Land Court. Certainly the people of Oakey, and specifically the miners at Acland, have been told repeatedly, both in writing, in public statements in the media and on TV over a number of years now, that if it is before the Land Court they could not possibly do anything to change that, they would have to let the process complete. It turns out that if there are 80-odd and another 800-odd leases that have not been administratively processed correctly by the executive, we can override the Land Court because that suits us right now and it would be a complete and utter mess for the industry if we did not.

This type of oversight is contributing to the fact that Queensland is not top of the world when it comes to lack of governance risk. When miners are looking internationally for where they might spend their capital, Queensland is slipping down the ranks when it comes to sovereign risk. This lack of administration detail, flip-flopping on certain issues and picking what is politically appropriate is causing some of those problems. I urge the minister, now the precedent has been set to not wait for the Land Court, to make an announcement. The opportunity exists today before the press closes to issue that lease to the people of Acland and everybody can have their jobs back. I am sure the people of Oakey would appreciate that.

There are a couple of other issues that fall into that same lack of proper administration. This is about how the executive is operating. If you do not have transparency and open debate, if you do not use the processes of this parliament appropriately, such as not guillotining every piece of legislation that comes forward, you end up making mistakes. Regardless of what the department might think and regardless of what some in the executive might think, most particularly the Treasurer, they are not always right on everything all of the time. There is a lot of wisdom held by ordinary Queenslanders who are going about their job trying to find their way through the bureaucracy to deal with the governance rules that have been put around them. Here we are with retrospective legislation trying to fix up an oversight. I am pleased to see that it does not affect any rights or obligations.

I am not opposing this legislation because I think it is appropriate that we do this for all of those people who hold those leases. That said, we should not be making these kinds of mistakes. The fact that there was lack of consultation on this bill, which is fixing up the fact that we missed some stuff generally, is a reason why we should be consulting widely and over an extended period of time so that this House, the people's house, can get the legislation right every time.

The abolishment of the Personalised Transport Ombudsman is interesting. It does not have a lot to do with resources, but I note this bill includes in its title 'other legislation amendment bill'. This is a half-a-million-dollar waste of money. This was a process that was set up by the government. It was a bit of a knee-jerk. It was not really widely consulted on. There was not good transparency around what was going on. Money was spent. Office chairs and some desks were bought. It was going to fix up the personal transport industry.

An opposition member: How did that go?

Mr WATTS: It did not go real well. It might have been mentioned by some in this chamber that this would not be the solution. In particular, one of my colleagues in Brisbane might have mentioned this was not a solution. Here we are, half a million dollars later, and it turns out it is not the solution.

We come in here to abolish something, but again without wide consultation. There was no wide consultation on whether to set it up in the first place, which cost half a million dollars of taxpayers' money. The next time someone pays stamp duty, let's remember where stamp duty went: it went on office furniture that nobody has ever used in the transport ombudsman's office. A lot of people in the industry would have loved to have seen that half a million dollars go towards compensation for legislative changes. Instead, it went towards the maladministration of this executive's ideas and concepts that were not widely looked into.

My colleague the member from Condamine outlined most of the detail of the bill and I endorse every word he said. I know he wants to speak to the manslaughter provisions. The industrial manslaughter issue was widely discussed at the time. I hate to say 'I told you so' but I am fairly certain that some people will be in that place. This was never going to work. At that time it was mentioned that there are incredibly complex legal and structural arrangements around the ownership and operation of mines, how they work and everything else. It was a blunt instrument of ideology to try to force through some regulation that was never going to work in a practical sense.

This debate will be guillotined and we are on a time limit, which is a shame because obviously that is when mistakes are made. We could have saved these hours by not making mistakes in the first place, making the whole thing a bit more efficient. That said, I hope we get an opportunity to discuss some of those issues because it is very important that people understand what is going on there. We do not want anybody losing their life whilst at work, whether it be on a mine site, a building site or any other place. We need to make sure that the legislation is effective, we need to make sure it works and we need to make sure that it is done properly. The fact that we are now pushing it out again would indicate that none of those things happened in the first place. That could all have been solved with a bit of consultation.

I will mention briefly the Urban Utilities and Unitywater issues. I was really pleased to hear the minister announce—although I did not quite hear how many millions of dollars he has put in—the building of the pipeline that I know they have been consulting on. I am really pleased that the government will be upgrading the pumps to Toowoomba and increasing the pipeline so that Toowoomba does not lose its water security, which it paid a substantial amount to achieve. I look forward to that. With reference to the amendments to the bill, obviously we do not want people to waste water and those who do should be fined. Appropriate action should be taken against them, as was outlined in the 2009 act. If the 2009 act had been widely consulted on and discussed with people, without input from an arrogant executive, maybe we would not be here fixing this up because it might have been picked up at that time.

My overriding message to the people of Acland is that we look forward to the minister's announcement later this afternoon. When Queenslanders think about why they are paying so much in state government tax, they should think about the transport ombudsman who swallowed half a million dollars but was never used effectively for anything.

An opposition member: Nice chairs though.

Mr WATTS: They are very nice chairs. The last thing that I would say is that if this place does not do its job properly, widely consult and act in a transparent way, and if the executive does not give members time for proper debate these mistakes will keep happening and in this chamber we will keep wasting the people's time.