




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 25 May 2021

DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (12.28 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. I would like to turn, firstly, to the elements of the bill which fall within my ministerial portfolio. The bill makes amendments to the Medicines and Poisons Act 2019 to clarify heads of power for the supporting regulations and makes other technical changes to improve the operation of the proposed regulations.

In particular, I acknowledge the feedback provided by the Australian Medical Association Queensland, the Australian Tattooists Guild and the Professional Tattooing Association of Australia on the Medicines and Poisons Act amendments during the committee process. The bill proposed amendments to require the manufacturer or supplier of tattoo inks to have a compliant analysis certificate before supplying a tattooing. The amendments would have required a tattooist to use as a tattoo ink for tattooing to be reasonably satisfied that, before using the ink, a compliant analysis certificate had been prepared for the ink.

Our intention has been, and will always be, to ensure that the inks being used for tattooing are safe for Queenslanders. These amendments were based on the best health advice and were designed to protect tattoo artists and their clients from harm; however, I acknowledge that the tattoo industry had concerns about the complexity of complying with the proposed amendments. It is important to ensure we strike the right balance between supporting industry and protecting the safety of Queenslanders. Therefore, after careful consideration, I have instructed Queensland Health to undertake further consultation with industry stakeholders before any amendments are progressed. I also am supportive of seeing if we can get uniformity on this important issue at the national level.

The bill also includes amendments to the Medicines and Poisons Act to allow the chief executive to delegate their functions under the act for the monitored medicines database to an appropriately qualified person. The monitored medicines database is an electronic real-time prescription monitoring database, known as real-time reporting. The database will be used to record information about the prescription and supply of certain prescription medicines prone to high-risk use.

All states and territories have committed to progressing real-time prescription monitoring systems which will interface with a Commonwealth system to achieve a national solution. To achieve this, Queensland's monitored medicines database, QScript, will need to interact with equivalent databases in other states and territories. This may require some responsibilities related to QScript to be delegated to third-party providers. For example, the responsibility for collecting information about monitored medicines dispensed in other states or territories may need to be delegated to a third party. The amendments in the bill will facilitate this delegation.

The chief executive will not be able to delegate regulatory and compliance responsibilities outside of Queensland Health. The chief executive may only delegate functions to an appropriately qualified person. Before delegating functions, the chief executive will consider all circumstances, including the scope of the power to be delegated, the expertise or experience needed to exercise the power, and any training and qualifications required to ensure the delegate is appropriately qualified.

The Medicines and Poisons Act will also be amended to provide greater clarity about which practitioners are required to check the monitored medicines database. The regulations will specify the practitioners required to check the database. It is expected these practitioners include dentists, medical practitioners, pharmacists, intern pharmacists, nurse practitioners, endorsed midwives and endorsed podiatrists.

The provisions about which practitioners are authorised to prescribe, dispense or give a treatment dose of a monitored medicine may change over time. Therefore, it is appropriate that this be specified in the regulations, rather than the act, to ensure this can be readily updated to reflect any changes to the arrangements for prescribing, dispensing or the giving of treatment doses.

The bill also extends the offence for disposing of waste from a 'schedule 8 medicine' to disposing of waste from a 'diversion-risk medicine'. Diversion-risk medicines will be prescribed by regulation and will include medicines with a higher risk of being diverted for illicit use. It will include all schedule 8 medicines and some schedule 4 medicines. Examples include anabolic steroidal agents, growth hormones, codeine and barbiturates. The offence will not apply to a person who discards waste by giving it to a person authorised to dispose of waste under the Medicines and Poisons Act. This may include, for example, returning the waste to a pharmacist for disposal or if the person discards or destroys the waste under another law. Improper disposal may allow a person to collect residual amounts from used containers and use it for unauthorised dealings. Ensuring that waste from diversion-risk medicines is disposed of correctly helps to prevent it becoming available for sale illegally and being used inappropriately.

Indicative drafts of the supporting regulations and departmental standards were distributed to key stakeholders to enable them to consider the scheme holistically. Consultation on the regulations and departmental standards began in late April 2021 and runs until 26 May 2021. The bill will enable the drafting of the supporting regulations to be clearer and make it easier for stakeholders to understand and comply with the medicines and poisons framework.

The bill implements a range of 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; abolishing or restructuring a number of public entities; and implementing public sector efficiency and modernisation measures. The bill provides the mechanism for the Queensland Titles Registry to be transferred to the Queensland Future Fund through the Debt Retirement Fund. The taxpayer will continue to own the value of the Titles Registry as an asset that can be offset against debt, thereby reducing our net debt.

The bill also abolishes and restructures a number of public entities as part of the Palaszczuk government's ongoing commitment to deliver savings and improve the efficiency of government. These include integrating the Queensland Productivity Commission into Queensland Treasury as the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction and integrating the staff, assets, resources and records of Building Queensland into the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. Building Queensland and the Productivity Commission have served Queensland well, but now it is time for their work to continue inside government agencies to help support our economic recovery and to save money.

The bill also repeals the Public Safety Business Agency Act 2014 so that the agency's functions are integrated into the Queensland Police Service and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. The amalgamation and restructure of public entities into existing government departmental structures means their specialised expertise, roles and responsibilities will be transferred to relevant departments to better drive outcomes for the community and the public sector. Importantly, these measures have been undertaken after extensive consultation with government agencies, the Public Service Commission and respective unions.

The bill also includes amendments to the Acts Interpretation Act to introduce a fee unit model which will streamline processes and reduce costs for Parliamentary Counsel as they go through the annual fee unit indexation. Queenslanders will remember how the LNP set indexation of fees and charges at 3.5 per cent regardless of inflation, meaning fees and charges rose in real terms. Over three years, Queenslanders saw an 11 per cent increase in the cost of interacting with government under the LNP. In contrast, the Palaszczuk Labor government has adopted the position that fees and charges are only indexed in line with inflation. The range of measures proposed by the Treasurer in this bill provides for \$3 million in direct savings, a part of the Palaszczuk government's broader \$3 billion savings agenda. These are sensible savings that do not hurt Queenslanders, unlike the LNP's cuts when in government.

What we heard from the member for Kawana in his response to this bill was plenty of looking backwards but conveniently skipping over the time his party were in government, which those opposite tend to do very often. The fact is that I am very proud of this government, the work of the Treasurer and

this bill. Why? It is because we are making savings that are not leading to cuts in public servant numbers. We are not sacking doctors, nurses, teachers or child safety staff. We are not cutting services from various portfolios and agencies across government. We are not cutting funding out of non-government organisations. We are not scrapping Skilling Queenslanders for Work, which supports trainees and skills.

We are doing this in a sensible way that finds savings within government and retains the expertise and skills we need but gets rid of some of those overheads. We need to do that because our budget, like every other budget in the country and globally, is under strain from the impact of COVID. There are two ways of doing that: cut, sack and sell; or find efficiencies within the system and savings that are sensible and proportionate but do not lead to further economic damage and the consequence of people losing their jobs. I still have people come up to me and tell me that they lost their job under the LNP and the Newman government. They still remember the damage. We know—we certainly did not hear from the member for Kawana—what those opposite took to the last election. We do not have to look back to 2012 to 2015. We know what they took to the last election. Cuts to services were proposed. I am very proud of this bill and the work the Palaszczuk government is doing to provide efficiencies in the system.