




Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2022

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (6.57 pm): I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on this bill and support every single aspect and element of the bill before us today. A quick history lesson for those opposite: unions proudly built the Labor Party. This does not—it is like a sermon—maketh a union, and I will table that. This makes some kind of—

*Tabled paper:* Organisational Chart titled 'QAS Group and NPAA Services Organisational Chart as at 2 November 2021' [1776](#).

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Martin): Member for Thuringowa, do not brandish it in the chamber.

**Mr HARPER:** Ponzi scheme of associations pretending to represent workers. They do not.

**Ms Fentiman:** Run by former LNP members.

**Mr HARPER:** I will take that interjection—run by former LNP members. I cannot start without responding to the disgraceful, misogynistic contribution from the member for Everton. What a disgrace, right up there with the member for Mudgeeraba! Both should come into this House tomorrow and apologise to the people of Queensland.

The objectives of this bill are to give effect to the Queensland government's response to the recommendations of the *Five-year review of Queensland's Industrial Relations Act 2016: final report*. The review made 40 recommendations, 36 of which are accepted in full by the Queensland government and four accepted in principle. In particular, some elements of the bill are important around the strengthening of protections against workplace sexual harassment and the provision of greater flexibility in relation to parental leave. It is ironic that the federal parliament today introduced its Industrial Relations Act as well.

While the bill has many important elements which I broadly support, in my contribution I want to concentrate on one particular element of the bill and that is around industrial representation from registered industrial bodies. I would like to take this opportunity to commend our respective trade unions that represent thousands of workers and public servants in this state. The bill amends the legislation to provide a clear distinction between registered employee and employer organisations and other entities not registered under the IR Act seeking to represent an employee's or employer's industrial interests. That includes adopting consistent language throughout the IR Act. The bill also strengthens the commission's powers to issue orders to stop behaviours that give rise to misrepresentation, which can lead to confusion for employees and employers about who can fully represent their industrial interests.

To put this into context, for over 20 years I was the nominated and duly elected station delegate for the Townsville Ambulance Station in the Queensland Ambulance Service. That role not only included ensuring union members were supported through various aspects of the job, but also sitting on various working committees like the regional consultative committee and representing the collective views of members when it came to enterprise bargaining agreements, or EBAs. In both 2007 and 2012 respectively as a regional union delegate and then state councillor, I made further representations with senior managers of QAS as part of the ambulance state council during those negotiations. We represented members in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. Hard fought entitlements,

meal allowances, overtime, afternoon and night shift allowances, extended hours overtime, increased leave and increased rates of pay for various clinical levels were achieved in 2007. We also lobbied for more equipment, vehicles and approved rosters—all part of the work we did as representatives for a registered industrial body, our union.

However, in 2012 that changed. All they wanted to do was strip everything away. Much of the work that we had achieved was through our then named union, the LHMU, subsequently called United Voice and now known as United Workers Union of which I declare I have been a loud and proud member for over 30 years. In 2012 it all changed under Campbell Newman, the LNP and his henchmen like the members for Broadwater, Kawana and the other ghosts of Newman past who sit on the opposition benches. Union delegates were no longer able to represent at station level and many a ploy by the LNP to bust up unions in this state was begun under that awful, distressing period of our lives. The then association called EMSPA, now APAQ—as members on this side of the House know, that is the association that pretends to represent ambulance officers through engaging lawyers, but in reality it has zero industrial representation. I do understand that the member for Mudgeeraba is also a member of NPAQ. She should declare that and/or resign after their anti-vax sentiments during COVID—

**A government member:** And comments today.

**Mr HARPER:**—and the comments today, but I have already called for that. The LNP-led anti-union association was formed. I knew how it worked because they invited me—stupidly—to meet with the then LNP opposition members to become whistleblowers against the then Bligh government. What made me really suspicious was that they met in secret in a warehouse in Bohle in Townsville to dig dirt on issues within the QAS. I ask members: does that sound familiar? Does that sound like the playbook of today that the LNP use? They do. They continue to do that today.

It was then that the really nasty stuff started at the station level as they tried to divide paramedics. It became very personal for me: false accusations and allegations about me were made by EMSPA delegates. After being put through the mud I never received an apology from those responsible. Operating under the guise of the Associations Incorporation Act, those anti-union, non-registered organisations posing as some industrial body or mob simply pretended to represent workers. The failures were tangible and costly as paid lawyers were brought in to do the dirty work with no clue and no knowledge of how to truly represent our ambulance workforce.

Thank God we got rid of the Newman government. Our union fought hard to stay the course as we were led to arbitration in 2012 where our previously hard fought wins were eroded away. The Newman government wanted to strip away our well-deserving and hardworking frontline staff of everything we in the union had worked so hard to achieve. May we never see that type of behaviour again in this state. I would call the member for Broadwater, the then member for Mundingburra and the then minister in Townsville, who directed my then assistant commissioner to sack me for speaking out against the Newman government. That is the kind of gutter level politics we saw then and that is the kind of gutter level politics we see today. I will not forget it, but he is too gutless to admit it. This bill confirms that the rights and protections—

**Mr WATTS:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. There was some unparliamentary language used.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): I did not hear the unparliamentary language. I was speaking with the Clerk. As I have done before while I have been in the chair, member for Thuringowa, did you use unparliamentary language and will you withdraw?

**Mr HARPER:** If I did I unreservedly apologise and I withdraw.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member. Please continue with your contribution.

**Mr HARPER:** They are days that I never want to go back to, days that I never want to see for our hardworking paramedics in this state, when that particular mob pretended to represent workers in this state. We know they were led—and are still led—by former LNP members. That mob should truly get a mirror and have a long, hard look into it. It is shameful; it is disgraceful. That is not representing the workers of this state. That is the job of unions. Those organisations are nothing more than a sham.

**Mr Bleijie** interjected.

**Mr HARPER:** The member for Kawana cannot lie straight in bed and look me in the eye and say they are not running NPAQ, APAQ—all of them are under the LNP member and you know it because you were part of it that formed it.

**Mr Bleijie:** We are not running NPAQ, APAQ, ACAP, Westpac—whatever. We are not running them.

**Mr HARPER:** I seem to have your attention now, member for Kawana. Get a mirror and have a long hard look into the history—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The members for Kawana and Thuringowa will not converse across the chamber, and the member for Thuringowa will direct his comments through the chair.

**Mr HARPER:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. When I am provoked I tend to reply. I will say this in summing up. Our unions represent the workers of this state. It is clear the associations are nothing more than a pretend—and I cannot believe some of the contributions I have heard from the other side when they call them unions. They are not unions; they are associations under the associations act—nothing more than that. They are lightweight, taking money off members for lawyers and donating it back to the LNP, and you lot know that it goes straight back to the LNP. That is why you are opposing this bill. You think you are going to lose some money from some people.

**Mr Head:** You're going to lose a lot of money.

**Mr HARPER:** I take your interjection, member for Callide. Welcome to the chamber! You have a lot to learn in this place.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Thuringowa is warned for repeatedly directing comments directly to other members and not through the chair. Please continue.

**Mr HARPER:** I say this to members on that side—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Actually, member for Thuringowa, I have just remembered that you have already been warned.

**Mr HARPER:** I have.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** You will leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 253A.

*Whereupon the honourable member for Thuringowa withdrew from the chamber at 7.08 pm.*