




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 17 August 2022

**TRADING (ALLOWABLE HOURS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (6.18 pm): I rise to address the Trading (Allowable Hours) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and to speak in support of the amendments to be moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. As we have heard, this bill seeks to implement the recommendations arising from the inquiry into the operation of the Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990, the report of which does not identify a need or a demand for substantial deregulation of trading hours arrangements following changes to the arrangements made by the state government in 2017. I note the committee has made nine recommendations in the inquiry report, which are reflected in the legislation before the House. As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said, the LNP will be opposing the provisions implementing committee recommendations 2, 7 and 9.

Just about every member of this House speaks about the importance of small and family business on regular occasions. Unfortunately, too frequently the rhetoric we hear from those opposite does not match the reality. Too frequently small and family businesses are left hanging in the breeze by this Palaszczuk Labor government. Throughout 2020 and 2021 time and time again the government had to be dragged kicking and screaming to provide any meaningful support for small and family business during their hour of need.

I cannot count the number of press conferences where I stood alongside the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for health calling on the government to not forget small and family business and to provide real support. That the state government provided any support for small and family business during the COVID pandemic is the result of advocacy from organisations like CCIQ, which fought alongside the LNP to get that essential support to keep small and family businesses afloat and their nearly one million employees in a job.

The simple fact is that small and family businesses are nothing more than an afterthought for this Labor state government. It does not understand small business and it does not care, and it is those same small and family businesses that this bill should protect. This bill should protect our local butchers, our bakers and our small independent grocers from the suffocating market power of large supermarket chains like Coles and Woolworths. Regardless of where they are located across Queensland, the importance of small and family businesses cannot be overstated. It is small and family businesses, as we heard from the deputy opposition leader, that sponsor the local footy club and increasingly it is the small and family businesses that employ our young locals, training them as apprentice butchers, bakers and the like.

During COVID when the supply chains of large supermarket chains crumbled, it was the local IGA or the local Spar or the other independent supermarkets that weathered the storm, providing a much needed source of critical products like fruit and veggies, meat, milk and, as the father of a toddler and baby, all too frequently nappies. This bill needs to strike a balance between protecting the little guys who simply cannot compete with the big guys on price and with providing consumers with choice and convenience. The LNP is the party of smaller government and less regulation, but there are times where I believe the government should seek to level the playing field.

Our communities are lesser if small independent retailers shut up shop because they are no longer viable. To level the playing field a little bit, the government should be protecting small retailers from the market power of huge businesses like Coles, Woolies and Aldi. That does not mean that big businesses like Coles and Woolies are not important parts of the community. They are. Big supermarkets employ many thousands of Queenslanders and, in fact, my first proper casual job was in a Coles supermarket and, like me, I am sure most Queenslanders get their weekly shopping from a big supermarket. However, the reality is that the market power big retailers like Coles and Woolies can wield is far greater than anything small and family businesses can compete with.

Submissions to the committee were diverse and a number of stakeholder groups, including the Australian Retailers Association and the Shopping Centre Council of Australia, advocated for complete deregulation of trading hours, which I do not agree with and I do not think such a course of action is in the best interests of all Queenslanders. Conversely, I note that the National Retail Association and the Queensland Small Business Commissioner were both broadly supportive of the bill in its current form. I want to address the CCIQ's submission that the committee chair spoke of which raises the fact that trading hours legislation in its current form is too complex. I agree that it is complex and I agree that we need to see a greater focus on reducing the regulatory burden right across government, but a solution that sees the removal of protections for small and family business is not the answer to that problem.

There are a multitude of other red-tape and regulatory barriers impacting small business that could be tackled if the state government had the inclination. The lack of focus on regulatory reform from this state government is disappointing given this is one of the greatest concerns raised by Queensland small business owners whom I speak to and who feel are being restricted by red-tape roadblocks. It is vital that the path to expand and grow as a business is made easier for small businesses.

During estimates I asked questions about what red-tape reduction initiatives have been established by the Palaszczuk government and the examples that were cited were the Business Launchpad and the Small Business Commissioner. Are they useful initiatives? Yes, but neither do anything to further regulatory reform. At best, the Business Launchpad identifies the multiple of redundant and duplicated regulatory requirements that businesses must satisfy just to trade and the Small Business Commissioner helps small business navigate a flawed system that is heaving under the weight of red tape. The Small Business Commissioner does a good job of that, but outside of her core role assisting to resolve tenancy disputes the Small Business Commissioner is not empowered to remove red tape. The body that was empowered to identify redundant processes and unnecessary red tape was the Queensland Productivity Commission, but it was cut by this state Labor government after one too many politically inconvenient reports.

Of all the submissions, perhaps the most significant for me was from Master Grocers Australia and it has shaped the amendments that the deputy opposition leader will bring into the House. Master Grocers Australia said that it believes that small and family grocery retailers will be forced to cease trading should committee recommendations 2, 7 and 9 be adopted or if the moratorium contained within section 59 is not extended for a meaningful period due to its inability to compete with major national supermarket chains. Twelve months is not a meaningful period. Twelve months is a year and it is far short of what Master Grocers Australia and the IGA representative bodies for northern New South Wales and Queensland have asked for. That is why the LNP will be opposing the provisions that implement committee recommendations 2, 7 and 9 and we will seek to extend the moratorium extension from the proposed one year to five years. This five-year moratorium is an acknowledgement that trading conditions over the last 2½ years have been significantly disrupted due to COVID—

Ms Richards interjected.

Mr MICKELBERG:—a point which the Labor committee chair acknowledged.

Ms Richards: Did you forget to put that in the statement of reservation?

Mr MICKELBERG: I did not write the statement of reservation, but I will respond to the interjection, Deputy Speaker—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Through the chair you will respond.

Mr MICKELBERG: I will respond to the interjection, Mr Deputy Speaker, from the committee chair. The LNP members of the committee submitted a statement of reservation. We read the committee report in its entirety, including all of the recommendations and the submissions, and that is how we arrive at the position that we are debating today. I know that those opposite like to come in here and things are a foregone conclusion and they run the talking points out because that is what they are told by their union masters and the front bench is made up of—

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mr MICKELBERG:—weak ministers like the member for Miller, owned by the union movement and incapable of independent thought.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member, I would ask you to withdraw that unparliamentary language.

Mr MICKELBERG: I withdraw. Getting back to the bill, this five-year moratorium is an acknowledgement, as I said, that trading conditions over the last 2½ years have been significantly disrupted due to COVID related impacts and they are likely to remain uncertain for the foreseeable future, so extending the moratorium by five years is a commonsense measure that removes uncertainty for small and family businesses at a time when they are just starting to get back on their feet.

The LNP, and only the LNP, is the party of small and family businesses. It is in our DNA. Many on this side, as has been noted, still run small and family businesses and we live the challenges day in and day out. Despite the calls from those opposite so far that we have heard and despite the fact that the minister has demonstrated that she is not prepared to engage in good faith and debate the issues that this bill contains, I call on those opposite to listen to the arguments raised in the debate today and listen to the voice of Master Grocers and the small independent grocery stores that are such an important part of our community. Listen to the Master Grocers and listen to your local IGA. Go and talk to your local IGA and see what they say this bill will do if it is enacted in its current form. Those opposite should support the amendments that will be moved by the deputy opposition leader which will provide certainty for small and family businesses.