




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2022

STATE PENALTIES ENFORCEMENT (MODERNISATION) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Trade and Investment) (4.02 pm), in reply: I am delighted to be able to provide this address in reply to this debate. Isn't the member for Everton agitated about the election result on Saturday? I think he is more agitated about what happened to him in October 2020. He talks about transparency. All I would say is where is the money for the Bruce Highway hoax and where is the money for the biggest dam in the world? That is the greatest hoax perpetrated on Queenslanders. He likes to throw criticisms across the chamber. He likes to call other people a disgrace. After the storied leadership responsibility he failed to discharge, their political party went backwards.

Mr STEVENS: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member has not mentioned one thing that is relevant to the bill we are discussing. Can you please bring him back to being relevant to the bill?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Treasurer, the member for Mermaid Beach does have a point. Please come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr DICK: That is the disgrace of the conduct of the member for Everton. I thank those members who provided their support for the bill. These are important reforms strengthening the financial sustainability and security of the Residential Tenancies Authority.

Mr Mander: Rubbish!

Mr DICK: I take the interjection from the member for Everton. It is not rubbish, member for Everton. Read the bill and the explanatory notes. When an organisation with investment returns consistently receives negative investment returns, that is not a sustainable organisation. The government has ensured going forward—

Mr Mander interjected.

Mr DICK: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not taking any interjections. This ensures the financial security and stability of an organisation whose returns have been—

Mr Mander interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Everton, cease your interjections.

Mr DICK: It has run deficits in fact. We need to provide that security to bond holders and to landlords because that is what Labor governments do. The bill gives legislative effect to the integration—and this is a very important point—of specified fine administration functions into the Queensland Revenue Office from the Department of Transport and Main Roads and the Queensland Police Service. I need to make these points again—to reinforce them—because of the misleading contributions made by almost every member of the LNP in this debate.

The bill also makes a number of amendments to modernise the administration of the State Penalties Enforcement Registry and the Queensland Revenue Office. The bill also amends the Land Tax Act 2010 to give beneficial land tax treatment to trustees of special disability trusts. I again recognise the member for Greenslopes for his work in bringing this matter to my attention. I listened to this debate intently, and not one member of the opposition and not one member of the crossbench was willing to talk about an important reform to help people with serious and significant disabilities in this state. Not one of them said a positive thing about a positive law reform to take another burden off people with disabilities.

Mr Mickelberg interjected.

Mr DICK: There they are interjecting again. The member for Buderim is interjecting again.

Mr Mickelberg: You're hiding from scrutiny.

Mr DICK: He is saying that I am hiding from scrutiny.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Buderim will cease his interjections.

Mr DICK: I see the member for South Brisbane holding up the speaking list. It would have been good to hear the member for South Brisbane—and I do not often say that—rather than the blowhards—

Dr MacMahon interjected.

Mr DICK: Member for South Brisbane, I am supporting you. It would have been better to listen to you than the blowhards we had to listen to for three hours. That would have been a more nuanced and sensible contribution, but of course the opposition did not want to hear from the member for South Brisbane. They did not want to have her on the speaking list. It would have been a more sensible contribution than all of the members opposite. No-one from the opposition spoke about special disability trusts.

Mr MANDER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Treasurer, resume your seat. What is your point of order, member for Everton?

Mr MANDER: I seek leave to move a motion without notice.

Division: Question put—That leave be granted.

AYES, 35:

LNP, 30—Bates, Bennett, Bleijie, Boothman, Camm, Crandon, Crisafulli, Frecklington, Hart, Janetzki, Krause, Langbroek, Leahy, Lister, Mander, McDonald, Mickelberg, Millar, Minnikin, Molhoek, Nicholls, O'Connor, Perrett, Powell, Purdie, Robinson, Rowan, Simpson, Stevens, Watts.

Grn, 2—Berkman, MacMahon.

KAP, 2—Dametto, Knuth.

PHON, 1—Andrew.

NOES, 48:

ALP, 48—Bailey, Boyd, Brown, Bush, Butcher, Crawford, D'Ath, de Brenni, Dick, Enoch, Farmer, Fentiman, Furner, Gilbert, Grace, Harper, Healy, Hinchliffe, Hunt, Kelly, A. King, S. King, Lauga, Linard, Lui, Madden, Martin, McCallum, McMahon, Mellish, Miles, Mullen, O'Rourke, Palaszczuk, Pease, Pugh, Richards, Russo, Ryan, Saunders, Scanlon, Skelton, Smith, Stewart, Sullivan, Tantari, Walker, Whiting.

Pairs: Howard, Gerber; McMillan, Weir; Power, Last.

Resolved in the negative.

Mr DICK: As I was saying, I want to recognise the member for Greenslopes again for his contribution on the important law reform in relation to special disability trusts of which no-one in the LNP bothered to even give a moment's consideration.

Turning to some of the matters raised during the debate, I refer to the member for Toowoomba South's contribution. Despite having it clarified in writing, the member for Toowoomba South continued to suggest that the changes to the RTA funding were somehow the government attempting to use bonds to hold onto the credit rating. Again, there will be no increase to the value of assets or liabilities shown on the general government sector balance sheet as a result of the changes. In short, the debt recovery and compliance program implemented by the government and the efforts of SPER officers have increased collections and stopped the growth of the debt pool, not that you would have known that listening to members of the LNP.

The member also gave us a history of SPER bills in this state. Remarkably, from a member who was incensed when members on this side bring up the actions of the very last LNP government, he is now going back to actions from 2004: three Labor premiers ago, two changes of government ago, seven elections ago. What was the alleged crime? Amending an act. The substance of the claim being made is that because amendments are made to maintain the legislation, it must not be working at all. The LNP, by the member's own admission, collected \$200 million in SPER debt during their three years administering the act.

Since its establishment in 2000, SPER has collected about \$6.1 billion on behalf of Queenslanders. That is progress. It shows progressive amendments to the act are making a difference. That is \$6.1 billion owed to Queenslanders which can be used to build schools, fund hospitals or maintain roads.

The member for Toowoomba South also referred to the government's SPER ICT project. The project actually commenced under the former LNP government as part of its agenda to partially outsource SPER debt collection. We know what the partial outsourcing would have resulted in: ultimately a total outsourcing and privatisation. Following the change of government, ICT requirements were changed to remove this requirement to outsource the partial collection of debts. There is only one party that has sought to use the outsourcing process, the privatisation and the use of private debt collectors, and that is the LNP. A contract was awarded to the preferred service provider in 2016.

The member for Mermaid Beach doubled down on the ICT project 210 days later, since he was first asked to apologise to the State Actuary, and I did that in the House on behalf of the State Actuary. He still has not apologised, but he doubled down on the ICT—

Mr Stevens: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the Treasurer's comments personally offensive and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: Treasurer, the member for Mermaid Beach has found your comments personally offensive. Will you withdraw?

Mr DICK: I withdraw. Again, I can advise the House that it was in fact the former LNP government which attempted to outsource debt management functions to the private fact sector. In fact, \$25 million was set aside by the former LNP government to pursue outsourcing. On 19 May 2015, our government announced that the former LNP government's plans would not go ahead.

I also note that it was the former LNP government who made the decision to automatically refer all tolling fines to SPER. This resulted in an additional \$92.3 million in tolling debt being registered with SPER in the first eight months of 2014-15 which was more than triple the 2013-14 levels.

A number of members have made claims about the intent of the changes to the RTA's funding model. The intent of the change is simple. The current funding model is not providing a reliable, stable return that the RTA needs to pay its staff and suppliers.

Over the past five years, in aggregate, over the period 2016-17 to 2020-21, the Residential Tenancies Authority has run a deficit of \$6.6 million because investment returns have not been sufficient to meet its expenses. Based on investment returns so far, a further deficit is expected to the current financial year.

I note that the member for South Brisbane from the Greens political party has moved amendments to reverse that. Is it the position of the Greens political party that the finances of the RTA should be determined on the stock market, determined by financiers on Wall Street, in New York? That is the current situation. That is not an acceptable position for the Labor government, which is why we want to provide that clear, certain funding to the RTA. That is why we have moved these amendments: to provide consolidated funding to the RTA so that they can get on with the work they do best and not have to deal with investment bankers on Wall Street.

The member for Toowoomba South referred to the RTA's \$43.3 million loss in 2019-20 as being driven by an accounting adjustment. However, the RTA's financial statements are clear that the key issue was a \$41.6 million loss on investments, and this from someone who was a senior banker.

The financial statements note that as at 30 June 2020, the RTA's total net assets were negative-\$312,000. A letter of comfort was provided by Queensland Treasury to provide assurance that financial support would be made available if it was required in order to meet the RTA statutory obligations. This is not a situation that should continue which is why we are moving these reforms.

The member for Toowoomba South also suggested that there would be some improvement in the state's net debt as a result of the change in the funding model. The state budget papers provide a definition of net debt. All members can have a look at page 142 of Budget Paper 2 of the 2021-22 budget. In simple terms, it is the difference between the amount of borrowings and the amount of cash and investments held by the state.

It has already been made clear to members opposite that the changes to the RTA's funding model will not result in a change to the state's level of assets or liabilities—a simple proposition that the LNP deliberately refuses to accept. To reiterate this point, the RTA is already part of the general government sector. Its assets and liabilities are already included in the general government balance sheet. When the RTA moves from holding investments to instead holding cash in a bank account, there is no change to assets or to liabilities or to net debt.

The member for Mermaid Beach suggested there is some benefit to credit rating metrics from the income on investments currently held by the RTA. Again I make the point that the RTA is already part of the general government sector financial statements. Its revenue is already taken into account in credit rating metrics.

The member for Coomera suggested that the RTA could take a long-term view of investments to the point where it would have such strong returns that it could pass some of these onto its clients. The reality has been that over the past five years the investment returns made by the RTA have not been sufficient to meet its own expenses. There has not even been capacity to fund tenant advisory services out of investment returns.

Tenant advisory services funding was ceased by the Newman government from 31 October 2012. Funding was reinstated of course by the Palaszczuk Labor government in the 2015-16 budget at \$6.6 million per year. That funding has been provided from the Consolidated Fund because the RTA cannot generate sufficient returns to enable that funding to support tenancy advisory services, another reason we have to provide financial stability and security. Going forward, the RTA will also be funded from the Consolidated Fund, providing certainty and stability to the RTA, landlords and tenants.

I also take issue with the matters raised by the member for Maroochydore. The member for Maroochydore talked about a 10-year-old debt. It is exactly why we are implementing these reforms: to ensure debt can be recovered at a faster rate. We know that if debts are recovered—

Ms Simpson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroochydore will cease her interjections.

Mr DICK: I note that this is an old debt. What we need to do is ensure that we can recover debt faster. The faster we get the debt in, the faster we can reach out to people who owe money; we know historically—it is proven—that we will recover more debt, and that is important. That is important to debtors, who will not incur additional costs or penalties; but it is more important to the people of Queensland, who deserve to recover that. If the member for Maroochydore complains about a 10-year-old debt, she should speak to the member for Clayfield, who, for three of those 10 years when the debt was new—

Ms Simpson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Maroochydore.

Mr DICK:—when the debt was fresh, when the debt could have been recovered, did nothing.

Mr Power: Failed.

Mr DICK: I take the interjection from the member for Logan. The member for Clayfield failed dismally at a time when the debt was fresh and new and there was the highest possible chance of recovering it. This is typical of the LNP: critical of our government but never looking inwards, never reflecting on their failures and, of course, failing to address the principal matters in this bill that were put before the House.

These are important reforms, these are critical reforms and they are necessary reforms. I am pleased to be part of a government that grasps the nettle when there are significant problems facing entities like the Residential Tenancies Authority. The organisation is having difficulty funding its expenditure. That has been a consistent pattern for many years. That is no criticism of anyone in the Residential Tenancies Authority, but it shows the system is broken and needs to be fixed. That is what Labor governments do. We lean into these sorts of problems and we find a solution.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DICK: I hear the members opposite chuckling. That is what Labor governments do. If we had seen more of that during the last nine years, perhaps Australia would be in a better place. That is what we are doing: ensuring we can strengthen the financial security of the Residential Tenancies Authority, making substantial law reform a significant law reform for those people impacted. I want to put on the record I met a parent, one of the parents who advocated to the member for Greenslopes, earlier in the corridor of the parliament. He was here on behalf of his daughter—

Ms Lauga: He is in the gallery.

Mr DICK:—and I acknowledge Chris, who is here in the gallery. I had the privilege of meeting Chris and it was Chris's advocacy on a street corner with the member for Greenslopes that has now resulted in this reform coming to the Queensland parliament. I want to acknowledge Chris and his advocacy. In our lives we have all been touched by disability in some way or another, but it is not often that loving parents get the opportunity to change the law in Queensland. That is what Chris has been able to do. I say that through you, Mr Speaker. I thank the member for Greenslopes, who took up that advocacy, who took up that argument, because that represents what Labor MPs do: knocking on doors, standing on street corners, not virtue signalling, not doing it to hold up a placard or a sign but to effect real and substantial reform. It is why every member on this side of the House is a member of the Australian Labor Party, because it is the only force for progressive reform in this nation and this state that can deliver for people like Chris and his family. We are very proud and honoured to be able to do that.

I want to focus on that reform again and thank Chris for his advocacy and the advocacy of the member for Greenslopes who regrettably, for a range of circumstances, was not able to contribute to the bill. I want to speak on behalf of the member for Greenslopes. He is a great mate of mine. He is a great advocate for the people of Greenslopes. I recognise his significant contribution in this parliament.

These are important reforms. They are substantive reforms. Members of this House should not be misled by the contributions made by the LNP. We had sterile lessons in history in relation to SPER. This has been a challenge for all governments. However, I am proud that this financial year, thanks to the reforms of our government, we are likely to see a record recovery of SPER debt for the people of Queensland. I am proud of that, and I am proud to work with my colleagues to achieve these reforms, the point of which in relation to SPER debt is to accelerate recovery. The quicker we can recover this money, the more it can be returned to the people of Queensland.

I know the members opposite dismiss quite regularly the reforms we implement as the government. I recall the savings and debt legislation that we passed through the parliament. It would result in \$3 million in savings that we wanted to return to the people of Queensland and the member for Chatsworth said, '\$3 million is nothing. It means nothing to me.' It means a lot to the people of Woodridge. I know the members opposite often make fun of me and the electorates that I have been proud to represent, but I can tell them this: I have never been prouder to represent the people of Woodridge and the money that I can help recover for them, for their schools, for the great Logan Hospital—under pressure for a range of reasons—for our disability support services, our community organisations, all of those organisations that serve the people of Woodridge and Logan.

That is why I am proud to see this bill pass through the House. I am proud of the reforms that we have moved as a government since our re-election in October 2020. We will not be dissuaded from our mission, from our task, by the members opposite or anyone else. I commend the bill to the House.