




Speech By  
**Daniel Purdie**

**MEMBER FOR NINDERRY**

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### **STATE PENALTIES ENFORCEMENT (MODERNISATION) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (3.08 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the State Penalties Enforcement (Modernisation) Amendment Bill 2022. The bill amends the State Penalties Enforcement Act to implement an integrated approach to managing fines for camera detected offences and toll offences with functions centralised in the Queensland Revenue Office, as well as providing a framework for the earlier registration of unpaid infringement notices for enforcement and makes amendments to modernise the operation of the SPE Act and support the effective administration of SPER.

The bill also amends the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995, the TO(RUM) Act, and the Traffic Regulation 1962 on account of the integrated approach to fines management to eliminate unnecessary duplication of services across government, improve operational efficiencies, provide a central point of contact within government for the person served with fines for camera detected offences and tolling offences and enhance the effectiveness of SPER's activities.

Thirdly, the bill amends the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008, the RTRA Act, claiming that that will provide stable funding for the RTA and ensure security of rental bonds on behalf of Queensland tenants. It also makes minor amendments to various tax acts to address anomalies for trustees of a special disability trust and confidentiality provisions.

I thank my colleagues on the Economics and Governance Committee who considered the legislation and the seven submitters that provided feedback on the SPER related amendments, including REIQ, LawRight, the Moreton Bay Regional Council, the Local Government Association of Queensland and Tenants Queensland. It is disappointing that there was not wider consultation, specifically on the amendments to the RTRA Act. Amendments that will substantially change the funding model of the Residential Tenancies Authority have not been widely considered and key stakeholders were not consulted. That alone raises more questions than answers.

This bill is another example of a state Labor government that is more concerned with the way things look than the way they are. The lack of transparency and question marks around the government's motives for some of the amendments are nothing but a blatant attempt to hoodwink Queenslanders and that is why the LNP will not be supporting the legislation.

On the introduction of the bill earlier this year, the Treasurer rightly pointed out that Queensland taxpayers expect that if someone owes them money then it would be paid back and that these amendments will do just that. He said—

It's all about accelerating the collection of funds owed to Queenslanders so they can be used on road upgrades, hospitals and schools as well as critical road safety, healthcare and emergency services our community needs.

The Treasurer is right, of course. However, what is of concern is just how much money Queenslanders are owed and how much the government has simply written off due to its failure to act on collecting that debt.

Under this tired third-term Labor government, the total value of the unpaid SPER debt has skyrocketed. In 2014-15, the SPER debt was \$999 million and by 2019-20 it had smashed through the \$1 billion mark and was sitting at almost \$1.3 billion. So far this financial year we have learned that

more than \$100 million of the SPER debt has been written off, which is five times the average of the previous 10 years. Let us imagine those figures for a moment. How many more frontline health staff could be employed if this government was capable of implementing an effective debt recovery system? How many more teachers, doctors or police officers could be deployed to our regions? How many more hospitals could be built if the money was repaid and simply not written off as a bad debt? What about the remaining \$1.1 billion that is still outstanding? Will these amendments ensure that that money is recovered in a timely manner so that Queenslanders can be assured it is being invested wisely in essential services such as health, education and law and order?

Queenslanders have become all too familiar with this Labor government's poor track record when it comes to managing the economy. These shocking statistics prove that they have no idea. They have no idea when it comes to managing a budget, investing in essential services or listening to Queenslanders. If the figures cannot be fudged, they simply write them off as a bad debt. When Labor run out of money they come after yours but apparently not all the time: it is a fifty-fifty bet when it comes to unpaid fines.

The other concern I have with this bill is the changes it proposes to the way that the RTA is funded. Currently, the RTA is funded by the returns on the investment of rental bond moneys through the QIC. Under the proposed legislation, those returns will be earned by the state and would go into the Consolidated Fund and the RTA would then be funded by a grant from the Consolidated Fund. Both the REIQ and Tenants Queensland made submissions on these changes and both were strongly opposed to them. Tenants Queensland not only rightly criticised the lack of consultation but also asserted the changes would remove the autonomy of the industry regulator and destroy a self-funded model that has stood the test of time. The REIQ went even further in their criticism, indicating that they were deeply concerned with the proposed amendments and that the brief summary did not substantiate any basis for them.

The bill's explanatory notes indicate that community consultation was not considered necessary due to the mechanical nature of the amendments. Firstly, I do not consider substantially overhauling a funding model to be 'mechanical'. The RTA had no opportunity to provide feedback or have input into the committee process, which should immediately set off alarm bells. There was only one briefing and one hearing with Treasury to ask questions about the amendments. That lack of scrutiny is becoming a hallmark of this tired third-term Labor government.

Currently the RTA holds close to \$1 billion of rental bonds for Queensland tenants. The proposed amendments will have the effect of allocating those funds to the government's operating bank account. Does that sound familiar? There has never been any suggestion that the current financial model is anything but stable and reliable. There have been no instances of the RTA failing to pay out a rental bond due to limited cash flow and the RTA's financial reporting data indicates a very strong 2020-21 financial year, with \$60 million in returns generated from their QIC investments. Why fix what is not broken? These funds do not belong to the government; they belong to the tenants. Much like the raid on public servants' super, this smacks of robbing Peter to pay Paul. It smacks of cooking the books which, I might add, has become second nature to this third-term government.

In the committee hearings, Treasury officials were quizzed on whether the proposed amendments would result in any change to the government's revenue, expenses, assets or liabilities. Not surprisingly, it is revenue alone that will most likely be affected. Given the government's abysmal record when it comes to transparency, Queenslanders have every right to be suspicious about the government's motives. This bill does little to restore the public's confidence that the government is working in their best interests. The amendments relating to the State Penalties Enforcement Regulation are too little too late and those that will completely overhaul the funding of the Residential Tenancies Authority are little more than a blatant money grab. The government's complete lack of transparency needs to be exposed. Queenslanders deserve and expect much better and that is why I will not be supporting the bill.