




Speech By  
**Linus Power**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2022

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

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (12.22 pm): To misquote someone, ‘Never have so many vocal chords been damaged for so little purpose.’ To go further, normally one would say ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing’, but this was full of croaks and groans and was unintelligible. One thing I did pick up was that the member for Toowoomba South was intimidated by a letter. I sought a copy of the letter, which is tabled for the benefit of the House.

Let us look at the advice. The advice was that the RTA is already part of the general government sector, which means both assets and liabilities held by the RTA are already reported as part of the general government sector balance sheet. Members must understand that that is a fairly mundane piece of accounting advice. It goes on—

There will be no increase to the value of assets or liabilities shown on the General Government Sector balance sheet ...

It seems that the member for Toowoomba South was embarrassed and intimidated by accounting advice. Presumably he has nightmares where CPAs come and talk to him about accounting advice. The member for Toowoomba South is not ready to be the Treasurer of this state because simple accounting advice in relation to general government ledgers intimidates him and he feels bullied and embarrassed. He is not up to it.

The administration of the State Penalties Enforcement Registry is vitally important. We have seen it continue to grow as individual Queenslanders build up significant debts. It has a major impact on their lives. I am sure people on this side have met people for whom this is the case. I am pleased that this government, and especially this Treasurer, has undertaken these reforms to make a difference, not like the last government when the failed Treasurer put it in the far-too-hard basket and let the SPER debts build up. I note that the member for Toowoomba South wished to go through every other bill except this bill. I was going to pick him up on relevance, but I think we have silenced him for some time due to his yelling. I would like to address some of the points he made. It is clear that we need to look at the history. Since 2020 when we put in place the recovery and compliance program, including the dedicated debt management centre in Ipswich—that I note the members for Jordan and Ipswich know about—it has collected more than \$145 million for the state, getting that debt down for people whom it would hang over. These initiatives have also contributed to over \$325 million worth of debt being finalised in 2020-21. I am advised that SPER debt recovery is projected to reach an all-time high of \$300 million in the 2021-22 financial year. The member for Mermaid Beach is no doubt enthusiastic that that is happening.

The member for Toowoomba South spoke about write-offs. We have had \$37.5 million worth of debts written off. It is important to compare that to the failed member for Clayfield’s regime as treasurer. They wrote off \$102 million in 2012-13. They put it, as I said, in the far-too-hard basket. It is not an easy task, but our government is beginning to have an impact. We heard in our public hearings that there had been some stabilisation in the debt and it had reduced from its peak. As I chaired the hearing, I noted with positivity its stabilisation. However, the deputy chair interjected, the one commended by the

member for Toowoomba South, noting that it was a bit of a step in the right direction. He said, 'I think it is an improvement.' Even members of the committee from the opposition are congratulating the Treasurer, SPER and Treasury officials for these positive steps.

This bill was introduced to the House on 21 March and referred to the Economics and Governance Committee. We noted that the policy objectives of the bill are to implement an integrated approach to managing fines for camera detected offences and tolling offences, with functions centralised in a single agency—the Queensland Revenue Office; provide a framework for the earlier registration of unpaid infringement notices; to make changes to the holding of the assets of the Rental Tenancy Authority; as well as changes to Special Disability Trusts.

The EGC sought a briefing on the bill from Treasury officials and the transcript of that hearing is available on the EGC webpage. We called for submissions from the public and organisations ahead of a public hearing on the bill on 19 April. We heard from Ms Katrina Beavon from the REIQ; Ms Penny Carr and Ms Mary Flowers from Tenants Queensland; Ms Greg Chemello and Ms Sheryl Krome from the Moreton Bay Regional Council; and Mr Stephen Grace and Ms Famin Ahmed from LawRight. After these hearings and after careful examination of the bill we noted these important reforms improve the collection of SPER debt and guarantee rental tenants' bonds by making sure that their bonds are securely held in trust. It is for that purpose that the committee recommended unanimously that the bill be passed.

Labor members value equity. Those who build up debts have them hanging over them. We want them to address and get on top of their debts as soon as possible. For that reason I wish to draw to the attention of the House the information that LawRight provided in relation to specific difficult circumstances. This bill is all about getting people to understand the debt they are beginning to build up and to assist them in making changes to get on top of it so they can do better.

We know that with delay there is the potential for older debts to build up and become harder to recover, leaving a lasting legacy for those who hold them. It is really important that we have a quicker rate of referring them into SPER so that they can be addressed professionally and quickly. We know that there is an equity issue in that the burden of debt for disadvantaged people is so much greater. The committee heard from the Moreton Bay Regional Council, which gave us great insight and information—information that I think would be beneficial for Treasury and the regulation that is to come—about the way debts are referred and the council's efforts to service the residents and ratepayers of the community by ensuring that their debts are dealt with as quickly as possible.

There will be changes relating to SPER officers doing things such as work usually performed by a locksmith, towing or transporting an impounded vehicle and storing or securing property. SPER officers will be able to use body worn cameras. This is an important tool and we have seen it used in other areas of law enforcement. I note that the Minister for Police is here. Body worn cameras have protected both police officers and members of the public. When a law enforcement officer uses a body worn camera, the person who is losing their asset will be protected because, when informed of the fact, they will not behave badly, which can lead to worse consequences. Often the officer is accompanied by a police officer, but that police officer might not have the right angle and that can lead to a dispute over the issues. Body worn cameras are really worthwhile and we balance that against other issues. Importantly, the use of a body worn camera also protects the officer involved so that they have a very clear record of their interactions.

The bill proposes reforms to the Residential Tenancies Authority. Concerningly for renters whose bonds are held in trust by the Residential Tenancies Authority, there were times when there was a deficit in the investments of the Residential Tenancies Authority. In 2017-18—obviously well before COVID—there was a \$7.9 million deficit and in 2019-20 there was a \$43.3 million deficit. The committee heard that a letter of comfort was sought and given by Treasury to the RTA. It is really sensible that we say to renters, who value their bonds, that we hold their assets securely and that we will act as guarantor to ensure they get their bonds back at the end of the rental period. That is a really important process that we value. We are ensuring that there is security over a renter's bond and that it will be returned to them.

I encourage members to look at the submissions the committee received on the Special Disability Trust. This is particularly meaningful for me because of a family I know in Park Ridge. They had attempted to make an arrangement to ensure the long-term security of their son, who has a very profound disability through a motor accident, but they ran into tax problems. This initiative will give more security to families that are dealing with that really difficult situation. They will be able to set up a special disability trust to ensure their disabled children can be financially secure. I commend the bill to the House.