




Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (5.01 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. From the outset, I would like to declare that I am a member of a union—the mighty United Workers Union and the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union. Prior to that I was a 20-year member of the Queensland Police Union of Employees.

From listening to the contributions of members on this bill, I understand that there are parts of this bill which are contentious and which get members fired up. There is passion on both sides when it comes to the rights and choices of workers and that choice being exercised or protected. I too am passionate about the rights of workers in the workplace. I am passionate and I would hope that other members could be just as passionate about a worker's right to experience a workplace free from sexual harassment, sexism and discrimination. Imagine if everyone in this chamber could bring that passion to this topic.

For the information of the member for Currumbin, the part in the bill about sexual harassment is hidden on page 1 of the explanatory notes. The aspect about the consequences is hidden at the top of page 2 in black and white. Perhaps some reading might not have gone astray. It is in clause 4, so it is not even that far into the actual weighty bill.

Members, we stood in this chamber 18 months ago—on 24 March 2021 to be precise—and we all supported a motion that condemned the harassment and assault of women across Australia. We supported all women across Australia and their right to be safe in their homes, their workplaces and their community. It was a motion moved after an outpouring of anger and disillusion by women across the country about the lack of action and respect afforded to women by those in power in Canberra. The irony is not lost on me about where those particular matters sit as of today. It is very hard not to be discouraged.

Members might recall during that motion 18 months ago that many members in this House rose and spoke of their experiences in the workplace—some in their current workplace. In my contribution I said that I could stand here and fill an entire sitting week with my experiences of harassment and sexism in my previous workplaces, not just three minutes. I think we should all be very thankful that I was limited to three minutes.

Anyone who has been following the Independent Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence will understand that the workplace is still not always a welcoming one for women. I had been trying my best to avoid the inquiry, to be honest, but what was uncovered has certainly attracted attention—necessary attention—and outrage; I would posit necessary outrage. It brought back so many memories. While many victims in this workplace were afforded anonymity, it is not a culture or organisation that actually affords anonymity. We all know who those women were, and I can say that reliving these experiences so publicly has not been easy on them.

I applaud the Police Commissioner for fronting up to this inquiry and taking this load because, let us be clear, the culture in that workplace—particularly that which has been reported—has been decades, if not over a century, in the making: decades of boys' clubs and a male-dominated workplace. Yet it is the QPS's first female commissioner on whose shoulders the task to address this must fall. Why is it always falling to women to clean up the toxic messes left by men?

Sexual harassment in the workplace is unacceptable. It is the manifestation of a lack of respect because of another's gender. It is the result of a belief system which believes that someone else is less than, that they are not deserving of respect, that they are an object, that they are something to be ogled, pursued, objectified, touched and handled in an inappropriate manner, that they are not equal.

Sexual harassment has costs to an organisation, a workplace and individuals. You can look at the financial costs, sure—the lost productivity from time lost in mediation, workplace harassment claims and suits, stress leave and managing employees leaving an organisation or being allocated to other parts of an organisation—but it has a larger, often intangible, effect on the workplace as well: the loss of cohesiveness and the loss of teamwork and trust. Can I just say that, when you are in a workplace where you rely on your partner to be there, to back you up and maybe save your life, to know that they believe that you are less than and not worthy of respect is going to have a big influence on how you do your job. It is going to have an influence on your mental health, particularly when your employer is limited, restricted or just downright not interested in preventing ongoing sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

This bill seeks to make amendments to how an employer can deal with sexual and gender-based harassment. The first is the expansion of the definition of 'industrial matter' to include workplace sexual harassment and sex- or gender-based harassment. The provisions ensure that sexual harassment is misconduct for the purpose of summary dismissal. For those repeat offenders, there are no more continual slaps on the wrist. Dismissal is an option—so bad, so sad, bye-bye, and good riddance I say. These are not good workers, and I do not care how good a bloke you thought they were. They are dangerous in the workplace, they are dangerous to productivity and they are dangerous to everyone else in the workplace. I commend this bill to the House.