



Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (2.54 pm): I rise to add to the debate on the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Speaking of health, can I congratulate all of the Queensland Health and allied health services that have kept us safe during COVID, especially those on the Gold Coast, who I think have been under a bit more stress than anyone else in Queensland. I would especially point out our ambulance officers and paramedics, because they have done a fantastic job under the circumstances.

The other members of the committee have pretty well outlined the majority of the things in the bill that I wanted to speak about, so I will limit my contribution to the amendments the committee made. Recommendation No. 1 was that the bill be passed. The opposition supports that, but I do have some reservations I would like to outline. Recommendation No. 2 states—

The committee recommends that the Minister, during the second reading debate, provide detail on how instances of environmental nuisance relating to Ministerial infrastructure designation as exempted by the amendment, would be investigated and regulated.

I noted that the health minister really was not able to articulate very well how that would be dealt with. I appreciate that she did attempt to and that she said the planning minister might add to that. I listened intently to the planning minister and, believe it or not, I am completely satisfied with what he had to say. Is everybody amazed by that? I am completely satisfied with what he had to say. Although he only got to his explanation in the last minute of his speech, I think he did explain the position quite well.

The committee had quite a bit of conversation about the Viewer and we did have some concerns about that. The report states, 'The Viewer is currently only accessible by health practitioners registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law,' but now it is going to be extended to other non-registered health practitioners who will be designated under regulation. It raises a concern with me every time this government extends something under a regulation because the parliament does not have complete oversight of that unless somebody picks it up when the regulation is done. The regulation applies straightaway and it sometimes takes the parliament weeks and months to look at those regulations and possibly move to disallow them.

The committee had two recommendations around the Viewer. One was that the department have a look at the functionality of the Viewer and maybe give some people the opportunity to pick and choose exactly who has access to their particular information. We thought about a few examples which we discussed with the department. As the shadow minister has outlined, this government is not very good with IT programs, so I will not be holding my breath to see whether this functionality comes into place. I doubt whether the government has enough money to spend on IT to fix this problem, but we will see. One of my concerns is that, if this applies to some regulated allied health professionals, they may have access to information that they really should not be concerned about. I understand that this is audited and regulated and there are heavy penalties involved for people who abuse the system, but nevertheless I am a little bit concerned about how that may go.

I am sorry to see the health minister go, because I was going to praise her in a minute as well. Maybe someone can pass it on to her later.

Recommendation No. 4 was that there be a comprehensive engagement campaign to tell people how the Viewer works. The department produced a flyer that they said would be the education program. I hope that is not all it is going to be because, quite frankly, I think people are a little naive about this whole Viewer situation. At the moment, they can only opt out, whereas I would like to see the possibility of them opting in and opting in on various levels of the Viewer. The only thing they can do is ring 13HEALTH and opt out, and that means they opt out of the complete system which is not a good idea in my opinion.

The real contentious recommendation involves the termination of pregnancy. The committee's recommendation stated—

The committee recommends that for the avoidance of any doubt, the Minister make clear in the second reading speech:

- that it will not be compulsory for students to assist with or observe terminations of pregnancy in order to complete their qualifications.
- information on alternative study options for students who express a conscientious objection to assist in a termination of pregnancy
- what measures will exist to ensure students feel supported in exercising a conscientious objection.

Knock me down with a feather, but the Minister for Health fully explained that and I am completely satisfied with her explanation again. I hope that this trend continues on some level.

I now turn to the criticism of the government. It seems to be a growing trend that the government comes in here at the last minute with amendments to its legislation which could have been put to the committee for consideration. The amendment that is in place now revolves around Norfolk Island and what happens with the health situation out there. As we know, Queensland is taking over the health and education area that New South Wales had control over for the last number of years—I think it was seven years. This was negotiated back in June last year. The bill only came to the House in December, and the committee only had the Christmas period to consider it and report on it. I do not see why the government could not have given those amendments as part of the bill so the committee could have considered them.

There is nothing contentious in the amendments, mind you. We only got those amendments just over an hour ago, and I have had a look at them. I do not see anything contentious in there, but I think it is worth raising that the government seems to do this more and more. We are seeing these last-minute amendments put forward and then the opposition and crossbench do not have the time to fully consider them. Those items have not been ventilated in public, and people who are concerned with these bills have not had the chance to make either a written submission or a verbal submission to the committee for consideration and then we cannot offer any amendment to that at the last minute. I think the government is doing this deliberately in some instances to sideline the opposition and to sneak amendments through—not in this case, but in other cases.

I highlight that to the House and say that we need to be particularly careful that this is not an increasing trend we see with the government. Also, we need to be careful that the government does not use regulation as an increasing trend to avoid scrutiny of a full bill in the parliament and the committee system. The committee system has been praised by the government over recent weeks. I differ in my opinion of how the committee system works. It is, after all, controlled and chaired usually by a Labor member and they control the numbers. Every committee in this House is controlled by the government, so the government outcomes are the ones that win every time, regardless of what the opposition and crossbench think. I think we need to be careful of that.