




Speech By
Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (4.04 pm): I want to pick up on a very misleading statement made by the previous speaker. The LNP opened birthing services in Queensland, while under Labor we have seen 37 maternity services closed. We saw Gladstone on bypass. That is an absolute disgrace in this day and age when communities throughout Queensland need vital health services. One of the most vital of health services was closed down and babies were born on the side of roads. That is a failure of this government. They do not have the right priorities when they will not address these fundamental areas of service delivery.

This bill is subject to a government gag motion on speaking times so I hope we get to vote on the clauses. It is a wideranging bill, as my colleague the member for Mudgeeraba outlined. She explained very well the complexities in this bill, which covers various serious matters.

In an extraordinary move, the Labor government is using this bill to erase the definition of 'woman' from the statutes and it is doing that in International Women's Week. That is ironic. Labor talks about inclusivity and diversity but then erases women from legislation. Most people can answer the question, 'What is a woman?' but not the health minister, who wants to erase women from the laws. What will be next? Will we have 'International People's Day' instead of International Women's Day? It is getting ludicrous. This should be about clarity in health care and, yes, understanding for people with gender dysphoria. However, that does not mean wiping out the right of women to have clarity not only in health care but also in the law. Stop erasing women.

Let us celebrate our diversity, including our diversity of thought and belief, but that should not be done at the expense of women. It is time to start respecting the fact that not all women think the same or have the same beliefs and that is okay in a pluralistic society. Labor talks about inclusivity and then with dogmatic intolerance attacks women and men who hold different beliefs, particularly those who hold views about the sanctity of life and conscience that are different from their own. That intolerance means that doctors and nurses who may want to exercise their right to conscientious objection by not acting contrary to their genuinely held beliefs about the sanctity of life will be afraid that they will be demonised in the workforce and not protected by the law, as senior Labor government leaders and, as we have heard, Labor backbenchers are setting the tone of abuse and modelling a culture that says that it is okay to abuse those people and discriminate against them. That is not respectful and it is not inclusive.

Unplanned pregnancies are one of the most difficult issues women can face and laws are seldom the complete answer, whatever people think or say. Compassion and support are vital to addressing the challenges women face, particularly at a time when some may feel that cost-of-living pressures, homelessness or coercion by partners leave them with no choice. That is tragic. There needs to be genuine, compassionate, safe and practical support so that no-one feels coerced and unsupported. That is also true for health workers. They matter, too. Leaders should seek to care for women and men

in all their diversity. They should treat health workers on the front line with respect and understanding rather than verbally abusing them or trying to abuse them for their beliefs or, even worse, erasing them from law.

I want to again address the issue of the 37 maternity services that have been closed by Labor. It is right that babies are considered patients. They are patients. We support the amendments in the bill with regard to the midwife ratios to support women and babies in maternity services. I issue this challenge to the government: do not use this as an excuse to close down yet more maternity services. It has been an absolute disgrace to see in the past few years a record number of services close down. There has been a lack of will and prioritisation of these services to ensure mums do not have to have their babies by the side of the road or worse still move out of their communities because they do not believe they can safely have their baby in their community. In addition to having legislation around ratios, the government needs to ensure there are actually midwives and birthing services in these communities. To have had 37 of these birthing units close is not good enough. It comes down to this government's priorities. We support ensuring these services in communities so mums can have their babies safely and close to home.