




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 19 March 2024

PHARMACY BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (5.06 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill. I was fortunate to be substituted on to the economics committee which was examining this bill to replace a member who was absent and that was a really interesting experience for me. I appreciated that opportunity and I thank the chair, Linus Power, for having me for the day. It was the day of the public hearing.

A government member: Great man.

Mr LISTER: I did hear a minor interjection from the other side, but I do not think I will be taking it.

Mr Purdie interjected.

Mr LISTER: I am a great man, and I am glad you think so.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Through the chair please, members.

Mr LISTER: My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is very important in speaking on behalf of my constituents and about my electorate of Southern Downs that we emphasise the importance of pharmacies being independently owned and operated. We do not want to see the big end of town—large multinationals, large corporations—amassing many pharmacies because that is bad for small communities like the ones that I represent and it also provides, in my opinion, a perverse incentive for a diversion away from what professional pharmacists hold dear, and that is to put the interests of the patient or the customer first and to not allow profit to drive decisions about what health solutions they might prescribe in their own right or in terms of what type of medication they are filling with a script. I am not an opponent of big business as such, but I certainly am where big business exercises a power that distorts the market and makes it difficult for small businesses. As the member for Buderim said earlier, small businesses—family businesses, family enterprises—are the backbone of our economy. They employ the vast majority of people in our economy and I am very proud to say that I put small and family businesses first whenever I am considering business matters as an MP.

This bill, as we have heard, provides two major elements. The first is to spell out clearly who may or may not own or have an interest in owning a pharmacy or pharmacy business and it also establishes for the first time the Queensland Pharmacy Business Ownership Council which is the statutory authority that will be assuming from Queensland Health the role of supervising the adherence to rules around pharmacy ownership and so forth.

The functions of the council will be deciding applications relating to pharmacy business licences; changing, suspending and cancelling pharmacy business licences under the act; the monitoring and enforcement of compliance; advising the minister on premise standards and other matters relating to the act; administering Queensland Pharmacy Business Ownership Council funds; and keeping a register of licensed pharmacy businesses. That that would be undertaken by an independent statutory authority is very fitting.

I would like to, as many members have done before me, pay tribute to the pharmacy businesses in my electorate. There are far too many to mention. They are all small businesses with the exception of one, of course, which is the Warwick Friendly Society. The Warwick Friendly Society is a mutual organisation. There are special provisions in the bill to stipulate how many pharmacies they may own and to clarify that a structure such as a friendly society is able to operate a pharmacy business. Lucy Walker's name has come up quite a few times here.

Ms Leahy: A fantastic pharmacist.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from the member for Warrego. Lucy is famous for having her face on the front of her big pharmacy in Marshall Street, Goondiwindi, but it may be less known that she is on the board of the Pharmacy Guild of Queensland and she is also a member of the Interim Pharmacy Roundtable. That was something I learned about for the first time when I sat temporarily on the committee. As I think the member for Buderim said, it is people like Lucy who run pharmacies, own pharmacies and invest and create the jobs that so many people enjoy in a place like Goondiwindi. At that pharmacy there is 'spencer the dispenser', a giant robot that somehow knows the stock locations for all the medicines and will zoom around, grab a box and put it in a container ready for the pharmacist or the pharmacy assistant to take and dispense. That makes it very efficient.

Ms Leahy: And the drone.

Mr LISTER: I will get to the drone. Thank you, member for Warrego. There is another giant robot there—I cannot remember what he is called—that packs pharmaceuticals into blister packs. This is really important in particular for nursing homes, where there are a lot of medicines going in and out. To have them blister-packed to assist with dispensing makes sure the correct doses are given to the correct people at the correct time. Very importantly, Lucy Walker's pharmacy provides that service for other small pharmacies in the district. That kind of investment and response to the needs of the community has been made possible by the requirement that pharmacies be operated effectively as small businesses. Lucy Walker has done a great job there.

I mentioned the Warwick Friendly Society. Tonight I am having dinner with one of the members of the board of the Warwick Friendly Society, Corrine Butler. She often talks to me about the chair, Chiara Farrell, and the other board members and the work they do providing pharmacy services, a sleep apnoea centre and also the medical centre in Warwick, which means they have a very large footprint. Their history goes right back to 1908, and they are still respected today for providing help to people when they are in need. That has been fantastic.

One of the submitters on the bill who came before us was from the Shopping Centre Council of Australia. I remember quite clearly that they were arguing that they need to have a statutory basis to prevent businesses in shopping centres from doing certain types of trade. I think in this particular case they were talking about having certain clients come who may not be welcomed by other tenants in the shopping centre. We are talking about people accessing methadone and things such as that. The committee, as I did, took a fairly dim view of that. I formed the view that on the one hand the Shopping Centre Council of Australia are a strong advocate for the liberalisation of trading hours, laissez faire and so forth, which hurts the small businesses in my electorate and something that I certainly do not like, but on the other hand they want to make sure that anything they deem unsavoury is palmed off to that small business in the main street which is probably suffering because of the exertions of the Shopping Centre Council. I really enjoyed putting that to the representative. He did not have a lot to say on that matter. I think my point was quite well made.

Overall, this is a good bill that enshrines what we in this House know to be important—that is, the independence and the primacy of professionalism and care focused on the client that pharmacies currently give. I am certainly not in favour of seeing an accumulation of many pharmacies by a corporate entity. Structures that would allow that to happen would make it increasingly difficult for excellent pharmacies like the Warwick Friendly Society and Lucy Walker's Chemmart in Goondiwindi to provide that care which centres on the needs of the individual, on the patient or the client, and is able to eschew extraneous commercial considerations such as which version of this will create more profit. I think we all agree that is a good thing and I definitely support that. I commend the bill to the House.