




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (POWERS AND PENALTIES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (12.15 pm): I, too, rise to make a contribution on the Environmental Protection (Powers and Penalties) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I have listened as a number of speakers from the other side of the House have given a history lesson about the waste levy and the waste problem around Ipswich. I well remember that waste problem because I lived at Deebing Heights and at Augustine Heights in my final years in the Air Force. Occasionally I would note the odours. I certainly noted them when I drove on the Centenary Highway extension to go to work in the morning at the RAAF base.

It needs to be borne in mind that the Labor Party is not without blame in this matter. Let us cast our minds back to 2018. The council that prevailed in Ipswich at that time was populated by Labor Party councillors and the notorious Paul Pisasale, who, after many years of campaigning by the former member for Bundamba, was finally shown to have been corrupt. That council benefited enormously from receiving waste from other places. It was something that the council did to make money. It was not until 2018 that the Labor government moved to bring in the waste levy. I remember the pious pretences of the then treasurer, Jackie Trad, about how this was a mechanism to stop the dumping of interstate waste in Queensland and it was motivated by the highest of motives. It was all about the environment.

In the weeks and months before the announcement of the waste levy, the Ipswich City Council decided, without telling the people of Ipswich, that they were going to dump into the common waste system the recycled materials that were collected in yellow bins. When they finally owned up to that, I think about a month after they started doing it, it attracted the ire of then treasurer Jackie Trad, who said that, as a result, she was going to bring the implementation of the waste levy forward by six or 12 months. Whatever the timeframe, it meant hundreds of millions of dollars came out of the productive economy of Queensland.

One expects to see incompetence from all Labor administrations, and the Ipswich City Council of 2016 to 2020 was no different. The very next day they came out to say that they would rescind their decision not to have recycling. Did the then deputy premier and treasurer come back to rescind her bringing forward of the waste tax? No, she did not! Such is the insatiable addiction that the Labor government has to putting its hands into the pockets of Queenslanders and taking their money. If my colleagues on the other side of the House decide that they do not like to hear a rude noise from the back of the class when they give a history lesson then I am over it, but it does not matter because I have given them the facts.

One particular aspect of the explanatory notes caught my attention. It states that the bill will clarify that the administering authority may require a person to conduct or commission an environmental investigation about an activity or an event causing harm regardless of whether the activity is authorised by an environmental authority. Let us turn our minds to the words 'causing harm'. Who judges that?

The activity might well be allowed. I can understand the good purpose of this particular provision, but I would like to speak up, as I must, about how this kind of power has been used against the good people of Southern Downs.

Quite a few of my constituents have had notices given to them that they are to cease their normal activities on their properties. It might be under different legislation, but it is the same power. For instance, they cannot cultivate it, graze it, clear it or do any of the normal things which they might otherwise lawfully be allowed to do. In one case, which I remember clearly, for a very nice fellow by the name of Linden Charles who lived on Stanthorpe-Inglewood Road, the environment department proclaimed a blue dot on his property which prevented him from doing his normal farming activities on hundreds of acres of his property. It was quite arbitrary and the same requirement prevailed: that he was obliged to get a consultant botanist to prove that this particular threatened species that the department said it discovered existed on his property—it was some sort of native cycad—was not there.

If I recall correctly, it cost this primary producer over \$20,000. At the same time, he was bearing the cost of a lack of productive potential because of the punitive actions of the department. When that report came in, Mr Charles felt quite vindicated because it said that the cycad was there because of the cultivating, grazing and clearing activities on his own lands. The reason it was there was that those activities had assisted in the spread and propagation of this particular endangered species. Do members think the environment department would listen? It took months or perhaps years—I cannot recall the exact details—for that restriction to be lifted. This is the kind of nonsense which I urge the government to put its foot down about, because on that occasion the environment department gave the impression that it forgot where its money comes from—that is, from the private sector. Politicians and people employed by government are effectively paid by the efforts of the private sector.

This member of the private sector was disadvantaged. It seemed that the department doubled down and did not want to know about the science. The Labor government has often talked about how it respects the science but, in this case, the science was not respected. These kinds of provisions need to be exercised with great care. It is an onerous burden for public officials to be able to make orders, require people to incur costs and stop doing what they are doing if they are not entirely certain that that course of action is in the public interest. Looking back on what happened to Mr Charles, it certainly was not in the public interest because in fact they prevented him from doing the very things which had allowed that particular endangered species to survive. These are the sorts of absurd things that I want the government to hear about. I urge the government to ensure any of the powers provided for in this bill are exercised judiciously and carefully in the general public interest—not just to make the wielders of this authority feel better about themselves.