




Speech By  
**Hon. Amanda Stoker**

**MEMBER FOR OODGEROO**

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**ELECTRICAL SAFETY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. AJ STOKER** (Oodgeroo—LNP) (4.23 pm): I rise to speak on this bill for one very simple reason: it is yet another measure from this Crisafulli LNP government directed at addressing the crisis in productivity that has beset this nation and particularly Queensland. I do not support it because productivity is a buzzword or for its own sake but because every expert on what it takes to build economic prosperity will tell you that better productivity is the single most important thing we need to raise living standards for ordinary Queenslanders. It really is that simple. It is about making your pay packet go further. It is about making houses more affordable. It is about getting long-awaited pay increases that cannot sustainably be provided until a workplace can afford to pay them. It is about getting back that feeling, that knowledge, that if I work hard and I am sensible I will be able to finish this life better off financially than when I started. These are not small things. They are at the very heart of the Australian dream.

We in the LNP are determined to get that back for Queenslanders in every corner of this state no matter where they work, what region they live in or how old they are. If they are older, they deserve to have their income, particularly if it is a fixed income, go the distance without feeling like constant inflation is making them poor despite a lifetime of hard work and saving. If they are young, they deserve to know that their government will take action to increase housing supply and make the cost of building fall so they can, in time, access a place to call a home of their own. If, like our household, they are in the in-between—maybe juggling work or kids or even caring for parents—they are feeling and seeing these things and everything in between as they are stretched to pay in every direction.

What the Queensland Productivity Commission has shown us is that militant unions like the CFMEU have become lawless thugs that are costing ordinary Queenslanders so much—many dollars. It was also costing them their safety and freedom at work. It was costing investment for our state and all the jobs and opportunities that come with it. It was costing homes for those who need them. Productivity is the big reason this bill matters, and the Queensland Productivity Commission has done extensive work on the crisis in productivity in the construction sector. In fact, it found that in Queensland's construction industry productivity had fallen by nine per cent since 2018. That means in a period of less than a decade—say, eight years—the very same inputs were producing almost a tenth less than they did eight years earlier. That is the same as saying that every product will cost almost 10 per cent more than it did, and I am sure the households in my electorate are feeling that every day.

It was said by the Productivity Commission, and indeed by Treasury, that if productivity had been improved back in 2018 in a sensible way, by not implementing a number of the measures that were put in place by the previous government, we would have another 77,000 homes for Queenslanders since 2018—I repeat: 77,000. That is more than two whole electorates of additional houses in this state, to put it in perspective. It is a phenomenal output that we are without simply because those opposite were more interested in doing sweetheart deals with their sponsors and mates from the thuggish union movement than they were in doing the right thing by the people who live in their electorates.

The hard truth those opposite do not want to grapple with is fourfold. When productivity collapses, Queenslanders pay four times over: the first time in higher project costs; again in having fewer homes, making them cost more and making rents go up; again in having less infrastructure and poorer infrastructure to use every day; and again in a weaker pipeline of work and all of the jobs that come with that. It is not something on which any government should rest.

It is worth looking at some of the things that have been uncovered by the commission of inquiry into the CFMEU that is designed to get to the heart of some of the tactics that were stalling productivity in this state. The first of them was a sense of regulatory capture. In essence, it is alleged before that commission of inquiry that the CFMEU was being treated beneficially as compared with other stakeholders and that the regulator's resources were being diverted towards the matters and priorities of the union instead of the safety and productivity of the sites it regulated.

That is a very dangerous path to take, because when union muscle is prioritised over worker safety dangerous things happen and people get hurt, and we see that in some of the allegations that are coming out in that commission of inquiry in relation to the way that people were being harassed and bullied, becoming psychologically victimised and in fact physically assaulted as a consequence of that method of operating. Concerns about the independence of regulatory oversight and whether decisions were being made in the best interests of worker safety or, on the other hand, whether they were being dominated by union agendas is a really serious matter that is being explored by the commission of inquiry at present, and it needs to be resolved because these are a drag on productivity. These are a drag on the capacity of ordinary households to get ahead financially.

It is also revealing that there has been pressure placed on inspectors in relation to their enforcement activities so that they focused their attention and their enforcement on specific construction companies at the behest of CFMEU officers, leading to a situation where their mates would not have enforcement but those who do not play their games—those who stand up to them—have the regulator directed to their activities. Not only is that not fair; it is a drag on productivity and it is a drag on safety. All of this means that the union's tactics—its work stoppages, its industrial action—have negatively affected timelines and costs without helping working people, without keeping them safer and with all of the harm that is done to productivity and investment as a consequence.

The CFMEU likes to talk a lot about its advocacy for worker safety, but the reality is that many of its methods have compromised safety practices by creating such an intensely adversarial and harassing environment. There has been evidence that working people have often felt pressured and threatened in the course of their work to comply with the directives of those at the top of the union in a way that put their own safety at risk and inhibited their own ability to go to work productively and achieve their own career objectives. Fundamentally, this bill removes a provision that risked turning a safety regulator into yet another lever for thuggish industrial muscle.

Safety is paramount—safety will always be paramount under this government—but this bill makes right a policy overreach enacted by the former Labor government that would have, upon taking effect, gone so far as to make workplaces less safe, made them more prone to bullying and harassment and made them less productive. The bill also takes measures to ensure there is a good framework in place so that electrical equipment defect notices can be issued and that unsafe equipment directions are able to be dealt with under the act. These things are all very important as part of the bread and butter of doing government well, but fundamentally this bill is vital because it ensures that a safety regulator will serve safety, not Labor's union power games.