




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 24 October 2019

SUMMARY OFFENCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (11.53 am): I rise to address the Summary Offences and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. Lawful protests are an integral part of any free and democratic society. I heard the comments from the Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations, the member for McConnel. It is absolute scaremongering and they are false and inaccurate comments when it comes to the Liberal National Party. They are absolutely false. The Liberal National Party has a very proud record of supporting lawful protests.

In recent times, we have seen the unions protesting out the front. They have been protesting against the Labor government, with debt reaching \$90 billion by 2022-23, seasonally adjusted unemployment at 6.5 per cent and 178,000 Queenslanders thrown on the scrap heap. That is why they are protesting against this government. The unions protest against this government because Labor on that side of the House is always one of debt, tax and unemployment. That is what we are seeing here in Queensland. That is why the Liberal National Party continues—

Ms Grace interjected.

Dr ROWAN: I hear the minister interjecting over there but that is why the—

Ms JONES: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. He is talking about taxes. We are talking about protests.

Dr ROWAN: I am talking about the unions protesting against—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): Order! I have a point of order in front of me here and I am making a ruling. I find that the member is sticking to the subject at this point, but I remind him to stick to the long title of the bill.

Dr ROWAN: That is why I was talking about protests, because the unions have been protesting out the front in relation to this government and this government's failure when it comes to debt, tax and unemployment here in Queensland. It is a significant issue, so the LNP has been watching with interest those protests which have been taking place more frequently and they will continue to take place. It is very relevant to allow them to have their free, democratic right to protest against this government, and I am sure that will continue to occur as we see debt spiralling out of control, the unemployment rate going higher and higher—it is 6.5 per cent seasonally adjusted, as I mentioned earlier—178,000 Queenslanders on the scrap heap, and this government having no plan in relation to that.

Australia's history is littered with famous and infamous protests and protest events which have gone on to define our nation and our nation's character. However, unfortunately, as we have seen in recent times in Queensland, the persistent actions of a small but defined protest group known as Extinction Rebellion have similarly marked a defining moment not only here in Queensland but also across Australia. Whilst lawful protests are an integral right within our democratic society, there are ultimately rules and laws that govern protests and large gatherings to ensure not only the safety of those involved within those protests but also the safety of the general public at large.

The fundamental right to protest must always be matched by equally fundamental mandatory responsibilities. Just because a particular individual or group has a grievance, it does not entitle such persons to fundamentally disrupt social cohesion, to disrupt and jeopardise the response times of our emergency services and to severely and adversely affect our economy. Nor does it entitle such persons to fundamentally disrupt ordinary citizens who wish to go about their daily lives. By their own actions, Extinction Rebellion and other associated persons have shown little regard or respect for the rule of law; therefore, it is incumbent upon the Queensland parliament to act.

The legislation before the House today as introduced by the Palaszczuk Labor government is limited in scope, particularly with respect to some of the actions we have seen in and around Brisbane's central business district. We have every right while we are debating this legislation to question the efficacy of these new laws and whether this legislation that the Palaszczuk Labor government has introduced will lessen the chaos and disruption that has impacted not only Brisbane but other parts of our state as well.

True to form, and as is the modus operandi of the Palaszczuk Labor government, the process that this legislation has undergone has been nothing short of a haphazard mess, marked by an eagerness to appear to be doing something whilst simultaneously abandoning any meaningful consultation. On 19 September, Labor introduced the Summary Offences and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 with the intent to crack down on unlawful protesters who use dangerous attachment devices. The bill was referred to the Queensland parliament's Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee for consideration, with a reporting date of 4 November 2019.

To the absolute surprise of no-one, Extinction Rebellion continued to ignore the rule of law and only increased its disruptive, dangerous and unlawful behaviour. On 9 October, after weeks of inaction and silence by the Palaszczuk state Labor government—a government which continued to sit idly whilst hardworking Queenslanders and emergency services workers were left to deal with the chaos and disruption—Labor's Minister for Police and Minister for Corrective Services wrote to the committee advising of the intent to bring forward the reporting date to 21 October 2019.

As committee report No. 52 of the 56th Parliament makes clear, a number of stakeholders raised significant concerns surrounding not just the truncated time frame for reporting but the supposed consultation that had taken place with respect to the legislation. Section 1.4 of the committee's report is damning of the government's consultation. It states—

The explanatory notes provide that consultation was undertaken with the following external stakeholders:

- Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) and member Unions
- Queensland Council of Civil Liberties
- Queensland Law Society (QLS)
- Queensland Bar Association
- Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF)
- Queensland Resources Council (QRC).

However, no additional information was provided in the explanatory notes regarding the nature of this consultation.

A number of stakeholders raised concerns that they had not been consulted on the Bill as indicated.

It is simply not good enough for the government to include in the explanatory notes that they have consulted with a number of key stakeholders when it is so clearly not the case. Indeed, it is offensive to this parliament and our legislative process. However, with the Queensland parliament finding the Premier in contempt with respect to other matters, how can one be surprised given the integrity and accountability scandals that continue to engulf the failed Palaszczuk Labor government? The Australian Conservation Foundation said—

No written correspondence has been received from the Queensland Government, by ACF regarding the Bill, nor has there been any formal opportunity to offer feedback.

They further submitted—

At the very least we would expect to see a written summary of proposed laws and be given the opportunity to present considered formal feedback. Ad hoc phone conversations are not, in our view, formal consultation and should not be represented as such in Explanatory Notes to the legislation.

After this ultimately damning indictment by the Australian Conservation Foundation of the Labor government's shockingly poor consultation, they said—

We request that reference to ACF be removed from the Explanatory Notes.

The Queensland Resources Council stated during the public hearing that it had not received any written materials in advance of the introduction of the bill. As for the Queensland Law Society, it submitted that its consultation consisted of a series of conversations with senior police officers, one of whom showed some pictures of the devices that have been used.

It is clear that, having sat idly for so long, the rush by the state Labor government to appear to be doing something has resulted in legislation which, while seeking to deal with dangerous attachment devices and enhancing some police powers, ultimately remains limited in both its application and its ability to effectively crack down on extremist protesters such as Extinction Rebellion. Protesters who use these so-called lock-on devices are small in number and form, but these are one of the many disruptive and unlawful activities. When it comes to effectively targeting these extremist protesters, Labor is all talk and no real action. That is why the Liberal National Party, as foreshadowed, will be moving amendments to this bill and seeks to act where the Palaszczuk Labor government will not.

The amendments the LNP opposition will be moving will seek mandatory jail for the new unlawful assembly offence to ensure anyone convicted of multiple breaches of the new offence will face mandatory jail time. Secondly, the Liberal National Party opposition will be seeking to amend the legislation to impose tougher bail law changes to reverse the presumption of bail for offenders charged with unlawful assembly who commit an offence of a similar nature whilst on bail. These amendments are necessary because the Palaszczuk Labor government is simply too weak and too beholden to unions and other extremist groups to meaningfully act in the best interests of the majority of law-abiding citizens.

All Queenslanders and all Australians have a right to free speech, but no-one has the right to break the law. No-one—certainly not Extinction Rebellion—has the right to endanger our society, endanger our citizens or endanger and adversely impact our hardworking emergency services, their personnel and the critical care they provide. I would call on all members of the House, in particular the members of the Palaszczuk Labor government, to support the Liberal National Party's sensible amendments which are to be moved by the shadow minister for police and corrective services, the member for Toowoomba North.