



EXTRACT FROM PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HANSARD

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

24 JUNE 2021

Mr Melhem

Western Metropolitan

Speaking on a Bill

MUTUAL RECOGNITION (VICTORIA) AMENDMENT BILL 2021

Mr Melhem: I also rise to speak on the Mutual Recognition (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2021. As Mr Rich-Phillips stated in his contribution, this is a straightforward bill which is basically to give effect to the decision of the national cabinet to streamline how licensed workers can operate between jurisdictions in Australia and particularly to help in the pandemic recovery process. I think it is very important that we do try to implement whatever changes are required to facilitate the recovery process.

Tradespeople can currently operate throughout the country. If you are a licensed electrician in Victoria, you can operate as an electrician in New South Wales. You might be required to apply for some paperwork to get your paperwork recognised and pay a fee, and you will have a duplicate licence given by the New South Wales government, for example, and vice versa. The same thing goes for plumbers and various other trades and licensed personnel.

Now, there will still be some slight variation between jurisdictions. I think the principle of facilitating licensed people to be able to work across jurisdictions is a welcome thing and something I have been advocating for even in my previous role in the union movement to assist workers moving between states to be able to work, because let us face it, we have become a very mobile workforce, where people fly in, fly out, where people in construction, for example, and a lot of trades move between jobs and between states. So the concept of streamlining that and cutting some of the red tape is actually very welcome. It is a good thing. However, I think it is important that in doing so you do not undermine standards. A high standard might exist in a particular state, where some other states may have lower standards. It is important to maintain standards. Always obviously the aim would be to achieve the highest standards possible for a particular discipline or trade. So it should not be seen as lowering standards, it should be the other way around—about improving standards.

For example, I can recall when years ago we were looking at harmonising health and safety laws in Australia. That took a number of years and an argument about which health and safety laws should be adopted. Luckily I think Victoria was seen as a benchmark back then and the other states were close to agreeing that the Victorian standard would apply, but I think for some reason something went wrong and that did not occur. The point I am making is that, whilst I welcome that, it is important that that is not used to lower any standards, and my understanding is it will not be.

The other thing is there might be some differentiation in requirements between various jurisdictions. You might have a licence, for example, to operate any NSR12, but the same requirements in Victoria for that particular licence may be slightly different. You take the restriction you have in New South Wales on that particular licence to Victoria and if Victoria's equivalent requires you to do additional training, that requirement will remain. The other thing is we will still require workers to meet any vulnerable person character test as applied to local licences, ensuring there is no reduction in protection for vulnerable people under the automatic mutual recognition scheme. That is another area, like working with children, for example, or consumer laws in Victoria may be different from New South Wales or vice versa. That will not be affected. It is important that we maintain that difference.

The other thing is consumer rights are maintained. For example, someone might engage a builder to renovate their home, a plumber to fix a leak or an electrician to install a light, or they may contract a real estate agent to sell their home. Likewise, drivers of taxis, Uber and other services—all these

occupational licences are used to make sure that they have got the correct training and licences. Where there is differentiation I think that should be recognised and maintained.

It is important that we continue the recovery and make sure that we get out of COVID-19. We all know that we could have restrictions, lockdowns or whatever you call them. New South Wales is going through a similar thing to what we went through a few weeks ago. That has a huge impact on the economy, so therefore you need to have that flexibility. You need to be able to have teachers, architects, building practitioners, plumbers, environmental auditors and private security. Anyone with those sorts of licences in the various states will be able to mobilise where the work is required. It is very important that we do that. It is a good bill. It is good to see that the national cabinet is actually doing something good. With those comments, I commend the bill to the house.