



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

BILLS

**Excise Tariff Amendment (Fuel Indexation)
Bill 2015, Customs Tariff Amendment
(Fuel Indexation) Bill 2015, Fuel Indexation
(Road Funding) Special Account Bill 2015,
Fuel Indexation (Road Funding) Bill 2015**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 24 June 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 24 June 2015</p> <p>Page 18</p> <p>Questioner</p> <p>Speaker Lambie, Sen Jacqui</p>	<p>Source Senate</p> <p>Proof Yes</p> <p>Responder</p> <p>Question No.</p>
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Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania) (11:14): I rise to register my strong opposition to the package of four bills including the Excise Tariff Amendment (Fuel Indexation) Bill 2014 and affecting fuel excise. The *Bills Digest* describes this bill, the Excise Tariff Amendment (Fuel Indexation) Bill 2014, and the three associated bills as providing 'for the reintroduction of biannual indexation by the consumer price index of excise and excise equivalent customs duty for all fuels except aviation fuel, crude oil and condensate'. If this bill passes the Senate, Tasmanian motorists will pay more for their fuel. For that simple reason, I cannot support this legislation.

At a time when the average price of fuel in Launceston, Hobart, Devonport, Ulverstone, Burnie et cetera is 10c to 15c a litre dearer than on the Australian mainland, this government and its Tasmanian members want to guarantee that it costs more to fill up the car. This is lunacy. This means there will be less money in the family budget to pay for food, electricity, insurance, rates, rent and school fees. So I cannot support this unfair measure—not at a time when oil companies are making massive profits, when the watchdog, the ACCC, has turned into a watch poodle; and when Tasmanian families, the sick and the unemployed are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. Many people already pay for fuel on credit cards. They are not putting luxury items on credit; they are forced to put essentials on credit cards.

The increased fuel cost will have a serious impact on my Tasmanian communities which are already doing it bloody tough. Recent media reports show that we have some of the highest unemployment rates in Australia. *The Advocate*, my local paper, reported higher jobless rates in Devonport and Burnie recently. Devonport and Burnie have much higher jobless rates than neighbouring municipalities, as many Tasmanians give up the hunt for work. Devonport's March quarter jobless rate of 9.2 per cent was much higher than Tasmania's 6.9 per cent and Latrobe's 5.2 per cent, according to figures from the federal Department of Employment. The Burnie region, where I am, had a 9.7 per cent jobless rate—significantly more than the neighbouring Central Coast at 6.5 per cent and Waratah-Wynyard at 7.1 per cent, and nearly double that of Circular Head at 4.9 per cent. Jobless rates fell in the March quarter state-wide and in all nine Cradle Coast municipalities, but the total number of jobs in Tasmania has been falling since the start of 2015.

Not only is my community battling high unemployment, we have been challenged by a public health system which was driven into the ground by the former state Labor and Greens coalition. It is hard to justify paying more to fill up the family car when you or your loved ones are sick, and when we have a health system in which, as reported by another local paper, *The Examiner*, more than 10 per cent of Tasmanian patients waited more than one year for elective surgery in 2013-14. This is in stark contrast to the national average of 2.4 per cent. The recently released Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Australia's hospitals 2013-14* report revealed that there were 15,000 elective surgery admissions to the state's public hospitals in that period. Of those, 11.5 per cent of patients waited more than 365 days for their procedures. The health minister, Michael Ferguson, on Monday labelled the wait times 'unacceptable'. Imagine being the breadwinner in a Tasmanian family and being sick, and living on credit from week to week—trying to find more money to fill up the car, so you can travel to hospitals in which, *The Examiner* says: 'Doctors and nurses say they are being stretched to the limit in the face of slashed budgets, joining calls for the state government to reinvest heavily in front-line numbers.' Health analyst, Martyn Goddard, says hospital staff numbers have remained static despite a huge increase in workload. Mr Goddard has warned that, without dramatic workforce changes, safety will be placed at high risk and more patients will be turned away untreated. Mr Goddard wants \$223 million in GST revenue injected into the health system. The Tasmanian community is facing greater social challenges, greater government department dysfunction, and dearer fuel than any other Australian community. On top of all those injustices, we should not have to face increased fuel prices caused by the passage of this bill.

In closing, I want to mention the Greens' contribution. Making Tasmanians pay more for their fuel and energy will not stop world climate change. It will just make it tougher for average families to look after their children and to pay their bills. We could stop driving cars, stop using electricity, and go back to living like people in the middle ages—which is the vision that the Greens—and Islamic State—have for the world. And climate change,

according to the Greens' own predictions, would still continue even if we all lived in a cave, burnt candles and ate tofu. We cannot stop climate change. We can only prepare for world climate change. We do that by making sure we have the cheapest and most secure fuel and energy supplies in the world.

I oppose this bill and the related bills. They increase Tasmanian fuel prices at a time when we should be driving down fuel prices.