

Anti-protest law would turn peaceful protesters into criminals: lawyers

By [Tony Moore](#)

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Human rights lawyers on Friday told the Queensland government its rushed proposed changes to street march legislation would turn peaceful protesters into criminals.

After a week of climate protests across Brisbane, lawyers warned the government [its planned legislation](#) could backfire and make relations between police and protesters worse.





Lawyers warn that changes are not needed to Queensland's street march legislation. AAP

A member of the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties warned the state government was rushing through legislation, while a lawyer from the Caxton Legal Centre urged “calm and caution”.

A public hearing was held at Parliament on Friday into [proposed legislation that would give police extra powers](#) if protesters used lock-on devices and booby traps during protests.

More than 500 pages of submissions were uploaded to [Queensland's Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee website](#) on Thursday night.



Lawyers Bridget Burton (Caxton Legal Centre), Alice Drury (Human Rights Law Centre) and Angus Murray (Queensland Civil Liberties Council). TONY MOORE

Alice Drury from the Human Rights Law Centre said the state government was making a mistake.

“This bill criminalises forms of peaceful protest,” Ms Drury said.

She said important progresses in society – the eight-hour work day and Indigenous voting rights – all followed street protests.

“The bill is a knee-jerk reaction and a Band-Aid solution,” she said.

She said the government’s planned amendments to the legislation were unlikely to have an effect on street marches.



A man is led away by police during a protest on the William Jolly Bridge to applause by activists. LUCY STONE

“What it will do is undermine democracy in Queensland.”

Greens MP Michael Berkman said the changes echoed back to street march legislation during the Bjelke-Petersen years.

“Joh will be spinning in his grave at the moment. Queensland Labor has seriously pinched all of his best moves,” Mr Berkman said.

Caxton Legal Centre direct Bridget Burton urged the government to be cautious and calm as it considered the changes to the legislation.

“We run a real risk that in cracking down on protesters – or even appearing to crack down on protesters – we, in fact, fuel the ‘us and them’ culture between the state and the protest movement,” Ms Burton said.

“That is more likely to increase protest action over time and will make it more likely to be clashes between protesters and police.

“We know what that is like in Queensland.

“We are urging calm, caution and proportionality.”

Environmental lawyer Karen Dyhrberg said the existing legislation allowed police to do their job at protests.

“We have laws that protect against violence and harm to individuals and first responders.

“We have laws that keep the peace.

“Good laws are not rushed. We need the government to step up and take action that protects its populations against the real dangers that we are facing; that is longer-term climate change.”

Queensland Council for Civil Liberties vice-president Angus Murray said the QCCL believed the amendments were being rushed through Parliament.

Mr Murray warned there had not been good reasons given for why the amendments to the legislation were required.

“The reason why the current law and the existing framework does not deal with the issues that police are faced with is concerning.”



Tony Moore



Tony Moore is a senior reporter at the Brisbane Times
