TUESDAY, 7 AUGUST 2001

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. R. K. Hollis, Redcliffe) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 a.m.

ASSENT TO BILL

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have to inform the House that I have received from His Excellency the Governor a letter in respect to assent to a certain bill, the contents of which will be incorporated in the records of parliament—

Government House
Queensland

3 August 2001

The Honourable R. K. Hollis, MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Speaker

I hereby acquaint the Legislative Assembly that the following Bill, having been passed by the Legislative Assembly and having been presented for the Royal Assent, was assented to in the name of Her Majesty The Queen on 2 August 2001:

'A Bill for an Act to amend the Gaming Machine Act 1991, and for other purposes'

The Bill is hereby transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, to be numbered and forwarded to the proper Officer for enrolment, in the manner required by law.

Yours sincerely

(sgd) Peter Arnison

Governor

PETITIONS

The Clerk announced the receipt of the following petitions—

Prostitution

Mr Horan from 6,522 petitioners, requesting the House to amend section 64. (1) (c) of the Prostitution Act 1999 to allow local governments with a population of more than 25,000 the same rights as those with less than 25,000 people.

Abortion

Mr Horan from 18,608 petitioners, requesting the House to (a) not decriminalise abortion, not amend sections 224, 225, 226 and 283 of the Queensland Criminal Code and (b) take all steps to facilitate the enforcement of the Queensland Criminal Code on abortion.

PAPERS

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

The following statutory instruments, received during the recess, were tabled by The Clerk—

Public Service Act 1996—

Public Service Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 2001, No. 125

Gaming Machine Act 1991—

Gaming Machine Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2001, No. 126

Government Owned Corporations Act 1993—

Government Owned Corporations (Ports) Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2001, No. 127

Crimes at Sea Act 2001—

Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 128

Forestry Act 1959—

Forestry Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2001, No. 129

Legacy Trust Fund Act 2001—

Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 130

Gas Act 1965—

Gas Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2001, No. 131

Queensland Law Society Act 1952—

Queensland Law Society Amendment Rule (No. 1) 2001, No. 132

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mining Exploration Permits

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.33 a.m.), by leave: The government has been working hard to develop an effective means of eliminating the backlog of exploration permit applications. This backlog has developed as a result of uncertainty in the exploration sector about the effectiveness of procedures under the Commonwealth Native Title Act. Explorers have been expected to undertake lengthy and potentially costly processes of notification and negotiation before receiving their tenure. We have been working to develop a scheme which allows the immediate granting of tenure with explorers then consulting with indigenous communities as they undertake their exploration activity.

I am pleased to advise honourable members that the Queensland Indigenous Working Group—QIWG—has endorsed a statewide framework agreement, negotiated with the government, and will recommend it to the boards of directors for each native title representative body. This is a breakthrough in indigenous issues and native title and in resolving the backlog. If the native title representative bodies also endorse the statewide framework, they and the government will present it to native title claimant groups as a basis to form area agreements or indigenous land use agreements with the government. Consideration of the agreements will occur over the next few months leading to signed agreements being lodged with the Native Title Tribunal for registration. Although registration of the ILUAs will take a further period of at least three months—and that is because it is required under Commonwealth law—there is nothing to stop explorers from starting discussions with indigenous communities once the agreements are signed. A similar agreement is being negotiated with the Kalkadoon people, who do not belong to any representative body.

This framework provides a basis for processing all 1,200 backlog exploration permits within a 12-month framework once agreements are registered. It has also the potential to be used for future permit applications. Importantly, the framework can provide certainty for explorers. It will be a quicker, less costly process with defined time lines and clear mechanisms to resolve disputes. For the first time in the nation there will be one process for all types of exploration activity, bypassing the high and low impact distinction contained in the Native Title Act. The explorer will immediately receive their tenure—in this case an exploration permit—once they sign a deed committing to the conditions under the agreement. Explorers will notify a committee set up by the indigenous community and explain their proposed activity. The committee would have 20 business days to advise the explorer to either go ahead or that they desire to inspect the area of activity first. Inspections must be undertaken quickly and diligently and there are deadlines for lodging the inspection report. There are set fees for services provided by the committee and a limit on the number of people who can be involved in inspections or monitoring of ground disturbance. This will avoid discussions being sidelined or sidetracked by squabbles about money.

Importantly, the issue of compensation is resolved through a modest up-front payment as full and final settlement. By obtaining indigenous consent to their activity, explorers can undertake their activities with confidence that the exploration will not be frustrated by injunctions or other delaying tactics.

The process allows a constructive relationship to be established between the explorer and the native title party that will facilitate any future right to negotiate process for a mining lease if a resource is discovered. This is about getting exploration and mining activity back on track in Queensland for the benefit of indigenous communities, miners and Queenslanders generally. Resolving these issues can be a slow and frustrating process. Honourable members can be confident, however, that Queensland is leading the way in creating effective native title processes that will allow Queensland to get on with business.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

CHOGM

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 a.m.), by leave: Last Thursday I outlined the commonsense controls that will apply in Brisbane during the

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting from 6 October to 9 October. The traffic plan for CHOGM will permit as much undisrupted day-to-day business enterprise as possible while allowing us to safely host a significant gathering of world leaders. I table a copy of the plan for the information of the House.

We must ensure the security and safety of our guests and our residents, while still providing access to the inner city. The key points are these—

the plan will operate from midnight Wednesday, 3 October to midnight Tuesday, 9 October;

the CBD will still be accessible by vehicle but some delays will occur;

sections of Alice, Felix, Elizabeth and Charlotte Streets will become two way;

public transport will be the easiest way to access the CBD;

pedestrians will be unrestricted except for designated CHOGM venues and the eastern side of Victoria Bridge;

some inner-city bus stops and routes will be changed; and

on-street parking will be very limited in the inner city.

There are also a number of travel tips—

if travelling across the city by car, use alternative routes such as the Story Bridge or Hale Street, rather than through the CBD;

some taxi ranks may change, but they will remain in proximity to key hotels;

cyclists will have to dismount to use the western footpath of Victoria Bridge; and

free access to the Commonwealth People's Centre—at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre from 2 October to 8 October—will be easiest from nearby bus or rail stations, or pedestrian access via the western footpath of Victoria Bridge.

And there is this advice for businesses in the CBD—

24-hour loading zones will be identified in streets adjacent to controlled roads;

plan to resupply schedules outside the 4 October to 9 October period to avoid possible delays or inconvenience;

businesses on controlled roads might consider flexible work hours for staff between 4 October and 9 October—and

yesterday cabinet decided to implement a strategy to encourage the Public Service as well to operate on flexitime; and

encourage staff to use public transport where possible.

We will be encouraging all people in Brisbane to use public transport where possible.

My thanks go to all those involved in the preparation of this plan, including the Minister for Police, Tony McGrady; the Minister for Transport, Steve Bredhauer; and that includes the State Government agencies, the Queensland Police Service and, of course, the Brisbane City Council.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Centre for Biomolecular Science and Drug Discovery; Melanoma Research

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.39 a.m.), by leave: The Smart State now has another smart place, the $13 million Centre for Biomolecular Science and Drug Discovery at Griffith University's Gold Coast Campus, which I officially opened last Friday with the Minister for Innovation and Information Economy, Paul Lucas, and the local member for Broadwater, Peta-Kaye Croft. The Queensland government has invested $8 million in this new centre, which is an important part my government's vision of a Smart State.

I had the privilege of joining the centre's founding director, Professor Mark von Itzstein, the world renowned biomolecular scientist who created the anti-influenza drug Relenza, at the official opening. Mark spoke about fulfilling his dream of starting his own world-class research centre—a dream that was fulfilled on Friday. I am delighted that he has been able to return to Queensland to live out his dream. The 30 members of his research team are our modern explorers, taking us to new worlds and new frontiers of discovery and, of course, riches. The centre has the potential to ease suffering and create jobs—up to 2,000 directly and indirectly within the first seven

years—and create a biotechnology hub around which we can build Queensland's prosperous future as the Smart State.

The centre has three main programs. One will focus on the discovery of new carbohydrate-based drugs to treat cancers that spread such as colon cancer, testicular cancer and skin cancer. Another will look at drugs to combat childhood diseases such as croup and other upper respiratory tract infections. The third will look at creating new technology in chemistry and biology to underpin the development of the new generation of drugs.

The centre incorporates four incubator spaces that can be used by start-up companies to focus on the market-end of the drug discovery pipeline. The centre is also linked with Progen, whose anti-cancer drug PI-88 is in its first phase 2 trial with melanoma patients at the Colorado University Health Sciences Centre in Denver. Progen will provide $1.4 million in funding over three years to help discover treatments for diseases including multiple sclerosis and inflammatory bowel disease.

Professor Mark von Itzstein studied chemistry at Griffith University, completing a Bachelor of Science with honours majoring in biochemistry and life sciences in 1980. Four years later he completed a PhD in organic chemistry, also at Griffith, which has added a significant new dimension to that university.

Yesterday, the Minister for Health, Wendy Edmond, and I made another significant announcement. We announced that Queensland's growing reputation as a world leader in cancer research had received another significant boost with the decision by the US National Cancer Institute to fund melanoma research at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research—QIMR.

The grant of $2.5 million over three years for research into the causes of melanoma is further evidence of QIMR's status for undertaking research of global significance. This is about the United States turning to Queensland as part of the worldwide battle to unlock the cause of melanoma. It is another big vote of confidence in the work led by Professor Nicholas Martin, the head of the genetic epidemiology laboratory at QIMR.

The grant from the prestigious US cancer institute will fund a detailed investigation of genetic and environmental risk factors in melanoma. The investigation will involve 2,000 Queensland families with one or more sufferers of melanoma. The grant highlights the contribution that QIMR is making in the international fight against melanoma.

The grant from the US is another example of the Smart State future that is creating jobs and opportunities for Queensland. The money will create an additional 15 knowledge based jobs and the research is also expected to create significant intellectual property. This funding is recognition that a team of hands-on researchers, led by Dr Nick Hayward, is at the forefront of the worldwide battle against skin cancer.

Dr Hayward leads a group that is identifying genes that play a role in the development of melanoma. DNA tests will be conducted on all of the melanoma cases and samples will also be taken from unaffected relatives. Tests will be conducted into whether melanoma in childhood or adolescence can be explained by the same risk factors that apply to adults.

The incidence of melanoma has risen dramatically throughout the world in recent decades. Queensland has the highest incidence in the world, with one in 16 females and one in 13 males diagnosed with the skin disease during their lifetime. Each year, 115 Queenslanders die from the disease, so it is imperative that every effort is made to reduce its terrible impact. The US grant to the QIMR made a recent decision by the Commonwealth government not to fund an internationally significant melanoma screening trial by the Queensland Cancer Fund hard to understand.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Census

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (9.44 a.m.), by leave: Every five years, the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts a national census of population and housing, and tonight is the night for the 2001 census. It provides a snapshot of Australia and Australians, and it is vitally important to the future of our state that all Queenslanders participate in this important event.

Estimates suggest that, should the Queensland population be undercounted by just one per cent, the cost to the Queensland government could be more than $200 million until the next

census is undertaken. We will lose these funds because the Commonwealth government uses population figures from the census to calculate the allocation of funds back to the states from the billions of dollars in taxes it collects each year. So for everyone not counted, Queensland stands to lose critical funding to the other states and could miss out on essential services in the community. Between 1976 and 1986, our population was underestimated by almost 84,000 people. Since 1986 our population estimates have improved and we want to keep it that way.

The census provides the best possible data source for planning and decision making over the next five years. If we do not get full information about the Queensland community on census night, we cannot plan for the types of services that it might need. For example, in health services, census data is used to identify and map community needs for hospitals, breast cancer screening clinics and immunisation centres. Business and industry also rely on census information to help with decision making regarding investment and expansion plans.

As members can see, the data collected tonight has a real and direct impact on the provision of education, health and many other vital services in our community. That is why the Beattie government has helped undertake an extensive campaign to raise awareness of the census and its important role in our society.

In 1986 Queensland had an undercount rate of 2.7 per cent, in 1991 it was two per cent, and during the last census in 1996 it dropped to 1.8 per cent. This year it is hoped that through initiatives such as the awareness campaign we can make sure that everyone is counted and that the census is as accurate as possible. I would encourage all Queenslanders to make sure that they count and to take the time to fill out their census forms tonight.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Building and Construction Industry Training Fund

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Youth and Minister for the Arts) (9.47 a.m.), by leave: A smart state needs a high skills base in its work force. This calls for serious planning by government and industry, rather than just leaving it to the economic cycles of the marketplace and hoping for the best.

One of the great challenges for government and for industries like the building and construction industry in this state is the need to get beyond the boom and bust cycle when it comes to the critical issues of skills shortages. We have got to use strategies that get away from the cycle that sees apprentices being trained in building skills when times are good but none being taken on when times are tough. As a result, the industry finds itself trying to play catch-up when it needs skilled people but discovers that not enough have been trained.

The Queensland government has addressed this crucial issue by putting in place the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund. The fund, which has achieved substantial success since it was established in 1999 by my distinguished predecessor the Honourable Paul Braddy, was introduced by the Beattie government as part of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative.

The Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Act 1991 was amended to enable 25 per cent of all money collected by Q-Leave, the trading name of the portable long service leave authority, to be given back to the industry in the form of the fund. The training fund encourages employers to take on school leavers and entry-level apprentices and trainees. It has provided financial support to employers in the form of incentives ranging from $1,750 to $7,000 over two years to employ trainees and apprentices. By providing incentive payments to employers who take on additional workers in industry areas identified as having insufficient apprentices and trainees, the government aims to increase the skills pool.

Since 1999, more than 1,600 additional apprentices and trainees throughout Queensland have been directly assisted. They are testament to the success of the fund.

Mr Beattie: Hear, hear!

Mr FOLEY: I thank the Premier for his strong support of training in this area.

Following a review of the fund's training plan, I am pleased to be able to announce today that the Beattie government has approved funding of more than $6 million for the 2001-02 financial year. The key groups that have been identified as needing an injection of skilled employees include bricklaying; painting and decorating; plastering; floor finishing; roof, wall and floor tiling; plumbing; sign-writing; and civil construction. This year's training fund plan proposes to

provide incentive payments to the employers of 755 additional apprentices and trainees. This number is slightly up on last year as we expect an increase in activity in building and construction. Significantly, it is not just metropolitan areas that will benefit. Fifty per cent of these incentives are earmarked for regional Queensland.

It is encouraging that more employers are realising that the creation of a skilled work force is a collaborative effort. The training fund will also be used for other purposes such as upskilling and cross-skilling, research and development, and enhancing skills development opportunities for women in the industry, people in regional areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This will ensure that the work force continues to gain new skills as the industry evolves. The fund will also make certain that employees have opportunities for upskilling to tradesperson status and for emerging technologies training. And this will apply in regional areas of Queensland, too.

Initiatives such as the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund will give employers the highly skilled work force they are looking for. It also demonstrates, once again, that by working smarter Queensland is without doubt the Smart State.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Retractable Syringes

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy) (9.51 a.m.), by leave: Last week I attended a meeting of the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy where I again raised the issue of community concerns over needle-stick injuries. The Beattie Labor government has joined other states in endorsing plans to develop a detailed proposal for a limited trial of retractable needles that meet the agreed standards.

The ministerial council agreed to ask the joint working party to forward these criteria to the Standards Association of Australia for consideration as an amendment to its current national standard for syringes. I seek leave to table the criteria agreed by MCDS for the information of the House.

Leave granted.

Mrs EDMOND: The joint working group has been instructed to prepare a report on how and where to implement the trial and circulate the report before January 2002. I have indicated Queensland's keen interest in participating in such a trial. A rigorous, evidence-based trial is needed to assess the impact on rates of publicly discarded needles and high-risk behaviours by injecting drug users leading to increased transmission of blood-borne viruses. As much as some are urging a quick fix to this issue, there are real risks to the health of the community if we get it wrong. Caution is even urged by those involved in the development of these products.

Contrary to some reports, it must be stressed that the one case of occupationally acquired HIV ever recorded in Queensland resulted from an incident over a decade ago and that there have been five cases across Australia in total. Ministers also noted there have been no documented cases of a member of the general public becoming infected with HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C as a result of a needle-stick injury from publicly discarded needles. In Queensland, hepatitis B and C are notifiable diseases under the Health Act.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Meat Processing Industry

Hon. T. A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for State Development) (9.53 a.m.), by leave: As a government, we are committed to helping the food and meat industry continue to develop new technologies and export markets to respond to national and international demands. As testimony to this fact, I am pleased to indicate that the Beattie government has recently approved more than $3 million to six meat processing companies as part of the department's Queensland Meat Processing Development Initiative—QMPDI. The scheme, which is jointly delivered through my Department of State Development's Food and Meat Industries Task Force, in conjunction with the Department of Primary Industries, will help these meat processing companies develop and expand sustainable export activities.

The Beattie government made a previous commitment to assist Queensland's meat processing sector to the tune of $20 million over a three-year period. And that is what we are doing. The previous coalition government commissioned a report that painted a very bleak picture

for the industry. The findings of its Meat Processing Consultative Committee warned the former coalition government that failure to act could see up to 17 abattoirs close and 5,000 jobs lost over the next three years. In contrast, we have said that we would assist meat processors create secure and sustainable jobs, and so far under the QMPDI scheme 3,000 direct jobs have been created in Queensland. When there is this kind of activity, we know that countless indirect jobs are also being created at associated businesses.

We congratulate the latest recipients of the QMPDI grants comprising Murgon based South Burnett Beef, Colmslie based Hans Continental Smallgoods, Kilcoy Pastoral Company, Gold Coast based Tender Plus, Brisbane based Listyard, and Woolworths' Brismeat facility at Ipswich. These firms are some of the 50 companies or projects that have been considered under the QMPDI scheme. South Burnett Beef will use its $1 million grant for a major expansion. Hans Continental Smallgoods will use its $600,000 grant to help it expand nationally. Kilcoy Pastoral Company will use its $160,000 grant to introduce a new beef packing facility. Tender Plus will use its $300,000 grant to build a new export accredited manufacturing site. Listyard will use its $377,000 grant to expand and target specialised export markets. And Woolworth's Brismeat operation at Ipswich will be redeveloped into a major distribution centre with the assistance of its near $1 million grant.

Best of all, more than 500 jobs are expected to be generated as a result of these latest grant approvals. This is great news because many of these jobs will be created in regional Queensland. Through supporting such initiatives, we are continuing to help Queensland companies develop and strengthen export markets, improve technology, expand their operations and, ultimately, create jobs.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Traffic Response Team

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province) (9.57 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to inform members of an important Beattie government initiative aimed at dealing with the problem of hooning in our communities. Most recently we have seen a rise in this problem in areas such as the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Ipswich. The Beattie government has pledged to establish tactical crime squads at the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, and their capacity to carry out special district based operations into these problems will provide a boost to these communities. But the government believes that other measures should also be pursued in an effort to address this issue. With this in mind, I will be taking several proposals to cabinet in the near future with a view to increasing penalties and police enforcement against hooning in our communities.

One proposal, which the Police Commissioner and I have discussed, is increasing the number of officers in the State Traffic Task Force to allow for a trial of a new police Traffic Response Team. The Traffic Response Team would be based in Boondall but would work throughout the state, and its first priority areas would be the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Ipswich.

Another proposal that I have discussed with police—and I have also discussed with my colleague the Minster for Transport—is the prospect of increasing penalties for drivers found to be creating undue noise when operating a vehicle. This could mean the loss of demerit points and, obviously, increased fines. A further measure which has been put forward is to consider legislative options to allow for the suspension of a driver's car registration in instances where they have repeatedly failed to adhere to the law. This option differs from the 'three strikes and you're out' option, which would be expensive and tie up police resources, as police would be responsible for vehicles that are impounded.

Like all members I am conscious of the need to address this growing community problem. However, any response that the government takes must achieve its aim of punishing those drivers who break the law when they participate in illegal motoring activities. We must not rush into new laws without giving careful and full consideration to their prospective consequences. However, I am pleased to report on the direction which the Beattie government and the Queensland Police Service intend taking in respect of this issue.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Motorcycle Riders; Q-Ride

Hon. S. D. BREDHAUER (Cook—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads) (10.00 a.m.), by leave: Later today I will launch an important initiative designed to reduce the road toll for motorbike riders in Queensland. Q-Ride is a new competency-based motorbike licensing program which aims to provide motorbike riders with competency-based training and assessment.

Motorbike riders are vastly overrepresented in crash fatalities. Only one in 100 licence holders in Queensland ride motorbikes, yet one in 10 people who died on our roads in the last six years rode a motorbike. In more than 70 per cent of cases the motorbike rider was considered most at fault by investigating police. With over 77,000 registered motorbikes in Queensland, we need to look at ways of improving safety for riders. Under Q-Ride, motorbike licence applicants will undertake Q-Ride training with a registered service provider. As of today there will be two Q-Ride registered service providers in south-east Queensland, but that number is expected to increase over the next 12 months, giving more Queenslanders access to Q-Ride.

Q-Ride participants will have to demonstrate that they are competent riders and have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to ride safely before they receive a motorbike licence. Existing licensing procedures require riders to hold a learner licence for six months before applying for a restricted class RE motorbike licence. They must then hold the class RE licence for a minimum 12-month period before applying for an unrestricted class R licence. Q-Ride applicants will not be required to hold a learner licence for the current six-month period. Licence candidates who have held a driver licence for a minimum of three years may choose to advance directly from a motorbike learner licence to an unrestricted class R licence.

Q-Ride will ensure that we have safer communities by moving to reduce the economic and social impacts of motorbike crashes. Current testing requirements will also continue for learners who do not have access to Q-Ride trainers or for those who choose not to participate. And licensed applicants will now be able to choose which licensing scheme best suits their needs.

The Q-Ride trial has been developed in consultation with the motorbike industry, ride trainers and motorbike rider community groups. The scheme has their strong support and the result is a training program that will bring benefits to their industry, motorbike riders and the community. I will present certificates of registration to our first two Q-Ride registered service providers, Morgan and Wacker Motorcycle Training Centre and the Motorcycle Riding School. I congratulate both schools on taking on the initiative to undergo the registration process and becoming Queensland's first registered service providers for Q-Ride. I hope that other driver training schools throughout the state follow their example by offering access to the Q-Ride program. It is a commendable initiative, one that will ultimately lead to improved road safety for motorbike riders, who are among the most vulnerable on Queensland roads.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Community Renewal Program

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (10.03 a.m.), by leave: The *Australian Financial Review* magazine for August features an article entitled the 'Real Face of Australian Wealth', which reveals a 20 per cent capital growth in house prices in the suburb of Inala from December 1999 to November 2000. As at the end of June 2001 there has been a total of 530 properties upgraded and new dwellings completed in Inala since the inception of urban renewal four years ago.

The government, through the Department of Housing, has invested $23.2 million in a combination of new constructions and upgrades and has also successfully secured private sector investment in the community worth a further $20 million, and I must thank my colleague the member for Inala for his support of this program.

Through our renewal activities, Labor governments have changed the face of Inala and boosted market confidence in the area. Since coming to office, the Beattie government has continued urban renewal initiatives developed by the Goss government, so far spending more than $53 million across the state. Our renewal programs in Inala have been so successful that it was the Brisbane suburb which recorded the greatest increase in the capital value of housing in the *Australian Financial Review* magazine article. It was not Ascot, Paddington or New Farm; it was Inala.

This amazing turnaround is a direct result of our successful urban and community renewal programs that have reinvigorated communities across Queensland by targeting capital and social investment. This is a direct result of the Department of Housing strategy of creating a diversity of housing styles, sizes and amenity. This is also a result of the Beattie government's commitment of $37.5 million to community renewal projects in its first term and an additional $45 million for the current term.

The Beattie government, by forming private sector partnerships, has harnessed the financial commitment of private developers to accelerate the benefits of renewal initiatives. We have done this by attracting private developers whose financial commitment to property sales and upgrades has helped promote healthy, strong communities. The transformation in Inala is a direct result of the upgrade funds expended on properties, and this has helped raise the median sale price of houses in Inala generally. Community renewal initiatives have included streetscape enhancements, public facility upgrades, cultural development strategies, community development activities, community arts programs and funding for the Inala Festival, as well as funding for community-based resources.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Drought Declarations

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: Rain late last month has provided little, if any, relief from the prolonged dry conditions for primary producers in southern Queensland. I can announce today that a further shire and the remaining area of another shire in southern Queensland have been drought declared. The respective local drought committees have recommended to the Department of Primary Industries that Tara and the northern section of the Taroom shire be drought declared. The southern section of Taroom shire was drought declared late last month as were Bungil, Bendemere and Murilla shires.

There are now 24 shires, one part shire and more than 200 individual properties across another 21 shires drought declared. Under a shire declaration, primary producers have the same access to freight subsidies as an individual droughted property declaration. The freight subsidies available to primary producers are on fodder and water, stock returning from agistment and on stock purchased for restocking.

According to the latest forecast by the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications, there is a reduced chance of getting the median August to October rainfall this year. The majority of districts in Queensland have only a 40 per cent to 50 per cent chance of getting median August to October rainfall. However, the probabilities decrease to only 20 per cent to 30 per cent in the north-east near Charters Towers and Cooktown. Also, the Central Highlands and most coastal districts between Rockhampton and Cape York have only a 30 per cent to 40 per cent chance of at least median August to October rainfall. In the drought-stricken regions of southern Queensland, rainfall probabilities have not improved significantly.

Despite the pleas from drought-affected primary producers, the federal government has so far refused to drought declare any areas of Queensland. The federal government has announced that it will offer initial welfare assistance but that it would have to examine further information before it granted an exceptional circumstances application. Agforce and the Department of Primary Industries can do no more to present the case for exceptional circumstances assistance from the federal government. It is now up to the federal government to ensure that those drought-affected farming families receive the exceptional circumstances assistance that they are entitled to receive.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Leasehold Land

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.08 a.m.), by leave: I recently announced government plans to interpret the Land Act more broadly to allow some rural leaseholders to diversify into additional land use activities to improve their economic viability and sustainability. Rural leasehold land constitutes more than 70 per cent of the land area of Queensland. So naturally the quality of the use and management of the leasehold estate has a major bearing on Queensland's long-term economic prosperity and natural resource sustainability. This week I am writing to leaseholders to inform them about the new

opportunities under this plan and to advise them that draft guidelines will be available for public comment from 20 August.

The new approach will apply to leaseholders of pastoral leases and grazing homestead perpetual leases and allow them to diversify into complementary land use activities that can be conducted under existing legislation without impacting on native title. Activities may include some forms of aquaculture, timber plantations, small-scale feedlots, low-key tourism such as homestay enterprises, nature conservation, documentary and film-making, and crops traditionally not associated with these types of properties. However, the scale of diversification will be an important consideration. It will not be possible to approve new land uses which become the dominant enterprise on the property.

I am pleased to report that the government's plan has been hailed by land-holders, rural industry groups and local authorities alike as a very progressive and practical way to address the problem of declining rural economic viability. Even the National Party's recent defector, the federal member for Kennedy, Bob Katter, recognised the importance of this government initiative when he said recently in the media, 'You would have to go back to the days of the Bjelke-Petersen government to find a result as good as this for land-holders.'

My Department of Natural Resources and Mines has begun consulting with other relevant state government departments, rural industry bodies and conservation and indigenous interest groups to develop final guidelines to determine the appropriate scales of each use. I have decided on this new approach to land diversification because I am acutely aware of the economic difficulties being faced by rural land-holders. In a general climate of declining rural profitability, farmers have genuine concerns about the long-term viability of their farms and their ability to respond to changing local and international markets. This will allow Queensland land-holders to spread their economic risk into complementary activities, thus making them less reliant on traditional commodities and less vulnerable to commodity price crashes.

ELECTORAL (TRAVELLERS' ADVANCE VOTES) AMENDMENT BILL

Deferral of Debate

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.11 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That the resumption of the second reading debate on General Business Order of the Day No. 1—Electoral (Travellers' Advance Votes) Amendment Bill be deferred until such time as the member for Nicklin recovers from his injuries and returns to the parliament.

Motion agreed to.

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

Report

Mr LIVINGSTONE (Ipswich West—ALP) (10.11 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House Public Works Committee Report No. 73—*Rockhampton TAFE College—Construction of an Engineering Technology Centre and Minor Refurbishment Works*. The committee is satisfied that the project is needed, is suitable for the purpose and represents value for money for Queensland. The engineering technology centre represents a huge improvement in the quality of the facilities available at the college. Rockhampton TAFE plays a major role in providing vocational education and training services in central Queensland. It is the key centre for diesel fitting and metal fabrication. The centre will allow the college to meet demand for broad-based delivery of greater user choice. It will support the training needs of business in central Queensland.

I thank all those who have assisted the committee with its inquiries. I acknowledge the work of the members of the previous Public Works Committee who initiated this inquiry. Thanks also go to my fellow committee members and committee staff. I commend the report to the House.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Beattie Labor Government

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.13 a.m.): The hallmark of the Beattie Labor government continues to be the arrogance, the incompetence and the non-delivery of services. We have seen over and over again just how this government cannot deliver

one major project for this state. The priorities of good government should be the delivering of day-to-day services that are important to people, not the priority of a Community Engagement Division within the Premier's Department that is a de facto name for the Premier's own PR machine. It is more important to see that normal services that are required are delivered.

In the last financial year this government saw an $820 million operating deficit in the budget, as well as a $280 million non-spend in the Capital Works Program. We have also seen the capital works budget for this year cut on a budget-to-budget basis. One of the most important ways of providing employment in this state is through a good Capital Works Program and an increasing Capital Works Program, not a cutback and a non-spend in the previous financial year.

The people of Queensland expect delivery of good services. What about the issue of seatbelts on school buses? That issue has been thrown away again to another review committee. The unemployment figures in this state are an absolute disgrace, because month after month the great state of Queensland comes last in Australia in the unemployment figures. One would think that with our sunshine, our tourism opportunities, our agriculture and mining and all the opportunities of this great state we would be above average. If anything emphasises the below average, substandard and below par performance of this government, it is the very fact that month after month we come last in the unemployment figures in this country. It is time the government got its priorities right and started to deliver services instead of concentrating on a government that is all about publicity and self-promotion.

Time expired.

Palmer Street Jazz Festival

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (10.15 a.m.): I believe that Queensland is well above average. Townsville's cultural identity continues to make its presence felt not only at a state level but also increasingly at a national and international level, attracting internationally renowned artists whose accomplishments and experience make Townsville the place to visit and stay. Townsville's climate and tourist attractions make it very attractive to national and international visitors who are able to bask in culturally diverse activities which continue throughout the calendar year. Nowhere is this more evident than the Palmer Street Jazz Festival, which has been held the last week in July for the last five years. Since its inception, the festival has been organised by the jazz presenters of community radio station 4TTT FM, together with local jazz musicians. It is worth noting that the festival is registered as a not-for-profit subentity and is run entirely by unpaid volunteers. I must make mention of Mr Neil Sellars and his partner Linda whose enthusiasm, commitment and hard work continue to make this fabulous event possible.

The festival venues are the pubs and restaurants on Palmer Street, together with an outdoor stage. In addition to the gigs, there are other special events. The festival encourages youth performance and participation via a junior youth jazz program on the outdoor stage on Friday night. It also seeks to broaden its musical focus when opportunities arise. For example, at the inaugural festival in 1997, a two-night session of the musical play on the life of Billie Holiday, *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*, was staged. The festival's policy is to offer a range of jazz styles, providing a showcase for the best of north Queensland local talent together with music of an international standard. The 2000 festival featured the legendary seven-piece Australian AllStars led by Don Burrows and the brilliant trio Cadenza from Kathmandu. The 2001 festival included the New York-based quartet VNMG, four outstanding young musicians with impressive musical and academic credentials. Congratulations and may this festival continue to grow and expand with our community's support.

Bush Connections

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—Ind) (10.17 a.m.): Today I bring to the attention of the House the job that the Bush Connections service does to assist rural people in need. Bush Connections is based in Toowoomba and does a mighty job. It has recently received funding through DRAP to employ another three councillors. Mary Louise North leads the society and its solicitor is Mr Lee Nevison. When the banks move on a farmer or small business, Bush Connections provides free help. I have sent many of my constituents to this organisation and can only say that the work it does is tremendous.

At this moment there are a number of farmers on suicide watch. Bush Connections provides carers to stay with these people, sometimes 24 hours a day. However, recently the workload on

this society has led to a lack of funding and its leased premises is under threat. Last week I met with the minister's senior advisers and explained the situation to them. I ask this government to seriously look at this situation. Bush Connections is doing too good a job to have this sort of problem hanging over its head.

I will personally be doing my bit to help Bush Connections in Toowoomba. I will be holding a fundraising horse ride through my electorate of the Darling Downs. Mr Steve Cook and Glen Jackson will be accompanying me on the ride. I will be asking every member of this House for $100 each towards the fundraiser, that is, $8,900. I think it would be a wonderful gesture of our government to hand me a cheque matching the funds raised dollar for dollar at the finish of the ride. This can only help to secure Bush Connections so that it can continue doing the mighty job it is doing. This gesture will also show the people of the bush who supported the Labor government that this is the caring government that it so often portrays itself to be.

Centres of Excellence

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (10.18 a.m.): Last month I had great pleasure in announcing on behalf of Education Minister, Anna Bligh, the location of the eight centres of excellence in maths, science and technology in Queensland, fulfilling another election commitment of the Beattie Labor government. Schools in far-north Queensland will benefit from the decision to twin Smithfield and Tully State High Schools to create a unique centre of excellence that will link urban and rural capability and strengths. This collaborative centre of excellence is part of the Beattie government's vision to make Queensland the Smart State and is about equipping young people for the workplaces of the future. In partnership with industry, the community and local schools, the centre will enhance student achievement in the key areas of maths, science and technology and prepare local students for the changing world.

Smithfield and Tully State High Schools were selected because of their well-established community and industry links and the quality of their student programs and professional development capability. The schools bring complementary strengths in science, with Smithfield focusing on engineering, physics and chemistry, while Tully has excellent programs in biology and agricultural and environmental science. Smithfield, with some of the best IT facilities in Queensland, will play a major role in providing information and communication technology support to Tully and other schools in the region. I am proud to continue my support for this leading edge high school in my electorate.

Both schools have the potential to extend and share their programs of excellence through innovative online delivery of student programs and professional development and training for staff using the technology at Smithfield high school.

Other features of the centre for excellence include opportunities for strengthening the link with the Cairns campus of the James Cook University; intensive remedial intervention and assistance to students struggling with technology, maths and science; and residential workshops for primary school children to nurture talent in these important areas.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the principals and staff of both schools for their well-deserved success in being selected for this exciting new initiative in Queensland education to which the government has committed $10 million over three years. The schools have embarked on a joint planning exercise. Staff attended a two-day seminar in Brisbane last week to progress the work of all eight centres of excellence. The Beattie government is committed to providing high-quality state education. These centres are part of our plan to continue to strengthen and revitalise state education across Queensland.

Time expired.

Condamine-Balonne WAMP

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (10.20 a.m.): Last week in the House the Minister for Natural Resources stated that there were no adverse findings by the Land Court in respect of the science behind the Condamine-Balonne water allocation management plan. The reason the court made no rulings with respect to the integrity of the science is that the department stopped the court proceedings halfway through the evidence relating to the science. The minister was advised that he was in for a mother of a hiding and that the witnesses who were to follow had nowhere to hide.

People power took on the minister and it prevailed. The departmental witnesses who did get into the court agreed in evidence that the science used in the report they relied upon for the

WAMP was flawed. The government held back important scientific data from the technical advisory group and the Land Court. The government has been using selective science to achieve its political aims on a number of environmental issues for too long. The communities of St George and Dirranbandi, at great expense, combined to fund a scientific challenge to this Labor juggernaut. Other WAMPs throughout Queensland may also be flawed through political interference, and people's civil and property rights may have been ignored.

I also inform the House that this case would not have got to court under Labor's new Water Act 2000, which has taken away the genuine right of appeal—a right even a murderer has but a Queensland farmer does not have under Labor. The minister is implying that the irrigators concerned obtained some unfair advantage. All they won was the right to use the licence that was issued to them by government. They will abide by the conditions of the licences and in fact are offering the government a 13 per cent reduction in their entitlement under a 10 percentile option, a position local irrigators have negotiated as part of the WAMP.

Honourable members should not forget that any water taken from Queensland irrigators will only end up in New South Wales and Victorian irrigators' pumps and not the environment, as members think. I urge the Australian media to examine the outcome of this Land Court case that lays bare the propaganda and deceit of the public by this government in order to win a few green preferences.

Time expired.

Queen's Birthday Honours List

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (10.22 a.m.): On 14 February 1975 Australia established its own honours system, the Order of Australia, for the purpose of according recognition to Australian citizens and other persons for achievement or for meritorious service. Honours and awards are meant to mark out people who are special. The Queen's Birthday Honours List does just that. It recognises and says thankyou to those tireless workers in the Australian community—those Australians who are dedicated to achieving their best and serving their fellow Australians, those Australians who are united by commitment to Australia and to all humanity.

Today I congratulate Mr Nick Xynias, the chairman of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, who became an officer of the Order of Australia on 11 June this year. Nick was recognised for his leadership in multicultural affairs, migrant welfare, reconciliation and aged care. Nick exemplifies the meaning behind the Queen's Birthday Honours List—dedication and commitment. Nick has also been recognised by being made a member of the Order of Australia in 1995 and by being awarded a British Empire Medal in 1982.

Born in Egypt to Greek parents, Nick migrated to Australia in 1956. In 1976 Nick co-founded the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland. The council's mission is to work at enriching the Queensland community by encouraging, coordinating and advocating for the participation of culturally and linguistically diverse people in all aspects of our community. For over 30 years Nick has been working with the community and has been involved in the Ethnic Affairs Advisory Council, the Commonwealth's Migrant Consulting Council, the International Year of Older Persons state steering committee and the Queensland Aboriginal Reconciliation Council.

Congratulations must also go to the other recipients recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. They are shining examples for all Australians, and the commitment and dedication shown by them makes Queensland and indeed Australia a force to be reckoned with.

Literacy

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (10.25 a.m.): Many people in our community recognise the difficulties faced by young people if they are lacking in literacy skills. Chris Tanner took this concern one step further in my electorate when at the beginning of this year he commenced the MULTILIT program—that is, Making Up Lost Time in Literacy. MULTILIT delivers an intensive skills-based program for late primary and early secondary school students with average reading ages of seven years and six months and who have been identified by their schools as being low-progress readers—unable to access secondary schooling and at strong risk of being disaffected from school. The centre operates from 9 o'clock to 1 o'clock each school day at the Mission to Seafarers in the Gladstone marina. Many groups of educators are involved. The TAFE bus returns the students to their schools of an afternoon.

The first intake, which started at the beginning of this year, comprised 14 students, and they graduated at the end of July. The district school principals agreed to support the program for two years and fund one teacher at a cost of $60,000. Education Queensland also furnished classrooms. Chris Tanner Pty Ltd funded the Macquarie University fees, but extra funding is needed to maintain this program into the future. Three teachers completed three weeks of training at Macquarie University's special ed centre in Sydney at the end of last year.

The first intake of students graduated in July. There were 14 low-progress readers from years 7 and 8, on average aged 12 years, and nearly four years behind. All students were assessed on a battery of literacy measures on entry and reassessed towards the end of the program. These 14 students made an average gain of 20 months in reading accuracy, 24 months in reading comprehension and 12 months in spelling. On average they could read 47 per cent more words correctly per minute, and all but one of the students were now able to access texts with a reading age level of 10 or 11 years.

Time expired.

Bridge Street Quarry International Gardens

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (10.27 a.m.): It is with pleasure that I inform the House of a proposed project being considered in Toowoomba by the Toowoomba City Council in the hope of gaining government support in the future. The project is the Bridge Street Quarry International Gardens project, which is to be situated at the eastern end of Bridge Street on the Toowoomba Range. During the recent community cabinet meeting I had the pleasure of taking the Premier to that quarry site in the pre-dawn hours to show him what the mayor and councillors have in mind for that area of Toowoomba. I am pleased to inform the House that the Premier was suitably impressed.

I will give the House some facts associated with this project. Opportunities on the site include the dramatic land form, views over the Lockyer Valley, the history of the quarry development, geological features and the potential to grow a wide range of plant communities.

Research of the botanical garden industry in Australia shows a very positive outlook, with a predicted growth rate of 3.5 per cent per annum. In Australia, visitors to botanical gardens comprise 15 per cent international tourists. In 1999 approximately 5.4 million people visited a botanical garden. With respect to the Darling Downs, 1.5 million people were overnight domestic visitors. It can be gathered from those statistics that there is a market for such a project. Obviously for the type of project in mind, which will eventually rival the Butchart Gardens in Vancouver in Canada, a large amount of government funding is necessary. Botanical gardens are dependent on government funding for their operation—

Time expired.

Year of the Outback

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.29 a.m.): I wish to bring to the attention of the House that in just under five months we will mark the Year of the Outback, 2002. This is a very important time on the calendar of not only people who live in the outback regions but also all Australians.

As I look around the House here today, I am thinking that there are probably not too many people—if there are any—in this House who have not had some affiliation with the outback, whether they have worked there, lived there, visited there, have a relative there, or whatever. I urge every member of the House to participate in a full capacity in the Year of the Outback, 2002. This will be an opportunity for us, as Queenslanders and Australians, to identify with many of our roots and the great worth of the people of the outback and their efforts over a long period.

A fitting tribute is that Bruce Campbell, the chairman of the Outback 2002 committee, has done a magnificent job in putting together a program right around the nation, very ably assisted by his CEO, Ruth Wilson. I know that Henry Palaszczuk, the Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities, is one of the ambassadors for the Year of the Outback, along with my colleague the Leader of the Opposition. There may be others who will come on board, too.

Mr Palaszczuk: Are you one, too?

Mr JOHNSON: Yes, I am. That is the badge I am wearing today. I hope that many people will come on board and be a party to the celebrations.

Yesterday I had occasion to travel from Longreach to Brisbane. I sat beside a young man, James Fitzpatrick, who is four years into his medical degree in Perth. He has sacrificed this year to tour around Australia and promote to young people the worth of the Year of the Outback and what young people can derive from it. I urge every member of this parliament to be a participant in the Year of the Outback, 2002. On behalf of my colleagues who are members of outback communities, I invite all members to the outback for that great celebration.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The time for private members' statements has expired.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Families Department, Resourcing

Mr HORAN (10.30 a.m.): I refer the Minister for Families to the crisis in the Families Department and the recommendations of the Forde inquiry of 1998. That inquiry found that, in order to simply catch up with other Australian states in the provision of child protection services, Queensland needed to spend an extra $103 million a year, CPI indexed, on top of existing Families Department budget outlays. Can the minister confirm that her spending in 2001-02 is $73 million short of that figure? And why has she failed to deliver on that critical recommendation?

Ms SPENCE: I am very pleased to inform the House that the Beattie government has delivered a greater increase in the budget for child protection than has any other Queensland government. In fact, this year the Department of Families received a 12.2 per cent increase in its budget, which represented one of the greatest increases of any budget across the government. And the extra $36 million we have put into child protection this year—which represents that 12.2 per cent—is an attempt by this government to catch up on the underspending of past governments.

It is no secret that Queensland has been underspending in the area of child protection for some time, and the member should be very aware of that. In fact, the member has so little understanding of the history of child protection in this state that he recently put out a press release about Queensland's honourable record in the area of child protection. Anyone who has read the Forde inquiry report would clearly understand that we have a far from honourable record in our treatment of children in this state, particularly under successive National Party governments.

The Beattie government can be proud of the fact that we are attempting to make up the shortfalls in child protection funding, and we will continue to do that in our successive budgets. Three years ago we added $10 million to child protection spending; two years ago, $20 million; this year it is $36 million. Do I think this is enough? No, I do not. That is why we are committed, in future budgets, to continue increasing the amounts that we spend on child protection. And yes, we are still one of the lowest-spending states in relation to child protection. We make no secret of that. But that is why we are committed to continuing to face up to this problem. We know that the problem will not be solved overnight, but we are going to deal with this problem through the budget.

Families Department, Resourcing

Mr HORAN: I refer the Minister for Families to the continuing industrial action within her department regarding staffing levels. In May last year, Department of Families area office staff walked off the job in protest at the government's continued failure to properly fund front-line service delivery. In April this year, a survey of Department of Families officers showed 91 per cent support for increased industrial action to fight the funding crisis. This was followed on 3 May when the union lodged a bargaining period, the aim of which is to negotiate a certified agreement about reasonable workloads. And the day after tomorrow, staff of Basil Stafford will be meeting to discuss, among other issues, their lack of confidence in management and cutbacks to services. Does the minister still deny that there is a crisis in her department? And what will she do to address these serious funding and staffing matters?

Ms SPENCE: I am pleased to inform the House that, two weeks ago, the Industrial Relations Commission recommended that the QPSU cease all industrial action. That recommendation has been accepted by all QPSU members. I can assure the member that we will continue to work closely with the union to deliver a reformed and effective child protection system to Queensland.

With reference to the Basil Stafford meeting—that is a normal meeting that would occur on a work site with the union and union members to discuss working conditions in that particular

environment. But the main thing is that the child protection workers who were undertaking industrial action around the state have ceased all their work bans and they are at work. We are continuing to work with the union over the issues of concern to them.

I acknowledge that our child protection workers carry a heavy workload. They tell me that they are carrying a heavier workload than members in other states, and I am prepared to acknowledge that that is the case. That is why this government is throwing an extra $36 million into child protection—to try to reduce the kind of workloads that our child protection officers are carrying. It is certainly a problem that was caused by members opposite when they were in government. But that is not something that we are going to walk away from.

I believe that the department has been involved in very productive discussions with our members about how we can reduce their workloads. It is not necessarily just a matter of putting on new child protection workers. We have put on an additional 154 front-line child protection workers in the last two years. In this year's budget we have budgeted for an additional 50 child protection workers, and we will put them on this year, plus the ancillary support staff. So by the end of three years we will have put on over 200 additional child protection workers. But we know that that is not the only solution—putting on more bodies in our regional offices. We also have to look at the way we carry on our business and whether their IT systems are efficient enough. I have concerns about that. We believe that we can improve the IT systems of our child protection workers.

One of the things that the child protection workers tell me is that the new child protection legislation that we passed last year has added to their workload. I acknowledge that that is the case. All our workers believe that it is good legislation—which we all supported—but it has significantly added to their workload. That is why we are putting on more child protection workers all the time.

These things are not going to be remedied overnight. They will take a conscientious desire on the part of the government and the department to work with our child protection workers to improve the system for future Queenslanders.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I welcome to the public gallery students and staff of the Ashwell State School in the electorate of Ipswich West.

Prisoner Art Exhibition

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: I refer the Premier to the exhibition of prisoner art which is being staged in Parliament House, and I ask: how has this exhibition come about, and what are the benefits for prisoners who participate in the arts program?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for the question, because this is about rehabilitation in our prison system, it is about preventing crime and it is about ensuring that there are many fewer victims of crime. Tonight I will open the exhibition, which is being staged here at Parliament House and organised by the Minister for Corrective Services, Tony McGrady. The exhibition will include more than 130 paintings by prisoners—

Mr McGrady: There are now 150.

Mr BEATTIE: They are mainly indigenous prisoners from 13 of Queensland's correctional facilities. One hundred and fifty? The minister has increased the numbers. Well done! Sixty prisoners have submitted works for this exhibition, which consists primarily of traditional and contemporary indigenous art.

Art programs in prisons are proving effective in boosting the self-esteem and skills of prisoners. They have also revealed some great talent. That is what it is about: developing self-esteem so that prisoners will go on the straight and narrow and not go back to committing crime. The production of this artwork not only allows prisoners to undertake a productive activity during their incarceration but also develops in them a sense of self-pride, which is a valuable step towards rehabilitation.

The Minister for Corrective Services, Tony McGrady, conceived the concept for the exhibition after receiving some indigenous prisoner artwork to adorn the walls of his ministerial office. He was impressed by the high quality of the work and immediately knew that an opportunity needed to be created to showcase this art. Some of these offenders took up art only when they were sent to prison, but they have discovered that they have a great talent and potentially an employment-generating skill.

Art programs form part of what the Queensland government is trying to encourage, namely, the rehabilitation of prisoners, not merely locking them away to serve out their time. If we did that, when they come out they tend to reoffend. In addition to paintings, restored antique furniture, pottery and leatherwork will be on display. The families and friends of prisoners will be able to visit the exhibition to see the prisoners' artwork first-hand and I encourage members of the public as well as all members of this House to look at this art show, which is an art show with a difference.

The artwork will be for sale. The prices range from $40, which is about my level, to $10,000 for the most expensive piece—I will leave that one to the minister—with the prices determined by the artists themselves. The exhibition runs until Saturday. Entry is free. I table a list of the exhibition times for the benefit of members.

I should say that three of Australia's most famous Aboriginal artists, Jimmy Pike, the late Kevin Gilbert and Gordon Syron, all first picked up a paintbrush when they were in prison. Those three forged highly successful careers as artists and I am hopeful that tonight we will see the beginning of a new career for some other Queensland artists.

From the sale of the artworks at this exhibition, 80 per cent of the sale price will go into a trust fund for the artist while 20 per cent will be retained by the Department of Corrective Services, which will spend that money on art supplies. I was talking to the Minister for the Arts about this issue. He says that he believes that one of the areas we should look at is artwork for victims of crime as well. That is something that he is working on. I think that if we put those both together, that blends: rehabilitation and the level of self-esteem.

Families Department, Resourcing

Mr JOHNSON: My question is to the Honourable the Minister for Families. I refer to the disastrous situation of continuing industrial action and staff discontent within the Department of Families and to the staffing turnover that has crippled the remote team of the Families Department's cape and north-west region. I ask the minister: given that the remote team deals with child protection and juvenile justice matters in the Cape York region, what action is being undertaken by her department to ensure that there is continuity in the management of the remote team, that there are experienced team leaders and that there are adequate staffing numbers? What support is being provided to Families Department officers by senior management?

Ms SPENCE: I do not think that the honourable member has understood my answer to the last question. There is no more industrial action in the Department of Families. Two weeks ago the members took notice of the Industrial Commission and ceased all of their industrial action. They ceased their work bans. I want to make that very clear. I am grateful to the child protection workers for that decision.

With respect to recruiting new child protection workers, it is very easy to say that we have the budget to recruit new workers, but actually finding qualified people is the real challenge for our department. We are looking for people with social work or psychology degrees. I make no secret of the fact that it is a real challenge to recruit people to these jobs—and they are not easy jobs by any stretch of the imagination—in certain parts of the state.

At the moment we are having problems trying to recruit child protection workers in the office in Emerald. For some time we have been trying to get people to work in that office. It is even harder to recruit them and get them to work in the far north. We are sending our child protection workers onto Aboriginal communities in the cape. They usually go there two at a time. They have to travel long distances, and what do they do? They go in there and, in many cases, they take the children off families for very many reasons. I ask members to imagine what we are asking people to do. It is very hard to recruit people to undertake that role.

There are many jobs available for social workers. Being a child protection worker is probably not on the list of the most desirable jobs for social workers. However, I have met the staff in the Cairns office who service the cape area. They are a very dedicated, fairly youthful group of workers. Many men who are child protection workers undertake this role in the far north and they do a very good job. In terms of recruiting and keeping staff, that is a real challenge for the department. We know that. We are looking at ways in which we can make the job more attractive to those workers. We will certainly continue to promote the great work that our child protection officers do.

I have to say that criticism of their work from the opposition and from the media makes it so much harder for us to get people to do this job. I salute our child protection workers for the job that they do. It is a job that I do not think that many of us would desire to do. Unfortunately, it is a very necessary job, and generally those workers perform it in a very professional manner.

Student Visas

Mr LEE: My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to recent media reports that this state is losing millions of dollars in export income because of immigration visa complications, especially with students from India and China. Can the Premier confirm these reports?

Mr BEATTIE: I can. Sadly, the reports are true. I am fearful that immigration rules for overseas students are costing Queensland's higher education facilities millions of dollars and their possible future links with countries such as India and China. This is a billion-dollar industry. I call on the federal government to urgently revisit its visa application rules and to make some changes.

It is estimated that at risk could be more than $11 million a year in export revenue. It is wrong that our federal bureaucracy is putting barriers in front of potential international students, the positive economic input that they offer and, therefore, the jobs that create here. This is about jobs for Queenslanders in education. This is about the Smart State. I think that the federal government should remove some of these impediments.

Australia has dropped from second to third most popular destination for Indian students, behind the United States and the UK. We will soon drop to fourth behind Canada. That is crazy. We are now outsmarting ourselves. I am told that one of our state's institutions approved 160 Indian students as eligible and only 16 could get visas. That is 144 lost opportunities. Queensland providers of English language intensive courses for overseas students are also missing out.

Let us get rid of the not-welcome barriers and ensure that not one job-creating opportunity is lost. My government is working hard in Asia and former Premier Mike Ahern is doing a great job in establishing trade opportunities. It is sad that they are being limited by the federal government's actions. The Chairman of the Queensland China Council, former Deputy Premier Tom Burns, also informs me that there are similar visa problems with China. Mr Burns said that we are losing Chinese investor capital, tourists and students because of very slow visa response times. Mr Burns estimates that this would run into many millions of dollars. He says that the United States has offered same-day visa approvals to people who were taking months to get access to Australia.

I have to say that, in Queensland, we are doing our bit. Over the past week my colleague the Education Minister, Anna Bligh, has approved an expansion of the waiving of fees for the dependent children of certain categories of scholarship holders. Education Queensland will now approve the enrolment of dependent children of AusAID scholarship holders, agreed foreign government scholarship holders and university scholarship holders if awarded for genuine aid and development purposes.

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right—of course, if they get a visa. These children are exempt from paying fees for entry to state government preschools, primary schools and secondary schools.

It is time for the federal government to come to the party, hasten the process and help us to get every job opportunity that we can. Export education is jobs for Queenslanders. We are out there marketing it to the world and we are being impeded by the federal government. We cannot allow these opportunities to go by. These are jobs for Queenslanders—Queensland companies, Queensland teachers, Queensland schools.

Dental Services

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: I ask the Minister for Health to tell me, so that I may report back to my constituents, what she is doing to reduce the unacceptable two and a half year waiting list for public dental treatment in Gympie.

Mrs EDMOND: I am delighted to answer the member's question. What I am doing is telling everybody who will listen that they should vote for the Labor Party in the coming federal election, because only the Labor Party is interested in the oral health care of Queenslanders.

Members may have noticed that last week I attended a number of ministerial councils on health issues, including the Ministerial Council on Health. Of course, oral health was on the

agenda of every ministerial council meeting that I attended. I hasten to add that it was not always put on the agenda by me, although I certainly supported it. Often, ministers from coalition states, such as South Australia, raised the issue. They have unanimously called—probably while the Leader of the Opposition was there—for the federal government to re-fund the oral health program.

Queensland was the only state to keep that funding going and I pay due credit to the former minister for doing that. However, it has meant that we are behind the eight ball in health right across Australia. The other states have not kept that funding going, and certainly a number of people from other states come up here in winter to use our services. They go on the waiting list in one year and come back the next year to have the procedure done. I am not sure how they work it, but we certainly know that it happens, particularly in areas such as the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast.

The federal Labor Party has given a commitment that it will reintroduce that program. I am telling everybody who raises the issue with me to support the Labor Party.

Dr D. Kemp; School Funding

Mrs REILLY: I refer the Minister for Education to the visit of the federal Education Minister, Dr David Kemp, to my electorate on the Gold Coast last week. Can the minister inform members of Dr Kemp's activities while he was on the Gold Coast?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the genuine concern that she and the other Gold Coast members have shown for the needs of the schools on the Gold Coast. As honourable members would be aware, for some time principals in the public education system around Australia have been voicing very serious concerns about the future of public education under David Kemp's and the Howard government's reforms to funding arrangements under the State Grants Bill, which was passed by the parliament last year.

In addition, primary principals across both the public and private sectors of Australia have recently prepared a report on their concerns about the relative funding for both primary and secondary schools. They have put that report into the public arena and MCEETYA considered it when I was at the ministerial council. Primary school principals have been visiting members of parliament from both sides of the chamber, bringing those concerns to their attention.

When David Kemp visited the Gold Coast last week, principals of 50 Gold Coast state schools invited him to talk to them. They asked Dr Kemp to talk to them and give them an opportunity to question him about what he sees as the future of public education. This was the opportunity for David Kemp to convince those 50 principals of the fairness of his system. It was his opportunity to answer their genuine concerns and to reassure them that the public education system was not under direct attack from his government.

So, members might ask, how did he go in this attempt? I am sorry to say that, according to the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, David Kemp has not done as well as he might have. The headlines read 'Educators cane minister over state school funding' and 'Principals say Kemp failed test'.

Mr Foley: Could try harder.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, he could try harder. The article reads—

During a 45-minute, closed-door meeting at Broadbeach, about 50 Gold Coast principals questioned Dr Kemp over his funding policies, which they said would see record million-dollar boosts to the country's richest private schools.

They emerged from the meeting unhappy with the minister's responses and vowing to campaign against the Howard Government.

One principal was quoted as saying—

At the end of the day, we weren't reassured and we weren't convinced that commonwealth funding is equitable and isn't biased.

I understand that at a press conference after the meeting, David Kemp went on to say that he does not feel welcome in Queensland and that the Queensland government has not made him welcome in Queensland schools. In the five months that I have been the minister, I have not received a single request from David Kemp to visit a Queensland school. John Howard has made a request and it was granted.

If this is the performance of David Kemp before 50 principals on the Gold Coast, I take the opportunity this morning to invite David Kemp to visit every single public school in Queensland.

There are 1,250 other principals who would like the same opportunity as the principals on the Gold Coast. I look forward to him trying and trying and trying again, but I do not believe that he will succeed in convincing them.

Juvenile Offenders, Accommodation

Mr COPELAND: I refer the Minister for Families and Minister for Disability Services to an incident recently relating to a juvenile offender in Townsville who was housed temporarily in a motel, and I ask: why are juvenile offenders being housed in motels? Why are those juvenile offenders not being supervised? What action has she taken to reimburse tourists who may have had possessions stolen?

Ms SPENCE: I have been briefed extensively on the case of that juvenile in Townsville. I understand that the matter is now before the courts, and I cannot talk about the specifics of it.

However, with regard to the issue of motel stays for juveniles, unfortunately it does occur from time to time. We are not going to walk away from that. It is unfortunate and it is not a practice that we want to promote. It is certainly a practice that occurred under the coalition government. Members have a right to ask why this occurs.

Basically, we have two options when we have a juvenile on our doorstep. Firstly, we try to find them a foster-parent who will take them in for the night or, in many places in Queensland, we have our own residential facilities to house those juveniles. Sometimes it is absolutely impossible to find a foster-parent who will take that particular juvenile. Sometimes the juveniles have been banned from our residential facilities for a series of bad behaviours. As a very last resort, the Department of Families will supervise a motel stay for a night or two nights before an alternative arrangement can be made.

We ought to be up-front and honest about the fact that in this state we have a problem finding foster-parents, particularly foster-parents who are prepared to take in juveniles with serious difficulties. One of the things that has happened in the fostering system over the last decade is that the type of children we ask foster-parents to take into their care is quite different from a few decades ago. They are children who come from increasingly dysfunctional households. They are children who have been sexually abused and neglected. Children with serious problems are going into foster homes. Understandably, they are children whom some foster-parents do not want to take in. I think that is unfortunate.

I acknowledge the terrific work that our foster-parents do in looking after those troubled children. We are putting an increasing number of children into foster care who have serious disabilities and whose families have given up on them. Their families do not want to look after them any more. We have foster-parents looking after very disabled children for us for long periods.

I reiterate that putting a juvenile into a motel is certainly the last option. It is an option that is used only after every other avenue has been exhausted.

Mine Safety

Mr PEARCE: The Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines would be aware that it is seven years today since the 1994 Moura disaster claimed the lives of 11 miners. Can the minister inform the house what steps the government has taken to improve mine safety and minimise the risks of another disaster in Queensland mines?

Mr ROBERTSON: I acknowledge the ongoing commitment of the honourable member to the safety of miners not only in his electorate of Fitzroy but also, of course, throughout Queensland.

At about 11.30 p.m. on Sunday, 7 August 1994 an explosion occurred in the Moura No. 2 underground coalmine. There were 21 mineworkers working underground at the time. Ten men from the northern area of the mine escaped within 30 minutes of the explosion. Tragically, 11 miners working in the southern area failed to return to the surface. A second and more violent explosion rocked the mine at 12.20 p.m. on Tuesday, 9 August. Thereafter, rescue and recovery attempts were abandoned and the mine was sealed at the surface. This was a terrible tragedy and today we reflect on those who lost their lives at Moura.

Following the accident, the state government immediately established a wide-ranging inquiry into the Moura disaster and the general safety of mines in Queensland. Today I can report that

the government has implemented all 25 major recommendations of the 1996 *Warden's Inquiry Report on an Accident at Moura No. 2 Underground Mine*.

The new Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999 and the Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999 enacted by parliament earlier this year are the centrepiece of these reforms. This contemporary new legislation is regarded as best practice in the Western mining world. The legislation imposes greater responsibility on the mining industry to ensure the safety and health of its workers and ensures that the industry is regulated by a strengthened government Mines Inspectorate with increased powers to prevent unsafe practices and to hold accountable those who fail to fulfil their health and safety obligations.

Other major departmental initiatives emerging after Moura include a complete restructuring of the Mines Inspectorate, which has involved a revised structure with nearly 50 per cent new recruitment in the past few years. Initiatives undertaken by SIMTARS include the continued maintenance of the mine emergency call-out service, better safety training for mineworkers and regular mine emergency evacuation exercises. SIMTARS continued the roll-out of the EZGAS high-speed emergency gas analysis system, which is replacing the CAMGAS system that has been operating since 1988.

Together these reforms represent the most significant changes to health and safety practices that have occurred in Queensland mining in the past 100 years. This improved focus on safety is being reflected in a big reduction in the number of working days lost through injury in the industry. The lost time injury frequency rate halved to 10.8 lost time injuries per million man-hours worked for 2000-01 from 20.2 just five years ago, in 1996-97. There has been a parallel reduction in the severity rate, from 354 days lost per million hours worked for the year 1996-97 to 145 for the year 2000-01. The commitment to and impetus towards improving mine safety out of the Moura disaster must now be sustained and the grim echoes of the past not revisited.

Drought, Molasses Supply

Mr HOPPER: Due to the horrific drought in south-east Queensland, I am sure the Minister for Primary Industries is aware of the shortage of molasses. I know that some farmers have ordered molasses in the past and, following rain, did not pick up the molasses they had ordered. I ask: would the minister consider importing molasses to help ease the situation or can he come up with another solution?

Mr PALASZCZUK: I thank the honourable member for the question. Of course, the issue of drought on the Darling Downs is a very serious one—an issue that has not been recognised by the federal government at all. It has not recognised that the Darling Downs is experiencing a catastrophic drought. The fact that we now have 22 shires and up to 200 individual properties drought declared leads me to believe that we have as many shires drought declared now as we had in 1996.

To be more specific in relation to the question the honourable member raised about molasses, the Department of Primary Industries and I have discussed the issue with Agforce and, going by previous experience, there certainly was a problem when the government was involved in purchasing molasses for supply to our primary producers in that the molasses was not used and the government was left with somewhat of a funding shortfall.

The issue has been raised with Agforce. If the situation becomes more critical than it is now in relation to feed for our stock, I think it is beholden on Agforce to work with the sugar industry to see whether supplies of molasses will be made available. But at the end of the day, the critical situation is this: the federal government has not officially declared the Darling Downs area as being an exceptional circumstances area. All it has done is introduce interim measures.

Mr Horan: Because you were late.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I refute the allegation made by the Leader of the Opposition. All he needs to do is speak to Agforce to find out that the Department of Primary Industries and Agforce have worked together on the preparation of the exceptional circumstances application. The only problem is this: the federal government keeps raising the bar higher and higher by requesting further information.

The information is there. The federal government has to make a decision. All members opposite are doing is protecting their mates in Canberra. They should be standing up for our primary producers in Queensland by supporting the government in its attempt to make sure that our primary producers receive the exceptional circumstances recognition that they deserve.

Physical Activity Trial

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I refer the Minister for Health to an article in Saturday's *Financial Review* on a physical activity trial in Rockhampton funded by Queensland Health, and I ask: what is the value in this project?

Mrs EDMOND: I thank the member for Pumicestone for the question and for her ongoing interest in health issues. I was particularly delighted to see the article in the *Financial Review*, because it echoes my mantra of a number of years. As opposition Health spokesperson, I said that I was determined to increase the focus on preventing illnesses, maintaining health and enhancing early intervention programs. I am delighted that at least the media has discovered that the major illness epidemic that we are facing is lifestyle induced. It is not difficult to imagine the sorts of challenges confronting us. That is why in 1998 the Beattie government allocated $1 million a year to Health Promotion Queensland, which funds the Rockhampton trial and another four based in rural, regional and urban areas across the state. The aim of each of these projects is to develop models that can be replicated in communities across the state. They are diverse and innovative projects.

In Bowen and Collinsville, risk factors such as being overweight or obese, having a low consumption of fruit and vegetables, drinking alcohol to excess and being inactive are being targeted through involving the community. In another project, the project leaders are working in partnership with the communities of Cherbourg and Stradbroke Island to develop and implement traditional indigenous games and cultural activities as a way to improve the health of indigenous families. A project in Logan City, Ipswich and Brisbane will for the first time in Queensland develop recommended health standards for urban indigenous communities. In the Wide Bay community, funding has also been allocated to implement a program to reduce the incidence of falls in older people.

The Beattie government has given a commitment to support a $500,000 Health Promotion Queensland project to identify and support resilience in primary school children. The focus is on preventing problems rather than picking up the pieces. I was thrilled to see this project endorsed as part of the National Illicit Drugs Action Plan endorsed by all of the Australian Health Ministers last week. Finally, I hope all members have brought their walking shoes to parliament.

Disability Access Requirements

Mr MALONE: I refer the Minister for Families to the construction of the Brisbane Convention Centre, where blow-outs in costs occurred as a result of another Labor government failure to comply with disability access requirements. The minister was the chair of the Public Works Committee when that committee reported that Queensland should learn from any mistakes made in other states in the construction of similar centres and other infrastructure. I also refer to the pedestrian bridge and the failure to comply with disability access requirements and the subsequent cost blow-out, and I ask: considering the minister's background, how could she have failed to raise this matter with her colleagues in cabinet?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for the question. We as a government and indeed the community are learning a lot of lessons all the time about the need to provide access for people with disabilities. Certainly, the Goss government learnt a valuable lesson when it took notice of disability groups out in the community and their desire to have a lift installed at the front of the convention centre. Those of us who were around at the time would remember that indeed the plan for the convention centre was to provide a lift, but we were going to provide it at the rear of the convention centre. Disabled people rightly said that they did not want to be shoved around the back, that they wanted to be able to enter the convention centre through the front like any other citizen. Certainly, we took notice of that and provided that lift for them.

With respect to the bridge, we are certainly providing a bridge which will be fully accessible for people in wheelchairs and with other sorts of disabilities. Frankly, I am very proud to belong to a government that listens to people with a disability, particularly when it comes to access issues. Do we get it right every time? Probably not. Like the rest of the community, we have probably got a lot of lessons to learn about access issues. I see examples out there all the time—in movie theatres, on beaches, and in private enterprises where corporations have made an attempt to provide accessible facilities but have not quite got it right. We are learning all the time, and I think it is a mark of the listening and the capability to work in partnership with people with a disability that we are going to build a bridge that will be fully accessible.

Small Business Networks

Ms KEECH: I ask the Minister for State Development: can he tell honourable members what the government is doing to encourage Queensland firms to build networks to meet major national and international supply demands?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for Albert for the question. She had a direct involvement in small business before entering the parliament and continues to work very closely with small business in her area, which neighbours my seat. We regularly have contact with the same small businesspeople.

Queensland industry is certainly meeting the challenge created by the fact that international and national organisations are now demanding much larger contracts than has been the case in the past. They are looking for national suppliers. The Queensland government and, in particular, my department are looking at ways to help Queensland companies have a competitive edge and meet the larger types of contracts that are significantly being entered into now. We are doing that partly by encouraging the development of industry clusters. We are bringing together small enterprises so that together, in a collective way, they can meet the supply needs of major projects, major companies and major industries that individually are looking to let larger contracts.

Small businesses can provide one link, but they cannot do it individually by themselves because they find it very hard to compete on that larger scale. So they are working with other businesses to provide a complete package, and my department is coordinating that because we believe in the concept of strength in numbers and that there is a demand, particularly in the food sector, for larger contracts of that nature. Earlier this month my department organised a meeting of food industry networks at Nerang on the Gold Coast so that that cluster of companies could better meet the needs of national and international supply chain demands. It was organised by the Gold Coast Food Forum, a network of food manufacturers that extends from Bundaberg to Byron Bay. We are holding discussions with those food networks right across the area extending from Bundaberg to the Gold Coast. As well as that, we are putting together clustering concepts in other industries.

My department has developed a support web site and is training 36 people as cluster facilitators. This example of what is being achieved in the food industry is being generated right across a whole range of other industry sectors in Queensland to provide clusters so that small business can network along with my department. My department is coordinating that because, at the end of the day, that provides more commercial opportunities for small business, provides more jobs for people in this state and is very much part of our Smart State concept—providing the facilitators and providing those clusters across a whole range of industry sectors so that they can compete better nationally and internationally.

CHOGM, Police Resourcing

Mr QUINN: I refer the Premier to assertions from both himself and the Minister for Police that there exists adequate additional funding for training and other police activities associated with the upcoming CHOGM. I also refer him to a memo recently sent from the north coast regional office of the Queensland Police Service which is addressed to all trained dignitary protection and motorcade drivers. I table the memo. It states—

Please be advised that CHOGM Planning Unit has planned a motorcade exercise to be run in Brisbane on 23rd August 2001.

As with previous exercises your participation is encouraged to ensure that you all have the required skills, knowledge and ability to undertake this important task as part of CHOGM 2001.

Again, as with past exercises, it is understood that there will be no budget allocated for overtime, travel allowances, out of pocket expenses etc. These matters are out of regional control.

I ask: does he still maintain that there has been adequate additional funding to cover CHOGM and can he please explain why these costs are being met from existing station budgets?

Mr BEATTIE: The answer is yes. As the member would be aware, when the Prime Minister rang me about CHOGM and we agreed to host CHOGM here because Canberra could not, I made it clear—and this was followed up subsequently by my department—that obviously there would need to be an agreement between the Commonwealth and the state in terms of the provision of funds. Let me make it absolutely clear at the beginning that this is an event organised by the Commonwealth government.

Australia is the member of CHOGM, not Queensland. We have agreed to work in partnership with the Commonwealth government to hold this event. We have recruited the Brisbane City Council to assist us in traffic management and other issues. The funding arrangement is an arrangement between the Commonwealth and the state. Any issues pertaining to funding had to be agreed between the Commonwealth and the state.

Early on in this agreement and this discussion there was some argy-bargy between Queensland and the Commonwealth. One of the issues that my departmental people raised at my direction was the funding of the provision of police and infrastructure. Because this is an international event, I do not intend to go through those discussions because it is not my intention to seek to embarrass or to attack the federal government on this event. I will not do that because, in my view, this is an international event that can showcase Queensland to the world. In the end we did reach an agreement. I would have preferred more funds. That is as far as I am prepared to go. Nevertheless, we reached an agreement and I will support that agreement here and elsewhere.

Is it going to cost us funds? Yes, it will. I have already signalled publicly that it will cost us millions of dollars. Will we manage that in a very frugal way? Yes, we will. That memo, which I have not seen, seems to indicate to me that the funding—and the Police Commissioner, Bob Atkinson, as well as the minister have obviously been involved in these discussions with my department, with me and with the federal government about funds—

Mr Mackenroth: The Leader of the Liberal Party was offered a briefing on this and has not taken it up.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. I will come back to that.

In terms of the management of it, of course the Police Commissioner is going to manage the funding and the expenses in a very frugal way. As I said, I have not seen that memo, but it seems to me to indicate that the Police Commissioner is using the normal management tools to obviously properly arrange the expenditure so that it is done properly and frugally.

This event will cost us millions. As the minister has indicated and as I have confirmed, when it is completed we will release the figure. At this stage we do not know what that figure will be because we do not know what will be the level of protests and the level of exposure or requests for services, particularly from the policing area. When the event is over we will know that. There will not be any secrets. It is just that we are not prepared to give out inaccurate figures. We have made estimates only.

The Leader of the Liberal Party was offered a briefing from the minister. With the greatest of respect, I suggest to him that he take that briefing and be provided with all the information. I do not want to be in the position of attacking the Howard government in relation to the funding of this event because I want to work in a partnership with them.

Graffiti

Mr PURCELL: I ask the Minister for Police and Corrective Services: can he inform the parliament about what is being done to address the growing impact of graffiti on Brisbane's suburbs?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the very timely question, because I recently met with my ministerial colleague the Honourable Paul Lucas to discuss this issue. As late as last night I had some meetings with members of the Ipswich community—and this meeting had been organised by Jo-Ann Miller—at which we discussed some of these issues.

In the discussions I had with Mr Lucas, he raised with me a number of concerns that people in his electorate had brought to him about the growing problem of graffiti, particularly in the Wynnum area. I should qualify my remarks by saying that the Wynnum community has for some time taken a whole-of-community approach to developing a solution to this very important problem. Graffiti is certainly a social illness, and its ugly impact can be seen any day of the week on walls and buildings not only in Brisbane and Queensland but also right around the world. It is certainly not something that occurs in any particular electorate, but we do need to find new ways to address this issue. I am sure every member of this House would agree with that. What better place to start than in Wynnum, given its long history of embracing community responses to this issue.

In conjunction with the Queensland Police Service, our government will conduct a pilot project to tackle graffiti in the Wynnum area. Of course, what we learn from this pilot project will

assist every other community in the state. A task force aimed at generating fresh ideas to reduce graffiti will be set up as the first part of this pilot project. The second part will involve the Wynnum police division evaluating and putting into practice strategies developed in conjunction with the working party. The working party will examine enforcement, prevention and other factors related to graffiti and also identify potential proposals that might require some legislative arrangements.

Suggestions that the working party will examine include static cameras to identify and deter graffiti offenders and implementing controls over the sale and distribution of aerosol paint cans. It may be that a static camera could be rotated throughout different communities that have known graffiti problems. This is an opportunity for a whole-of-community approach to this visual pollution. In the past, governments, business organisations such as Queensland Rail and the police have frequently adopted individual methods to deal with this problem.

Families Department, Resourcing

Mr LINGARD: I ask the Minister for Families: given the crisis within her department and the case loads that she is expecting her child protection officers to carry out, can the minister inform the House when the methodology for assessing case loads will be finalised and implemented?

Ms SPENCE: The irony of the member for Beaudesert, the former Minister for Families, asking a question about child protection is not lost on members on this side of the House who sat through the years of National Party government and its disgraceful handling of the Department of Families.

Mr Lingard: Can you tell me what you are doing with BoysTown?

Ms SPENCE: This incredible attack on the Beattie government this morning is supposedly about our spending on child protection. I am happy to come into the House tomorrow with a comparison that will show the increase in spending on child protection under the Beattie government compared to former Minister Lingard's years when he added no substantial funding to the Department of Families. Let us look at Minister Lingard's record in the area of child protection. He sat on new child protection legislation for over two years but it was never debated in the parliament. Former Minister Lingard has no runs on the board when it comes to child protection.

With respect to BoysTown, which I understand the member mentioned when he shouted across the chamber at me, the director-general of the Department of Families and other senior officers met with the De La Salle Brothers yesterday and had a significant discussion about the future of BoysTown. I am not going to air the issues raised in that discussion in the parliament today, but I expect to be making a public statement about that in the near future. I am very pleased with the results of that discussion. I understand that agreement was reached about the future of BoysTown. I hope to be able to give the member more information on that in the future.

With respect to child protection, I am pleased that the opposition has given me the opportunity this morning to talk about our fine record in child protection funding. The amount by which we have increased the child protection budget over the last three years is certainly something that we can be proud of as a government. As I said before, no other government in this state has ever added funding to the child protection budget like the Beattie government. We know we have more to do. We are not going to walk away from that. There will be funding increases in the years ahead.

Logan Motorway Toll

Mr REEVES: I ask the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads: is he aware of a recent campaign to abolish the toll on the Logan Motorway? What are the ramifications of abolishing the toll? Will it really help the local residents, as some have claimed?

Mr BREDHAUER: I thank the member for Mansfield for this question. The issue of Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road is an issue on which he has been constructively working with me on behalf of his constituents since I have been the Minister for Transport. I also place on record the work that has been done by the member for Mount Gravatt, the member for Stretton and the member for Algester. I contrast that with the work that is currently under way by the federal member for Moreton, Gary Hardgrave, who is running a deceitful confidence trick against the people of that area in relation to a campaign to remove the tolls on the Logan Motorway. He knows that that is not the solution to the traffic problems on Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road. We have actually demonstrated that. The origin and destination survey, which the member for

Mansfield instigated, indicates that the vast majority of heavy vehicles on Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road are using local origins and accessing local destinations. Removing the tolls on the Logan Motorway is not going to impact on the majority of the traffic.

However, removing the toll on the Logan Motorway would transfer the responsibility for this issue from the Commonwealth—because Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road is part of the National Highway—to Queensland taxpayers, and they would have to foot the bill for the debt that exists on the Logan Motorway. Not content with his coalition colleagues in Canberra underfunding Queensland in its share of National Highway funding consistently since it cut $620 million from the National Highway budget in 1996, he now wants to shift the cost on to the state government, and that is a confidence trick. What has he done? He has asked people to sign a petition. The petition is meant to be a petition to me, but he has asked people to return it to his office.

Let me advise members of the House that not one petitioner's signature has been received by me via the office of the member for Moreton since he started his campaign. Not one single petition has come to me. It is a deceitful campaign that he is running to try to shift the responsibility from the Commonwealth for the National Highway problems. In contrast to that, we have worked with the Commonwealth government to put in place a long-term study to deal with the long-term issues. He actually tried to claim the credit for that, and now he is trying to undermine that study, which the four members I mentioned previously are actively involved in.

But this undermining is not just confined to the member for Moreton. I notice that the federal member for Herbert entered into the debate the other day with a campaign to get me to fund the Douglas Arterial. Once again, they are trying to shift the responsibility for National Highway funding to the state government, and we will not do it. I will not do it to save his hide in Herbert and I will not do it to save Gary Hardgrave's hide in Moreton, because it would be at the expense of Queensland taxpayers and road projects in other parts of the state. Members should bear in mind that we are funding the part that provides the hospital access and we have agreed to fund the pre-maturity costs. All the federal government has to do is put up $6.7 million in the first year, $17 million in the second year and $9.7 million in the third year and we will build it, but it has to come from the Commonwealth government because it is part of the National Highway.

Maryborough Skate Bowl

Dr KINGSTON: I refer the Minister for Sport to the fact that Maryborough skateboarders have been trying to fund the construction of a modern skate bowl for in excess of five years. They have researched design and have had a modern facility formally designed. They formed the Yammitt Group, the primary purpose of which was to raise funds for the skate bowl and to make Maryborough a more interesting place in which they could spend their formative years. The Maryborough City Council has budgeted $50,000 for the construction of the skate bowl. It applied for a sports and recreation grant for a matching $50,000. I ask: can the minister explain, first, why the funding application for the long-planned skate bowl submitted by the Maryborough council was rejected and, second, why a similar application from the Hervey Bay City Council was granted? Additionally, can the minister assure the residents of Maryborough that the decision was made objectively and not influenced by political bias? I assure the minister that residents of Hervey Bay are ringing my office to register their opinion that this apparent discrimination is unfair.

Mr MACKENROTH: There is one thing I can tell the member. That is, there is no discrimination whatsoever in the allocation of money out of the Sport and Recreation Fund. Members on the other side of the House would be aware of the amounts of money allocated into their electorates. In fact, if we did an analysis I suspect that, on a per capita and a dollar basis, there would probably be more money going into electorates represented by non-government members than into electorates represented by some Labor members. So I refute that allegation.

The applications from both Hervey Bay and Maryborough would have been assessed by the same person. The recommendation that came to me was to fund the one in Hervey Bay and not the one in Maryborough. The Maryborough people would have received a letter from the director-general and would be able to take that up with the local area as to what they need to do to their application for the next round. However, I conclude by saying that there was $5 million in that round of funding for which we had $8.5 million worth of applications. So at the end of the day we could not fund every one of them.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Beattie Labor Government

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.31 a.m.): It is time the Beattie Labor government was held accountable for its appalling record of incompetence and non-delivery of services to the people of Queensland. As I said in a speech earlier this morning, what we are seeing from this government is a concentration on the Division of Community Engagement within the Premier's department—that is, the PR department. That is the government's priority, but its priority should be delivering the day-to-day services that are so important to the people of Queensland. The delivery of the services that people expect and want is the hallmark of a good government—not self-promotion and a cover-up by a massive PR machine.

We spoke last week about the list of projects that have fallen over and that have not been achieved by this government. Today I will speak about some of the important day-to-day services that simply are not being put in place by this Beattie Labor government. This government's record is marked by its ongoing arrogance, its financial mismanagement, its underachievement and its non-delivery. The recent estimates hearings highlighted the Beattie government's lack of commitment to delivering across most departments, but particularly the Departments of Family Services and State Development.

It is a shame to see how this Premier has single-handedly turned this state's once great strong financial position right around. The result for the last financial year was an $820 million operating deficit. That is the sort of red ink we simply do not want to see in this state. We can add to that some $280 million of capital works funding that was not spent last year—capital works spending that would have delivered literally thousands of jobs. If we add to that the cutback we are seeing in the capital works budget, on a budget-to-budget basis, we see that this government is going down the dangerous path of taking money out of capital funding and moving it into recurrent spending. We are moving away from the sound principle that ever-increasing capital works funding was what actually drove this state and gave it the efficiencies that made people want to come to Queensland to invest.

As well as those cutbacks in capital works funding, we are seeing that Queensland prison debts have soared to some $226 million after the Beattie government slashed a $100 million equity injection from the corrective services budget. We are seeing police families living in appalling conditions in some parts of the state, in departmental housing that should be fixed. Despite months of complaints those dwellings have not been fixed. When we raise these issues in the parliament to put some pressure on the government to improve housing conditions for police families in remote parts of the state we are berated with the comment that we are working hand in glove with the Queensland Police Union. That is a good example of the arrogance of this government. When we raise issues on behalf of decent, hardworking families this government likes to arrogantly tread over the top and say that we are just working in with the Police Union.

There is still no promise with regard to seatbelts in school buses, something the National and Liberal Parties took to the state government before the last election. All we see is another review. This government just does not see that it could spend money on this project, yet it can spend $24 million on the footbridge. That money probably could have seen the fitting of seatbelts to all school buses operating in dangerous or mountainous areas or to all school buses running on highways and travelling at greater than 60 kilometres an hour. The money wasted on the footbridge could have been used in that way.

Today we have questioned the Family Services Minister about the funding of $103 million recommended by the Forde inquiry. I acknowledge that the government has put some additional funding into child protection, but it is not good enough. The Forde inquiry was held specifically to address the issue of the protection of children in this state. One hundred and three million dollars was declared to be the amount of money required urgently—immediately—to enable this state to provide the level of child protection provided in other states. It is now some four years after that inquiry and we are still some $73 million short of the mark. We will continue to fight on behalf of children to see that funding is provided, that staff are recruited and that the department is managed by the minister such that staff do not have the current massive workloads and do not have to resort to ongoing industrial action for some 16 months in order to bring some attention to and some support for the task they undertake.

The caseloads for child protection officers are extremely high due to the absolute lack of frontline staff. We have seen the industrial turmoil arising from that over the past 16 months.

More than 700 priority 1 child abuse cases went unassessed from July last year to March of this year. The number of priority 2 cases that went unassessed rose from 323 to 2,029. That is why we are pushing for the money. That is why we are pushing for the staff. That is why we are pushing for decent caseloads. Queensland staff are forced to handle up to 50 cases each. Equivalent staff in Victoria have a workload cap of some 15 cases. When we understand the difficulties of some of these cases we understand the need for staff to have a reasonable workload and a maximum number of cases.

The greatest reflection on a government is how it treats its children. It is truly a sad state of affairs at the moment. There is a lack of direction and a lack of management on the part of the minister. We are completely missing the target of $103 million. We are still some $73 million short.

The non-delivery does not just stop there. Members should look at some areas of regional and rural Queensland. There is no funding commitment in relation to the capping of bores. The federal government continues to provide its funding offer each year, but this government has not provided a funding commitment in the last budget for the capping of one of our greatest natural resources—the artesian bores. I mention the lack of weed control, particularly around national parks, and the mismanagement of national parks.

One of the great worries in this state is the drop in numbers of QR wagons available for the transporting of cattle. Farmers and agents are frequently forced to use road trains when they would normally be using the train system. This has been brought about because of the disrepair of the wagons on the southern line. They cannot be shifted up to the central Queensland and north Queensland lines as they have been in the past. I saw a case recently in central Queensland where the agents called for a train—they needed a large train to transport cattle—but could get only one wagon. They were forced to cast around and find trucks to put out onto the road to do the work the train system should have done and would have done in the past. Port authorities up and down the coast have also suffered at the hands of Mr Beattie's cash grab. Ninety-five per cent of their after-tax profits are to be stripped from the Queensland port authorities to help this Beattie government through its financial problems.

I refer to asset sales. The Brisbane Markets and Dalrymple Bay are being sold off to try to again help the cash-strapped Beattie government meet its commitments. The DPI has been forced to sell off assets from DPI research stations to fund the government's unbudgeted $10 million contribution to the east coast trawl management plan. Talk about financial mismanagement—to provide for a $10 million contribution, to not even have the money and to then sell off some of the assets of the Department of Primary Industries to meet it!

The cutback in general DPI staff across Queensland is having a huge impact on those Queensland export businesses that provide so much to our economy. More than 500 staff positions in the past three years have been lost. And the government talks about our unemployment problem!

But perhaps the biggest cash grab of all, with very little return for the people of Queensland, is the pub tax being imposed on the hoteliers to pay for the unfunded Lang Park complex. Of course, it will be the patrons who will feel it, because the publicans will have to meet their financial commitments on improvements and the redevelopment of the facilities that they provide for the public. So it will be the patrons who will feel it, no doubt through some form of increase in the price of beer or food. We just cannot whack on a tax like that overnight without it having some effect.

There has been complete disregard for the public in the whole process of the Lang Park redevelopment. The calling in of the Minister for State Development to take over the whole appeal process clearly demonstrated that. We are seeing this government moving to make secrecy an art form, particularly under freedom of information legislation, and continually abusing the cabinet exemption rules to cover up anything that it would be embarrassed about and which it does not want out there in the public arena.

This is a government obsessed with publicity. It is a government obsessed with its Community Engagement Division. It is spending thousands of dollars on the PR machine throughout the state when that money could have been spent in the Department of Families or perhaps on seatbelts for school buses.

We have seen projects lost, such as the PNG gas pipeline, the Brisbane light rail project, Expo 2002, the footbridge fiasco, the synchrotron to Victoria and the regional water projects. Most importantly, our record in unemployment is the worst in Australia. We should be above average. If we cannot get above average in Queensland, that is an indictment of this government that it is a

poor performer; it has no direction; it has no target; it has no policy; and it has no real plan, other than ad hoc stopgap projects to address the issue of unemployment. On top of that, we have investors being turned way by this government's practice of ripping extra royalties out of the coalmining industry.

Time expired.

BHP Coal Pty Ltd Enterprise Agreement

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (11.41 a.m.): I rise today to bring to the attention of the House the latest attack on permanent jobs of mineworkers by BHP Coal at seven of its central Queensland mines. Mineworkers are at this time considering the terms of a new enterprise agreement known as the BHP Coal Pty Ltd Enterprise Agreement 2001. I was contacted over the weekend by dozens of BHP employees angry about the failure of this agreement to commit BHP to job security for its current work force and the lack of commitment to the survival of communities through a stable work force living locally.

The recent five to seven-week dispute was not about more money, and there was nothing more clear to me when visiting picket lines than that the BHP dispute was about job security—the right to have a permanent job, and not to have that job threatened by contractors. Workers and their families are angry. They feel betrayed by a heartless non-caring federal government and its IR policy. They want the issue raised in parliament. The people who elected me want their concerns raised by me here in this place. They want me to speak on their behalf to make the Queensland public aware of the fact that this agreement allows BHP to forcibly retrench workers and replace them with contractors. These are workers with families who live in the coal towns. They have children to educate, mortgages to pay, and want only to have a real job.

BHP Coal's latest enterprise agreement demonstrates once again that the industrial relations legislation established by the Howard government is so biased against working Australians that it denies them the right to job security and the quality of life that a permanent job brings. This agreement offers financial incentives of a one-off gross payment of $3,000, a 12 per cent pay increase over three years and an increase in superannuation contributions. But it offers no commitment to security of employment. In fact, under clause 10—Types of Employment—the only employment status categories listed are part-time, fixed-term and casual employment.

Clause 12—Contractors—makes it clear what the company's true intentions are. It reads—

> The company shall have free and unfettered access to contractors.

Under this clause, BHP will be able to engage contractors to do any work at a mine. In those instances where the engagement of a contractor will displace an existing permanent employee, BHP may offer the employee voluntary redundancy or redeployment to other work at the mine or to another mine within the BHP group. If the employee declines to accept the offer of voluntary redundancy or redeployment, the company, at the end of six weeks, may forcibly retrench that employee. There is no offer of security of employment for BHP workers, which means that in time permanent employees can be replaced by contractor gipsies moving from mine site to mine site. And no worker can feel secure in their job, because this agreement allows BHP to target employees for voluntary redundancy on the pretence of creating employment for an employee affected by the engagement of a contractor. There will be no place to hide. The company, by agreement, will be able to target employees for redundancy.

The agreement allows BHP to go about the process of handing mining operations over to a contractor regime that supports and encourages the casualisation of the coal industry work force. This agreement is therefore discriminatory, unfair and nothing more than a union-busting tactic. I am most concerned about this agreement and the pressure put on workers by BHP management to accept the agreement. I am even more concerned when I hear reports that union members have been threatened with litigation emanating from actions on picket lines if the agreement is rejected. They have also been warned that failure to support the agreement could mean that the Industrial Relations Commission will order a return to award conditions. This agreement sets an all-time low in the industrial relations agenda of the Howard government and the multinationals who will go to any lengths to kick the Australian worker.

I ask: why will BHP not provide security of employment for its work force—a work force which is among the most productive in the world, delivering record profits? The answer perhaps is found in the recent performance of BHP in central Queensland. BHP has, in the past three years, retrenched more than 2,000 coalmine workers, or about 40 per cent of its work force. Many of

these jobs have been replaced by contractors under the fly-in, fly-out culture that the coal industry has embraced. The BHP agenda is not about cost cutting; it is about deunionising the mine site work force through the increasing use of contractors. And when the unions have no power, workers are savagely exploited and unionists are persecuted. As I have said, in the past four years alone more than 4,000 permanent jobs have gone. Most of them have gone to contractors who are part-time employees. Thousands of families have been forced to uproot from the coal towns.

Time expired.

Men's Crisis Support Centre, Gympie

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT (Charters Towers—ALP) (11.47 a.m.): I wish to draw to the attention of the House the work of a group of men who not only are an inspiration to those with whom they come in contact but also provide a model for what community spirit really means. I refer to the work of the people at the Queensland Men's Crisis Support Centre located at Gympie, whom I visited with recently in company with Mrs Rae Gâté, our former Labor candidate for Gympie. Rae has worked closely with this group for a length of time and, indeed, is to be commended for her care and concern for all the people of the Gympie electorate.

Some six years ago, a group of men, then in their fifties, became concerned that, at their age, they were unable to find productive work. These men had adequate skill levels and found it difficult to understand why they could no longer secure meaningful employment. So concerned were they that they initially formed the Gympie Men's Health Group in order to gather some community support. These men found there are many in the community who are finding it difficult—if not impossible—to overcome some of the more damaging and hitherto unrecognised problems men face in today's changing society. Since incorporation, the crisis centre has actively encouraged any who are experiencing confusion, anxiety and depression to express their concerns in a male environment—to talk to men who have been through similar experiences. This philosophy met with success. In fact, some men travelled from the Hervey Bay-Maryborough and the Noosa-Cooroy regions to access the services being offered.

As a result of their work, the crisis centre discovered that, left unresolved, the confusion and anxiety felt by many men inevitably led to individual and socially destructive behaviour—behaviour that imposes on a community an enormous financial cost and which undermines social resources. What became apparent was that men coming to the centre were not concerned about what might be termed health problems. These men were not seeking help about prostate cancer, giving up smoking, lack of exercise or alcohol addiction. What these men were concerned about were relationships with their partners or children, with work or with the community.

In pursuit of their objectives, the centre also offers emergency accommodation for the new homeless. Today many men cannot obtain normal housing. For various reasons, men may find they are in debt to Centrelink or the Housing Commission or black-listed by rental agents. The centre provides men with an opportunity to obtain housing while working towards re-establishing their rental credentials.

It would seem fair to say that in some aspects current federal government policies and programs have largely overlooked these aspects of men and their problems. While it is true that there are programs directed at particular men's health issues, such as cancer and diabetes, and programs directed at homeless men, such programs may not necessarily be the social markers that gauge the extent of men's health. A more holistic approach could be called for.

This group knew that while men know they might feel depressed and confused at critical times, they also know they have the ability to solve their personal problems, given the opportunity. They knew what men needed was a process whereby they could work through their confusion and anxiety in a constructive and safe environment. This is the fundamental philosophy of the crisis centre—that men who are treated with respect and dignity gain the ability to resolve their own issues.

As a result of their work, the centre has been involved in a number of community projects. Of note is their involvement with the local women's centre in a partnership against domestic and family violence. In fact, the House might note that men who have committed domestic violence are beginning to access the centre for counselling. This should only be encouraged. The Men's Crisis Support Centre is staffed purely by volunteers and does not receive any government funding whatsoever. Apart from a small Cooloola shire grant and enormous community support, the centre is totally self-supporting.

The men's crisis support centre has achieved much with very little. What it lacks in finances, it makes up for with personal enthusiasm and widespread community support. I am impressed by the high regard in which the general community holds the work of the centre. Its work is unselfish and dedicated to filling a gap currently existing in support programs. I can only add my voice in support of this group of men who lead by example and seek to address constructively the more damaging social effects of economic and social change visited on men in regional areas of our state. Today I ask the parliament to honour the wonderful work done in Gympie and district by the men's crisis support group.

Breast Cancer Awareness Week

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—Lib) (11.51 a.m.): Today I would like to bring to the attention of the House Breast Cancer Awareness Week, which begins on 1 September this year. It will run for a week and be held at South Bank during the period of the Goodwill Games. The occasion will be marked with a silent walk of women and men who have been breast cancer sufferers, who have had treatment and who have responded well to that treatment; women and their families who make up the 10,000 new breast cancer cases diagnosed every year; women who are currently on treatment and their families; the families of women who have died of breast cancer; and any supporters of this very worthwhile cause and the people involved.

The walk will begin at the Ship Inn and will last about one hour. It will end at what is called the Field of Women, and I will explain what that is. It is a very important event for women and, of course, for their families; for men—and believe it or not, men get breast cancer; and for the community. It is an event that I think that we would all like to be part of and support. The Field of Women is the major annual landmark event awareness-promoting activity for the Breast Cancer Network of Australia. Its primary purpose is to raise awareness of the significance of breast cancer in the lives of members of our community and at the same time to celebrate the survivors of this disease. It is a spectacular display and it cannot but succeed in generating interest, inquiry and support from the community.

There will be 12,000 silhouettes of women approximately 80 centimetres high and planted in a field in a prominent position visible to the public—and there will be many members of the public attending the Goodwill Games. Those 12,000 silhouettes will represent the 10,000 women who will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001—as I mentioned, every year over 10,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer—and, sadly, the 2,500 women who will die of breast cancer in 2001. Those figures relate to Australia as a whole.

Each year the field is hosted in a different state. The inaugural field was planted in Canberra in 1998 and since then the field has been planted in Melbourne and Perth. This year the field will be located at South Bank, as I said, during the Goodwill Games. After the walk on Saturday, 1 September, a formal ceremony is planned to launch the field. The silhouettes will remain planted for a full week, providing the general public with the opportunity to see the silhouettes and for the network to provide information about breast cancer to all who will visit the spectacle and the games. In addition, for a small donation silhouettes may be sponsored in memory of those who have passed away or in support of those who have experienced breast cancer.

These silhouettes are used time after time and the messages written are shown and read. It is a very emotional experience to read the messages on these silhouettes. Sometimes they are written for people who, unfortunately, are no longer with us and for the families, partners and spouses of the women who have died.

The donations for the template go to further the work of the Breast Cancer Network. I would also like to say that this little badge, which is a little pink badge of a woman, which can be worn on the lapel, is also being sold by the Breast Cancer Network of Australia. It costs $5. So for a small donation members can buy that little badge. I urge all members—male and female—to do so and to give it to their womenfolk and to support this very worthwhile cause.

The network is a unique organisation whose membership is made up of women who are breast cancer survivors. It is a national body and its aims include the following: to promote awareness of the condition, to lobby for improved treatment and for research, to provide information to the community and to provide advocacy. This group of women are so switched on; they are all women who have had breast cancer and who, in their own words, have been given a new lease of life and are out there supporting others. Believe it or not, many of them have said

that getting breast cancer turned their whole life around and now they have a positive outlook on life. They are now working to promote in others a positive outlook on life. They certainly deserve our support.

Symphony Orchestra Musicians Association

Ms LIDDY CLARK (Clayfield—ALP) (11.57 a.m.): Today I would like to share a story with the House. Recently on behalf of the Premier I had the privilege of welcoming delegates to the Symphony Orchestra Musicians Association—known as SOMA—conference. In doing so, I learned a story that captured as one two of my greatest passions. It is in part an inspirational story of a talented musician, a story of a fabulous artist and a story of an inspiring leader. It is all of these things, but mostly it is a story that shows that, across all vocations, there is power in the union.

The world of the arts is not one that people associate naturally with unions. Public preconceptions of unions tend to clash with the misconceptions of what the arts industry entails. Yet it is an industry that needs the union as much as any other. In fact, poor conditions, shocking wage rates and lack of security and entitlements are issues that still have not been addressed properly in the arts industry.

The story that I would like to share with members today is the story of the man who set about changing all of that—a man who recognised that, just like any other industry, the strength of the arts comes from the solidarity of its members and its weaknesses from their divisions; a man who showed the arts industry that fighting for your rights and being proud to do so is not just the bastion of the workers in the factories and the offices. He inspires by his vision, commands respect from his dedication and provokes all by his talent. His legacy is 98 per cent union membership.

I speak of Martin Foster. Martin has been a musician with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra for 30 years. His passion for the union stems from the early 1960s when he recognised the failure of the existing structures to not only advocate for a change in conditions but also actively work to create an innovative and exciting future for the industry. His vision was to reawaken in orchestral musicians the ideas of solidarity, creativity and belief in the union.

So the Symphony Orchestra Musicians Association began. Originally under the auspices of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, SOMA was established for the specific representation of symphony orchestra musicians. Martin's early achievement was the massive and heartbreaking task of not only organising the members but also inspiring them. What he gave to the musicians in those early days was the hope of a brighter future for orchestral music in Australia. In doing so, he sowed the seeds that would allow SOMA to flourish. It was this vision and passion that allowed SOMA to develop not only as a union but as a community.

As the achievements of SOMA grew, they decided to affiliate under the banner of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance yet remain an autonomous body. What they gave to MEAA was another step in ensuring the solidarity of the arts industry—another link towards building a dynamic, proactive and organised arts community in Australia.

SOMA's achievements are far too great to detail here. The level of organisation that exists within the association is amazing. The reforms and progress in conditions that it has made are truly incredible. There is no other way to say it.

The strength of SOMA is the greatest compliment to Martin and the only testimony needed to the achievements of this incredible musician. Martin is to retire early next year. I take this opportunity to recognise his years of work and the amazing union that he has created and championed. His legacy will serve as an inspiration for many more years. Martin received an honorary life membership from the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance during the conference, which is a rare and prestigious honour that signifies the respect in which he is held. SOMA sets a benchmark for unions everywhere. It has 98 per cent union membership. May it be the first of many.

Before I was elected to the parliament, I spent a lot of time as a union organiser organising the merger of the symphony orchestra and the philharmonic orchestra in Queensland. It was an amazing privilege to work with such dedicated members of a union. It is a regret, somehow, that I am here, but I can still be an advocate on their behalf. I acknowledge their commitment to their union.

Emerald Sawmilling Company; Ausgum Furniture

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.01 p.m.): I bring to the attention of the parliament and the people of Queensland the good news story of the Emerald Sawmilling Company. This sawmill operation was acquired by Adam and Judy Gleeson in 1993 and, at that time, employed the owner and three other people. After capital investment of almost $1 million, today the operation employs 19 people. Almost $700,000 has been spent at the Emerald sawmill in the last 12 months, and over the period since the Gleesons purchased the business they have created 16 new jobs. With immediate upgrade requirements in excess of $670,000, a further 15 jobs will be created at the sawmill. Of course, this is a good news story as it is, but even more exciting is the fact that this sawmill uses quality hardwood from managed resources.

The processes of the new mill maximise log utilisation, reducing waste and minimising tree felling. Ultra value adding is a real feature of the plant, which is specifically designed to undertake the recovery of preused timber. For example, recovered fence palings are used to produce chair slats. The mill is now concentrating on value adding so that, rather than milling sawn timber, the operation is producing tongue-and-groove flooring, claddings and linings.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the operation is that the mill is now creating Australian furniture produced from reclaimed timber and new Australian hardwood, under the name of Ausgum Furniture. This furniture manufacturing aspect is really important to our environment, because it maximises the utilisation of Australian managed forests and replaces questionable imported Indonesian timber products.

Previously, the timber allocation to this mill had a sales potential of $1.4 million in traditional sawmilling sales. Now, with an emphasis upon value adding, the same Crown timber allocation has a potential retail sales value of $7.5 million. Using the accepted industry benchmarks, this sales revenue equates to a downstream employment potential of 68 jobs.

The Gleeson family vision goes much further, with strategies being developed for the establishment of additional production facilities in the Theodore-Monto region, as well as in Victoria. At an expo held in Emerald recently, I had the opportunity to introduce my colleague the member for Callide, Jeff Seeney, to Adam Gleeson. Jeff was very impressed with the quality of the product he saw.

The Gleeson family is also planning to establish a design and production facility with consequential software licensing potential at its Emerald business. In a state where we are suffering continual attacks on our regional and rural communities by economic rationalist governments, it is time to recognise the potential of enterprises like the Emerald Sawmilling Company. With its unselfish approach, its initiative can be a real winner for all.

I am concerned that this sawmill has not been eligible for state or federal funding, yet mills down the road have been eligible for $200,000 because they have run out of Crown log resource. Last Friday, I inspected the mill with Adam Gleeson and I believe that this government must put in place assistance programs to encourage the expansion of this type of facility, taking into consideration the potential benefits for the local communities. This program echoes the government's jobs strategy.

Recently the Gleesons attended a trade fair in Melbourne, where they launched a new chair range known as the Consuelo. This innovative operator has taken one huge step in the responsible management of our natural resources by showing how environmentally responsible it is in adopting these value-adding, economically responsible changes to its sawmilling operation. Clearly, it illustrates the company's genuine approach to the very exciting and world-quality production that is Ausgum Furniture.

My colleague the member for Callide, Jeff Seeney, was so impressed with Ausgum Furniture that he has thrown his full support behind the project by purchasing one of its furniture settings. It is a true quality product. I recommend the product to all members of the House. I invite the Minister for Primary Industries, the Minister for State Development and all members of the parliament to inspect the facility when they are next in Emerald. It is truly a quality product. Many of the people whom Mr and Mrs Gleeson have employed and are teaching the trade to are from the town of Emerald.

University of Southern Queensland, Wide Bay Campus

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (12.07 p.m.): The University of Southern Queensland opened its Wide Bay campus in Hervey Bay in 1997 with 117 students. In the four and a half years since the campus opened, its growth has been nothing short of extraordinary. It grew to 145 students in 1998, 171 in 1999, 286 in 2000 and jumped to 475 at the beginning of 2001. The university is expecting spectacular growth to continue, anticipating 585 enrolments in 2002 and 686 in 2003.

The USQ's success in Hervey Bay has been great news for the city, offering full-time teaching and administration jobs, creating work in the construction industry and, most importantly, giving our young people first-class educational choices and career options at home. The university currently offers courses in significant career areas, including information technology, hospitality management, commerce, business, education and arts. However, to its credit, the USQ wants to do more.

With assistance from the Beattie government, the university has been actively working to offer nurse education courses in Hervey Bay. However, the university's extraordinary growth has led to substantial pressure on teaching space. Accordingly, in February the Premier announced that, to assist the university to deliver nursing courses in Hervey Bay, the Queensland government would make space available in the old Hervey Bay hospital at Point Vernon. However, before the university can go ahead it needs additional student places, which are allocated by the Commonwealth government.

The USQ has made a submission to the Howard government, which I have been happy to support, seeking an additional 80 student places for its Wide Bay campus. If it receives this assistance from the federal government, it will offer 40 places in nursing in 2002 and allocate the other 40 places to expand existing university programs. Those extra places are desperately needed to keep pace with demand and so as not to stifle Hervey Bay's best growth industry: education. The Howard government knows that regional Queensland needs more university places. The federal government specifically allocated funding in its May budget under its Additional Regional Places Scheme 2001. However, it is now August and it is time to deliver some of those places.

USQ's argument is irresistible. Undergraduate enrolments have increased by 55 per cent in the last 12 months. Hervey Bay's population continues to increase by nearly three per cent per annum. The Wide Bay region has one of the lowest tertiary participation rates in Queensland, brought about by decades of underservicing in terms of higher education facilities.

Although tertiary education funding is without question a federal responsibility, the Beattie government has recognised the importance of USQ's continued expansion in Hervey Bay and has assisted by making teaching facilities available. I take this opportunity to place on record my thanks for the ongoing support for the university's ambition to deliver nursing courses in Hervey Bay which has been offered by the Premier and the Minister for Health, Wendy Edmond.

The USQ's submission for the extra 80 places is also supported by the Hervey Bay City Council, the Fraser Coast/South Burnett Regional Tourism Board and the Hervey Bay Chamber of Commerce. I have been working with the university since 1999 to bring the university degree to Hervey Bay, and I can assure the federal government that its time for dillydallying is now over. Hervey Bay has a magnificent hospital which stands ready to assist in the delivery of the practical components of nurse education. The development of home-grown nurses would be warmly welcomed by people throughout the Wide Bay. We have the growing population which requires increasing health services and the young people who want the opportunity to train locally. We have a world-class university, which last year was recognised as the world's best with respect to dual-mode teaching and elected Australia's University of the Year in 2000-01. All we need is the federal government to allocate some of the additional places it has specifically budgeted for in its Additional Regional Places Scheme 2001.

I call on the federal government to stop talking about listening to regional communities and start delivering. Hervey Bay is a city in transition from its traditional tourism, fishing, building and primary industries to a more sophisticated economy featuring high-level health, education and information technology components. The advent of telemarketing has huge potential for a lifestyle destination such as Hervey Bay. Knowledge workers and students are choosing to move there now in ever-growing numbers. This trend will continue if it is not choked off by the federal government.

USQ and Hervey Bay are ready to grow. It is time for the federal government to join the Beattie government in making nursing training happen in Hervey Bay in 2002. The growth of USQ's Wide Bay campus in Hervey Bay helps build the Smart State. It is now attracting full fee paying on-campus students from overseas, earning export dollars for USQ so that it can provide better education facilities for its students. It is also injecting substantial dollars into the local economy by way of rent, food, clothes and so on. The people of Hervey Bay want and demand that these 80 places be allocated now.

Queensland Health

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—Ind) (12.11 p.m.): The annual report of Queensland Health indicates that there has been an increase in spending on health. Much of the increase has been dissipated through the increased amounts being outlaid by the department in servicing debt repayments. This would, in my mind, mean that there is little hope that the targets of reduced waiting time for health services will be met. This is of great concern to my Darling Downs electorate as I am constantly being asked for assistance by people who are being told that services they used to access are no longer available. Many of the calls received are in respect of the Toowoomba Hospital, where people who have been on waiting lists for as long as 12 months are being asked if they still wish to be on the waiting list or whether they would be prepared to go on the waiting list for the waiting list. I presume this is one of the methods being used in an effort to reduce the waiting list.

Another glaring case is that of the pensioner who goes every two years to have a dental check only to be told that there is a 12-month waiting list for such a check-up. Surely the Minister for Health cannot possibly think that these are acceptable waiting times. Surely if the waiting lists are so long there is a need for extra staff. The waiting lists are only going to get longer, not shorter.

Other services which were previously available, we are now being told, are no longer available. One instance is the supply of surgical stockings which a pensioner must wear to reduce the risk of heart problems. Now he is told that they are no longer available. Another area where services are being cut back is the area of patient travel subsidy. I cite the case of a wheelchair bound patient with severe spina bifida who has to travel to Brisbane for tests. She does have a vehicle with hand controls but is unable to drive for any more than short periods because of the deterioration in her spine. She is now expected to drive herself two and a half to three hours to Brisbane. Previously, her husband, who normally goes everywhere with her, would have accompanied her. Now he is told that he is not eligible for assistance to accompany her.

Another matter which has caused concern to some within the electorate is the availability of accommodation for the intellectually disabled, especially those with psychiatric disorders. The parents and/or guardians are finding it increasingly difficult to have the person assessed and often times find the patient has been discharged without any notice to them. This is extremely disturbing to the older guardians, who then have to attempt to relocate the patient who has been discharged. Letters from doctors concerned at the level of funding for public hospitals are being received on a regular basis. It would appear that in most cases the equipment and facilities are in place but the funding for staff is inadequate for the facilities to be utilised to their full capacity.

Injuries from discarded needles and syringes are becoming another major concern even in rural communities. I am disappointed that the minister has failed to make provision for the introduction of retractable needles in the needle availability program in this budget. We all have children and families who no doubt have the right to live in a safe environment. I would like to take my kids to the beach or park without the worry of looking for needles. My heart goes out to those who have contracted deadly diseases due to someone standing on an infected needle.

Mackay-Bucasia Road

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (12.15 p.m.): On Monday I had the pleasure to turn the first sod in the first project of the major improvements planned for the Mackay-Bucasia road over the next few years. The Mackay-Bucasia road is the major arterial link between the Mackay central business district and the fast-developing residential area of the northern beaches suburbs.

Work will commence on the Holt's Road intersection, which will be upgraded by constructing a two-lane roundabout at a total cost of $2.25 million. The works will include drainage, earthworks,

paving and asphalt surfacing and will involve crossing two water mains and relocating power and telephone cables.

The contract for this work has been awarded to Civdec Construction Pty Ltd. The company has had experience in the Mackay area in recent years, including the upgrading of a section of the Mackay-Habana road for Main Roads, as well as the civil works for the first-class residential development at Shoal Point called Shoals. The company will employ all local labour on this project, as it has done in the past.

Holt's Road intersection is one of the busiest intersections in Mackay and also one of the most dangerous. A friend of mine, the late Mr George Horton, lost his life following a fatal accident at this intersection, which also claimed the lives of three young Mackay men, one of whom was the grandson of Mr Horton's cousin. It was a double tragedy.

The Main Roads Department expects that construction will take around five months and will work closely with Civdec to ensure minimal impacts on the travelling public. In December 1999, the Main Roads Department awarded a contract to engineering consultants Maunsell McIntyre to undertake an extensive study on the Mackay-Bucasia road corridor. This study also included public consultation. The study, which was concluded this year, was quite complex and included a review of existing conditions and modelled future traffic flows. It identified the future road infrastructure requirements for the corridor.

The current population in the northern beaches suburbs is approximately 10,000 people. The study estimated that this population will increase to 30,000 people within the next 15 to 20 years. The study considered a number of alternative road improvement options to handle the increased volume of traffic, together with their costs and benefits. The community was consulted to see what their preferred options were.

Over 400 submissions were received and considered before any decisions were reached. Of those 400 submission, the majority were from the community. My friend and colleague the honourable member for Whitsunday, Jan Jarratt, was involved in this consultation process in her previous incarnation as the President of the Northern Beaches Progress Association. Through the public consultation process a number of different issues were raised and had to be considered before the final decisions were made. These issues included safety, accident history, traffic operations and flow, costs, technical feasibility, environmental issues, social issues and community expectations. The options that were chosen are those that will deliver the greatest benefit for the cost involved.

Main Roads and consultants Maunsell McIntyre developed a staged program aimed at improving safety and traffic flow along the corridor, with the upgrading of intersections as the first priority. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Mr Ken Williamson, District Director, Main Roads, Mackay, and his staff members—Mr Bruce Hansen and Mr Lance Christiansen—and Mr Russell Perkins of Maunsell McIntyre for their professional approach in dealing with the community on this study.

Holt's Road is just the first of the intersections to be upgraded. Other intersections will include Wallman's and Eimeo Roads, Solinjenkins and George Fordyce Roads, Golf Links-Habana road, Beaconsfield intersection and Phillips Street near K mart. The estimated cost, including the Holt's Road intersection work, is $9.6 million and a significant proportion of these works will be completed within the next five years.

This upgrade to the corridor will improve the safety and capacity of the intersections, provide safe pedestrian facilities at signalised intersections, provide safer access to Mackay-Bucasia road, offer improved passing opportunities and improve safety for cyclists. The announcement of the Holt's Road upgrade will be welcomed by the residents of Andergrove-Beaconsfield in the Mackay electorate, residents of Mount Pleasant-Northview in the Mirani electorate and residents of the northern beaches in the electorate of Whitsunday. This project, along with the $4.1 million reconstruction of the Mackay Harbour Road, demonstrates the Beattie government's commitment to improving road infrastructure in the Mackay region. I thank the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads, the Honourable Steve Bredhauer, for his support in ensuring that Mackay gets its fair share of road infrastructure projects.

School Transport Assistance Scheme

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (12.20 p.m.): The state government's management of the School Transport Assistance Scheme for the past three years has created endless financial

and emotional upheaval for families across Queensland. Nowhere is this upheaval more evident than in the communities of my electorate of Cunningham. For approximately three years Queensland Transport has undertaken the task of correcting anomalies in bus boundaries. These corrections to the boundaries have meant that many families who had been sending their children to a school for years using the assistance scheme are no longer eligible for that assistance. These families have been informed by Queensland Transport that, if they wish to continue receiving assistance, they must remove their children from their current school and place them in an alternative school which is either closer or has a more cost-effective bus route. The decision fails to take into account parents' choice or the structure of the local community. With a bureaucratic stroke of the pen in a far removed office, a change can be made with little regard to the consequences. Sadly, the human face of these decisions is forgotten and, on the ground, people's lives are being turned upside down.

I would like to highlight some examples in my electorate where this situation has occurred. One family in question resides in the Brookstead district approximately 22.4 kilometres from the Brookstead State School. For five years they had been approved to receive free bus travel to Brookstead State School for their eldest son and for three years for their second son. The children were well established at the school as were the parents, who volunteer and participate heavily in the school community.

The family live on the property of their employer and the children travel with their father within the property to his place of employment, which is on the Brookstead bus route, and catch the bus to that school. However, 10 months ago they were absolutely astounded when they received a letter informing them that they would no longer be eligible for school bus assistance to the Brookstead State School. Instead, they were advised to change their children to the Cecil Plains State School, which is located 18.2 kilometres from their residence on the property. As honourable members can imagine, the children were deeply distressed at the prospect of being torn away from all their schoolmates and teachers and put into a school where they would not know a single person, let alone considering the cost of things such as new uniforms that the change would cause.

These decisions do not just affect the family. The Brookstead State School is a small school and the loss of two students puts the school at considerable risk of reductions in school entitlements in the areas of staff allocation and general school funding. Brookstead State School is a fine small school that provides quality education. To see its resources cut due to a decision such as this would be devastating to that community. I have fought hard for this family and for their community to have this decision overturned and to allow commonsense to prevail. This, however, has been to no avail.

From this one example it is patently obvious that decisions being made on the School Transport Assistance Scheme are having a massive effect not only on the families but also on the communities. This example is by no means unique. My electorate office is frequently contacted by families, schools and local government representatives informing me of similar cases right across the electorate. Through discussions with my colleagues on both sides of the chamber I have been told that this is a major problem right across the state. One colleague even said that if I do have a win I should let him know how I did it because he has been unable to win any of his cases.

Another example is of a single mother of five children who lives out of town and works in an abattoir to provide a living for her family. She drops her children off at her parents' place on her way to work. The children catch the bus to and from Pittsworth and her parents care for them until she finishes work. However, she has now been told that, because she lives on the Mount Tyson bus route, the children must go to school there regardless of the fact that she would have no-one there to care for them either before or after school when she has to work.

The department often says that children must go to the closest school, but even this is inconsistent. I have one small school currently without any bus at all. They want a bus route but have been unable to get approval for it largely because it will have a detrimental effect on an existing route. However, that existing bus route takes children to a school that is about the fourth or fifth closest from where it picks them up. So the closest school argument simply does not hold water.

There are problems right across the Cunningham electorate, including Millmerran, Cambooya and especially Clifton and issues relating to the Clifton State High School. I fully acknowledge that a framework in relation to the bus travel is vital, however commonsense has to prevail and individual cases must be examined on a case by case basis. I urge the minister to examine the

whole issue of school transport assistance and to show compassion when making decisions that have such a dramatic impact on communities. What is required is a complete overhaul of the bus policy for the entire state which puts the people of Queensland before government and provides flexibility and choice for Queensland families right throughout the state.

Drug Awareness Forum

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (12.25 p.m.): Recently, I held a 'drugs in the community' forum for the people of Springwood. Like the recent *60 Minutes* program, the night was about getting the community together to talk about the issues of this international problem. It was to provide new information to the community and for me to actively listen to the people of the Springwood electorate. I do not think anyone in that room—nor anyone in this room—would say that they have never been affected by the drugs issue. If it has not affected someone in their own family, it has probably affected their extended family, their neighbours or their family, their friends, or maybe they have been a victim of a drug-related crime. The drug issue is such a complex issue. It is not just about drug users or sellers, it is not just about young people, it is not just about law and order nor is it just about low socioeconomics; it is a web of complex issues.

The first speaker at the forum was Mrs Philio Bird from the Ethnic Mental Health Program. I had heard Philio speak at another drug awareness night and was so impressed that I decided to ask her to speak at my forum. The best thing about Philio's talk is that she told it to us so plainly and simply. She deals with this problem every day and told us what is going on out there from first-hand experience. Many of her stories will shock people. She speaks about a nine year old client who said, 'You are looking a bit down today. Would you like me to get you something to pick you up, make you high?' That is right—a nine year old child!

Philio's talk was warmly received and question and answer time was full of interesting discussion. Not everyone in that room would have agreed with everything that people said, but it did create an environment for discussion to flow freely. Some very different and controversial ideas were raised and discussed.

The second speaker, Mr David Floyd, from the Lions Drug Awareness Program, gave valuable information to attendees on practical examples of what the Lions Drug Awareness Program is providing. They have videos, workshops and brochures dealing with different aspects of the drug issue. To coincide with the Olympic Games last year they put out a video for high school students regarding drugs in sport. They are still implementing new ideas and are fully committed to helping the community regarding this issue. All of us in that room agreed that no individual, no government and no organisation has the solution to this problem. It was agreed that, as a community, we have to be active in dealing with the problem and not pushing it aside, and that is what the Beattie Labor government is doing—dealing with the complex issues. We heard that this morning in a ministerial statement from the Minister for Health.

I have listened to the people of Springwood and they tell me that they want less paper communication and more practical assistance from professionals. In particular, the participants felt that doctors should regard this as a specialist area and have specific training to deal with the issue. I thank the people of Springwood for taking the time to come to the forum and to participate. Their participation was a major part of the night. We heard many of their stories on the night. One such story of a gentleman with a son addicted to cannabis stays in my mind. This man will do and is trying to do whatever it takes to help his 23 year old son. I know we were able to give him some information to assist him and his family. I hope that he is successful.

What made the night successful was knowing that everyone went home having learned more about the issue than they knew before they attended. I look forward to many more community forums with the people of Springwood on issues that are of concern to them.

EDUCATION (ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS) BILL

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (12.28 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That leave be granted to bring in a bill for an act to provide for the accreditation of non-state schools, and deciding the eligibility of non-state schools' governing bodies for government funding for the schools, and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

First Reading

Bill and explanatory notes presented and bill, on motion of Ms Bligh, read a first time.

Second Reading

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (12.29 a.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Even before Queensland was recognised as a separate colony, church-run schools provided for the general and religious education of young people, funded from fees and, in many cases, supported by facilities and services contributed by sponsoring organisations. While the state government has significantly developed its own role in the provision of education since the 1860s, non-state schools had limited interaction with the state government until the 1970s, when both Commonwealth and state governments accepted a commitment to provide funds to non-state schools. While it is common to refer to these non-state schools as a sector, there is considerable diversity in the educational philosophies and religious and other organisational affiliations of these schools. This diversity is growing as the cultural diversity of the Queensland population grows and individual groups seek to maintain their cultural or religious identity through the provision of particular forms of education for their children.

Under current arrangements, non-state schools now attract funding from both levels of government, with the balance derived from private sources, mainly fees. The actual mix of funding for schools varies considerably, but schools on average derive 70 per cent of their funding from government sources. Of the 653,000 young people attending school in Queensland in 2001, 183,000, or 28 per cent, attend non-state schools. The state government has an obligation to ensure that all young Queenslanders have access to education of an appropriate standard during the compulsory years of schooling regardless of the setting in which students are enrolled. As Minister for Education, I have a duty to the community to seek to promote the overall quality of education in the state and ensure accountability for public funding. Young people spend their formative years engaged in structured educational activities. Much of their intellectual, social and personal development and their wellbeing, health and safety are shaped by schools during these years. There is a clear public interest in a regulatory framework which enables the public to have confidence in the organisations undertaking this role.

Successive state governments have recognised for some time that approval processes to establish new non-state schools needed to be made clearer and more transparent and that accountability measures for the expenditure of state funds by non-state schools needed to be improved. With a view to solving these issues, a review of accreditation and accountability arrangements for non-state schools was conducted in 1999. The review committee was led by Professor Roy Webb and, after extensive consultation, published its recommendations for regulating the non-state school sector. These recommendations formed the foundation of this bill. The Beattie government made a commitment to the community during this year's state election that the passage of this bill would be a priority.

I wish to acknowledge that the vast majority of non-state schools provide a high quality education for young Queenslanders. The introduction of this bill is not intended to cast any doubt over the long tradition of excellence and service that these schools have provided to our community. The main objective of this bill is to create for the first time a comprehensive and transparent regulatory regime applying to all non-state schools. The bill will also establish a system of accountability that aims to ensure that funding of non-state schools is based on accurate data and that non-state schools formally certify that state funds were expended in accordance with the purposes for which they were granted. These objectives are to be achieved by establishing a Non-State Schools Accreditation Board that will assess applications against accreditation criteria prescribed in regulation and continue to monitor an accredited school's compliance with those criteria. The Eligibility for Government Funding Committee as a subcommittee of the board will assess applications and make recommendations to the Minister for Education as to whether a proposed school should be eligible to receive government funding based on transparent criteria set out in the bill. The establishment of the accreditation board and funding committee will be the subject of further consultation with the non-state school sector.

Transition provisions in the bill have been designed to ensure that existing approved schools will be automatically deemed to be accredited and eligible for government funding under this legislation. These schools will be subject to review within five years. The criteria for accreditation will cover all relevant issues and will ensure that non-state schools are able to offer a consistent,

stable and high-quality educational program. A regulation is to be made to elaborate on these criteria and will be developed in consultation with representatives of the non-state schools sector.

Under the new regime, the primary focus of regulation of entry to the industry is to ensure that all schools meet acceptable minimum standards. Proponents of new schools who may be well able to add to the range of schooling options in the state who are not dependent on state funding will not be prevented from operating. A virtual or distance education provider of high quality would be able to establish an operation in Queensland, as might a prestigious non-state school from an interstate or overseas system. Schools which meet the required quality standards will be able to apply for government funding. The minister is not bound by recommendations of the funding committee. The final decision as to whether a school is to be considered eligible for government funding will remain, rightly, with the government. By separating the decision on accreditation from the decision on funding, in a climate of limited resources the state is able to give greater focus in funding new schools to those which address the needs of rapidly growing or under-serviced communities or groups or meet specific community needs.

The bill makes it illegal to operate, or to purport to operate, a school that does not satisfy the criteria for accreditation or provisional accreditation. Stiff penalties are provided for offenders and the board has power to make public notifications in these situations. The bill specifies procedures for provisional accreditation, assessment of a provisionally accredited school for accreditation, and accreditation of major changes to the school's profile, such as the addition of further years of schooling, new locations or new modes of delivery. If reasonable grounds exist, all decisions taken by the board or the minister can be reviewed. The board will have the power to revoke a school's accreditation on a number of grounds, including non-compliance with the criteria. Under the bill, accredited non-state schools will be required to demonstrate to the board once every five years that they continue to meet the standards contained in the accreditation criteria. A school that fails to provide this evidence may, after due process, have its accreditation revoked.

In developing a process to meet the obligations under which I must report to the parliament on the use of state recurrent funds for non-state schools, there are two key issues that the bill addresses. One is the reliability of census data reported by schools which forms the basis of the allocation of state funds, and the other is the process for certifying that funds allocated are used for the purpose for which they are intended. In its considerations of these issues, the bill has been developed to make sure that any processes do not increase unreasonably the additional administrative burden placed on schools while still meeting adequate public reporting standards. The Non-State School Accreditation Board will manage the accountability process for state government funds.

The bill provides for the screening of members or prospective members of non-state school governing bodies, as well as prospective assessors and auditors employed by the board. The Commissioner for Children and Young People will conduct the screening process and will decide whether to issue positive suitability notices to members. The accreditation criteria include provisions that address two aspects of child protection; that is, inappropriate behaviour of staff towards students and the reporting of suspected or actual harm to a student to the appropriate authorities. Schools are required to have written policies and processes that address these issues. The bill also includes amendments to the Education (Work Experience) Act 1996 to bring into line the insurance indemnity for personal injury or property damage for students undertaking work experience required under this act, with the indemnity specified in the Training and Employment Act 2000.

While this bill signals groundbreaking public policy in upholding the standards of education of non-state schools in this state and maintaining public confidence in the operation of those schools, it is the culmination of a substantial period of hard work for many people. This is a significant bill before the House today. I thank all those who have contributed in some way. In particular, I cannot let this opportunity pass without expressing my thanks to Professor Roy Webb for his original contribution to the policy framework which underpins the bill, to the former Minister for Education, Dean Wells, who oversaw that work, and to those representatives of the non-state schooling sector who have worked tirelessly on assisting the policy framework for this bill. I have given stakeholders my commitment to continue to work with them in a consultative way and to ensure that the implementation is effective. I will be happy to take any recommendations for review into account. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Johnson, adjourned.

LAW REFORM (CONTRIBUTORY NEGLIGENCE) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (12.39 p.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That leave be granted to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Law Reform Act 1995.

Motion agreed to.

First Reading

Bill and explanatory notes presented and bill, on motion of Mr Welford, read a first time.

Second Reading

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (12.39 p.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill contains amendments to the Law Reform Act 1995 to address the impact of the High Court's decision in Astley v. Austrust Ltd. The amendments are directed at division 3 of part 3 of the Law Reform Act, which deals with the apportionment of liability in cases of contributory negligence. In general terms, where a plaintiff has contributed to their own loss that part requires a court to reduce damages to such an extent as is just and equitable. All other things being equal, if a plaintiff is guilty of contributory negligence the damages they receive should be reduced proportionately. If you contributed 60 per cent to your loss, you should only be entitled to claim for the remaining 40 per cent of liability of the person against whom you claim.

Prior to the High Court's decision in Astley v. Austrust, the authoritative interpretation was that these provisions applied in cases of concurrent liability in tort and contract. The common law recognises that a person may owe a duty of care both in tort and in contract in a range of circumstances; for example, in the relationship between an employer and an employee. Similarly, a professional adviser will usually be found to be concurrently liable for negligence in tort and breach of contract.

In Astley, the High Court held that the equivalent provisions in the South Australian Wrongs Act were not applicable to actions in contract. That decision is now the authoritative interpretation of the Queensland provisions. The High Court's decision currently means that if a plaintiff can frame their claim solely in contract their own contributory negligence will not be a relevant consideration. Although the plaintiff may have been guilty of contributory negligence they will be entitled to recover 100 per cent of their loss, assuming they can prove their claim for the breach. That outcome is plainly unfair.

Whilst it might be thought the effect of this decision is limited to litigants, there is a wider negative impact. If higher damages are awarded against individuals, the result could be higher insurance premiums for all. The High Court acknowledged in its judgment that governments may wish to respond by amending the relevant legislation. The Standing Committee of Attorneys-General has received representations from a number of bodies calling for amendment. These include the Insurance Council of Australia, the Australian Medical Association and the Law Council of Australia. As a result, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General instructed the Parliamentary Counsels' Committee to prepare model amendments in response to the High Court's decision.

The bill before the House is directed solely to remedying the impact of the decision in Astley. The bill inserts a new definition of 'wrong' to include a breach of contract that is concurrent with a duty of care in tort. The bill amends the apportionment provisions to clarify that a court should reduce a plaintiff's damages arising from a wrong if the plaintiff is guilty of contributory negligence.

The bill will apply to wrongs that occurred prior to the commencement of this bill. However, the new provisions will not apply where a court has given judgment in a matter or where the parties themselves have agreed to settle a matter. In addition, the new provisions will not apply to certain actions under the WorkCover Queensland Act 1996 or actions that have been commenced but not determined by a court. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Springborg, adjourned.

PENALTIES AND SENTENCES (NON-CONTACT ORDERS) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (12.44 p.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That leave be granted to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 and Evidence Act 1977.

Motion agreed to.

First Reading

Bill and explanatory notes presented and bill, on motion of Mr Welford, read a first time.

Second Reading

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (12.45 p.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill was introduced into the parliament last year by my predecessor. Some changes have been made to the bill as introduced last year because of further consultation.

On occasion, victims of crime fear that an offender, even though convicted, may injure them or harm them in some other way. This bill seeks to address this by allowing the sentencing court in certain situations to make orders prohibiting the offender from contacting the victim or from going to a stated place.

The courts have arguably always had the power to make orders of a similar type as a condition of probation. However, the bill takes this one step further. Under this bill the courts can make such an order as part of any sentence imposed upon an adult offender convicted of an indictable offence against the person. Such an order can be made for the benefit of the victim of the offence and an associate of the victim. An associate of the victim is defined as a person who was with the victim when the offence was committed.

The court may make the order if satisfied of certain matters set out in the bill. For example, the court can make an order if satisfied there is a risk the offender will injure or harass the victim or associate. The court may also make an order if satisfied there is a risk the offender will damage the victim's or associate's property. The court, in deciding whether or not to make the order, is to have regard to all of the circumstances of the case.

The bill makes it an offence for the offender to breach the order. Such an offence is punishable by imprisonment of up to one year. An application for amendment or revocation of a non-contact order can be made by the victim or associate, as well as the offender or prosecutor. This is because the original order is made for the benefit of the victim and/or associate. An offender cannot make an application for amendment or revocation of the order until at least six months after the date of the original order. This will prevent offenders making repeated vexatious claims for amendment immediately after the original order was made.

The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee was concerned with this aspect of last year's bill. I have considered the committee's arguments on this matter. I remain convinced that for the reasons I have just expressed the six-month prerequisite should remain. This prerequisite does not in any way affect the offender's rights to appeal against the order as an appeal against sentence.

The bill provides that an order cannot be made where an order may be made under section 30 of the Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Act 1989. This is because there is power in section 30 of the Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Act 1989 for the sentencing court to make a domestic violence order against the offender. This exception should avoid any potential for inconsistency.

I shall now briefly outline some of the changes to the bill since it was introduced last year. Firstly, the bill provides the sentencing court with a further sentencing option where the court believes there is a need to protect the victim or associate. The new legislation will be monitored closely to ensure that its intended effect is being achieved. As my predecessor indicated last year, the bill is a further example of this government's ongoing commitment to protect victims of crime.

Out of an abundance of caution, the bill also contains an amendment to section 132C of the Evidence Act 1977. This makes it clear that the judge or magistrate has to be satisfied on the

balance of probabilities about evidence given in relation to an order. Honourable members will recall that section 132C was inserted into the Evidence Act 1977 last year. This was done in response to the decision of the Court of Appeal in R v. Morrison [1999] 1 Queensland Reports at page 397. The amendments to the Evidence Act 1977 in this bill make it absolutely clear that section 132C applies to this bill.

As I indicated, this bill evidences our government's ongoing commitment to protect victims of crime. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Springborg, adjourned.

COMMONWEALTH POWERS (FAMILY LAW—CHILDREN) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (12.51 p.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That leave be granted to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Commonwealth Powers (Family Law—Children) Act 1990.

Motion agreed to.

First Reading

Bill and explanatory notes presented and bill, on motion of Mr Welford, read a first time.

Second Reading

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (12.52 p.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to make further reference of power to the Commonwealth for family law purposes. The bill tidies up some anomalies in relation to the handling of family law matters affecting children who are subject to child welfare laws. This further reference will confer jurisdiction on the Commonwealth to make laws about—

- custody, guardianship and access matters involving children who are subject to a child welfare law where the relevant state minister or authorised person consents;
- maintenance for children who are subject to a child welfare law; and
- declarations of parentage for Commonwealth purposes.

The bill will preserve the state's power in relation to child welfare laws and maintain the state's exclusive power to make adoption orders. In terms of Commonwealth/state jurisdiction, jurisdiction in relation to matters affecting children is shared between the Commonwealth and the states. Section 51 of the Commonwealth Constitution empowers the Commonwealth parliament to make laws with respect to divorce and matrimonial causes. This gives the Commonwealth the power to legislate for maintenance, custody, guardianship and access only in relation to children of a marriage. However, the constitution does not enable the Commonwealth to legislate for maintenance, custody, guardianship or access in respect of ex-nuptial children.

The Commonwealth Constitution therefore creates a distinction in the handling of matters relating to children whose parents were married, as compared to those whose parents were not married. This anomaly was largely resolved by the Goss government in 1990 with passage of the Commonwealth Powers (Family Law—Children) Act 1990. This act referred power to the Commonwealth to legislate with respect to—

- maintenance for ex-nuptial children, except where such children are subject to a state child welfare law (for example, children who are subject to an order under the Child Protection Act 1999); and
- custody, guardianship and access for ex-nuptial children, except where those children are the subject of child welfare law.

The only remaining distinction in the handling of matters regarding children relates to those children who are subject to child welfare orders. At the present time, the Family Court does not have the power to make orders in relation to these children. This bill addresses that distinction.

Regarding custody, guardianship and access matters, the bill responds to concerns about the appropriate jurisdiction for the resolution of cases involving children where there have been allegations of child abuse. The Family Court has no jurisdiction to make parenting orders about a child who is under the care of a person under the Child Protection Act 1999, unless those orders come into effect when the child is no longer subject to that care. This limitation on the jurisdiction of the Family Court limits the range of options that can be considered when the Department of Families is conducting an assessment of a child's protective or other needs.

It is also common for proceedings involving the same allegedly abused child to be instituted in both the Family Court and a Childrens Court. Obviously, this duplication can result in confusion, delay, expense, inconvenience and the possibility of a child being further abused. This bill allows the Family Court, therefore, to hear applications for parenting orders—previously known as custody, guardianship and access orders—where children are in the care of the state, with the consent of the relevant state minister.

In terms of child maintenance, the Commonwealth can legislate currently with respect to maintenance for any child not subject to a child welfare law. The reference to the Commonwealth of the residual maintenance power will therefore remove that vestige of discrimination against children who are subject to a child welfare law.

With regard to parentage declarations, this bill also includes a reference to the power to make declarations of parentage for Commonwealth purposes. The Family Court has no specific power currently to make declarations of parentage, although it does have power to order a person to undergo a parentage test. The Family Court currently makes parentage declarations in the context of applications for a parenting order. It cannot determine parentage where there are no other proceedings before the court. This bill will therefore confer concurrent jurisdiction on the Commonwealth to make laws with respect to parentage for Commonwealth purposes. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Springborg, adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 12.57 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

GAS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 20 June (see p. 1573).

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.30 p.m.): The opposition will be supporting this bill. Basically, this bill provides for changes to the legislative architecture, which are necessary because the existing legislation was based on the premise that the gas market contestability at the smaller end of the bulk market and in the domestic and small business market would be in place by the end of July this year. We are in favour of supplier competition for gas where that can provide real cost benefits and improved service for customers, but the reason for this bill is that the conditions are not yet favourable for the creation of those benefits. It is legitimate to ask why.

The whole Australian gas market is still to be put in a position in which the full range of benefits of competition can be secured by customers, be those customers large or small. It is interesting to note that market arrangements are not in place anywhere in Australia. I guess it is also good to see that at last something is not presented by the government as being a uniquely Queensland problem. Evidently, something has run off the tracks somewhere.

This bill illustrates the complex nature of the Queensland gas industry and the difficulty of enforcing competition within a relatively small retail market. This amendment bill is necessary because the market arrangements that must be in place to provide for competition under the national competition policy are not yet in place and will not be for some time. The 20 to 30 large industrial customers that operate on existing contracts that still have some time to run will have to have consumer protections built into their access to competitive gas. That will have to be built in by the gas and petroleum legislation.

This legislation, the Gas Amendment Bill, provides for a delay in contestability in the market for the 100 or so smaller industrial and business users of gas and it provides for a delay until the year 2003 for contestability in the domestic and small business market. This is a sector that needs measures of protection so that the market power of big suppliers does not work to disadvantage users whose commercial clout would not otherwise withstand the power of the gas dollar. The

National Party supports these protections and, indeed, believes that they are vital to the fair operation of any market in any commodity.

The Queensland Competition Authority is examining the issue of an access regime for the state's existing network of gas pipelines. The delay in full contestability to 2003 gives time for this process to be completed. Again, we might ask why, at the eleventh hour—given that the original plan was for a 31 July start date—this parliament is again being called on to pull some prematurely heated irons out of fire. The QCA is conducting a cost-benefit analysis in order to make a pricing determination. The government says that this must produce a net benefit to consumers. We agree that it must.

The issue of access is to the existing reticulation network; it is not one of the new pipelines. At issue in this legislation is the distribution network. The service to retail customers and smaller pipeline systems is the focus of this legislation. Third-party access is now guaranteed to the gas reticulation pipelines owned by Allgas, a government company, and Origin, which was formerly Boral. At present the wholesaler is Santos, which owns the gas fields of south-western Queensland and South Australia and supplies Allgas and Origin. New retailers could enter the Queensland retail gas market with access to the reticulation network on the same basis as telecommunications companies have access to the Telstra network.

This debate also provides an opportunity to look briefly at the wider gas picture in Queensland. Although the matters dealt with under this bill are focused strictly on the existing gas network, Queensland's energy infrastructure is at an interesting stage. The success or otherwise of the government's energy policy as a whole will have a great bearing on the costs that are to be borne ultimately by the small consumer and the family home user. The government's policy is for 13 per cent of power generation to be from gas by the year 2005 and a further two per cent is to be provided by renewable sources.

There are some problems with the non-appearance of the PNG gas pipeline, certainly within the time frame that was provided originally and the now inevitable—perhaps lengthy—delay in Timor gas reaching Queensland by pipeline. It is possible that not only supply issues will be under pressure but also cost issues. I think that we would all be hoping that either of those two gas pipelines can become a reality to provide for industrial gas down the coastal spine of Queensland.

I know that the people constructing the pipeline from Darwin to South Australia intend to proceed with that project, if they possibly can, depending upon whether the issues relating to the Timor gas field can be sorted out. Those issues relate to the changed structure of taxation benefits. Certainly, if that pipeline from Darwin to South Australia goes ahead—of course, a different pipeline would come across to Queensland—it would be important that that gas gets hooked up, most probably at Mount Isa, across a long distance where there are not a lot of users along the way, to a spine running down the coast. That will certainly be a great advantage to industrial users along the Queensland coast and it will help the government.

I think that we would all want to see this come to fruition so that we are able to provide for a certain amount of power generation to come from gas. Once that line was hooked up, it would certainly be able to join up with some of these other systems—the lines that we have running currently from south-western Queensland up to Mount Isa, the line that comes through Roma, over the downs to Toowoomba and on to the Brisbane metropolitan area, and other branches of that network system.

This is a relatively simple bill because it addresses the time frame that is needed for contestability to occur. It is addressing issues of regulation that need to be put in place, competitiveness arrangements that need to be put in place and market access arrangements that need to be put in place. The arrangements might be a little bit simpler for those big industrial users who use gas, but when gas goes into the reticulation networks that are currently in Brisbane—one company operating on the north side of the river and another company operating on the south side of the river—and if new retailers are getting involved in the market, then there has to be a marketing arrangement and there has to be a network arrangement. Protocols and systems have to be put in place for the wholesaler to know where his gas is going and for the individual customers to be able to take gas from a particular company, even though it is all coming through the same line. All of those things have to be put in place. We understand that.

We are also aware that this contestability is not in place in any other part of Australia yet. The opposition supports this bill so that that can be done. The important thing is that, ultimately, these arrangements have to provide cheaper gas and true competition so that not only the big users of gas have the opportunity to receive discounted or cheaper gas prices that can help their business

operations but also the tens of thousands of domestics users have the opportunity to share in any benefits arising out of competitiveness and contestability within the domestic gas market system.

Finally, I would like to thank the minister and his staff for the briefing that they provided to me. It gave me a clear insight into the bill. The opposition will be supporting it.

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (2.39 p.m.): I am proud to speak today on the Gas Amendment Bill. Governments have to plan for future energy sources and, through this bill, the government should be commended for doing just that. I did not think that I would often be in agreement with the opposition leader, but I do agree with much of what he said.

In past years Queensland has relied heavily on the sale of coal and the use of coal-fired power generators. I was born and bred in Ipswich. Many coalfields surround that area and, of course, the Swanbank facility, was one of the major power sources for south-east Queensland for many decades. This morning we paid homage and respect to those who lost their lives in the tragic Moura mine disaster that occurred seven years ago. Ipswich also suffered with numerous fatalities from disasters such as the Box Flat coal disaster in the Swanbank area, which was the worst disaster in the state. I remember it vividly, although I was a child at the time. It sent shock waves across the entire community. I do not think that there was a family or community group that was not affected. Obviously with coalmines came a lot of Rugby League footballers. Ipswich was probably so well known for its football because of the number of coalminers who resided in the area. I was involved in the Norths Junior Rugby League Club. We lost a few coaches, a few members and a few players in that tragic disaster.

I believe that in four or five decades—50 or 60 years—this state may not be as reliant upon coal. Coal generates wealth and jobs, and I hope that we can continue to make money out of the industry through exporting. However, it remains to be seen whether one day all our generators will be gas fired. We have to plan for the future. As all members would realise, we may be able to utilise reserves of gas that are not too far to the north of us. Neighbouring developing countries will also benefit if we utilise some of their assets. Our country has often exported much of its mineral wealth, and nations such as Papua New Guinea and East Timor will also be reliant upon funds from this country and many others into the future. Therefore, I hope that the government continues to look towards gas-fired generators to power this state and, with the power grid system, possibly other areas across Australia. Gas is a cleaner industry and it would be part of our Smart State strategy to continue the long-term development of that industry.

On the Sunshine Coast we are well aware of the anticipated growth between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast. In the not-too-distant future, Queensland will be the second most populated state in Australia. As a lot of this growth will occur in the Sunshine Coast area, we cannot rely only on tourism and the building industry. We will have to look to other industries, many of which may be powered by gas. The sooner we can get pipelines in place to provide an affordable fuel source to continue industry growth and job creation, the better.

Caloundra Downs is an area between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, just south of Caloundra, that is being investigated for major job creation industries. The Department of State Development, other government departments and local councils in the area are all playing a part in what will happen in the area once the pine trees are farmed. I believe that the area is a part of the Lensworth property group. The government must continue to investigate positive job creation industries.

One of the major problems on the Sunshine Coast is the disposal of treated effluent or sewage. We have a commodity that allegedly meets drinking standards. People have said that recycling sewage effluent for potable reuse is not politically palatable or is not acceptable to the residents. Therefore, we pump millions of litres of high-quality water into our oceans and rivers. I believe that a high water usage industry could be based on the Sunshine Coast. It is just over an hour from Brisbane, where there is an international airport. Therefore, we have access to local, regional, interstate and overseas markets.

Planning for the future through the management of gas is very positive. This government will do everything that it can to improve the gas supply not only to businesses but also, in the long-term, to domestic users for cooking or heating. That will reduce the greenhouse problems that we have. Queensland's reliance on electricity is driven home when one travels interstate or overseas and sees the alternatives to electricity that exist, whether it be for heating, cooking or whatever.

As I said, I grew up in Ipswich where town gas was used greatly. It was a very affordable fuel source for the working-class areas that made Ipswich the great place that it is. Unfortunately, on

the Sunshine Coast only bottled gas is available, so gas is not utilised as it should be. It is much easier to tap into gas and to plan for developments when town gas is supplied through pipelines that run to the front door, just as with electricity, water, sewerage and telephone cables. I hope that the day will come when the majority of Queenslanders will have access to gas. Most restaurants or other cooking facilities utilise gas because it is much more convenient to use. However, I feel that planning for the future is a part of this. It will make access to gas more affordable and more competitive. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—Ind) (2.48 p.m.): In rising to speak in support of the bill, I am very mindful of the full implications that the introduction of full retail competition in the Queensland reticulated gas market could have to some of the towns within my electorate, such as Dalby, Oakey and parts of Toowoomba where reticulated gas is an option for consumers. The impact of full deregulation and the consequences upon competition need to be viewed carefully, as we may well end up with a situation similar to many of the other industries where many small towns are suffering grievously as a result of deregulation.

Whilst deregulation and open competition may seem to be good for the general public, in many cases they have been disastrous for our country towns and people. The deregulation of the dairy industry has to be a prime example and another good example is the banking industry. We have seen many of our local dairy farms being sold while tanker loads of milk continue to run into Toowoomba from Victoria. In the banking industry, we have seen the closure of bank branches in most of our communities, and even in the suburbs of Brisbane. Another example has been the effect on many of our local authorities of the need to change the way they operate their sewerage and water supplies—all, generally speaking, to the detriment of country people.

In addition to the towns within my electorate, other country towns along the Roma-Brisbane gas pipeline will be affected by this gas reticulation bill, and we need to understand that their gas distribution, as in the case of Dalby's reticulation, is operated by the local authority. We need to look very carefully at this bill before it is passed.

I am pleased to see that the purpose of this amendment is to delay further the introduction of the process, which will give more time to properly assess the full impact that the introduction of this bill will ultimately have on people generally and whether the multinationals will be the only winners from the move as is generally the case.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (2.49 p.m.): I recognise that for many people the issue of contestability is different. It affects my electorate significantly because of the industrial customers in the electorate who have been waiting for contestability and perhaps a more advantageous gas price for their industrial inputs. Many of the big industries already use gas because it is a cleaner fuel source. Certainly, that is one of the greatest attractions of switching from coal fired to gas fired, whether it be for turbines or heaters for other processes.

I know that industries were looking forward to this early contestability. I would not say that I fully understand this, but I do understand that the contestability process would be a complex one and, therefore, it is much more advantageous to all participants to get the process right before it is introduced and ensure that it can be brought on line without any unforeseen complications.

The other issue that I wish to raise—and it is attached to the contestability—is appropriate levels of gas supply. One of the questions asked regularly in my electorate is: where is the PNG pipeline process at? The proponents had done a lot of work to ensure that they had native title access rights and that the general layout of the pipeline from Papua New Guinea was in place. The sovereign risk issues are ones that governments have to negotiate and recognise. However, a finalisation of that process would be looked on very favourably by the larger industry and other consumers in my electorate and also, I am sure, in other areas of the state.

As the previous speaker said, gas prices also affect the smaller urban consumer. A number of people have complained about the increases in gas prices and the price that is charged for rental on gas cylinders. Whenever we have passed on those concerns we have been given a cyclical argument about it not being the ACCC's right to oversee those prices, that the price of the cylinder hire is up to the company. But one could question whether some of these price increases are not being put in place in advance of the contestability to give a small buffer to the company as far as the urban price of gas is concerned.

Again, I can understand the reason for laying aside the current date of implementation of this bill. I look forward, on behalf of the larger consumers and the urban consumers in my electorate, to contestability being put in place so that, one would hope, a reasonable price for gas can be achieved.

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (2.53 p.m.), in reply: I thank all members for their support of the legislation.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

Bill, on motion of Mr Mackenroth, by leave, read a third time.

DALRYMPLE BAY COAL TERMINAL (LONG-TERM LEASE) BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 22 June (see p. 1838).

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.55 p.m.): The Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal (Long-term Lease) Bill addresses a matter under the Property Law Act such that the provisions as to covenants are not to assign and so on without licence or consent. That is the key point of the bill. Under the Property Law Act lessees have the opportunity to assign to another lessee or third party. However, in this case it is the desire of the government—and we agree with it—not to have any assignment unless the assignee can conform to the various principles put in place under the original 99-year lease. That is the key point of this piece of legislation. It is pretty straightforward.

The government proposes to sell the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal lease. That is the effect of it. It is a 99-year lease, but it wants to retain control over the lessee's actions in terms of five objectives. They include the competitiveness of the terminal, the efficiency of supply, long-term sustainability, management of the asset, and maximising return to the state. There is nothing overly controversial in such a commercial arrangement.

However, there are some issues that are worth mentioning in this debate, particularly from the point of view of those people who use the terminal—the coal producers. What we are doing today is facilitating one element of the sale process; this will be one of the conditions of the sale of the lease. For those central Queensland coal producers it is very important that two things happen from the sale process.

The first is that in using the terminal they are no worse off than they are at present with the terminal being owned by the Ports Corporation. It is very important that if the government sells off this lease Queensland coal producers are still able to remain competitive and they are able to use the facility at a very competitive price to load ships in order to send the coal overseas. There have been examples, particularly in Victoria, where private organisations have bought power stations, paid too much for the asset and have had to charge more in order to get a return for that asset. That will be one of the important aspects for the government to consider in the whole process of negotiating the sale.

Whilst we may wish for the best price possible, if that price is at such a high level it might mean that these people will have to charge more for the coal to go through the terminal, which would make it more difficult for our coal industry to remain competitive. The coal industry is developing in China and has increased substantially in recent years. Some of our coal, but not every type, is facing strong competition from the Chinese and also from interstate.

Because it will virtually be a monopoly arrangement, it is important that the incoming successful lessee will be able to make application to the Queensland Competition Authority for an access regime so that the user can ask for any matters to be referred to that competition authority. There will have to be a system in place so that those people using this port facility are able to go to the competition authority and say, 'In this monopoly situation we think we are paying too much and we need an adjustment for the price so that we remain competitive.' I would like to hear the minister's comments on whether that arrangement is being negotiated into the various sale protocols.

Secondly, the capital growth of this terminal needs to be guaranteed. The next stage is stage 6. The Ports Corporation would have moved on to undertake that. Any successful incoming

lessee will need to be able to provide a guarantee that they will be undertaking stage 6 or any other necessary expansions that need to occur over that 99-year lease of that facility. There are projects in the pipeline that are about to commence. There was the recent announcement about Hail Creek. When that comes on line it will be very important that stage 6 is constructed to allow for the transportation of the coal from that mine. So there are two aspects: there is the access regime for reasonable pricing systems in that monopoly situation and, secondly, the future growth in capital construction of the terminal, particularly stage 6 but also other stages as they become necessary.

The coal industry itself in central Queensland and in the Bowen basin has become one of the major industries in the state. It will be important to see that this sale process does continue to provide the sort of service, accessibility and pricing regime that allows our great coal industry to remain competitive to attract interstate or international coal exporters. There is not much of a margin at times. If we look at some of the royalties that the coal industry provides to Queensland we can see how important it is not just as an industry that provides for jobs and economic growth but as an industry that provides a pretty substantial proportion of the income of the state.

It is predicted that in the next 12 months there will be a windfall increase of around $130 million to $140 million to the government due in part to the increased productivity from those coalfields of Queensland, the increased export activity, the increased tonnage that is being exported and some of the relative price increases or the competitiveness that has come about through the low Australian dollar. As I have said, there is probably going to be a likely total cash return to the government of about $531 million, which will be an increase in the order of $130 million to $140 million in royalties. We can see that that is a huge predicted increase.

On top of that, in the last budget the government increased overnight quite secretively an additional royalty on coal exports. That is over and above the natural increases that are coming about through increased tonnages and a better relative pricing structure that the exporters have been able to obtain, particularly because of the low value of the dollar. That additional royalty is going to be somewhere in the order of $80 million. It is brought about by changing the system of charging the royalty based on mine mouth prices to the value of the coal at the wharf. That has meant that it has provided a wider base, and that will provide another boom in royalties to the government—somewhere in the order of $80 million.

We want to continue to provide for an economic climate in Queensland where people have the confidence to invest. It is very easy to lose that confidence. If the investors, be they small or large, feel that investing in companies involved in mining in Queensland will provide good capital growth, good yield, then they will invest with confidence. But if they think that a government is going to change overnight the royalty structure so that extra money is taken out of the proceeds or the profits that the mining companies make, then they will become reluctant to invest. Sometimes they are quite subtle shifts in confidence. A good example of that was when Alan Bond took the Milton Road address off the XXXX label. It did not seem like much at the time, but it resulted in a total shift in brand loyalty and people's attitudes. They are the subtle things that can happen overnight. Instead of governments working carefully and closely with the mining industry and talking about these issues and working out the competition that this state is facing—

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr HORAN: There were a lot of reasons.

Mr Mackenroth: There were 60 pubs in Queensland and he sold them.

Mr HORAN: He lost the loyalty of those licensees who from generation to generation could hand down those particular hotels and had the loyalty to the brand. I am saying that these things can be pretty subtle. The Milton Road issue was a big one in lots of people's minds. The government needs to work closely with the mining industry and not start making these overnight changes without any consultation at all, without any discussions with the mining industry. You can only pare off so much meat until you hit the bone.

The mining industry has gone through a number of years of hard times. They have had to restructure to be able to meet the new competitive forces. They have had to restructure to meet changes due to the downturn in the Asian economy and the decline in the export markets that they had to meet. They have to meet the competition that comes currently from China and Indonesia and the cheaper cost of production in those areas. They have all those particular competitive forces to continue to meet and to which to adjust to maintain this great industry back home here in central Queensland.

This industry provides not only the export incomes to our state and the companies involved but also wages for so many people. It contributes to the associated businesses that hang off the mining industry, whether it be through the sale or maintenance of heavy machinery. It provides wages for all the contractors who work in the mining industry and is responsible for the viability of some of our central Queensland and hinterland towns inland from Mackay and just north of Emerald that depend heavily upon the mining industry. All of those towns rely upon the company that operates the particular mining enterprises there. They rely on the mining industry having good export markets, being able to maintain a good work force, good equipment, good technology and bringing that economic benefit to those areas.

What the government has done is quite serious. The government is taking a natural increase in royalty payments through the increase in tonnage and the better pricing structure that exists for coal and, not satisfied with that, they have whacked on this extra $80 million by changing the base upon which the royalty is being charged. I warn this parliament that too much of this sort of activity is going to destroy investor confidence and make mining companies look elsewhere in the world in terms of where they can do business. That is the last thing we want because this industry has been great for Queensland; it is one of our truly great industries. In terms of export commodities, our mining exports are the biggest of any commodity in the state, and we in Queensland rely heavily upon those mining exports.

I want to emphasise those two points about the sale process which has been renegotiated. Reports appeared in the financial papers to the effect that the sale had been all tied up and was complete, yet now we see the government renegotiating this sale. I asked the minister some questions during the estimates process about the possible $100 million black hole that would result in the budget if the government had been working on a particular set of figures that it was anticipating receiving this financial year in return for the sale of this lease and now the sale has to be substantially renegotiated.

Apart from how much the government gets for the facility in the renegotiation, I ask the minister to address two important aspects in his summing-up. Firstly, there is the matter of the Queensland Competition Authority and the access regimes so that producers loading their coal through this monopoly owner will still be able to access services at a fair price and not be held to ransom. Secondly, there is the matter of the continued capital growth of the terminal in order for stage 6 to be constructed in a timely fashion so that those mines supplying the area can cater for any increased production. The Queensland coal industry is substantially built on export coal, and the Bowen basin is a key element in the industry.

Dalrymple Bay was established to ensure the availability of a multiuser coal loading export terminal for a large number of Queensland mines, not just mines owned by one particular company. It opened in 1986 and has been progressively expanded. It has also seen a number of technological enhancements since then. Some of the mines supplying Dalrymple Bay include Blair Athol, Goonyella Riverside, German Creek, Oaky Creek, North Goonyella, Burton, Moranbah North, Foxleigh and Coppabella, which is now expanding its own operations.

This bill means that the Dalrymple Bay coal terminal will be exempt from section 121 of the Property Law Act, legislation that dates back to 1867. If this were not the case, this legislation would otherwise limit the government's control over the activities of the lessee. In particular, it means that the government can apply restrictions throughout the 99-year term of the lease on who can be assigned parts of the lease and that they conform to the principles applied in the sale of the lease in the first stage. It means that major users can be barred from buying out the facility, that is, a major buyer purchasing the facility for its own use. A situation such as that would make it very difficult for all those mines I mentioned to use this port. As a result of this legislation, Dalrymple Bay must remain a multiuser terminal. There is also a 10 per cent limit in terms of ownership of the lease assets by users, or 20 per cent in some foreseeable circumstances. It also means that other non-finance institutional investors will be limited to 20 per cent ownership of the lease but imposes no limit on ownership by financial institutions.

These are sensible measures that the majority of Queenslanders would support. The leasing of Dalrymple Bay will undoubtedly provide the state with an income stream without the capital costs of expanding or refurbishing the facility. However, it will be interesting to see the result of the lease arrangement. Because the government has a capital commitment and a capital need through the Ports Corporation to undertake certain expansions, obviously a return comes to the government. Any sale or any lease obviously has to be of benefit to the state. Even though the government theoretically retains ownership during the 99-year lease, it is as good as a sale.

When the final figures and results of the sale come out, it will be important for us to be able to analyse whether or not the government has created an improvement on the current situation.

Two matters would need to be given consideration to see whether or not it was in fact an improvement: firstly, the annual return coming from the lease and whether that is better than the dividends the government receives now from the facility and, secondly, whether the Queensland government of the day is making a substantial saving on the capital it would have to spend to expand the facility and whether or not savings on capital expenditure offset the returns and what the Ports Corporation would have to borrow for its future capital development. In summary, limiting the lease by removing the rights implied in section 121 effectively gives the government of the day control over the operation of the coal terminal and would be built into the original sale of the lease in the negotiating process. Finally, I thank members of the minister's staff who provided a briefing for me on this matter.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.14 p.m.): I rise in this debate on the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal (Long-Term Lease) Bill to express concerns about this quasi-privatisation; that is, the long-term lease of the Dalrymple Bay coal terminal. I do not believe it should be a model adopted throughout the state for strategic infrastructure. The Dalrymple Bay port facility is slightly different in both size and commodity mix from the port of Gladstone. There has been a great level of concern expressed to me that there could be plans—not just under this government but previous governments as well—to privatise the Gladstone port. It started off with corporatisation and the requirement for the port to pay dividends, the percentages of which have grown over time. As I said, there were clear concerns expressed by the then chairman of the port board, now the CEO, about the proposal to privatise the Gladstone port.

Whether it is the port of Gladstone, the port of Brisbane or Dalrymple Bay, there will always be questions about port charges. In the case of Gladstone, the harbour board and more recently the GPA have created an enviable infrastructure facility for primarily coal and quite a list of other commodities such as woodchip, magnesite, fuel and fuel oil, the container port, cement cyanide and a mix of other products that go out over the full length of the port facilities at both Auckland Point and up to Yarwun. I put on record my concern that this is not privatisation but is a step closer to it. The Labor Party has on a number of occasions and in certain circumstances expressed its unwillingness to privatise strategic state infrastructure. I believe the ports are strategic state infrastructure. I seek a clarification from the minister that it is not the government's intention to privatise ports over time and in particular that this long-term lease of Dalrymple Bay is a one-off consideration and not a model being considered for the other ports in the state.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.17 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal (Long-Term Lease) Bill and the issue of leasing by the Ports Corporation. The Dalrymple Bay terminal is located in my electorate and, as I have said previously in speeches in this place, is one of the major factors contributing to the sustainable employment base in the Mackay region. It generates many jobs and sustainable growth in terms of the maintenance and service industries at both Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay. As I said, it is a very considerable part of the employment base in the region.

The Dalrymple Bay coal terminal is a Ports Corporation owned entity. In 1999-2000 Dalrymple Bay exported 36.5 million tonnes. That tonnage will rise very significantly in the next few years, even in the shorter term, with Macarthur Coal going out to equity raising recently and being very successful at that. It operates the Coppabella coalfields and is producing a level of capacity that will expand and specialises in a very special commodity of coal. Hail Creek is on line to be developed shortly.

Members would be aware that Hail Creek is probably the biggest coal resource in the Bowen basin, with more than a billion tonnes of resource coal which is easily accessible. When the coalfields in the Bowen basin were being developed, Hail Creek was one of the coal resources that was mooted to be developed first. The area at Moranbah was finally opened up and the coal line was built to Moranbah and Goonyella.

Obviously the raising of capital by governments is very important. As a previous speaker mentioned, the 99-year lease of the coal terminal is virtually akin to a sale. It raises issues we have canvassed in not only this parliament but also the federal parliament in relation to the sale of Telstra. A consortium would not put in excess of $500 million on the table and take on the onerous responsibilities inherent in the leasing conditions that the Leader of the Opposition spoke about for the sake of its good health or for the sake of Queensland. Any consortium that puts that sort of money up will make sure it will get a return on the capital it puts in. One must ask: if that

consortium can get a return on that capital, why can the state government not? Is there an admission that it does not run the terminal properly or is there some other reason for that?

I know that in the short term the influx of very considerable amounts of money into the bottom line of the budget would be very helpful, but Dalrymple Bay is a growing port facility and it will not be too long before that whole facility is probably one of the biggest in the world. I hope that in the minister's reply to the second-reading debate he will address the issue of equity and the return on capital that has forced the government to go this way.

As I said, the National Bank consortium or any other consortium would not put half a billion dollars into buying or leasing Dalrymple Bay for the sake of their health. They are doing it as a capital investment and for a return on that money. Why can the government not gain that same sort of return on equity by operating it through the Ports Corporation?

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (3.21 p.m.), in reply: A couple of questions raised by the opposition probably cannot be answered today. They relate to the actual negotiations that are still under way about the sale of the long-term lease. Once the sale is completed those details will be made public. At this stage they are commercial-in-confidence and are being worked through.

The Leader of the Opposition raised a couple of issues that I can answer. One relates to the access undertakings. There is a requirement on the lessee, whoever it is, to give an access undertaking which would need to be approved be the QCA. That ensures with a monopoly situation that there is an oversight. So there is that protection there.

The other issue the Opposition Leader raised relates to the requirement of the lease that the port be expanded. If there is an increase in coal going out through that port, there will be a requirement on the lessee to expand the port to take account of that extra coal that goes through. The lessee will not be able to sit back and say, 'We are not going to do it.' That is a requirement they will have to meet.

Another issue related to mining royalties. What I actually said during the budget process was that we would enter into discussions with the mining industry in relation to the coal royalties. We have started that process. Meetings have been held with Minister Robertson's department and Treasury and officers from our respective departments. Stephen and I are both meeting very shortly with the heads of the Mining Council to further those discussions. Nothing has yet been put in place. We are doing what we said we would do: meet with them and discuss the mining royalties.

We need to ensure that Queensland taxpayers are getting a reasonable return for their coal, because the Queensland taxpayers own the coal. The member opposite talked about the increased tonnages that are going out. He talked about the expansion of the ports and the fact that more coal will be going. One day there will not be any left.

Mr Malone: There is a lot there.

Mr MACKENROTH: It is still owned by the taxpayers of Queensland and we should be ensuring that the taxpayers get an adequate return for the resource that they rightfully own. That is what we will be doing.

The member for Gladstone raised the issue of her own local port. There is no intention to sell off the Gladstone port or to lease it out. I can give her that assurance. The main aim of this bill is to ensure that the lessor is not able to sublease the coal terminal when they lease it from the government. This bill is taking that possibility out of the Property Law Act.

Mr Horan: That the lessee is not able to.

Mr MACKENROTH: The lessee from the government, yes.

So that is the main aim of this. At the estimates hearing the Leader of the Opposition put his view that we will have a black hole in our budget. I can assure him once again that we will not have a black hole in our budget. When the negotiations on the lease are completed all those details will be made public and he will be able to see then that we will not.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) in charge of the bill.

Clauses 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Clause 3—

Mr HORAN (3.27 p.m.): I seek some clarification from the minister. This clause is really saying that a lease that will be exempt from the Property Law Act is one where the lessor is either Dalrymple Bay itself—the holding company—the Ports Corporation or the state. Who is the actual owner of what is being sold? Is it the port authority? I am just trying to understand why those three organisations are listed. It must be that one of those entities will actually be the lessor negotiating the sale.

Mr MACKENROTH: I guess the actual owner of the facility is the people of Queensland, but it is owned by the Ports Corporation of Queensland for the state of Queensland. That is an effect of what would happen there. DBCT Holdings Ltd is the company established to in fact hold the lease on behalf of the Ports Corporation or the state. So the actual owner—

Mr Horan: It is just to cover the whole three?

Mr MACKENROTH: Yes. The actual owner is, I guess, the people of Queensland but it is being owned by the Ports Corporation for them.

Clause 3, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

Bill, on motion of Mr Mackenroth, by leave, read a third time.

NEW SOUTH WALES-QUEENSLAND BORDER RIVERS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 3 April (see p. 243).

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (3.30 p.m.): The National Party opposition will be supporting the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Amendment Bill 2001. The objective of the proposed legislation is to enable the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Agreement, contained in the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Act 1946, to be amended. It will enable the Dumaresq-Barwon Border Rivers Commission to allocate to a state any part of the supply of water to which that state was entitled in respect of any previous period of time and which was not expended by that state.

As noted in the minister's second reading speech, one of the commission's responsibilities will be to determine the quantity of water that may be used by the states each year from the Border Rivers and to share that water between the states according to the provision of the Border Rivers agreement. Further, it will allow the commission to approve that the states may carry over any part of their unused share of that water from one year to the next.

For the benefit of the members of the House, it is important to note some important background information on the Border Rivers catchment. The catchment straddles the Queensland-New South Wales border to the west of the Great Dividing Range and forms part of the headwaters of the Murray-Darling basin. Queensland and New South Wales are carrying out flow management planning in the Border Rivers in response to both the June 1995 decision of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council to cap water diversions and the water reform initiatives of the Council of Australian Governments, commonly known as COAG.

The Border Rivers flow management planning process is taking account of the water resource, environmental and stream flow characteristics of the catchment itself. It will aim to achieve more integrated water management across the catchment, which will also provide a flow regime that better meets environmental needs and that will define the allowable level of usage in the catchment and allow for the introduction of more widespread water trading.

The Border Rivers catchment, although only a small part of the Murray-Darling basin, covers almost 50,00 square kilometres and lies, in approximately equal portions, in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. It then extends west from the headwaters of the Macintyre and Dumaresq Rivers in the Great Dividing Range to the Barwon River at Mungindi. The towns of Stanthorpe, Tenterfield, Inverell and Glen Innes are prominent in the upper catchment, with Inglewood, Texas and Ashford in the middle reaches and Boggabilla, Goondiwindi and Mungindi on the western alluvial plains. Affecting these towns is the climate of the region, which varies

markedly from the high country in the dividing range to the western plains. It is a very important irrigation area. The catchment receives predominantly summer rainfall, with only half the average annual rainfall occurring in the five months between November and March. Agriculture has been the main commercial activity in the catchment since European settlement. Sheep and cattle grazing once dominated, but more recently the production of cash crops, both dryland and irrigated, have been important economic activities in the region.

The water resources of the Border Rivers catchment are managed for a number of consumptive purposes. However, by far the greatest user is the irrigation industry. By far the greatest impact on the management of this river system, like other river systems in Queensland, will be on the irrigation industry. However, water is also provided for town water supplies, stock and domestic purposes, and for industrial use. Extraction of water for commercial purposes from regulated and unregulated rivers and streams requires a licence, as does any large-scale or non-riparian extraction for non-commercial purposes.

There are three main regulated river systems. The Border Rivers regulated system is located on the Severn-Macintyre-Barwon Rivers to Mungindi and is supplied jointly by the Glenlyon and Pindari dams. The Dumaresq River irrigation project is located on the Dumaresq and Macintyre/Barwon Rivers to Mungindi and is supplied from Glenlyon Dam with some supplies from Coolmunda Dam. And lastly, the Macintyre Brook irrigation project is located on Macintyre Brook and is supplied from Coolmunda Dam.

As I previously noted, water diversion works are currently authorised by a system of waterworks licences and water supply agreements under the provisions of the Water Resources Act in Queensland. The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, at its June 1995 meeting, agreed that a balance needed to be struck between consumptive and in-stream uses for all water in the rivers of the Murray-Darling basin. It agreed that diversions must be capped and to introduce an immediate moratorium on further increases in diversions while the precise details of the cap and its implementation were being established.

Therefore, in November 1996 the independent audit group submitted its report *Setting the Cap* to the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council. This report addressed a number of issues arising out of the 1995 decision, to which I referred earlier. The independent audit group has an ongoing role in auditing each state's arrangements for cap implementation and to ensure an accountable and transparent process is in place. In line with the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council's decisions, a cap on water diversions in Queensland's section is being developed based on comprehensive water planning processes. It is those processes which have been called into question of late.

The ministerial council's independent audit group supported these planning processes, noting that they must accommodate in-stream use not only in Queensland but also in the rest of the Murray-Darling basin; they must include both licensed diversions from streams and the current unlicensed flood plain water harvesting; and they must include a management regime that includes pricing, property rights and measuring and reporting. There needed to be an assessment of downstream flow and diversion impacts in New South Wales. And there needed to be a precautionary principle applied through the establishment of allocations to ensure that allocation was held in reserve to minimise the risk of overallocation for consumptive use. And finally, an independent audit of the planning process should be conducted, including modelling of impacts on downstream basin flows.

It is my contention that a number of those points that were established by the ministerial council's independent audit group in their support for the planning process have not been complied with by the Queensland government. Certainly, the modelling that is being used in the establishment of the studies and the processes involved in establishing the caps has been called into question. And it is worth taking this opportunity to place on record some of the facts about how that modelling has been called into question of late and to correct some of the misinformation that has unfortunately been promulgated in this House.

On 4 August 1999, Anchorage Farming Pty Ltd applied to the Department of Natural Resources to amalgamate water harvesting licences which had been issued with respect to certain properties in the St George district—once again on the headwaters of the Murray-Darling basin. The purpose of the application was to allow the appellants to use licences already issued with respect to properties known as Guee and Upson Downs in conjunction with the water harvesting infrastructure constructed on a property known as the Anchorage to there extract the water and to store it in water storages constructed on the Anchorage and Wagaby and to use that water for irrigation purposes. The DNR refused to make a decision on the application, and on

8 August 2000 the appellants brought the matter before the Chief Justice, who made an order that the DNR decide the application within 14 days.

On 21 August 2000 the DNR, in response to the order, advised a decision to refuse the application. Exercising their rights pursuant to the Judicial Review Act 1991, the appellants requested the DNR to provide reasons for the decision to refuse the application. By letter dated 20 December 2000, the DNR furnished reasons for that refusal. In providing those reasons, the DNR advised that the decision involved consideration of the draft WAMP and findings that to allow the application would facilitate an increase in diversion of water in circumstances where the draft WAMP and the technical studies upon which it was based showed that the available water resource was overcommitted with consequent deterioration in riverine health and ecological outcomes. The letter from DNR further advised that it was decided to refuse the application because, if granted, the increase in diversion of water could contribute to further deterioration in riverine health and ecological outcomes as identified in the draft WAMP.

It is very important to recognise that the draft WAMP was the basis of the reasoning for refusing the application to amalgamate existing licences—a draft WAMP that was based on a modelling system that has been used in every other river system in the state, including the Border Rivers system, including the Burnett River and including the Fitzroy River. The appellants appealed to the Land Court against the DNR's refusal decision, a decision that was justified using the WAMP documents. The appeal was set down for hearing before the Land Court to commence on Monday, 25 June 2001. On Wednesday, 4 July 2001 the Land Court ordered that the appeal be allowed and that the DNR forthwith issue the amalgamated licences for which the appellants applied.

There were a number of matters disclosed by the evidence put before the Land Court. In support of its case, the respondent—DNR—put before the court a considerable body of documentary evidence and called a number of witnesses, including expert witnesses in relation to both hydrological and ecological matters. The documents that the DNR relied upon in seeking to resist the appeal, and which were put before the court, included both the draft WAMP and the environmental flows technical report prepared during the WAMP study process. The essential process of reasoning upon which the draft WAMP was based was that the technical analysis of information gathered from test sites in the Lower Balonne led to the DNR putting forward the conclusion that there had been significant ecological damage. Further, it was based upon the proposition that the supposed ecological damage could be seen to have been caused by changes in the flow regime caused by water harvesting.

The oral evidence called by the DNR in relation to ecological matters included that given by Dr Satish Choy. The evidence indicated that the conclusion that there had been environmental damage was based upon tests conducted at three particular sites, Bokhara River, Narran River and Briarie Creek. The DNR expert witness, Dr Choy, accepted that three single tests at those three single sites were used as the basis for the description of the environmental condition of the entire Lower Balonne distributary system.

Dr Choy, who had conducted the tests at the sites in question, was cross-examined in relation to each of those three sites. As to the Bokhara River site, he told the court that he did not intend that the site be used as a determinant of the condition of the river system. Under cross-examination he also agreed that he would not have used the test result on the Narran River as the basis to conclude that the river system was in a poor ecological condition. Dr Choy eventually agreed that if other available sampling data for the same site was taken into account, that would support a conclusion that the ecological condition was fair to perhaps good.

A further matter that emerged from the evidence was the lack of correlation between flows in the river, natural flows and the ecological condition of the river. The evidence suggested and demonstrated that there was no attempt in the modelling undertaken to establish what would be the natural flow in the river. I ask members to remember that this is the same modelling process that has been used in every other river system where the WAMP process has been completed. The evidence showed that the DNR reference to natural flow did not, in fact, refer to conditions equivalent to a natural state. In order to establish natural flow, according to the ordinary meaning of such an expression, it would be necessary to construct a model that made adjustment for such features as the consequences of land development and the impact upon flows of structures such as dams, weirs and other developments.

Evidence from an expert hydrologist, Mr Wood, whose firm Pellis Sullivan and Meynink was commissioned by the DNR to prepare a report in relation to hydrology matters, was that the effect of land development would be to increase water run-off and, therefore, natural flow by some

40 per cent. It is, therefore, apparent that if one were to attempt to define desirable environmental flows by reference to a percentage of what would be the natural flow, then it would be more important to identify the actual natural flow.

This was apparently never done and it has never been done by the DNR in any of the other river systems. The DNR's modelling attempted to identify what was the flow of water at the end of the system expressed as a percentage of a mean natural flow. Indeed, for every other WAMP that has been done, that percentage that is identified as the river's mean natural flow is one of the very important figures that is used to determine the level of water that can be used from the system. It is a critically important figure.

It appears that by September 2000 the DNR had accepted that a cap would be acceptable on the basis that the level of development as at mid-2000 would produce an end-of-system flow equivalent to 40 per cent of natural flow in the mean year. The working paper for the advisory group meeting of 7 September 2000 showed in the bar chart in section 8 that the mid-2000 level of development would produce an end-of-system flow equivalent to 40 per cent of natural flow in the mean year. By 1 December 2000, the system had been refined and attachments to a fax from the DNR dated 1 December 2000 showed that the mid-2000 level of development would, in fact, deliver an end-of-system flow equivalent to 48 per cent of the natural flow in the mean year. We are not dealing with arbitrary figures here; we are dealing with figures that have an enormous impact on individuals and communities. Yet we have a variation of that order.

It goes further. By May 2001 the DNR had further refined the model to the point at which the DNR analysis of the system's performance used in a document from the meeting of 4 May 2001 showed that the end-of-system flow produced on the basis of the mid-2000 level of development was equivalent to 50.3 per cent of the mean annual flow. So we went from 40 per cent to 50.3 per cent of the mean annual flow. I wonder what sort of result we would get if we revised the studies that were done on the Burnett River system and the Fitzroy River system. Would they, too, produce a variation of 10 per cent in the mean annual flow? It is a critically important figure that has a huge impact on individuals and communities. It is not something that the minister can smile about and take lightly. It is critically important that these figures are right and able to be demonstrated to be right.

Having regard to the matters that I have referred to, it is readily apparent that the evidence in the case shows that, far from it being necessary to impose any cap upon water extraction, there is a rational basis to allow further limited expansion of water harvesting having regard to the following matter: the adjustment of calculations relating to natural flow on account of the failure of the model thus far to adjust for the unnatural increase in flow consequent upon land development, which can be put conservatively at 40 per cent. The evidence also indicated that there was a lack of rigour in the environmental analysis and a failure to demonstrate a connection between the perceived environmental condition and the net flow alteration.

The plot of annual flows at St George from 1922 to 2000 shows plainly that there was extraordinary natural variability in stream flows. There was no evidence to show that the pattern was anything other than random. That, too, is characteristic of every other river system in Queensland. It is a characteristic and a result of the random nature of Queensland's climate. It seems untenable to suggest that in such circumstances controlled water harvesting can be regarded as a cause of environmental damage, particularly given the other influences and, in particular, sedimentation. There is no rational basis upon which to blame water harvesting.

The decision of the Land Court in allowing the appeal is self-evidently inconsistent with the reasons for the decision upon which the DNR had relied to refuse the application in the first place, in particular, the proposition that any increase in water harvesting can be regarded as likely to lead to adverse environmental consequences. It is impossible to justify those reasons in light of the order of the court to allow the appeal. Likewise, it follows that the establishment of any cap can allow for some expansion of water extraction, having regard to those matters. Such an approach would be consistent with the original basis for Queensland's involvement in the cap process and it would be consistent with the original basis for Queensland's involvement in the Murray-Darling agreement and the Border Rivers agreement. That involvement was best summed up by the then Minister for Primary Industries, Mr Casey, when he said that a Queensland cap would involve no issue of any new licences but would allow for existing licences to be developed to their full potential. No sound basis has been established for departing from that approach and efforts by some sections of the DNR seem to be aimed at inventing that requirement to satisfy their own agenda.

This case has shown those attempts to be a spectacular failure. Accordingly, the announcement of a cap ought now allow for volumes consequent upon the full utilisation of all existing licences having regard to the fact that no new licences have been issued for many years. Putting to one side the issue of the substantial differences between the natural flow and the modelling produced by the DNR, there is an even more fundamental issue that has been raised in the case that has implications for all river system management in Queensland, that is, the accuracy of such a model would not generally be expected to be any better than plus or minus 20 per cent. That was the evidence that was given in the court case.

The effect of that evidence was that the model's result might, therefore, be 40 per cent out. There are huge implications for the Border Rivers, the Burnett, the Fitzroy and the Burdekin where irrigation development is being restricted based on this model, which has been shown to be possibly 40 per cent out. A model that could be 40 per cent inaccurate is being used to impose a water management regime that has enormous costs to individuals and communities.

Evidence given by the hydrologist called by the DNR, Mr Paul Harding, revealed an even more damaging feature to the hydrology studies upon which the draft WAMPs have been based. In his evidence he revealed that the modelling was not even intended to seek to model reality. In explaining the discrepancy between what was observed as a matter of fact and the results produced by the model—results that became the foundation of the draft WAMP and the ecological analysis—in evidence to the land court he said—

So I think if you look at those numbers you can see why the model is not reproducing those numbers but the important point is it wasn't intended to. It's intended to calculate the entitlement not reality.

It is little short of extraordinary that the process being undertaken, which has such a significant potential to affect the livelihoods of families and the businesses upon which they depend both directly for their employment and indirectly in the case of supporting towns and communities, was based upon a system that did not attempt to replicate reality but could be up to at least 40 per cent inaccurate.

In dealing with Mr Wood's opinion that the level of accuracy of a model would not generally be expected to be any better than plus or minus 20 per cent, Dr Harding revealed that, in fact, the variation might be up to 50 per cent. He explained that gauging in flat country in flood conditions was particularly unreliable. It is impossible for me to reconcile that responsible policy making by any government could proceed on the basis of a study that could not lay claim to any reasonable degree of accuracy, yet it has. This study regime and modelling has been used in the Border Rivers, the Burnett, the Fitzroy and the Burdekin.

It must be emphasised that Dr Harding was not giving evidence in support of the appellant's case when he spoke about the accuracy of the studies. Rather he was an expert who had been relied upon by the DNR itself in relation to the hydrology supporting the draft WAMP.

A further extraordinary circumstance is that, while the draft WAMP process involved the exploration of a methodology for assessing economic impact, the process was not progressed beyond the draft methodology. Apparently, the government was just not interested in the economic impact, but rather was interested only in progressing the agenda of some sections of the DNR to restrict and cut back the irrigation industry.

It seems extraordinary to think that, given the acknowledged social consequences for people and communities of the economic impacts, a responsible government would even consider the prospect of substantial policy changes without having the economic impact statement done properly, rigorously considered and reported upon. It defies belief that a substantial economic and, therefore, social impact would not be exhaustively assessed before considering substantial policy decisions. It is all the more extraordinary when it is appreciated that the ecological and environmental consequences are not suggested to involve any location of any high environmental or ecological merit other than the Narran Lakes in New South Wales. The evidence indicated that those lakes could be protected by a weir system that would see the necessary flows available to them in any event.

The whole sad, sorry saga exposes the falseness of the government's approach to the water reform process. Despite the rhetoric of this government, it is apparently driven by extremists who are not willing to take a measured, balanced approach based on reliable and replicated science.

It is again worth making the point that we support the water reform process and the irrigation industry supports the water reform process, but the process has to have credibility and it has to stand up to rigorous scientific examination. What we have seen in the development of the St George case has reinforced what so many people in the irrigation industry have been saying, that

is, that the water reform process that was pursued by the previous minister and that has continued to be pursued by this government has not been based upon credible science and it will not stand up to rigorous scientific examination. It certainly did not stand up to any sort of rigorous examination in the appeal that the DNR brought to the Land Court involving the St George area.

Despite the rhetoric of this government, it has not been prepared to consider and respect the rights of people and the effects of its policies on people and communities. I go back to where we started: one of the supposed planks of the Murray-Darling basin process was respect for property rights. This government has made no attempt to respect property rights. In fact, the previous minister went to great lengths to establish some sort of a quasi-legal framework to deny any property rights to people who had held irrigation entitlements and irrigation licences for generations and who had spent large amounts of money acquiring those licences. All of a sudden, the property rights that they had acquired disappeared because they were no longer considered to be property rights, as that suited the government's intention. There has been no respect for property rights. There has been no suggestion that anyone who loses those entitlements, which are so critically important to the basis of an irrigator's business, will be entitled to any sort of compensation. On many occasions we pursued that issue in the parliament with the previous Minister for Natural Resources, but we never received any sort of fair recognition of the rights of those people. This is a challenge for the current minister, although I think it is beyond his ability to turn back the clock. The government has committed itself to this unfair and unjust position.

We will support this bill to ratify the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers agreement because we believe that it needs to be ratified. However, there has to be a major rethink of the whole water reform process in Queensland. There has to be a taking of stock.

The water reform process must be based on scientific integrity and, over time, considerable doubts have been raised as to whether it does that. The recent court case cannot be interpreted in any other way than to support the contention that the science lacks integrity. The water reform process has not been implemented in the way that the irrigation industry and all of those who support us had hoped that it would be.

The water reform process must be able to stand up to rigorous scientific study, it must be able to stand up to legal challenge and it must respect the rights of land-holders and compensate them when those rights are necessarily taken away. Although it will not always happen, it is more likely that the rights of an individual will need to be taken away for the community good or to achieve what the community wants to achieve. Where an individual is impacted upon by that type of action, it is only fair that the community compensates them for that loss of right or that loss of opportunity.

The Queensland Government has consistently refused to do that, both in respect of the water reform process and in respect of the vegetation management process. That is another subject altogether, but it mirrors the government's approach to compensating the individual when the individual's rights are transgressed for the greater community good. In both instances there will always be a time when fulfilling the greater community good will mean that the rights of the individual are transgressed. The individual Queenslander should be compensated for the loss of and transgression on those individual rights.

This government has not given one indication that it is prepared to recognise those rights, either in the water reform process or in the vegetation management process. We have not had one indication that it is prepared to recognise the rights of Queenslanders and we have not seen one cent of government compensation in any of the budget documents. Instead, we see the government continually blaming Canberra and turning the subject into a political football, but I digress. I am getting into the vegetation management issue. I would welcome an opportunity to provide the minister with some information about that process, which may well assist him in his rather formidable task of rectifying the terrible situation that he inherited from his predecessor.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I would be only too willing to assist the minister and I guarantee him that he would benefit from the advice that I would give him.

Above all, the water reform process must consider the socioeconomic effects of the process on the communities involved. This process has, to a greater or lesser extent, been driven by the national competition policy requirements. National competition payments were meant to be used to provide the compensation and the adjustment programs to relieve the ill effects of the reform process upon which those payments were conditional. That is simply not happening in

Queensland. It is not happening in terms of the water reform process and it is not happening in terms of a whole range of other national competition inspired processes.

The member for Darling Downs spoke earlier about the dairy industry. That is a classic example of where the national competition payments were not used to compensate and soothe the angst of the people most directly affected by the requirements. The $98 million that the government received in that case disappeared straight into government coffers rather than being passed on to the dairy industry.

There is a case that the government must answer in respect of the national competition payments that are dependent upon the COAG water reforms. The government has an obligation to use at least a major portion of those national competition payments for adjustment programs and direct compensation for those people who are most directly affected by the reform process that is necessary for the state government to achieve those national competition payments.

However, the reform process will necessarily impact on individuals and communities. That principle has to be recognised by the Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines in this instance, but it needs to be recognised on a wider scale by the state government. The national competition payments are not just some sort of bonus or Christmas present that the federal government hands out. They are contingent on achieving certain ends. Necessarily, individuals and groups within the community will be impacted in achieving those ends. The national competition payments are meant to be used to soothe that process, to compensate those people who are impacted upon. If anyone has any doubt about that, they should go back and read the original agreements and they will see that that was the ideology and concept that was developed in the COAG meetings. That was the concept, but in Queensland it is just not happening.

If we take as an example the water reform process, which is the one we are dealing with here, it almost appears as though the government is hell-bent on doing what it needs to do to satisfy the COAG requirements to get the money, and hang the consequences. There is no compassion for the people impacted by these processes. There is no attempt to recognise property rights. In fact, the previous minister's agenda of not just devaluing property rights but also arguing so long and consistently that they did not exist was in itself based on the aim of avoiding the payment of compensation for those property rights. And yet the national competition payments were meant for that very purpose. That is the purpose they were meant for. That is what they were designed for. This government certainly has a case to answer in respect of what that money is going to be used for now and in the future.

I hope we never again see an example like we saw with the dairy industry, where the entire $98 million national competition payment that was contingent on the deregulation of the dairy industry disappeared into general revenue and has been used for we know not what. I hope we never see that again. I hope that at least part of the national competition payments that are contingent on meeting the COAG requirements in the water reform process—part of that money at least—is used to provide compensation, structural reform and adjustment programs that will make it possible for the people whose lives are impacted upon to alleviate the damage that is done to their lives and businesses.

We support this legislation and we look forward to a rethink of the whole water reform process. I say again that I, the opposition and the irrigation industry will continue to support a water reform process that is based on science, that is credible, that recognises people's property rights and takes proper account of socioeconomic impacts. This border rivers agreement is an integral part of that water reform process. This legislation before the House today ratifies that agreement and, as such, it has our support.

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (4.05 p.m.): This is important legislation for the towns and farms which straddle interstate borders and put up and work with two state systems of water management and coexist with a joint state system—all operating in one catchment. Currently, there are four government agencies directly involved in water resource management and rural water supply delivery in the Border Rivers catchment. The Border Rivers Commission, established more than 50 years ago, enables the joint construction of works for water conservation and flow regulation and their asset management. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has regulatory oversight and delivery of Queensland's share of water in the border streams. The Department of Land and Water Conservation is its New South Wales counterpart. SunWater has accountability for storage operation, asset management and rural water delivery to its Queensland customers.

A report to the Border Rivers Commission on water infrastructure management and water delivery services in the Border Rivers stated—

In a catchment where two state jurisdictions apply, management of natural resources becomes complicated with various state agencies using different policies and approaches for delivering services and landholders then having to operate their businesses with varying regulations. All these factors lead to uncertainties and inefficiencies, resulting in frustration and often tensions.

A briefing paper prepared by one of the most professional agricultural groups around, that is, Goondiwindi based Border Rivers Food and Fibre, said this of the arrangement—

With the possible exception of the Murray, no other catchment operates under such a restrictive regime. The water is the same, water users have common needs and aspirations, towns service their surrounding districts regardless of the border, and generally speaking the Borders Rivers sees itself as a single productive unit. In this context, the current arrangements are artificial, counterproductive and out of date.

Typical of the constructive way this group sets about its business, it proposes a solution which I put to the minister. It suggests a Border Rivers water management authority to lease water storage space in the dams from state governments, take on ownership of Boggabilla Weir, distribute water to consumptive users and manage consumptive use of off-allocation water, unregulated water and ground water. I commend that suggestion to the minister for his consideration.

This bill is part of a wider process of water reform. Water entitlements are now separated from land title. This will provide greater flexibility to irrigators and proper recognition of the value of water entitlements held by irrigators. Irrigators will receive commercial benefits from these entitlements by allowing their transfer in the water marketplace.

The results of water trading in other states are quite revealing. As the *Australian* noted—

Water is switching from thirsty low-value enterprises such as pasture or rice to the big money-spinners of grapes, olives, tomatoes and almonds.

Australian farmers lose 23 per cent of the water they take from rivers, dams and the ground through evaporation and seepage. One of the paradoxes of the new market is that farmers are using more water, based on the latest national land and water resources audit.

Most water sales have involved farmers giving up entitlements they were not using—the so-called sleeper licences. And when that is taken up, other farmers are using that water.

The rural water use efficiency initiative is one way the Queensland government is supporting all irrigators, regardless of their level of water right and security in maximising the economic benefit of every megalitre they use. This $41 million initiative helps irrigators to move towards operating an irrigation industry best practice and to remain competitive in national and international markets. The resultant efficiencies in water use will help irrigators increase productivity, produce a higher quality product and increase their yield while reducing operating costs.

The Border Rivers area is highly productive and is internationally competitive. I am told by the Border Rivers Food and Fibre Group that up to $400 million of cotton, fruit, vegetables, grapes, cereal grains and lucerne is generated in a good year. This involves the use on average of 350,000 megalitres of water, which is less than 40 per cent of mean annual flows. The jobs generated from this are estimated at 1,000 farm jobs, with another 1,900 employed as a direct result of irrigation.

A small group of small business representatives I met with at Goondiwindi left me in no doubt that many small businesses, whether they be retail, wholesale or service sectors, relied upon irrigation. I stress that much of this activity—cotton, wool and grain—is export-related activity and thereby has direct economic benefits for Australia as a whole. It is more questionable if the irrigation is for domestic activity only, particularly if the result is to put more and more of a product on the domestic market, thereby lowering domestic commodity prices for farmers who have already been, and are, profitable.

The farmers with whom I have spoken are worried about the Murray-Darling negotiations. I know that the minister has met with local producers. I encourage all honourable government members, particularly those on the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, to visit places like Goondiwindi and hear first-hand the problems of farmers and businesses. These groups want the minister to stand up for Queensland in negotiations with Senator Hill in any discussions on the Murray-Darling system. The Border Rivers system developed later than the catchments in other states. Locally, people do not want Queensland to carry a disproportionate burden of the Murray-Darling cap.

The Border Rivers Food and Fibre Group is a highly professional group. I commend their executive director, Mr Bruce McCollum, for his energy and dedication to the task. He is a congenial host and a forceful advocate for his district, and I thank him for his ongoing courtesy. I thank him also because I believe that agro-groups throughout Queensland could learn from the activities of his group and the manner in which they put their case.

Primary producers want to know that the Queensland minister will be aware of their concerns when the Murray-Darling issues are discussed in the state cabinet. They are also fed up to the back teeth with the fact that Senator Hill will not go out there and talk with them and listen to them. I commend the minister for meeting with the producers at Goondiwindi. I know that he will continue to argue their case, particularly Queensland's case, with Senator Hill. This bill is about creating greater certainty and efficiency in the management of water resources from those rivers that flow between both states in the Border Rivers district. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (4.13 p.m.): Australia is one of the driest continents on earth. Therefore, water is one of our most valuable resources, and we have to make sure that we use it wisely. Obviously there is a sharing arrangement in relation to the borders. I see that the member for Logan is about to leave the chamber, but I would like to mention a point that he raised. He called on Senator Hill to get out there and listen to the people. I was with Senator Hill only a few weeks ago. We went to Goondiwindi, Dirranbandi and also Dalby. So the fact is that Senator Hill has been out there listening to the people. I thought I would put that on the record.

Mr Cummins: Did you vote for him to be sacked at your convention?

Mr HOBBS: I am pleased that the member has raised the issue, because I would like to expand on those points. Senator Hill certainly has a role to play as the federal Environment Minister. At the end of the day, the state has the responsibility for land and water matters. Senator Hill has a duty as the federal Minister for the Environment to bring together an overall plan. It is up to the states to—

Mr Foley interjected.

Mr HOBBS: The member opposite knows how I voted. I told him here in the House. The state's responsibility is to make sure that it puts together a program that is acceptable to the federal government and the other states. This is what has not been done. This government got it wrong with tree clearing and the RFA, so the federal government has not put the money into it. It is the same situation with water.

A government member interjected.

Mr HOBBS: The member opposite knows that as well as I do. I do not necessarily agree with the stand that Senator Hill has taken, but I disagree more strongly with the position that the Labor government here in Queensland has taken. The point is this: if this government puts together a plan that is basically acceptable to land-holders and the community, then it will find that the federal government would accept that. The reason that it has rejected the state government's tree clearing and water agreements is that the state has not got the agreement of land-holders and the community in doing that.

Mr Foley: Why doesn't John Howard go out there to Roma?

Mr HOBBS: I am telling the member the story. It is the same thing with the RFA that this government put together. It was not accepted by the community and it was not accepted by the land-holders at the time. That is why the state government did not receive the money. It is as simple as that. This government will not get any funding if it keeps on trying to be half smart in relation to environment issues.

The state government was caught out the other day in a Land Court case. It was quite clearly shown that the state government hid from the Land Court evidence that it had—it actually hid it from the technical advisory group—which showed that the flows of the river and the environmental condition of that river were okay. The flows that the state government mentioned in its documentation were the ones that were bad. That is in the evidence. The minister should read it. That is all he has to do.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr HOBBS: Read it again.

We have to share our water, and how we share our water is a big issue. New South Wales has very seriously overallocated water in that state. Victoria is probably in a fairly similar situation but not quite as bad. New South Wales would be in the worst situation. We understand the

problems of salinity. Everyone accepts that we in Queensland do not want salinity of any nature that is likely to deteriorate the quality of the land and diminish the resources that we have. We must do everything we can to prevent that. The government will get all the support that it needs from this side of the House in relation to making sure that all of those avenues are examined and we do the best that we can to prevent the situation from getting out of hand. However, we have to make sure that, in doing that, we do not just run with the simple old philosophy that if you have plenty of trees, the problems will not occur. That is not necessarily the case.

New South Wales has to address its own problems. It does not have to sit around like crows on a killing pen, waiting to try to pick off our water allocation. That is what it is doing at the moment. It is putting out a few press releases saying that Queensland has to abide by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission findings and so on to make sure that it can get as much water from our producers as it can. It is cheaper that way. It costs New South Wales nothing; it costs not a razoo.

If Bob Carr wants to go out and buy the water and pay compensation in New South Wales, which he should, to claw his way back—and he has to pay compensation over the border because they have water trading—it will cost him. For every 100,000 megalitres he claws back it will probably cost him in the vicinity of $70 million to $90 million. So it is far cheaper for him to put out a press release occasionally and run a campaign against Queensland so that we give him the water. The minister is trying to give him the water at the moment to fix up his problems. Let Bob Carr fix up his own problems.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr HOBBS: I agree with that.

Mr Seeney: You're underestimating the cross-border flow.

Mr HOBBS: Absolutely. Why does the Condamine-Balonne need a 45 per cent to 50 per cent environmental end-of-valley flow? It is not necessary. Why have by far the highest end-of-valley flow in the whole system? It is not wise to have that. Why do it?

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr HOBBS: That is right. We have to play our part, and we want to play our part, but why should we be robbed at the same time? There is no need to be robbed. This only plays into the hands of the southern states and Bob Carr, because this saves him $70 million for every 100,000 megalitres he claws back. If the minister wants to be that generous, he should use his own money and not land-holders' resources. That is what I am saying. If the community requires a natural resource, the community should pay. It is as simple as that. Individual land-holders should not have to pay. It does not have to be a land-holder but can be anybody, such as a householder. If the council wants to build a road in the city and takes the equivalent of 25 per cent of a person's land, it is automatic that compensation is paid for the loss of that land because it takes away 25 per cent of that person's income. Sometimes it can be less than that.

Why isn't it the same in this situation? These people have set up a business. It has cost them a lot of money to put together an irrigation scheme. In some cases it might have cost $1 million and they probably owe $900,000 on it. But the commercial reality is that they are prepared to accept that, and then someone suddenly comes along and says, 'We're going to carve some of that off. We're going to be good guys. We're going to put it into the environment.' Sending more water over the border will simply go into irrigators' pumps, not the environment.

Mr Robertson: That is what this agreement is trying to address.

Mr HOBBS: I have no problem with this agreement in that respect. I think this is a better agreement with better arrangements. However, it has been shown that there are flaws in the WAMP process. This process also works on a WAMP in relation to sharing. It has been shown that the Condamine-Balonne WAMP, the same methodology used for the Border Rivers, is flawed. Therefore, this one could be flawed as well and, in fact, there could be more water available for Queensland producers to use.

Mr Robertson: Or less.

Mr HOBBS: Probably not.

Mr Robertson: You can't say that it's flawed.

Mr HOBBS: Yes, but we know the figures.

Mr Seeney: It's flawed because DNR withheld the information.

Mr Robertson: According to your argument; you don't know.

Mr HOBBS: We do, Minister.

Mr Seeney: We know you selectively used the information.

Mr HOBBS: The member for Callide is right. The department has been caught out using the figures that are more favourable to its argument. It is as simple as that. We have no problem with the science. If the science is perfect, we have no problem with that. However, the reality is that those opposite have been twigging with the edges of the science to make it swing their way. The same thing happened in the Cooper Creek water management plan as well. That was before the current minister's time, but I know about it.

Mr Robertson: And what happened? They brought out another draft WAMP.

Mr HOBBS: They brought out another one, yes, and then adjusted the figures to suit their needs. It is as simple as that. All those opposite have been doing is making up their own scientific data to suit their needs, and that is the problem. But they have now been caught out. That community group and others spent $300,000, $400,000 or $500,000 taking the government to court. If the other WAMPs throughout Queensland were the same, they will get caught out on those as well. The Burnett WAMP is one. I am very confident that, from the numbers I have, the environmental flow indicated is far higher than is necessary. We want good rivers. We want clean rivers. We want to be able to feed the fish and all that sort of stuff. We understand all those things, but there is no reason why we cannot have a sustainable irrigation system that will do all those things.

The cautionary principle has been taken to the utmost extreme in most of the cases we have seen so far and none of them have been tested, but they tested the minister in the Condamine-Balonne. They took him on. The minister was told that he was in for a mother of a hiding, and that is why he ran. He knows that. He had to do that. He had no choice—

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr HOBBS: The minister knows that as well as I do. We understand what happened. He was told.

Mr Robertson: Are you talking about beforehand?

Mr HOBBS: No, I am talking about during the case. The minister knew what was going to happen to the witnesses who were about to go in. There was a seven-foot gun aimed right at his head, but he decided to take a dive. He made a wise move because he is still here today. I do not believe that people's civil liberties in relation to property rights are being adequately looked after if in fact the government is trying to reduce people's assets.

We need to resolve these issues of the water allocation management plans responsibly and quickly and then get on with more important things like efficiencies. For instance, the cotton industry has a best management practice target of reducing water consumption by 10 per cent. That is a very admirable target to introduce. But while it is fighting for its own survival at the moment, it cannot put its mind to those efficiencies that are needed.

Mr Robertson: They are.

Mr HOBBS: The industry is doing some, but many producers are doing so much for their industry at great expense to try to at least keep what they have. We need to have greater understanding of the issues, as we do of many new industries such as horticulture. There seems to be a perception that if any new water is provided in those systems it will degrade the area and will be no good for the environment. The reality is that many crops can be grown by horticulture, even though the technology is only new. Crops such as watermelons and trees of various sorts can be grown in this way with not a lot of water. Even a very small amount of water can make a lot of those farms quite viable. Even if they presently farm cows or whatever but can put aside five or 10 acres or hectares, or even less, for an additional crop, that makes them more viable and that, in turn, flows through to the whole community. This type of farming does not need a lot of water. Therefore that extra 10,000, 20,000 or 50,000 megalitres in a system could have an enormous benefit.

There is not going to be contamination because we are more and more aware of the need to reduce chemical use. A lot of organic methods are used to control pests these days. In fact, I advise members that the cotton industry has reduced the chemical use per hectare from three litres a hectare to 1.5 litres a hectare. In fact, there are some crops on the downs that have been grown without a single spraying this year. The season was okay for that situation to occur. There

is an awareness and we need to give encouragement to it. The water efficiency scheme is certainly a help. It probably needs more funding down the track—

Mr Robertson: Down the track. It's got three years to go.

Mr HOBBS: Yes, it does have three years to go. They are all good schemes.

Mr Robertson: No-one else in Australia does that, by the way. We are the only state that does that.

Mr HOBBS: I am not sure, but that is good.

Mr Robertson: We are the only state in Australia.

Mr HOBBS: Believe it or not, Minister, I was the one who started that process and Minister Welford actually allocated money for that. So that was pretty good.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you. That is where we were heading. Efficiency is the big thing and we can produce so much more with less if we really want to try to work our way through it.

This agreement has been a fairly satisfactory one and it has stood the test of time. Necessary amendments are made occasionally but, overall, I urge the minister to proceed with much caution in relation to the water management plans and make sure that everyone gets a fair go.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (4.30 p.m.): I rise to speak on the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Amendment Bill with some degree of reluctance in the sense that my knowledge of matters to do with water resources generally has been, in the past at least, deficient. However, it is a fascinating topic. I have noticed in my short time in this House that it has generated a great deal of interest, if not heat at times, particularly from members opposite in terms of the obvious effect of what government policy might or might not be in this area.

I realise that my electorate of Toowoomba North, whilst it is a provincial city electorate, does have a very close connection with people on the land. My electorate is near the Border Rivers as well as the Maranoa and the Condamine-Balonne. A lot of people who live in my electorate have interests in or connections with those areas in one way or another. Quite apart from that, I think it behoves all members of this House to take an increasingly more in-depth interest in the questions raised from time to time in these water bills.

Salinity is not a problem just for members who serve electorates out west or down south; it is a national problem. It is a problem that will affect all of us and generations to come. For that reason alone it is worth while members becoming au fait with the issues involved. There are other issues I have recently become aware of—potential problems in relation to water trading, for example, and also the vexing issue of compensation. In my experience, from my former practice as a lawyer, I fear the amount of compensation in court cases cannot be compared with the type of compensation that some might envisage if future actions cannot bring about agreement on a sensible regime. If that is the case and if it is suggested down the track that the government, be it this government or the Commonwealth government, pick up the tab for very vast amounts of compensation, that will become a problem for all members of parliament, whether they represent rural electorates or not.

Because of my lack of experience in this area I was pleased to be able to rely on some material in a research brief, which I found very informative and well done, prepared by the Parliamentary Library. Legislation Bulletin No. 9 of 2000 refers to the original 1946 debates in the House when the first act dealing with the Border Rivers was brought in. I also referred to the information paper referred to earlier by the member for Logan.

The research brief sets out the area occupied by the Border Rivers catchment. It gives a description of the general area of Queensland and New South Wales that is involved. It points out that the area of concern is held in equal proportions by New South Wales and Queensland. The Border Rivers we are talking about are those rivers that actually make up the border between Queensland and New South Wales.

The Border Rivers catchment encompasses three regulated river systems in which the natural stream flow is supplemented by release from government storages or dams. Those three are the Border Rivers regulated system, located on the Severn-Macintyre-Barwon Rivers to Mungindi and supplied jointly from the Glenlyon Dam and the Pindari Dam; the Dumaresq River irrigation project in Queensland, located on the Dumaresq and Macintyre-Barwon Rivers to Mungindi and supplied from the Glenlyon Dam and the Coolmunda Dam; and the Macintyre

Brook irrigation project, located on Macintyre Brook and supplied from the Coolmunda Dam. The water resources of the Border Rivers catchment are used to supply water for irrigation, for industry, for stock watering and for domestic and town water supply.

The original bill introduced in 1946 dealt with an agreement between the governments of New South Wales and Queensland. The act formalised and ratified an agreement reached between the two states. The three elements of the agreement were the construction of certain works, namely weirs and a dam; the establishment of a uniform system of making and recording continuous gaugings of the flow of water in the Border Rivers and their tributaries; and the establishment of the Dumaresq-Barwon Border Rivers Commission to control the construction, operation and maintenance of the works and to facilitate the management of the border streams. As a matter of interest, the Queensland government in 1946 estimated that the cost of construction of the storage dam on the Dumaresq River at that time was one million pounds, and for each weir the cost was 10,000 pounds. I would be interested to find out what the cost would be for the construction of those fairly substantial infrastructure items today.

Two other pieces legislation preceded the bill now before the House. The first was in 1968 as a result of a report of the commission which found in part that the foundation conditions in the vicinity of the Mingoola area made the site an unsuitable one for the construction of a dam as proposed under the agreement and that a smaller dam on Pike Creek should result. That was formulated in the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Amendment Act 1968.

The second and last amendment related to implementing an updated agreement to provide for the management of the ground water resources associated with the Dumaresq and Macintyre-Barwon Rivers to establish investigations into river improvement work to be undertaken. These amendments in 1993 resulted from the concern that the use of ground water and the resulting lowering of the watertable could draw water from the stream into the ground reservoir, thereby depleting stream flows.

In his second reading speech the minister summarised what this bill was all about, which is fairly brief and of itself, from what I can understand, not terribly remarkable.

Mr Robertson: Excuse me?

Mr SHINE: It is not as complex, perhaps, as my perusal of the Water Bill 2000 would indicate.

Mr Springborg: Well, he is learning.

Mr SHINE: I am learning slowly.

As I said, this bill seeks to ratify an agreement between the two states. That agreement concerns the sharing of the water between the Border Rivers and what works are to be carried out from time to time. The agreement has been and will continue to be implemented by the Dumaresq-Barwon Border Rivers Commission. The commission comprises representatives from both governments and it determines the quantity of water and shares it in a proportion between the states.

This bill allows that commission to approve carryover of any part of the unused share of water from year to year. It also provides for a better management and more effective use of water. Of course, this amendment to the agreement has to be ratified by both states. That is why we are dealing with it today.

I said before that I would make reference to the 1946 debate on this issue when the first bill was introduced. But before doing so, I point out that, in Australia, water is—for the reasons I gave earlier—of critical importance. Australia is the driest continent on earth, other than Antarctica, and it has the least amount of water in its rivers and the smallest area of permanent wetlands. No matter what our degree of knowledge was in the past on these matters, we can always learn more. Water is Australia's most valuable natural resource, but it has suffered from relatively rapid clearing of vegetation, inefficient farming practices and inadequate management. It is only in the past decade really that decisive measures have been talked about and/or taken.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr SHINE: Having said that, it is interesting to consider history. Often, if one reflects on what history has told us, we can learn and we can adopt better practices for the future. There are some, I suppose, in this House who do not see much point in looking at history; they know it all. But I am not one of them, I humbly confess.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SHINE: I am pleased that the member for Southern Downs agrees with my view that one can learn from history.

The original bill was introduced by the honourable Arthur Jones, the then minister for public lands. That is interesting in itself. In those days, there was no separate Department of Natural Resources. In fact, there was not even a separate department of irrigation and water supply. That piece of history might be of interest to certain honourable members here today. It was indicative of the approach that our community in Queensland had to water and to these problems at that time.

The minister, when introducing the bill, said—

The main features of the Bill are the setting up of the commission, the distribution of the water in the storage dam and the agreement as to the construction of the necessary works …

He said—

This proposal will be the first major irrigation project in Queensland.

This is of interest in itself. He said also—

We are satisfied that we have enough land in Queensland to use our share of the water from the main storage.

How things perhaps have changed! The worry seemed to be that we might not be able to deal with the amount of water we had in the storage.

Investigations had been undertaken by that government—which, I might add, was a Labor government in Queensland after the war—into irrigation needs throughout Queensland. However, it was not until 1946 that it was foreshadowed in that speech to parliament by Mr Jones, which I mentioned before, that the concept of setting up a subdepartment of irrigation and water supply was first ventured. He made reference to the building of weirs in the Lockyer, which was a very early attempt at water storage in Queensland. He also made mention of the fact that there were mistakes made in irrigation areas elsewhere in Australia. He referred to disasters in Victoria at a place called Cohuna. And as a result of that, the government of the day in Victoria had to write off considerable amounts of money.

Reference was also made to a previous unsuccessful scheme in the Dawson Valley at Theodore. In fact, Mr Nicklin, who was then the Leader of the Opposition, made reference to the fact that, in 1933, a royal commission had been held to inquire into why that scheme had failed. So because of the past mistakes that were referred to even in those days, it behoves us all now—particularly with the benefit of knowing that background—to be cognisant of the fact that mistakes were made in the past and that we should learn from them.

I would like to make some comments on what I understand is being done now to address these problems. Because of its location, Queensland and New South Wales are conducting a joint flow management process, which is mentioned in the information paper to which I referred earlier. That process is for the whole catchment in conjunction with a panel of stakeholders from both states. The joint planning will result in an interstate agreement that will include provisions for environmental flows and a framework for interstate trading of water entitlements. Queensland is providing technical, planning and administrative support for the joint planning process, including the development of a hydrologic model jointly with New South Wales. The model is being used to simulate and assess stream flows, water infrastructure performance, losses and water use throughout the Border Rivers basin for a number of possible development and management scenarios.

The information paper I referred to earlier provides background information on management systems, water policies, ecological condition and assessments of historical and possible future development scenarios. Detailed technical advice relating to environmental flow requirements of aquatic ecosystems within the catchment is provided by an independent technical advisory panel comprised of environmental scientists with knowledge of riverine systems within the basin. They have produced three reports providing information and assessments on the current ecological condition and processes in the catchment.

Running in parallel to this joint planning process, Queensland is developing a draft water resource plan in consultation with Queensland stakeholders. The Queensland water resource plan will cover water in watercourses, lakes and springs and provide for the establishment of water allocations that will be transferable and separate to the land title and will include the management of overland flows. As support to the Queensland water resource planning, a moratorium on the starting of new works is in place. It applies to both licensed and unlicensed works, including works to take overland flow and off-stream storages that would take water from watercourses. The

moratorium provides a firm basis for assessing the impacts of current Queensland development in the catchment.

The water resource planning process is not about penalising communities in the Border Rivers and Condamine-Balonne catchment areas. Rather, it is about ensuring that the water resources that they rely on are protected and preserved well into the future. Water resource planning is an investment in the future viability of these communities. The joint flow management plan will help to protect the rivers that flow from Queensland into New South Wales and ensure the economic viability of surrounding communities. This is an important step in the effective management of the Border Rivers.

I also believe that the solution to the long-term problems must involve communities and local governments. There must be some sort of a partnership between communities and the legislators, including local government. Local government has legislative capacity through the Integrated Planning Act. A group of local governments—for example, EDROC on the downs—has the capacity to take a strategic view.

For total community acceptance of projects or potential legislation, the community must be educated and engaged on a catchment basis. The people currently providing land care and catchment management outcomes need to be mutual and encouraged so that they do not feel alienated in the new processes. The process needs to be discussed on a community of interest—that is, a subcatchment basis to achieve the total river picture. For a total Queensland Murray-Darling perspective, there are three major river catchments: the Condamine, the Maranoa-Balonne and the Border Rivers. The people concerned must recognise and work in harmony with each other to achieve Queensland's water quality and salinity targets.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (4.49 p.m.): I rise to support the bill before the parliament. I must admit that I enjoyed listening to the potted history of the establishment of the cooperative arrangements between the states as elucidated by the member for Toowoomba North. I am sure that the minister also learned a few things from the member's speech, as did I.

Much of the Border Rivers area, which we are seeking to address today through this amending legislation, is located in my electorate. The river systems, as mentioned by the honourable member—whether they be the Severn, the Dumaresq or the Macintyre systems, and even further downstream, the Barwon River—all relate to my electorate. So I have a very keen interest in this legislation. By and large, generally the community and the irrigation community believe that a great deal can be gained by regulating sensibly that which is a finite resource, and that is our water. But, of course, they are very concerned that we make sure that, in regulating our water supply, we take into consideration the social impact and the economic impact that could have on those communities and those people who directly or indirectly derive their livelihood from the use of that water. The use of that water does not only accrue an economic benefit; it also accrues a social and environmental benefit.

Water regulation is undergoing constant and, I think, sometimes turgid change not only in this state but also throughout Australia. There is a great degree of frustration out in the general community about the length of time that it takes to bring to fruition some of these decisions, these consultation processes and these planning processes. A very good reason why there is that concern is the impact that those processes have on people. A moment ago the honourable member for Toowoomba North mentioned the consultation process and the cooperation that is taking place between the authorities in Queensland and New South Wales in the development of the flow management process, the Border Rivers water allocation management plan. That has now been in the pipeline for a good five years. I can say that a lot of people—as the minister is very much aware and as the shadow minister is certainly aware, and I commend him for his understanding of this issue—are very frustrated by the length of time that it has taken to reach this stage.

When I was very briefly the Minister for Natural Resources—and that was only to about July 1998—we were looking for a time line for the completion of a draft WAMP, which was about 18 months. That would have taken it towards the middle or latter part of 1999. We are now in the year 2001. This is not a necessarily a barb at the minister; it is about the process. I remember saying at a ministerial council meeting for ministers in relation to the Murray-Darling—that is, ministers from Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria—that we would hasten slowly but we would hasten well. When it came to addressing this issue, we would make sure that we had the model and the data integrity. I think that is extremely important. But I must admit that I am a little bit concerned that these time frames have become a little bit longer than they should.

Whilst as members of parliament we may regard this issue as a matter of urgency, and whilst the irrigators may regard the issue as a matter of urgency, I think that a lot of people who are developing the storages do not necessarily regard the matter with the same degree of urgency. Sometimes they do not understand the economic or the social implications of the time delays. I do not say that as a barb against those people; I am saying that, basically, people who are pulling a wage every week are doing their jobs, but a lot of people whose lives and economic decisions depend upon our being able to hastily and properly conclude this matter are growing increasingly frustrated.

Basically, this amending legislation updates the agreement that is in place for the Border Rivers Commission to make sure that it continues to work effectively. It is also very important to note that over the past 20 or 30 years as these processes have been put in place and as these storages have been constructed—as was pointed out by the member for Toowoomba North—not everyone has been a winner. I refer to those people who live in the Dumaresq River irrigation area. Prior to the construction of the Glenlyon Dam, they were able to pump water. They were not very big irrigators—they might have produced some fat lambs, some irrigated lucerne, or whatever the case may be—but they had a reliable supply of water. The dam was constructed under the guise that it was going to provide them with a greater degree of reliability and also it would mean that more people downstream would be able to take advantage of that water. So those people have gone from a position where they might have been pumping reliably 150 or 200 megalitres of water per annum, which is not a lot in the scheme of things, to now having that nominal allocation but, in some cases, a much lower yield; no real ability to be able store water on their farms compared with people who are located downstream from Goondiwindi, who produce a lot, who are excellent irrigators, but who, in the broadacre scheme of things, are able to effectively carry over but have the capacity as well to be able to flood harvest and to put it on significant-sized ring tanks on their properties. So they have the best of both worlds.

I understand this flow management planning process and the new rules that will emerge further down the track—and the amending legislation also talks about the issue of carryover, and I assume that we are talking about the apportionment of carryover and the way we manage that—but I say to the minister that there needs to be a much fairer system. I understand that they are looking at the issue of capacity sharing to ensure that our dams are not necessarily going to be used as a water bank for those people who have a lot and then, as a consequence, cut out those people who have little and who have little capacity to be able to utilise that little bit of water that they have. Basically, by banking that water, those people then affect the allocation that is made available to those people. I think that some sort of equitable process of capacity sharing has to be the obvious conclusion to these processes.

I note that recently the minister was at the Landcare and Catchment Management Association annual conference in Goondiwindi. I think that he would agree with me when I say that that was an excellent conference. It was extremely well organised. As the minister indicated, a lot of people are doing some excellent things in the area of land care and they deserve to be rewarded for that, because they understand that there are some very strong linkages between the proper husbandry of the land and also the impact that that has on our other natural resources and issues such as water quality. I think that it is important that we pay tribute to those people.

Natural resource management is the catchphrase in these areas. For a long time its popularity has been growing. I caution this parliament that, as we go down the track of looking at further regulation and looking at further restrictions and allocating a lot of money to addressing the issues of soil degradation and salinity, we make sure that we do it on the basis of proper science. I am sure that the minister is aware of this issue. The shadow minister is certainly aware of it. He meets with people on this issue and on many occasions talks about it.

The salinity issue concerns me. If we pick up the newspaper or listen to the news, we get the impression that it is a problem everywhere right around Australia—basically in every farming community—and that if we do not have the problem now, we are going to have it sometime in the future. Whilst we need to be concerned about salinity and whilst it is an encroaching problem, sometimes it is related to vegetation clearing and in other cases it is not. Historically, for various reasons many parts of Queensland were vegetation free. We know that. The minister has historical documents in his office that would indicate that. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to take these things for granted. We have to look at the issue of virgin timber clearing that can lead to degradation. Of course there were also vast areas of treeless plains in this state where salinity has never been a problem and is not necessarily going to be a problem.

If we consider the southern parts of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, we realise that often there are differences between the soil types that they are dealing with and the soil types that we are dealing with in some areas in Queensland. I am talking about porous soils or soils where the watertable might have been only five, six or seven metres deep. If the vegetation is taken off soil of that type, it is much easier for water to be able to rise to the surface and, consequently, cause a problem. In many areas in my part of the world, whilst there is an encroaching salinity problem in some places, in other places there is not necessarily going to be a problem as long as we continue with our land management practices. There may not be a problem, anyway, because we are dealing with watertables that are 100 metres deep; we are dealing with heavy clay soils where water is not going to rise through and where there has not historically been a large body of vegetation.

So if we are going to be considering these things, I think that it is very important that we be proactive and constructive in the way in which we talk to people about them. At the end of the day, any decision that the government makes can affect the livelihoods of producers. Unfortunately, sometimes we deal a lot more with issues of perception rather than reality. I know that on some occasions that may be the easy thing to do, but we have to make sure that our science is good. If we let perception overcome real science, that does not do us in this parliament any good, it does not do the department any good, and I do not think that it does good public policy in Queensland any good.

The Border Rivers WAMP is of concern to me. We were hoping that we would have an indication of what the water cap would be in that part of the world come the middle of last month. We know that there was a court decision at St George which has—

Mr Robertson: There was no decision.

Mr SPRINGBORG: We do not want to play with semantics because of time, but issues were raised in court that caused some concern for the government. The minister knows that it caused concern with the way that that decision is being looked at. Certainly it has frustrated the cabinet decision about the amount of water that was to be diverted from the Condamine-Balonne system and also the Border Rivers. That is something that the people—

Mr Robertson: Not Border Rivers.

Mr SPRINGBORG: As I understood it, the Border Rivers decision was supposed to be made about the middle of July. Can the minister stand in this place and say that the reflections of the judge in that particular court case had absolutely no impact whatsoever on the time frame of the deliberations on providing the mean annual diversion limit for the Border Rivers? There is a lot of concern about that. At the end of the day, we can dress these things up all we want, but that court case did create concern for the government because it questioned processes that were to have been adopted by the department.

If cabinet has not been frustrated in making a decision on the upper limit of the mean annual diversion for the Border Rivers, I would like the minister to indicate when cabinet may make that decision. I will contain my comments to the Border Rivers, although a small part of the Condamine-Balonne catchment runs through my electorate and those people are obviously very concerned about the issue. The Border Rivers people are waiting for the decision because it will give them a much clearer picture of where they can go; no doubt the minister appreciates that. The water management planning process that is in place will be hung off that decision. The very great hope of the people in the Border Rivers area is that the status quo will be agreed to by the government.

As I understand it, the maximum allowable limit of mean annual diversion would be about 228 megalitres at Mungindi. We believe that our system is in fairly good shape generally. On average, about 40 per cent of the water that flows down the stream system and out at Mungindi is currently diverted. That means that on a mean annual average, about 60 per cent continues to flow down the system. It is important that we recognise that the majority of the water that originates in the Border Rivers catchment area runs out of Queensland. I know that there are some other idiosyncrasies such as overland flow that have been worked out in tandem with the flow management plan. However, basically we are dealing with the in-stream flow, and I think that that is reasonable. Therefore, generally in the Border Rivers we have a reasoned argument.

As I have indicated to the minister previously, it is very important that we recognise that there is the capacity for a small area of growth on the Granite Belt. They are pushing for 8,000 to 10,000 megalitres. I do not think that that is unreasonable. They use only about 20,000 megalitres at the moment and they produce over $100 million in produce—fruit and

vegetables—for the Queensland and export markets. In addition, they use their water extremely efficiently. They use only relatively small amounts of water—30 or 40 megalitres. Many of the people on the Granite Belt have fairly significant dams. Of course, the minister is also very much aware of the Stanthorpe community's need for an additional water supply of around 2,000 megalitres.

Generally, groups within the Border Rivers have worked fairly cooperatively. The minister has met with the Granite Belt irrigators and the Border Rivers Food and Fibre Group, which has done a good overall job in representing the interests of all of the irrigator groups from the top of the Granite Belt down to the cotton areas below Goondiwindi. As with anything there are internal politics. They are staking their claims and they are wanting this—

Mr Robertson: That has not detracted from the message.

Mr SPRINGBORG: It has not detracted from the message, because basically they have worked out a sustainable case to put to the government. As I understand it, the department is reasonably impressed with the approach of the communities and the irrigators. They recognise the need for regulation and the need to preserve existing rights. I note that in the Macintyre Brook area and also the Dumaresq there is a desire to look at the possibility of an additional supply for the emerging olive industry and other small crop industries. No doubt that will be considered through this process.

It is very important that, as this process continues, there is absolute model integrity and data integrity, because without it the entire process can be compromised. Of course, the involvement of the community reference panels is important. Many people involved in the process have understanding and a lot of historical knowledge. For example, sometimes a meter can be put in a river because it is very important to gauge something, but where it is placed in the river is critical. We know that there is not a lot of good historical data in some cases because of the impact of the tributaries or the small creeks that run into the river, and some of those meters have been in place for only 20 years.

However, anecdotal information can also be extremely important. We know that vegetation clearing and vegetation growth impact on water uptake or water run-off and all of those sorts of things. In addition, the interpretation of the information is absolutely crucial. We need to be very much aware of that, because if people do not have confidence in the process we cannot expected it to be properly implemented. People need to have faith in the process for it to continue working.

Over and above all of this is the fact that the irrigators and the communities that rely upon irrigated agriculture, whether that be broadacre agriculture or small crops, just want certainty. In Stanthorpe, the local chamber of commerce is always talking about this issue because it impacts upon business decisions and spending. It impacts on not only the farmers but also the people who work for them. Farmers in my area employ 50 to 60 seasonal workers, which is a lot of workers. They want certainty.

We do not want this thing to continue to drag on. Late last year I called a meeting that representatives of the department were good enough to attend. They provided some good information. At that stage it was hoped that we would have a draft WAMP for the Border Rivers by March or April. Now it is almost September. I would be very pleased if the minister could indicate when that draft will come out. It is very important, because people are waiting for it. In some places individuals have put financial plans to their banks and the draw down of the next stage of their loan is dependent upon development decisions that they need to make. Their financial and economic security is being compromised by delays. Also, earth movers and many others who work in complementary and ancillary industries need to be considered. Basically, this bill is consequential. It is something that we need to do. Of course, overlying it and underlying it are a whole range of micro and macro issues that we need to consider for the economic and social wellbeing of the communities that I represent.

Mr STRONG (Burnett—ALP) (5.08 p.m.): In the early 1990s, governments throughout Australia recognised that there was a need to find a smarter, more responsible and more transparent way of sharing water fairly. In 1993, the Council of Australian Governments reviewed water resource policy in Australia and agreed to implement a strategic framework to achieve an efficient and sustainable water industry. One of the major components of this framework was the introduction of comprehensive systems of water allocations, including the determination of clearly specified water entitlements, the provision of water for the environment and water trading arrangements.

This and other COAG water resource policies are incorporated in Queensland's Water Act 2000. The act provides for efficient and effective management of our precious water resources and the needs of a wide range of water industry participants, including private sector participants. It provides a framework for water allocation that includes provisions for the environment and protection of current entitlement holders, management planning of water as a resource, water entitlement trading, public and private sector involvement in development and operation of water infrastructure, regulation of water services applying to all service providers, corporate governance of public sector water service providers, and water supply planning and development to achieve an efficient and sustainable water industry.

Queensland's water reform policy is designed to maximise the benefits from existing infrastructure while ensuring that future resource use and development occurs in a manner consistent with the principles and actions of the COAG framework. Problems like salinity and environmental degradation from overuse of water are not yet as severe in Queensland as they are in other states. However, there is already stark evidence that a number of river systems across the state have limited or no capacity to provide further allocations of water over and above the level of current use.

As our population and industries continue to expand, there is more and more demand for water. Consequently, water allocation decisions have become more complex and the community is demanding a smarter, more responsible and more transparent way of sharing water fairly. Water users are seeking greater certainty regarding the security of their entitlements. That is what this government is delivering. The challenge in delivering the Water Act has been to develop modern water law aimed at improving the security of supply for users, ensuring that future water developments are sustainable and protecting the health of our rivers and catchments.

It is crucial to industry and the environment that we manage existing water resources to maximise the value of production from each drop. Quite apart from Queensland's commitments under COAG, water reform will provide a framework for achieving an economically efficient and sustainable Queensland water industry.

The Queensland government has commenced the difficult but essential task of defining water resource allocations to users within key catchments. Our task is to find a balance between supporting existing uses and investment at the same time as preserving the natural environment, water quality and ecosystems that sustain the community. We need to do this by defining sustainable extraction limits from catchments. Of course, some development is necessary to ensure the viability of regional economies, but development cannot occur to a degree where our streams become little more than drains and where water quality is unfit to sustain local communities and ecosystems.

Preserving and maintaining our water resource and ensuring the sustainability of the communities that rely on them underpins the crucial water reform process occurring in Queensland and elsewhere. Rivers and streams do not respect state boundaries. We need to develop with other states cooperative agreements such as the New South Wales-Queensland border rivers legislation if we are to ensure their effective management. I commend this bill to the House.

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (5.12 p.m.), in reply: Firstly, I thank all members from both sides of the House who participated in the debate on the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Amendment Bill. I thank the opposition for its support in relation to this bill. I have some prepared notes that I want to read into *Hansard* and then I will take the opportunity to comment on a number of the issues raised in particular by members opposite in their speeches.

As we begin the new millennium, one of the most crucial policy areas facing governments is planning for and allocation of our scarce water resources. After 100 years of development in Queensland, we now need to take stock of our water resources and ensure their sustainable management for future generations.

The past few years have been a landmark period for water reform in Queensland. Part of that reform process includes the New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Amendment Bill, which provides scope for each state to better manage and more effectively use its available water resources across water years.

The inaugural Borders Rivers Ministerial Forum will be held at Parliament House this Thursday. It will be attended by me, the Minister for Environment, Dean Wells, and our New

South Wales counterparts, Environment Minister Bob Debus and Land and Water Conservation Minister Richard Amery.

This government's commitment to the effective and efficient management of the rivers and streams that make up the border rivers reflects a wider commitment to conserving and regulating our precious water resources. Other recent government initiatives include the introduction of the Water Act 2000, the most fundamental rewrite of water industry legislation since the early 1900s; the development of water resource plans for vital catchment areas across the state; and approval and commencement of five-year rural water price paths to enable most schemes to achieve lower bound cost recovery by the year 2004. We have seen the corporatisation of the state's rural water service provider and extensive public consultation in relation to the Water Act, institutional reform, water resource planning and rural water pricing initiatives.

The Queensland government's approach to the implementation of COAG water reform has its basis in the Water Act 2000. The legislation provides for both environmental sustainability and the needs of a wide range of water industry participants. The effective management of water resources in the Queensland Murray-Darling basin is a major focus of our water reform policy. Queensland is continuing to progress its commitment through the preparation of water resource plans in each of the Queensland Murray-Darling basin catchments. The Queensland cap will be determined after these plans are completed.

The Beattie government is committed to the proper preparation and finalisation of water resource plans in each of our Murray-Darling basin catchments to ensure our cap arrangements are finalised in accordance with the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement. Until then, the status quo in relation to the taking and interference of water is being maintained through moratoriums so that planning outcomes will not be prejudiced by ongoing development. We are committed to sound planning that provides a balance between the ecological, social and economic values of these Queensland catchments.

Since the commencement of these planning processes, there has been extensive consultation with regard to water allocation and management issues in these catchments and, in the last year, in regard to draft plans released for public comment. Work is being consolidated to enable water resource plans for the Warrego-Paroo, Moonie and Condamine-Balonne basin to proceed towards finalisation and for a draft plan for a border rivers catchment prepared for public consultation, which I will return to when addressing the remarks by the member for Southern Downs in his speech.

Queensland believes that because it is developing its water resources at a much later stage in the game, our cap should be brought in at a level to reflect this later development whilst also recognising the need for healthy river ecosystems. Current water use in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling basin represents less than five per cent of all water use in the basin. Queensland does not intend to pay for the overallocation mistakes of our southern neighbours by holding back from a reasonable sustainable level of water development in its catchment.

In regard to the recent water licence appeal in the Land Court, I would highlight that this case is another example of the difficulties of the old Water Resources Act in allowing incremental decisions on water diversion applications. It highlights the uncertainty that the old legislation created for water users and the environment and reinforces the benefits of the Beattie government's Water Act 2000. The act will give greater water entitlement certainty as sought by water users and needed for environmental outcomes.

It is fair to say that media commentary on the Land Court case has been selective and biased in its representation of the evidence and proceedings, some of which, of course, we have seen here during this debate and in earlier speeches in this House today. That probably leads me into commenting on the various speeches made by members opposite, starting with the member for Callide.

Of the many things the member said he quoted, to support his argument and those of certain interests around St George, the original comment made by then Primary Industries Minister Ed Casey in terms of the process that we are going down. I think it was stated that the original basis for Queensland's involvement in the cap process, as explained by the then Minister for Primary Industries, Ed Casey, was that the Queensland cap would involve no issue of any new entitlements but would allow for existing entitlements to be developed to their full potential. That is a quote that is used a lot around the place, so I have heard. But unfortunately it is not quite as it would appear, in terms of supporting the argument from the member opposite, because it represents only half the story.

The 1996 document *Towards the Cap* suggests that the full potential as referred to by the then minister, Ed Casey, was to be approximately 550 gigalitres drawn out of the river across the whole of the Queensland Murray-Darling basin. Unfortunately, we have gone far beyond that 550 gigalitres extracted out of those rivers. Current extraction levels are at 900 gigalitres.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: No. When Ed Casey made that comment back in 1995-96 extractions were at 550 gigalitres. Current extractions, ourselves included, are at 900 gigalitres. That is an increase of 60 per cent on top of what was then considered as full development.

Mr Seeney: 'Existing licences'—read the quote.

Mr ROBERTSON: No, full development of existing licences back then equalled 550 gigalitres. We are currently at 900 gigalitres extraction. That comment by Ed Casey is irrelevant.

Mr Seeney: Are you saying that no other licences have been issued? Have other licences been issued since then?

Mr ROBERTSON: No further licences have been issued since then.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: No.

Mr Welford interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: That is right. There was a reinterpretation of what 'full development' meant. The increase of up to 900 gigalitres represents an increase of 60 per cent on top of what was then full development. What the irrigators want is even more—another 150 gigalitres on top of what they currently have or, if you like, a 100 per cent increase on top of what was identified as full potential in Queensland's cap in 1996. I do not think we need to hear again Ed Casey's comment being quoted, because it is clearly—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: Then the member opposite clearly has not listened to what Ed Casey actually said back then, what the extraction levels were back then, what extractions levels are now and what extraction levels could be in the future. If the member wants to ask any further questions at some stage in the future, that is fine.

The member talked about making decisions before socioeconomic impact assessments had been completed. There has been no decision. The process continues.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: I do not know who has been briefing the member for Callide. If it has been the people out in St George, then they know—because they have participated in the socioeconomic impact assessments—that those studies have gone on by the Department of State Development. Before cabinet would have considered any cap decision, that socioeconomic impact assessment done by the Department of State Development would have been fed into the process. So by the time cabinet meets to determine the cap, there will be the work done by my department, the Department of Natural Resources, and there will be the work done by the Department of State Development in terms of the socioeconomic impact assessment. That has always been the case. It will always be the case. These decisions are not made in isolation.

The member opposite has made much of the state government allegedly not being prepared to recognise property rights. Despite that, the state government—my department—has stood in the market out in St George and was prepared to buy back water for the last three years—$6 million. We have been standing out in the marketplace prepared to buy back water. Not one offer was provided to us by anyone who was prepared to sell the government back water at what would be considered to be a realistic price. The prices that were being suggested through that process were outrageous, to say the least. It is not as if the department or the government has not been prepared to buy back water; we have been. We have been standing in the marketplace for the last few years.

Mr Seeney: Will you buy back the water over the cap?

Mr ROBERTSON: I have told the member what we have been doing. Any decisions about that in the future will be made by cabinet, not by my answering a question of the member.

I now turn to the comments made by the member for Warrego. One of the difficulties that the members for Callide and Warrego face in tearing down every bit of the science that has gone on in this process is that it actually does not reflect reality. They talk about selective quoting. I can

say that what the member for Callide said in this parliament last week and in the debate today is selective quoting at its absolute worst. What he refused to recognise—and he keeps saying 'read the transcript of the case', and I have—is that the expert witnesses for the appellants made a number of important concessions. Does the member admit that? No, he remains silent.

Last week I provided examples of the expert witnesses for the appellant recognising on transcript that current extraction levels had resulted in a significant degradation in the health of the river system. I am prepared to quote at length from the transcript of the cross-examination of the expert witness—I think it was Dr Lee Benson—in which time after time after time, when questioned by the department's barrister, QC or whomever it was, he acknowledged that, in relation to the health of the river system, based on current levels of extraction, there is an issue that needs to be addressed with respect to the degradation that occurs in that particular river system. It is wrong and, I would suggest, irresponsible for the member for Callide or the member for Warrego to suggest that the whole process has collapsed as a result of evidence presented in this particular court case. If they continue to argue that, they are then arguing for a complete abandonment of the process.

Mr Seeney: No, no, no.

Mr ROBERTSON: That is what they are arguing. The member is taking this matter too seriously.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. I find that assertion by the minister offensive. I have always maintained my support for the water reform process and I will continue to do so. I am advocating a creditable, scientifically based water reform process. I ask the minister to withdraw the statement.

Mr ROBERTSON: What I was suggesting to the member—

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. I found the minister's statement offensive and I have asked him to withdraw.

Mr ROBERTSON: I find it offensive that it is not true.

Mr SEENEY: Under the conventions of this House he is obligated to withdraw the statement.

Mr ROBERTSON: No, I am not.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Liddy Clark): Order! There is no point of order, but is the minister able to withdraw?

Mr ROBERTSON: There is no need for me to withdraw because there is no offence taken to the standing orders.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. The minister is well aware of the conventions of this House. I find the minister's statement that I am tearing down the water reform process offensive and I ask that he withdraw it. Under the conventions of this House, which he knows very well and which he used very effectively in the two-minute speeches the other day against me, he is obligated to withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the minister to withdraw the statement.

Mr ROBERTSON: In deference to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, of course I will. I note that the difference is that last week I took a point of order about a statement that was both untrue and offensive. I note that the member opposite only takes offence at what I said; there is nothing untrue about what I said. Nevertheless, I withdraw.

That is the problem. Members opposite are going out there, whipping up a frenzy and suggesting that the whole process has collapsed as a result of this court case, and that is not so. We are still committed to bringing down a cap and then moving to the next stage, which is the resource allocation process or the allocation of water as stage 2 of the process. As to the actual time frames, we have a bit of work to do to tidy up some of the issues that arose out of that court case. Nevertheless, the science behind our water resource planning process remains the best in the country.

Mr Seeney: Why didn't it stand up to scrutiny in the court? Explain that to us.

Mr ROBERTSON: If we are going to acknowledge that, we also need to acknowledge the evidence provided by the expert witness for the appellant, and that is what the member for Callide refused to do. He refused to acknowledge that in the transcript the expert witness for the appellant made significant concessions. I offer him these little morsels from the transcript. This is the witness Benson being questioned by our legal representative.

Mr Seeney: I have read it.

Mr ROBERTSON: Okay, then the member would recall that Mr Benson was asked—

You would agree with me, wouldn't you, that if the amount of water that's being taken out of a river system is in the order of 50 per cent of the mean annual flow, then you would certainly expect there to be an effect?—Yes.

On the environment?—Yes.

Downstream?—Yes.

Now you would certainly expect there to be a real connection between the reduction of flow and the reduction in the ecological condition?—At that level, yes.

And what we're talking about, with respect, in this case is how much worse the system might become ... with the lag effect on top?—Yes.

You would concede it as a professional engaged in the area that there is degradation in the system?—Yes.

That is the expert witness for the appellant in the court case. This is the evidence that the member opposite relies upon to suggest that the science is flawed. This is the expert for the appellant acknowledging that, as a professional engaged in the area, there is degradation in the system. He says, 'Yes.' What are you supposed to do? What you do not do is go out and start arguing for additional allocation of water out of the river system. If your own expert says there is degradation in the river system, you do not go out there and say, 'Let's take more water out,' because that is what the member for Callide has been doing. That is why his argument is so flawed. That is why the mischief he has been creating over the last three weeks is nothing short of irresponsible.

If the health of the river system is to be protected and if the economic viability of growers in the Lower Balonne is to be protected, the member for Callide should be backing off. He should be getting on board with us because we will address some of the minor issues that came out of this court case. At the end of the day, we will make a decision based on maintaining the health of the river system and maintaining the health of the economy in the Condamine-Balonne area. That is the process we will follow under the Border Rivers system, regardless of the amount of mischief-making and the amount of selective quoting by the member opposite, by others and by the member for Warrego, who, interestingly enough, has just reappeared on the scene. I remember going to St George for the first time to meet with irrigators. I said, 'What does Howard Hobbs think of all this?' They said, 'Who?' I said, 'Your local member.' They said, 'Oh, we don't worry about what he has to say.' They do not think too much of the honourable member for Warrego, I have to say. I think the member for Warrego should take a good look at what he is being used for at the present time.

Whilst this debate has principally been about the Border Rivers, it has provided an opportunity for a number of members to talk about other river systems—in this case, the Condamine-Balonne. I am more than happy to continue to talk about it because time and time again we will focus on the real issues. We will not get down and dirty with the politics. We are committed to making a proper decision in the Condamine-Balonne and a proper decision in the Border Rivers. That is why it is with pleasure that I address some of the comments made by the member for Southern Downs. A clear distinction can be made with respect to the contributions by the members for Callide and Warrego as compared to the member for Southern Downs, because the member for Southern Downs is a former minister for natural resources and knows the issues involved. He does not get caught up in the politics. He is not interested in making mischief. He is committed to, as I wish the members for Warrego and Callide were, a decent outcome for the communities in the Border Rivers catchment.

I do need to correct him on one point, however. On a couple of occasions he mentioned the Land Court decision. There has been no decision by the Land Court. There has been no comment by a judge. It was a settlement that was reached in relation to this matter. But that is a minor point. I would rather deal with the substance of the comments made by the member for Southern Downs. With respect to when his community can expect to see the draft resource plan, I will be meeting with my department tomorrow to discuss this very issue. As I have indicated, there is a ministerial council on the Border Rivers scheduled for this Thursday in Brisbane, when I will also be discussing what we intend to do. Following those two meetings, I expect to be in a position to be able to outline the timetable for the release of the draft water resource plan for the Border Rivers.

I give the member for Southern Downs a commitment that I will do my utmost to keep him informed of the process as we go through it. We have of course already been engaging various community groups. I certainly endorse the comments he made with respect to the contributions by both the Food and Fibre Group and the Granite Belt irrigators. Yes, there have been some

differences in views by those groups but, as I indicated, I do not think that has detracted from the quality of either of those group's arguments. In fact, this weekend I will be seeing Bruce McCollum again. I will be taking the opportunity to visit one of the cotton growers out there, as well as meeting with representatives of the Queensland Murray-Darling Consultative Committee at Goondiwindi.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: No, they are actually overseas. It will be some other cotton grower whose name I cannot remember at this stage, but it is not the Turners. That will provide me with another opportunity to meet with stakeholders in the general area to relay what we have been talking about this week in the Border Rivers ministerial council and, of course, to get feedback from them about things such as the impact of the court case. Despite some arguments that the member for Callide and I may have about such things, I do appreciate the support of members opposite for the passage of this bill.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Clauses 1 to 7, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

Bill, on motion of Mr Robertson, by leave, read a third time.

LAKE EYRE BASIN AGREEMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 19 June (see p. 1536).

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (5.40 p.m.): The National Party opposition will be supporting the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement Bill 2001. This bill provides the parliament with the opportunity to approve and ratify the Lake Eyre basin intergovernmental agreement, an agreement made between the Queensland and South Australian state governments and the Commonwealth of Australia. The initial agreement was drafted after considerable consultation within the communities of the basin, both before and after a heads of agreement was signed by the three relevant governments in May 1997 prior to the actual signing of the agreement in October 2000.

South Australia was the first state off the mark when its parliament passed the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement Act on 3 April 2001. The act came into operation on 24 May 2001. Since then we have seen the first, historic meeting of the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum, held in Longreach on 26 May 2001. This process will allow the community, government agencies and key stakeholders to work together on natural resource management issues with an integrated, whole-of-basin approach. This will hopefully lead to sustainable and viable pastoral and tourism industries while maintaining the biodiversity and cultural aspects of this unique region for future generations. Importantly, to best achieve these objectives the agreement requires a joint, cooperative approach between the three governments, as the minister outlined in his second reading speech.

The Lake Eyre basin covers approximately one-sixth of Australia, with 50 per cent of that basin lying within Queensland. The basin has two main rivers—the Georgina-Diamantina and the Cooper Creek. As the minister has already noted, these streams are important to the communities as well as to the pastoral and tourism industries of the basin.

The Lake Eyre basin covers approximately 1.17 million square kilometres of arid and semiarid central Australia—about one-sixth of the continent, or the same size as the Murray-Darling system. It is considered to be one of the world's last unregulated river systems and, unlike other river systems in Queensland, flows in the basin are highly variable and often unpredictable.

Lake Eyre itself is the world's fifth largest terminal lake and is the heart of the largest drainage system in the word. The basin is part of Australia's arid zone, and the ecosystems it supports are varied and often unique. Land use within the basin is equally varied. It includes

pastoralism, mining, tourism, oil and gas exploration and production, conservation and Aboriginal activities. These things mean that the area is environmentally, economically and socially important for people both within and outside the Lake Eyre basin.

The sustainable management of this area is critically important to all Queenslanders but, as I outlined in debate on the previous bill, the sustainable management of this particular area must, as with the management of the Murray-Darling basin, be based on a credible, scientific approach. The minister's selective quoting in his reply to the debate on the previous bill does not add anything to any confidence that I or any other stakeholder in the irrigation or natural resource management business may have that this government is committed to achieving that sort of credible, scientifically-based management system.

A credible, scientific approach is critically important if a natural resource management system is to be a success, be it in the Lake Eyre basin, the Murray-Darling basin or any other catchment in Australia. If a natural resource management system is to succeed, it must have credibility. It must have sufficient credibility to have the support of not only the stakeholders—not only the people who are directly involved in that particular natural resource management system for that particular river catchment or that particular basin—but also the entire Queensland community.

The management system must be transparently credible. It must be able to stand up to rigorous scientific examination. It has to be able to weather the challenges and the tests that will be directed against it. Quite clearly, the government's natural resource management processes for the Murray-Darling basin have not been able to endure that type of rigorous test and analysis. It is critically important that natural resource management processes for not just the Lake Eyre basin but also any basin in Queensland are able to stand up to that type of analysis by the peers of the scientists who do the initial work on which the government's decision making is based. Quite clearly, that did not happen in the Murray-Darling basin WAMP, as illustrated by the court case at St George.

The minister can come into this parliament and play with words—talk about the fact that there was no decision and selectively quote from the transcript—to try to reinforce the position he is desperately clinging to. The fact remains: if the process the government has gone through to establish the basis on which these decisions were made was credible then the department would have had no need to withdraw from the court case.

The department withdrew from the court case as a deliberate strategy—so that the minister could come into this place and go out into the communities of Queensland and say that there was no decision. That has been the minister's defence from day one: to say, 'There was no decision. The science has not been discredited because there was no decision.' There was no decision because the minister and his department took a deliberate strategic decision to withdraw before the decision was handed down.

The only reason that decision was taken was that the minister and the department knew, as everybody else knew, that the evidence presented in that particular court case indicated that the department's scientific processes were unable to stand up to the type of scrutiny that they should. The department's scientific processes were unable to stand up to the scrutiny of cross-examination in a court of law.

There is a big difference between getting a decision in the department's favour and winning the media battle with the spin doctors and the information manipulators—winning the media battle in a shallow, suburban situation. That is easy to do because we are dealing with complex issues that not a lot of people understand. It is incredibly difficult for people to understand the detail of it. The previous minister was in charge of the portfolio for three years and never came close to understanding the detail of it. We are dealing with complex issues that are very easy to misconstrue in the mass media—in the 30-second grab, in the short concentration span—

Mr ROBERTSON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I ask a question about relevance to the debate on the bill before the House.

Mr SEENEY: The relevance is that the Lake Eyre basin, like every other basin, has to be managed through a natural resource management process that is credible and scientifically verifiable. The contention I put to the House is that, while this government has been good at winning the argument in the media headlines and while it has been good at winning the argument on a very shallow level—that is the type of treatment this subject gets from an urban-dominated media—it has been spectacularly unsuccessful in establishing the credibility of that resource management process where it counts. That was demonstrated by the case in the Land Court, which the minister referred to in the parliament today and last week.

If the Lake Eyre basin, to which this legislation refers, is going to be managed in such a way as to give confidence to the people of Queensland, then that credibility has to be established, otherwise the management process will not survive the test of time and will not provide the people of Queensland with the confidence they deserve that this very special and unique area is being managed adequately. And to reach that point of having credibility, we have to deal with what happened in the Land Court case in St George, because that court case questioned the very basis on which the natural resource management process and the water reform process has been based. The minister's defence, which he has repeated over and over again, that the court did not make a decision and that science has not been discredited because the court did not make a decision, is shallow, it is false, and it refuses to address the critical issue for resource management in this state for every catchment across this state, not just the Lake Eyre basin, to which this legislation refers.

Even today in this parliament the minister has done nothing at all to advance the cause of resource management in Queensland. He has done nothing at all to advance the cause of the water reform process, which we support and which we have always supported—despite the minister's cheap shots in his reply to the last piece of legislation. We have always supported and will always support the water reform process. We have always supported and will always support responsible natural resource management processes. This is critically important in the Lake Eyre basin, just as it is critically important in every other catchment in Queensland. There are some things that are different about the Lake Eyre basin, because it is one of those last undeveloped river systems, and there are precious few of them left. But that credibility has to be established.

I say to the minister quite candidly and sincerely that he really has to do better than his response here today if he has any chance at all of establishing that sort of credibility. He has to deal with the issue. There is no point hiding from the issue or using this clever semantic type of approach and dodging the issue. The government really has to deal with the issue of establishing some credibility for its resource management processes and establishing some credibility for the whole water reform process if things like the Lake Eyre basin agreement are going to be worth the paper that they are printed on. That is the challenge for the minister. That is the challenge that the minister—unfortunately, in my view—failed to take up today.

Last week in the parliament we asked the minister a number of questions. And question time being a very different forum, the minister took very limited advantage of the opportunity to address some of those issues. But today in the parliament, in the debate on the second reading of the previous piece of legislation and on this piece of legislation, the minister had an opportunity to repair some of the damage that has been done to the credibility of the government's approach to natural resource management and to repair some of the damage that has been done to the government's water reform processes, but he failed dismally to do that; and that is regrettable. It is regrettable because I know that there are a lot of families, businesses and communities in Queensland who want to see this water reform process over and done with so that they can get on with it and deal with their future planning. There is a lot of confusion and uncertainty out there. And the minister's refusal to deal with this issue simply adds to that confusion and uncertainty.

There are a lot of people who have no direct connection with natural resource management who want to be confident that places such as the Lake Eyre basin are being adequately and properly managed and that the management plans that are in place for those areas do have credibility and are scientifically based. The minister has a responsibility to give that confidence to the people of Queensland by establishing the credibility of these processes and these pieces of legislation. But today he has spectacularly failed to do that.

The minister quoted selectively from a transcript with which nobody would disagree. It is so self-evident that no-one would disagree with it. Of course, the transcript that the minister quoted from would engender a yes answer, which he seemed to make much of. But the minister failed to make any effort to explain to the House the complexities of the whole issue, and he failed to make any attempt to explain to the House why his department withdrew from the case, why the department was not able to sustain its argument, and why the argument—which was based on those documents which are the basis of the water reform process and the basis of the natural resource management processes—was not able to stand up to the rigour of examination in a court situation, where all the benefits of cross-examination are available to the proponents—that type of examination which is far and away more complex than the type of examination that these issues are going to receive in the urban media, which seems to be the focus of the government's attempts to sell the issue.

We will be supporting this Lake Eyre basin legislation because we do support the sustainable management of our underground and surface water resources and, indeed, all our natural resources. That is critical to the welfare of all Queenslanders. The government has a responsibility to manage those water resources to supply the community's needs in a fair and equitable manner. Too often we see the Beattie government mouthing the rhetoric, talking about the ideals, but never producing the desired result.

In particular, I want to bring to the attention of the House one example which falls within the Lake Eyre basin. That relates to the inadequate funding provided for the Great Artesian Basin rescue plan. The equivalent of all the water in Sydney Harbour will continue to be wasted every year unless the state fully funds its $15.8 million contribution to capping flowing bores and replacing open bore drains with pipes and troughs under the Great Artesian Basin sustainability initiative. This five-year plan was jointly agreed by the federal and state governments and land-holders to stop this wastage, to restore water pressure in the basin and to reduce the salinity, pest and weed problems caused by open bore drains. This government is reneging on that agreement.

We are talking about the Lake Eyre basin agreement here. Despite having signed that agreement, this government has back-pedalled from its responsibilities. Despite its efforts to establish its credentials as a responsible resource manager, and despite the almost over-the-top, hand-on-the-heart support for this type of conservation initiative, when it comes to the crunch this government has failed to make the money available.

This government is $2 million in arrears, and it has failed to provide full funding for the $3.9 million required for this financial year. This is a slap in the face for those in the community who depend upon this resource. As a result, there are already a reported 300 land-holders who are waiting on this government to meet its funding commitment so that they can cap flowing bores and replace open bore drains with pipe watering points on their properties.

I therefore put it to the minister to ensure that, in ratifying this agreement, his government does not turn around and change its mind—just as it has done with the Great Artesian Basin agreement—and find that it has other priorities for the money. The Beattie government claims to have all sorts of environmental credentials; but too often, when we look at the detail, the reality does not meet the rhetoric.

We will be supporting this legislation, but I take the opportunity again to urge the minister to address the important issues in this area of natural resource management. He can be assured that we will continue to highlight his failings to do so.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (5.59 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise in support of the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement Bill. Unlike the previous speaker, my support for this bill is total, not with reservation. This bill formalises and strengthens the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement. The main rivers in the Lake Eyre basin, the Georgina-Diamantina and the Cooper Creek, as well as the Coongie Lakes in South Australia, are extremely important to the communities and pastoral and tourism industries of the basin. They are largely unaffected by major water extractions or regulation by dams.

The Lake Eyre basin river systems alternate between periods of little or no flood and massive flooding events, as recently witnessed in the basin. This requires a different management approach than that usually applied to coastal rivers, which tend to have more constant flow regimes. The natural variability and the frequency, duration and volume of these flood events is essential for the maintenance of ecological processes in the basin's river systems and associated wetlands. We need to better understand the ecological implications of management decisions affecting these river systems to ensure we avoid making the mistakes now affecting the Murray-Darling basin and other parts of Australia.

The agreement came into existence some years ago following a proposal to grow broadacre cotton using large-scale extractions from Cooper Creek. The proposal created considerable concern in the basin and the broader community over the possible impacts of the proposed development. I know that this bill has the support of the people in the far south-west. During a period in opposition, Henry Palaszczuk, the now Minister for Primary Industries, and I toured that area and met with Sandy Kidd; David Brook, the Mayor of the Diamantina shire; and others. They were concerned about the cotton irrigators and the impact that they would have on the Lake Eyre basin, and particularly that they had gone to great lengths to develop an organic beef product with good markets into Japan. They were alarmed that the National Party—the party of the bush—was not listening to their concerns. We raised the issue—

Mr Johnson: Come on, get a hold of yourself.

Mr MULHERIN: No, they said that Howard Hobbs would not even listen to them.

Mr Johnson: What about this old ringer here?

Mr MULHERIN: No, he said that they wanted to string him up.

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. Whilst I agree with what the member for Mackay is saying, I find his remarks offensive in relation to the National Party, of which I am a member, and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr MULHERIN: I just said the National Party, the party of the bush.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You know that it is no point of order, too. I will not take another one.

Mr MULHERIN: He finds that offensive!

As I said earlier, in response, the Queensland, South Australian and Commonwealth governments considered that there needed to be a framework for the coordinated management of issues of basin-wide significance. An agreement was drafted after considerable consultation within the communities of the basin. It provided for the establishment of arrangements for improved coordination in the management of water and related natural resources for that part of the Lake Eyre basin that is located in Queensland and South Australia.

Minister Robertson, his South Australian counterpart, Mark Brindal, and Federal Environment Minister, Robert Hill, met in Longreach on 26 May to advance arrangements regarding the sustainable management of the basin. While not an official forum meeting under the agreement, it was very successful and pointed to a fruitful partnership between the three jurisdictions into the future.

A number of decisions were made. It was decided that the costs of the arrangements are to be shared 50 per cent by the Commonwealth, 25 per cent by Queensland, and 25 per cent by South Australia. A budget of $500,000 is to be provided, with Queensland's share to be $125,000 from the base allocation of the Department of Natural Resources. The Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group, supplemented by local government representatives from Queensland and South Australia, will act as a community advisory committee to the forum.

Professor Peter Cullen, the Director of the Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology, was appointed Chair of the scientific panel to advise the forum. A draft policies and strategies paper is to be further developed through community consultation before finalisation by November 2001. The state of the basin's resources are to be determined through a project to be called the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers assessment. A conference on the basin should be held in October 2002.

An important point to emphasise is that, under the agreement, no other parties will be able to force Queensland to put in place policies or legislation that it does not agree to. Clause 5.5 of the agreement is quite clear that decisions of the ministerial forum can be made only by consensus of all parties. Thus, if the Queensland member does not agree with a proposal, the proposal cannot be passed.

Clause 4.9 of the agreement sets out clearly that Queensland will continue to have the full responsibility for the development of policy and the administration of legislation in relation to water and related natural resource management. Clause 4.9 expects the states to comply as much as they can with the agreement and the policies and strategies developed or adopted under it and to use their best endeavours to secure the passage of any legislation necessary to comply with the agreement and its policies and strategies. However, importantly, there is no legal obligation on Queensland to adopt policies or legislation that it does not choose to.

This agreement recognises the ecological significance of the Lake Eyre basin and the need to ensure its future sustainability through effective, cooperative management. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.05 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): You can now defend the National Party.

Mr JOHNSON: I will certainly do that. I rise in support of this bill, which implements the intergovernmental agreement between the Commonwealth, Queensland and South Australia. At the outset I must stress that the arrangements that are established in this bill are far more than

an intergovernment agreement, because this bill is all about community management. I congratulate the minister and the relevant ministers of the other governments on putting this in place, because this is a very responsible initiative and one that is going to create a viable beef industry and as well manage the ecological systems of south-west Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and part of the Northern Territory.

I believe that this legislation is a testament to the people who live and work in the Lake Eyre basin. This bill is about those people, because those people make this bill possible. This bill has a long history. It started off as a proposal by a Canberra Labor government to include the Lake Eyre basin on the World Heritage List, which would have been a disastrous move in terms of the continuing economic viability of and access to this resource. People of the west are passionate about preserving this unique river and channel delta system and, as I just said, preserving probably one of the most unique chemical-free beef industries in the world.

Today I want to place on record my appreciation to the hard work that was put in by the former Mayor of Barcoo shire, Peter Douglas; Dr Bob Morrish; Sandy Kidd; Bill Scott from the Stanbroke Pastoral Company; John and Helen Ricketts from the Australian Agricultural Company; David Brook, the Mayor of the Diamantina shire; and numerous other personnel who have worked long and tedious hours working with the government and with the wider community to bring about this responsible outcome for the preservation of the Lake Eyre basin as one of the largest and cleanest natural waterways left on the face of this earth. It is through the input of these responsible people that they have this outcome today. I cannot applaud enough the efforts of those people, because there has been a lot of heartache and a lot of angst over a long period as to the future of this basin.

The communities along this waterway took the initiative and have turned the process around, as I have just said, from placing this basin on the World Heritage List to this cooperative approach that forms the basis of this intergovernmental agreement. The relevant communities in Queensland and South Australia have demonstrated that the protection of our natural resources is something that they appreciate, understand and are totally committed to. This bill is living proof that our people of the land are committed to sustainable development and that it is possible to manage this development while at the same time ensuring that the economic values of the basin are maintained and enhanced.

The people of the land do not have to be told by government that their future depends upon the successful management of this resource. They understand that if the benefit of the organic beef production in the south west of the state is to continue, the waterways on which it depends must be managed accordingly. That goes hand in hand with the very fragile environment that this Channel Country delta runs through. This is probably one of the lowest rainfall areas on earth and the last 150 years have proved the worth of the managerial practices of those people. They have managed a very viable beef industry in a very fragile environment. As I have said, they understand that if the benefit of organic beef production is to continue, the waterways must be managed accordingly. The quality of the work done by the Lake Eyre basin community group in demonstrating its proactive management of this resource has been formally recognised by the governments that are party to this agreement, because the bill provides that that community group will become the advisory group that is to be established.

One matter that needs to be addressed is the ongoing funding of the Lake Eyre basin community group. While the agreement provides for funding for the actual meetings associated with the advisory group, the community group must still go cap in hand to the Natural Heritage Trust every year. This is a difficult situation under which to operate because it means that it is virtually impossible to do any long-term planning. I believe that the time is right to make some longer term commitment to groups of this type.

I also raise the contrast between the rhetoric of this government and its action in relation to the management of the Great Artesian Basin. My colleague the shadow minister, the member for Callide, has already addressed this issue. I urge the minister to tell the people of the western areas exactly what the government's policy is and where his commitment stands at this point.

As members will be aware, the Great Artesian Basin Consultative Council and the opposition have been criticising the government for a shortfall in funding for the capping and piping of artesian bores. While New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory are fully committed to the program to save the Great Artesian Basin, Queensland is $2 million behind in the funding of this work and has failed to provide full funding for the $3.9 million required for this year. Despite this, the government now pats itself on the back for the legislation before the House—for which I have applauded the government—which was really the initiative of local

communities in reaction to Labor's World Heritage listing proposals. I say to the minister that it is absolutely paramount that, if we are to show leadership in environmental issues in the western areas, the Great Artesian Basin capping program is treated no differently to any other environmental issue throughout the state. In the meantime, while pandering to the Greens right here in Queensland, which is part of the driest continent on this earth, each and every day one billion litres of water go to waste because of the government's continued failure to resource this issue—instead it gives preference to pedestrian and cycle bridges over the river—wasting millions of dollars because of its failure.

In summary, I put on record the opposition's admiration for the communities of the Lake Eyre basin, which have demonstrated so appropriately the love and respect that they have for their part of the world and the environment that is enveloped within that region. This bill demonstrates that those communities, with the support of the relevant governments, can more than adequately manage their water resources in a sustainable manner.

I ask Peter McLeod of the Lake Eyre basin community group to pass on my appreciation to his members. I also acknowledge the fine work that has been done by Laurie Cremin and his team on the Remote Area Planning and Development Board in supporting the remote area communities that will drive this agreement and protect the Lake Eyre basin for future generations.

All of the people whom I have named this evening are very passionate and very sincere about making this become a reality and making it work. We will make it work by working collectively. It is about protecting and understanding one of the most fragile environments on the Australian continent. We can only do that by being fair dinkum about the way that we manage the resource. Over the last 150 years the cattle industry has managed it very ably and professionally. Unique fat cattle are turned off because of the good management practices of the past and they will continue to be so managed in the future.

Previous speakers have mentioned the Coongie Lakes in South Australia and how important the run-off is for the preservation of bird and animal life. Probably many members of this House have not visited that area. If members do get the opportunity, they will find a very unique area, especially if one has the opportunity to fly over it after a flood to see how the river system works, and will begin to understand what these people are so passionate about. People such as Laurie Cremin and Peter McLeod, who are not locals of the region, have travelled countless thousands of miles to bring about an outcome that is going to be beneficial not only to the current generations of the south west and the Cooper basin, but also to future generations. We can now teach the younger generation how important it is to maintain and retain this part of Australia in its current state. Through our management practices, we will keep it away from World Heritage listing and, at the same time, retain a viable cattle industry within the confines of the Lake Eyre basin.

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT (Charters Towers—ALP) (6.16 p.m.): I rise in support of this bill because cooperation between Queensland, South Australia and the Commonwealth is crucial in setting water resource management objectives for the Lake Eyre basin and for achieving those objectives. The Lake Eyre basin occupies 1.14 million square kilometres or about 15 per cent of the Australian continent and is the world's largest internal drainage system. The rivers of the basin are in close to pristine condition. They are largely unregulated by dams and large weirs and there are few large water extractions from them.

The basin contains a number of important environmental features. Many of those lie within South Australia, including the Ramsar-listed Coongie Lakes, but the Queensland government accepts its responsibility to manage its water resources in a way that protects the environment throughout the basin, not just in Queensland.

The agreement will enable Queensland to access a wider range of views and options when determining the resource management strategies for its part of the basin. Sustainability of this rare natural resource and the maintenance of good quality water are vital to the future health of the pastoral and tourism industries of the basin.

Under the agreement a ministerial forum will meet at least once a year. The forum will provide the opportunity to achieve an integrated approach by the three jurisdictions to the management of those basin resources with cross-border impacts.

The Commonwealth, Queensland and South Australia will meet to discuss emergent issues, to receive advice from both the communities of the basin and scientists, and to develop responses that meet the aspirations and objectives of stakeholders in both states, as well as Australia's obligations under international agreements to which we are a party. In summary, the

agreement will lead to the better management of the water and related natural resources of the basin. I have no hesitation in supporting this bill.

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (6.18 p.m.), in reply: The Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement was first signed in Birdsville on 21 October 2000 by my predecessor Minister Rod Welford and the South Australian Water Resources Minister Mark Brindal, so comments by the member for Gregory congratulating me on this initiative should really be given to my predecessor, Rod Welford. Senator Robert Hill also signed the agreement previously on behalf of the Commonwealth government.

The Beattie government, in partnership with the South Australian and Commonwealth governments, has a rare opportunity to ensure that the water resources of the basin are managed sustainably. This means finding a balance between protecting its social, cultural and environmental values, whilst maintaining and enhancing its economic values where possible.

The agreement provides for the preparation and adoption of policies and strategies for the management of the water and related resources of the basin which potentially have cross-border impacts. The first ministerial forum addressing the agreement had its inaugural meeting in Longreach in May. One of the major outcomes of this meeting was the release of draft policies for community consultation.

The member for Gregory mentioned that a range of people deserve recognition for the work undertaken in the Lake Eyre basin. I endorse what the member for Gregory had to say. I particularly enjoyed my time at Longreach meeting such characters as Sandy Kidd, who has a unique perspective on not just the history of the development of communities in the Lake Eyre basin but also has perhaps one of the driest senses of humour we would ever come across—probably even drier than the landscape.

The policies we are engaging the community on will form the basis for strategies designed to protect water quality and river flows within the major cross-border river systems and to maintain the ecological integrity of in-stream and flood plain ecosystems. Other outcomes included the appointment of the Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group as the community advisory committee with an expanded membership to include a local government representative and the South Australian Arid Areas Catchment Water Management Board. A scientific advisory panel was also established.

The forum also agreed on cost sharing arrangements to implement the agreement. Two features of the Lake Eyre basin agreement are important to note. Firstly, decisions of the forum can be made only by consensus, so Queensland's interests cannot be overridden by the South Australian or Commonwealth members of the forum; and, secondly, implementation of the forum's policies and strategies in Queensland can only be in accordance with our existing legislation. The agreement provides a pragmatic solution to the problem of managing cross-border flows in a way that meets the aspirations and concerns of all stakeholders in the basin.

Like Lake Eyre, the Great Artesian Basin is another one of Australia's most important water resources. In June 2000, the Queensland government signed an agreement with the Commonwealth government to jointly fund, together with land-holder contributions, the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative—GABSI. 2001-02 state funding for GABSI has been considered as part of the recent budget process. At this stage, it is likely that the Department of Natural Resources and Mines will provide $2 million in base funding for the initiative in 2001-02. State funding of $2.4 million was provided for the initiative and related NHT piping projects in the 2000-01 financial year—a significant investment by the Queensland government. In addition, the government is spending $1.4 million a year on ongoing management of the basin which is not recognised by the federal government.

That is a matter of great concern to me. I refer again to the comments made by the member for Gregory about the role that NHT funding plays and the difficulties that community organisations have in terms of setting out long-term work plans when NHT funding may provide them secure funding for only one, two or three years. I believe there is significant work to be done by the federal government to provide the certainty and surety that is necessary under such a program as NHT that allows communities to plan in the long term. After all, when we are talking about natural resource management projects we are not talking about projects that can necessarily be fixed in one, two or three years; a lot of these projects are ongoing projects. If they are to be filled to their full potential, that security of funding over the longer term is certainly necessary.

The other thing that is a concern—and I mentioned it just before—is that the federal government does not recognise the additional $1.4 million a year that the Department of Natural Resources provides for the ongoing management of the basin. If it did acknowledge that level of work and funding that the department provides, Queensland could attract a further $1.4 million on top of that which could go to on-the-ground works. But that is not to be and, as a result, we have come in for some criticism for that and that is acknowledged. I take this opportunity to call on the federal government to acknowledge the additional funding that the state government does provide to the Lake Eyre basin and come in behind that funding by providing more financial support than it does currently.

The aim of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative is to rehabilitate hundreds of outdated, corroding bores and replace some 22,000 kilometres of open bore drains with piped systems throughout the basin. To date, some 404 bores have been capped and 69 piped reticulation schemes have been installed. This has resulted in significant water saving and partial pressure recovery in some key sections of the basin. Stakeholders have been instrumental in ensuring these early program achievements. These key stakeholders include land-holders, mining and tourism representatives, the Great Artesian Basin Advisory and Consultative Councils and the state and Commonwealth governments.

A major issue which was resolved some months ago is the cost-sharing arrangements applying to the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative. The decision was made to retain the subsidy levels which have applied for a number of years under other funding programs. For bore rehabilitation works, the subsidy is 80 per cent, with land-holders having to cover only 20 per cent of the costs. For piping projects, land-holders pay 40 per cent of the cost of the work conducted on their property and the state and Commonwealth governments share equally the remaining 60 per cent. This may be less than the subsidy of 70 per cent sought by the Chair of the Great Artesian Basin Consultative Council, but it is commensurate with the level of private benefit attached to these projects and has been acceptable to the 300 land-holders who have applied thus far to participate in the initiative.

The Queensland government is committed to doing its share to ensure the future sustainability of both the Great Artesian and Lake Eyre basins, in partnership with other relevant governments and stakeholders. The Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement requires the ratification of the agreement by the parliaments of South Australia and Queensland. The agreement comes into effect once it has been so approved and ratified. It has already been ratified by both the South Australian and federal parliaments.

In commending the bill to the House, I thank the opposition for its support of this bill and thank all honourable members for their contribution to the debate that we have had on this important piece of legislation.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

Bill, on motion of Mr Robertson, by leave, read a third time.

FORESTRY AND LAND TITLE AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 19 June (see p. 1537).

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (6.29 p.m.): The opposition will be supporting the Forestry and Land Title Amendment Bill 2001. As the minister has outlined, there are two objectives to this bill, which proposes to amend the Forestry Act 1959 and the Land Title Act 1954. These legislative amendments seek to clarify legal ownership and property rights of landowners and other parties in carbon that is absorbed and stored by trees and other vegetation on freehold land in Queensland. The opposition understands that the intention of this legislation is to separate the

ownership of the land and the rights intrinsic to the property from the contractual rights of a person in respect of natural resource products. Currently there is no recognition of carbon credit rights in Queensland law and, in fact, we will be one of the last states to pass this legislation giving that recognition.

Of course, as most members of the House would understand, this legislation is in response to the Kyoto agreement or the Kyoto protocols, which have had some difficulty achieving the ratification that is necessary to bring those things to reality. However, I think everyone in this parliament is probably well aware that sooner or later there will be some type of emissions control. Sooner or later there will be some effort on an international basis to control the carbon emissions that the Kyoto protocol set out to address. When that will happen and whether or not Queensland land-holders will be able to use this legislation to take advantage of a carbon trading regime only time will tell.

However, I think it is prudent that the Queensland parliament move now to put in place the framework that will allow that type of emissions trading to occur here in Queensland for two reasons: firstly, to allow speculative investment if there are investors out there who want to take advantage of the particular attributes that Queensland has in regard to providing a place for the large scale establishment of forestry projects that may be able to act as sequesters of carbon and, secondly, to allow Queensland land-holders to make the best of whatever opportunities present themselves as the whole emissions trading protocols develop and as the whole Kyoto protocol is negotiated on the international stage.

A key feature of the Kyoto protocol is its provision for a number of flexibility arrangements known as Kyoto mechanisms, which can help countries fulfil their carbon abatement commitments. International emissions trading is one of those mechanisms. However, an international agreement is yet to be reached—and is unlikely to be reached in the near future—on how these mechanisms will be implemented. Therefore, a national emission trading system has the potential to facilitate cost effective greenhouse gas abatement and could help Australia meet its international greenhouse commitments.

Carbon credit trading is already occurring in Australia, but in the absence of any government decision to establish a national emissions trading system, it is largely speculative. This is mainly due to many issues relating to the Kyoto protocol's compliance and methods for measuring carbon sequestration in forests which are still subject to scientific investigation and international agreement.

There are a number of issues which we have to resolve internationally about sequestering carbon. The most obvious one is how we are going to account for what carbon is sequestered; what types of tree planting and growth, if any, will be counted; how we are going to measure the carbon that is stored; the extent of discounting of carbon storage to account for threats to its longevity such as a pest infection, disease, fire and so on; how we are going to account for carbon if and when plantations are harvested; and the size of the transaction costs, including the cost of measuring the amount of carbon sequestered. There is a whole range of issues which have to be addressed before we see any legitimate carbon trading system.

However, the value of carbon credits will ultimately depend on the extent of the emission obligations and how sequestration compares with other abatement opportunities. If emissions trading is adopted by the Australian government, the scheduling of plantations and revegetation projects to maximise carbon sequestration in the commitment period becomes strategically important for the tree grower, the investor and for the Commonwealth government.

This legislation will vest all or part of the natural resource product in the benefited person. It will grant the benefited person the right to enter the land to do either or both of the following: to establish, maintain or harvest the natural resource product, or to carry out works or activities for the natural resource product. This legislation will also grant the benefited person the right to deal with the natural resource product. However, to ensure that contractual rights are recognised and capable of being ascertained by any potential buyer, the contract may be registered as a profit a prendre. As a result, registration will allow the principles of indefeasibility under the Land Title Act 1994 to apply. As noted in the explanatory notes, a contract may be entered into by parties outside of this provision; however, the contract will not have the benefit of the government-backed indefeasibility of title obtained by registration under the act.

Section 7 refers to definitions that will be amended in this legislation. The current definition is 'for a tree or vegetation, includes the process by which the tree or vegetation absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere'. That is the definition for carbon sequestration. However, there is no

definition for 'vegetation', and that is something that I think the minister needs to address. Just what is vegetation? I know that in the Vegetation Management Act it is defined in a particular way, and I will not try to quote it from memory. The definition in the Vegetation Management Act defines vegetation as trees only; it does not include any of the other grass-type plants which make up a huge proportion of the biomass of many parts of Queensland. When that scientific work is done, it may well be discovered that they are just as effective stores of carbon as plantations. The scientific work to establish how much carbon is stored in what type of organic matter and what type of organic matter represents the best and most efficient sequester of carbon is yet to be done. There is a lot of work to be done, and I would not like to see us pass legislation in this House which may preclude or which may anticipate what the final result of that work will be over time.

There is also the issue of soil carbon. Large amounts of carbon are stored in the soil. It may be non-organic carbon, which I think is the term used. Science has also not yet established just how that non-organic carbon can be measured and how it changes from organic carbon to non-organic carbon, and the whole process of storage and reuse of that element in a soil situation has yet to established.

So there are some areas that I think this legislation has to be broad enough to encompass. This legislation has to at least be aware of the possibilities that the studies that are going to have to be done between now and when a legitimate and creditable emissions trading regime is put in place may well establish that there are carbon stores out there quite apart from the physically obvious tree plantation. I bring that issue to the minister's attention. Perhaps he might like to comment on that when he sums up at the end of this debate.

Although the establishment of an emissions trading scheme on an international scale remains uncertain in the near future—and that emissions trading scheme will be determined by the international policy environment—it is evident that there are benefits to having this legislation in place. There are benefits to the whole Queensland economy and there are benefits to individual Queensland land-holders.

This legislation will better inform land-holders and other interested parties, such as overseas investors or multinational corporations, of the commercial viability of plantation investments in Queensland and what they can expect in terms of flow-on opportunities. It will provide a framework which will allow any international carbon trading scheme to be implemented and negotiated in Queensland. As this is just the first step to recognising the rights of carbon and natural resource products, it is vitally important that the consultation process with industry, local land-holders and potential investors is continued. As I said earlier, I believe that, in time—it will not be a short time frame—there will be considerable opportunities for Queensland land-holders. Today we have already spoken about the differing interpretations of property rights and how the Labor government has, in my view, deprived Queensland land-holders of their property rights.

In relation to this legislation and the whole developing area of carbon trading, I would be particularly vigilant that Queensland land-holders are able to take advantage of developing opportunities. I do not see anything in this legislation which would transgress what I believe should be their expectations so far as property rights are concerned in natural resource products. However, given the government's record with the vegetation management legislation and the water legislation, I sound a note of caution as far as respecting individual property owners' property rights are concerned. However, we need to be careful. Having identified that there will be opportunities for land-holders in the future and that the legislation needs to respect property owners' rights and provide opportunities for property owners to take maximum advantage of those rights, we need to be careful that we do not oversell the opportunity that may arise for Queensland property holders.

Mr Robertson: Lest we create a monster.

Mr SEENEY: Absolutely. I do not think anybody should do anything to increase an expectation that carbon emissions trading is going to provide an income for any Queensland land-holder in the short to medium term.

Mr Robertson: That's why we've taken a careful and considered approach.

Mr SEENEY: Very good, and I support that careful and considered approach. I just sound a note of caution about property rights and the potential for particular interest groups to oversell the opportunities that this may present to Queensland land-holders.

Mr Robertson: You can see the shonks developing, can't you?

Mr SEENEY: Absolutely. As the minister indicated, there is the potential for unscrupulous promoters to promote schemes that may or may not come to fruition depending upon international policy decisions rather than anything that might happen in Queensland. We need to be very cautious about that. We need to ensure that the Queensland community is well informed. We need to ensure that any reporting of the passing of this legislation is accurate and does not add to such unfortunate promotions which may take encouragement from the passing of this legislation. With that, I certainly support the legislation. I look forward to the minister's comments.

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.43 p.m.): The Forestry and Land Title Amendment Bill amends the Forestry Act 1959 and the Land Title Act 1994 to clarify legal ownership and property rights in carbon absorbed or stored by trees and other vegetation on freehold land in Queensland. Similar legislative action is being undertaken in other jurisdictions, and this legislation will bring Queensland into line with those other states. Whilst the Commonwealth government has indicated a preference for a national approach to emissions trading, it has advised that it is up to the states and territories to establish a legislative framework to recognise carbon rights.

While Queensland does not propose to establish or operate an emissions trading system or carbon credits trading, the government does consider that it is important to provide a clear legal framework within the state to recognise carbon as a tradeable legal commodity and to clarify the way in which agreements for trading in carbon would operate. I agree that it is not going to necessarily happen in the short term, but it is most important that we put into place this framework for the future. Those are the first steps in preparing for future trading opportunities at a national and international level. Carbon credit trading by land-holders could thus provide a source of new income and incentives for sustainable land management. That is why the government is taking this step to provide an appropriate framework.

Heightened investor interest has indicated to the Queensland government that it needed to take action to put Queensland in a position to take full advantage of forestry investment in the event that an emissions trading scheme is finally established. If in the future this emissions trading scheme was introduced, high emitters, that is, the energy industry, may need to purchase credits which can be obtained from groups able to produce them, that is, land-holders and forest producers, allowing the latter groups to profit from such arrangements. It is anticipated that other environmental benefits from those measures may also follow, such as sustainable land management and reduced land degradation. In addition, economic spin-offs may include greater investment in forestry plantations and the potential commercial gains to land-holders from carbon trading. As I said, this amendment will bring Queensland into line with Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, which have already recognised carbon rights, and will allow Queensland to reap the benefits, having had interest expressed from investors in Japan and China.

Under the new legislation, carbon is to be treated as a legal commodity prior to harvesting. Landowners will be able to enter into contracts concerning a natural resource product. I might point out that the definition of 'natural resource product' does include trees, parts of trees or vegetation, including shrubs and grasses, either above or below the ground or dead or alive. This comprehensive new definition is vitally important to maximise the benefit that will flow from this to landowners.

The agreement can vest all or part of a natural resource product in another party and/or grant the other party a right to have access to the land to establish, manage, harvest or otherwise deal with a natural resource product on the property. However, the agreement creates no land interest in the other party. Thus, an oil company might contract to purchase carbon rights stored in a plantation or some of the trees in it owned by a timber company or by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries Forestry Division. The oil company would have no rights to the land itself but could go on to the property to look after its trees. The agreement can be registered on the land title as a recognised legal interest separate from ownership of the land.

The implementation of the South East Queensland Stakeholder Forest Agreement is aimed at, amongst other things, development of plantations for carbon sinks. In fact, the aim is to plant some 10 million trees during the next five years. The Queensland government has recently funded the establishment of 5,000 hectares of hardwood plantations, mainly on private land. This legislation will encourage private interests to enter into agreements with landowners to develop more plantations and thus provide a significant new source of income to regional Queensland.

Far-north Queensland also hopes to benefit from the possibility of carbon trading with a number of initiatives in the area of farm forestry. However, as is so often the case, the Commonwealth government is frustrating attempts in Queensland to improve natural resource

management and regional economic development. The Farm Forestry Program is one of a number of specific NHT programs undertaken in Queensland. The FFP aims to encourage the integration of commercial plantation and management into farming systems to increase agriculture efficiency and sustainable natural resource management. They are seen by the community as a vital component of the delivery of sustainable development and management in the regions. Farm forestry is of course also a means of enhancing greenhouse sinks and sustainable land use—one of the eight modules of the National Greenhouse Strategy of the Commonwealth.

However, I was very disappointed to learn that Wilson Tuckey, the Minister for Forestry and Conservation, has actually rejected all government agency farm forestry projects, including two from far-north Queensland. I would like National and Liberal members to take this up with Wilson Tuckey, because I think this is a retrograde step. I will mention these two projects to the House, because they are of significance to far-north Queensland. The first was the North Queensland Farm Forestry Development Committee and Forest Industry Network project, which was a continuing program in its final year. It is also disappointing that far too often we get halfway through a project and then the Commonwealth just simply changes its mind and pulls out its funding. It happened with WaterWatch in far-north Queensland. I am sure members opposite understand the implications of this. We would urge them to support us in our negotiations with the Commonwealth.

Mr Seeney: They are state government agency projects, and you know it. That is the reason they were funded.

Dr LESLEY CLARK: That is the rationalisation given, but that actually denies the significant community involvement in those projects. That is what is disappointing. It is not simply the government trying to shift the funding. They are genuine projects.

This particular project facilitated and coordinated the establishment of a north Queensland forestry development committee and a forestry industry network, which was needed because the local private forestry industry was fragmented and largely uncoordinated. The program has helped to develop an effective communication network between all interested stakeholders to coordinate activities and ensure a rational and orderly development of the regional forestry industry.

There was a new program also: the Capacity Building for Forest Growers program, which sought to build the capacity of the private farm forestry sector in north Queensland to deliver commercial services to farmers to help facilitate the transition from government funded programs to industry and community driven projects. In particular, the north Queensland forestry development committee and forestry industry network projects have achieved considerable success in terms of sustainable agricultural and natural resource management in Queensland.

The federal government has declined agency programs on the grounds that these projects are the responsibility of other levels of government, but these projects were supported and recommended to the federal government at both a community and a state level by the NHT regional and state assessment panels. I think that is also important. The panels actually recommended these projects, yet at the ministerial level they were knocked back. To me, that clearly points to political influence. It is another demonstration of the Commonwealth doing a disservice to Queensland and not recognising the legitimacy of its own assessment process, which it put in place to make decisions about these projects.

As I said, this is particularly unfortunate given that many of these projects are predominantly community run and administered, despite the agency-employed status of their project officers. These projects will now find it impossible to achieve their proposed objectives. I am obviously disturbed that the projects, especially continuing projects, were rejected simply on the basis of them being perceived to be agency projects, despite their strong community support.

Notwithstanding this setback, a company has recently been formed to help develop a private forestry resource in north Queensland. Private Forestry North Queensland is a small, dynamic and responsive team that services the needs of the private forestry industry in far-north Queensland. PFNQ regards the creation of a regulated carbon market with tradeable carbon rights as vital to the development of private forestry in north Queensland for the following reasons. Private forestry is a new form of land use in north Queensland, with a decade of government tree-planting schemes in the 1990s establishing trial plots of rainforest and hardwood species not previously established in the region. The resource established with this government funding is scattered and of varying quality and does not constitute an industry due to its lack of scale. The range of

demonstration sites is available to potential investors and industry to act as a catalyst for investment in the sector. Returns on investment for carbon will add to the profitability of forestry enterprises, acting as icing on the cake for traditional timber investors.

North Queensland is the only region of Australia capable of growing tropical timber species with high growth rates and biomass accumulation. The carbon sequestration potential of the tropics is likely to be higher than temperate regions of Australia due to these climatic conditions. We have the opportunity in this region to combine overseas and national investment in forest plantations for both timber and carbon, encompassing longer rotations and possibly incorporating more biodiversity than traditional forestry enterprise established by governments and the corporate sector in other regions of Australia. Private Forestry North Queensland is taking direct action with both land-holders and investors to make this happen. I wish it every success.

The present legislation represents a very significant milestone in the development of the Queensland forestry industry, particularly in light of the Kyoto 2 agreement, signed in Bonn, where Australia won the right to include an unlimited amount of emissions reductions from the carbon-trapping properties of revegetation.

This clearly represents an enormous opportunity for Queensland, which has such potential for revegetation in all parts of the state. This legislation also provides the opportunity for a new source of income to regional Queensland, where so many land-holders are really struggling at this time. I just hope that, with this initiative and initiatives on the national and international scene, we will be able to make that a reality. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Rowell, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (6.55 p.m.): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Midwifery

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (6.55 p.m.): Last week an item on *A Current Affair* highlighted the recent decision of Guild Insurance to cease renewing professional indemnity insurance to midwives. A written statement from the company confirmed that it believed that midwifery was a highly litigious area and that it did not receive enough premiums to cover even one large damages claim. This is hard to refute in an industry where it is difficult to find out just who is being sued or to discover what the rate of litigation is. As Guild's policies for each of the 80 midwives across Australia run out, midwives are being told that their insurance will not be renewed so that their services will no longer be insured.

Where will this leave midwifery in this country? I suggest that this latest decision will have a very negative impact and many midwives will simply opt out of the business—a business which has already reached crisis point because of the shortage of independent midwives. One midwife said during the television interview that in her 30 years of faultless expertise and care she had not had to make even a notification, let alone a claim. She is retiring, not because she wants to but because she is no longer insured and she does not want to take the risk—and why should she?

Midwifery is not everyone's choice—it was not mine—but for some women it is the only way they wish to have their babies, and it is a choice they should have. To deny women choice about where they have their babies and which care provider should be in attendance is an erosion of basic human rights. Of the two women who were interviewed for the program, one said that she would go so far as to not have another child if she could not have the services of a midwife. The World Health Organisation states—

Midwifery appears to be the most appropriate and cost effective type of health care provider to be assigned to the care of normal pregnancy and normal birth …

Federally it is time to look at the capping of medical malpractice payouts, which should reduce insurance premiums, and look at recognising midwifery as the independent profession that it is. There must be a concerted push to ensure it remains a viable, accessible and safe alternative service to those women who demand it.

Adult Entertainment Licences

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.57 p.m.): I rise to add my voice of concern to those in the community of Maroochydore with regard to the possible opening of a new bar at which a female revue and gentleman's club services will allegedly be supplied. Mooloolaba has already been through the fight against an adult entertainment licence. The community spoke loudly in that case, and there were thousands of petitioners. More detail is yet to be provided with regard to this particular application. The licence has not been issued yet, though work is going on at the premises.

Some 1,000 people live in the immediate vicinity of this proposed club. I can understand the concerns of the Maroochydore police-community committee, which has spoken out in opposition to this. We want to clearly say that we are looking for family entertainment in this area. A lot of work has been done in the area in terms of landscaping and there is a need to try to get appropriate businesses back.

People in the community are saying that there is a particular type of business they want to see operating there, and they have a concern particularly with regard to places which may seek licences allowing late-night trading. We have had problems in the past with nightclubs and premises being open late. I guess that our memories are long because of the concerns and the problems that caused in the community.

I back the concerns of those in this community with regard to what is proposed for this site. Some very good businesses have gone into the area. Proprietors are not always there after hours—their businesses are not open late at night—and they have a concern about compatibility of businesses and about those who are wandering the streets at night. Owners of other businesses cannot be there themselves and have to employ appropriate security.

I want to talk also about the CAMCOS project, which has been going on for years. The coalition initiated this process. There has been a lot of talk about it, and the studies have been completed, but we are yet to see an implementation program. I am calling on the state government to show the colour of its money in putting this project into practice.

We need public transport and coordination. We need to see an implementation plan and a schedule of capital works to go with that. Also, we need to look seriously at addressing the issue of coordination and the need for funding to assist in coordination, as well as a fair public transport subsidy. When one considers what Brisbane gets for its public transport subsidies across rail and buses compared to a major region like the Sunshine Coast, one realises that there is very much a need for a level of public subsidy to provide services to people who cannot afford cars, people who are elderly or people who have other disabilities and cannot drive.

Time expired.

Centenary of Federation

Mr RODGERS (Burdekin—ALP) (7.01 p.m.): Tonight I wish to mention the Centenary of Federation celebrations that were held in the Burdekin from 30 July to 5 August last week. The Centenary of Federation celebrations and events program over the week included a Burdekin panorama at the Burdekin library in Ayr, which highlighted a visual panorama of historic photographs and family history, including displays by local interest groups.

There was also a musical morning tea at the memorial hall in Home Hill. This function recognised the valuable input of our senior citizens and disabled members to the community. I was unable to attend the function but was informed by Mayor John Woods that this was a fun-packed morning tea and everybody in attendance enjoyed it.

I had the pleasure also of attending the Centenary of Federation ball in Giru. People from throughout the area came in various costumes depicting different eras throughout the century. But the night was abruptly disrupted when Ned Kelly and his gang burst in and robbed everyone in the hall. The highlight of that part, though, was that his mother, who was also there, gave chase, hitting him over the head with an umbrella and taking his takings and giving them to charity.

Last Saturday, I also attended the Youth Motorama at the Brandon raceway with my son Matthew. The guest on that day was motor sports identity Dick Johnson. He was very popular, signing autographs and mixing with spectators and competitors. The highlight of the day for my son was the burnout competition—smoke and rubber everywhere. That seems to be what young people like today. It is okay, as long as it stays on the track.

There was also a gala musical production at the Burdekin theatre in Ayr. This featured music, song and dance from a cavalcade of popular musicals from throughout the century, plus a few comedy skits. This was a great production that my wife, my children and myself and all those attending enjoyed.

I also had the pleasure of announcing the Centenary of Federation winners of the Ayr surf-lifesaving club's youth mural competition, which depicted the theme A Snapshot of a Nation, to be highlighted on the surf boat. The junior winner was Sally Ahern. Sally said that her mural told the story of the Australian nation. The senior winner was a joint mural by Amaya Danello and Lisa Foster. They said that their design involved a number of concepts which expressed aspects of Australia as a nation and the Burdekin. These murals will be preserved on the club's new surf boat. People around the state and Australia will get to see these murals as the Ayr surf-lifesaving club and its crew take the boat to victory in many a competition.

Gympie Country Music Muster

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—ONP) (7.03 p.m.): I rise to speak in honour of the many volunteers who donate their time and effort to the annual Gympie Country Music Muster. It is appropriate that in this, the Year of the Volunteer, these people and organisations be acknowledged. It is only due to their continued and unstinting support of this muster that it is the great success that it is today.

The Gympie muster is one of the biggest country music events in this country and will celebrate its 20th anniversary this year. Over 40 community volunteer groups assist the Gympie Apex Club in all aspects of its organisation. The Muster Rural Aid Appeal raises funds every year for a different charity, and this year Diabetics Australia will benefit from this fundraising event. This money will go towards developing vital educational resources for the children who suffer from this disease.

Since its inception, the muster has raised over $2 million for non-profit organisations. Each August, Amamoor in the beautiful Mary Valley—and which is also my home—receives approximately 25,000 visitors, 23 per cent of whom are from interstate. So not only do those dedicated volunteers provide a fun and safe environment for thousands of people, but they also help the local community by providing a fantastic tourist venue.

Noah's Ark Resource Centre

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (7.05 p.m.): It is a pleasure to speak about a great organisation known as Noah's Ark Resource Centre, which has also been known over the years as the Noah's Ark Toy Library. This is an organisation which touches the lives of at least 63,000 Queensland children. The centre is located in East Brisbane in the electorate of the Minister for Education. I had the pleasure of visiting the centre recently, when I inspected the various resources and the work that is done there by various staff and volunteers. I also had the pleasure of meeting the parents and special children at the playgroup that meets regularly at the centre.

The core services provided by this very great organisation include resources to schools, preschools and families to support and enhance the special education programs or mainstream education of children with disabilities or special needs. It also services children in child care with additional needs—disability, cultural diversity and indigenous backgrounds. The organisation operates a specialised equipment library for children with disabilities, a mobile unit and a rail/mail service to schools and families throughout Queensland. Indeed, it does provide a great service to many of the members in this House tonight from all over Queensland.

The unique services and key activities of the organisation include statewide services, qualified staff and specialised equipment designed and manufactured in liaison with teachers and therapists. The equipment that I saw is extremely diverse, including certain musical instruments and specialised equipment tailored for all ages and particular needs of children. The services also include structured and integrated early education sessions.

Noah's Ark Brisbane operates the largest rail/mail service to isolated and rural communities with disabled children. That is very much welcomed by some of those families who are very isolated in this state. The new facilities assisted with bulk loans of specialised equipment—for example, switches—adapted equipment for severely and profoundly disabled children, consulted on the range of equipment available, and assisted with the initial purchasing and ordering.

This is a great organisation. I am very pleased that the Minister for Education recently, on 10 July, wrote to the organisation, particularly Rosemary Meadows, whom I met on that occasion, to indicate that whilst negotiations are under way for future service agreements she has assured the organisation that funding for the centre will be continued. I am very glad to see that. I congratulate the minister on her support of this organisation. This organisation has put something back into my electorate because of the great volunteers who work there, and I commend them.

Time expired.

Exceptional Circumstances Scheme

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (7.08 p.m.): The Exceptional Circumstances Scheme is too cumbersome and too slow to react. State and federal primary industries ministers should overhaul it at their next meeting on Friday. The current application for drought-stricken Darling Downs people has exposed problems with the rigidity of the assessment criteria and the lengthy delays in sourcing information to support the EC applications.

There has also been a lack of coordination between the state and federal governments in administering the scheme, which all too often has been used as a political football. After three failed crops, Darling Downs farmers are at the end of their tether waiting for a decision on the area's EC application. The application was made only in late March, but the information was still being submitted to support it as late as June owing to the difficulties in sourcing that information and worsening conditions. I also question why the state government made the application for the period from February 2000 to January 2001 when one of the criteria is that there must have been an impact on farm incomes for more than 12 months.

One of the biggest flaws of the current arrangements is the lack of state government commitment to the scheme, which often sees it passing the buck when drought conditions start to bite. The National Farmers Federation and Agforce have supported calls to overhaul the EC, as has the federal Agricultural Minister, Warren Truss, and the federal Labor Agricultural spokesman, Gavan O'Connor. We now need the support of the state ministers at their ARMCANZ meeting next Friday, which includes Primary Industries Minister Palaszczuk, who has resisted the overwhelming calls to fix the EC. The minister's excuse is that the federal government proposes to shift the cost to the states. That is a smokescreen to cover the fact that his government has made a negligible contribution to the EC scheme.

From 1 July 2001 the interest rate subsidy was reduced from 70 per cent to 50 per cent. Prior to that, 70 per cent was the maximum rate as the state administered the subsidy and could choose not to provide the maximum rate. The Commonwealth paid 55 per cent and the state paid 15 per cent. But since 1 July 2001, as agreed by all ministers in 1999, the subsidy has been reduced from 50 per cent to 45 per cent for the Commonwealth and 5 per cent for the state. Historically, the interest rate subsidy makes up one-third of the total costs of the EC scheme. Income support—all from the federal government—makes up two-thirds. So now the state's contribution is only 3 per cent of the total costs.

Time expired.

Legacy Junior Public Speaking and Plain English Speaking Award

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (7.11 p.m.): Last Saturday I had the very great pleasure of meeting some of Queensland's finest young communicators when I presented the Legacy Junior Public Speaking and Plain English Speaking Award. I congratulate not only the winners but all of those who participated.

The awards are held each year by Legacy with the support of Education Queensland, the English Speaking Union and the Australia-Great Britain Society. The 2001 finalists, all aged between 12 and 17 years, delivered speeches on topics of their choice as well as impromptu presentations. My attendance there was to represent the Minister for Education, the Honourable Anna Bligh.

The young communicators are gifted far beyond their age. Public speaking teaches people so many transferable skills. In today's competitive world and in a vibrant multicultural society the ability to use plain English is the mark of the skilled communicator.

One of the top priorities of this government is for young people to take an active role in our state's social, economic and public life. Of all the qualities that we admire in others, the ability to

speak well would have to relate alongside kindness, good looks and health. In the public sector, the ability to use plain English is also much touted but seldom seen.

When we think about public speaking, we often think only about the actual speeches that are made. But public speaking teaches people the arts of persuasion, enthusiasm, research, creativity, risk management, organisation and objectivity. The ability to use plain English will enable young people to communicate effectively with others from all walks of life and from our many different heritages. In our multicultural society, that is a very important thing. Those who hope to entertain or persuade us know that they can no longer get away with glib statements, unfounded arguments or bureaucratic gobbledegook. That is where the skilled communicator comes to the fore. The skills that these young people displayed on Saturday showed them as being communicators who are greatly empowered by their skills. It is for that reason that Education Queensland has been pleased to have been involved for over 20 years with the plain English speaking competition and is proud to support Legacy with some $5,000 each year.

The government is also proud to be associated with an organisation such as Legacy, which works so hard for the families of those who defend our nation. The fact that Legacy is also supported by organisations of the calibre of the English Speaking Union and the Australia-Great Britain Society shows that we are in good company.

The Legacy speaking competitions are directly relevant to so much of our school's curriculum: English, through its emphasis on communication and research skills; the social sciences; history; the study of society; and civics—in fact, all areas of the curriculum through the discipline of organising thoughts and flexible work habits.

I thank Legacy for its role in not only training people in public speaking but also providing experiences where those skills can be exercised. I congratulate them on the sustained success of the Public Speaking and Plain English Speaking Award.

Time expired.

Team Gladstone 2001

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (7.14 p.m.): The Sydney-Hobart yacht race is the major yachting event in every yachting competitor's calendar. Yachts come from all over the world to participate in what can only be parallelled, in both distance and unpredictable weather conditions, by the Fastnet race in the UK.

The Sydney-Hobart yacht race is one of the world's most celebrated ocean races. It is important as a classic blue-water contest and as an arena for men and women to display the courage, determination, commitment, spirit, adventure and mateship, and maritime skills for which Australians are known around the world. Each Boxing Day, the Sydney-Hobart yacht race continues to attract worldwide coverage because, unlike any other yacht race, it has a great element of adventure and challenge despite the stringent safety regulations implemented by the organisers, the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia and the Royal Hobart Yacht Club.

Team Gladstone 2001 is a group of eight local sailors who want to compete in the Sydney-Hobart yacht race, one of the world's most challenging sailing events. They also want to promote the dynamic, successful and modern industrial community of Gladstone and the entire state of Queensland. To achieve this skill, Team Gladstone 2001 is seeking sponsorship. They will take on the best and toughest yachts in the world when they compete in the 2001 Sydney-Hobart yacht race. They will be sailing the Petersen design 50-foot *Bright Morning Star*, a yacht that has a rich history from several Sydney-Hobart yacht race starts and her win in the inaugural 1999 Coffs Harbour-Suva race.

The people in the crew include Melinda Benedetto, Tony Craner, Ken Cowden, Mike Phillips, Brian Haydon, Ray Hobbs, Jeff Paul and Muriel Strahm. Together they have significant expertise. As I said earlier, they are seeking support for this tourism and promotion proposal from suitable sponsors. I commend this group's initiative, their energy and vision and wish each of them every success in this venture.

Banyo P-12 School

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (7.16 p.m.): I am pleased to report further on the announcement by Education Minister, Anna Bligh, of $8.8 million to amalgamate Nudgee State Primary School and Banyo High School into a new preschool to year 12 campus. The co-location

of both schools onto the grounds of Banyo State High School will provide a modern new junior school and new and refurbished buildings for the middle and senior subschools to be established on the site. The junior school will cater for preschool to year 5; the middle school from years 6 to 9; and the senior school from years 10 to 12.

I am pleased that a feature of the new school will be a 300-seat performing arts centre, which will provide major benefits to students and the local community. This decision is the result of overwhelming support from the Banyo-Nudgee community. I take this opportunity of thanking the minister and the community for its support and patience. I particularly thank the local project working party.

I recognise the considerable efforts and support for this project from former District Director, Tom Mould and current District Director David Manttan; former Principals, Ian Crabb and John Fitzgerald; current Principal, Greg McKitrick; Deputy, Leah Richards; Principal of Nudgee Primary, John Swan; Deputy, Kylie Sheehan; staff and community representatives Bob Hutchings, Donna Baker, Dawn Richards, Jill Antuar, Dawn Beitzel, Cindy Gerhart, Lee Scott, Ann Perkins, Kim Guymer, Morgan Reeder; and Australian Catholic University representative, Richard Clifford.

The Banyo-Nudgee area is experiencing a community renewal based on its educational facilities. This $8.8 million investment in our new P-12 school is complemented by a $6 million state government investment in the relocation of the Australian Catholic University to Banyo in 2003. It is hoped that stage 1 of the new school will be completed in time for the 2003 school year, with all levels of students accommodated on the new site by 2004.

Both developments cement Banyo-Nudgee's future by creating an exciting, integrated educational precinct in the area. This is good for local families and good for local businesses. Children and students in the area will have the advantage of being able to attend kindergarten, preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary education all within walking distance of their homes.

It is important for local families to know that full primary and secondary education will continue to be provided at both Nudgee Primary and Banyo State High Schools during the transition period for the new school. We also hope to establish strong and constructive links with local feeder schools Virginia, Northgate and St Pius Primary Schools to ensure that students wishing to continue their secondary education at Banyo receive the maximum advantage.

There is a lot of creative energy and a lot of good ideas that we need to harness through ongoing community consultation on the new facilities and curriculum for the new school. This is a very strong family-orientated community and I look forward to working with local residents and the department to implement this exciting initiative.

Drought Assistance

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (7.19 p.m.): I rise in support of comments made by the shadow minister for the Department of Primary Industries about drought assistance, as severe drought conditions still exist in parts of the Darling Downs including Chinchilla, Murilla, Tara and many others. Drought assistance is provided, firstly, by independent drought declarations and then by shire declarations. It is on the record that the state government, through the Department of Primary Industries, held up many of those shire declarations. Then exceptional circumstances guidelines are put together by ARMCANZ, the Agricultural Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand, as the shadow minister also mentioned.

ARMCANZ has been dominated by ALP governments and others in areas where drought is rare: New Zealand, Victorian and Western Australia until recent times. Parts of Western Australia has since experienced some droughts. The emphasis has been on self-reliance, which means that drought assistance is diminished, and that is what has occurred over time. The Queensland government, through the Minister for Primary Industries, sets the rules for exceptional circumstances. Quite clearly, the Queensland Minister for Primary Industries has a very important role to play in setting the guidelines for exceptional circumstances, even though he says that the federal government is to blame.

This package also gives consideration to exceptional circumstances that are beyond the scope of normal risk management. An EC application process requires state and territory governments to assess whether there is an EC event occurring in their jurisdiction that potentially warrants EC assistance. If the state or territory believes that there is a case for an EC, it will submit an application to the Commonwealth minister for consideration.

If the Commonwealth minister decides to declare an area as undergoing exceptional circumstances, the farmers within that area may be entitled to receive income support in the form of exceptional circumstances relief payments. Those farmers may also receive business support by way of interest rate subsidies supplied under agreed Commonwealth-state funding. Subsidies of up to 80 per cent on interest rates paid may be available.

The Rural Adjustment Scheme Advisory Council, RASAC, advises the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on rural adjustment issues, including EC applications. The council consists of eight members, including a chairman, a Commonwealth representative, one state representative—we have a state representative on the board that the minister is accusing of holding things up—a representative of the National Farmers Federation and others appointed as expert members.

The information used by RASAC in forming its assessment is gathered from a number of sources, including state and territory departments, industry bodies, individual landowners, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics and the Bureau of Rural Sciences. RASAC may also conduct a tour of affected regions to assess the information provided and to obtain additional information from producers.

The criteria for exceptional circumstances are, firstly, that the event must be rare and severe. A rare event is one that occurs on average once in every 20 to 25 years.

Time expired.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.22 p.m.