

THURSDAY, 11 APRIL 2002

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

PETITION**Water Pipeline, Lander Shute-Maleny**

Ms Male from 2,173 petitioners, requesting the House to (a) not approve subsidies for the water pipeline from Lander Shute to Maleny until such time as a least cost study is undertaken which identifies all options and accurately reflects costs, social, environmental and economic and (b) undertake this study in conjunction with full community consultation.

PAPERS**MINISTERIAL PAPER**

The following ministerial paper was tabled—

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (Mr Welford)—

Queensland Law Reform Commission—

Report No. 56—Vicarious Liability—December 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**Queensland Events**

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.32 a.m.), by leave: Queensland is leading the nation with events marketing and, as a result, we are also reaping great rewards for our hotel, hospitality and tourism industries. The Woodford Folk Festival and the Noosa Triathlon have both claimed national awards as the best national events of their kind. The success of such events is made possible by an aggressive strategy undertaken by Queensland Events on the government's behalf.

The awards are nice—but the rewards are even sweeter! I am delighted to detail to the House that the Queensland government's decision to focus on events is reaping rewards—again and again and again. Brisbane, Cairns and the Gold Coast are defying the national trend and clearly leading the nation in hotel occupancy and yield trends. The latest Andersen Hotel Benchmark Survey Report details that hotel occupancy across Australia fell 2.9 per cent last year, but Brisbane led the nation with a rise of 8.8 per cent, while Cairns at 3.3 per cent and the Gold Coast at three per cent also showed gains. Occupancies in Brisbane at 76 per cent and Cairns at 75 per cent were the nation's best in 2001. Where are those Goodwill Games critics now?

According to Andersen's survey, the Gold Coast also rose three per cent to 68 per cent and north Queensland resorts in the tropical north, despite a poor fourth quarter, climbed two per cent to 70 per cent. The survey provides monthly performance statistics for eight cities and four regions across Australia.

The news gets better! Andersen's hospitality and leisure director, Rutger Smits, says that Queensland's success is largely attributed to our strong events calendar. Our events strategy is working. For example, among the first round, three of the first 17 regional events are already real winners in our Queensland Events Regional Development Program. The Global Infolinks Australian Nationals at Willowbank Raceway, Ipswich, in January attracted a record summer crowd of 20,048—more than double the Castrol Summer Championships event in 2001. Last month's Tarong Coal Wine and Food in the Park at Kingaroy produced a record crowd and a 35 per cent increase in visitor tourist and accommodation inquiries through the Kingaroy Visitor Information Centre. Organisers of the Australian Gospel Music Festival held in Toowoomba over Easter reported a record crowd of around 30,000—up about 20 per cent on 2001—despite rain on the first day. That is great news indeed for Ipswich, Kingaroy and Toowoomba and their local business houses.

It is my intention to be on the Sunshine Coast tomorrow to outline the second round of announcements for the Queensland Events Regional Development Program. That will mean another 21 regional organisations better prepared—just like Ipswich, Kingaroy and Toowoomba—to showcase their region. More events—and in the regions—are just what Mr Smits

highlights as leading to our success. Mr Smits also says that the Gold Coast motorway proved that investment in quality infrastructure reaps rewards. When airline numbers dropped, it was obvious that more people opted for driving holidays. What's more, he says that Cairns is doing well because of the convention centre.

And there is more! Our events strategy, which includes supporting the Goodwill Games and ensuring that we have the added magnets of world-class venues such as the revamped ANZ Stadium, the Gabba, the Lyric Theatre, the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Roma Street Parkland and, in the future, the Suncorp Metway Stadium, means that we are the best place to holiday, play sport and do business. The Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre has been one of our successes. It is one of the largest fully integrated meeting centres in the Southern Hemisphere and contributes more than \$100 million in economic benefits to Queensland every year.

I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* a short statement in relation to the convention centre and other events for the information of the House so that members are fully informed of our events strategy.

Leave granted.

Last year was by far the biggest year yet in Queensland Events' 12 years. Today's figures further attest that these are working. Currently through Queensland Events we support a calendar of 22 major events and 16 regional events. Tomorrow I will announce a further round of funding of at least another 21 regional events. That is an investment in over 50 major and regional events; a unique tapestry of events in sport and arts that make Queensland a more interesting place to visit and a more compelling place in which to live and do business.

In 2003, Queensland is seeking a greater role in the rewritten Rugby World Cup, which coincides with the formal opening of the revitalised Suncorp Metway Stadium. The World Cup is the world's third largest sporting event. Add to that the Air New Zealand Golden Oldies Rugby World Festival—Brisbane (4,000 competitors) and the Rotary International Convention—Brisbane— (25,000 delegates).

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mr G. Fisketjon; Mr S. Bradbury; Brisbane Lions

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 a.m.), by leave: Last month, Queensland writers and fans of home-grown fiction scored an international coup when Gary Fisketjon visited our state. Fisketjon is a fiction editor, best known in this country as the primary editor of Peter Carey, the Australian-born two-time Booker Prize winner. He edited Carey's latest Booker Prize winner, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, which also won the best fiction book category of the 2001 Premier of Queensland's Literary Awards. He has worked with a litany of other distinguished writers, including Raymond Carver, Jay McInerney and Gore Vidal—a personal favourite of mine, as many members would know.

I was delighted when Gary Fisketjon was able to attend a New York lunch that I addressed last month, and then when he was able to take up my invitation to run a series of writers workshops in Brisbane and Cairns. He also addressed a packed house at a Brisbane Institute function, and squeezed in some holiday time at Port Douglas. He spent four days conducting the Premier's Writers Workshops in a masterclass setting, with established as well as emerging authors. His feedback about the writers was excellent, and he made special mention of the indigenous authors. He said—

Through my work with Peter Carey I have been exposed to the talent of Australian writers, but Australian indigenous writing is something scarcely known about in the United States.

He also commented favourably on the Queensland government's support for our writing industry. Clearly these workshops fulfilled their purpose of promoting the Queensland literary industry and offering support for our published, as well as aspiring, authors. This is part of the Smart State. Writers play an important role in the development of the Smart State, as well as in the development of an emerging literary industry and culture in this state.

Gary Fisketjon's comments are a vote of confidence in the future of Queensland writing and, indeed, in the future of the Smart State. I thank Mr Fisketjon for his contribution, and I thank the Queensland authors who worked with him and the many Queenslanders who took the time to listen to and learn from him while he was here. I also thank the Minister for the Arts, who worked with me on this visit, and other members who participated.

Mr Speaker, while we are talking about major events, it is important that I put on record my appreciation to you for opening up the parliament to a wider range of community activities. I think

that is one of the things that has been noted during your time as Speaker. I think the community now sees this as a more friendly place for them to visit.

Recently, I took up the spirit of your speakership and held two major events here. On 27 March the Queensland government saluted the gold medal-winning performance of Olympic skater Steven Bradbury with a well-attended state reception at Parliament House. I joined cabinet colleagues, past and present Olympians and the family and friends of Steven Bradbury to acknowledge his mistake-free victory in the 1,000 metre short track speed skating final at Salt Lake City.

Mr Mackenroth: It was a good night and you were the last man standing.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, it was a great night and I was the last man standing; that is true.

Steven Bradbury is a great Queensland athlete who has carved out a remarkable niche in Australian sporting history. He is the first Australian ever to win a gold medal in a Winter Olympics—a fitting reward for the more than 20 years of hard work and dedication he has invested in his sport.

Mr Mackenroth: The first ever to win a medal at that Olympics.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. He twice overcame life-threatening injuries and, when his doctors told him to retire, Steven refused to throw in the towel. I was delighted to host a state reception for this fine young Queenslander and acknowledge his wonderful achievements. In fact, I will be visiting the bush in the not-too-distant future and he will be joining me on the plane as part of his activities.

In addition, on Tuesday, 26 March I joined a large group of supporters and sponsors on the Speaker's Green at Parliament House for the launch of the Brisbane Lions 2002 season. This is their second home ground.

Ms Liddy Clark: Hear, hear!

Mr BEATTIE: The Lions have great community spirit, as I know the member for Clayfield would agree. They are also a terrific group of athletes and all of Queensland shared in their historic AFL Premiership win last season. We are in a new season and they have started very well, I am delighted to say, with new challenges and fresh hopes. But there is another mountain of hard work to be done by Leigh Matthews and his team to make the finals again this season. Leigh Matthews is one of the true giants of sport. Not only has he handled himself well and now has a record of 300 games both as a player and coach; he is a gentleman and a very clever tactician. I put on record my admiration for him.

The Lions have started well and we are all quietly hoping for back-to-back premierships, difficult as that might be. The Brisbane Lions coach and players have been great ambassadors for the club right across the state, and I was delighted to authorise the use of the government King Air to ferry the AFL Premiership cup around Queensland last season with the support of my Parliamentary Secretary, Darryl Briskey. I was also delighted that the season launch could be held here at Parliament House. It was a great night for a great team.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mr W. T. D'Arcy; Cape York Justice Study

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.41 a.m.), by leave: An issue has been raised in this parliament relating to an unfortunate victim of William Theodore D'Arcy. I have been cautious about my comments on this, because as is clear from letters tabled in the parliament on Tuesday the woman was concerned about media exposure and media intrusion in her life. She was critical of the conduct of the *Courier-Mail* and other media. I am not seeking to join that criticism; I just make that point.

My thoughts have always been for the victim and the trauma she has faced, and that continues to be so. I have not wanted to say anything to make that pain or trauma any more difficult. I have consulted with the Attorney-General and taken, I guess I could describe it as, fresh advice from Crown Law about matters presently involving the victim and the government of Queensland and what the current legal position is as of now, that is, April 2002.

I am advised that the victim has commenced civil proceedings in the District Court against D'Arcy and the state of Queensland—something I tried to refer to yesterday in questions. The advice says that she has applied for special leave to appeal to the High Court and in March of this year the High Court granted special leave in this case and another in New South Wales in which a

similar issue has arisen concerning an employer's liability for the criminal activities of an employee. I am advised that the High Court may hear that appeal in June this year.

I am further advised—and I am trying to do the right thing by the victim here—from the Crown Law advice provided to me by the Attorney, for which I thank him—

I can see no fundamental objections to the Honourable the Premier meeting with—

I have deleted the name of the woman—

... if he wishes to do so, although I would suggest that given there are pending appeals in both the criminal and civil matters it would be advisable for any discussions to be general in nature and that any issues about the possible liability of the state for D'Arcy's activities should be avoided as far as possible.

After receiving that advice, at about 5.20 yesterday afternoon I rang what I understood to be the victim's number and left the following message on her answering machine, because clearly she was not available. I will repeat this, because I want people to understand my bona fides in this. I will read it into *Hansard*. I obviously mentioned the lady's name but will not mention it here. I said—

... It's Peter Beattie calling. How are you—

again, I mentioned the lady's name—

... I've taken legal advice about having a discussion with you. I've got very serious limitations about what discussions we can have and I've been given advice about what they can and can't be. I'm happy to have a discussion with you. It would seem to me though that that would probably be more appropriate when matters before the courts are completed. But I'm happy to have discussions with you. If you ring my Chief-of-Staff Rob Whiddon on—

and I left the number—

... I'm happy to arrange a meeting. I should point out however that there will be, based on Crown Law advice, very restrictive things about what we can discuss. But I'm happy to do that and I invite you to call Rob Whiddon, my Chief-of-Staff—

and I repeated the number.

My concerns have always been for the victim. If she feels that my office or I have not dealt with her requests properly, then I am happy to apologise to her. I have not sought to increase her grief; rather, I have sought to minimise it. But I have extended that invitation. Obviously, bearing in mind that her initial concerns when they were raised with the office of the then Attorney, Matt Foley, were about media intrusion, I would hope that the meeting, if the victim wants to go ahead with it, would be a private one. I do not want to turn this into a street circus. But bearing in mind that matters have been raised here, I have an obligation to report here, which I have now done.

Turning to other matters in relation to meetings, there has been some criticism by the opposition about my meeting with the Aboriginal Coordinating Council. I want to report to the House that yesterday I received an approach through Judy Spence, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, who I have to say has done an excellent job on our response. I again put on record my admiration for the work she has done on our response on indigenous matters. She has done an excellent job. She approached me yesterday and indicated that there had been a request to meet me from ATSIC and from the Aboriginal Coordinating Council. I table a copy of a letter that they subsequently wrote to me. I have indicated that I am happy to meet with them today with Judy, which I will do, but there was a suggestion in there that that meeting include Vaughan Johnson. I would prefer that I met with them directly.

As I understand it, the minister has agreed to brief the member in detail about this. Subsequent to that time, I am quite happy to meet with him. I want to get bipartisanship on this. However, since they have some issues they want to raise with me, I think they should have the right to raise them directly with me as Premier. But I do not want the member to feel excluded from this process, which is why Judy has indicated that she will be giving him a detailed briefing. Perhaps next week when parliament is sitting the member, the minister and I can have a short discussion about this, and include Steve as well. This is a fundamental issue to the lives of future indigenous Queenslanders and I do not want it to be a political issue. I table that letter.

In addition, yesterday I was proud to join with the Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Judy Spence, and the member for Cook, Steve Bredhauer, to launch the government's response to the Cape York Justice Study. Our strategy in *Meeting challenges, making choices* means that there is now a course of action laid out to enable Aboriginal communities in Queensland to create a better future for themselves.

Today I want to remind everyone that this was only made possible by the landmark Fitzgerald interim report on Cape York justice. It was Justice Fitzgerald who compiled the wide-

ranging list of recommendations to help indigenous communities develop and implement action plans to improve their lifestyles. In August last year, on behalf of the government, I asked Justice Fitzgerald to conduct a study that would go further than yet again describing the problems facing indigenous communities on Cape York. I asked him how we could make smarter use of existing state resources which would support the continuing development of partnerships between the state government and Cape York indigenous communities.

I congratulate and thank former Justice Fitzgerald for his four months of hard work and insights which went into the report and for his briefing of cabinet which enabled ministers to understand more about the complex and entrenched problems facing these communities. It was Justice Fitzgerald whose work between 1987 and 1989 resulted in the exposure of endemic corruption and grave shortcomings in many Queensland institutions, especially politics and the then police force. Importantly, that 1989 Fitzgerald report contained many recommendations about how those many problems could be corrected.

As a result of the Fitzgerald report and strong, positive action by the Goss government, Queensland now enjoys a Police Service and a system of government second to none. Once again the Queensland government is in the position of being able to make a significant improvement to people's quality of life as a result of a report by former Justice Fitzgerald. It is important that we all acknowledge his work and dedication in dealing with problems that in the past have proved intractable. We owe him a great debt for his exceptional work and his great vision.

Tony Fitzgerald is truly a great Queenslander. He has my admiration and the admiration of all Queenslanders. When I met with him yesterday— and Matt Foley and Judy Spence dropped by briefly at the end of the meeting— I thanked him on behalf of all Queenslanders for making a most significant contribution. In many senses, he is a Queenslander who has made a more significant contribution than any other Queenslander during the last few years to make Queensland a better place.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Market

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (9.50 a.m.), by leave: The *Courier-Mail* argued in one of its editorials yesterday, titled 'Power Politics and Power Failure', that it had been advocating privatisation of the state's electricity assets since 1995. Its suggestion that Queensland would be better off privatising its electricity assets is simply wrong.

A cursory look at the national electricity market shows that those states with fully privatised markets, namely Victoria and South Australia, are the same states that are suffering ever-present problems of undersupply. Mixed ownership of generation—a combination of private and public ownership as found in Queensland—is delivering optimal outcomes for industry and consumers.

Queensland has significant amounts of reserve generation capacity. That means cheap, reliable and secure electricity for the people of Queensland. AMC, Comalco and numerous other projects are attracted to Queensland because of the quality and price of its electricity. Ultimately, that is great for the Queensland economy and great for Queenslanders.

It is the people of Queensland that this government is most concerned about, not some perceived ideological position on asset ownership or competition. The facts clearly speak for themselves. Since the start of the national electricity market in 1998, nearly \$4.8 billion of investment in electricity generation has taken place across Australia. Some \$3.4 billion of that has been in Queensland, and 68 per cent of that \$3.4 billion has come in the form of private sector investment. That marks a real example of government partnering with industry. Queensland has deregulated the industrial and commercial sectors of its electricity market, saving industry—and the *Courier-Mail*—up to 40 per cent on electricity input costs.

The government has also assessed the benefits of deregulating the domestic market but found that the costs far outweigh the benefits. Other states, such as Victoria, have already deregulated their domestic market. I must say that the results have been dismal, with very few people electing to switch retailers.

New South Wales is reported to have spent over \$200 million introducing systems to support the electricity market. That is \$200 million out of taxpayers pockets. Victoria has no doubt spent similar amounts, plus an extra \$118 million to maintain short-term price support to rural areas.

Just think about that. That is about half a billion dollars to allow people in the markets in New South Wales and Victoria to decide if they want to switch from one retailer to another.

After three months, at the end of March, only 4,000 people in Victoria and New South Wales combined had changed retailers. That is after both of those governments had spent half a billion dollars of taxpayers' money. These results are hardly impressive. Queensland does not have the same need as other states to sell assets to pay off debt.

South Australia may have got some \$5 billion for its electricity assets, but in that time Queenslanders would have earned close to that much in dividends, tax equivalent payments and capital repayments. Comments have been made about the forecast decline in electricity government owned corporation profitability. History tells us that electricity GOCs tend to outperform their forecasts. Electricity is a growth business with demand growing at a rate often faster than GDP.

This week, the *Courier-Mail* quoted a February 2002 FITCH Ratings Agency report forecasting a decline in profitability in our GOC sector in 2002 and 2003, due primarily to lower wholesale electricity prices. These figures have already been incorporated into the state's forward estimates published in the June 2001 state budget, and the issue was raised in Budget Paper No. 2. This is not a new issue. The 2000-01 profits of the GOC sector were somewhat inflated due to a one-off accounting benefit received in the transmission sector.

In addition, there will be a reduction in electricity community service obligation payments from 2001 to 2002, also as a result of lower pool prices. Although the GOC profit figures appear to show a decline from a high of \$811 million in 2000-01, this is offset by the above factors. Queensland power corporations continue to be well placed to compete in the national electricity market. Many industry analysts expect pool prices to recover somewhat in later years, resulting in improving profitability forecasts in those years for the electricity GOC sector.

Queensland is well placed to manage that demand. As an investor in the market, it is able to facilitate new investment in generation and capture the benefits of that growth for the benefit of Queenslanders.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Australian Croquet Championships

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (9.58 a.m.), by leave: I would like to inform members that the 2002 Australian croquet championships are currently being played in Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast, hosted by the Croquet Association of Queensland. More than 50 players representing six states will compete—

Mr Reeves: Another great event.

Mr MACKENROTH: I would not be too critical of this because you will soon find out who has the power! More than 50 players representing six states will compete in a number of events, including the interstate teams event, the Australian gold and silver individual medals, the Australian open singles and plate event and the Australian women's and Australian men's single championships.

Croquet is an absorbing outdoor sport played on grass courts, requiring tactical manoeuvres similar to chess and a mental toughness similar to golf. It is a game that needs stamina rather than strength. Croquet is played all year round by more than 1,200 members at 44 clubs in Queensland. Nationally, there are approximately 7,000 club members.

The two-day gold medal event started today at the Graceville Croquet Club. The patron of the Croquet Association of Queensland, the Leader of the House, Anna Bligh, will this evening be hosting drinks for the state representatives in this event. Honourable members are invited to drop by and meet the players from 6.30 p.m. on the level 5 colonnade area. Queensland has been well represented in the gold medal event in previous years.

A government member interjected.

Mr MACKENROTH: The Premier spoke earlier this morning about the lawn. Perhaps we could have croquet there. The inaugural winner of the Australian gold medal in 2000 was Queensland's Bruce Fleming. This year's representative is Les Watson from the Windsor club, who was the runner-up at last year's championships. I wish Les all the best for the event today

and tomorrow. The championships are being played until 21 April. I encourage honourable members to get along to an event.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Literacy Education

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.59 a.m.), by leave: The future of the young people of Queensland will be determined by their capacity to produce, read and interpret language, whether it is spoken, in print or in multimedia form. Literacy is the core business of education—in every school, in every classroom and for every teacher of students from pre-school to year 12. State schools can make and are making a difference to improve students' literacy.

While I, like the Deputy Premier, look forward to a time when croquet might be played on the Speaker's Green, today at 11.45 on that green I will be taking the opportunity to release the whole-school literacy planning guidelines that will help schools to develop a coordinated approach to the teaching of literacy. These guidelines represent the next step in the development of a new road map for literacy education in Queensland. The guidelines, which have been sent to all state schools, were developed from a major review of the teaching of reading and writing in Queensland in 2000, under my predecessor the Hon. Dean Wells, which resulted in the report *Literate futures*. The review which resulted in the *Literate futures* report, which was headed by the University of Queensland's Professor Allan Luke and assisted by Griffith University's Professor Peter Freebody, found that students required more than just basic skills in reading and writing.

Advancements in technology and the move to knowledge based industries are redefining our understanding of literacy. Today's children need to be proficient not only in reading, writing and speaking but also in navigating new multimedia such as the Internet. The future of the young people of Queensland will be dependent upon their skills in producing, reading and interpreting language in all its forms.

As we charge towards this exciting future, our government is determined not to leave the basics behind. *Literate futures* showed that effective literacy education is reliant upon skilled teachers and a flexible system which allows schools to develop specific programs to target diverse student needs. Whole-school literacy planning can make a difference to student achievement. I am confident that the new guidelines will support this important and ongoing process.

The government last year established 20 learning and development centres in literacy to support schools in developing their literacy plans. The whole-school literacy planning guidelines were refined as a result of analysing the experience of schools which trialled this planning last year and provided advice on the most effective processes. Many state schools have already adopted a coordinated approach and are achieving improved outcomes. All schools are required to have effective plans in place by the end of this year. I have asked my department to provide me with regular progress reports to ensure that this target is achieved. These guidelines are about learning, refining and developing. They clearly signal the ongoing commitment by our government to the central importance of literacy in achieving our objectives for students in the Smart State.

The groundbreaking Education and Training Reforms for the Future package announced last month also demonstrated the need for information and communication technology literacy. Employers want people with good communication and thinking skills and proficiency in numeracy and literacy. Students need the system to make a long-term commitment and engage in strategic planning to improve literacy overall. These guidelines will support schools in that process. Literacy is a fundamental part of this government's agenda for education as the driver of the Smart State.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Airline Holdings Pty Ltd

Hon. T. A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for State Development) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: Last Friday night, after a search of some nine months, a newly formed aviation services consortium, Queensland Airline Holdings Pty Ltd, concluded the purchase of the former Flight West Airlines. The decision by Queensland Airline Holdings is a welcomed one, especially given that the company has reappointed the existing 100 staff of the former Flight West and is predicting more jobs as the company grows.

This development is important for the state and, though the company is working on its structure and areas of business, the company has said that it will provide a broad range of aviation services, specifically contract and air charter services, heavy maintenance of aircraft and some scheduled air transport services.

The Queensland Airline Holdings decision also comes at a time when the aviation industry, not just in Australia but worldwide, is facing extremely difficult times. The tragic events of 11 September in the United States have impacted on the global aviation industry, with a number of airlines falling by the wayside. Here at home, the collapse of Ansett Airlines and the unsuccessful attempt to revive the carrier have been felt throughout the nation. The new consortium has advised the government that it intends to unveil a new name and a change of aircraft livery in the next few weeks.

The majority of the fresh capital for Queensland Airline Holdings has come from people experienced in the industry. QAH has advised that Mr Stephen Bond is well known in the Australian aviation community for his purchase of Lloyds Helicopters, his subsequent involvement in related companies and his current interest in major helicopter operator Bond Air Services and European regional airline Logan Air.

QAH has advised that Mr Hugh Jones is the majority shareholder in Airwork, which has facilities in New Zealand and Australia and operates a significant number of helicopters and aircraft, including Boeing 737s, on charter and air cargo operations. Another member of the new group is Mr Scott McMillan, who has more than 20 years experience in the Australian and Pacific aviation industry, with senior roles with Flight West and Ansett. He has been appointed chief executive officer of the new company.

QAH will use two Fokker F100 91-seat aircraft and 30-seat Embraer Brasilia turboprop airliners, and the company has secured long-term contracts with the resources companies Western Mining Corporation and Pasminco Century Mine Ltd to operate regular Fokker F100 charters between Townsville and mining sites in north-west Queensland.

The Beattie government has played a role in the ability of Flight West to be on-sold with its decision last year to provide more than \$400,000 to ensure that the airline was able to keep its operating certification. At this point the government has not provided further assistance but, as has been stated previously, the government will consider approaches from a successful buyer.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Parks Day

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: National Parks Day was celebrated on 28 March. It commemorates the declaration of Queensland's first national park, Witches' Falls, at Mount Tamborine in 1908. In the 94 years since then, Queensland's national park estate has grown from 131 hectares to more than seven million hectares.

National parks are an important part of Queensland's unique and spectacular environment. They help underpin the state's second biggest industry, tourism. They are a part of Queensland's identity, covering lake and plain, beach and mountain, rainforest and reef. They include Australia's most spectacular scenery and some of our most important cultural heritage.

To encourage a greater awareness of the importance of national parks, I was involved in a number of events which celebrated National Parks Day. They included: a community breakfast at Burleigh Heads National Park with local volunteer groups and local members of parliament; the opening of a major new attraction called Naturally Wild at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary; and the unveiling of a new display commemorating the 50th anniversary this year of the David Fleay wildlife park at West Burleigh.

Since 1992, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has provided employment and training for almost 3,000 previously unemployed young people. The growth in the parks system since the early 1900s reflects the importance our society places on the conservation of natural and cultural values. This year alone, the government provided an extra \$10 million for the funding of up to 140 new ranger positions. We are also in the process of recruiting another 100 young unemployed people for inclusion in the second round of the state government's better parks traineeship program.

This program enables young people to gain valuable skills while working to upgrade facilities in national parks across Queensland. During the program the trainees will work towards obtaining

a TAFE certificate in Australian land conservation and restoration, as well as receive training in first aid, workplace health and safety, job seeking skills and community health. Seventy-seven trainees recently completed the first round of the better parks program. Work was carried out on a range of national parks throughout the state, including Barron Gorge, Whitsunday Islands, Eungella, Mount Archer, Burleigh Heads, Tamborine and Girraween. This program clearly highlights the Beattie Labor government's commitment to creating jobs and protecting our state's unique heritage.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Affordable Housing and Residential Development

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (10.08 a.m.), by leave: I wish to inform the House of plans to develop a state planning policy on affordable housing and residential development. The policy is to be prepared in cooperation with my colleague the Minister for Local Government and Planning under the Integrated Planning Act. The policy will address the issues of affordable housing and residential development in the context of land use planning and development assessment. It will apply throughout Queensland.

Public notice was given at the weekend of the intention to prepare a state planning policy on affordable housing. The Department of Housing is now inviting submissions on what issues should be addressed by such a policy and supported by legislation. It is also seeking comment on how those issues should be tackled. A discussion paper has also been prepared and is available from the department on its web site. As part of the consultation process, eight public forums are being held in Brisbane and regional centres during April and May. Submissions on the discussion paper need to be received by Tuesday, 4 June.

The Department of Housing will report all submissions to me and the Minister for Local Government and Planning. After that, the minister and I will decide how to proceed. There will be further consultations on any draft state planning policy. The continuing availability of affordable housing is a key factor influencing the viability of all Queensland communities. Our state faces a growing demand for affordable housing for households on low to moderate incomes and people with special needs. Unfortunately, the private rental sector is shrinking at the more affordable end of the rent scale. Cuts to housing funds at the federal level mean that the already stretched public housing system cannot meet growing demand. The consultation process will help shape the approach taken to ensure the maintenance or expansion of affordable housing through local planning provisions. I urge anyone with an interest in this issue to make their views known.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Aboriginal Coordinating Council; Cape York Justice Study

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.10 a.m.), by leave: Yesterday the ATSIC Commissioner, Jenny Pryor, and Deputy Chair of the ACC, Alfred Lacey, wrote to the Premier suggesting that the Aboriginal Coordinating Council sought meetings with me without success to discuss the Cape York Justice Study. Let me outline for members in the House the dishonesty of this claim. On 24 January 2002, at short notice I rearranged my diary to meet with the ACC in my office in Brisbane specifically to discuss Cape York Justice Study issues. ACC representatives included Thomas Hudson, the Chair, Peter Opio-Otim, Ted Wymarra, Lloyd Fourmile, George Kulka and Bob Sands. Also present were Dr Robert Anderson, Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board, and Mr Frank Rockett, Director-General of DATSIP.

At the meeting the ACC sought an extension of time for consultations on the justice study. I clearly outlined to it that this was not possible as this government was determined to act quickly on the matter. I also advised that there was a justified feeling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that they were being consulted to death with little action. The consultation process on the study was outlined to the meeting. The ACC was advised of the commencement of the second round of consultations in February and that consultations would conclude at the end of February. I gave an undertaking to the ACC at this meeting that the justice study team would travel to Cairns and meet with it for a full day and discuss the justice study, recommendation by recommendation. The offer was made to allow dialogue with the ACC. This

meeting occurred on 18 February and was attended by the executive director of the Cape York justice team and other staff members. This was a full-day meeting.

The following morning, my director-general met with ACC delegates to ensure that there were no outstanding issues from the previous day's meeting. Despite the ACC being aware of the closing date for submissions being 28 February, we did not receive its submission until 5 p.m. on 28 March, the day before Easter Friday. At my 24 January meeting with the ACC, I also made another offer—that is, for the ACC to nominate one person for each of the consultation teams. I emphasised the need to provide the nominations to me quickly. The ACC failed to nominate any representatives.

Further to the January meeting with the ACC, I addressed the full meeting of the ACC at Yarrabah on 20 March. The Cape York Justice Study was discussed and I answered questions that were put to me at that meeting. I have also led consultations in many communities since the justice study report was released last year. I reiterate that it is dishonest to suggest that the ACC has not been able to meet with me to discuss the Cape York Justice Study report.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Banana Industry

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.13 a.m.), by leave: Australian primary producers have long expressed concern with the operation of the federal government's import risk assessment process. Industry is concerned about the biosecurity risks some of the proposed imports pose. The federal government announced a review of import risk assessment in November 2000, and that review is continuing. It is critical that this review ensures that the decisions on import applications are based on rigorous science. No-one should believe that import risk assessments are a means to protect our industries from competition, because it is just not true. Import risk assessments are there to offer protection from exotic pests and diseases. Import risk assessments must be made on quarantine and biosecurity grounds, not on trade outcomes. No country should be expected to allow imports into their country if there is an unacceptable risk of introducing an exotic pest or disease, and Australia should be no different.

The incursion of pests and diseases is costly in terms of mounting a response. The incursion of exotic pest and disease can severely hinder the trading future of the domestic industry and undermine its ability to produce. The decisions of import risk assessments must be based on science and must be transparent. Currently, the banana industry is very concerned about the application to import bananas from the Philippines. The industry's concern is based on the risk of importing five exotic diseases which industry is most concerned about, and they include black sigatoka, moko, bugtok, freckle and bract mosaic. Last year, the banana industry released a report that found that these diseases would cost \$918 million in lost production, with increased spraying and labour costs. The Australian banana industry is worth more than \$400 million per annum and generates thousands of jobs.

Queensland is Australia's dominant banana-producing state. The industry is also an important contributor in New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. I again urge the federal government to ensure that the banana industry is not put at risk and that its quarantine decisions are based on science. A rally of banana industry representatives is planned to be held in Cairns on Friday. A flawed import risk assessment process threatens to expose domestic primary industries to exotic pests and diseases. As a government, we will not stand for that. I would now urge those Queensland federal Liberal and National Party MPs representing banana-growing areas to take the same stand as the Queensland government.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Ambulance Service

Hon. M. F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland) (10.15 a.m.), by leave: March was a great month for the Queensland Ambulance Service, with the opening of four new ambulance stations and the delivery of the first new Mercedes Sprinter ambulances. As minister, I was very pleased and proud to officially open within an eight-day period the Woodridge, Mudgeeraba, Durack and Nathan ambulance stations built at a total cost of more than \$1.7 million. Indeed, it was a very proud

moment for me with the member for Woodridge, the member for Mudgeeraba, the member for Algeester and the member for Yeerongpilly.

Mr Palaszczuk: What about the Minister for Primary Industries?

Mr REYNOLDS: And the Minister for Primary Industries. I was just getting to that. The new \$546,000 Woodridge Ambulance Station is a first-rate facility that will enhance the Queensland Ambulance Service's ability to assist the Woodridge and area community. The Mudgeeraba ambulance personnel had been operating out of a Queensland Fire and Rescue Service plant room since October 1999, so their new \$145,000 facility—which includes three bedrooms, an office, kitchen, dining and staff amenities room—has been very welcomed. The new Durack Ambulance Station replaced the Oxley station, which would have required extensive additional refurbishment and had become isolated for rapid response because of the changing road network. The Durack station, built at a cost of \$596,073, will provide direct access to main roads in all directions and will greatly enhance response times. The Minister for Primary Industries has been very happy with that. The new \$470,000 Nathan station is centrally located in a response grid to support south-west operations and allows for safe 80 kilometre per hour access into surrounding areas by a network of major roads.

I congratulate the officers and paramedics who are working in these new stations. I know that working under such improved and efficient facilities will enhance their ability to serve the community. I also acknowledge the work of the local ambulance committees and I thank them for their work in supporting these projects and, in many cases, assisting with the provision of additional equipment for those stations.

I was also delighted to see the first of 57 new Mercedes Sprinter ambulances arrive as part of the \$8.8 million vehicle upgrade across Queensland. Their cost effectiveness, superior road handling, smooth ride and improved braking capacity—all vital for emergency response—will no doubt make them a very valuable addition to our ambulance fleet. There is particular emphasis on paramedic safety and functionality and, as a result, an acutely ill patient can be treated using life-saving techniques in a safe and comfortable environment.

The four new ambulance stations and Mercedes Sprinter vehicles are great acquisitions for the Queensland Ambulance Service. They are also another example of the Beattie Labor government's commitment to doing everything it can to ensure that the QAS maintains its position as one of the best ambulance services in the world.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sun Exposure in the Workplace

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.19 a.m.), by leave: By now all Queenslanders should be very aware of the risks of exposure to the sun, not just on holidays or weekends but also at work, because more than one-quarter of Queensland's work force is exposed to ultraviolet radiation every day as part of their job. Here in the Smart State, my department has helped to develop a special device in order to run the largest study of measured workplace ultraviolet exposure conducted anywhere in the world.

An honourable member: A hat.

Mr NUTTALL: A hat! No. These special patches were attached to the clothing of more than 400 workers on 107 different construction worksites for three months between September and November last year. Disappointingly, the audit has found that many workers and employers are not taking the risk of skin cancer seriously. The average sun exposure of these workers was five times the acceptable limit set by the National Health and Medical Research Council. Some construction workers were found to be as much as 30 times over the limit. In fact, almost every worker audited in the construction industry exceeded the limit of UV exposure.

One-third of all workers were between five and 10 times the exposure limit and almost half were double or five times the limit. The audit found that 90 per cent of all workers had no personal protection or that the materials and items provided did not provide an adequate level of protection. Even when protective items such as shade tarpaulins were made available, they were often not used. The audit found that working with reflective materials caused a significant increase in UV exposure. It also found that lunch breaks in heavily shaded areas could significantly reduce a worker's overall level of exposure. Almost 300,000 cancers of the skin are treated each year in this country. Because of this, my department was determined to investigate the exposure of Queensland workers to the dangers of UV radiation. To do so, they worked with the Australian

Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency to develop a method to measure UV exposure accurately, using small poly-sul-phone patches.

As a result, I hope the Queensland government's efforts in this area will help employees and employers not just in Queensland but also around Australia and overseas to improve their current level of protection against the dangers of the sun. In the meantime, my department has scheduled a series of state-wide seminars for outdoor workers during August and September to provide information for Queensland workers on the need for protective clothing and materials.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Education and Training

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Youth and Minister for the Arts) (10.21 a.m.) by leave: A gathering in Hobart tomorrow will provide the opportunity for governments right around Australia to take a significant step in assisting young people at risk. The national subcommittee on young people's transitions, which I have the privilege of chairing, will consider a declaration which affirms the commitment of the states and the Commonwealth to improving life opportunities for young people. The draft declaration, with the working title, 'Stepping forward: creating opportunities for successful transitions', is designed to strengthen the public commitment of ministers and governments involved in education, employment, training, youth and community service portfolios. It provides the opportunity for a united response by ministers to the many issues facing young people disconnected or at risk of being disconnected from society.

The subcommittee, formed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs last year, has established links across education, training, youth and community services sectors and between state and territory governments and the federal government. This declaration has the potential to bring the future of our young people to national attention and to enable all states and territories to join forces to work towards a common goal. I seek leave to incorporate the balance of my ministerial statement in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Mr Speaker, the Beattie government has already started to confront the challenges outlined in the declaration.

Our recently released Green Paper, *Queensland the Smart State: Education and Training Reforms for the Future*, embraces a package of reforms and initiatives that offer young people a variety of opportunities to engage in meaningful learning experiences.

To strengthen transition pathways we are reviewing the linkages between courses and institutions and, to record and value the many achievements of young people, the senior certificate is also being reconsidered.

The purpose of the proposed changes is to give all young people an equal chance to reach their full potential by providing the best possible education and training platform for their future lives.

This Government is looking anew at how we can support and equip young people for a new world of work, and a new world of continual learning.

We are also declaring our commitment to social justice and equality of opportunity.

Mr Speaker, after consideration by the National Sub-committee on Young People's Transitions in Hobart, the declaration will be taken to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in July for endorsement.

It is appropriate that such a significant opportunity should be taken up by the governments of Australia in Hobart tomorrow at the conclusion of National Youth Week.

MEMBERS' ETHICS AND PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

Report

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (10.23 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House report No. 51 of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, *Report on a citizen's right of reply No. 13*. I commend the report and the committee's recommendation to the House.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Public Liability Insurance

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.24 a.m.): The National Party first raised the effect of spiralling public liability insurance premiums in June last year. Since

then, the Labor government has done very little to get to the root cause of the whole problem of public liability insurance, and the crisis has developed for sporting clubs, community organisations and many voluntary associations. In January the National Party released a six-point plan that addressed the root causes of the public liability crisis. Since then, we have met with other National Party leaders in Australia to put together a submission to the public liability insurance summit recently held in Canberra.

Our plans and policies are about addressing the root cause, capping public liability claims, restricting the actual claims, restricting the advertising by lawyers—the no win, no fee system—and, importantly, giving some protection to community organisations, voluntary associations and sporting clubs that need the protection so that they can operate. The summit took forward most of our proposals, and it is important that this government now takes some action to introduce tort law reform, to cap the actual claims that can be made and to restrict the advertising of the no win, no fee process of solicitors.

Importantly, we need some action to protect volunteers, honorary associations and community organisations from the legal process. I call on this government to stop all the business of all show and no go, to get down to some action and to deliver some real results. The National Party wants to see a result. We want to see the root cause of these high premiums attacked and addressed now.

Unemployment, Hervey Bay

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (10.26 a.m.): I am delighted to inform the House of the latest of the very substantial number of grants recently announced by the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth, Matt Foley, to address unemployment in Hervey Bay. I am particularly pleased that the minister has supported the Hervey Bay City Council's Links Mobility Corridor Project by granting \$171,610 for the employment of 15 unemployed people for 20 weeks. These local people will help transform Hervey Bay into a national leader for wheelchair access. On Monday I visited the worksite between Denman Camp Road and Tavistock Street at Torquay where the project workers are transforming the disused rail corridor into a magnificently landscaped corridor of pathways and recreational areas.

The Links Mobility Corridor Project, which has my very strong support, will eventually link major buildings and shopping centres in Torquay, Urangan, Scarness, Pialba and Urraween. The development will provide a green, safe environment for locals and visitors and will allow people on foot, on pushbikes, in wheelchairs and on scooters to move across Hervey Bay without having to compete with cars. This project is a winner on so many levels. It provides job skills and work experience for 15 local unemployed people.

Last week I had the pleasure of meeting those workers, and I can tell the House that they are full of well-justified pride in their great work. This project also improves Hervey Bay's desirability as a tourist destination, which is good for all of Hervey Bay's businesses. Access tourism is a largely untapped market and Hervey Bay can lead Australia in this regard. Most importantly, it improves the facilities and living standards for everyone living in Hervey Bay, particularly the elderly, the disabled and school students on push bikes.

Finally, I note that over the past six weeks the Beattie government has announced employment generating grants for Hervey Bay totalling in excess of \$830,000. It is no surprise then that business optimism is up and Hervey Bay has the smell of success about it again. The Minister for Employment has been giving his very personal attention to Hervey Bay's needs, and the city of Hervey Bay is responding appropriately. Young people are getting jobs, tourism facilities are being improved—

Time expired.

Gympie Hospital

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—ONP) (10.28 a.m.): I wish once again to address an issue of great concern to the people of my electorate—the state of the Gympie public hospital. Last week, I was approached by members of my electorate who advised that whilst they were attending an antenatal class at the Gympie Hospital, along with a group of other mothers-to-be, they were told they would not be able to give birth to their babies at the Gympie Hospital. These women were told that when they went into labour they would be sent, along with a midwife, to

Nambour to give birth. They were also told that they would have to find their own way back to Gympie after their deliveries.

These women have been denied the right to have their babies in the maternity ward of their own public hospital. Never in the history of Queensland health care have our hospitals been in such a severe crisis. This government, and in particular the Minister for Health, has shown a blatant disregard for the people of Queensland and, most notably, those who reside in regional and rural areas. The incompetence of this government in regard to the public health system cannot be surpassed. The Health Minister has done nothing but lie to the constituents of my electorate. They have been told over and over that their hospital is not and has not been—

Mrs EDMOND: A point of order, Mr Speaker! The member has only been here a year, but that comment is unparliamentary. It has to be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: The honourable member will withdraw.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: No way.

Mr SPEAKER: No, the honourable member has to withdraw the comment. The member finds it offensive.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: A member must withdraw the word 'lie'.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Okay, I withdraw.

A government member interjected.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: It is a mistruth. The minister does not tell the complete truth. How is that?

Government members interjected.

Mrs EDMOND: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. That is untrue and I ask for it to be withdrawn. It is offensive; it must be withdrawn.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I cannot hear anybody.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Yes, yes, I will withdraw. I will withdraw, yes, yes.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: The people of my electorate are both appalled and disgusted—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order! The time for private members' statements has expired.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr W. T. D'Arcy; Sexual Abuse Victim

Mr HORAN (10.30 a.m.): I direct a question to the Premier. I note the legal advice that the Premier has sought from the Solicitor-General that tells him that there is no impediment to him meeting with the victim of Mr D'Arcy who approached his office a year ago. I welcome the fact that the Premier is now prepared to offer a meeting with that victim. Given that the Premier based his original excuse not to meet Mr D'Arcy's victim on a legal opinion about supposed prejudice to trial proceedings that were actually over, I ask: when did he seek that legal opinion? Did the Premier seek that opinion when the victim made the approach to his office for help? Or did he seek it this week, a year later, after my question on Tuesday exposed his failure to meet her?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. As I think I have indicated to this House, after Mr D'Arcy's conviction he appealed unsuccessfully to the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal gave judgment on 22 August 2001.

I do not have all the material in front of me, but if I recall correctly the alleged dates of contact that have been put forward by the Leader of the Opposition preceded the date of 22 August. As I indicated to the member this morning—as a lawyer, I indicated this to him earlier; I made this point and it is on the record—it is a clearly established principle that matters before

criminal courts need to be handled in a way that is free from interference by the executive. I indicated to the member this morning that I asked the Attorney-General to provide me with some advice, which the Attorney-General did yesterday, and I have responded in relation to that Crown Law advice.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No, I was not. This is the difficulty. The Leader of the Opposition does not understand what I said. What I said in my ministerial statement this morning—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No, no. This is a very important point. If we are going to deal with this honestly, let us deal with it honestly. Let us not have half-truths. I dealt with the Crown Law advice in which we referred to appeals on civil and criminal matters. The member needs to be aware of that. The member also needs to be aware—and I emphasise this again—that, as I understand it, there are still charges to be brought against Mr D'Arcy, or have been brought against him. They are criminal charges and they are still to be heard.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: How does the member know that? Is he a lawyer? The member does not know that. These are matters—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No, no.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No, no. The Leader of the Opposition is not a member of a court. It is a matter for the prosecution to determine which witnesses will be called. Not only that, as I understand it, it is against the law for the member to know that. Secondly, it is a matter for the prosecution and the defence to raise whatever matters they believe are appropriate. They can call what witnesses they determine without the member's interference or mine. That is the law. That is the principle. It is not a matter for the member, nor is it a matter for me. A very important plank of our democracy—the whole underlying principle of it—is the separation and independence of the courts. If we destroy that, we destroy democracy.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: This week, the Opposition Leader has pursued me about whether I am prepared to meet the victim. The answer is yes. I made contact with her yesterday. I left a message.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BEATTIE: I have also indicated in that message, which I delivered personally, that if she contacts my chief of staff I would be very happy to meet with her on the conditions that I spelled out in my message.

Mr W. T. D'Arcy; Sexual Abuse Victim

Mr HORAN: I refer the Premier to his ministerial statement in this House on Tuesday in which he said—

Timing in terms of Bill D'Arcy's trial is crucial ... to the allegations made. He was found guilty on 1 November 2000. He was not sentenced until 17 November. I understand from Mr Horan's comments this morning that the woman concerned approached my office on 10 November; in other words, before the sentence on 17 November. It would have been entirely improper for me to meet with her before the verdict and the sentencing. It could have been perceived as some attempt by me to influence the sentence or indeed to influence the court.

What I told the House on Tuesday and what the Premier's office records would show is that the victim approached his office on 9 March 2001—four months after the trial had finished. So the Premier's excuse on Tuesday does not stack up. I ask: why did the Premier deliberately mislead this parliament about the date of Mr D'Arcy's victim's approach to him in order to invent an excuse for his failure to meet with her?

Mr BEATTIE: As I have already indicated, the court appeal in relation to the D'Arcy matters was determined on 22 August 2001. Matters before the courts are matters before the courts, and that includes appeals.

Let me say right at the outset that my office has done a check. We have no record of the contacts that the member has referred to. I have not made that an issue, nor I do intend to.

Mr HORAN: I rise to a point of order. In my speech in the Matters of Public Interest debate I spoke about how she made the approach on 9 March and the next day had a reply from the Premier's secretary.

Mr SPEAKER: You have made your point.

Mr HORAN: And then had particular meetings with particular staff. So the contact was made.

Mr BEATTIE: Contact was made with the staff of the Attorney-General and I have made reference to that in the parliament in my ministerial statement. If the member would be patient enough to let me answer this question, all I am saying is that he said that the records of my office would show agreement with the dates that he suggested. They do not. But I have not made that an issue, nor do I seek to make it an issue. If the member had not raised it, I would not have made this point.

I do not seek in any way to make this an issue, because my concern here is for the victim. I am prepared to accept that there has been—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: That is not true. There are not.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Good. I am prepared to accept those diary notes and I am prepared to accept the word of the victim on this matter, because I do not want to cause her any more grief. The bottom line with all of this is that the woman wanted to see me, I have indicated a willingness within the legal straitjacket that I am in to see her, and I have spelled that out to her.

One of the issues that we have to remember is that when the woman first approached the Attorney-General—and I remind everyone that a representative from the Attorney-General's staff met with her; the Director of Public Prosecutions met with her as a result of the letter from the then Attorney-General—one of her big concerns was how she had been treated by the *Courier-Mail* and the media, how this issue had become a matter of public record and how she had been dragged through the media. As a result of that I have been restrained on this matter. I have not sought in any way to challenge the contact dates and times—and I do not challenge them now—because I do not want to cause her grief. The member has pursued me to meet her. I have indicated that I am prepared to meet her. I just remind the member that one of her greatest concerns was having these matters dragged through the media. The member is doing that today. He got what he sought out of this matter. If the member continues to pursue this, he hurts the victim. The member should remember that: he hurts the victim—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Because she went out of her way—

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Horan: You won't concede you wouldn't meet with her.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Callide will withdraw that unparliamentary comment.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am talking to the member for Callide. He will withdraw that comment.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw on your instructions, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr BEATTIE: Let us have some finality to this. The Leader of the Opposition has pursued me to meet with her. I have spelled out the legal impediments on the Premier of the day. I am quite happy to meet with her. I have made contact with her to make that offer. If this continues to be dragged through the media, the victim will be hurt further by the behaviour of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the next question, could I welcome to the public gallery a group of students from the Chapel Hill State School in the electorate of Moggill.

Trade

Mr MICKEL: I refer the Premier to his well-known and commendable enthusiasm for trade and the need to increase our exports, because one in five of all Queensland jobs depends on trade, and I ask: can he inform the House how effective the state government's overseas trade and investment offices are in increasing our trade?

Mr BEATTIE: I am happy to do that. I will say at the outset that this is not an exhaustive list. The European office had significant input into the state's relationship with the EADS Eurocopter, which the Minister for State Development has talked about, which resulted in the choice of Queensland as the principal base for the Australian Government Air 87 defence.

The Americas office in Los Angeles is involved in active discussions with five separate bio-manufacturing projects representing the creation of an estimated 1,000 jobs and it facilitated a \$US10 million investment by biotech firm Sequenom in Queensland. That is what the Europe and Americas offices have done. Bob Gibbs is doing a good job.

The Japan office in Tokyo achieved 21 separate education export successes with a total value of \$41 million. The Japan office in Osaka coordinated a biotech mission to Queensland as part of a two-year strategy to strengthen biotech ties between Osaka and Queensland.

The Taiwan office in Taipei assisted a \$1.2 million investment in a prawn farm in Mackay and facilitated business migration, including \$4.5 million of investments in Queensland Designated Investment Bonds QIC by Taiwanese investors.

The Hong Kong and Southern China office in Hong Kong facilitated the establishment of the Institute of Accounting for the University of Southern Queensland in south China, which is expecting an intake of 1,000 students this year, and facilitated the winning of a multimillion dollar theme park design contract in Macau for the Queensland-based Sanderson Group.

The China office in Shanghai facilitated the winning of the master plan design for the Nanjing national sports stadium by HOK Sport. I attended a major function as part of that bid in Nanjing with the governor.

The Korea office in Seoul is in detailed discussions with LG Chemicals on a potential partnership for a proposed \$500 million ethylene dichloride plant.

The Indonesian office in Jakarta assisted a Queensland consortium in bidding for the Solo Toll Road project in Central Java. The Indonesian office in Semarang supported two Queensland syndicates, involving QUT and Griffith University, in bidding for a significant World Bank health project in Central Java. That is just a quick overview.

Recently, the Australian ambassador to Indonesia visited Semarang. The Queensland Deputy Commissioner to Indonesia and representative in Central Java, Robert Wardrobe, took him to Semarang International school. The ambassador addressed the school assembly and talked to them about Australia. Then he asked one of the students to name the capital of Australia. Straight away one little girl waved her hand in the air very eagerly. 'Brisbane,' she said. 'Incorrect,' said the ambassador. 'Would anyone else like to try?' A boy was next to try. 'Queensland,' he said, at which the ambassador turned to Mr Wardrobe and said, 'You have been brainwashing these kids.'

It is not brainwashing, but it just goes to show how to win friends and influence people, and how well our trade offices are doing. They are doing an excellent job and we will continue to work very hard to deliver. I had all the trade commissioners here and they are doing a great job. I thank them on behalf of all Queenslanders.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Gregory, could I welcome to the public gallery John Wood and Geoff Kelso, two of Australia's finest actors, in town to perform in *Art* at QPAC and guests of the member for Clayfield.

Cape York Justice Study

Mr JOHNSON: I refer the Premier to a letter dated yesterday, addressed to him and me, from Mr Alfred Lacey, deputy chairman of the Aboriginal Coordinating Council, and Ms Jenny Pryor, ATSIC commissioner, which he has tabled today. In this letter, the ACC and ATSIC propose a tripartite approach to the government's response to the Cape York Justice Study report.

I ask: does he agree that this is a fantastic proposal and represents a revolutionary approach to achieving real partnership with indigenous Queenslanders for real outcomes? If so, why then

did the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy advise the ACC and ATSIC late yesterday that the Premier would meet with them but that under no circumstances would I be allowed to be present at today's meeting?

Mr BEATTIE: That is not true. No such advice was given to them. This is part of the problem. We want to take the politics out of this and to make certain that there is, indeed, a bipartisan approach. Indeed, had the member for Gregory rung me, I would have been happy to discuss this with him. I have already said this morning that the government is prepared to work with the member for Gregory. Judy Spence will provide him with a brief and I am keen to speak with him next week. I tabled that letter this morning in good faith. We have nothing to hide. I tabled it because I want to ensure that the government and the opposition do work together on this.

There are some matters which I believe both organisations should have the right to put to me. There have been some unfair criticisms levelled at the government as a result of what they have said in recent times, and the member has aired a number of them in this House. I want them to have the opportunity to put that to me. Now, I do not share their view. Our contact and consultation with them has been very good. I want to discuss those matters with them, as the government of the day and as the government that will be implementing this plan with them. That is not intended to exclude the member for Gregory. As I have indicated, Judy Spence will meet with the member and provide him with a detailed brief, and I am happy to follow that up with a discussion between the three of us next week while the parliament is sitting.

I make this point very clearly to the Aboriginal Coordinating Council: there is a difference between consultation and opposition. This is a democracy. They are entitled to their view and I respect their view.

Mr Johnson: I asked you to listen to them.

Mr BEATTIE: And I did. I met them in September last year; many of my ministers have met with them; Judy has met with them and I am meeting with them today. I can do no more than that. I have rearranged a number of scheduled meetings to meet with them, and I am meeting with them today along with Judy Spence.

Let there be no doubt that there are sections of the community who are opposed to parts of the plan, and there are internal differences within the community between indigenous personalities. I am not interested in personality conflicts within the indigenous community, I am interested in lifting up indigenous community representatives, giving their kids a go and ensuring that women are not bashed. I will not tolerate stupid conflicts between individuals standing in the way of improving indigenous communities in this state. When it comes to helping young kids and preventing women from being bashed and raped, I will not allow egos to stand in the way of helping indigenous people. I will not compromise on that.

Some people think that consultation means you have to agree with them. That is not what it means. Subsequent to this report coming down, there was consultation with 700 people. As far as I am concerned, they had a chance and they will get another chance today.

Trade

Mr HAYWARD: I refer to the Premier's longstanding commitment to educating Queenslanders on the need to export if we are to retain our high standard of living in this Smart State, and I ask: is the Premier aware of any outstanding individual contributions to our export drive?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member. I know that he has a keen interest in this. The answer, of course, is yes. When members think of exports, they usually think of large items such as wheat, sugar, coal, beef, education, IT, biotech, minerals, light metals and so on. But talented individuals can also be successful exporters in their own right. These include our great sports men and women and our world-class entertainers.

This afternoon I will be travelling to Movie World to participate in a special presentation to Darren Hayes, a local boy made good in the tough international music business. As part of Savage Garden, Darren achieved phenomenal success, with the group selling 21 million albums. That success is continuing, with Darren's first solo single, *Insatiable*, launched in January. The single has gone platinum in Australia, with over 70,000 copies shipped to record stores. *Spin*, the album from which *Insatiable* was taken, has already gone gold in Australia, with over 35,000 copies shipped to record stores.

Ms Bligh: Can you hum a few bars?

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, I will hum a few bars if you like. You can join in and hum with me. I know that at least Matt Foley can sing, but I worry about your humming. That stopped you.

Spin debuted at No. 2 on the UK charts and at No. 3 on the Australian ARIA charts. Darren has made a sensational start to his solo career and we wish him every success in the future. This afternoon I will have the pleasant duty of presenting Darren with a plaque in recognition of platinum sales for *Insatiable* and gold sales for *Spin*. I will also be presenting a similar plaque to Darren's music publisher, John Woodruff, and his personal manager, Leonie Messer, for their role in the success of the single and CD. The motto of Darren Hayes' old school, Mabel Park State High School in Logan City, which some of the local members would know all about, is 'strive to excel'. That would be a perfect motto for any individual Queenslander or business to follow.

While we are talking about exports, Queensland's push to attract more international students received another boost last week when about 50 international agents visited Brisbane for the three-day—3 April to 5 April—Study English in Australia workshop. I officially opened the workshop, which gave agents from 21 countries a chance to network with about 50 Australian providers of English language courses. Twelve of those providers are from Queensland. This is about job creation. If we can attract more students we can attract more jobs in education. The students spend more money while they are here, creating still more jobs.

English language intensive courses for overseas students, known as ELICOS, are a booming area. In 2000, Queensland had 6,400 ELICOS students—a jump of 44 per cent on 1999. Studying English in Australia also paves the way for further education and training in Australia. Queensland is well placed to benefit from this interest, with nine excellent universities to choose from. I seek leave to incorporate the last two paragraphs of this statement, which are of interest to all members.

Leave granted.

There are more than 20,000 international students currently studying in Queensland universities, with international students making up 34 per cent of the total student population at Central Queensland University.

Queensland has more than 280 education and training institutes specifically equipped and registered to provide education and training to international students.

Immigration Detention Centre Site

Mrs PRATT: I refer the Premier to his reported statement that there are plenty of areas in the bush that would welcome the idea of a detention centre, and I ask: does he support the establishment of a detention centre in Queensland as proposed by the federal immigration minister, and what discussions have been held and conclusions reached with him? Rosalie Shire Council has indicated its desire to be considered as a proposed site and, given Yarraman's support for the prison which went to Maryborough, I ask: is it being considered? As a detention centre is vastly different from a regular prison facility, what consultation will the Premier encourage with the communities of proposed towns and their surrounding districts?

Mr BEATTIE: Let me say right at the beginning that, no, I do not support the centre as proposed by the minister—not in its current form, no. But I have made it clear that we are prepared to negotiate in relation to the facility. Let me make it very clear right at the outset that this is a decision for the federal government. It will be on their land and their terms and they will be paying for it. However, as I said earlier this week, there is an ongoing partnership between the Commonwealth and the state. The Minister for Police is involved in these negotiations about people who turn up here without a visa or with a visa that has expired.

Am I interested in encouraging a facility to be placed in the member's area? The answer is, yes, I am. Indeed, I have said that the federal government should be prepared to consider a number of sites, including those that were interested in having the prison which went to Maryborough. That would happen only if the local community wanted it, which would mean that it would require strong advocacy from the member. If the member is prepared to come out and nominate a town and a site where she wants it and write to me about what she wants, I am prepared to take up that response. So the challenge is in the court of the member. If she wants to do it, she should write to me, tell me where she wants it, who supports it and go on the public record as championing it; I will stand behind her.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The member led with her chin on this. If she wants to go ahead with this, she should tell me where she wants it. I will put her case to the federal government. I cannot do more

than that. She has asked for it. I am giving it back to her. If you want to come out, it is up to you, Dorothy—sorry, 'honourable member'. I do not want anyone to think this question was a Dorothy dixer. I do not want anyone to think that.

On a serious note, we want to work with the federal government. I am prepared to do that. Phillip Ruddock has indicated that he is prepared to consider a number of country sites. I know the Leader of the Opposition, in addition to supporting this 550-bed medium security jail in the heart of the Clayfield electorate, is prepared to look at other alternatives. I would hope that the federal minister, who has indicated that he is prepared to look elsewhere, is too. But we have a responsibility to deal with illegal immigrants or those who breach their visas. We need to have a system in place. We have a responsibility to play a constructive role in this, and we will.

When he rang me, the minister said that over a thousand people a year turn up at Brisbane airport without visas and there are also people in Queensland who overstay visas. We are prepared to work to ensure that we have appropriate security for this state.

Gladstone Port Access Road

Mr STRONG: I refer the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads to the strong economic growth being experienced in the Gladstone region, and I ask: could he advise us on the status of funding arrangements for the new Gladstone port access road?

Mr BREDHAUER: There has been substantial economic growth under this government—thanks largely to the efforts of the Minister for State Development—in the Gladstone region, which is benefiting the entire economy of Queensland. When I became the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads in 1998 there was a proposal to build a new access road to the port of Gladstone. That matter has been under discussion among a range of parties for quite some time—almost four years now. However, I am very pleased to announce that on 28 March this year the state government made a decision that we would proceed with the construction of the new port access road in Gladstone, or route D as it is known locally.

The funding for this has become available due in no small part to the cooperation of the federal government. I acknowledge the contribution by the Commonwealth. It has contributed \$7.5 million through the roads of national importance budget to fund half of the cost of building the access road. In addition, the Department of State Development and the Department of Main Roads will contribute \$1.5 million. It is actually a budget allocation to the Department of State Development, but the Department of Main Roads will manage the money. The Gladstone Port Authority, which is another government owned corporation, will contribute an additional \$4.5 million. So the state government's contribution will be \$6 million in total. That will be supplemented by a contribution of \$1.5 million from the Calliope Shire Council.

I particularly thank George Creed who, as mayor of the Calliope Shire Council, has shown some leadership on this issue. He recognises that economic infrastructure in Gladstone is important to the entire region and that benefits for his council and ratepayers will flow from this. I thank the Department of State Development. I thank Ross Dunning, the chairman of the Gladstone Port Authority, for the work that he did with my director-general, Steve Golding, in helping to bring this arrangement to fruition. We expect that planning and design work will commence in the very near future and we intend for construction of this important project to begin in 2003. We have indicated to the Gladstone City Council that there will be discussion about a de-maining proposal for other roads in the area as we seek to realign the state controlled road network to take into account the fact that the state government will own and maintain the port road. All of the parties that I have mentioned have worked well together to bring about this important piece of economic infrastructure for the city of Gladstone and the region.

Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board; Mr B. Bentley

Mr HOBBS: I refer the Minister for Racing to the Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board and the massive division and unrest in the racing industry caused by her political interference in the selection process. In the interests of putting an end to this damaging division and providing some evidence to back her claim that Mr Bob Bentley was on the original independent selection panel's reserve list, I ask: on what date did she receive the board member recommendations from the original independent selection panel and who were those nominated members? Will she also table the original independent selection panel's reserve list?

Mrs ROSE: In short, no, I will not. We have been going through this for the last couple of days. It is a little bit like *Groundhog Day*; every time I come in here I hear the same sort of theme. At some stage during the day I am happy to sit down with the member for 15 minutes and go through the whole process again.

Mr Horan: And the list.

Mrs ROSE: No. I will not breach the confidentiality and the privacy of those people on the reserve list, otherwise those opposite might as well have the names of the 200 people who applied in the first place. I am happy to sit down with the honourable member today. I will make the time available to sit down with the honourable member and go through the whole thing with him.

I met with the five-member board for the first time this morning. This is the first time I have had an opportunity to meet them. They are having their first meeting as we speak. They are very nice people. I hope that not only the shadow minister but other members of this House will have the opportunity to meet them, have a cup of coffee with them and have a chat with them. I am very confident that we are going to see some really strong, positive decisions coming from that board for the future of the racing industry in Queensland.

We have had a great season this year. Our horses, jockeys and trainers have been more prominent on the national stage than at any previous time in history. Queensland broke its duck with the magnificent victory by Calaway Gal—a Queensland bred, Queensland owned and Queensland trained horse—in the world's richest two-year-old race, the Golden Slipper. It was a fantastic result for Queensland. It was a great achievement by Calaway Gal and her Doomben-based trainer Bruce Brown. We should all be incredibly proud that we are involved in the Queensland racing industry.

Queensland also had its first Victoria Derby winner with the Eagle Farm-trained Amalfi. I was there. I watched Amalfi come home first. I have to say that I backed Amalfi because it was a Queensland horse. Show A Heart also captured the group 1 Toorak Handicap during the Victorian spring. Falvelon—that great horse Falvelon—went one step further by winning his second Hong Kong Sprint in December.

Mr HOBBS: I rise to a point of order. The minister is going on with a lot of garbage. She is living in a fairyland. The bottom line is that the minister has misled the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr HOBBS: Mr Bentley is not on the reserve list, and you know that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order.

Mrs ROSE: I am very pleased that the record will now show that the great achievements of Queensland racing have been called garbage by the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: That is totally outrageous. I reject the minister's accusation. I ask that it be withdrawn. I support Queensland racing 100 per cent, but I do not support a minister who politically interferes with racing.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is not a debate. There is no point of order.

Mrs ROSE: The member said that those achievements in the racing industry were garbage.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is not a debate. Before I call the member for Woodridge, could I welcome a second group of students from the Chapel Hill State School in the electorate of Moggill.

Dexta Insurance; Home Warranty Insurance

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: My question is directed to the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing. I refer the minister to news reports about the withdrawal of Dexta Insurance from the home warranty insurance market in other states, and I ask: can the minister outline if this development will have any effect on Queensland consumers or the state's home building market?

Mr SCHWARTEN: There is no doubt that with Dexta withdrawing itself from the house warranty market the building industry—especially in the southern states—is in more strife than a rat in a python's cage. This matter is best outlined in an article in today's *Advertiser* which sums up pretty nicely the situation the building industry finds itself in post-HIH collapse. The article reads—

Industry sources say obtaining the cover has been fraught with difficulties since the collapse of insurer HIH last year, with spiralling premiums and lengthy approval delays.

It goes on to say—

State governments around Australia are locked in crisis talks with the industry amid predictions that up to \$9 billion of construction work and 200,000 jobs around Australia are in jeopardy.

That might well be the case in other parts of Australia but it is not the case in Queensland. The *Advertiser* has got it wrong there because this state government is not locked in crisis talks with the industry because we have our own scheme.

Four years ago, when my predecessor Judy Spence was the minister, she derailed the efforts by the coalition government to privatise this insurance in Queensland. May I say thank heavens that that is the case because otherwise we would have our consumers and our builders in exactly the same predicament. I notice that page after page of today's clips illustrate the gravity of the situation in Victoria and New South Wales.

In Queensland, we heard the Deputy Premier today outline some of the pitfalls of this nonsense of privatisation. Here is yet another example of the pitfalls of privatisation. The other day I had a look at the premiums and I found that the average premium in New South Wales, if one is able to get coverage, is \$850 to \$900; in Victoria it is \$600 to \$650; and in Queensland our consumers, through their builders, are paying \$400 to \$450 for that level of cover. They are guaranteed through our statutory scheme that they will receive coverage. It is a pig in a poke in the other states.

Dexta is out of it now because it cannot get reinsurance, but while it was involved in this insurance the fact is that it was playing ducks and drakes in determining when and where it would cover people. It was taking anything up to eight weeks to get cover. A couple trying to build a home, and the builder trying to build it, would find that it would take up to eight weeks before they could turn the first sod or dig the first post hole on the site.

I say to the people who say that privatisation is the way to go—and the person who is going to ask the next question, the member for Moggill, might be able to answer it because he is the one who is going to do it—that we got it right and they got it wrong.

***Sunday Mail* Education Supplement**

Dr WATSON: As usual, the minister is talking through his hat. My question is directed to the Premier. I refer to the forthcoming supplement in the *Sunday Mail* concerning Labor's plans for education in Queensland, and I ask: which private organisations did his government approach to sponsor this supplement, what non-financial rewards do participating organisations expect to receive from his government for their agreement to participate in such non-core business activities, and did he obtain an ethical clearance from Alan Demack when this proposal amounts to little more than a private contribution made under duress for Labor Party propaganda?

Mr BEATTIE: I am not quite sure which publication the honourable member is referring to but I am quite happy to take on board the question he has asked and, together with the minister, provide him with a detailed response. I am happy to give the honourable member a detailed response to it and give him a letter on the subject. We are here next week. The honourable member may have noticed that today is Thursday. We can guarantee to give him a reply by, what does the Minister for Education think, Monday afternoon or Tuesday. Either the minister or I will respond to the honourable member. I am not quite sure of the details.

While I am here—

Dr Watson: Take the opportunity.

Mr BEATTIE: Well, the member would not want me to miss this opportunity! I have been watching all the speculation about the merger of the Liberal Party and the National Party. I was very encouraged to see this article by Lawrence Springborg. At the moment he is pretending to be Superman in a phone box. He is on the phone. Do not come out wearing one of those red and blue uniforms, that is all I ask!

Mr Mackenroth: He is ringing Russell Cooper.

Mr BEATTIE: Just leave Russell Cooper alone; you can ring him later.

I am intrigued by this new-found commitment to a single conservative political party. If it is good for Queensland then of course we would love to see it. We would see it as a good thing.

Mr Foley: It would be great to see Mr Springborg up in National Youth Week.

Mr BEATTIE: Absolutely.

Mr Mackenroth: We could have daylight saving on every second day.

Mr BEATTIE: That is a brilliant observation. Let us think about some of the policy differences. We could have daylight saving on Sunday but not on Monday. Then we could have daylight saving again on Tuesday but not on Wednesday. When it comes to tree clearing I do not know where they are. I do not know who supports it these days.

Mr Mackenroth: Just take it off the top.

Mr BEATTIE: The Treasurer is right. Maybe what they could do is just take off the tops of the trees but keep the rest of the trees. That is what they could do. And if the tree did not fall over they could shoot it.

Mr HOBBS: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. As the Premier is talking about tree clearing, I ask him whether he knows where he is on that issue. We would like to know, too.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr BEATTIE: Very funny! We do know. We have brought in laws. We know exactly. With tree clearing, the Liberals could cut the tops of the trees off and the National Party remnants could shoot what remains. We have consistent gun laws. That is terrific.

It is interesting. Bob Quinn says that his message to the National Party today would be to settle its own direction and then talk to his party about developing a working relationship. What Bob is saying to the Opposition Leader is that he has no direction. That is what he is really saying. He has no direction, although—wait a minute—Lawrence has some direction. He wants them to get together. So what do we have? We have Bob and Lawrence on a unity ticket, and where have we got Mike? No-one is quite sure where Mike is. All I can say is: good luck, guys; we wish you well.

Crime, Gold Coast

Mrs SMITH: Can the Minister for Police and Corrective Services inform the parliament about any positive contributions the community has made in assisting police to reduce crime in the Gold Coast area?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the honourable member for the question. What a great question it is. I get the greatest of pleasure from telling this parliament about the good work communities right around the state do to help their local police in the prevention of and reduction in crime. In answer to this question I am happy to talk about the Gold Coast.

The Gold Coast has many effective proactive problem-oriented policing strategies—POP strategies as we know them in the service—which involve the community working with the police to identify and address particular problems. These include a project in Broadbeach which is aimed at reducing youth related public order offences, raising community awareness about vehicle security to reduce vehicle theft, and initiatives by the water police to encourage water safety, just to name a few.

One of the key signs that the community is keen to work with the police is the results from Crimestoppers in the Gold Coast district. During the last calendar year 96 people were arrested on 238 charges as a result of information to the Crimestoppers anonymous phone line. More than \$300,000 worth of drugs was seized, and more than \$158,000 worth of property was recovered. These are pretty impressive results considering that many of these crimes may never have been solved without help from the public through Crimestoppers. I thank the people of the Gold Coast for their assistance.

I also mention that three Gold Coast police stations commenced 24-hour policing services at the end of January. That is part of our strategic plan. I think it is appropriate that today I thank those people of the Gold Coast who are assisting the police in helping to reduce crime.

Drugs

Mr SEENEY: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to the skyrocketing growth of the amphetamine industry in Queensland, which has led to claims by Lord Mayor Jim Soorley that some 70 per cent to 80 per cent of Brisbane nightclubbers are using ecstasy. I note that the *Australian Illicit Drug Report* of 2000-01, released recently by the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, reveals an increase in the arrest rate of amphetamine consumers and providers of

1.9 per cent in New South Wales, 10.7 per cent in Victoria, 29 per cent in the Northern Territory, 59.2 per cent in Western Australia and a massive 150 per cent in Tasmania. This report also reveals that the arrest rate for amphetamine consumers and providers in Queensland dropped by 7.6 per cent. Do these figures support the claim by Brisbane's Lord Mayor that the minister has buried his head in the sand about this escalating drug problem?

Mr McGRADY: Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, fairly recently my ministerial colleague the Minister for Health and I attended a summit of police and health ministers at which we placed this issue fairly and squarely on the agenda. We have said in this chamber many, many times, and so has the Premier, that those people who peddle in death—that is what these people do, these merchants of death—have no place at all in Queensland. Quite recently the Attorney-General lifted amphetamines into schedule 1 of the Drugs Misuse Act. We are doing what we can.

It is all very well for people to make these claims. Of course, as I have said in this place on many occasions, anything can be done with figures. Maybe the Queensland Police Service is more successful than some of the other states.

Recently I invited members of the media to come out to a location in Brisbane. There we showed them some of the equipment now being used in the manufacture of amphetamines. As late as yesterday in this chamber I pointed out that drug pushers no longer stand on street corners. Drug pushers are now using some of the most sophisticated equipment. The use of heroin is declining and the use of amphetamines is increasing.

Last year I visited New York with the Queensland Police Commissioner. There we had meetings with the FBI. Australia normally follows the trend of the United States. One of the points the FBI raised at those meetings was that it had forecast that the use of heroin was on the decline and the use of amphetamines was on the increase. There are a number of reasons that could be the case. First, with amphetamines people do not have to go down some dark alley as they would if they wanted to inject themselves with heroin. With amphetamines people can simply pop a pill.

Mrs Edmond: They inject as well.

Mr McGRADY: They can inject as well, but it is mainly popping pills. We talk about bipartisan approaches. I think the fight against drugs is one area in which there can be a bipartisan approach. In the main, it is the young people of the nation who are the first to suffer. Almost 80 per cent of those inside the Queensland prison system are there as a result of drug related crimes. I appeal to everybody, whether it be the Lord Mayor of Brisbane or the shadow minister here in Queensland, to, rather than play politics with this issue, work together to try to reduce the incidence of drug taking in this state.

Student Access to Justice System

Mr CHOI: My question is directed to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. As this is National Youth Week, I ask: what steps are being taken to ensure that our young people, particularly students, can access user-friendly information about our justice system?

Mr WELFORD: I thank the honourable member for his very important question. As I indicated earlier this week, the Department of Justice is doing a number of things to encourage young people to become more aware of the law and to understand their rights and obligations. We believe that it is an essential part of a young person's education to understand the justice system—to understand how our courts work, what the law is and how these issues affect their lives.

With the assistance of the Department of Justice, young Queenslanders can now access a web site which provides comprehensive information about the law. It provides information in an imaginative way. Its layout and language are used to make the site fun to use and navigate as well as educational. There is a detailed history on how our laws were created and an illustrated guide about who is who and who does what in the courtroom. The link for students is composed of four parts: About the Courts, You and the Law, Crime and Justice, and Justice for Queenslanders. Each section provides a comprehensive yet easily readable explanation of the subject. For example, the section entitled You and the Law covers topics including drugs, domestic violence, bullying, graffiti and the Children Services Tribunal. There is advice on how to cope with bullying, how the law views bullying and links to other helpful sites. There is also an

explanation of the difference between criminal and civil proceedings and a summary of the role of the Magistrates, District and Supreme courts.

Our government is also launching an information campaign this week to help Queensland children in care to understand their legal rights. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the role of the Children Services Tribunal. I want to make sure that young people in care are aware of their rights and realise that there is somewhere to go to get help if things are not going so well. Every young person in care in Queensland will receive an information brochure entitled *A young person's guide to the Children Services Tribunal*. The brochure explains in a friendly and easy to read fashion the role of the tribunal and what it can do in protecting the legal rights of young people in care. It also outlines how to contact the tribunal and the types of help that can be given. I believe that the new web site and this information campaign to children in care will ensure young people throughout Queensland have a much better understanding of our justice system.

Regional Queensland

Ms LEE LONG: I refer the Premier and Minister for Trade to the fact that, as rural communities continue to see the removal of services and jobs from their towns, comments by Professor Robert Stimson of the University of Queensland indicating that politicians and academics alike are talking about resettlement of rural people into cities over the next 20 years or so is causing much concern in rural communities. I ask: what is the Premier's view on this?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for the question. It is a very important question, because I saw those comments and I do not agree with them. I say to all those who argue a similar line: if we go down that path, we will end up with everybody living in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. That is what we will end up with. We know that some of our counterparts interstate have some difficulties, but that is what will happen. For someone who comes from Atherton in the member's electorate, she could hardly expect me to agree with this view.

Mr Seeney: I knew you were going to say that.

Mr BEATTIE: That is all right. My wife comes from Charleville. I am happy to accept that we have country origins. A large number of my family live in Condobolin in western New South Wales, which is country New South Wales. It is the bush in anyone's definition. What we have sought to do as a government is to turn around the drift from the bush to the cities. Ever since I was a kid—and this started in the fifties—people have been complaining about the drift from the bush to the cities. There were changes. Mechanisation came to farm land. There was the dieselisation of trains. Then of course the roads and communications got better. Therefore, some of the settlements which had been determined on rail links were threatened.

We have sought to turn that around. The Heritage Trails Network we have put in place—and there is \$110 million from the state and the Commonwealth on this—is the most significant project since the fifties to create jobs in the bush. This is something that is not understood. Merri Rose often talks about this, but many people do not understand that, in terms of tourism, which is our second biggest market, 70 per cent of tourists who come to Queensland are drivers. It is called the drive market. They do not fly here; they drive here. We have ended up with an ageing population which means that more people are going to drive. We think the Heritage Trails Network is going to put jobs in service stations and restaurants in the bush in an unprecedented way. That is one thing we have supported. We are going to continue to do that.

Secondly, we have given a commitment to support services in the bush and in the provincial cities. Some of these things include QGAP offices—

Mr Lucas: Access Queensland.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, as well as the things being done in Paul Lucas's area like Access Queensland and access to the Net. They are about improving the quality of life for people in the bush as well.

Mr McGrady: And the minerals province, too.

Mr BEATTIE: I was about to come to that. The other issue of course relates to minerals.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I am actually trying to do something sensible to answer the member's question. It is not your question. Will you knock it off?

In terms of the minerals province, we have ensured that there is infrastructure there. The light metals project in central Queensland is going to be a spin-off for jobs. The great thing about the Comalco deal is that 80 per cent of the content has to be from Queensland. There are about 7,000 jobs which Matt Foley's people in TAFE are training people for. We have a total commitment to the regions, and that can be seen in the infrastructure.

Firstly, I do not agree with the comment referred to by the honourable member. I think it is wrong. Secondly, we are going to make certain that we change it, which is what we have been doing.

Small Business

Mr FENLON: I refer the Minister for State Development to the fact that there have been many media reports recently on the health of small business in Queensland. I ask: can the minister provide an update on the state of small business and the Beattie government's contribution to this?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question. Of course, he takes a very close interest in small business in his electorate and regularly raises matters with me and with my department. Small business in Queensland is very optimistic about the performance of the Australian economy in 2002 and, more importantly, about the prospects here in Queensland in their own businesses. The most recent survey by Dun and Bradstreet showed that more small businesses in Queensland are optimistic about their business prospects than any other state in Australia. The survey found that 89 per cent of Queensland small businesses are optimistic compared to 81 per cent across the nation. Small businesses in Queensland expect company revenue and company profits to increase more than those in any other state. In Queensland, 73 per cent expect company revenue to rise compared to 65 per cent Australia wide, while 70 per cent of Queensland's small businesses expect company profits to increase compared to only 61 per cent nationally.

With respect to employment—and this is also very important—33 per cent of Queensland's small businesses expect to increase employment in 2002 compared to 31 per cent nationally. Only Western Australian small businesses show a higher level of optimism in the Australian economy than those in Queensland, with 78 per cent and 75 per cent respectively compared to 70 per cent nationally. These results are very important compared to the challenges that small business has had over the past 18 months, particularly with the implementation of the GST. The survey also found that small businesses in Queensland are focusing more on controlling costs and improving their debt management, practices that have become increasingly important as a result of the pressure that administration of the GST has placed on them.

I have to say that a lot of the credit for that in Queensland must go to the Beattie Labor government and its initiatives with regard to assisting small business to grapple with the GST, because the federal government brought it in and then essentially hurled it out there into the small business sector and left it to cope for itself. We identified it as a government very early and raised a whole range of programs to assist small businesses to come to grips with how they had to manage the GST. In fact, the figures that we have indicate that 43,000 work books were distributed by the Department of State Development through its 18 state development centres. Some 3,200 people from small business attended 18 GST seminars organised by my department. That is just a small part of it, because we assisted them through the GST shambles that was thrust upon them. They have managed to come to grips with that and small business in this state is prospering. But that is only part of what we do in terms of assisting small business through the state development centres. We run 700 workshops a year for 17,000 small businesses.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Cunningham, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from Carole Park State School in the electorate of Inala. Welcome.

Youth Charter

Mr COPELAND: I refer the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth to the launch of his youth charter on Tuesday when the State Youth Advisory Council was present. I would like to quote a message posted on an Internet youth web page from one of those participants. It states—

At the State Youth Advisory Council meeting—day 2, yesterday, Tuesday—the representatives including myself were briefly informed of an amendment to state legislation directly affecting young people in Queensland. In fact, it is my opinion along with the other people that this amendment directly discriminates against young people.

The question was asked whether young people, youth organisations and other interested agencies have been consulted on this amendment and the answer has been emphatically no. I have felt as though I have been kicked in the stomach. This amendment has been endorsed by cabinet without any community consultation, particularly with young people—what then does this charter mean?

The State Youth Advisory Council then attended the launch of the youth charter, a document that guides government departments on strategies to consult with young people. Having just been informed that an amendment to legislation directly affecting and implicating young people had been endorsed by cabinet without the opportunity for young people to inform or advise the state government—what then is the purpose of this charter?

Is the youth charter another glossy example of the Labor government being all talk and no action?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The time for questions has expired.

BRISBANE MARKETS BILL

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (11.32 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That leave be granted to bring in a bill for an act relating to building work carried out on the Brisbane Markets site and the use or occupation of the site or a building or other structure on the site.

Motion agreed to.

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (11.33 a.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Brisbane Markets Bill 2002 addresses approval deficiencies for the development and construction of works at the Brisbane Markets site. Members are aware that the government is conducting a competitive bid process to sell, as a going concern, the Brisbane Markets assets and business of Brisbane Market Corporation. The government's due diligence process, conducted as part of the sale process, has revealed that Brisbane Market Corporation and its predecessors, the Brisbane Market Authority and Brisbane Market Trust, did not obtain all of the required town planning and building approvals for the development and construction of works at the Brisbane Markets site. Brisbane Market Corporation and its predecessors operated in good faith on the premise that they had immunity from the application of state town planning and building legislation.

Both state and local governments accepted this view. As a result, approvals were not sought from the relevant approving body and instead were sought in most cases from the minister responsible for the approval of construction and development by the state and state authorities. There is now uncertainty that immunity in fact existed for the entire period during which development occurred on the site, being from March 1960, when the Brisbane Market Trust was established, to the present. In certain circumstances, Brisbane Market Corporation and its predecessors mistakenly obtained approvals under the regime applicable to the state and its authorities.

Therefore, they did not comply with all of the applicable legislative requirements in relation to town planning or building approvals. In circumstances of non-compliance, the relevant authorities have power to take enforcement action. At a minimum, the authority can require the owner to apply for a development permit under the Integrated Planning Act. In a worst case scenario, the authority may require that a building be demolished.

The only effective and practical way to adequately address this issue is to legislate. I am satisfied that this is the only method that will adequately address bidders' concerns without impacting the timing and the integrity of the sale process. Any other course of action has the potential to compromise the outcome for the government and Queensland taxpayers. The bill provides that the required approvals were obtained for the development and construction of works

at the Brisbane Markets site. Members can be assured that the bill does not purport to remedy development and construction that did not comply with the applicable building codes. The bill does not remove the powers of the relevant authorities to take action where, for example, a building is dangerous or unfit for use or occupation. Matters regarding building code compliance and condition are the subject of an independent expert's report commissioned as part of the sale process for provision to shortlisted bidders. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Lingard, adjourned.

REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (11.40 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That leave be granted to bring in a bill for an act to amend acts administered by the Treasurer, and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (11.41 a.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2002 makes a number of amendments to the state's revenue, grant, subsidy and financial legislation, including those necessary to implement revenue initiatives announced in the state's 2001-2002 budget. Currently in Queensland, pay-roll tax applies only to a payment made upon termination of an employee if the payment represents a reward for service to which the employee has an enforceable right. It does not apply to payments made to an employee on termination of employment where the payment is made gratuitously or does not otherwise represent reward for service. Accordingly, the 2001-2002 state budget announced that the pay-roll tax concession involving termination payments would be removed from 1 July 2002. The Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 is therefore to be amended to include in the pay-roll tax base from 1 July 2002 assessable eligible termination payments under the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936 (Cwlth), other than a payment upon death of an employee. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of the second reading in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Since 1 January 1994, Queensland's pay-roll tax base has included fringe benefits under the Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986 (Cwlth). The Commonwealth's fringe benefits tax is imposed on the taxable amount (or the before-tax equivalent) of fringe benefits. Despite the Commonwealth approach, Queensland currently imposes pay-roll tax on the taxable value (or the after-tax equivalent) of fringe benefits. Under Commonwealth legislation, the taxable amount is the taxable value after application of a gross-up formula.

In the 2001-2002 State Budget, it was announced that pay-roll tax concessions on grossed-up fringe benefits would be removed from 1 July 2002. The Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 is therefore to be amended to provide that the value of fringe benefits will be "grossed-up" for pay-roll tax purposes, in the same way that they are "grossed-up" for fringe benefits tax purposes, with effect from 1 July 2002.

Further, these changes to the pay-roll tax base are consistent with the arrangements introduced in Victoria from 1 July 2001, and South Australia from 1 July 2002.

Finally, in accordance with this Government's commitment to maintaining Queensland's low tax status, the Budget also announced reductions in the pay-roll tax rate from 4.8% to 4.75% on and from 1 July 2002. This initiative ensures that Queensland continues to have the lowest pay-roll tax rate of any State.

The Government is also committed to ensuring that Queensland's fuel subsidy scheme, as provided for by the Fuel Subsidy Act 1997, operates as effectively and efficiently as possible. To achieve this objective, it has been necessary to introduce administrative arrangements to reduce red tape for subsidy recipients and minimise administration costs.

These arrangements provide for—

- the waiver of the requirement for licensed bulk end users to lodge annual returns if they have not claimed any subsidy during the year;
- payment of an annual provisional subsidy of up to \$1,000 in advance to licensed bulk end users in certain circumstances;

- extension of entitlement to the bulk end user subsidy to cover incidental use of diesel in an on-road diesel engine road vehicle;
- relaxation of the conditions for a licensed bulk end user claiming a subsidy more frequently than every three months; and
- monthly claims by local councils.

To provide certainty in the administration of the scheme, this Bill contains amendments that give retrospective effect to these beneficial arrangements.

A number of other amendments are also proposed to the Fuel Subsidy Act 1997, so as to further refine and enhance the scheme. To ensure that the provisional subsidy payment made to a licensed retailer aligns, as closely as possible, with the retailer's actual subsidy entitlement, the Fuel Subsidy Act 1997 is to be amended to confirm the Commissioner's ability to adjust the provisional subsidy payment more than once in a financial year. To protect the integrity of the scheme, the Act is to be amended to allow the Commissioner, in limited cases, to pay a subsidy to a licensed retailer in arrears based on actual claims or not pay a subsidy in respect of a particular claim period. To assist in the recovery of overpaid provisional subsidy amounts to licensed bulk end users where the bulk end user ceases operations during the year, the Act is to be amended to impose notification and lodgement obligations on those bulk end users. Finally, it would be more efficient and less costly if the Commissioner could enter into a written agreement with a subsidy recipient in relation to payment of an estimated amount. The Act is therefore to be amended to allow an agreement for an estimated amount and remove the recipient's right of review of the Commissioner's decision to require payment of the estimated amount, given the recipient's agreement with the decision.

The first home owner grant was introduced on 1 July 2000 to assist home buyers with the purchase or construction of their first home. On 9 October 2001, the Commonwealth announced some changes in the eligibility criteria for the additional first home owner grant for new homes and also that the additional grant would continue to be available from 1 January 2002 to 30 June 2002 at a reduced amount. An administrative arrangement is currently in place to give effect to these changes but the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 is now to be amended to give the changes legislative support and also to correct an anomaly that has been identified in its administration. This amendment will ensure that an applicant who has permanently separated from their de facto spouse will be treated in the same way as a married person who has permanently separated from their spouse.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to amendments proposed to the Debits Tax Act 1990. Debits tax is imposed on certain debits to accounts that have a cheque-drawing facility kept with a financial institution in Queensland. Both the account holder and financial institution with which the account is held are liable for the tax. The debits tax revenue base is highly mobile as liability depends on accounts being kept in Queensland. The abolition by New South Wales of the tax in that State from 1 January 2002 raises the prospect of revenue losses to Queensland due to accounts being relocated to New South Wales. The Act currently contains an anti-avoidance provision which imposes the tax on a Queensland resident account holder for accounts kept in another State or Territory where the account is used for the purposes of avoiding Queensland debits tax. The anti-avoidance provision in the Debits Tax Act 1990 is to be amended to extend liability to financial institutions that actively promote the use of an account outside Queensland for the sole or dominant purpose of avoiding Queensland debits tax.

The Duties Act 2001 is to be amended to extend the current exemptions for transfers on breakdown of a de facto relationship so that de factos are treated consistently with married persons. This amendment is necessary following the commencement of a similar exemption for married couples by the Commonwealth. In addition, unintended consequences in related definitions in the Duties Act 2001 will be removed. The Duties Act 2001 will also be amended to confirm its application to mortgages executed prior to 1 March 2002 where there is a dutiable further advance secured by that mortgage after 1 March 2002, and to provide an exemption for certain transactions and instruments to give effect to, or which form part of, financial or other arrangements entered into by the Queensland Treasury Corporation and to provide that a regulation may exempt transactions and instruments entered into by a statutory body in relation to a financial arrangement under the Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982. These exemptions replace exemptions formerly contained in the Queensland Treasury Corporation Act 1988 and the Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982.

This Bill also contains two minor transitional amendments to the Gaming Machine Act 1991. Mr Speaker, on 8 May last year I announced that there would be a state-wide cap on the number of gaming machines in hotels. The Gaming Machine Amendment Act 2001 subsequently gave legislative effect to the cap and provided some transitional measures to deal with certain applications for gaming machines in hotels. In particular, the Queensland Gaming Commission was required to finally deal with all such applications by no later than 30 June 2002, after which the applications would lapse.

The hotel industry has expressed concerns that consideration of the transitional applications are being delayed by circumstances beyond the control of the industry. For example, some applicants are waiting on town planning approval or are currently involved in litigation action. But, under the current provisions, through no fault of their own, their applications will lapse on 30 June 2002.

Consequently, the first amendment I am proposing will enable the Queensland Gaming Commission to extend its consideration of existing applications to 31 December 2002, after which the applications will lapse.

The second amendment to the Gaming Machine Act will correct an oversight in last year's amendments. The transitional provisions last year enabled applications for gaming machine sites to be made by applicants who had applied under the Liquor Act 1992 for a general licence but had not been issued with a liquor licence by noon on 8 May last year. Unfortunately, that provision did not enable applications to be made by a person who had applied under the Liquor Act to remove their liquor licence to proposed new premises.

The amendment will therefore enable an application for gaming machines to be made by a person who is entitled, under section 238A of the Liquor Act, to continue with an application for the removal of a liquor licence to new premises. Such an applicant must apply for a gaming machine licence by 1 October this year. The Queensland Gaming Commission must then decide the application by 31 January 2003, otherwise the application will lapse.

However, the Commission may defer the lapsing date to no later than 30 June 2003 if the applicant satisfies the Commission that there are exceptional circumstances to warrant the deferment.

This will correct the anomaly under the existing transitional arrangements which prevented the very small number of sites in this category from applying for a gaming machine site licence despite generally complying with the policy framework in other respects.

The Bill also proposes minor amendments to the Government Owned Corporations Act 1993, the Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978. The Government Owned Corporations Act 1993 is to be amended to alter the process of determining dividends for government owned corporations to ensure that final dividends as approved by shareholding Ministers are reflected in the audited financial statements of government owned corporations for the year in which the dividend is paid. This amendment will ensure consistency between the government owned corporation dividend consultation and financial statement audit processes.

The Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978 is to be amended to alter the date for finalising a report on a review of Part 6 of this Act. This will allow members of the aboriginal community at Aurukun Shire an extended time to consider a review of community based controls over alcohol in their Shire.

Mr Speaker, this Bill delivers pay-roll tax concessions in line with the Government's commitment to providing a competitive, low-tax environment for Queensland business. The Bill will also keep Queensland's revenue, grant and subsidy legislation up to date and operating efficiently and effectively for the community's benefit.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Lingard, adjourned.

BUILDING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second reading

Resumed from 11 December 2001 (see p. 4425).

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (11.48 a.m.): This bill is important. I do not need to remind members of the origins of this legislation, that is, the tragic Childers fire. We all have agonised over what in fact is the best way to manage backpacker accommodation, because there are many old buildings and hotels throughout this state that have safety issues. How do we manage this? What are the costs? What happens to the infrastructure of those towns? Seasonal workers who undertake grape picking, fruit picking or cotton chipping are attracted to these towns. So, the use of these types of accommodation is very, very useful, in fact absolutely necessary, in many communities.

We have to find the best way of keeping backpackers safe. We have to make sure that all visitors to Queensland are provided with safe and secure accommodation. The problem with this legislation is that local government will have to bear too much of the responsibility, particularly in relation to litigation. As we are all aware, insurance costs have gone up. We hear about it constantly in the news, and we hear about the effect that rising insurance costs are having on our own communities. Many groups are facing a very serious financial situation as a result of the increased cost of public liability insurance. Local government is no different. It is experiencing exactly the same problem. In fact, the responsibility of local government has been made quite clear in various decisions that have been made in relation to nonfeasance in terms of litigation for roadworks. If local government is going to have to take on the responsibility of looking after backpacker type accommodation, its public liability insurance premiums will blow out dramatically. Local governments have received quotes for public liability insurance which reveal an increase of up to 100 per cent in their premiums—not specifically because of this legislation, but because of a combination of various events. That is a huge burden on local government.

I know that people try to buy in bulk to get discounts. Local government has been doing that for a long, long time. They pay the cheapest insurance premiums that they can obtain. That does not mean to say that local government cannot do better; however, the reality is that in the past they have put a lot of effort and a lot of thought into their public liability insurance premiums. Local governments are very progressive in the way in which they do business. They have extremely competitive insurance cover.

The opposition will be supporting the broad intentions of this bill, but it will move some important amendments. Those amendments will place the majority of the responsibility for this matter back on fire services where it belongs. Local government is happy to do the work—the inspections and so on—where necessary, but the reality is that fire services should retain their responsibility for those matters. That responsibility is being handed to local government without any compensatory funding that would help them defray their insurance costs. That is the main reason why the opposition believes that local government should not have the total responsibility under this legislation. The amendments that I will move are in those terms.

This Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill seeks to improve fire safety uniformly across all budget accommodation in Queensland. The objectives of this legislation are outlined in the explanatory notes. They aim to achieve a satisfactory standard of fire safety in budget accommodation buildings by requiring budget accommodation buildings not approved under the Building Code of Australia to comply with the prescribed minimum fire safety standards and owners of budget accommodation buildings to prepare and implement a fire safety management plan.

As members of this House would be aware, this proposed legislation is the government's response to the Childers backpacker hostel fire. Although we need to review and implement more up-to-date and stringent building fire safety legislation, we have to make sure that we do it in the most appropriate way that meets the needs of our society. The Building Fire Safety Task Force was formed by the state government to review fire safety standards for budget accommodation buildings. This review included backpacker hostels, boarding houses, hotels and other similar share accommodation style buildings. However, it has taken this government nearly 18 months to come up with new fire safety standards for budget accommodation.

I appreciate the fact that it would have been difficult for this legislation to be introduced while the Childers hostel arson trial was going on. The opposition accepts that. Unfortunately, this legislation has taken time to be introduced, which is probably out of the hands of everyone at this stage. It is just one of those things that we have to work our way through. However, the minister has put the onus back on local government authorities to administer and implement the proposals of the legislation. I mentioned that the opposition will move amendments to the effect that the responsibility should lie with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. The government has opted for the easy way out and put the burden of costs and responsibilities on local councils.

Generally, budget accommodation has a higher occupation density than other forms of accommodation and a large number of older buildings are being used as budget accommodation. Given the nature of the occupation, the age, the lack of fire safety facilities and the predominant timber construction of the buildings, fire risk is very high in a large proportion of budget accommodation buildings. The majority of budget accommodation buildings were built prior to the introduction of the Building Act 1975 and had to comply only with the fire safety standards established by individual local governments at that time.

Between 1976 and 1992, the Building Act contained only minimal fire standards for new buildings of this type. It took until 1992, when the Building Code of Australia commenced in Queensland, for new budget accommodation buildings to be required to comply with contemporary fire safety standards. As a result, the current building and fire safety legislation does not require older buildings to comply with contemporary fire safety standards unless an owner wants to renovate or alter a building or there is a change in the building's use classification under the Building Code of Australia.

As the explanatory notes rightly point out, the Childers incident demonstrated that fire in older buildings with high density use can have devastating consequences. It was reported that safety inspections of 263 of the 276 backpacker hostels in Queensland over two months following the Childers backpackers hostel fire revealed quite a number of fire safety defects. Ten per cent of those were considered to be serious, including blocked emergency exits, no fire evacuation procedures, and overcrowding. The audit was subsequently broadened to include other budget accommodation buildings, such as boarding houses and hotels with sleeping quarters.

The proposed legislation intends to achieve this improvement through the insertion of Part 2A—Fire Safety for Budget Accommodation Buildings. The fire safety standard would be called up by the Standard Building Regulation 1993 and set minimum standards for smoke alarms and emergency lighting. The installation of these minimum required standards will be self-assessable development and will not require a development approval under the Integrated Planning Act 1997. Owners will be able to approach local government to confirm that their buildings comply with the standard if they are in doubt. In the event of higher-risk budget accommodation buildings requiring additional fire safety improvements other than smoke alarms and emergency lighting, this will require a development application that will then be accompanied by a fire safety management plan to be assessed by local governments.

The Local Government Act 1993 will be amended to provide powers of entry for local government officers into budget accommodation buildings to monitor compliance with fire safety standards and local government assessed fire safety management plans. Therefore, the primary responsibility would be firmly with the relevant local council. That would chiefly involve the initial assessment of the buildings, fire safety management plans, and the conduct of ongoing

inspections where it has granted a development approval for building works on a budget accommodation building.

A more limited role has also been outlined for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. This process would involve amending the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 to increase the powers of entry for fire brigade officers to inspect budget accommodation buildings, including conducting random audits to monitor ongoing compliance with the fire safety management plans.

I also wish to make some more detailed comments on various sections of the bill, starting with definitions. 'Budget accommodation building' is defined in section 12B(1) of the legislation as being a building that has shared facilities, including bathroom and sanitary facilities other than a laundry and/or provides accommodation for six or more persons. Included in this definition are backpacker hostels, boarding houses, supported accommodation and hotels providing sleeping accommodation, either as a community service or at commercial rates. Excluded from the definition are motels, correctional facilities, juvenile detention centres, aged care facilities, houses, townhouses, home units and, of course, health care facilities.

This legislation proposes a new Part 2A, a fire safety standard for budget accommodation buildings. It provides for the Department of Local Government and Planning to issue guidelines for compliance with fire safety standards and to ensure they are publicly available and accessible. The owner of a budget accommodation building must have regard to the guidelines in ensuring that their building conforms to the standards under proposed new section 12S(2). In addition, new section 12S(2) proposes that an entity—which is local government—must have regard to the guidelines when it carries out its authorised powers or functions.

Proposed new section 12H provides that the owner of a budget accommodation building must install emergency lighting and an early warning system as described within the fire safety standard, if required, within one year of the commencement of the legislation. Proposed subsection 12H(b) of this section requires an owner to install other fire safety measures as described in the fire safety standard, if required, within three years of the legislation commencing.

The National Party supports the proposed standards. A very real need exists to implement these minimum requirements, particularly for budget accommodation which was built prior to the Building Act and the commencement of the Building Code of Australia in 1992. Queensland's backpacker market grew by 20 per cent in the three-year period up to June 2001, surpassing a national increase of 16 per cent, which highlights the need for reform of fire safety standards for buildings.

However, the responsibility for regulatory compliance with building fire safety will rest with Queensland's local governments. Obviously this will result in the shifting of significant costs to local councils, 91 of which have no local law relating to the regulation of budget accommodation. Further, many councils in Queensland—particularly the more remote ones—have neither the expertise to fulfil this responsibility nor the financial wherewithal to pay for it. Many councils responsible for hotels, particularly those in western and remote areas, will be faced with having to find somebody with the qualifications to do that job. Local governments are happy to help and to play their part, but they do not have to cop the cost as well. Councils will be forced to impose huge costs on the owners of budget accommodation and on their ratepayers.

The feedback provided to date from a survey of Queensland's local governments by the Local Government Association has indicated the following results. The fee to be charged by local governments to assess and decide whether a pre-1992 building conforms to the fire safety standards will range from \$165 to \$2,500. Whether that accommodation is in places such as Ilfracombe, Isisford, Boulia or in the fruit picking areas where the big old hotels are used for this sort of accommodation, it will be quite expensive. The variance in the fee arises from the size and location of the local government, the number of budget accommodation establishments in the local government area, the complexity of the application, and whether a local government retains the existing expertise in-house. Some local councils will be faced with the very real likelihood of sending an employee who is not appropriately qualified to conduct building fire safety assessments.

Another issue which is of concern to the National Party is the expected 100 per cent increase in insurance premiums for local governments, which I mentioned before. The current insurance crisis has already started to impact upon insurance premiums for non-profit organisations, small businesses and voluntary associations.

Proposed new section 12I allows for approval of a longer period for conformity with the fire safety standard. This would allow the owner of a budget accommodation building to apply to local

government to extend the period for compliance with the fire safety standard. If the local government is satisfied that granting a longer period for conformity will not cause undue hardship to the occupant or the budget accommodation building, it can grant the extension with a time to comply and other reasonably imposed conditions. In the event of a fire in the building within the interim period—20 business days to grant the extension—liability would rest with the local council which granted the owner the extension period for conforming to a minimum fire safety standard. This is a major issue. It places a significant insurance risk on every local council in Queensland that is responsible for budget accommodation.

That is not reasonable at all. It is simply not fair. Therefore, the National Party will move to amend these fire safety laws and place the responsibility for the new standards with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, where it should rightfully rest. The bill allows for increased powers of entry for fire brigade officers for inspection and for the issuing of guidelines for fire safety management plans. Those powers are additional to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's current role of assessing buildings in terms of safety standards, so it is commonsense that this regulatory role be taken on by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

The Local Government Association, as a representative of local governments, supports this change, which will be contained in amendments to be moved at the committee stage. I urge the minister to accept this constructive and commonsense set of amendments. The National Party is genuine in its approach to this issue. We know that something must be done. We cannot have a recurrence of past events. Fire safety in these sorts of buildings must be fixed. However, in anyone's language it is not fair to duckshove the cost to local government, as has been done here. I do not believe the government intends to assist local government on this issue.

The Local Government Association has been very forthright on this particular matter and has done a lot of research. This is not the decision of a few councils which have problems; it is a state wide assessment of an issue which has to be resolved and dealt with responsibly. I urge members to remember that when this bill is at the committee stage, because I believe that, if the amendments the opposition intends to move are accepted, this legislation will be of great benefit to Queensland.

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (11.58 a.m.): I am pleased to speak to the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As a result of the Childers backpacker hostel fire on 23 June 2000, which resulted in the tragic loss of 15 lives, a task force was formed to review fire safety standards for budget accommodation buildings across Queensland.

This review included backpacker hostels, boarding houses, hotels and other similar shared accommodation-style buildings. The task force found that many of these buildings contained inadequate fire safety standards. Subsequently, it recommended that a minimum standard of building fire safety be imposed for budget accommodation buildings in line with the current requirements for new buildings under the Building Code of Australia. The budget accommodation sector provides lodgings for a variety of persons, ranging from international tourists in the case of backpacker hostels to people who, because of their low income or disability, have no choice other than to reside in boarding houses.

The Queensland economy has benefited enormously over the past 20 years from the growth in the number of visiting backpacker tourists, which adds some \$480 million to our economy annually. In recent years the Sunshine Coast has also identified the niche market of backpackers. As a former board member/director of Tourism Sunshine Coast, I can say proudly that I was part of Tourism Sunshine Coast when we released a backpacker strategy to target and benefit from the backpacker market. Although they look for lower cost accommodation, they spend a good deal of money per day—something that is well documented in many tourist studies.

The government will ensure that these types of buildings are made safe so as to protect our reputation as a safe destination for backpackers and also to protect the vulnerable people in our community. The proposed legislation will provide the most cost-effective standards possible without compromising occupant safety.

The bill follows detailed research into the safety of budget accommodation buildings and extensive consultation with stakeholders. The standards and compliance mechanisms proposed are the bare minimum to ensure the occupants of budget-style accommodation buildings are safe and that any upgrade costs faced by building owners are reasonable. The bill will ensure that the occupants of hostels, whether they be tourists, itinerant workers, people on low incomes or those with disabilities, are provided with the same standards of safety that the rest of us take for granted, and can safely evacuate a building in the event of a fire.

The bill allows a fire safety standard to be adopted under the Standard Building Regulation 1993. All budget accommodation buildings will need to comply with this standard. The bill requires that smoke alarms and emergency lighting required by the standard be installed in all budget accommodation buildings within one year. Smoke alarms will ensure that occupants are provided with early warning of a fire, while emergency lighting will guide them safely out of the building. We all realise that over the past decade smoke alarms have become a vital lifesaving device. Now—thank God—smoke alarms are quite common and more affordable for both domestic and commercial-type buildings.

However, even with alarms and emergency lighting, some accommodation buildings, due to their age, design and occupancy, will still not meet all of the provisions under the standard and will not allow for the safe evacuation of occupants. These higher risk buildings may require further upgrading or enhanced management procedures. The bill ensures that these buildings will meet the standard within a period of three years—a lead-in time.

In addition, local governments will be responsible for assessing these applications, as they already have the statutory powers and responsibilities under the Building Act 1975 in respect of these buildings. In addition, many local governments have local laws addressing the standards of these buildings. I acknowledge that local governments have raised concerns about this. Owners will be able to apply to local governments for extended compliance time on the grounds of undue hardship. I trust that each council will make a decision on a case-by-case basis. In a small number of cases the bill anticipates that because of the design of the building it may not be viable or cost effective to alter its fabric. In these cases the proposed standard will allow alternative solutions, such as a management system which outlines staff procedures to be implemented to evacuate people in the event of a fire. In these situations the bill will require councils to undertake annual inspections to ensure the procedural systems remain operational. This inspection could be carried out in conjunction with those required under the local government law, thus resulting in a lower cost impost on councils. Hopefully, it will be the case that these inspections can be carried out simultaneously with other inspections.

Improvements in budget accommodation buildings' fire safety standards will not be effective unless there is also a continued compliance with the standard. To complement constructive improvements, owners of existing buildings will be required under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 to prepare within one year a fire safety management plan for new buildings. A fire safety management plan will be required to be submitted with the development application for building work. The plan must comply with the fire safety standard called up by the Standard Building Regulation 1993 under the Building Act 1975. This plan will require owners to identify the number of occupants allowed in the building, the maintenance schedule for fire equipment, evacuation procedures and training programs for staff. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will undertake random audits to ensure owners comply with these plans.

To ensure owners comply with the plan, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and local government officers will be given increased powers of entry to inspect the living areas of budget accommodation buildings. Currently, these officers are sometimes denied access to these parts of a residential building, but it is critical that compliance inspections are undertaken. This will also enhance the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's current random fire safety audits. It will be an offence for an owner not to upgrade the building in accordance with the fire safety standard, and the minister has touched previously upon the penalties.

The Sunshine Coast has a vibrant tourism industry, which has a benefit to our community that is estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars annually. The backpacker budget accommodation market is a growing one. Just over a decade ago, I was lucky to be a backpacker travelling the world. I know first-hand that backpackers talk to one another about various destinations, safety standards and tragedies that occur from country to country. We have to lift our standards. I commend the minister and the department for undertaking good consultation in the preparation of this bill, and I commend it to the House.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (12.06 p.m.): I speak in support of the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. The types of buildings covered by this legislation are those which provide accommodation for six or more people where they share bathroom and sanitary facilities. These are defined to include boarding houses, backpacker hostels and hotels, including buildings which accommodate people who have a disability. Houses, accredited aged care facilities, juvenile detention and corrective centres, school dormitories, workers' camps and motels are not covered by this definition. I understand these buildings are subject to separate investigations proposed for other high-risk buildings. Buildings used as guesthouses or farm stays

might fall within the definition if each building accommodates six or more people and those people share the bathroom and sanitary facilities within that building or an associated building.

The bill will require an owner to comply with the prescribed fire safety standard. This standard is to be called up by the Building Standards Regulation and will include a range of solutions for owners to comply with, depending on the type of construction and the size and height of the building. Owners will also be required to prepare and implement a fire safety management plan outlining the ongoing maintenance procedures and evacuation plans for the building. This is an important component in ensuring that buildings remain safe in the event of a fire.

Building owners should be able to assess whether their buildings meet the minimum standards for smoke alarms and emergency lighting. However, where additional work is required to meet the standard, council approval will be required. Owners will also be able to apply to the local council to confirm their level of compliance. I understand that extensive guidelines are being prepared to assist building owners and local governments understand their obligations under this legislation.

Compliance with a fire safety standard will become mandatory for all budget accommodation building owners. The onus to meet these requirements will be on the owner. However, local governments and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will be able to enter these premises to check whether buildings comply with these standards. It will be an offence for owners to not upgrade their building in accordance with the fire safety standard. The penalty will be up to 165 penalty units, or \$12,375. Failure to implement a fire safety management plan will attract a penalty of up to 100 penalty units, or \$7,500.

The plan must also be kept available for inspection by the public. Failure to do this will attract a penalty of up to 20 penalty units or \$1,500. In some circumstances, the additional cost to install the extra fire safety features may place an additional burden on building owners to the point where it would create undue hardship for the residents or guests. In these situations, the legislation allows owners to apply to the local council for an extension of time to carry out the work. I believe the time frames for compliance are reasonable. However, should an owner feel they are not and the period for an extension of time is not approved by the council, an appeal can be made to a tribunal to hear the matter.

Appeal provisions are available to building owners in a number of other situations, namely in relation to a council decision to approve or refuse a building application or where the owner wishes to challenge the advice from a local council about whether a building complies with the fire safety standard. Owners and occupiers are also able to appeal against the directions of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the maintenance of the fire safety features.

Training and education will be provided to building owners and occupiers, local government officers, architects and building designers, fire protection contractors, fire service officers and other interested building professionals through an extensive series of seminars and workshops throughout Queensland.

Building owners and occupiers, particularly, are encouraged to attend these seminars to gain the greatest assistance in understanding their responsibilities under this legislation.

Councillor Hinchliffe has recently been quite critical of this bill. I thought Councillor Hinchliffe would have understood that all bills have costs and benefits. The important question is whether the benefits outweigh the costs involved and are the costs reasonable. In this case I believe that, through the minister's hard work, we have achieved a solution where, yes, there will be costs to local councils and to building owners but I believe these costs are reasonable and the benefits definitely outweigh them.

We are talking about human lives here. We saw the tragedy of the Childers backpacker fire. Many of my ex-police colleagues were involved in the investigation. I know the horror they went through; I can only begin to imagine the horror that the victims went through. I find it personally offensive for Councillor Hinchliffe to put dollars ahead of human lives. I believe that the economic rationalist mantra that he regurgitates is personally offensive. If Councillor Hinchliffe wants to put a dollar value on human life, let him go for it. I commend this bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (12.13 p.m.): In rising to support the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill I also want to put on the record that I will be supporting the proposed amendments to the bill.

Sadly, over a period of time we have had a number of budget accommodation fires. Even more regrettable is that a significant number of those fires have been personally lit; they have

either been arson attacks or, in the very sad case at Childers, an attack by somebody who perhaps had some fairly strong feelings against the owners of the building and the occupants of the building.

Having said that, no matter what is the purpose of the building, it needs to be fire-safe. I do not know about other electorate offices, but at my electorate office we find that the fire brigade often calls in to see how we are going with regard to evacuation plans and to check on our supply of fire extinguishers. They also look at exit places and exit plans. I believe that any building—be it a family home, a motel, a hospital or even Parliament House—needs to have some sort of reasonably regular practice of exiting the building. This particularly applies to a multistorey building or a building that contains a collection of people who do not normally work together, such as in budget accommodation.

The initial requirement for boarding houses to have smoke alarms and emergency lighting fitted within a year is most achievable. Nowadays, it is quite easy to fit fire alarms. Emergency lighting is something that can be quite easily retro-fitted. I commend the minister for that very achievable target. Operators have other obligations such as evacuation plans, maintenance records and management plans detailing fire safety procedures. Without having information or representations to the contrary, I can only assume that these things will also be readily achievable.

It will be more difficult in older style buildings to retro-fit a sprinkler system but I guess that is something that can be discussed with the local authority. I share the member for Warrego's concerns about the transference of not only inspection obligations but vulnerability to litigation in relation in some of this legislation. Local authority is best placed to administer building inspections. It is an area of work in which they are readily involved. Local authorities have very qualified building inspectors. They are very practical people. Our building inspector in Calliope shire is a very practical man who is able to communicate with builders and building owners in a clear and concise way.

However, I am concerned if the intended or unintended consequence of this legislation is to transfer public liability and other insurance liability to the local authority. The fact is that the fire safety standards are appropriately set by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. At some stage premises should be inspected by the service. On that basis, the responsibility for the final tick-off as far as compliance is concerned should be that of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. Certainly, any ordinary Queenslander would find some of the fire standards difficult to understand. I am not saying that they are irrelevant or unnecessary, but they can be seen to be a little bit difficult to understand and therefore transferring responsibility to the local authority, where there may not be a person qualified in fire and rescue issues, could lead to some misinterpretation, or differing interpretation, of the standards.

As I said earlier, I support this legislation. I support the requirement for building owners to adhere to reasonable and achievable fire safety standards. However, I support the amendments that clarify legal liability as far as local authorities are concerned. They cannot continue to absorb costs that are delegated to them from other spheres of government. I will be supporting the amendments.

I commend the minister for her response to the very sad situation at Childers. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.18 p.m.): I rise to support the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001 and I commend the minister for her foresight and concern over the circumstances relating to the backpackers hostel fire in Childers. This bill implements the recommendations of the government's Fire Safety Task Force by ensuring that new and existing budget accommodation buildings, including backpacker hostels, boarding houses, hotels and other shared accommodation-type premises meet minimum fire safety standards.

The new legislation will, of course, also be applicable to budget accommodation buildings built before 1992 so that it may take into account those older timber structures that pose the greatest fire risk. It is important that owners of these types of accommodation are not unduly financially penalised. Building owners have 12 months to implement the basic provisions of a new fire safety standard. This includes installing smoke alarms and emergency lighting. Building upgrades that will be more expensive will need to comply with the remainder of the standard, and within two years from the commencement of the new laws these building owners will be expected to comply with the remainder of the new standard.

Not only will the accommodation have to comply with the new standard but it will also need to comply with requirements for a fire safety management plan. This plan will ensure that there are adequate measures in place for the safe evacuation of residents in case of fire. The bill allows for local government officers and fire service officers to be given increased powers for inspecting this type of accommodation.

As a government, we have a responsibility to ensure that everything possible is done to make sure that preventative measures are in place so that tragedies, such as the Childers backpackers hostel fire that claimed the lives of 15 young people, do not occur again.

The best that any government can do is to learn by what has happened and how it happened to enable them to take steps to reduce the risk of it happening again. This government did not take long to act and immediately ordered fire authorities to undertake safety audits on budget accommodation across the state. A high level Fire Safety Task Force was appointed to review Queensland's fire safety legislation.

Safety inspections were conducted within days of the Childers fire on Brisbane City Backpackers Hostel, and other blitzes were repeated at many unregistered, low cost accommodation in other parts of the state. Other action taken included providing multilingual brochures on fire safety in all budget accommodation buildings for guests on check-in and providing these brochures at Internet cafes and on popular Internet web sites that backpackers regularly visit.

I extend my appreciation to the fire service, local government inspectors, workplace health and safety officers and others involved in the fire safety inspections for the dedicated and competent manner in which they approached the task of inspecting premises and for formulating the recommendations to improve fire safety of Queenslanders and visitors across the state. While many of these measures are costly to accommodation providers, the government will not sit on its hands or fiddle while budget accommodation burns. Ensuring the safety of residents is our paramount concern. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr STRONG (Burnett—ALP) (12.20 p.m.): I speak in support of the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. When fire ripped through the Palace Backpackers building in June 2000, Queensland and Australia were thrust into the international spotlight. In the following hours, days and weeks, the small community of Childers was in the glare of publicity from the world's media. The families who lost loved ones tried to determine what had happened and how 15 young people tragically lost their lives.

Immediately this government took action. The then Emergency Services Minister, Stephen Robertson, instigated an urgent review of budget accommodation buildings across the state. Fire officers conducted hundreds of inspections to ascertain the fire safety standards of buildings in the budget accommodation sector. After the fire, certain buildings in the Bundaberg district created a hell of a lot of alarm in the community, considering that some of them were over 90 years old and up to four storeys.

Mr McNamara: That is why this legislation is so very important.

Mr STRONG: I take the interjection of the member for Hervey Bay, because I know that he has an interest in this. He is a hardworking member for his community and they are neighbours with our friends in Childers.

Some of the findings of the review were not pleasant. It found that many buildings being used for budget accommodation were not up to scratch in terms of fire safety standards. The outcomes of the inspection process were that clear action needed to be taken. I am delighted to say that over the past 18 months, even before this legislation came before parliament, the budget accommodation industry has improved out of sight. For that I am sure every member of this House will be more than grateful. I am sure that Queensland's millions of visitors and those among us who live in a range of other budget and supported accommodation buildings will also be appreciative of the improved conditions.

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service fire officers and staff from the Department of Local Government and Planning have worked extremely closely with various industry groups to develop these changes. In essence, this legislation is their collective effort. Everyone involved should be applauded for their contributions. Decisions such as contained in the bill being debated today are not easy, but this government is about making tough decisions for the betterment of the community at large. Already a number of the 12 recommendations made following that initial inspection process after the Childers fire have been implemented, and the passing of this legislation will further boost that effort.

In July last year a new licensing regime was implemented by the Building Services Authority. That regime was designed to raise the standard of protection in all buildings. The compulsory licensing model was the result of strong collaboration between the government, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and industry groups, with public safety and improved standards the driving considerations. It meant that from 1 July 2001 companies and individuals that operate as fire protection contractors had to comply with the new requirements, including mandatory professional indemnity insurance. The new process, which replaced an unwieldy voluntary system, includes contractors installing, repairing, maintaining and certifying fire protection systems. Licensing covers all fire protection systems, including portable devices such as extinguishers, passive systems, detection systems, sprinklers, hose reels and hydrants.

In December another key recommendation was enacted with the introduction of a new process whereby firefighters in Queensland now have the option of issuing on-the-spot fines for breaches of fire safety standards in commercial and industrial buildings. The new infringement notice system adds to existing fire safety enforcement options and has been designed to improve fire safety standards in Queensland buildings. The introduction of this on-the-spot fine system will help to reinforce to owners and occupiers the importance of their fire safety responsibilities.

While firefighters appreciate having the additional powers, they hope that these measures will never be required. What they want is to have the standards maintained without legal action. The bill being debated today is being closely watched by fire agencies across the country. It will set the benchmark for others to reach and will put Queensland at the forefront of fire safety standards in Australia, something I am sure all members of this House appreciate.

The fire at Childers was a traumatic event for the whole community. To single people out for their efforts in getting over this traumatic experience would do injustice to some other people. To name everyone I would have to go through the local area phone book line by line, because it was a community effort. The SES people in Childers on that night came from places such as Moore Park, Bargara, Bundaberg and Maryborough. There were people who travelled up to two hours to do 12 hours work and then travelled two hours home, all voluntarily. Their efforts are to be applauded as well. I commend the bill to the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Liddy Clark): Order! I welcome to the gallery the rest of the cast of *Art*, Kym Gyngell and Geoff Kelso.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (12.26 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. Certainly the Childers backpacker hostel fire was a tragedy. Whilst many occupants managed to escape the fire, there were 15 who did not make it to safety. This was a very unfortunate incident. We now know that the fire was deliberately lit, and the culprit is behind bars. This one deliberate action by a single person has led to these stringent laws, which will affect everyone in the budget accommodation industry, being proposed.

It is true that many older buildings are used for budget accommodation, but for all of these buildings the percentage destroyed by fire is very low. There is concern amongst owners of this type of accommodation about the high cost in some cases to upgrade to the required specifications at a time when many are doing it tough. With the 11 September events affecting tourism, farmers tightening their belts and not employing as many people and more competition in the industry, they too are doing it tough.

An interesting point about the Childers hostel fire is that the building had safety equipment installed and yet it was not working. Even though the owners had called on a tradesman to repair the fault, they still had to wait for that person to physically come and do the job. It is amazing that it was during that time that the fire occurred. This makes one wonder about how effective these new laws will be. After expending large amounts of money in some cases, will this equipment still be operational five, 10 or 20 years down the track? If the equipment is found to be faulty, the owner will still have to call a professional to do repairs. There could still be a situation such as happened at the Childers hostel.

There are many more modern budget accommodation places which were built before 1992. They, too, are required to upgrade their premises. The cost to them also will be high, as the equipment is more expensive to put in now than if it had been installed in the building during construction.

Budget accommodation is defined as shared facilities including sanitary and bathroom facilities but not including a laundry and which accommodates six or more persons. These include backpacker hostels, boarding houses, support accommodation and hotels providing sleeping

accommodation either as a community service or at commercial rates. Clearly, this is a bill which will impact a wide variety and, I suggest, a very large number of operators.

While there is a clear need to ensure public resting places are safe, I simply want to flag that yet again this government is coming up with laws, obligations and requirements to impose on others but shows very little, if any, interest in helping carry the cost burden of implementation. At this time with additional burdens being faced, such as the skyrocketing costs of insurance which we are all familiar with, I urge a reasonable allowance of time for the implementation of this bill's demands. Whether it is smoke alarms or regular inspections, fire safety is not and should not be an issue only for accommodation operators. It is also a cause for concern among local authorities. Local councils in my electorate have clearly identified the risks. The councils are concerned that they will be required to play an ongoing monitoring role to ensure that these standards are complied with.

There is another issue here—that is, surely the inspection of anything to do with fire safety, monitoring of installations and the wider fire safety environment in these places, including exit signs, escape plans and so on, is best done by the dedicated professionals of the fire brigades. It is that organisation which has the greatest expertise in this area and the most advanced training. If the fire brigade only had enough funding, it would be an enormously useful organisation. However, we live under a government which, it seems, is content to downgrade hours, cut staff and even close stations while introducing legislation controlling fire safety. Of course we need legislation in this area, but we also need enough fire officers in enough stations which are open and manned often enough to meet community needs.

I make it clear that of course safety is of primary concern, but this government is well practised in coming up with laws for the public good while skipping out on the actual delivery. In far too many instances that is left to ordinary Queenslanders who may be operating in a particular industry and to our already overstressed local governments. If the trend of local government performing so many state government tasks continues, I wonder whether we will see one day an efficiency report identifying the Beattie government as a waste of time.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Liddy Clark): Order! Before calling the member for Cairns, I welcome to the gallery the principal, captains and vice-captains of the Mitchelton State High School in the electorate of Ferny Grove.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (12.31 p.m.): It is my pleasure to speak on this important bill, the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As has already been recognised, the bill comes about through very sad—tragic in fact—circumstances where unfortunately 15 young people lost their lives. What has been revealed since that tragic event is that it was not just that place that had difficulties in terms of fire safety and meeting existing regulations. Rather, many accommodation houses around the state have not maintained their existing systems. Investigations have indicated that there needs to be an upgrading of the requirements and regulations for the protection of those who stay in such places, whether in the short term or on a more permanent basis.

This bill identifies and targets a variety of budget accommodation buildings, particularly in relation to the new provisions that enforce the installation of smoke alarms, emergency lighting and other fire safety standards and those which require building upgrades, such as improved exits, to comply with the new standard. We have been more vigilant since the tragic event in assessing the present situation with regard to budget accommodation. I must say that this is particularly relevant in Cairns because it contains a high proportion of the backpacker hostels, which are well patronised around the state. They are well patronised in Cairns, because roughly 60 per cent of the international backpacker market comes to Cairns to stay and, I hope in general, enjoy themselves in a wide range of activities. Many of these young people come to Cairns for experiential and even thrilling kinds of tourism ventures associated with the Barrier Reef, whitewater rafting, bungee jumping and other such—to them, at least—delights.

However, following this tragedy and the subsequent checking of the situation in our backpacker hostels and accommodation houses in the far north, we were dismayed. I must give recognition to the swift and firm action taken by the Cairns City Council and its inspectors. Cairns had some 54 hostels on the register at that time. The bad news indeed is that, of those hostels immediately inspected, only 16 operated within council by-laws. Four hostels were closed down immediately because it was believed that they posed an unacceptable risk to those who stayed there. One of those hostels had 26 people living in four bedrooms! Another seven hostels voluntarily agreed not to trade as hostels. As the months went on, it was revealed that there were hostels which were not registered and which were not fit and proper places for groups of people to

stay and which did not comply with any level of legislation existing at the time or with fire standards.

I give recognition to the tremendous leadership taken by Stephen Welsh, who is not only one of our own backpacker hostel proprietors but the Queensland Backpackers and Independent Travellers Industry Association President. He has therefore been a leader in not only the Cairns industry but across the state of Queensland. He made it plain and was supported by all good backpacker hostel operators that proper safety standards were part of their agenda in order to reassure all backpackers who visit Cairns and the far north and other places that they were in safe premises and well looked after. He gave no support at all to those hostels in breach of the regulations and those operating illegally. In fact, he welcomed the extra initiatives of both local and state government to ensure that all hostels were properly registered and met the standards properly.

Nonetheless, when it came down to the detail, it was clear that he and other backpacker operators had some real concerns, and I am pleased to support them. The original discussion paper released in relation to the details of the new fire standard that follows from this bill contained some expectations that were not easily and reasonably complied with by the backpacker industry, particularly in existing hostels. It is very much easier to institute new standards for new developments than it is to require that new standards be met by old developments, and met quickly. So the detail of what are reasonable standards to set and the time line by which these standards must be met has been discussed at some length in Cairns and elsewhere.

Some statements made in that early discussion paper were made with good intentions as well as basic information by those involved in fire standards and local government—not people expert in the tourism industry—which suggested that the increased costs as a consequence of the draft standards would be relatively small and 'would not significantly affect the competitiveness of Queensland as a backpacker destination'. I believe that this referred to an estimated rise in cost of \$17.50 per person per week in order to meet the new building and fire standards required. This is the kind of superficial statement that unfortunately government people and related consultants can make without giving due regard to all of the imperatives being taken across a wide range of portfolios at all three levels of government and which impact on the costs that must be charged by various tourist accommodation and other businesses to those visiting the region. One charge after another after another—not independent of each other but all affecting the bottom line—can be serious indeed in a market that is highly competitive at an international level.

However, I am pleased to inform members that considerable discussion in Cairns between the fire service and the backpacker operators led by Stephen Welsh has been very productive. An ongoing relationship has developed between the two that will be productive not only in terms of instituting this bill and the following new fire standard but also for the longer-term safety and good functioning of backpacker hostels. In fact, recently the *Cairns Post* published a picture of Steven Welsh as the leader of the industry trying out some of the training provided by the Queensland Fire Service officers, including one of our leading lights, Gavin Holden, to backpacker hostel proprietors and managers. I give recognition to the good sense of that effort to work together.

What further is happening and remains to be done following the passing of this legislation in parliament is the details in the standard. Following consultations, I gather with supported accommodation as well as hotels and backpackers' industry groups, a new set of draft standards will be released at the end of this month or at the beginning of May. Through the very detailed and genuine consultation undertaken by the minister's department and involving the fire service, we all hope that these standards will be close to perfect and that it will not therefore be long before they can be in place. I commend the bill to the House and recognise the very valuable, intense and important but effective work that has been done by the minister and her staff.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (12.41 p.m.): This bill has particular relevance to my electorate as it concerns the requirement to improve fire safety in budget accommodation units typically used by the backpacker market. Airlie Beach has long been recognised as a mecca for backpackers, who come to enjoy the relaxed lifestyle and visit one of the world's great wonders, the Great Barrier Reef. While the Whitsunday area attracts a wide range of visitors and tourist, the backpacker market remains an important component of the area's wealth-generating tourism market. The traditional view of the backpacker is that they do not spend money and contribute little to the local economy. This is not the case. While backpackers do look for economy

accommodation, they willingly spend money to participate in social and adventure activities such as sailing, diving, hiking and experiencing the unique activities associated with an island holiday.

Further north in Bowen, backpackers also look for budget accommodation. Some of these visitors come to Bowen as tourists, but many come on a seasonal basis to work in the local horticulture industry, for example, picking tomatoes. While backpackers in both Airlie Beach and Bowen generally look for budget accommodation, this does not mean that they expect to have their safety compromised as a result. The tragic fire in Childers has brought home in the most terrible of circumstances the need to establish fire safety standards in all budget accommodation, regardless of the location or age of the premises.

This bill will achieve a satisfactory standard of fire safety in budget accommodation buildings by requiring the buildings not approved under the Building Code of Australia to comply with prescribed minimum fire safety standards. In addition, it will require owners and occupiers of budget accommodation buildings to prepare and implement a fire safety management plan.

Budget accommodation generally has a higher occupation density than other forms of accommodation, and a large number of older buildings are being used as budget accommodation. Given the nature of the occupation, the age of the buildings, the lack of fire safety facilities and predominant timber construction, fire risk is very high in a large proportion of budget accommodation buildings. Many of these buildings were constructed before the introduction of the Building Act 1975 and only had to comply with the fire safety standards established by individual local governments at that time.

Between 1976 and 1992, the Building Act contained only minimal fire safety standards for new buildings of this type. It was not until 1992, when the Building Code of Australia commenced in Queensland, that new budget accommodation buildings were required to comply with contemporary fire safety standards. Current building and fire safety legislation does not require older buildings to comply with contemporary fire safety standards unless an owner wants to renovate or alter a building, or there is a change of the building's use classification under the Building Code of Australia. However, classifications are broad, and these higher standards would not apply, for example, where a building is converted from hotel accommodation to a backpacker hostel.

The proposed legislation will ensure owners of existing budget accommodation buildings comply with a prescribed fire safety standard which will be called up by regulation. A draft of the proposed fire safety standard was tabled in parliament with the bill. In order to comply with the fire safety standard, building owners will have to ensure their buildings meet a number of minimum standards for fire safety in their buildings. For most buildings, this will only require the installation within one year of smoke alarms in bedrooms and corridors to provide occupants with early warning of a fire, as well as emergency lighting.

Experience has shown that the lives of people can be saved when smoke from a fire is detected early and they are given substantial warning of an impending fire. That is an important fact. The standards to be called up by this legislation focus on early warning and safe evacuation, not property protection. The fitting of these smoke alarms to existing buildings may be a costly exercise for some building owners. However, this government has ensured that the most cost-effective solutions are available for owners, depending on the size, height and construction materials of the building. The other component for ensuring safe evacuation is the provision of emergency lighting. Obviously, smoke from fires in buildings can disorient people, particularly when they are unfamiliar with their surroundings.

Emergency lighting will be required in all budget accommodation buildings to guide occupants to a safe place in the event of a fire. This lighting can be the existing lighting in the building, which is activated by the smoke alarms in the corridors, or a dedicated system of emergency lighting. The legislation requires owners to comply fully with the standard within three years.

An honourable member: Top idea.

Ms JARRATT: Yes. I am advised that about 400 buildings across the state will require further physical upgrades for such items as emergency escape routes, exit signage, fire extinguishers and hose reels. In addition, all budget accommodation buildings will need to comply with prescribed occupancy rates. Many of these items have been discussed in detail by previous speakers. One of the risks with these types of buildings is the potential for overcrowding. The proposed standard will nominate a minimum floor area of 2.5 square metres per person in each

bedroom. This is consistent with the Commonwealth guideline for backpacker hostels, *Building for backpackers*.

An issue also addressed by this fire safety standard is the evacuation of people with a disability. In many cases, full-time carers live on-site with these people and would be available to assist them during an evacuation. However, while the installation of fire safety features will ensure that these buildings meet an acceptable level of fire safety, the ongoing inspection and maintenance by the building owners is a key factor in the continued safety of these buildings.

A fire safety management plan will also have to be prepared by all building owners within one year of this legislation being implemented and be available for inspection by Queensland Fire and Rescue Service officers during a random audit inspection. A plan will include the following components—the allowable number of occupants for the building; the proposed maintenance schedule for the building's prescribed fire safety installations; the evacuation plan for evacuating the building's occupants in the event of a fire in the building; proposed training programs for occupants and persons employed in the building about fire management and prevention and emergency evacuation; and a list of the building's prescribed fire safety installations, together with the brand name and model number of each installation, if applicable.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will continue its role of ensuring budget accommodation buildings remain safe in the event of a fire by carrying out random audit inspections of these buildings. This is a fine piece of legislation that looks at the safety of not just backpackers but all people who live in or spend short times in budget accommodation. I commend the bill to the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Phillips): Order! Before calling the member for Maryborough, I welcome to the gallery the school captains and the principal, Mr John Corbett, of the Shailer Park State High School.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—Ind) (12.49 p.m.): I refer to this bill with some sense of familiarity and much sadness—familiarity because the tragic event which precipitated this legislation occurred in Childers, a small community very close to my electorate and one in which I have many relatives.

In fact, many of the backpackers who work in the vegetable and fruit farms around Childers also work within my electorate and, indeed, within the electorate of the minister. Subsequently, they frequently visit Fraser Island where, hopefully, they spend quite a lot of the money that they have earned and thus leave it in our country. The itinerant backpacker community has become a very important component of the Fraser Coast community.

This bill cannot be addressed without paying tribute to the immediate and ongoing compassionate and supportive activities of the Childers community, very ably led by example by Bill Trevor. Bill Trevor, a very competent and energetic mayor, has subsequently visited grieving families in Europe and the UK. We, as Queenslanders, are grateful to Bill and his community for repairing and enhancing the reputation of Queensland as a safe, hospitable and caring place to visit and work.

Obviously, a bill such as this, with its aim to prevent further tragic events in high density accommodation, deserves strong support. As I read the bill and the explanatory notes, I was constantly reminded that the basic requirement that was being addressed was quality control, or quality assurance. QA in the building industry is essential for safety and I am happy to support legislation that compels contractors and builders to abide by strict QA standards. Unfortunately, when thinking about QA, I am reminded of the unfortunate situation of one of my constituents, John Chandler. John Chandler has an enviable reputation as a reputable and competent builder with great attention to QA. In the past, John Chandler has worked on projects supervised by Project Services, in other words, government buildings. In each of three situations, there has been a QA problem and John Chandler has been, I believe, unfairly penalised to the point at which he is now struggling to survive. This week I received five glowing references concerning John Chandler's honesty, professionalism and devotion to QA. I look forward to the regulations concerning QA, which should emerge following this bill.

To finalise my contribution, I congratulate the minister and the government on the introduction of this legislation. I strongly urge the government to continue its insistence on compliance with QA standards and ensure that that compliance goes right across the industry and includes Project Services. In summary, I support the legislation and I support the

amendments, which will try to accommodate the valid concerns of the Local Government Association.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (12.53 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. As a result of the fires in the Childers backpacker hostel on 21 June 2000 and the tragic loss of 15 lives, the previous Minister for Emergency Services established a high-level task force to review the current fire safety laws for existing budget accommodation buildings in Queensland. These buildings comprise backpacker hostels, boarding houses, hotels and other similar shared accommodation style buildings.

As part of these investigations, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service inspected approximately 1,400 accommodation buildings across Queensland. These investigations highlighted numerous safety issues including the lack of alarms, locked exit doors, no exit signs, no emergency lighting and overcrowding. The task force found that, by today's standards, a significant number of budget accommodation buildings contained inadequate fire safety standards to protect the lives of those residents who occupy the premises. However, the task force noted that many of these buildings would have conformed substantially to the relevant building laws in force at the time that they were constructed. I must point out that, prior to 1976, these laws were the responsibility of individual local governments. The key recommendation of the task force was that contemporary building fire safety standards be imposed to provide lifesaving protection in all existing budget accommodation. The report identified several options to achieve industry compliance, including industry accreditation, local laws and the amendment of state building legislation.

The task force preferred the amendment of the Building Act 1975 and its regulations, because this option was the only way of ensuring that all budget accommodation would meet minimum standards within the prescribed time. In addition to ensuring ongoing compliance with these standards, a system of regular testing, maintenance and auditing was also recommended. Because the fire safety improvements considered were likely to impose appreciable costs to building owners, a regulatory impact statement—or RIS—was prepared as required under section 43 of the Statutory Instruments Act 1992 to fully assess the economic and social costs, benefits and implications of different regulatory options. As a member of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee in this parliament, I applaud its inclusion and congratulate those who helped prepare it.

The work to complete the RIS involved comprehensive research into different building types and upgrade options. It looked at five possible options for upgrading existing budget accommodation buildings. These ranged from full compliance with the Building Code of Australia, as recommended by the task force, through to the installation of smoke alarms and emergency lighting. It also considered three options for ongoing compliance ranging from self-assessment through to annual auditing by local government. Each of the options was costed to gain an understanding of the possible economic impacts on building owners for further discussion during the development of the proposed fire safety standards. Copies of the RIS were sent to representatives of the backpacker, boarding house, supported accommodation and hotel sectors as well as local government.

I am pleased to inform the House that 34 consultation meetings were held with the representatives from these sectors around the state. Letters advising the availability of the RIS were sent to 1,400 budget accommodation building owners. Sixty written submissions were received from the groups, such as the Supported Accommodation Providers Association, the Queensland Backpacker and Independent Travellers Industry Association, Youth Hostels of Australia Queensland, the Queensland Hotels Association and individual local governments. Overall, there was clear support to improve fire safety standards in budget accommodation buildings.

Some of the key issues arising from the RIS were that the proposed standards should have regard to the additional costs of retro-fitting existing buildings and be cost effective; changes needed to be made to the building fabric of higher risk buildings and that each building should be assessed on a case-by-case basis as there will not be a single solution that can be applied to all without imposing unreasonable requirements on some building owners; the standards need to be affordable to ensure low income residents are not disadvantaged; and legislation should apply consistently across the state rather than on a local government basis. The feedback on the RIS was used to develop this legislation.

Importantly, it recognises the need for early warning systems and emergency lighting to ensure that occupants can safely evacuate in the event of a fire. When further changes are

required to make buildings safe, the RIS recognises that every building will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis rather than applying a single solution.

As members can see, there has been extensive public consultation on this legislation. Before I commend the bill to the House, I take this opportunity to compliment the fire station personnel and rural fire brigade crews in the electorate of Pumicestone for carrying out free fire safety inspections in local residents' homes, units, rental accommodation, flats, caravans and even sheds. The advice given is practical and is aimed at reducing the occurrence of death and injury due to fires in homes. Residents may be eligible for a free smoke alarm to be fitted. I give special thanks to station officer Ross Nunn, who has informed me that the service is popular with people on Bribie Island and the surrounding areas. In the past six months, he and his personnel have carried out 100 inspections, installed 60 free smoke alarms, and the station has not had any reports of residential fires over that time. Ross believes that the strategy is working. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): It is a great pleasure to rise today to speak very briefly on the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. I congratulate the minister on bringing this very important piece of legislation before the House. I refer to its importance because of the government's enormous responsibility to legislate effectively in this area. That legislative responsibility extends, at a very general level and at an economic level, to addressing the backpacker industry, which contributes an estimated \$480 million to this state. It is certainly a very substantial industry on any estimation. Its credibility and its integrity in the international sphere are at stake, so we must ensure that safety measures are properly regulated.

That legislative responsibility extends not only to the economic level but also to fundamental issues of personal safety. This parliament has a moral responsibility to ensure the safety of all persons—Australians and tourists—who live in low-budget accommodation around Queensland. Those types of accommodation are situated in my electorate of Greenslopes and I consider those residents to be friends. Buildings which might be described as hostels are situated in my electorate and over the years I have taken a great interest in those institutions and in ensuring the welfare of the residents in them.

These categories of accommodation are often controversial because they house people who are disabled or who have a range of other problems—perhaps a drinking problem or a drug problem. One could almost view these places as one step back from a nursing home in terms of the quasi care situations that might occur within them. That is one area of interest that I have in this particular piece of legislation, as well as the general interest of welfare for these people throughout Queensland.

In my younger days, I travelled extensively and stayed in many hostels. I shudder to think of the precarious and dangerous situations I might have been in, especially as I travelled through countries such as Afghanistan.

Mr Johnson: There's not very much of it left, is there?

Mr FENLON: There is probably very little of it left today. Certainly wherever people are, they are entitled to basic levels of care. The fundamental issue of care is what is at stake here and it is at the heart of this legislation. There is an expectation that people will live safely in this accommodation, whether they are short-term or long-term residents.

Fire is just one of a range of pertinent safety issues. I worry about the safety of young people staying in these places, in terms of the integrity exercised by the proprietors of these establishments and whether they will ensure that the residents are not subject to attack or any other predatory behaviour from people in positions of authority or from outsiders.

There are a range of issues that are relevant in these places to ensure the safety of people. Every member in this place who is a parent would be well aware of that. If we place one of our own sons or daughters in these establishments, we want only the best for them and, as such, we want only the best for those parents overseas who have their children staying in institutions in Queensland. I know that every person in this House and my community felt very deeply for the people who lost children in the Childers backpacker fire. It was a great tragedy that was felt by every single Queenslander. We know, perhaps to some degree, how those parents felt.

It is indeed an appropriate response that today we are making a start on the road to regulating and improving safety in this backpacker industry. The point I make very clearly is that this is a start. There are probably many other areas to address in terms of ensuring that young

people, and particularly those from overseas, who stay in these places are well cared for and that they are not threatened or jeopardised in any way.

In conclusion, I strongly suggest to all proprietors of these institutions who continue to operate in the future, whether they are in hostels for disabled people in my electorate or in the tourist regions, that no matter what is done in terms of concrete safety measures which are mandated within this bill, that no matter what physical apparatus is in place—in terms of fire alarms, lights, escape routes, procedures, et cetera, all of which are referred to in the bill—there is no substitute for a human being on duty for as much of the time as is possible, especially during night hours when many dozens of people could be fast asleep in a building. Some of those people may have been drinking or they may be on medication, and there may be some difficulty in those people even being roused by electronic alarms, et cetera. There is no substitute whatsoever for having human beings supervising on the spot 24 hours a day. That should be foremost in the consciousness of proprietors in the future.

In an ongoing review of this legislation and the workings of hostels, I hope that matter is kept foremost in the minds of the relevant departments to ensure that these places are well supervised; that the people who are sleeping during the night are protected not only from fire but from any other form of predation. I welcome this legislation. I commend the minister for bringing this bill before the House and I commend it to honourable members.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (2.40 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. I note that the object of this bill, as indicated in the explanatory notes, is to achieve a satisfactory standard of fire safety in budget accommodation buildings by requiring that budget accommodation buildings not approved under the Building Code of Australia comply with the prescribed minimum fire safety standards and that owners of budget accommodation buildings prepare and implement a fire safety management plan.

I see this as a typical example of where the state government is required by the Queensland community to create more laws and regulations simply because individual businesspeople have not been doing the right thing. When people do not do the right thing we traditionally turn to government to pass new laws to regulate the alleged behaviour. So within a short period we will have a new act that has various requirements for fire safety management plans, terms of reference, new entry powers for buildings and a range of other matters.

On the one hand, the government is often criticised for having too much red tape, legislation and regulations. But on the other hand, if this government did not respond in a sensible manner in an attempt to rectify this problem, I have no doubt that the Queensland community would be very critical of the government over its lack of action.

There are many backpacker and budget accommodation facilities in the Sunshine Coast region. I look forward to seeing this bill passed into law, and I commend it to the House.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (2.41 p.m.): Backpacker hostel victims had no chance of escaping the fire—that is what the media and the numerous police and fire experts reported within days of the Childers backpacker hostel tragedy that, sadly, as we know, took the lives of 15 young fruit-pickers. The report into the tragic fire disaster stated that the worst of the damage to the Palace Hotel in Childers was on the top floor, where flames and smoke gutted the rooms in just 15 minutes. This was the floor where most of the lives were lost. It was reported that 10 of the victims were sleeping in one room and four in another. Only one exit existed from these adjoining rooms. This was down a narrow stairway that had also been gutted, with flames licking the walls of the ground floor. It was alleged that the 10 victims in one room had struggled to escape through a barred window. All but one of these people perished.

The 98-year-old wooden building was usually home to about 90 exhausted fruit-picking backpackers from all over Australia and the world. Residents slept in two- or three-level bunks, either in a large ground floor dormitory or in rooms upstairs. Almost straightaway after the tragedy, the survivors, parents of victims, the media and the wider community were asking about the absence of smoke detectors and sprinklers and the lack of fire extinguishers. However, the problem was that under current legislation smoke detectors are not compulsory for pre-existing buildings. Those in control of buildings had only to meet the fire standards in place at the time of their construction. Annual fire inspections have also not been compulsory in our backpacker hostels because of different local government regulations.

The tragedy at the Childers backpacker hostel will be forged in the hearts and minds of many for years to come. If any good is to come out of that experience it is amendments to this legislation. Today's bill proves that the lives lost on that cold winter night in June 2000 were not

lost in vain. It proves that this government is committed to ensuring that such a tragedy will never happen again.

Budget accommodation generally has a higher occupation density than other forms of accommodation. In common with Childers, backpacker hostels and budget accommodation on the Darling Downs and Granite Belt are very popular amongst young people on working holidays, not just because it is affordable but also because it offers convenience and gives residents a wonderful opportunity to meet and live with other young people who share similar interests.

The Childers Palace backpackers hostel advertised itself on the Internet as a place where, for about \$90 a week, young people could rest and meet a range of other young people while management arranged fruit-picking work for them. It is this type of lifestyle and convenience that attracted and continues to attract so many backpackers to Queensland and Australia. In fact, the backpacking industry itself is worth close to \$1.6 billion a year in Australia—a figure I am sure most of us would not have realised. The tourism industry estimates that backpackers stay about 70 nights in Australia and spend over \$4,500 each during their stay. On average, 65 per cent of backpackers who come to Australia will visit our state, lured by the warm weather and the availability of work on fruit or vegetable farms for most of the year. Therefore, the sustainability of the backpacking industry relies heavily on budget accommodation and, after the Childers backpackers hostel tragedy, accommodation that is safe.

While there is no accommodation of this nature in my electorate of Toowoomba North, numerous areas surrounding my region, such as Gatton and Stanthorpe, provide backpacker style facilities for their passing fruit and vegetable packers. Such accommodation is defined as share facilities where at least six residents share sanitary, bathroom and laundry amenities. Similar to Childers, most of Queensland's budget accommodation consists of old buildings that have seen better years. Consequently, the dense occupation of these facilities and their age make them major fire hazards.

This legislation ensures that adequate fire safety standards exist in budget accommodation to the extent to which those hazards are minimised. The major thrust of this bill requires budget accommodation to be fitted with smoke alarms and emergency lighting within one year of the bill's introduction. Local governments will now also have the important responsibility of undertaking annual inspections of buildings. Budget accommodation managers will have to prepare, implement and maintain a fire safety management plan and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service officers will conduct random audits on budget accommodation buildings to scrutinise ongoing conformity to these plans.

Finally, local government will now have the powers to enter budget accommodation buildings to further monitor management's compliance with these newly introduced fire safety standards and safety plans. All of these measures are to ensure that the tragedy of Childers never happens again. Just three days after the Childers tragedy there was another fire in a budget backpackers accommodation building in Sydney's Kings Cross. Fortunately, only five people were in the hostel when that fire began at 1 a.m. and no lives were lost. However, once again, the premises had no alarms and no fire safety plans in place, highlighting the problem that we face not just in Queensland but across Australia with the fire safety hazards in our budget accommodation.

Some people claim that, regardless of whether such laws were in place in 2000 before Childers, we still would have lost 15 lives and the fire still would have completely destroyed the Palace Hotel. The *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial on the Tuesday after the fire commented—

It is all too easy to call for stricter fire and safety regulations for backpackers hostels. The more detail that emerges from the fire the more likely it seems that very little could have been done to prevent it. If the fire was deliberately lit, it is hard to see what may have stood in the way of a disaster of this kind.

These critics are entitled to their opinions, but this government is still committed to trying to make things safer within budget accommodation buildings. There is no alternative to the bill before us. We have a responsibility and a duty of care to ensure that we make these changes to the building regulations in Queensland. The costs and the effort in implementing this bill are worth every cent for the future of the backpacking industry in Queensland but, most importantly, for the safety of all Queenslanders and all visitors to our state. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (2.50 p.m.): In rising to speak to the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, perhaps I could say at the outset that there is an old adage that out of everything bad comes something good. Many people who have spoken in this chamber today have referred to the Childers Palace backpacker hostel and the tragic events that occurred there a couple of years back. It is something that I hope and pray

this state and this nation never witnesses again. This is one of the reasons why the government commissioned the Building Fire Safety Task Force to review premises similar to those of the Palace backpackers hostel in Childers.

I reflect on the comment made by the member for Greenslopes in relation to high-density housing. The opposition spokesman for local government and planning, the member for Warrego, has mentioned how the numbers of people using these facilities have increased over the last couple of years. This type of accommodation is probably used by young people more than anyone else. Many of these young people are overseas visitors. We have a responsibility to make absolutely certain that these places are safe not just for the tenants but for the general public and adjoining businesses.

I congratulate the minister on endeavouring to correct this anomaly because it touches the lives of everyone in our community. As the honourable member for Warrego said, we also have such places as motels, aged care facilities, blocks of units and many other different types of buildings. It is a matter of conforming with the standards. It is paramount that all such buildings are inspected to ensure that they comply with the standards.

The annual fire inspections conducted by local government are vitally important. A lot of people are somewhat casual about these things. I suppose we can all be casual from time to time in our everyday undertakings. We do become a little complacent. In this particular case we are talking about business and the lives of our fellow citizens. Anyone who can put a price on someone's life is a better person than I.

The National Party opposition supports the general thrust of this legislation. The intent is to improve fire safety in budget accommodation. As I said, we do not need to see repeats of such incidents as the Childers fire which occurred on 23 June 2000. Local councils should have the choice to take control of this legislation.

A lot of local councils do not have the expertise and the finance to put in place some of these inspection services. In Queensland we have one of the most renowned fire and rescue operations in the world. Our fire and rescue services are a very integral part of our emergency services. They are operated by fully trained and highly skilled personnel who go about their business in a very professional and ethical way. We can utilise their services more by calling on their expertise to work in unison with local government authorities to help them overcome the anomalies and the lack of expertise that they might have.

The Brisbane City Council and some of the larger local authorities around the state have the necessary expertise within their workforces to be able to carry out these inspections. A lot of the smaller local authorities do not have that expertise and they do not have the finance which allows them to have that expertise within their work force. We should be making more use of the experience and the professionalism of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in playing this very important and integral role.

I know some of the larger shires would prefer to do this on their own. But if we have standards for these things we will eventually have a safer environment in which people can enjoy the services of this high density type housing.

The shadow minister will be moving amendments to this legislation. I believe that these amendments are very important. They will give the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service the responsibility of inspections. The QFRS will be able to work with the larger local authorities as well as with the smaller authorities.

These are very responsible and very important amendments. The minister, as a former mayor of one of Queensland's larger shires, would fully understand the workings of a larger shire. From her expertise in the area of local government she would also understand some of the problems that afflict smaller shires. She would be aware of the cost factors in question. I urge the minister, being the responsible person that I know she is, to give serious consideration to the amendments moved by the honourable member for Warrego. I think the acceptance of those amendments will be very advantageous to councils. The amendments will certainly lead to making hostel type accommodation much safer for people who want to use such facilities. I think that is the general thrust of this legislation. It is aimed at making these facilities safer.

It is important to remember that the Local Government Association of Queensland supports the amendments that will be moved by the honourable member for Warrego. The burdens are great and the imposts are great, but I know that this legislation will make us more responsible and more observant of what is going on around us. We drive past a lot of these facilities from time to time and we would not have a clue what is going on.

I heard the member for Greenslopes say earlier that he has travelled to Afghanistan. I have never been to those countries but, as the honourable member said, we do not know what is behind doors in most cases. We certainly want to make sure that we are at the forefront of establishing a safe environment. We can do that by being more observant. As legislators, we can do that.

As I say, it is very difficult for the less financial shires to operate in this environment. Costs are rising. A lot of times the small print can deceive a lot of people. A lot of people are not aware of what this legislation is all about. We have to be open and up-front. The legislation must be transparent. Where people do not understand legislation they are put in a difficult situation.

I urge the minister to look very closely at the amendments that will be moved by the honourable member for Warrego. I believe those amendments will assist in having the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service making absolutely certain that these facilities conform with the law. It is necessary to ensure that smoke alarms and the necessary emergency lighting is put in place.

This is important legislation. It is important that it is rammed home to everybody in this state that these sorts of facilities must conform with these changes.

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (2.58 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. There are 1,400 buildings that will be affected by this legislation; the vast majority—about 1,000—will require only smoke alarms and emergency lighting to be fitted and to have fire safety management plans in place to meet the new standards. They will not require approvals or licences from local councils to undertake this work.

About 400 buildings will require structural changes to meet the new standards. To make the structural changes they will be required to submit building applications to the council. The responsibility for assessing the building applications will be with local government through the statutory responsibilities and powers councils have under the current Building Act to assess building applications lodged with them. The building application must also be accompanied by a fire safety management plan which will outline matters such as the number of occupants, maintenance schedules and evacuation plans. It is essential for this plan to be lodged with the building application, as the additional building work cannot be assessed without knowing the complete picture in relation to fire safety.

There are 400 buildings, mainly in major urban centres, which will require further upgrading if they are to be made safe. It is only where additional building work is necessary to make the building safe, such as an additional fire escape, that the owner is required to obtain a building permit, as is normally the case with other types of buildings. Council building application fees will be able to cover any costs associated with providing these services. This is a relatively small number of buildings when compared to the value of building work approved by local governments each year.

There will also be situations where the safe evacuation of occupants relies on alternative special management procedures. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will provide advice on these aspects of the application as a referral agency under the Integrated Planning Act 1997. In the very limited number of circumstances when this situation occurs, councils will need to undertake annual inspections to ensure that management procedures remain in place and are being maintained appropriately.

There have been suggestions that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service could fulfil the regulatory role required by this legislation. This is not practical as the service does not have expertise in building certification, a function currently performed by all councils in accordance with the Building Act 1975 and the Integrated Planning Act 1997. The service has expertise in special fire services such as sprinkler systems, fire hose reels and evacuation procedures. It will act as a referral agency for some building applications, as it does now under the current legislation.

For its part the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will continue to undertake random audits of budget accommodation buildings. Where there is non-compliance with the fire safety management plan the service will be able to issue offence notices to building owners. As part of its role, local government can also be asked by building owners whether their buildings comply with the fire safety standard. This role is similar to that carried out under the swimming pool fencing regulations. Building owners may also use other building professionals to assist them in assessing whether a building application to the local council is required for carrying out additional work.

Sixty-four local councils already have local laws regulating shared accommodation premises and include fire safety standards in their requirements. The legislation will override local law fire safety standards to the extent of the inconsistency but will allow those councils which currently register operators of shared accommodation to continue to do so, provided the council ensures that the premises continue to meet the requirements of the legislation. Because some councils already carry out an inspection role which includes fire safety aspects, it will be more efficient and less confusing to the owners and operators of budget accommodation buildings to continue with the one inspection. I therefore commend this bill to the House.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.02 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly to the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The need to review fire safety in budget accommodation has been highlighted by the most tragic of circumstances, that is, the fire that destroyed the Palace Backpackers Hostel in Childers on 23 June 2000 claiming 15 lives. I think we should all be very conscious of the fact that it was that tragedy that caused this bill to come before the House. That tragedy will remain with us all for a long time, even after the demolition and reconstruction is completed in Childers.

I say at the outset that the National Party supports the content of the bill. We have some reservations and the shadow minister will be moving some amendments. It is imperative that an acceptable and consistent standard of fire safety is achieved across the state to ensure the safety of occupants in backpacker hostels or lower-cost boarding accommodation.

The bill places yet another impost on local government. No matter how it is dressed up, that is the fact. The fire safety regulations and this amendment bill really are the responsibility of QFRS, which already carries out safety audits on commercial-type properties. In this instance I believe it should also carry out the full inspection service on these buildings.

Some of the smaller councils in my electorate do not have a building inspector. They use external consultants on a cost-plus basis. That will have some impact on the way in which they handle this situation. For example, the shire of Sarina has at least six establishments that would come under the control of this amendment bill. Initial assessment of all of the buildings, including necessary approvals, would cost them between \$2,000 and \$2,500. Annual inspections to ensure compliance would cost between \$800 and \$1,000.

I will read a couple of letters I have received. A letter from the Sarina Shire Council relating to the proposed legislation for local government to regulate fire safety in budget accommodation buildings states—

Sarina Shire Council was recently requested by the LGAQ to provide an estimate of costs associated with the above proposal.

Council has directed that I forward you a copy of this letter for your information.

It is trusted that this advice may be of some assistance to you.

The letter reads—

I refer to your recent correspondence in regards to the above matter.

This Council has identified at least six (6) establishments in our local government area that offers budget type accommodation.

For Council to make an initial assessment of all six buildings and issue the necessary approvals etc could incur a total cost of between \$2000-\$2500. Subsequent annual inspections to ensure compliance is estimated at a total of \$800-\$1000.

It is agreed that this work should be the responsibility of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority who already carry out safety audits of commercial type properties.

I trust this information provides the assistance you require.

A letter from the Broadsound Shire Council states—

On behalf of the Mayor and Councillors of Broadsound Shire Council I would like to express our concern about the current Building and other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001 which is to be debated in State Parliament in early March.

Council is opposed to the current legislation which will impose further financial costs and liability onto ratepayers with respect to Councils having to certify fire standards compliance for budget accommodation and undertake an annual inspection of the same properties.

Rural Councils are finding it very difficult to engage suitably qualified building certifiers and as a consequence of the National Competition Policy private certifiers are performing the role of building certification. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority currently performs the role for other classes of building where fire standard compliance is a requirement.

Council is of the opinion that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and private certifiers should bear the responsibility for implementing the requirements of this legislation, and not Local Government.

We respectfully request the legislation be amended to remove any legal obligation imposed on Councils as a result of the bill.

I think those letters sum up my concern and the concerns of just two of the councils in my electorate. I think the shadow minister's proposed amendments will provide some comfort for them in that regard.

I hope the inspection service is conscious of the fact that we have some very low-cost accommodation buildings throughout the state that basically are a way of life for some people. Some people may have lived in that type of accommodation for a long time. It would be a real concern to me, and I guess to government also, that if by some overzealous imposition of costs and inspections some of those low-cost buildings were condemned or went out of business we would suddenly find a lot of low-cost housing tenants out on the street. That would create a real problem for another agency of government.

This has to be done very sensitively, with compassion and in partnership with building owners and landlords. We need to take on board the social consequences of being overly onerous, overly bureaucratic or overly vigorous in assessing the real needs of landlords throughout Queensland. However, we need to do this in partnership with those people so that these buildings can be brought up to scratch without imposing overly onerous conditions on buildings. With those few remarks, I commend the bill to the House and hope that the government will accept the amendments put forward by the shadow minister.

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (3.10 p.m.): I rise to briefly speak on the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. This bill aims to provide a satisfactory standard of fire safety in budget accommodation buildings by requiring, firstly, budget accommodation buildings not approved under the Building Code of Australia to comply with prescribed minimum fire standards and, secondly, to ensure that owners of budget accommodation buildings prepare and implement a fire safety management plan.

We are all aware that the Building Fire Safety Task Force formed following the tragic Childers Palace backpackers hostel fire in June 2000 has concluded that there are inadequate fire safety provisions to protect the lives of occupants in many budget accommodation buildings. Budget accommodation often has a higher occupation density than other accommodation. Many budget accommodation buildings were built before the introduction of the Building Act 1975 and, as a result, have only had to comply with fire safety standards established by individual local governments. It was not until 1992 when the Building Code of Australia commenced in Queensland that new budget accommodation buildings were required to comply with contemporary fire safety standards. However, current building and fire legislation does not require older buildings to comply with contemporary fire safety standards unless the owner wants to renovate or significantly alter the building.

It is these factors that make this bill absolutely crucial. The objectives of the bill are to be achieved by requiring budget accommodation buildings to meet fire safety standards for the safe evacuation of all occupants, and there will be minimum standards of smoke alarms and emergency lighting. There will be amendments to the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 to require owners of budget accommodation buildings to prepare fire safety management plans, and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service officers will conduct random audits on budget accommodation buildings to monitor ongoing compliance with the plans. Amendments will be made to the Local Government Act 1993 to provide powers of entry for local government officers into budget accommodation buildings to monitor compliance with fire safety standards and local government assessed fire safety management plans.

On 23 June 2000, 15 people tragically lost their lives in the Childers fire. Among them was Julie O'Keeffe. Julie was an Irish backpacker who was 24 years old at the time—indeed, the same age as me. She was a marketing graduate from Limerick who had travelled to Queensland and was working as a tomato picker at Childers. Julie O'Keeffe should never have died in that fire and I hope that this legislation will mean that people are never put in that position again. I have to briefly say that throughout this whole incident the *Irish Echo* newspaper, a Sydney based newspaper serving the Irish community in Australia, has provided tasteful, sensible and informative reporting on what occurred at Childers. I commend *Irish Echo* for what it did in its newspaper of 28 March, just after St Patrick's Day. It had a front-page story with the headline 'Childers: families hope for closure after guilty verdict'. I want to read briefly from the *Echo*, if I may, just before concluding. It states—

Ms O'Keeffe (24), a marketing graduate from Limerick, had travelled to Australia in January 2000 and was working as a tomato-picker in Childers.

Her parents did not attend the trial, but both are due to travel to the town in September, at the invitation of the Australian government, for the unveiling of a memorial.

Following the verdict, Ms O'Keeffe's uncle, Jimmy Doherty, told the Irish Times that the family was glad to have it over, but that nothing would bring Julie back.

She had been a perfect daughter, he added. 'She was really, really lovely.'

He hoped the O'Keeffe family could now get on with their lives.

It is with these words that I am very pleased to support this bill.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (3.14 p.m.): I am pleased to support the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As has been outlined by a number of speakers, the genesis of this bill was the terrible tragedy in Childers in June 2000 when 15 young people tragically lost their lives at the Palace backpackers hostel. I join with other members in this debate in paying tribute to the firefighters who attended that disaster. On many occasions, they put themselves at risk purely for the sake of others and we should give them credit whenever the opportunity arises.

The task force established following the backpacker fire was created to look into safety in hostels, boarding houses, hotels and other shared accommodation facilities. It recommended a range of issues to improve and maintain fire safety standards but in particular to bring a lot of existing and older buildings up to a standard equal to that of newer buildings. It is very pleasing to see that, as a result of all the consultation on these measures, there has been very strong community and industry support for the measures proposed in this bill. This bill of course is just a part—a significant part albeit—in the government's response to that tragedy. Following the tragedy, a number of initiatives were put in place. Of course, one was the establishment of the task force, one of the results of which is this bill. There was a significant emphasis on audits of existing buildings by fire authorities, particularly on budget accommodation. Some quite disturbing facts were found as a result of those audits and also in terms of breaches of fire safety requirements. Again, the measures outlined in this bill are intended to address them.

Additionally, there was the production of a number of brochures on fire safety written in a number of languages which were distributed to backpacker hostels, Internet cafes and also posted on web sites accessed particularly by backpackers and travellers. The government also introduced legislation which came into force recently which allows firefighters to issue on-the-spot fines for fire safety breaches. So there has really been a package of initiatives put in place by the government in response to that tragedy. This bill is, in a sense, the culmination of a whole range of other activities.

The principal objective of this bill is to protect lives. There are a number of measures that will be outlined in fire safety standards, but early warning devices such as smoke alarms and the like are a very effective means of saving lives in the case of fires, as are building design factors, the information available to operators and tenants of these facilities and proper planning for fires. As I said earlier, this legislation will bring a lot of older buildings up to a minimum standard that is considered acceptable for fire safety. Importantly, the legislation can require the production of a fire safety standard by regulation which, amongst other things, will cover issues such as evacuation procedures, training for staff and occupants and the installation of early warning systems such as smoke alarms.

I want to make a point about evacuation procedures. Many of us have worked in large buildings where evacuation practice, in a sense, is a regular feature. Many people seem to feel that this is a bit of an annoyance to their regular routine. Evacuation procedures and practice in the event of an emergency—knowing the routine, knowing where to go, knowing how to exit a building—are a critically important part of fire safety. I am pleased to see that things such as evacuation procedures will be a part of the regime put in place as a result of this legislation. People should never, ever consider evacuation practice as a waste of time or an annoyance to their daily work routine.

They should participate in them genuinely and treat them in the intended way, which is obviously to save lives. Of course, one can never put a value on one life or indeed many lives. Whereas the protection of life is the most important aspect of this bill, it is also important to recognise the importance of maintaining the confidence of the national and international backpacker community because of the significant contribution this industry sector makes to our economy. It is estimated that international and interstate backpackers contribute about \$480 million annually to the Queensland economy. It is critical to maintain standards and to remove any perceptions in the backpacker community that accommodation in Queensland and, indeed, Australia is not safe.

Backpackers have an exceptionally good communication system. Earlier, the member for Greenslopes mentioned his days in hostels, and in my younger years I, too, spent about 12 months backpacking around New Zealand where I spent a fair bit of time in hostels and low budget-type accommodation. It is fair to say that good news travels fast. In the backpacker community, one knows of the good accommodation, of good places to visit and so on; but bad news travels fast as well. These measures, which are intended to save lives, will also restore confidence in the backpacker community that the facilities we in Australia provide do meet the highest standards and are intended to ensure that people visiting our country, and our state in particular, are safe and free from the terrible events of Childers.

I refer to smoke alarms in general as they will be a part of the initiatives put in place with this legislation. It was disturbing to read reports of some survivors of Childers that, while smoke alarms were installed in the Palace Hostel, they were not operating. There were suggestions, in media reports at least, that by some means smoke alarms had been disabled. Under the proposed initiatives, hard wired smoke alarms, that is, those connected to a 240-volt supply, will be the standard. I support that and believe that that is an important initiative.

I have had both battery-operated and hard-wired smoke alarms in my home. I still have a couple of battery-operated alarms, but for a number of reasons I have turfed the main ones and installed hard-wired smoke detectors. Unless one is an exceptionally vigilant person, one tends to forget to change the batteries. Unless there is an annual date when the batteries are changed, say, at Christmas or on a birthday—and although they meet Australian standards and we encourage people to install them—people allow batteries to run down and simply pull down the cover when the warning signal indicates the battery is going flat, rendering the device totally useless. Under this proposal, the requirement to install hard-wired smoke detectors at least will remove one of the ways in which many smoke alarms are disabled, that is, flat batteries. I am pleased to see that and believe that that was a good initiative.

The other issue with smoke detectors is that their inappropriate placement can cause false alarms which, unfortunately, is another reason for people disabling them. When smoke alarms are in areas where people smoke or are too close to a kitchen, on some occasions they can constantly trigger false alarms which cause people to disable them, thus exposing themselves to danger.

I note that the backpacker industry has supported this legislation very strongly. I pay tribute, as did the member for Cairns, to the Queensland Backpacker and Independent Travellers Association for its support. In my electorate, a number of concerns and issues have been raised with me. I have some budget accommodation premises in my electorate. I did write to the minister, who gave me a very good response in relation to some of those concerns, and I shall outline them.

One significant concern of some operators is the potential cost of implementing these requirements. The government has recognised that and has proposed a staged implementation of the measures outlined. Building owners will have up to a year to comply with the early warning and emergency provisions of the fire safety standard, and there will be a period of up to three years to carry out any additional building works required.

The provisions also allow an extension of time to owners for whom the costs of complying with the legislation may lead to the closure of a premises, thereby forcing people onto the street. The government has also committed substantial resources to assisting building owners and councils, which will have a significant part to play in implementing the legislation. There will be an extensive program of training and education for owners and local government officers to assist in that regard.

Finally, the government has recognised that in some cases financial support may be necessary. The Department of Housing is considering an affordable finance package to assist owners faced with those difficulties. With those few comments, I commend the bill.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (3.26 p.m.): Most people will agree that this is one of the more essential bills before the House. It is only when tragedy strikes that we find that those things left unattended finally get the benefit of a little action. That was the case when, on 23 June, the Childers backpacker fire occurred and where, sadly, 15 lives were tragically lost. Thankfully, many more were fortunate to survive. It was one instance in which a community really came together and showed its true heart.

As with much of our low-cost accommodation, there is a tendency to house as many people as possible due to these residents' inability to afford higher priced accommodation. Very few, if

any, backpackers who travel the world on as little cash as is humanly possible would check on the safety aspects of a facility they have booked into. Unfortunately, as with the Childers incident, the cause of a tragedy is often faulty equipment which has not been repaired or a lack of regular maintenance. Sometimes it is the 'Oh well, it has never happened before and I do not expect anything will happen now' attitude which can leave potential residents of these facilities confronted with the possibility of a horrendous outcome in the event of a disaster. Unfortunately, disasters do not wait until we are prepared for them.

I would like to know what period of time is permitted for the application to be submitted. I am concerned by proposed new section 12I(1), which allows the owner of a budget accommodation building to apply to a local government to extend the period of compliance. I suggest that a serious attempt by the owner to comply should be demonstrated before that extension of time is allowed. I am aware that for some it will be a major cost to meet the standards as many of the residents in low-budget hostel accommodation cannot afford very much and therefore the owners would not receive a very high level of income. As stated before, Queensland does reap a major economic benefit from this low-budget accommodation—a benefit that I would not like to see jeopardised by news of incidents such as the Childers backpacker fire spreading rapidly around the world like wildfire. If the safety issue is not addressed, it may cost Queensland dearly in the future.

I have had plenty of experience with smoke alarms. Within three days of moving to my present address I had unknowingly set fire to the kitchen. There were no fire alarms in the house whatsoever. Were it not for some pretty good neighbours who go walking every afternoon at the time I cook dinner, the fire probably would not have been noticed and the house would not necessarily still be standing. From that day on, we have had smoke alarms in the house. My husband now calls it the Dorothy alarm, because it warns everybody in the whole street that Dorothy is cooking again. I have it in a position where no matter what we are doing—if we are opening a door, having a shower or whatever—it seems to go off. But I am loath to remove it, because when it does go off I know full well that it is working and that gives me comfort.

I believe that this legislation has really reined in an area of accommodation that in the past has been overlooked. At this point I want to let it be known that I will be supporting this bill, but I will also be supporting the amendments that will be moved by the opposition that will ensure that the responsibility is not placed wholly at the door of councils. I ask the minister to accept those amendments, which are submitted in an endeavour to make this bill a fairer, more easily accepted piece of legislation for all the parties involved.

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (3.30 p.m.): I would like to make a small contribution to the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. I congratulate the minister, along with her task force and officers, for introducing this bill to the House. I think that it is appropriate and probably long overdue. It is a pity that the tragedy of the hostel fire in Childers on 23 June 2000 had to happen before legislation such as this could be prepared.

It is a fact of life that a lot of people live in accommodation where fire alarms and an adequate number of exits and entrances are not properly taken into account. A lot of people live in such accommodation because of their economic circumstances. When their economic circumstances improve, they move on. The task force found that there was an inadequate level of fire safety provision to protect the lives of occupants in many budget accommodation buildings. I would like to talk about one such accommodation building out my way. We used to call it the ponderosa. It was at Lytton Road in the Bulimba electorate. Members may think that people who live over my way are fairly affluent. I can tell members that a lot of people over my way are not very affluent and they live in all sorts of accommodation that is getting harder and harder to find. The ponderosa was just an old house. It was divided up into rooms and people rented those rooms. It had a common kitchen, a common lounge room, and the rest was just bedrooms. When I knew of that house, nine people lived in it, and they were mainly men. They probably were not the best at doing their housework and there was fat and so forth around the stove, under the stove and in and behind cupboards. In my opinion it was a real fire hazard. There were no safety alarms in the house. There were only two exits—one at the front and one at the back. So if a person was in the centre of the house and the kitchen caught fire, that person would be in all sorts of trouble because they would not be able to get out.

That house has been demolished and units have been put up in its place. Those nine people who lived there no longer live in the area because that was the only accommodation that they could afford. There is a need for budget accommodation such as this, but there is also a need to make sure that they have an adequate level of safety so that the people who live in them

can be looked after. A large number of older buildings have been used—and are still being used—as budget accommodation. They are predominantly timber houses. Therefore, the fire risk is very high.

The current building and fire safety legislation does not require older buildings to comply with contemporary fire standards unless renovations are undertaken. The classifications are broad and, for example, would not apply when a building is being converted from a hotel to a backpacker hostel. Therefore, there was a disincentive for the owner to do too much work in renovating or upgrading a place, because they would then have to comply with fire standards. So they would do the minimum. In a lot of cases, the accommodation was a disgrace. Without the appropriate improvements in building fire safety in budget accommodation buildings, the occupants of those buildings will be at a high fire risk.

Under this bill, budget accommodation buildings not approved under the Building Code of Australia will be required to comply with the prescribed minimum fire safety standards. If they are in doubt, owners will be able to approach local governments to confirm that their building complies with the standard. Owners of budget accommodation buildings will be required to prepare and implement a fire safety management plan. So people who live in there have to know how to get out in case of a fire—in other words, owners have to show people the plan of the building and hold fire drills to make sure that they understand what to do when there is a fire.

Officers of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will conduct random audits on budget accommodation buildings to monitor ongoing compliance with the plans. The Local Government Act 1993 will be amended to allow local government officers powers to enter into budget accommodation and to monitor compliance. I think that is necessary when owners are not keen to spend a lot of money on their accommodation. Therefore, they would be reluctant to let those officers in. If those officers are not given the power to enter those premises, they would not be allowed in.

This bill will help owners, because since HIH collapsed they would be finding it just about impossible to get insurance if they do not upgrade their buildings. These days, insurance companies are getting a lot harder to deal with and would probably want to look at the buildings. So if people want third party insurance for fire and so forth, and if their building is, say, an old pub, it would be just about impossible to get insurance cover unless the building was upgraded so that it complied with this legislation.

In my former life, a lot of members of my union lived in hotels around the Expo site. They would move as close as they could to a job. Usually, the quickest way to get accommodation was to go to the local pub and see what was available. People could rent a room by the day, by the week, or by the month if the job was a long job, for about \$5 to \$8 a day. A lot of that accommodation has now disappeared because of Expo. A lot of old pubs did up their accommodation to take into account the influx of visitors from overseas to Brisbane for Expo and they have never really gone back to offering cheap accommodation. I suppose not everybody likes to stay in an old pub and have to walk down an alleyway to go to the toilet or to take a shower. That is what people had to put up with if they wanted to live in accommodation that was at a reasonable cost.

I do not think that the minister and this government had any alternative but to amend this legislation to raise the fire and safety standards in budget accommodation across this state. It is going to cost the government money, but I think that it would cost us a lot more in overseas visitors, backpackers and lives if we do not do something about it. We cannot afford not to endorse this legislation. Therefore, I have pleasure in supporting the bill.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (3.39 p.m.): In rising to support the bill before the House, I wish to comment on one aspect of the legislation, namely, the value of smoke alarms. I speak from a personal experience. On 5 January this year, on a pleasant Saturday morning, I was working in the driveway doing some gardening with two of my sons and Trish was doing some work around the house. A smoke alarm went off and alerted Trish to some problem. She saw that our car had caught fire. We believe that there had been an electrical fault and flames were coming from the engine of the vehicle, which was parked underneath our house.

We quickly telephoned the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and firemen from the nearby Chermside station arrived within a few minutes. I thank Ace Hammond and his Chermside crews for their speedy response. One of our neighbours, Shellie, assisted us with a hand-held extinguisher, and my son Daniel's quick thinking in connecting the hose and spraying water on the fire meant that minimal damage was done. Although the car was a write-off, there was no

damage to the house, apart from a repaint in the garage and some cleaning of curtains and covers.

One smoke alarm downstairs saved our house. This legislation is designed not just to save property but, more importantly, to save lives. From personal experience, I know that this does occur. I support the bill before the House.

Hon. N. I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Planning) (3.40 p.m.), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. I am very pleased to know that the bill will be broadly supported by members on both sides of the House.

As the member for Bundaberg and as a close friend of many people in Childers and members of the Isis Shire Council, I was in Childers the day after the fire. I heard the horror stories from the mayor, Bill Trevor, from his councillors, from the community workers and from the emergency services workers. I heard about one young lass who was dragged through the bars of a window to safety. She was very badly bruised, but she survived. I saw the distress of the survivors and I attended the heart-wrenching service for the victims two days later. I do not ever want to see that again.

The Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001 is a significant step by this government to improve the safety of people living in budget accommodation buildings in Queensland. It is about saving lives, it is about imposing some of today's fire standards on older buildings, built before today's standards applied, and it is about taking positive action from the results of a review of fire safety standards following the tragic fire in Childers which claimed the lives of those 15 young people.

The legislation will ensure the occupants of these older buildings, whether they are backpackers, itinerant workers, people on low incomes or those with disabilities, are provided with high standards of safety and can safely evacuate a building in the event of a fire. The state government, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and local governments will all play important roles in implementing the legislation and ensuring the fire safety in budget accommodation buildings is maintained. The legislation builds on the existing responsibilities of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and local government by utilising the audit and enforcement powers of the fire services and the development approval and local law regimes of local government.

There have been a number of views expressed that this legislation will create a regulatory and financial burden on local governments. This is simply not the case, as we have heard from other speakers. The government has developed a regulatory system which will ensure these buildings are upgraded, yet without imposing unnecessary costs on owners or councils. It does this by ensuring the primary responsibility for compliance with the prescribed fire safety standards is on the owner. Most of those owners are responsible business people, many of whom have already complied with the requirements.

The vast majority of buildings—about 1,000 of the 1,400 buildings identified—will comply with the legislation once smoke alarms and emergency lighting are installed and a management plan has been prepared. No approvals or licensing by local government will be required at all to undertake this work. The other approximately 400 buildings will require structural upgrading, such as new fire exits, additional stairs or changes to windows or doors to make them safe in the event of a fire. In these situations, the local council must approve the building application for the work. Some local governments have called for the role of private building certifiers to be expanded to include approving upgrades for these buildings. However, as there have been problems with private building certification since it was introduced and this system is currently under review, it would not be responsible to expand private certification into another area at this time.

The purpose of this legislation is to prevent deaths from fire in budget accommodation buildings by ensuring that people can safely evacuate these buildings. The best way to achieve this is to place an obligation on building owners and operators to make their buildings safe, and to strengthen the existing roles and responsibilities of both local government and the fire services. For its part, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will continue to undertake random audits of budget accommodation buildings, as they do now. Where there is non-compliance with the new standards, including the preparation of a management plan, the service will be able to issue offence notices to owners and occupiers using the existing regime of on-the-spot fines.

There have been numerous complaints that the legislation is either too tough or too weak. In addition, there have been concerns about the time taken. It would have been very easy for the government to introduce legislation to upgrade these buildings to the requirements in the existing

building code. This would have been done very quickly. However, it would have imposed considerable costs on building owners and could have forced many of these buildings to close, with the result that many low-income people in boarding houses, including those with disabilities, would have become homeless. The regulatory impact statement released last year estimated that the cost of full compliance with current building codes for all of these older buildings could be as much as \$230 million across the state.

Introducing ad hoc legislation on the run to solve one problem, only to create another, would have been counterproductive and totally irresponsible. Instead, significant research and consultation was undertaken right across Queensland. Some 1,400 buildings were inspected, options developed and costed in detail, broad community consultation was conducted and the government has balanced what can be introduced to ensure safe evacuation of residents while not imposing unreasonable costs on the owners of these buildings. As a result, the total revised costs are estimated at approximately \$8.32 million across the 1,400 or so budget accommodation buildings in Queensland.

The government is concerned about the supply of affordable housing, particularly in inner city Brisbane, and has ensured the legislation will have the minimum impact by providing the most cost effective standards possible without compromising occupant safety. Nevertheless, the impact on the private boarding house and hostel industry will be closely monitored by the Department of Housing.

I will now outline the key features of the bill. Firstly, the bill requires owners of budget accommodation buildings built or approved before the introduction of the current Building Code of Australia on 1 January 1992, to upgrade their buildings in accordance with a prescribed fire safety standard, a draft of which was tabled in parliament with the bill. The bill requires owners of these buildings to install early warning systems, such as smoke alarms and emergency lighting, in accordance with the standard, within one year. Smoke alarms will ensure occupants are provided with early warning of a fire, while emergency lighting will guide them safely out of the building. The vast majority of accommodation buildings will then comply with the standard.

However, even with alarms and emergency lighting, some accommodation buildings, due to their age, design and occupancy, will still not allow the safe evacuation of occupants. These buildings may require additional upgrading or enhanced management procedures to make them safe. Owners of these buildings will be required to undertake those further improvements within three years.

Secondly, if building work is necessary to make the building comply with the standard, the owner must obtain a building permit from the local council. This is consistent with the statutory responsibilities and powers that councils have under the current Building Act to assess building applications lodged with them. The building application must also be accompanied by a management plan which will outline matters such as the number of occupants, maintenance schedules, and evacuation plans. As I mentioned earlier, around 400 buildings may require building permits to carry out this work. The majority of these are situated in the larger coastal cities and towns, most of which have the expertise in-house and already regulate these premises for fire safety through their own local laws.

Where a council does not employ a building certifier on its staff the council can use a consultant or a certifier from another council under a contract to provide advice on the application. This is the same arrangement councils use to provide building approval services to their community now. It is nonsense to suggest that these councils do not have expertise. These councils have a statutory duty under the Building Act to approve building plans and have been doing so since the building by-laws were first introduced in the early 1900s.

In a small number of cases the bill anticipates that because of the design of the building it may not be viable or cost-effective to alter the fabric of the building. In these cases the proposed standard will allow the council, on the advice of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, to approve alternative solutions such as special management procedures to ensure that people such as those with disabilities can safely evacuate the building. Where the councils approve such special management procedures the bill will also require councils to undertake annual inspections to ensure these systems remain operational. This inspection could be carried out in conjunction with those required under a local law and with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

Thirdly, the bill amends the Fire and Rescue Service Act to require owners and occupiers of all budget accommodation buildings to prepare and implement a fire safety management plan. This plays an important role in the understanding of building owners and occupiers of their

responsibilities and duty of care to their residents and guests. Lastly, the bill amends the Local Government Act to extend the powers of entry for local government to inspect budget accommodation buildings.

I turn to the matters raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee regarding the guidelines and the powers of entry. The first matter relates to the chief executive issuing guidelines and the fact that they will not constitute subordinate legislation. The legislation places the onus on building owners to comply with the prescribed fire safety standard. It also requires local governments to assess the building applications for any additional building work to be carried out to bring the buildings into compliance. Because the legislation applies to existing buildings and will involve the assessment of technical matters, guidelines are necessary to assist owners and local government officers understand their obligations.

Under this legislation the chief executive of my department is required to consult with potential users in preparing the guidelines to ensure the material is suitable for use by such groups. I do not believe it is necessary for these guidelines to be subject to the scrutiny of parliament, as they will only be explaining the legislation and associated processes.

The other matter raised by the committee relates to the increased powers of entry for authorised fire officers and local government officers. The powers of entry for fire officers will ensure that they can enter budget accommodation buildings to check on compliance with the fire safety standard, particularly for occupant density. Overcrowding of some premises and non-operational alarm systems were identified by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service during a survey of buildings immediately after the Childers fire. I have provided a formal response in writing to the committee about those issues.

Finally, I have already addressed in my speech some of the issues raised in this debate and I will respond to a couple of the others in a moment. I have given the amendments consideration, but the government will be opposing the amendments put forward by the opposition, which are clearly aimed at taking any responsibility away from local government.

More than half of Queensland's local governments already have by-laws to register accommodation buildings and they undertook annual inspections, the attached fees for which go to the councils. This government is not about to take that right away from the councils. Under the Local Government Act councils are also already responsible for regulating fire safety in all buildings through the approval of building work in their areas, and councils would act very quickly if we took that right away from them as well. The members for Warrego, Gladstone, Tablelands and Maryborough have all stated that responsibility for buildings should be borne by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

There has been a lot of misinformation about this. The suggestion that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service could fulfil the regulatory role required by the legislation is just not realistic as the service does not have expertise in building certification. This is a function currently performed by all councils in accordance with the Building Act.

The service has expertise only in assessing special fire services as a referral agent under IPA, such as checking sprinkler systems, fire alarms and smoke control, and will act as a referral agency for some building applications as it does now under the current legislation. The service also is responsible for ensuring that buildings are properly managed. This is why they will continue to undertake random audits of budget accommodation buildings. Where there is non-compliance with the fire safety legislation the service will be able to issue offence notices to building owners.

There appears to have been considerable misunderstanding by opposition members about the respective roles of local government and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. There have also been concerns about the moving of responsibility on to councils and the inherent costs. I have covered most of that in my speech so far. Also, the members for Warrego, Gladstone and Maryborough were worried about the increase in public liability for councils when accepting this increased responsibility. Claims that the bill will increase public liability costs for councils do not take into account the existing roles and responsibilities of local government. Even though private certification of building work was introduced in 1998, councils continue to approve about half of all building work occurring in Queensland each year—the total value of which is estimated at \$6 billion. The estimated cost of upgrading all budget accommodation premises in Queensland over three years is only \$8.32 million, or an annual increase in the value of work approved of about 0.05 per cent. Therefore, any impacts on insurance premiums should be relatively minor.

The member for Warrego spoke also of rural councils not having the expertise to assess building applications. I believe I have already addressed that as well, because if those small

councils do not have building certifiers on staff they can use private certifiers on contract, as they do at this time, for building approvals.

Mr Schwarten: Q-Build might be able to help them out, too.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: I am sure Q-Build would love to help them out.

I believe I have already addressed all of these other issues that have been raised. In conclusion, I would like to say that the government has committed substantial resources to assist building owners and councils. My department will be carrying out an extensive program of training and education for building owners and local government officers to assist in the initial assessment of buildings for compliance. This will ensure that all owners have access to the necessary support and advice on how to comply with this new legislation.

This bill, though, is about saving lives. We all need to share the responsibility. We need the state, the local governments and fire services to do their part in making it work. We all need to work together on this so that we will have a safer budget accommodation system throughout Queensland and so that the tragedy we saw in Childers need never happen again in Queensland.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Hon. N. I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Planning) in charge of the bill.

Clauses 1 to 3, as read, agreed to.

Clause 4—

Mr HOBBS (4.00 p.m.): I move amendment No. 1—

1. Clause 4—

At page 11, lines 8 to 27—

omit.

This amendment refers to clause 4 and the insertion of proposed new section 12J. It is the view of those on this side of the House that the regulatory responsibilities under this legislation should not be thrust onto local councils. This amendment will not require the owner of a budget accommodation building to make a written application to the local government authority for advice as to whether or not the building conforms with the fire safety standards.

In this legislation it is important to remember that local government authorities are facing quite a large burden in relation to extra charges. Contrary to what the minister says, local government have documentary evidence to establish that their costs will increase, particularly in the field of insurance. We have a copy of a letter from Jardine Lloyd Thompson. This letter says in part—

...it is quite clear that the public liability and professional indemnity costs for LGM Members will rise significantly due to the specific change to the Council's risk profile that the amendments appear to contemplate. The reason that costs will rise is that under the terms of the current reinsurance package supporting LGM Queensland, and all the other Local Government Mutual Liability Pools across Australia, we have an obligation to advise underwriters immediately a material alteration to the risk profile of participating Local Governments is likely to take place. This obligation applies to any material alteration which affects a particular council in any State, or all the councils in a State.

The recent High Court decision in respect of the nonfeasance immunity for local governments is an example of a material alteration to the risk profile of all councils in Australia which will have future cost implications for the cost of reinsurance for the Local Government Pools across the country.

As you know the reinsurance package is underwritten in London and since the Childers fire in June 2000 these underwriters have been closely monitoring the circumstances surrounding the fire in order that they may form a view as to whether Queensland and Australian Local Governments have an increased exposure to loss as a result of the events.

This is the final bit that makes the difference—

It would be difficult to mount an alternative argument with the result that Queensland's contribution to the national premium pool may increase by up to 100%.

That is one aspect that we really must consider.

Councils may be saddled with other responsibilities. For instance, consider the refusal of an application for extension of time in relation to a pre-1992 building regarding fire safety standards. It is a case where there is full cost recovery. The cost can be returned. However, what happens if

there is an appeal? Council has to pay for the appeal. There would be quite a large level of unrecoverable costs if the council is challenged. It has been mentioned that it may cost up to \$2,000 for a building inspection. That is fine. If everything goes okay, they get their money and it is virtually revenue neutral. However, if it is challenged or an appeal is instituted it could go on for years. The council wears that cost. In other words, the ratepayers are picking up the bill. Councils must have an opportunity to work with this and have the option to take it on if they wish.

At the end of the day, it is really the responsibility of the fire service. The legislation points out that local governments which do not employ building certifiers can contract a certifier to provide these services. The minister is saying that they are able to do that now. But at what cost? What amount has to be paid to have a certifier go to Boulia? In her letter, the minister said—

My department has estimated around 300 to 400 buildings may require a building application to carry out work to comply with the proposed fire safety standard.'

Maybe the minister could confirm whether that is correct. In her letter the minister also said—

Given the recent upheaval in the insurance industry, I am wary of claims that the legislation will double the cost of insurance premiums to councils. Given that these buildings will now be much safer, local government liability should decrease.

Why? They did not have this before. It has to go up. How can the minister say that when in fact the insurance companies are saying the opposite. We all have to pay insurance. I do not know about those opposite, but most of my insurance premiums have risen. Honourable members ought to fly an aeroplane and see what happens with insurance.

A government member interjected.

Mr HOBBS: No, I lost my no-claim bonus the previous year. I was able to claim a no-claim bonus this year. The insurance premiums rose dramatically. I do not believe that the minister is correct in what she is saying. I do not believe that local government needs this extra burden. Local government does not want this burden. Local councils have made their position quite clear. They are prepared to help but they do not want to have this burden placed on the ratepayers of their shires.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: There are a number of issues to which I would like to respond. With regard to the rising cost of insurance, I think everyone in Australia, and probably everyone all over the world, has heard all the threats that have been made by insurance companies in recent times about how their fees are going to rise and what they are going to go to. It is a concern that clearly has to be addressed somewhere else rather than during this debate. However, why wouldn't their insurance premiums go down when the building is safer and the risk is less? That is what is going to happen when all of this work is done. I did not know that there was a backpackers hostel at Boulia.

All councils have a responsibility under the Building Act and under the Local Government Act to process building approvals. The only approvals that councils have to work through are building approvals. At this stage, every council has to have some sort of arrangement in place. They either have their own building certifiers on staff or they have an arrangement where they can contract other people to do that work. Councils also have the ability to set their fees to cover any costs incurred. I do not believe there is a problem there. I think any small council would have arrangements in place to provide building approval assistance to their constituents. I do not think that is a concern. I believe there has been a lot of misinformation spread concerning this issue. In February I wrote to every mayor in Queensland to clarify some of the issues that concern them. I do not believe I have received one complaint from a council since then. I have met with a number of councils since February and the matter has not been raised at all. I do not think it is a big issue.

I think most people in Queensland—whether they are in local government, the fire services, the state government or in the community—want a safer system to be put in place. Nobody wants to see a repeat of the problems that we have had in the past. I am sure everybody is willing to do their part to make sure that this legislation works. As I said earlier, there are a lot of building owners who have not waited for this legislation; they have already put the requirements in place because of their responsibility to their tenants to provide a duty of care. I do not believe that there are any real concerns.

Mr PURCELL: I support the comments of the minister. In my speech at the second reading stage I said that any owner of this type of accommodation who did not upgrade their accommodation—put in fire alarms, have clearly marked ingresses to and egresses from the building, store nothing in entrances, have the doors unlocked and make plans for people to get in

and out of the building—would not be able to get any insurance. I agree with the minister 100 per cent. Anyone who does not do those things should be slugged in their insurance.

It is no wonder the honourable member for Warrego has a problem in getting insurance. He talks about pilots and planes. He said himself that there are only two types of pilots—those who land with their wheels up and those who land with them down. He has landed his plane with the wheels up! Who would want to insure someone who does not know whether their wheels are down when they are landing their plane? That has nothing to do with this bill. This bill is doing the right thing by people who live in this type of accommodation, whether it is at Boulia, at Bulimba or on the Gold Coast. We have to have a standard for people to meet in order to protect people's lives.

Mr HOBBS: What a vicious personal attack!

Mr Purcell: Who would want to insure you?

Mr HOBBS: I advise the member for Bulimba that I am now one of the safest pilots, because I have done it. The rest are about to.

I do not believe that the minister is right. Chinchilla shire has 10 facilities that would be affected by this legislation, and the council does not employ personnel qualified to undertake this role. That is one example.

Is the minister suggesting that the Local Government Association is fibbing to her? Does she not take some of its advice? She does not have to take everything anyone says, but the LGAQ has put together a very strong case. It quite categorically says that there is a shift in responsibility. Presently the responsibility is with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

Mrs Nita Cunningham interjected.

Mr HOBBS: It certainly does not go to local government.

Mrs Nita Cunningham interjected.

Mr HOBBS: I do not know about that. This legislation will put the responsibility on local government. We say that this responsibility should rest with the fire service and not with local government. It is quite clear. Other shires will be affected. Murgon shire is another example I have. I am not sure whether the minister has read her mail. I do not think she is taking this seriously. I do not believe she is doing the right thing by local government. They are genuinely trying to help. I do not see that we as a parliament should impose these extra costs and conditions on local government.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: Would the member like to clearly spell out what extra responsibilities we are putting on local government? Quite frankly, the only buildings that will need council approval are 400 buildings across Queensland that need building approvals. That is the job of local government. It is their responsibility to do that and they get fees to cover it. So what extra responsibility is the member talking about?

Mr HOBBS: Under this bill local governments have to make sure that their public liability insurance covers them for the inspections they do of these buildings. It is as clear as that. Currently they do not have that responsibility. The minister is giving them an additional responsibility. Their public liability insurance will increase. The insurance companies have said that local government insurance could double, although not necessarily solely because of this. Even if it goes up 10 per cent, why are we doing that to local governments? Why are we putting this extra cost on them? Local governments presently do not have to do these inspections. Under this legislation they will. That is where the added costs come in.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: The inspections the member is talking about will only be required by local government, with the help of the fire service, in those cases where a building approval is requested through the council—the council and the owner decide that they cannot really make that building safe and they put in a special management plan for evacuation.

There are only 400 buildings in Queensland that will need building approvals anyway. How many does the member think will actually have to have special management plans for evacuation put in place? They are the only cases where there will be a requirement for an inspection. At this stage more than half of the councils in Queensland already have by-laws registering accommodation buildings. They are inspected annually, and there is an annual inspection fee. I think the member is drawing a very long bow.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put; and the Committee divided—

AYES, 19—Bell, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Kingston, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Springborg

NOES, 56—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, L. Clark, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Hayward, Hollis, Jarratt, Lavarch, Lee, Livingstone, Lucas, Mackenroth, Male, McGrady, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Purcell, Reilly, Reynolds, N. Roberts, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Reeves

Resolved in the **negative**.

Interruption.

PRIVILEGE

Division Bells

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (4.22 p.m.): Mr Chairman, I rise on a matter of privilege. Could you bring to the attention of the Speaker the fact that the bells are not ringing on level 11?

The CHAIRMAN: The Speaker will look after it for us.

BUILDING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Resumption of Committee

Resumed on clause 4—

Mr HOBBS (4.23 p.m.): I move amendment No. 2—

2. Clause 4—

At page 12, line 5, 'or 12J(1)'—

omit.

This amendment refers to clause 4 and proposed new section 12K and again relates to appeals about conformity with fire safety standards. This section applies if the owner of a budget accommodation building is dissatisfied with a local government decision on an application made by the owner. Given our position, this responsibility to assess and decide whether a budget accommodation building conforms to a minimum fire standard should not belong to local councils. Similar to the previous amendment, we believe that this responsibility should not belong with local councils. Omitting this part of the bill is an important follow-up amendment.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: I would have to oppose amendment No. 2. I believe it is only a consequential amendment that removes appeal rights in respect of the amendment that was just lost.

Amendment negated.

Mr HOBBS: I move amendment No. 3—

3. Clause 4—

At page 12, lines 23 and 24, 'or 12J(2)'—

omit.

This amendment refers to clause 4 and proposed new section 12M relating to local government decisions. It states—

This section applies to a decision made, or written notice of which is given, by a local government after a period stated in part 12J(2).

This is a subsequent amendment that ensures that the responsibility of local government to reply to an application and give the owner a decision is removed. In other words, this is also another part that has to come out of this bill if we want local government not to have the total responsibility for this. As a result, the onus goes back to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, where it should belong.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: Again, I have to oppose this amendment. Having seen amendment No. 1 defeated, this makes no sense at all.

Amendment negated.

Mr HOBBS: I move amendment No. 4—

4. Clause 4—

At page 14, after line 23—

insert—

'(5) However, the assessment manager must not act under subsection (4)(b)(ii) until the assessment manager has consulted with the commissioner of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service about the part of the application.'

This amendment means that local governments will not be lumbered with the final responsibility. The final responsibility and authorisation will come from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. This amendment refers to clause 4 and proposed new section 12Q of the bill relating to development approval for building work for budget accommodation buildings. The effect of this amendment would be to ensure that an assessment manager has to consult with the Commissioner of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service prior to assessing whether a fire safety management plan complies with the Fire Service Act 1990 and its content.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: Under the current building code, councils must already consult with the fire service on any applications that are relevant to it. This is already there. There is no requirement for another clause at all. It is superfluous.

Amendment negated.

Mr HOBBS: I move amendment No. 5—

5. Clause 4—

At page 14, lines 24 to 28, and at page 15, lines 1 to 9—

omit.

This amendment refers to clause 4 and proposed new section 12R dealing with annual inspection of buildings for which development approval is given. By omitting this section, the local government would not be required to annually inspect buildings for which a development approval is given nor the records kept by the owner.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: As council approves the management plan in lieu of building work, it should also inspect the building annually to ensure that management practices have been maintained. There is no need for this.

Amendment negated.

Clause 4, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 5 to 8, as read, agreed to.

Insertion of new clause—

Mr HOBBS (4.29 p.m.): I move amendment No. 6—

6. After clause 8—

At page 17, after line 7—

insert—

' 8A Amendment of s 19 (Delegation by commissioner)

'Section 19—

insert—

'(1A) The delegation of a power under section 104FAA or 104GA¹ may also, if requested by a local government, be made to the local government.

'(1B) If a power is delegated to a local government under subsection (1A), the local government may, by resolution, subdelegate it to any person to whom the local government may, under the Local Government Act 1993, section 472, delegate its powers.'

¹ Section 104FAA (Advice as to conformity with fire safety standard) or 104GA (Annual inspection of buildings for which development approval is given)

The first part of this amendment is to ensure that the commissioner has a delegating role within the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990. The second part inserts a new section 19 that would allow the responsibility to ensure a conformity with the fire safety standard. The annual inspection of a building will be delegated to a local government at its request. Further, if this power is delegated to the local government, the relevant local government may subdelegate this responsibility to whom the local government may under the Local Government Act 1993, section 472. This would provide for the larger councils or those that prefer to take responsibility for administering this legislation. In other words, this gives flexibility to those councils that can manage it. The Brisbane City Council may decide that it can do it. Other councils may have the expertise or may wish to do

it. That is their responsibility and they can make that decision. This at least does give the flexibility in relation to this legislation.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: I oppose the amendment. These are building certification functions which are a local government responsibility and not that of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is a referral body under the Integrated Planning Act where special fire services are to be installed in the building. They certainly offer their assistance, but the responsibility remains a local government one.

Amendment negated.

Clause 9—

Mr HOBBS (4.33 p.m.): I move amendment No. 7—

7. Clause 9—

At page 17, line 13, 'part 9A,¹⁰'—

insert—

'and, for a building, measures to ensure the building conforms with the fire safety standard as required under the Building Act 1975,'.

The effect of this amendment is to ensure that there are measures for authorised officers to ensure that the building conforms with the fire safety standard as described under the Building Act 1975.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: In opposing the amendment, there are already sufficient powers under section 55 of the Fire and Rescue Act to enforce compliance with standards.

Amendment negated.

Clause 9, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 10 and 11, as read, agreed to.

Clause 12—

Mr HOBBS (4.35 p.m.): I move amendment No. 8—

8. Clause 12—

At page 18, lines 5 to 7—

omit, insert—

' 12 Insertion of new pt 9A, sdivs 2A and 3

'After section 104F—

insert—

' Subdivision 2A—Fire safety standard

' 104FAA Advice as to conformity with fire safety standard

'(1) The owner of a budget accommodation building may make written application to the commissioner for advice as to whether the building conforms with the fire safety standard.

'(2) Within 20 business days after receiving the application, the commissioner must—

(a) decide if the building conforms with the fire safety standard; and

(b) give the owner written notice of the decision.

'(3) If the commissioner decides the building does not conform with the fire safety standard, the notice must state—

(a) the reasons for the decision; and

(b) that the person to whom the notice is given may object to the notice or its terms under division 4.

'(4) The notice must also state what must be done by the owner to make the building conform with the standard.

'(5) The owner must comply with the notice.

Maximum penalty for subsection (5)—165 penalty units.'

The intention of this amendment is to insert a new subdivision 2A to force the owner of a budget accommodation building to apply to the commissioner of the Queensland Fire Service in terms of whether the building conforms with the fire safety standard. The commissioner would be responsible for ensuring that the building conforms with the fire safety standard instead of the local council.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: The fire safety standards come under the Building Code of Australia that come under the Local Government Act and are a full responsibility of local government. We cannot just pass that responsibility on to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. That is not its role.

Amendment negated.

Clause 12, as read, agreed to.

Clause 13, as read, agreed to.

Insertion of new clause—

Mr HOBBS (4.36 p.m.): I move amendment No. 9—

9. After clause 13—

At page 22, after line 8—

insert—

' 13A Insertion of new sdiv 6

'Part 9A, division 2—

insert—

' Subdivision 6—Annual inspection

' 104GA Annual inspection of buildings for which development approval is given

'(1) This section applies to a budget accommodation building if—

- (a) a development approval is given for building work for the building after the commencement of this section; and
- (b) the building work involves an alternative solution, within the meaning of the Building Code of Australia,² that includes fire safety management procedures as a condition of the use and occupation of the building.

'(2) The commissioner must inspect the building annually—

- (a) to monitor compliance, by the owner of the building, with this division; and
- (b) to inspect the records required, under this Act, to be kept by the owner for this division.'

² Building Code of Australia, part A1 (Interpretation), section A1.1 (Definitions)—

"Alternative Solution" means a Building Solution which complies with the Performance Requirements other than by reason of satisfying the Deemed-to-Satisfy Provisions.

The effect of this amendment is to ensure that the Commissioner of the Queensland Fire Rescue Service is responsible for conducting annual inspections of buildings for which development approval is given. This is in preference to the local council which, under the bill, would conduct the inspections. Minister, there is another example where councils must carry out that work and also need public liability cover.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: As I said earlier, there will be a very small number of buildings throughout Queensland that will require this type of inspection on an annual basis. The Fire and Rescue Service does random audits of all of these accommodation buildings all the time. When it comes to a council imposing a management plan on a building approval, it is clearly the responsibility of the council to undertake that annual inspection.

Amendment negated.

Clauses 14 to 18, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

Bill, on motion of Mrs Nita Cunningham, by leave, read a third time.

ELECTORAL AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 6 March (see p. 76).

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (4.38 p.m.): At the outset I indicate that the National Party will be supporting the Electoral and Other Acts Amendment Bill. We note the number of principles in the bill. The principles are something with which we could not disagree, that is, the idea of having open, transparent and fair elections. At the end of the day, it is very easy to say these things sometimes, but the intentions of some practitioners often do not live up to what is laid down in the law of the land. We all agree that democracy is something which must be fair. We all agree that we have to respect our democracy, and we hope that people respect our democratic institutions to the extent that they do not feel that they should cheat the system in order to be elected. Unfortunately, some people do choose to do that.

Last evening when we debated another electoral amendment bill in this parliament—a private member's bill—I made a note about how our democracy is taken for granted in this country. Yet people are very quick to criticise the job that parliaments do and unfortunately, by

implication, criticise the standard of living and also the very fair systems, including administrative systems and service delivery systems, that we have in our country as a consequence of our developed democracy. However, we must do all that we can to ensure that those processes that have been built up over a long period continue.

I turn to the genesis of this bill. If one reads through the wording of the bill, one finds a lot of guff, fluff and fluster. Although there are some very fine principles and enunciations in the Attorney-General's second reading speech, there are also quite a few platitudes. One line from that speech that I thought was very interesting was the following—

The challenge is to follow the lead of the Australian Labor Party and conduct open and accountable preselection processes in which members of the party have a say.

If it was not for the rather debatable preselection processes of the Labor Party in this state exposed via the Shepherdson inquiry, then this amending legislation would not be before us. It was as a consequence of the actions of certain Labor Party members and the Labor Party's lax rules that we are debating legislation that is designed to tighten up this process. I think that, at the very least, is a little bit comical.

The legislation also falls a little bit short of the Premier's promises last year at Barcaldine. Although some of those promises are contained in this legislation, it is deficient in a number of areas and I intend to point them out. Basically, we are dealing with what is principally a Labor Party problem. Sure, another party has had some issues with some internal branch machinations, but in terms of deliberately setting out to cheat the electoral roll, it would appear that that has been a Labor Party issue. That is why we are debating this legislation today. We have to put in place constraints that reduce the possibility for electoral cheating. We all agree on that. I imagine that members opposite would also feel a pang of conscience in their heart with regard to the actions of some of their former colleagues.

The Attorney-General in his second reading speech indicated that penalties to deter electoral fraud or cheating have to be tough. He also indicates in his second reading and also in the explanatory notes that Queensland now has the so-called toughest penalties regime in Australia. That may very well be the case, but we must ensure that those tough penalties are imposed by our courts. I think that over a period that has been a significant deficiency in our criminal justice system. I will not necessarily blame the courts for this, but I will say that we as politicians go out there and say, 'The penalties are deficient. We will increase the maximum penalty from two years to five years, we will increase the maximum from one year to three years, we will increase the maximum penalty from five years to seven years, or from seven years to 10 years, or seven years to 14 years, or 10 years to life,' and then we pat ourselves on the back. But that in itself does not necessarily solve the problem, because in reality very few maximum penalties that are laid down in law are imposed. Very rarely does a judge of any of our jurisdictions in Queensland make a statement that the maximum penalty available under law restricts them from imposing the penalty that they would wish on an offender. It has happened occasionally, but not very often. I wonder if we are going about this legislation the right way. I can support increasing the maximum penalties, but if we consider the penalties that were handed down in some of those electoral cheating cases that created the genesis of this bill, we find that they certainly were not even near the very modest maximums that were prescribed in the law. Also, in terms of this issue of electoral fraud, we are not only dealing with state legislation but also Commonwealth legislation.

The concern of the community is that our courts and the community in general do not necessarily take seriously the magnitude of the crime of electoral cheating—of somebody who aspires to be in parliament, who aspires to be part of the democratic process, deliberately setting about to cheat to get into that great institution of which they want to be a part. Those people have to be dealt with very, very severely. I would like to hear from the Attorney-General as to how he expects the courts are going to impose penalties that are around the maximum penalty. I know that the Attorney-General is looking at another issue involving maximum penalties. In that case also the existing maximum penalties are not being imposed. The Attorney-General says, 'Because we are debating this issue in parliament it will indicate to the courts that we want them to consider far more harshly such offenders.'

Next Wednesday in this parliament we will debate a private member's bill that I introduced, which the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee has reported on, and which seeks to live up to the very noble aspirations of the Premier, and that is jail, jail, jail and jail for electoral cheaters. That is what the Attorney-General should be considering. I think that we would have a far greater degree of credibility in this process if the Attorney-General was prepared to come into this place and say, 'Sure, let us beef up the maximum penalties available and show

that we are serious about it but let us also put a minimum sentence so that these people who offend against our democratic institutions by seeking to cheat it go to jail for at least some time.' In my private member's bill I proposed a minimum penalty of three months. It is a modest penalty; nevertheless it lives up to the expectation and the aspiration that was enunciated in this parliament last year or the year before by the Premier when he said that there should be jail, jail, jail, and jail for these people. I think that this bill is deficient in that area.

The legislation imposes upon the Electoral Commission of Queensland certain obligations with regard to the conduct of preselections and other matters. I would like to hear from the Attorney-General by way of summary at the end of this second reading debate how much additional resources are going to be made available to the Queensland Electoral Commission to ensure that they will be able to do their job in ensuring that the auditing process that is expected of them is going to be carried out properly. We know that any law that we pass through this parliament that places an expectation on a statutory body or another government instrumentality has to be adequately and appropriately resourced to make sure that the job can be done properly. To do otherwise makes a farce and a mockery of it. We also impose in this place other statutory obligations on a range of individuals and we do not put the resources in place for the compliance agencies to make sure that they can do their job properly. That is extremely important.

I also think that the fact that the Electoral Commission of Queensland can oversight the preselection processes on its own initiative or in response to a complaint will act as a deterrent to individuals who may want to break the law of the land. However, we know that often individuals who have a predisposition to break the law are not necessarily deterred by the law that we lay down. That is why we have compliance agencies, we have the police, we have the Electoral Commission of Queensland and we have officers of Fair Trading. I think that is extremely important and I know that the Attorney-General would be aware of it.

Another issue of importance is education. It is extremely important. The second reading speech and the explanatory notes state the importance of educating people about their obligations and the benefits that come from being part of our democratic institutions and being enrolled. I agree very much with that.

Another important issue is charging the Electoral Commission with a greater degree of responsibility for undertaking checks of the electoral roll to ensure there is compliance. That is very important. I hope that once again the resources of the Electoral Commission of Queensland are commensurate with the job expected of it.

There are probably a great number of people enrolled to vote in Queensland who—for whatever reason—should not be enrolled or are inappropriately enrolled. However, I do not know how one actually checks or ensures that the system is completely transparent and that everybody on the roll in this state—bearing in mind we have a joint electoral roll—is enrolled under their proper name, at their right address, et cetera. I suppose the only way that can be done is by providing the Queensland Electoral Commission with the necessary resources to undertake the proper checks and updates.

An aspect of this bill that is certainly a step in the right direction is the provision to the Queensland Electoral Commission of the capacity to undertake data cross-referencing. Other Queensland government agencies—the Department of Transport, for example—and Commonwealth agencies probably have more up-to-date data on the movement of people than the Electoral Commission. The capacity to access information in real time is important in order to ensure that people are appropriately enrolled—at the right address, for example—and to pick up on possible attempts to defraud the Queensland electoral system. That requires resources and, significantly, the capacity to use technology. I would like to hear from the Attorney-General about the resources that will be made available for that particular purpose. I note from the papers associated with this bill that there will be a capacity to link in with Commonwealth agencies to ensure that information on the electoral roll is up to date.

The bill refers to the disqualification process. People who have been convicted of disqualifying offences are unable to be part of the democratic representative process for a significant period of time, or to ever hold office. I agree absolutely with that. In actual fact—and perhaps it is a coincidence that the government had an idea similar to mine—in October 1998 I proposed a system whereby if a person was convicted of electoral offences, they should be barred from ever holding office, barred from membership of a political party and restricted from occupying senior positions in the public service.

I note that the government's amending bill provides that a person convicted of disqualifying offences will not be able to be a member of a political party for 10 years and, as I understand it, will never be able to hold an elected office position in local or state government in Queensland. Certainly that penalty is a significant deterrent. The Attorney-General deserves to be commended for its introduction.

There is one deficiency in the bill and it is an issue on which members have not been prepared to take a step down. I suppose there is a link here with the Commonwealth government because of the nature of our joint electoral rolls. It is the matter of identification when a person enrolls to vote. To date, there have not been any changes made. Maybe the Attorney-General can offer some advice to the contrary, where a person has to provide identification before they are placed on the electoral roll. I am aware of the civil liberties arguments and the arguments of others that we have made something compulsory but we do not want to make it detrimental for them, or we do not want there to be a deterrent against those people if they are forced to enrol to vote and also to vote.

At one stage the Attorney-General was asked by the media as to how we were going to potentially resolve some of these issues, and if Queensland would even look at going back to having its own state electoral roll for the purposes of ensuring that we had a greater control over it and allowing us to deal with issues of identification. At that stage, the Attorney-General indicated that that was a possibility. Well, that has not happened. However, I do not think we can drop the ball on this issue of identification because it is extremely important.

When a person hires a video, they have to present some form of identification. A video might cost \$3 or \$5, or \$6 or \$7 if it is a latest release—I am not sure what the fee is here in Brisbane—and a person has to present some form of identification. However, if a person enrolls to vote, they do not have to present some form of identification. Nobody has any idea if you are actually the person you say you are.

The voting system relies upon the intrinsic honesty of the majority of the population. I think that the majority of the population—probably 98 per cent—is extremely honest. However, as we have learned, there are people in the community—maybe it is one or two per cent of the population; we can debate the figures—who are prepared to be dishonest in various processes, and they are certainly prepared to be dishonest when it comes to filling out the details on the electoral roll relating to their correct name or address. In some cases, multiple enrolments are made in different names. How do we detect that? The new data cross-referencing process which the Attorney-General is putting in place will help to overcome that to an extent, but certainly not completely.

There needs to be a process of identification prior to enrolment. The government, the Attorney-General and the committee charged with the responsibility for electoral matters should not drop the ball on that. The hundred point system that was proposed some time ago may have been seen to be somewhat unreasonable and onerous. If something is too onerous, you trim it back to something which is more reasonable but which, nevertheless, provides some sort of security and integrity to the electoral roll. I do not believe that by neglecting the issue of identification at the time of enrolment we have adequately fulfilled our responsibilities.

The other identification issue, of course, is identification at the time of voting. I note that we all get little cards. Some of us may remember, because it was not all that long ago, a little card or piece of paper with some information typed on it. I received my card about 15 years ago. It stated, 'You are enrolled here,' and so on. When voters roll up at election time I think that most of them are honest. Maybe we should be looking at a form of basic identification at the time of voting as well. That is, 'Do you have a driver's licence or bankcard?'—whatever the case may be. There is no doubt that a person can have a false driver's licence or a range of other IDs, but the production of that identification further minimises the opportunity for cheating.

I think the mobility argument has basically moved this next issue on. I remember as a child that when my parents had to vote, they voted at their own booth; otherwise it was absentee. Now a person can vote anywhere across their electorate. I think that that has happened because of the mobility of people and it is more realistic. However, when people voted at their own booth, there was a greater chance that the person sitting down there—and it was probably the local schoolteacher because they tend to do a very good job of this—would know them because they have links in the local community. In effect, that was a check and balance that existed but does not necessarily exist at the moment.

When we get our ballot paper we are asked who we are and where we are from. Even members of parliament are asked who they are. We can say, 'I'm Billy Bloggs,' and when asked whether we live at such and such address we can say, 'Yes, that's me.' It depends very much on the honesty of the person involved. The how-to-vote card provisions are welcome. The person responsible for authorising how-to-vote cards must submit them to the Electoral Commissioner seven days prior to the election. That is probably a good move.

There is one issue that I would like to raise with the Attorney-General. This is something that is unclear to me. Perhaps it is answered by way of the amendments. I have read through them, but I did not see it. What happens if a person has a change of heart in the five to seven days leading up to an election? Is there a capacity to change a vote during that time? I could not see it, but perhaps it is covered in the bill. For example, people might find out something about a candidate they do not like and so might have a change of heart and seek to change their preference recommendation, if they chose to give preferences. Increasing numbers of Queensland electors are generally enjoying the opportunity to just vote 1. However, this is a good point that needs to be answered.

The other issue is that the government could have taken the opportunity by way of this amendment bill to outlaw second preference how-to-vote cards. I have spoken in this parliament about them before. The political parties and the political system say that they are a legitimate part of encouraging voters to do something or other and are about giving them choices. They have generally been used more to deliberately deceive than to provide choices and informed information to voters. I know from previous amendments in this parliament that there has to be a greater degree of disclosure on the how-to-vote cards than there has been previously. I am referring here to making it clearer which party has authorised a card. I do not believe that we should be intending by way of second preference how-to-vote cards to prejudge or to indicate to somebody that this is what another party might want. A card might read, 'Thinking of voting Fred blue party? Why not give your preference to red?' That sets out to deceive people. The government should seriously consider banning second preference how-to-vote cards. A couple of years ago we had debates in this parliament about the seven days and the registration. At that stage it was considered to be too hard. Great difficulties had to be surmounted, and they have been. It is the same with respect to second preference how-to-vote cards.

I note that there are some more onerous provisions with regard to special postal voters. I am not sure that there is any great problem with special postal voters, because they are basically distance related. Most of those people—just about all of the ones I know—live there. They probably all live there vis-a-vis the Shepherdson inquiry's exposure of the people who were not living there. I would like to find out the motivation behind that and the evidence that there has been a significant problem in that area. I might stand to be corrected.

The honourable member for Hinchinbrook will speak later about an issue that I wish to touch on very briefly. No doubt he will elucidate the subject even more. When he sought election at the 2001 general election some parts of his electorate suffered as a consequence of inclement weather and the ballot in two polling booths was postponed to the following Saturday. Once the closeness of the seat became known, a greater degree of effort was put into campaigning by one political party than it had put in during the general election campaign. If the boot was on the other foot I am sure that still would have been the case. This is not about protecting the interests of the member for Hinchinbrook, this is about ensuring that we have a system underpinned by basic fairness.

I will be proposing an amendment—and this is worthy of consideration by the Attorney—that a provision be inserted in our Electoral Act in Queensland which compels the Electoral Commission to hold the election as soon as possible after the date of postponement. The current provisions stipulate up to 34 days, but it is usually held on the following Saturday if the weather clears up and so on. As I understand it, there is precedent under Commonwealth legislation where, in previous cases in north Queensland when there has been postponement due to inclement weather, the election has been held as soon as possible midweek, on a Tuesday or Wednesday. Some people might say that that is inconvenient. For a lot of people Saturday is inconvenient; it keeps them away from the footie or from taking the kids to the beach. It stops them watching television with their mates, taking the kids for a picnic or whatever the case may be. I do not think that the argument about inconvenience is necessarily a good one, because people will view it in exactly the same way. Some people can vote during their lunchtimes. Some people work on Saturdays, anyway, so that is an issue for them. They could vote on their way to

or home from work. We should say to the Electoral Commissioner, 'There is an onus on you to hold it as soon as practicable, and that can be midweek.'

I will be moving another amendment so that there can be no counting of booth ballots cast in non-postponed booths until all booth ballots have been taken. Let us say there are 49 booths, with 47 holding voting on the Saturday and two not being able to do so due to flooding. No counting should be able to take place until the other ballots have been cast. We are talking about normal booth ballots. I had thought about the issue of publication. One reason I did not go the further step to address publication is that we have people called scrutineers in each of the polling booths. If the scrutineers thought something was going on, they could say, 'We've got an opportunity to win this seat.' Publication is not the issue. It is about the postponement of the counting. That is only fair.

The general election should be held on the issues and campaigning done up until the gazetted date for the general election, not on the never-never. This is an inequity and an unfairness in our system that needs to be sorted out and we should fix it. I believe it is a worthy amendment and something that could affect any honourable member. It is not about self-interest but about basic fairness and making sure that an election is held on the issues of the day.

The opposition supports the bill. We would like some clarifications from the Attorney in his summing-up. We will be moving those amendments.

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (5.07 p.m.): A number of selfish and foolish individuals have undermined public confidence in our electoral system through their attempts to rot or more generally abuse the system. I think that is the practice that concerns us as much as any illegal practice. These are practices across all parties. All parties are guilty of these sorts of abuses of the system that undermine not only public confidence; rank-and-file party members also need to have confidence that their votes will count in preselection ballots and know that the system is fair. Electoral rotters must feel the full force of the law, and firm action needs to be taken to prevent electoral rotts and these sorts of abuses. This bill deserves all-party support and it is pleasing to see that it is getting that.

The bill contains some of the most powerful electoral reforms that any jurisdiction throughout Australia has seen. In formulating this bill the Premier, the Attorney-General and other members of the Beattie government are determined to restore public confidence in our state electoral system and political parties. The clear message in the bill is that electoral rotting in any form will not be tolerated and that rotters will face the toughest penalties of any state or territory jurisdiction. This is good news for members of the public. The public must have faith that they can front up to a polling booth knowing that their vote will count and will not be diminished in any way by the illegal actions of others. It is also good news for members of parliament and aspirants to political office.

We have some self-interest in these reforms; we all need a fair go in our own internal party ballots. As I said, the reforms in this bill are also good news for rank-and-file members. It is these people who have been treated with contempt by people who want to abuse or rot the system. Rank-and-file members in my area have not raised any specific concerns but have told me that they have been embarrassed by the sorts of things that have happened within our party and the sorts of things they see happening across the nation. They need to know that, when they pay their money, sign up and contribute, and go out faithfully during elections and campaign, they are getting a fair go when voting in ballots.

How could any fair-minded member of the Liberal Party cop the fact that the fly-in overseas residents not even enrolled to vote in Australia and those from the shopping centres in Sydney that the member for Logan will elaborate on later—he has raised concerns about these people in the parliament on many occasions—have been stacked into their branch meetings and overturned their wishes locally? It may not have been an illegal practice, but it is an abuse of the system that we have to stop. It is encouraging that provisions in this bill will make preselection ballots more transparent and accountable. Sections 148J and 148N empower the Electoral Commission of Queensland to conduct random audits of internal party ballots and can require registered officers of parties to hand over relevant information to the Electoral Commission of Queensland.

Some party members may not be very keen to empower the ECQ with this level of intervention but, given that political parties, in the past, have not been able to stop the sorts of rotts and abuses that we have witnessed in recent times, and which we can assume happened in the past, it is important that the ECQ has this oversight role.

It is also encouraging that party members who are convicted of 'disqualifying electoral offences' face bans from holding office and from membership of their party. This hits people where it hurts the most. This is one of the critical parts of this bill because these sorts of penalties really provide some disincentive to this sort of behaviour. They directly remove the sort of trophy that rorters and abusers are striving for.

This bill, in my view, is best practice in electoral reform. The point I want to make today is that we also have the opportunity for significant sentencing reform in this bill. We have a need for serious penalties, and I commend the Attorney-General's efforts in relation to the penalty provisions contained within this bill. However, electoral rorters are not likely to be violent offenders or people who pose a serious safety risk to the public. Why pay \$70,000 on average a year to put them behind bars? That does not make a lot of sense.

I have an overall view that our system has to be more capable of following the principle of the punishment fitting the crime. People who are not putting others at risk in the sense of affecting their safety should be putting a lot back into the community. They should not be behind bars and being a cost to the community. In any legislation that this government brings forward I want to be on the front foot saying that wherever we can we should find some alternative sentencing options. We must ensure that the corrective services system can support this and can handle the necessary supervision that will be required when the person is out in the community.

I am not necessarily saying that seven years or 14 years, or whatever penalties are there, are not correct. What I am saying is that we have an opportunity here, where we are having significant best practice electoral reform, to look at sentencing reform.

The principle in part underpins the bans on people with convictions. That is the sort of thing we need. We need to have that accompanied by community service orders and significant fines. These are the sorts of things that will force people to put something back into a community for which they have shown contempt.

Mrs Reilly: Periodic detention.

Ms STRUTHERS: Periodic detention. We need a capability state-wide to handle that. We need it in regional areas and in urban centres within Queensland.

I accept that the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 promotes the principle that a sentence of imprisonment should only be imposed as a last resort. Further, it embodies the principle that a sentence that allows the offender to stay in the community is preferable. In order for these sorts of options to be widely available we need to pay far more attention and have far more resources being directed to our community corrections options within the corrective services system.

I commend the minister for the get-tough approach adopted in this bill. I also seek his support for alternative sentences for people who are committing these sorts of offences. Hopefully, with this new legislation there will not be people who will be brave enough, silly enough or foolish enough to do this sort of thing. In case it occurs in the future, tough penalties need to be there, but alternative sentencing options could be the way to go in the future.

I commend the minister, his departmental officers, the staff of the Electoral Commission of Queensland who have had significant input into this bill, and others who have been involved in its drafting. I also pay tribute to the Premier for taking such decisive action with the Barcaldine plan. I was not proud to be a Labor Party member during the height of the electoral rorts scandal which occurred within our own party but I was very proud of the firm stand taken by, and the constructive forms engineered by, the Premier. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (5.14 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Electoral and Other Acts Amendment Bill. Certain aspects have been clearly expressed by the opposition spokesman, the member for Southern Downs, with regard to how democracy should be exercised and the penalties that need to be implemented. I believe there is a large degree of support for this bill on this side of the House.

However, I would like to refer to a situation which I personally experienced and which I think is totally unfair and unreasonable. It should not have happened. It could have happened to anyone in this House. It was an incident that was caused because of inclement weather and flooding. People had difficulties in getting to a polling booth to cast their votes.

The state election was called for 17 February 2001. In the Hinchinbrook electorate at that time of the year it is highly likely that we will have bad weather. It is a totally inappropriate time to have an election because of wet weather conditions in north Queensland. When anyone

considers having an election they should take into consideration the fact that all people should have some prospect of getting to a polling booth to cast their votes.

In February in north Queensland it is quite likely that we can have metres of rain each month. Roads become impassable and flooding occurs. Very often people cannot leave their homes. On polling day the Herbert River was in flood, as was the surrounding area. The polling booths at Halifax and Lucinda were inaccessible. It was not possible to get the polling information through to the schools in those two areas. That caused quite a dilemma. I suppose if those who were in charge of those booths and who lived outside the area had tried a little harder, they may have been able to get in, but probably not at the designated time for the commencement of voting.

I drove in fairly close to the area within a matter of hours of polling commencing. I believe there was a real opportunity to get the ballot boxes in. However, that did not occur. Voting at those two booths was deferred until the following week. That decision was made by the Electoral Commissioner. The difficulty in north Queensland is that the following weekend could be even worse. We experienced some very good weather during the early part of the week but, lo and behold, towards the weekend a low depression formed off Cairns. It could have meant that, once again, polling would not have taken place in Halifax and Lucinda.

Approximately 1,000 voters were affected by not being able to get to the polling booth on 17 February. However, they were able to vote on 24 February. Another area that was very much affected was Lower Tully down at Tully Heads and Hull Heads. People could not get through to the Lower Tully school on 17 February. However, because the Lower Tully school polling booth was open those people were denied the opportunity of having the booth reopened the following weekend. Consequently, those people had the opportunity to travel 100 kilometres down the highway, at a time when a cyclone was threatening Cairns, to lodge their votes at Halifax or Lucinda. I think that is totally unreasonable. However, that was the option that was available to those people. The poll was deferred from the 17th to the 24th. On the night of the 17th, votes from all other booths in the electorate were counted. It was fairly clear who was going to win the seat, but there was a slight glimmer of hope for the candidate with the next highest number of votes. If he had received an enormous proportion of the votes in those two booths—

Mr Mickel: Those figures should never have been published.

Mr ROWELL: I am getting to that. I am pleased that the member has raised the issue, because it goes exactly to an amendment proposed by the shadow minister. Those figures were published, and it was apparent that if an enormous proportion of the vote was obtained by the candidate running second there was a slim chance that person could have won the seat and had a majority of the primary votes. I think that is totally unreasonable and unfair. We saw the likes of Pauline Hanson camping down at Lucinda and Halifax for a couple of days. I am pleased to tell the House that it did not do her party any good.

It was an unfair situation. The shadow minister's amendment proposes that in the event of a similar circumstance, where there are booths that have not been able to vote for whatever reason, none of the vote throughout the whole electorate would be counted. It means that in that situation nobody would have an advantage or know if there was any advantage in further canvassing for votes.

The deferment of one week enabled further political activity in the electorate to be ramped up. Had the deferment been limited to, say, two or three days, there would have been less likelihood of increased political activity in Hinchinbrook beyond the point at which the rest of Queensland had to really close down on these sorts of activities. Political activity did continue in the Hinchinbrook electorate, as it would continue in any electorate facing similar circumstances.

I remember a similar situation in relation to a federal election held in the early nineties. Booths at Euramo and Ingham re-opened on the following Tuesday or Wednesday. My memory is not absolutely clear about the exact day, but booths were opened as soon as possible. The Electoral Commissioner raised certain issues about advertising, schools and so on. There were other places in which voting could have occurred and there were people other than schoolteachers who could have carried out scrutineering.

I believe there is a good case for supporting the amendment foreshadowed by the shadow minister. Firstly, it seeks to restrict the length of time between the closing of the booths and the re-opening of booths adjourned for whatever reason. Flooding was the reason in this particular instance, but there may be another reason at another time. Secondly, it seeks to provide that, in the event of booths being adjourned, no votes for the electorate would be counted on the night of the election. They would only be counted when all votes had been cast. I think that will create a

fair and reasonable situation. I will be very disappointed if the minister does not support the amendment, because it seeks to create a fair and equitable situation for anybody who in the future may face a circumstance similar to the one I have described. I am pleased that the minister has returned to the chamber. I raise again the issues highlighted by the shadow minister. They are quite important.

I believe that this bill should take account of what happened in north Queensland at the last election. I repeat for the minister the matters I have canvassed about deferred polls and the counting of votes in electorates in which polling has not been concluded in some booths. Currently, votes cast in the majority of the electorate are counted on the night of the election. In Hinchinbrook approximately 1,000 votes remained to be counted as a result of two booths being deferred for a week.

I think a fair and equitable situation will be created if we ensure that the election for the deferred booths—those unable to cast votes on the day of the election—is held as close to election day as possible. Also, no votes in the affected electorate should be counted on election night. All votes should be counted when voting at all booths has been concluded, when voting has been completed throughout the whole electorate. I believe that is fair and equitable.

I have run into those circumstances, so someone else could run into them, too. What we are proposing is fair and equitable. It is not a big ask. I do not think it will impede democracy in any way. It will certainly be beneficial in ensuring that we do not have situations in which, with an extended time before voting, groups canvass for a certain candidate and maybe bring about an unfair situation.

Mr Welford: I know what is proposed. We will canvass it more in committee.

Mr ROWELL: Good.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (5.26 p.m.): I rise to participate in the debate on the Electoral and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2002. If we look at world events today we see that many nations battle famine, disease and wars. They fear for their safety when partaking in political discussions. Some people live in fear of their governments. We are fortunate enough to live in a friendly and safe society. We discuss politics without fear for our safety or fear for the safety of our families. We live in a lucky country in which we are free to give our political opinions.

Australians believe in the democratic right to vote and they believe in the need for a parliamentary system that has integrity and honesty. This bill is about maintaining honesty and integrity in Queensland politics. The Beattie Labor government made a commitment to the people of Queensland to implement electoral reform. Here it is: tough new laws—in fact, the toughest in Australia. The bill moves the most serious electoral offences—including forgery, giving false or misleading information to the ECQ, bribery and voting if not entitled to—to the Criminal Code and increases penalties.

Forging and uttering or uttering a ballot paper will carry a penalty of 10 years imprisonment, providing false and misleading information to the ECQ will carry a penalty of seven years imprisonment, electoral bribery carries a penalty of seven years imprisonment, and voting if not entitled to carries a penalty of three years imprisonment—as I said earlier, the toughest laws in Australia. These laws need to be tough, because people expect integrity in the system.

To ensure integrity of the electoral rolls and the enrolment process, the Electoral Commission will be given explicit responsibility. The ECQ will be given access to roll related data held by state government entities and local governments to improve the accuracy of the roll. Confidentiality obligations will apply to employees involved, and the data is to be used solely for the purpose of the Electoral Act. This will enable the ECQ to look for discrepancies such as the same person being enrolled at different addresses, therefore ensuring the integrity of the roll. Certainly this is an important part of the reform process. As I said earlier, the penalties for serious electoral offences are the toughest in Australia, so we need to ensure that the information is correct and that those who offend are punished.

While many people choose not to be a part of the political process in a direct manner through membership of a political party or running as a candidate, those who do so need to be assured that internal processes are also honest and of the highest integrity. The Beattie Labor government gave a commitment to reform the conduct of political parties. Once again, we have delivered. We have delivered on the promise that registered political parties that seek public electoral funds must have a community based membership with rights to control the party through proper democratic processes, overseen by the Electoral Commission. We have delivered on the promise that only political party members who are eligible to vote in Queensland elections will be

able to preselect candidates. We have delivered on the promise that convicted rorters who falsify enrolment or break new tough rules that seek to clean up political parties will face the full force of the law.

Any political party that does not comply with these rules will not be eligible for public funds. This means that political parties will need to have a constitution of a registered political party to be approved by the ECQ. The constitution will need to include basic information such as entitlement to membership, rules for the election of office bearers and rules for the preselection of candidates for Legislative Assembly and local government elections. Mandatory rules apply to all registered political parties and include that, where the party constitution provides for preselection ballots, the voting must be in accordance with the general principles of free and democratic elections and must only be open to members who are eligible to vote in a state election. They also include that persons sentenced to imprisonment for an electoral offence will be banned from becoming or remaining as members of the political party for 10 years following conviction. This is another example of the Labor government keeping its promises and delivering.

Reforms to eliminate abuse of preselection processes will be ensured by the role of the ECQ. The Electoral Commission will oversee the preselection of candidates for all registered parties. I have seen first-hand the results of abuse of the preselection process—honest, hardworking members of a political party let down by somebody they trusted. They felt hurt. They were disappointed. They felt disillusionment. This should never, ever happen again. The large majority of members of political parties are honest and believe in their party's ideology. They need to know that there is integrity and honesty in the party and in the internal political process that they are a part of.

Under conditions to restore faith in the internal system, I was preselected by the Premier. The people voted on the steps that the Premier put in place to deal with this issue, and the results speak for themselves. I acknowledge the Premier for his strong leadership as the Premier of Queensland and also as the Queensland Labor Party parliamentary leader. Over many years, I have met the most wonderful people in the Labor Party—branch members, unionists and ALP supporters. I thank them all for their support. In particular, I thank members of the Springwood, Mount Gravatt, McGregor-Robertson and Carina Heights-Belmont branches for their years of friendship and their support during my campaign to win the seat of Springwood. The ALP has been a big part of my life and I have been a member for over 23 years. I am proud to be a member of the Australian Labor Party and I am even more proud to be a part of the government introducing these reforms. I congratulate the Attorney-General on bringing this bill to the House. I commend the bill to the parliament.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.32 p.m.): In rising to speak to the Electoral and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2001, I hope that this legislation brings reforms to the Electoral Act. This bill serves to give effect to the recommendations of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee report of May last year in relation to electoral reform. From the outset, the National Party, with one or two minor amendments, supports this legislation, which seeks to introduce stricter standards of honesty and accountability in relation to the electoral process in Queensland. As members of this House will remember, this legislation has been brought about by the disgraceful performance of a number of members on the other side of the House prior to the last election. I just hope that this legislation will eliminate that type of behaviour and bring about a system that is fair and equitable to all people.

Be that as it may, the Premier, in responding to the fraud by none other than the previous Deputy Premier and others, has undertaken to address the problem, and I congratulate him on that. The people of Queensland took him at his word that he would introduce this legislation to restore public confidence in the electoral process. This bill provides tougher penalties for electoral offences, but of course one thing it does not address is the real irony of the Shepherdson inquiry—that is, that some people who used to sit opposite were able to escape the consequences of their actions because of the statute of limitations in relation to offences of this type. The Premier in his Barcaldine statement also promised to clean up the preselection processes in political parties. I noted with some amusement the minister's second reading speech in which he said that the challenge is to follow the lead of the Australian Labor Party and conduct open and accountable preselection processes in which members of the party can have a say. What is really amusing is that the minister was serious. In the Labor Party one can have their say as long as what they say is what the union wants them to say.

Government members interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: That is a fact of life, and those opposite know that. Soon it may be a lot easier for a person to have their say in the Labor Party because the union bosses are not taking too kindly to some of the reforms being proposed by Mr Crean and they are none too happy with our Premier and some members of his frontbench either. There is also a new public disclosure provision in this bill overseen by the independent Electoral Commission to ensure that there are no secret deals. I am assuming that this will include the discussions that have been taking place recently with the rebel unions. The real test of this legislation will be just how open and accountable this process is.

One of the features of this bill is the requirement for how-to-vote cards to be registered in advance, a move which the National Party welcomes. But I suggest that this may just shift the problem. Based on the recent performance of this government, I can predict that the Labor duplicity will now concentrate on full-page newspaper ads and television propaganda. While this bill also addresses the integrity of the electoral roll—and the National Party welcomes the upgrading of the integrity of that data—what is significant is the failure of this bill to address the question of appropriate identity at the polling booth. I believe that this is the real issue at any election. I look forward to the day when participating in the democratic process is treated as seriously as borrowing a video.

When reading this legislation I was reminded of a speech I made to this House on a similar issue in 1993 relating to the Labor approach to elections. I was in attendance at Doomadgee and Mornington Island during the federal election of 1993 when Bob Katter Jnr contested that seat for the first time against the then sitting member and now Victorian Attorney-General, Rob Hulls. I saw first-hand fraud at that election in that people working for the Australian Labor Party were filling out voting cards. I have witnesses to that. I hope that the legislation before the chamber today tidies up this type of behaviour. It is certainly not acceptable in the democracy that we live in. This was an issue I raised in this House back in 1993, and I do not resile from it today. At that time I said that I hoped that that practice did not flow into state elections. I say to the Attorney that that type of behaviour is one practice that we have to tidy up. I saw it first-hand and certainly do not take it lightly.

As I indicated earlier in my contribution to this debate, the opposition will be supporting this legislation and will be moving an amendment in relation to the adjournment of the polls to ensure that the debacle that occurred during the last election in Hinchinbrook—and the member for Hinchinbrook just touched on that—in relation to counting the votes before an election has been completed due to inclement weather does not happen again.

Another issue I want to touch on today relates to postal votes. Postal votes are a very important part of the democratic process in this very diverse state in which we live. As members would appreciate, many of us hold seats that very much rely on the right of electors being able to vote via postal votes. Regardless of whether we are talking about special postal votes or just ordinary postal votes, the fact is that it comes back to weather conditions. Inclement weather conditions can affect people's ability to vote, and the electorates of Mount Isa and Cook can quite easily be affected by it, as can my own electorate of Gregory if there are floods in the Channel Country and to the far west. Many times mail cannot get in or out, and that is a real problem. This needs to be recognised as a unique situation. I draw the House's attention to that today, because I believe that it is a very valid point. This is a very important part of the electoral process in Queensland. People in those areas have a proper entitlement to vote, but inclement weather that can cause flood conditions can mean that those votes cannot reach the returning officer in time for the count. I trust that the minister will take that on board.

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (5.40 p.m.): The bill before the House delivers on an election commitment that the Premier made in Barcaldine in January last year to the people of Queensland to put the electoral system beyond reproach. The bill will amend the Electoral Act 1992, the Referendums Act 1997, the Local Government Act 1993 and the Criminal Code. These reforms are aimed at eliminating electoral fraud and at restoring public confidence in the electoral process. The bill will achieve these objectives through amendments to the act, which I will outline.

There will be new registration requirements for political parties. We know that there are still matters to be heard in that regard about whether or not a party is registered. This legislation will make it quite plain how to go about registering a party. If a party is not registered correctly within six months of this legislation coming into force, that party will cease to be a party.

Preselection audits will be carried out by the Electoral Commission of Queensland. That will cost the taxpayers money—the estimate is \$500,000—but it is money well spent. There will be audits if and when the returning officer deems fit. If complaints are made, I imagine he will

consider the complaints and, if he thinks it is necessary, audit parties and their rolls. There will be new public disclosure requirements, new measures to maintain the integrity of the roll and tougher penalties for electoral offences.

The bill also implements recommendations for electoral reform contained in the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee Report No. 23, May 2000. So it has been recognised for some time that reforms were needed. These recommendations are to overcome anomalies in the act and to improve operational efficiency. They relate to: enrolment entitlements for members of the Legislative Assembly following an electoral redistribution; removal of anomalies in relation to the return of deposits to accompany nominations; giving the ECQ responsibility for the distribution of how-to-vote cards in declared institutions; clarifying the ECQ's authority to reschedule mobile polling—and members on the other side have made some comment in regard to that; and relaxation of the restrictions on canvassing in or near polling places in relation to pre-poll voting.

These are commonsense steps that have needed to be taken for some time. Everybody recognised that these changes needed to be made. This bill provides a good opportunity to remove any anomalies. The recommendations further include adopting new registration criteria for special postal voters to achieve consistency with the Commonwealth. The opposition has an amendment to that proposed change to the act. If members opposite were fair dinkum, they would also try to change the Commonwealth act. They have got two chances in that regard—none and Buckley's. Members opposite need to be fair and acknowledge that this will make the rolls more accurate. The recommendations also include ensuring that publications on the Internet are covered by the offence of misleading voters and amending election funding and financial disclosure provisions to achieve greater consistency with the Commonwealth requirements. I am not aware of any areas where there have been inconsistencies, but if there is one law for the Commonwealth and the states, it makes it much easier to comply with.

Finally, there is enhancement of roll maintenance by authorising the ECQ to obtain roll-related data from state government departments and agencies. That should have happened many years ago. I get an enormous amount of mail in my office after elections. This is usually as a result of people registering to vote before an election and then moving on afterwards. The commission needs to constantly upgrade those rolls, because sometimes it relies only on family members to identify such changes. If the commission contacted the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, it could find out the names of anyone who had died and those names could be removed from the roll. I support the bill.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (5.45 p.m.): The aim of this bill is to eliminate electoral fraud. My hope is that this bill holds a lot more substance than the minister's contribution, which delivered a lot of platitudes and 'how great are we' lines. Self-praise is no recommendation, and the revelations of the recent past must surely put an instant stop to such lines. This bill is a step in the right direction and no-one would deny that a new standard of accountability and honesty is needed. Hopefully, the penalties in the event of someone choosing to manipulate the system will deter them.

One of the key elements of the Premier's Barcaldine statement was that 'Registered political parties would have a community-based membership with the right to control their parties through proper democratic processes.' Does that mean that we will now see the emergence of Country Labor as a branch of the Queensland Labor Party? The Labor supporters in the Nanango electorate decided to start their campaign as Country Labor. I can only surmise that the Labor Party felt that the word 'country' would appeal as being new and more sensitive to its country persona. I understand that it was what the candidate wanted, and the election campaign started quite strongly as Country Labor. Then, mysteriously, further into the campaign the Country Labor candidate became the Labor candidate and the word 'country' disappeared forever. I would suggest that if this were not illegal under this legislation, it should be. It may not have been illegal at the time, but it remains a dishonesty perpetrated on the constituency.

Is that the sort of right of a community-based membership of a political party that the government is advocating? It is sad that we even stand in this House today to debate electoral reforms to restore public faith in the electoral process. Honesty in advertising is something I can remember being debated in this House a long time ago, and no consensus was reached back then. Although I realise the numbers will ensure that this bill is passed tonight, I recognise the intent to erase the past efforts of their questionable practices and the hope that they will not be repeated. I wonder whether the bill goes far enough.

It is an indictment on the members of political parties that legislation is required to stop such acts as rotting; that we need to introduce public disclosure requirements for political parties; and that electoral rotters need to be banned from running for political office and from being members of political parties. Does that also include stopping these same rotters from being employed by political parties at any level? These people are selfish individuals who believe that it is okay to achieve their ends at any price, and their actions have literally shaken the faith of all who hoped that the stories of electoral rigging were perhaps exaggerated.

The key elements are, I believe, based on a genuine desire by the government to clean up the political party system. Branch stacking in political parties has been reported constantly in the past—not just the major incidents but also the very minor ones and the new ones. It is not just the individual who is tarnished by these acts; it affects everyone associated with the party, and any fallout taints other parties as well. That is why I like being an Independent. It is very simple in that one does one's job or one goes. There are no favours to anyone.

The bill addresses constitutional standards for eligibility for funding as a political party, which is good. I believe it will make parties more accountable to their members. The rules for election of office bearers and preselection of candidates for party endorsement for Legislative Assembly and local government elections are welcome.

The bill states that people who have been convicted of a disqualifying electoral offence are prohibited from becoming or remaining a member of a party for 10 years. Although there are exceptions, I believe that overall a leopard does not change its spots and, although members may try and howl me down, there are many instances of repeat offenders.

A crime is a crime, and if the government is serious about improving the image of a political party, then 'One strike and you're out' is the only way I can see the public accepting this as genuine legislation. Too many times the general public see people who have committed unacceptable acts cast aside for a period of time, only to be brought back at a later stage to continue on their merry way. A crime of this kind tarnishes a person in a political position forever. Although many may see this as an extremely harsh attitude, we in this House should recognise that we are supposed to set the standard by example.

I fully endorse the new public disclosure requirements for how-to-vote cards. From personal experience, I know some of the dirty tricks that candidates try to pull on others. I have said enough about those, because I believe that there is not a person in this chamber or among their supporters who handed out their how-to-vote cards who have not experienced such despicable behaviour. I have always had concerns about what happens when people go to vote. It is too easy to give a false name. It was reported to me after the 1998 election that a woman who went to vote found that the name of her father who had died just a few weeks before had been crossed off and registered as having voted. At the time, I told her to report that. At another booth a gentleman had found that his name had been crossed off. As he lived in an area where there were many booths, he found that his name had been crossed off on three books. I think that matter really needs to be addressed. Quite a number of people have come to me because they found that their names were off the electoral roll and they had quite an argument trying to vote.

I would like to see that matter addressed sooner rather than later. I ask the minister to make that a priority in the next step towards eliminating electoral fraud and restoring the confidence of voters. I commend the government for this bill. But again, I find it sad that legislation such as this, which seeks to put integrity back into the political party system, is necessary. I support this bill and I can only hope that it improves the standing of all parties and all candidates in the eyes of the voters.

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (5.51 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly to the Electoral and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2002. This bill aims—and I believe that it will—to restore public confidence in Queensland's electoral process. In speaking to this bill, I wish to address the ways in which the bill will clean up political party preselection processes.

Mr Mickel: There was a good one in Ryan.

Mr LEE: I take that interjection from the member for Logan. Quite recently, there was indeed quite an interesting preselection process in Ryan. To put things in context, the federal electorate of Ryan, within which my electorate of Indooroopilly falls in part, throughout 2000-01 was the subject of a rather unpleasant preselection process within the Queensland Liberal Party. There were stories in not only the *Courier-Mail* and the *Australian* but also in the newspapers in my electorate, the *South West News* and the *Satellite*, about the internal machinations and goings-on in the Ryan branch of the Liberal Party. This was indeed—

Mr Welford: Tell us about John Moore.

Mr Mickel: John who?

Mr LEE: Well before the announced retirement of John Moore, there was a jockeying of positions and a bit of a carry-on within the Ryan branch of the Liberal Party. To be honest, it was a bit like *Melrose Place*. People did not know from week to week what was going to happen. At one stage the local papers in my electorate suggested that persons who were not resident in Queensland, not resident in Australia, and were not, in fact, Australian citizens were to exercise considerable influence in the selection process.

Mr Mickel: I couldn't believe that.

Mr LEE: I heard an interjection from the member that he could not believe it. It may indeed have been true. People who were not Australian citizens, not resident in Queensland and not resident in Australia were going to exercise considerable influence in a preselection process within a major political party.

I believe that key elements of this bill would stop this debacle from occurring again. They include that registered political parties must have a community based membership with the right to control their parties through proper democratic processes overseen by the Electoral Commission of Queensland; that registered political parties that breach the new requirements would be prohibited from receiving public funding; that the Electoral Commission would supervise the preselection process and conduct random audits of balloting and voting procedures; and that voting in preselections would be restricted to Queensland electors, and I think it is high time that that occurred. That should have happened quite some time ago. This bill would clean up the mess and the carry-on that went on in the Ryan branch of the Liberal Party.

Without giving the House the impression that I am too hard on the Ryan branch of the Liberal party, let me just say that the whole mess of the preselection process following the retirement of John Moore did one really useful and productive thing; it provided a delightful candidate by the name of Bob Tucker. He is the sort of Liberal candidate I like, because he manages to lose elections for the Liberal Party. That says that if a party has preselection processes that are an absolute shemozzle, at the end of the day, whether the party intends it or not, it is going to get candidates that are not trusted by the electorate. I am pleased that this bill addresses that concern.

Before I conclude, I would like to touch on a comment that was made by the member for Gregory, who seems to have some concern about the influence of trade unions within the political process. It is my view that trade unions represent the aggregated interests of working people in this country. They play a very significant and fundamental role in Australia's democratic process. There is not only nothing wrong with trade unions having a voice in the political process, it is absolutely important that they do. I have spoken in the House before about the role that the free trade union movement in Poland played in defeating communism in that country and in creating a wave of popular support for overthrowing a capricious and arbitrary regime that was then run by the Polish communist party under the influence of the Russians. It created a wave of support that spread throughout eastern Europe and ended with the end of the Cold War. That is just one example of the positive and important influence that trade unions play.

One thing that is not addressed by the bill—and perhaps at this stage it is outside the scope of the bill—and while it may not yet be an issue in Australia, it is certainly one in America and it is one that needs discussing, is that we are starting to see significant amounts of money being spent on election campaigns. Just as free and open and democratic preselection processes are important, we also have a free and open democratic process overall only if people are not unnecessarily barred from participating in the democratic process because of a lack of cash. Often in America we are seeing people having an opportunity to be real players in the political process only if they have quite a lot of ready cash at their disposal. Currently, this is not a problem in Australia, but in a lot of areas we tend to follow what happens in the United States. I would hate to see a situation of large and excessive amounts of money being spent on election campaigns.

I suggest that the Canadian government has quite a sensible way of dealing with this issue. It sets two types of limits on the amount of money that candidates are allowed to spend on election campaigns: firstly, a limit on the amount that an individual candidate can spend in their constituency as an individual candidate—and that is audited by an electoral agent and is reported to the electoral commission; secondly, the provincial party, which is the equivalent of our state parties, or the national party, also has a limit on the amount of money that it can spend. It is by

making that little suggestion that I am happy to say that I am very pleased with this bill and I am delighted to support it.

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (5.58 p.m.): This bill represents a challenge for every political party. That challenge is to end branch stacking, the rorting of preselections and other malpractices in our political system. This bill requires political party officials and office-bearers as well as MPs to follow what are basic standards in the conduct of preselection ballots—ballots that form a fundamental part of the democratic process, because they are generally a prerequisite for standing for parliament, although not a compulsory one.

It is nonsense to pretend that these reforms are due only to problems in one party, as has been suggested by the members opposite. They are due to problems in the whole political process, including the process followed by the opposition parties. In the interests of balance, because I know the opposition is enthusiastic about raking over our problems, I have continued my extensive research into branch stacking and rorting within the Queensland division of the Liberal Party.

This is important research and it has been greatly enhanced by the number of Liberal Party members who send me new material every time I speak about the subject. I will give the House three blatant and appalling examples of branch stacking and preselection rigging in the Queensland Liberal Party, in the interests, as I said, of a balanced and totally non-partisan contribution to debate on a bill which deserves universal support.

Sometimes I wander into the library and see members of the National Party engrossed in the newspapers. On closer inspection, I find they have tears in their eyes because inevitably these members are reading about past glories, such as the 1986 redistribution. Therein lies the remarkable complacency in the National Party today. As we heard in speeches in the last parliament, the Leader of the Opposition and his faithful followers see a return to malapportionment and the zonal system as their great hope for the future. They pray for rain and for a return of the gerrymander.

We cannot ignore the worst corruption of all: the politicisation of the redistribution process and the rigging of boundaries, which allowed the then Country or National Party to come third in the vote tally but win the most number of seats. Around the cabinet table in the National Party-led governments the most important positions to be discussed were not those of governor, chief justice or department heads, but that of chairman of the redistribution commission. This position required special skills: the ability to know which ministers and members to take notice of and which to totally ignore when drawing up boundaries.

This book—which is never far out of my sight—entitled *Trial and Error* and written by the late Don Lane, covers the redistribution process with some candour. It refers to how MPs gathered in room B28—just up the road a little bit—to put in their bids for their boundaries, and how to shaft not only the Labor and Liberal Parties but, where necessary, their own colleagues as well. Fortunately, thanks to the reforms introduced by the Goss government, those nefarious practices are now history.

I will give the House four examples of branch stacking and rorting in the Liberal Party, examples which are not historic but quite recent and relevant. All have one common factor: the fingerprints—or footprints—of the former member for Clayfield and Senator George Brandis. We know about the blatant branch stacking and preselection rigging that has gone on in recent years in the Ryan division of the Liberal Party. In the Centenary branch within that FEC there have been up to 500 members, most of them recruited in the last two or three years. The new member for Ryan, aided and abetted by Mr Santoro and Senator Brandis, stacked the branch. There was not even going to be a preselection until Bob Tucker took the Liberal Party's ruling faction to court. In other words, to get decent democratic processes, he had to go to the courts of Queensland.

Many of the members of that branch do not live in Ryan, as we have just found out; some do not live in Queensland and some did not even live in Australia. Despite that, they were able to vote in the Ryan Liberal preselection. They were able to vote for two reasons: the first is that cheap international airfares enabled fly in, fly out branch stacking at affordable prices. This is one of the reasons why the aviation industry has relocated to Queensland. A Queensland Liberal Party preselection is a financial bonanza for the airlines. I understand—and the Attorney-General may be able to verify this without giving up too many cabinet secrets—that one of the undisclosed reasons Qantas will increase overseas flights into Queensland is the prospect of Liberal Party preselections later this year and the promise of fully booked airlines.

The second reason, of course, is the unique constitution of the Liberal Party of Australia, Queensland Division. This constitution will one day earn a place in the national museum because it will be seen as a unique historic relic. Under the 'Eligibility to participate in preselection' provisions, a Liberal Party member can vote in a preselection in a federal electorate in which their branch is located if they meet one of the following criteria: firstly, if the person lives in the electorate but is not necessarily enrolled in it; secondly, if they live in an adjoining federal electorate; thirdly, if they work in the electorate or in an adjoining federal electorate; fourthly, if they attend a tertiary institution in the electorate or in an adjoining electorate; and lastly, if they are at an army base in Ryan or an adjoining seat, they can vote.

These generous provisions enable someone living in the seats of Brisbane, Griffith, Moreton, Oxley, Dickson and possibly even Blair to vote in a Ryan preselection. If they do not qualify under any of these conditions, then they can qualify if they attend any of the three major universities—the University of Queensland, Griffith University or the Queensland University of Technology.

But I have not finished! If anyone fails to qualify even under these generous provisions—and in Ryan many failed to do so—then Senator Brandis helpfully provided another means to qualify them. The branch is capable of calling a meeting and by a two-thirds majority they qualified the unqualified. That is a provision that the new member for Ryan used to qualify 50 branch members living on the Gold Coast and in Sydney, Hong Kong and elsewhere. Even more shamefully, those whose qualifications were to be confirmed by the meeting were even able to vote to qualify themselves. The *Sydney Morning Herald* stated in relation to the Ryan exercise—

Many of the recruits do not live in the electorate. Some have residential addresses in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Under the Liberal Party rules members are not required to live in the electorate they enrol in. They don't even have to live in Australia. It is branch stackers wonderland.

All honourable members will be appalled by the breathtaking cynicism and hypocrisy of Brandis and his branch stacking, especially after his performance at the Senate inquiry into refugees. On the one hand, non-residents and non-Australians can fly in, vote in a Queensland Liberal Party preselection for him and fly out, but woe betide them if they are non-residents and non-Australians arriving in a boat from Afghanistan. They are vilified and demonised under those conditions.

The rorting in Ryan has been repeated, even exceeded, in at least three other divisions in the last year or so. That is why the provisions contained in this bill need to be put into the Federal Electoral Act as well.

I will refer now to the rorting in Rankin. First of all, in raising this matter I know I speak for the handful of decent Liberals who actually live in Rankin. When Senator Brandis was seeking endorsement, he had to get the votes of as many FECs as possible. He had Ryan because of the way they had signed up anyone from around the world. However, Rankin did not qualify for the 10 votes because it did not exist at all—it had no branch. Senator Brandis and Mr Santoro soon fixed that by shifting one branch—the Sunnybank Hills-Algeria branch—from the federal seat of Moreton into Rankin. This provided the FEC with 101 members, just one more than was required to legitimise the FEC, and it gave Brandis the vital 10 votes he needed to secure the preselection.

One can imagine a confused tourist from Hong Kong, whisked through Customs, probably greeted by the former member for Clayfield or an operative, and driven to Logan or the western suburbs of Brisbane—without a chance to unpack their bags or visit South Bank—to vote for someone they have never heard of in a Liberal party preselection. It is an optional extra and definitely not in the tourism brochures.

In the interests of fairness, I will give the House an update on this key branch, the branch which pushed Brandis over the line.

A Government member: How very fair!

Mr MICKEL: I have always been fair. By sheer luck and a little bit of enthusiasm, I have a copy of the names of the members of the Algester branch of the Liberal Party—and what a compelling document it is! Members will remember that I said it had 101 members. Today it has 59. Of that number, no less than 26 have the surname Deen, from the legendary Deen brothers. They demolished Cloudland and the Bellevue, and now they are helping to demolish the Liberal Party—only this time we are not going to have any protesters standing in their way. With the declining memberships in the family's branches weighing heavily on his mind, is it any wonder that one of the Deens fell asleep exhausted in the valley?

The next example is the federal division of Moncrieff. When the Santoro faction decided that the long-time Brisbane Young Liberal Stephen Ciobo would be given the seat of Moncrieff, it became necessary to stack at least one of the branches in the Gold Coast based seat. Fortunately, at the same time the magnificent Gold Coast motorway was being completed and domestic discount airfares were in abundance. So rather than trying to recruit people on the Gold Coast, which would be the natural thing to do, they simply transferred all of the young Liberals from Brisbane and interstate.

A 2001 Gold Coast Young Liberals branch list contains addresses in Melbourne, Kirribilli, Kingscliff, Clayfield, Taringa, West End, St Lucia, Coopers Plains, Tarragindi, Bardon, New Farm, Indooroopilly, Yeronga, Birkdale, Kenmore, Shailer Park, Tennyson and Auchenflower. No wonder the Liberals opposed the tollway proposed for the Gold Coast motorway; they did not want to add to the cost of the branch stacking. These Young Liberals were also legitimised by the same shonky processes used in Ryan.

The third case I want to turn to is that of the federal member for Fisher, Peter Slipper, who has risen to the exalted status of acting Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. The position includes the right to be called 'Honourable' and also to have a state funeral. There are many in the Liberal and National Parties who are undoubtedly singularly unimpressed by the former and, judging by the view of the Liberal Party's Caloundra branch, are looking forward to paying for the latter.

The member for Fisher, the acting Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, stands accused of perhaps the most blatant preselection rort seen in Australian politics. Before the last election all sitting members had to seek re-endorsement. Most parties require that applications for endorsement be invited by way of advertisement in the media generally read in the particular electorate. In the case of Fisher, a Sunshine Coast based seat, one would have expected the ad to appear in the *Sunshine Coast Daily*, a reputable local newspaper with wide circulation. But, no, where did it appear? It appeared in the *Courier-Mail*—a distinguished journal. But one would have had difficulty matching the *Sunshine Coast Daily* with the Fisher electorate. So the notice appeared in the *Courier-Mail* on the Tuesday. Nominations closed just three days later, on the Friday. Clearly, no-one told the Liberal Party that Australia Post is still as good as it used to be with efficient deliveries.

The same day nominations closed branch officials were phoned and told that the preselection would be held on the next day, the Saturday. A move at this hastily called and no doubt illegal meeting to defer the process was only just lost, even though the meeting was stacked with Slipper family members, his staff and the Santoro faction heavyweights from Brisbane. Every party has had problems in the past, but this one surely takes the cake. Mr Slipper parades himself in the media as a paragon of virtue and the acting and potential permanent successor to Senator Heffernan. Given how he rorted his latest preselection he is probably eminently qualified for the position.

These examples confirm that the ruling Santoro-Brandis faction in the Queensland Liberal Party makes everyone else pale into insignificance when it comes to branch stacking and preselection rorting. I know the honourable member for Robina wants to clean up his shameful party, and we wish him good luck because he is going to need it in abundance. There is a saying that power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely. Nothing could better describe the state of the Queensland Liberal Party today. The Santoro-Brandis faction thinks that power sharing is what you do when there is electricity rationing. That is why this bill must be supported and that is why I am sure the distinguished members for Robina, Caloundra and Moggill want to keep out the former member for Clayfield.

I listened as the current member for Clayfield outlined the centre being proposed for Pinkenba. Do any members seriously doubt, in the light of what I have just said about overseas branch stacking operations, that that thing really is a detention centre? Of course it is not. It will be a convenient place for them to have an overnight sleep between being driven around to all of these places to vote in preselections. It will save them money.

There are a couple of other things that I wanted to touch on in my remaining minutes, and one is called the surprise party announcement—the Liberal who was not a Liberal. The party thought he was a Liberal, but he did not know he was a Liberal; he just turned up on their sheets one morning as a voter. I am indebted to the *Queensland Independent* for the article under the headline 'Liberals give receipt without a payment'. This poor bloke woke up one morning and discovered that he was a member of the Queensland Liberal Party.

In my remaining time I wish also to deal with something that I dealt with last year—another document that my fax machine has been working overtime to procure. It is called the *Liberal Party of Australia Queensland Division report: committee inquiring into Young Liberal matters of 16 August 1996*. Its 21 pages show the abuse by the Liberal Party on campuses. It makes a recommendation that some of the people involved should not be readmitted to the Liberal Party. Yet in cases I have outlined to this House previously these same jokers, under the Santoro-Brandis-Bob Carroll faction, have re-emerged as players in the modern Queensland Liberal Party. I hope the legislation outlined by the Attorney-General makes sure that these characters never again participate in our political process. What they got up to is outlined chapter and verse.

Let us not have all of this cant and rubbish that this is happening on just one side of politics. I heard the contribution of the honourable member for Nanango. Everybody forgets, as she parades around today as an Independent, that she was elected as a One Nation representative—a party that was fraudulently registered.

Mr Purcell: Still doesn't exist.

Mr MICKEL: It did not exist. Rather than lecture us about honesty, I would have thought that if you were elected to this House as a member of parliament and halfway through your conscience will not allow you to carry on, that conscience would allow you to say, 'Listen, I was elected on that. I've got to face you again. I'm going to resign and contest this as an Independent.' I have no quibble with the fact that this time she was elected as an Independent—none-whatsoever. She stood as a One Nation member under a rorted and possibly illegal process but now lectures us about virtue. What duplicity!

The point is that the system needs cleaning up. It needs cleaning up on all sides. That is what this legislation hopes to do. I wish the Attorney every success with it. There is an issue that I wish to raise with him during the debate on the clauses and I will deal with it at the appropriate time.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (6.18 p.m.): In my electorate of Cairns I have sometimes been flattered by compliments on the speeches that I make. Over the years, one or two people have even been kind enough to say to me, 'Desley, you're a hard act to follow.' Now that I am a member of parliament and part of a team, most of whom are very good speakers, my own skills do not show so well. Tonight the situation is such that I should never, if I have a choice again, follow the honourable member for Logan, John Mickel. This is indeed an impossible position in which to find myself.

I am also very distressed by the contents of his speech. While he made clear the dreadful circumstances in which people have gained preselection in the Liberal Party, he did alert me to a situation that I had not previously awoken to. I have been so complimentary of Minister Tom Barton and the Department of State Development for their efforts in securing the new Qantas subsidiary, Australian Airlines, to Cairns, and whilst I thought that their purpose was to bring more tourists to Cairns I now realise that maybe Qantas have got wind of a Liberal preselection in Cairns later this year and that the benefits of Australian Airlines may not be so great.

The important thing that we are doing here tonight is talking about the Electoral and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2002. I wish I had something special and different to say from other members of this House. I do not. My sentiments are those that have been well expressed already. The minister himself has described this bill as heralding a new era in Queensland politics. It is indeed a bill of such significance. It follows, as we all well know, from the Premier's commitment not only to the members of the Labor Party who were shaken by events that revealed some impropriety within the Labor Party but also to the people of Queensland to ensure that the sins of the past would not be possible in the future or, if they were in fact committed, punishment would be swift and severe.

Known now as his Barcaldine commitments, they are embodied within this legislation and I am proud to support them and to support the direct and honest way in which he has faced the problems which have occurred within the Labor Party. He has also signalled his determination to ensure that no political party will be able to commit such crimes as to bear on the integrity of our electoral system.

There are a number of significant reforms and I will not detail them. Some of them include some ways which are intent on restoring public confidence in the electoral process. It is my experience in Cairns particularly that the general confidence that Australians have in the electoral process has not been so badly shaken; that it is those of us who are close to the business of elections who may be more aware of the pitfalls, the risks, the gaps and the loopholes than are

the broader community. The broader community knows that in Australia generally, and certainly in Queensland, we have a fine and democratic electoral process that has great integrity—not 100 per cent but, nonetheless, very close to it.

The legislation allows for a modernisation and an upgrading of the standards that surely will be welcomed and will contribute to a greater confidence in the electoral process. That is signalled by the tough penalties that are referred to for electoral offences—tougher penalties in Queensland than in any other jurisdiction in the country.

There are, of course, very importantly, new requirements within the bill for the registration of political parties. The debacle of the demise of One Nation has signalled the need for that more than any other recent event. It is essential at this time when Independents and splinter parties seem more common than they have been at other times in our history that not only the major parties but also the newer and sometimes naive parties are held to the same high standards right from their very inception. It will be such when this bill is passed that only parties which have constitutions that comply with the standards set out in this bill will be eligible for registration in the first place and public funding in the second place.

This should bring, we would all hope, a level of transparency and accountability that in fact has never been seen before in political parties. Many have operated—including the Labor Party in decades past—as secret societies to some extent. There will be an opportunity for people to inquire much more easily about the processes and to assure themselves, whether they are members or not, that the processes underlying our democracy are well entrenched in all political parties. That is indeed a positive move.

We have needed particularly to spell out the details with regard to preselection ballots to ensure that there is probity in this regard, and that there are, with these provisions, new public disclosure requirements. The Premier himself in his Barcaldine statement promised that public disclosure laws would be tightened and would be overseen by the independent Electoral Commission to ensure that there are 'no secret deals', and of course the bill delivers on this, and in some detail. For example, there will be new requirements for how-to-vote cards to be lodged in advance with the commission, along with declarations as to any financial contributions received from or on behalf of another political party or candidate. In this way, everyone will know what the preference arrangements are well before polling day.

During the last parliament I had the privilege to serve on the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, and during that period we variously examined the present electoral system and particularly focused on the composition of, and the rules around, how-to-vote cards and their distribution. I am aware through my experience on LCARC in that term that the Electoral Commission has not really wished for control over how-to-vote cards; that it is in fact a very difficult matter and that it will be for the Electoral Commission a matter of some considerable responsibility and will require some resourcing if indeed it is to be well done. It charges the commission with a responsibility at a time when the staff are extremely busy, and so we will need to be mindful of instituting this new system, as with the other provisions that go with it. For example, the cards that are lodged for registration as proper how-to-vote cards will be available for public inspection before polling day and, if it is practical, on polling day and in each polling booth. The cards which have not been lodged at least seven days before polling day will not be able to be distributed on polling day. Whilst this is an appropriate stand, it is nonetheless something that in practice is going to require enforcement and, 'enforcement' again means resourcing.

Additionally, there will be tougher financial disclosure requirements for both parties and candidates. Parties and candidates will be required to keep certain particulars of loans that they have received from entities other than financial institutions. It is the spirit, of course, of this particular part of the bill that all of us who are now elected, and all of those who in the future hope to be elected, need to take on board, as well as all of our colleagues in political parties, and that is that there should be nothing hidden. There should be nothing to hide. We should be proud of the associations that we have politically and of the decisions that we make in regard to the parties that we stand for and those to whom we wish to distribute our preferences. In being proud, we should make them plain to the public at large as well as ensuring that they are properly registered with the Electoral Commission.

The commission's functions have also been amended to include the function of promoting electoral enrolment and, through my experience on LCARC, I am pleased to give recognition to that as a most important duty. I have forgotten, and therefore am unable to quote with accuracy, the proportions of 18-year-olds who are enrolled. The proportions of 19-year-olds and 20-year-olds

increased slightly. They improve the older the young adults become, but they are still woefully inadequate in this state, and, I must say, in other states in Australia and on the Commonwealth roll.

So far we have not been successful in encouraging young people to know their rights, their responsibilities and their freedoms and to take them up as soon as they are able. To charge the Electoral Commission with the task of increasing electoral enrolment—particularly targeting young people as well as people in remote communities—is a fine thing which is contained within this bill.

I am pleased, too, that special postal voters will be subject to more vigorous reviews than they have been in the past. From time to time, there have been rumours about the special postal voters who have been on lists for years—as to whether or not they truly exist in some far-flung parts of Queensland, particularly western Queensland. It surely is a concern for those members from western Queensland that anybody can suggest that some of their voter support has been in any way improper. Having the Electoral Commission ensure that there are reviews of those special postal voters at least every three years will contribute to the integrity of the vote in those electorates.

The Electoral Commission will also be authorised to obtain electoral roll related data from state government entities and local governments prescribed by regulation. This requires, of course, a tremendous sophistication in terms of our information technology systems, as well as protocols between departments and with the Electoral Commission. It requires, too, quite properly—this is written into the bill—confidentiality requirements, which will be contained in new section 33A, to ensure that the information so gained from other government departments will be properly used and yet not passed on and made available to others for other purposes.

This seems sensible to me when I know that in Cairns a lot of our wrong enrolments are not about people committing any kind of crime or behaving with any improper conduct. They are about people who have moved home and forgotten to do anything about it. They are about people new to town who might have realised, because of the risk of serious fines from the police, that they should change their drivers licence address but have not bothered to change their address with the Electoral Commission. This ability to use those databases we have in Housing, in Transport and in Health to back up our knowledge of people and where they are properly living and should therefore be properly enrolled will be of great assistance to us in striving for perfection—that 100 per cent correct and up-to-date roll. I am not suggesting that we will reach that, of course, but we may move some percentage points closer to it.

The Australian Electoral Commission will be able to benefit from this, of course, and our continued cooperative work with the Commonwealth towards ensuring the highest accuracy and integrity is appropriate and should surely be welcomed by it and by members on the opposite side whose parties are those of the present federal government.

I would like to address one more matter that is not in the bill; that is, any changes that will contribute to electronic voting. There are those, after each election in particular, around the state of Queensland who say, 'When are we going to use computers? When are we going to be able to vote at the touch of a button? Isn't it time modern technology was made available?' On the surface we would all like to say yes, and we assume that the system would be quicker and cheaper and that we could have the vote recorded for all seats, with preferences, in a matter of minutes after the close of voting. Unfortunately, however, the situation is not so simple. We need to take into account that there are considerable reasons for us to be concerned about inaccuracies or about improper interference with electronic voting, which must be addressed prior to us moving down that path. If there were any way in which the vote could be manipulated or tainted by fraud, then of course we would not wish to move in that direction.

It is instructive to consider how other countries—sophisticated democracies—have taken action in terms of Internet voting. So far, in fact, action has been slow. Honourable members will recall the debacle of the 2000 US presidential election and the uneven attempts to use technology and to speed up voting. In fact, the situation in the US is that then President Clinton back in 1999 called on the government to conduct, with appropriate consultancies, studies to discover ways to overcome the barriers to the acceptance of Internet voting and to take into account any social impacts, such as accessibility. This report, to my knowledge, has not yet been tabled, though it is soon due.

Britain also is taking the softly-softly approach. New Zealand has moved to a position of considering electronic voting, at least at some polling places, in 2005. The Australian federal government has said that it believes no new technology is yet sufficiently good enough to be

introduced for voting and that it, too, will take a wait-and-see approach. It seems, therefore, that the advice of which I was last aware from our own Queensland Electoral Commission—that is, that we also should move slowly on this matter—is quite appropriate.

I must say that, at least in Cairns, by and large, for all that the people grumble a bit, it is the kind of grumble people like to have as they go to vote every three or so years. They enjoy standing around the polling booths, chatting to people they have not seen for a while, making a few statements to those who are about and purchasing a few sundries—cakes, generally—at the P&C stalls while they go to vote. The personal experience of voting, despite that somewhat superficial grumble, is actually one that people enjoy. It is one in which many of us at least—a great majority—take pleasure, in recognising again that we do have indeed a fine democracy.

This bill is a tremendous bill. I am proud indeed to be in this parliament at the time we are bringing it in. I pay recognition to the minister and to all of those in his department who have contributed to the detail of it.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (6.35 p.m.): I join with the honourable member for Cairns in stating our appreciation for the contribution made by the honourable member for Logan. I was personally disappointed, however, to find out about the nefarious activities of Senator Brandis. I am sure I would be joined by the honourable members for Sandgate and Lytton in that regard, as Senator Brandis is an old boy of our alma mater.

My disappointment, however, is overcome by the satisfaction derived from reading this bill. I congratulate the Attorney-General and his department for the work done so well in implementing the government's reforms as set out in the Premier's landmark Barcaldine statement. What preceded that statement is well known to us here particularly—particularly the events associated with the holding of and recommendations arising out of the Shepherdson inquiry. Various findings were made against a number of people. Tragically included were people from this House—the then Deputy Premier and the former members for Woodridge and Springwood. Some suffered very severe penalties as a result of those events—loss of careers, loss of reputation. Some may well argue that the penalties were too severe for the crime. One could compare those penalties with any number of other examples of man's inhumanity to man.

Nevertheless, what happened I think demonstrates the seriousness with which the Premier in particular and the government in general responded to these events. The Barcaldine plan encapsulates the Premier's and government's approach. It is a very clear plan with very detailed commitments. It is very thorough and transparent in its commitments. I suppose today is the culmination of the process of the reforms referred to by the Premier at Barcaldine. It was said at the time of the statement—

It is a watershed moment in the democratic life of this state and the reforms listed above will ensure the opportunity to improve our democratic processes is not lost.

It was also said, and indeed promised at the time, that the plan would deliver honest democracy, honest elections and a parliament that works. A reading of the bill indicates the fulfilment of that commitment. Under the plan and the honest democracy goal, political parties are to be accountable and clean. This is achieved by providing that only enrolled electors vote in preselections, providing supervision by the Electoral Commission itself, provision for Electoral Commission random audits of political parties' ballots and providing registration requirements for political parties. Real sanctions were to be imposed in that political parties which did not comply with the rules would receive no public funding. Finally, also under the heading of honest democracy, convicted rorters were to be banned from ever running for political office or even being members of political parties.

The second plank in the Barcaldine plan deals with honest elections. Honest elections will be achieved under the Beattie Barcaldine plan by a combination of enrolment and voting reforms, public disclosure requirements, the development of a political parties code of conduct and tougher penalties generally. Let me say a little bit more about those aims. To achieve enrolment reform, such initiatives as Electoral Commission campaigns will make sure elderly, poor and remote Queenslanders are all encouraged to be on the electoral roll. Extra commission resources and legal power are to be guaranteed to keep the rolls clean. Special postal voting will be cleaned up. Implementation of periodic canvassing of areas of concern to maximise proper enrolment will be undertaken. Public disclosure will take the form of requiring disclosure of arrangements made between candidates or parties.

Likewise, loans and gifts are to be disclosed as are contributions to other candidates or parties. The commission will have the power to track down the real source of funds to overcome

circumstances like the Liberal's Greenfields rort. Significantly, where proper disclosure is wanting, public funding will be forfeited. I look forward to an all-party adoption of a political parties code of conduct. It is pleasing to see penalties, the toughest in Australia, including the banning of convicted rorters from party membership or their ability to stand as candidates being implemented.

The third plank of the Barcaldine plan was to implement a parliament that works for the people. To achieve this, the plan sets out the desirability of parliamentary proceedings being broadcast on the Internet, the holding of parliament in a regional centre once a term, a three-year e-democracy trial through the government web site, the development of an online petition system, mandatory training for new members of parliament about their role and accountability as well as enhanced civic education for members of the public. We have already seen the government deliver with respect to the holding of parliament in a regional centre with the sittings to be held in Townsville in September. I know as a new member that we certainly have extensive induction procedures. They are not mandatory as I understand it, but that is certainly a first step towards that other objective. These initiatives are designed to cut out bad practices and to restore integrity to the democratic processes in Queensland.

The Premier, as part of his Restoring Integrity statement, said that the Shepherdson inquiry was a wake-up call for Queensland Labor and that the Beattie government has been open with the people of Queensland about its desire to fix the problems exposed by the inquiry and to remove those accused of wrongdoing from both the parliament and the Australian Labor Party. Peter Beattie is a proud defender of the real traditions of the Labor Party and has paid the price for this politically over the years. The Labor Party in Queensland is 110 years old. This means that Peter Beattie and Labor are mature enough to understand that the findings of the Shepherdson inquiry are an opportunity to make fundamental reforms to the internal workings of political parties, the electoral system and our parliamentary processes. The government has grasped that opportunity splendidly in the form of the bill before the House, which I am pleased to support.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (6.44 p.m.): The Liberal Party will be supporting this legislation. Basically, it flows from the events in the lead-up to the last election in terms of public disclosure about ways in which candidates have been preselected both in the Labor Party and, to be honest, within the Liberal Party. The Shepherdson inquiry unearthed some illegal activities in terms of the Labor Party and, to be quite frank, the constitution of the Liberal Party did not withstand close scrutiny either and led to the public perception that in fact we could tighten up our preselection process, although nothing of an illegal nature had occurred.

There are also recommendations from LCARC about tightening up the electoral system in general, and we support that. The only comment I would make about the detail of the bill is that, whilst the bill empowers the Electoral Commission to data match to ensure that enrolment details are as true and accurate as possible, I still believe that we need some form of voter identification on the enrolment of an elector and possibly even voter ID when the ballot paper is issued at a polling booth, but those are matters which can wait for another day.

As I said, the bill itself is a step in the right direction in terms of restoring public confidence in the processes of political parties in this state and, in my view, will enhance the reputation of those people selected as candidates who are then subsequently successful at state election campaigns. This will go an immeasurable way in terms of restoring public confidence in the electoral system in this state. We are happy to support the bill.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (6.46 p.m.): This legislation will make our Queensland electoral system more transparent, democratic and accountable while preserving freedoms and ensuring the integrity of our electoral rolls and our voting system. This legislation may have been borne out of a painful period for our government. However, it is designed to address many practices which are now recognised as less than ideal when viewed by the general public and indeed our own branch members. When I look around this House, particularly at my own colleagues in government, I see hardworking, honest members who have the welfare and progress of their own area of the state as their foremost interest and goal. I therefore must conclude that, although we are tightening up our electoral system, if the calibre of members in this place is an indication, our system has delivered us a wealth of talented members and I feel privileged to be a part of this government.

No discussion on this bill could take place without the acknowledgment of the leadership shown by our Premier in the face of an extraordinarily difficult period. To say that our Premier does not shrink from tough decisions is an understatement and, although I personally felt a lot of pain through that period, I have very much been a beneficiary in that I have been given the

opportunity to represent the people of the Woodridge electorate in this place, a position which gives me a great deal of satisfaction and delight. The people of the Woodridge electorate are salt of the earth people—no pretentiousness, a wonderful sense of community and a care for each other seldom witnessed in this very fast-moving world. I thank my constituents for giving far more to me in return for my time and energies than I could ever have imagined.

When I view the world at this time, it is clear to me that our right to vote is a very precious right, one which many people throughout the world have sacrificed their lives for. Australia is a unique country. My electorate in particular has in excess of 150 different cultural groups represented, many of which have absolutely no democratic voting rights at all in their own countries. The tough new penalties outlined in this legislation will demonstrate the high value we as a government place on the rights we in this country enjoy. The bill states that we take very seriously any action of giving false or misleading information, forging or uttering electoral or referendum papers, voting when not entitled or bribery, and that we are prepared to imprison for up to 10 years, depending on the seriousness of the crime, anyone willing to tamper with our democratic electoral process.

Those convicted of a crime under this new act will also face a ban disqualifying them from nominating as a candidate or even holding membership in a political party for 10 years. While speaking of branch memberships, it should please many that members eligible to vote in a preselection ballot will now be required to satisfy eligibility to vote in a general election, thus nullifying some of the branch stacking witnessed in other parties that occurred on a grand scale with voters having their citizenship in far-off countries.

It is only right and proper that those who have a say in who our elected representatives will be should live in the area and be eligible to at least vote for the endorsed candidate. We in this House are all aware of the role played in past elections of preference deals and how elections could be won or lost on the issuing of a how-to-vote card. This section of the bill sets out clear guidelines which will make for a fair and transparent race, no secret deals and availability to the public prior to election day. I concur with the seven days prior to election requirement of lodging how-to-vote cards and the banning of how-to-vote cards not formally declared.

All through the election process, the independent Electoral Commissioner will take on an enhanced advisory role and will be empowered to conduct random audits. When we view the larger picture of political parties and their disclosure responsibilities as well as how they conduct their overall campaign, their breaching their electoral responsibilities will result in their losing public funding.

I applaud the additional funding and greater role foreshadowed for our Electoral Commission, with data matching, encouraging greater participation in the electoral process and, most of all, its supervisory role throughout the electoral process. I congratulate our Premier on his leadership in this issue and also our minister, the Hon. Rod Welford, and his staff for such a comprehensive set of proposals which I am sure will lead to greater integrity in our electoral system.

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (6.53 p.m.): I support the bill being brought to this House by the Attorney-General and its being motivated by the Premier's Barcaldine statement. The bill is a significant step in restoring public confidence in the political system—confidence that has been enormously eroded in recent years by the revelations at the Shepherdson inquiry of branch stacking in parts of the ALP, the sad but somewhat laughable antics of Santo Santoro in the Liberal Party and the appalling deceit of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation cronies who established a shell party which took the money of the people who genuinely supported her but which did not make them real party members.

These actions have seriously undermined public confidence in the political process. They have revealed a far too common attitude of politics as a game to be played according to any rules. But politics is not a game. It is a democratic process which has the real capacity to improve society and to make people's lives better. It is possible to take oneself too seriously in politics, but the political process itself should always be treated seriously and with respect.

The bill cleans up the constitutions of political parties, ensuring that parties' constitutions are registered with the Electoral Commission and includes, among other things, democratic and representative preselection processes. These processes will be overseen by the Electoral Commission. The requirement to lodge how-to-vote cards will remove the intrigue of the last minute and shady preference swaps, a significant element of political game playing, as will the tougher requirements for financial disclosure.

There has been substantial debate in Queensland about how to maintain the integrity of the electoral roll. While there has been some hysteria, most recently reflected in Lawrence Springborg's bill to be debated next week, it should be remembered that among the revelations of the Shepherdson inquiry, shockingly dishonourable though they were, there was never any suggestion that the outcome of an election, even in a single seat, had been influenced. In that context, this bill is right to reject the idea of it being necessary to produce ID before voting and instead to place emphasis on encouraging more people to vote, that is, practically extending the franchise.

While it may seem perfectly obvious to people engaged in modern society, that is people like us, that one should produce photo ID to vote, there are many, including older people, homeless people and people in remote communities who do not have photo ID. For instance, when I asked my grandma about it she said she did not have any photo ID at all. These people tend to be Labor voters, but not grandma. I was always of the view that conservative support for showing ID at voting time was politically motivated by an attempt to limit the franchise to Labor people. My cynicism was confirmed by the fact that one of the Howard Government's first tasks when elected in 1996 was to close down the arm of the Commonwealth Electoral Commission that moved around remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory to enrol people. Those people are, in the main, Labor voters. That was a despicable act.

The government has done the right thing to reject the idea of photo ID. It has also done the right thing to allow the ECQ access to other data held by government so that it can crosscheck and monitor the electoral roll and to facilitate the ECQ's promoting of enrolment. I have visited communities in India, the world's largest democracy, where people who live in labyrinthine slums are enrolled to vote and passionately participate in the democratic process. They are allowed to do so because genuine efforts are made to enrol them and because those people respect and value their democracy. To vote is to participate in society, and we should do the same and encourage everyone here to vote.

I support the earlier comments of the member for Algeester, Karen Struthers, regarding the penalty provisions of this bill which place electoral rorters in the same boat as far more dangerous offenders. I very much support the intent of seriously punishing these dishonourable people who see politics as a game and who undermine the genuine efforts of people, particularly in political parties, doing the right thing. I do, however, believe that as these offenders are not a physical risk, they should be contributing to, not costing, our society. One of the steps towards justice being seen to be done is that the community should be more involved in the justice process. Having offenders visibly contribute is an important part of that.

I consider this to be an excellent bill which will make a real difference to the political process. It encourages those people involved in politics to contribute and it cuts off avenues for those playing a game. I hope that it will restore faith in the political system and that it will create an environment that encourages us to join political parties, such as the great social movement that is the ALP. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (6.58 p.m.): I support the bill before the House and in so doing state clearly that we should put to bed the myth that electoral fraud belongs to either one party or one faction. Tonight we have heard about the irregularities in the Labor Party and the Liberal Party and about the fraudulent registration of the One Nation Party. It is unfortunate that a lot of people's views on this were formed by the selective reporting within the local media during the Shepherdson inquiry. A detailed study of what occurred would have shown that even within the Labor Party there were people from all factions, from a variety of areas within the state and certainly from within different groupings in the party.

It is interesting to note that some of the most outlandish behaviour that occurred, and which was examined by the Shepherdson inquiry, occurred at the same time that a plebiscite was held in my area on the north side of Brisbane. At that plebiscite a former state secretary and a person who is now a member of the administration committee stood for a particular preselection. The plebiscite was extremely close—it came down to about four votes. I assure members that, if there had been any sniff of irregularity or the breaking of party rules, both of those candidates were in a position to know the party and the workings of the party to take matters further. There would have been proper references to the administration committee or the various units within the party to complain if there had been any hint of irregularity, branch stacking or irregular enrolments.

In brief, I am saying that only certain individuals in the party—and I would suggest certain individuals in other parties—are responsible for electoral rorting. I do not believe that we should tag every person in the Liberal Party because of the efforts of the Santo Santoros of this world. I

do not believe that we should target everyone within the Labor Party or a faction simply because of people such as Bermingham, for whom I have no respect.

We have to recognise that within all parties and all factions within the parties there are good and honest people and there are some corrupt people. Why I support this legislation is that those within my faction, within my party and within other parties who have done the right thing and continue to do the right thing will see that those who are trying to be dishonest will not get away with what they want to do.

This legislation will bind all parties. It will bind people in a way that, hopefully, will be transparent. I ask the Attorney-General that if in the near future evidence shows that the intent of the bill has not been fulfilled, then necessary amendments will be introduced. I support the bill before the House.

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (7.01 p.m.), in reply: I thank all honourable members for their contribution to this debate. It has been a wide-ranging debate. A lot of members raised various issues to do with their own electorates and various parties. Of course, as honourable members have said, all parties have some responsibility to take for the way in which the selection or preselection of candidates in the past has been in many cases irregular, to say the least.

This legislation is about tidying up that system. This legislation is about making sure that the public can have confidence in the preselection processes of all political parties by putting in place in the constitutions of all parties and their rules the proper procedures overseen by the Electoral Commission to maintain the integrity of that preselection process.

The member for Southern Downs as the shadow minister raised a number of issues and I will address those in further detail when this debate resumes at a later time. I will make sure that those issues raised by the honourable member are addressed. A number of other members raised various issues ranging from the behaviour of political parties through to the amendments that are proposed by the opposition, which are of particular interest to the member for Hinchinbrook who on one occasion had an election ballot partly adjourned due to floods.

The member for Gregory raised the issue of postal votes. In view of the time and the desire for members to adjourn for this week's sittings, I will now move that the debate be adjourned.

Debate, on motion of Mr Welford, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (7.04 p.m.): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (7.04 p.m.): Racing in Queensland has been put through unnecessary angst with the restructure of the governance of racing in Queensland. The industry was prepared to work through the proposals put forward by the minister, even though there would be some changes to the administration over two years. However, the sacking of the QPC overnight signalled an irrational attitude by the Minister for Racing.

Quite clearly, the QPC was sacked because it defied the minister's instruction to bury the investigation into the expenses of the chairman of the Toowoomba Turf Club and to sack the CEO of the QPC. When I tabled a letter to be forwarded to Mr Stewart launching an official investigation by the QPC, the minister spat the dummy and sacked the board. It was important that this matter be investigated independently, properly and fairly for once and for all to resolve the issue. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Only the new ITRB viewed the matter. Legal advice was provided by Mr Stewart to support his case and the treasurer of Mr Stewart's club participated in the decision-making process of the Interim Thoroughbred Racing Board. The decision that was made was in accordance with the minister's wishes. However, most importantly, the issue was not resolved. This is a most unsatisfactory position for the Toowoomba racing fraternity.

The minister was not satisfied with the decision of the independent selection panel for the members of the Thoroughbred Racing Board and appointed a second panel headed up by Mr Longland, the minister's appointee to the Interim Thoroughbred Racing Board. The second panel, which was not officially formalised by the Interim Thoroughbred Racing Board, selected Mr Bob Bentley as chairman. Mr Bentley was not on the original independent panel's nominated list, nor was he on the reserve list.

The minister has made a serious error of judgment to try to bypass the independent process as advised to this parliament. She has also misled parliament and deceived members of this House and the racing industry. She has placed Mr Bentley in a terrible position. It is most unfair on Mr Bentley for him to be tangled up in this ministerial stupidity. Because the minister has bypassed the system, she has allowed herself to be an active player in racing politics, which in recent years had settled down.

Two new chairman now run our two metropolitan race clubs and they are now working together for the betterment of the industry. The minister should have known that, to have a successful QTRB to work with Queensland clubs, we needed someone who would be acceptable to as many as possible of the clubs throughout Queensland. The court case of Q-Promotions v. Queensland Bloodstock Breeders Sales Pty Ltd involved Mr Baxter, Mr Bentley and, of course, Mr Stewart and Mr Needham. Interesting comments arising out of that case are worth noting. The TAB is taking the race clubs to court to stop casino sponsorship in race meetings from Cairns to the Gold Coast.

Time expired.

Oxley-Chelmer History Group

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (7.07 p.m.): Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the Oxley-Chelmer History Group on an occasion when they were launching their publication *Them's our ways in Oxley-Chelmer*. This publication marks the first five years of the Oxley-Chelmer History Group and it is the group's contribution towards the Centenary of Federation celebrations. On the cover of the booklet is a photograph of Dame Nellie Melba opening St Matthew's fete on 22 May 1922 at the Sherwood Open Air Picture Theatre. A disastrous fire destroyed St Matthew's second church at Sherwood just prior to the fete.

I congratulate Jocelyn Clarkson, founder of the Oxley-Chelmer History Group in 1996, and members of the group for contributing to this very interesting and informative account of our local past. The publication is set out in three sections: firstly, the early days; secondly, religion; and thirdly, community activities. The first dates mentioned in the book were the early 1860s and a chronological account of events brings our history to life again. Historical information for the publication came from a wide range of sources, including local newspapers, government documentation, institutions, schools and clubs, but more particularly from members of the local community.

I was particularly impressed at the level of knowledge and detail of things past that were articulated by members of the local community at the recent meeting that I attended. Of particular interest to locals is the story about the 1974 floods and the voices of the people involved in the floods. Although this terrible natural disaster happened over a quarter of a century ago, it is still very much alive in the memories of a lot of people living in the Oxley-Chelmer district. Some of the worst-affected areas were in this district.

The account describes family photographs that recorded the devastation in terms of rescue by boat, fishing in the streets, the collection of rubbish and the mammoth clean-up. For me, the memories of the flood come close to home as I have been a resident of these suburbs for 13 years. I think that the stress on family life of those families who lived through the flood and who still live in the area would have been great—the fear would still be there.

That is why knowledge of the history of the area is so important. If we know what has happened in the past we can better deal with issues in the future. *Them's our ways in Oxley-Chelmer* is an insight into the lives and the struggles of families living from Oxley to Chelmer dating back to the early 1900s. There are many families who still have descendants living in the area. However, as time passes, so does the knowledge of what was in the past diminish. For young families coming into the area, it is helpful to know of the community spirit that once was so that their quality of life can be enriched by becoming part of it. I commend the efforts of the group for bringing this priceless knowledge to our schools and our families.

Gympie Hospital

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—ONP) (7.10 p.m.): This morning I spoke in this House about the way in which the people of my electorate have been, and are continuing to be, deceived by this government. On 16 May last year, on two occasions, the Minister for Health said, 'Under the Beattie government, services have been enhanced at the Gympie Hospital.' I will not be gagged against speaking the truth because some minister has their feelings hurt. If someone does the wrong thing by the people, then that person has to be big enough to face the consequences.

The number of Gympie residents who are sent to hospitals in other districts is growing daily. Women are told that they cannot have their children at Gympie; patients are told to go to their GPs rather than to their hospital. How on earth can the status of the Gympie Hospital not have been downgraded when previously nearly every Gympie resident was born at the Gympie Hospital? If people were not having something as major as a transplant, they were treated at Gympie.

I raised in the House this morning the fact that the truth had not been told to my constituents. An untruth is an untruth—full stop! Whether you wish to describe it as stretching the truth or providing a false statement or handling the truth carelessly, it all means the same thing. I will not pretend it is anything but.

The minister has been accused of telling untruths in this House before, and a particular nurse's name springs to mind. This is not the first time and I dare say it will not be last. I have retracted the word 'lie' from my description of the minister's treatment of my constituents. The word may be gone but the intent still remains.

I may be relatively new to this place; I do not have a huge party machine behind me to hold my hand and tell me what to say and what not to say; and I may not use the correct parliamentary etiquette at all times. However, I stand here as an honest person who stands up for people who do not otherwise have their say in this House. If the people of my electorate believe that they are not being told the truth by their ministers, then so be it. I am the voice of the people in my electorate. If ministers do not like being told how they are perceived by the people of Queensland, then they should get out of the business.

Mrs Edmond: They threw you out of the meeting!

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Point of order. I walked out because the minister's staff were typically useless.

This House is supposed to be a place of democracy, but it clearly is not. In a democracy all people are treated equally. It appears that is not the case in this House. It makes me ill to continually hear about the way this government treats rural Queenslanders. The plight of rural and regional Queenslanders and the decline of their rightful services is beyond belief. What on earth can rural Queenslanders have done to the members of this government to deserve to be treated with such disdain? Do not ever forget that rural and regional Australians have been the backbone of this nation since its inception. They will not lie down and take this treatment without a fight. It is about time some of the Labor mob shed a few tears for them!

Taringa Rovers Soccer Football Club

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (7.13 p.m.): I wish to speak about a remarkable sporting club in my electorate, the Taringa Rovers Soccer Football Club. Established in 1949, Taringa Rovers is one of the oldest soccer clubs in Brisbane and, indeed, one of the largest, with about five men's, at least two women's and up to 30 junior teams, and a membership of around 500 players and 12,000 past players.

Taringa Rovers makes a valuable contribution to junior sport in our community and I want to acknowledge the club executive for their efforts. They are: Rob Kirby as president, Gary Banks as vice-president, Neil Brown as secretary/treasurer, Paul Deranja, Wayne Diaz, Greg Tucker, Mark Jones, Glenn Collinson, Rod Smith and David Mitchell. They have all worked exceptionally hard this year, as has Jo Kirby who, as the canteen convener, has kept us fed on match days.

I recently accepted the honour of becoming Taringa Rovers patron and I was delighted to present the captain of the Firsts with the Queensland flag at their game last Sunday. I was also very pleased to be asked to conduct the celebrity kick-off at that game. As I walked back into the clubhouse as the game got under way, someone remarked that if I was ever to have another kick with the Firsts, I would have to attend training.

At this stage, I seek leave to have the names of the Firsts team who played last Sunday incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Malcolm Van de Graaff, Randall Banks, Grant Dickens, Shane Barnes, Beau Hodge, Craig Slaughter, Craig Collins, Brendan Lewandowski, Scott Robertson, Darryl Hathway, Cameron Williamson, Matt Packer, Danny Pitkin, Shaun Molenda, Reza Aysen, Tristan Fraser, Neil Reed, Kris Dodd, Clint Dal Santo, Troy Reed

Mr LEE: I look forward to a long and fruitful involvement with Taringa Rovers. I am keen to see the club grow, not only as an important part of our local community but also as an important part of soccer in Queensland. I am keen to see the soccer side, particularly the Firsts, prosper.

Taringa Rovers is also a family friendly club. They regularly provide free passes for junior players and local residents to first division games. One only has to be at the ground when they are playing at home to see the strong, vocal and enthusiastic support from the local community and their supporters. I am very pleased to commend the members of this club for their efforts.

Dairy Industry

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (7.16 p.m.): I rise to speak about the recent ruling by the ACCC in regard to collective negotiations. Farmers will now have the ability to form collective bargaining groups to negotiate milk supply agreements. I congratulate the QDO and Senator Ron Boswell on their progressive moves to have this implemented.

However, as members are no doubt aware, this is seen by major processors as a threat. For the first time, farmers have the right to have a say in the price of their product. What have we seen happen? Immediately after the law was passed, National Foods challenged the ruling. This ruling will provide stability in farm gate pricing. An extra two or three cents a litre can make or break our farmers. The greed of our major processors has finally been challenged, and what happens? They have to overturn this ruling, as power-happy leaders might lose a bit of control.

I understand that Coles and Woolworths have not lodged an objection to this authorisation. Those retailers know that without farmers they will not have milk. I am sure that our major supermarkets are happy to pay a bit more for their milk if it will guarantee a continued quality supply.

I firmly believe that collective bargaining for farmers must be a part of the review of the Trade Practices Act which will take place later this year. Let me explain what collective bargaining is. A group of farmers from one area—for example, the Darling Downs or the north or south coast—can collectively bargain in relation to the price of their product. They might offer to sell milk to processors at a certain price. This ruling enables farmers to bargain or to have some say in the sale of their product and to get the highest possible price.

I am extremely concerned about the Woolworths contract which is up for tender shortly. We last saw the Dairyfarmers cooperative win this contract. I fear that the tenders will be way too low and that this will drive the price of milk down.

The appeal launched by National Foods against the collective bargaining ruling by the ACCC will no doubt be extremely lengthy, thus preventing the ruling from being implemented and putting further pressure on already struggling dairy farmers. This appeal has to go before the Australian Competition Tribunal of the Federal Court for hearing and I doubt there is any way that can be sped up.

I now call on National Foods to withdraw their appeal, if they have any intestinal fortitude at all. I also ask any National Foods supplier to seriously question the reasons behind this appeal. I will tell members what is behind the appeal. It will help them to pay as little as possible for milk—milk which is produced by farmers who have to wake up and challenge their processors, and challenge them fiercely.

I also ask National Foods' suppliers to please put pressure on them and ask them to withdraw this appeal, as I can confidently say that it will hurt every producer. If a National Foods supplier is unhappy with what that processor is doing, that supplier should approach another processor.

Time expired.

Woree State High School

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (7.19 p.m.): Tonight I rise to bring to the attention of honourable members an initiative by the school council of the Woree State High School in Cairns, namely, a petition addressed to me. Unfortunately, it is not in the strictly correct form to allow its tabling as a petition. Nonetheless, the message in the petition and the number of signatures collected in only one lunch-hour at Woree State High School are a testament to the importance of the statement that these students are making. I bring it to the attention of honourable members and I will be passing it on to the Premier for his reply in due course. It states—

We the undersigned wish to acknowledge our support for the cultural diversity of our society. We recognise the need for harmony and the need to celebrate our many cultures. We call on the state government to create and fund policies that encourage cultural understanding, tolerance, celebration and acceptance.

This petition statement was placed on a table during one lunch-hour and was signed by 272 students and teachers of Woree State High School. Woree State High School is proud of its cultural diversity and it is appropriate that its young people should call on this government to do its utmost in the present climate to address multicultural issues.

I will ask that the Premier reply to the students as to what this government is already doing and any future plans we have to address the subject of that petition. I will also ask that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier (Multicultural Affairs), Darryl Briskey, meet with the students at his next opportunity. I am proud of the young people of Cairns, and particularly of these young people, for the fine values that they hold and for their determination already to take action and ensure that the society of the future in Cairns is a healthier and happier one than we already have.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (7.20 p.m.): Last week I had the happy privilege of launching an information resource on attention deficit disorder. The project was undertaken by the North Queensland Attention Deficit Disorder Support Group in conjunction with Soroptimist International and the state government. The folder is aimed at promoting awareness and highlighting the needed for understanding and support of attention deficit disorder. Soroptimists donated \$1,000 to the support group for the development of 80 information folders to be distributed throughout the community.

It is well known that parents of children with ADD suffer from a great deal of stress and are often blamed for their child's behaviour. Increasingly, research shows that many of them suffer poor health due to stress. Women have reported that their general health and wellbeing has been adversely affected by the lack of support in the community for their children. It is hoped that the circulation of information on diagnostic, medical, support, management and other services available will promote awareness and advocacy.

The North Queensland Attention Deficit Disorder Support Group is committed to providing information and education to assist individuals and families affected by this disorder. The resource dispels many myths and gives detailed and easily explained tools so that parents, carers and all stakeholders can be better informed about ADD. Definitions and guides are explored and covered in a comprehensive and easy to understand format.

I congratulate the North Queensland Attention Deficit Disorder Support Group on its fine efforts to produce an outcome which will go a long way in the effort to work with ADD and not run away from it. I also applaud the Soroptimists for their valuable contribution which made this project possible. They continue to make a difference to communities like ours and I thank them. This project could be a national resource, because sufferers of ADD do not just live in north Queensland; ADD occurs nationally.

Loco 106 Steam Train

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (7.22 p.m.): An important part of Toowoomba's history came home recently. After much negotiation between the Queensland government through Queensland Rail and the Darling Downs Rail Historical Society, Loco 106 returned home. In 1914, Loco 106, a C16 steam train used for passengers and freight, was constructed at the Toowoomba foundry. Today it is the only C16 in the world. Therefore, it is a valuable treasure not only to the Toowoomba community but the entire world. This treasure has been hidden from the public in a Queensland Rail storage facility at Redbank for some time. For the past 20 years,

Toowoomba's John Peel held a constant vision to return this train back to its home town and let the public marvel at its rarity and splendour.

After much negotiation, Queensland Rail made a commitment to the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce in 1999 to return the train to Toowoomba if suitable arrangements could be made for its ownership, restoration and care. As a consequence, the Darling Downs Rail Historical Society was formed as the body to take on this endeavour. The society is made up of representatives from all around the Darling Downs, including the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce's Ian Anderson; Toowoomba city councillors Lyle Shelton and Joe Ramia; Pittsworth Shire Council's Mayor Ros Scotney; the man with the vision, John Peel; and hard workers on the committee Ray Murphy, George Lucas and Ken Griesbach.

The project had the enthusiastic support of Mayor Di Thorley. After long, tedious and persistent negotiations for the best part of last year, Loco 106 was handed over recently—eventually—to the Darling Downs Rail Historical Society. Its homecoming was celebrated in hand with Toowoomba's Centenary of Federation celebrations and the opening of Federation Park, which is conveniently situated near the Toowoomba Railway Station.

The vision for Loco 106 continues for the Darling Downs Rail Historical Society as the restoration of the great train begins. The restoration will be funded through fundraising and community generosity, which has already been overwhelming. The ultimate vision for Loco 106 is to return it to the tracks at Toowoomba to be marvelled at and celebrated by all citizens and the rest of the world.

Darling Downs Rail Historical Society secretary and Toowoomba city councillor Lyle Shelton has asked me to pass on the society's most sincere thanks to the state government and Queensland Rail in particular for helping to make this vision a reality. I, too, would like to congratulate Queensland Rail on holding to its commitment and returning an important piece of history back to its home town. The persistence and vision of the Darling Downs Rail Historical Society and Mr John Peel should be acknowledged. They are the people who have worked so hard to make this dream a reality. Their efforts are a perfect example of how this state government and the community can work together.

Jobtrack

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (7.25 p.m.): On Thursday, 28 March I had the pleasure of attending the third birthday celebrations of Jobtrack. Jobtrack is an employment service at Zillmere in my electorate that works with young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years. The organisation was established in March 1999 and is auspiced by the St Vincent's Youth Service and Mercy Family Services.

I particularly mention the leadership role played by Andrew Bradshaw and Brenda Allport, team leaders of Jobtrack and the resource centre respectively, in the delivery of Jobtrack services to young people in north Brisbane. In the last year alone they have motivated, supported and assisted over 200 young people to seek and maintain employment, education and training.

Jobtrack has been a very important partner for the Queensland government under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative. Under the Community Employment Assistance Program, which provides training, job search and other assistance, Jobtrack has received over \$764,000 in grants for 15 projects. To date, these projects have assisted 587 long-term unemployed people.

One project, Yeaca Dhargo, meaning 'working all together', assists young indigenous people in achieving their employment, education and training goals. I particularly recognise Sil Johns and his co-workers for the excellent work they do in supporting young indigenous youth through this program. Under the Get Set for Work program, which aims to assist unemployed early school leavers aged 15 to 24 years into the local labour market, Jobtrack has received over \$244,000 in funding for two projects to assist 100 young persons. I congratulate all involved in the Jobtrack programs for providing an exceptionally valuable service to young people in need.

Honourable members would be aware of the government's recent announcements in terms of employment and training reforms for the future. There are essentially three elements to that package: firstly, the introduction of trials for the preparatory year of schooling; secondly, substantially increased spending on information and communication technologies; and of particular relevance to Jobtrack, a proposal to raise the leaving age for school from 15 to either 16 or 17 years, with the requirement that young people in that age group be involved in either work,

school, TAFE or other vocational education and training or higher education or an acceptable combination of those factors. It is exceptionally important that we target those people most at risk of leaving school early and involve them in the consultation process.

With that in mind, I have undertaken to visit Jobtrack in the very near future to conduct a forum at that centre specifically for young people in my electorate and neighbouring electorates. I look forward to cooperating with Jobtrack and young people and receiving their feedback on these exceptionally important reports proposed by the government.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Prince Charles Hospital

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (7.28 p.m.): The Prince Charles Hospital recently marked another milestone in its history of excellence in providing medical services. In the presence of the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, the chair of the Prince Charles Hospital and District Council, Ted Howard, the Centre of Excellence in Cardiovascular Magnetic Resonance Imaging was launched.

Mr Andrew Nunemaker from GE Medical Systems was there to formally hand over an MRI machine which, at the time of its commissioning, was only the fourth of its type in the world, the other three being located in the United States of America.

Under the direction of Dr Richard Slaughter from the Prince Charles Hospital, and working with Queensland Health and GE Medical Systems, this machine was located at the Prince Charles Hospital in an area specifically built for this purpose. This centre will be used not only for cardiac imaging and research, which will provide excellent treatment and analysis of current patients, but also to develop ways of using this technology and developing this technology to make it a more effective tool for assisting patients.

The dual speed magnets provide a variation in MRI which current machinery does not possess. As well, it is a great deal quieter than existing machines, which means that the trauma, particularly for older persons and children, is minimised and the patient is much less stressed.

The centre of excellence has attracted radiographers from other institutes to the Prince Charles Hospital, and I am pleased to say that all the other sections of the hospital have supported this department in its achievements. TPCCH has a fantastic spirit, where every department supports every other department in their achievements.

I thank the minister and Queensland Health for what they have done. I thank GE Medical Systems for its part in the partnership. I know that this will lead not only to the better treatment of patients on the north side of Brisbane but also to developments for all Queenslanders in this field of medical services.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.31 p.m.