WEDNESDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2002

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

PRIVILEGE
Vandalism, Chung Tian Buddhist Temple

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.31 a.m.): I rise on a matter of privilege. There is a report in this morning’s Courier-Mail headed ‘Vandalism—statues ruined.’ It refers to an alleged incident where a sledgehammer was used to knock the heads from five statues at the Chung Tian Buddhist Temple at Priestdale in Rochedale South on Brisbane’s southside. Police believe the destruction may have been a warped attempt by the vandal to exact revenge over the terrorist tragedies. The police have verbally confirmed to my office this morning that they are investigating under those circumstances.

I want to make it very clear—and I have discussed this matter with Stephen Robertson—that I would be deeply disturbed if anybody would seek to pursue any issue of violence against any Australian. We made it very clear in the condolence resolution yesterday that we need to bring Australians together. There is no room for this behaviour from anybody. I want to say very clearly to the Australian Chinese community that they have the full support of my government and, no doubt, the full support of all members of this parliament. We will not tolerate this behaviour. We expect the police to fully investigate it and to take appropriate and full action.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORT

Mr SPEAKER: I have to report that today I received from the Auditor-General a report entitled Audit Report No. 2, 2002-03: Results of audits performed as at 31 July 2002 incorporating a governance and risk management review of government owned corporations and local governments. I table the said report.

CRIME AND MISCONDUCT COMMISSION

Mr SPEAKER: I have to report that today I received from the chairperson of the Crime and Misconduct Commission a report entitled Forensics under the microscope and I table the said report.

PETITIONS
School of Distance Education
Mrs Christine Scott from 88 petitioners requesting the House take the appropriate steps necessary to ensure that years 11/12 be included in the School of Distance Education curriculum and that this initiative is adopted by the Education Department.

Police Station, Ravenswood
Mrs Christine Scott from 10 petitioners requesting the House to take the appropriate steps necessary to ensure a new police station and residence is built in Ravenswood at the earliest possible opportunity. Also your petitioners wish to ensure that a Ravenswood police station be administered from within the Charters Towers Police District.

Bridge, Copperfield River, Einasleigh
Mrs Christine Scott from 173 petitioners requesting the House take the appropriate steps necessary to ensure a new bridge is built over the Copperfield River at Einasleigh and that the necessary repairs to the rail line are carried out as a matter of urgency.

 Dangerous Dogs
Mrs Pratt from 115 petitioners requesting the House to amend the laws to ensure each ‘alleged dangerous dog’ is assessed on its individual merits, by an animal behaviour expert, for example, Dr Cam Day and not by appearance alone. We further petition that animals falling into this category are housed humanely at the nearest RSPCA in lieu of using council dog pound facilities, where contact with humans is so poor and so limited, during any litigation.
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Internet Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.34 a.m.), by leave: Very shortly the Leader of the House will be moving changes to sessional orders, but the recent highly successful sittings of this House in north Queensland prove that Queenslanders are very interested in the work of their parliament and parliamentarians. As members are aware, the government is committed to making the Queensland parliament more accessible to the people of this state every day it is in session. The e-petitions service that allows Queenslanders to initiate and join petitions to the Queensland parliament online is already in place. I am very pleased that later today the House will now also consider a motion for the Queensland parliament to trial a live audio broadcast of parliamentary proceedings via the Internet with a view to the broadcast service commencing later this year or early next year. I am convinced that the Internet broadcast of parliamentary proceedings will give more Queenslanders an opportunity to understand how their parliament works and to see how their elected representatives are performing. I am also convinced that this will allow for a new level of transparency around parliamentary process, with the public having greater opportunity to hear at first-hand the decisions made by their elected representatives about issues important to Queenslanders.

I would like to reassure members that Hansard will remain parliament's official record. Queensland is far from being the first jurisdiction to trial a broadcast of parliamentary proceedings. Indeed, Queensland is in good company, with a number of legislatures around the world and in Australia broadcasting proceedings over the Internet. I am nevertheless very proud of this and other e-democracy initiatives to which this government is committed. The Internet broadcast of parliamentary proceedings along with the online petitioning service launched earlier this year, which I note is an Australian first, represent significant achievements for the government in relation to enhancing community and government engagement. I will of course make further statements in the House when the broadcast service is about to commence. However, I take this opportunity once again to encourage members to make these facilities known to their constituents. As well, I encourage Queenslanders to make the most of these new opportunities to get closer to the work of their parliament and parliamentarians. Mr Speaker, I acknowledge our conversation earlier today when you indicated that we had received our first e-petition, which arrived yesterday. I understand that there are another three on the way. It is fantastic to see the e-petitions becoming popular.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Coral Reef Fin Fishery

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 a.m.), by leave: The tropical fish of the Great Barrier Reef are among Queensland's great natural assets. Fish such as coral trout, sweetlip and emperors are coveted not only for their eating quality and the recreational fisher's enjoyment of catching them. They are also prized for their vibrant beauty that helps attract snorkellers, divers and tourists, and for their vital role in the delicate ecology of the Great Barrier Reef. The fish are so much a part of our state that it would be easy for Queenslanders to take them for granted and to assume they will always be there. But a growing body of evidence shows this is a foolish assumption. Growing demand and high prices in the live fish export markets, coupled with increasing sophistication and efficient commercial fishing techniques, have put the fishes' future in the balance.

Despite warnings against increased investment and effort in 1997 and 1998, the commercial catch has grown by 45 per cent since 1997. The catch of live fish for export grew from 708 tonnes in 2000 to 1,150 tonnes last year. The average sizes of many popular species have fallen to be marginally above the minimum legal size. Most of these fish are long-lived and slow-growing, so stocks are not readily renewed.
The science alarms the state government, and we are not alone. An independent expert panel has reported to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority that this fishery needs a 'precautionary approach'. Another marine park authority report has gone so far as to suggest the fishery be closed for three months each year during the October-December spawning season. And the Commonwealth may use its power to ban the export of Queensland coral reef fish unless the industry becomes more sustainable. The Commonwealth has the power under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. It requires us to report on the condition of the reef fishery and to show we have plans to ensure its sustainability.

Make no mistake: if we do not reform the industry, the federal government could shut down Queensland exports of live coral fish. This makes the draft management plan and regulatory impact statement on the coral reef fin fishery, released last month for consultation by Henry Palaszczuk and myself, absolutely crucial. We propose a ban on fishing for three species, as well as size limits on most species and revised bag limits. We want the commercial catch to shrink from the current level of up to 4,400 tonnes to the 1996 level of 3,061 tonnes, and we are considering closures during the spawning season.

If ever there is a time to be careful and conservative in the way we fish and allow fishing, it is the three-month spawning season at the end of each year. We want to hear the views of all interested parties about the proposal in the marine park authority report for a full three-month closure. The state government is not overly keen on this proposal. We are hearing arguments for periodic closures lasting nine days—for example, two or three nine-day closures during the spawning season. What we do in terms of closures will depend largely on the results of consultation.

The bottom line is: without reform, some species will disappear from plates, lines and tour brochures. Consultation on the future of the fin fishery closes on 16 December, and I urge all interested people to give very serious thought to the long-term health of the fishery and of the reef.

For the information of the House, I table the Queensland Fisheries Service coral reef fishery response form so that every member is aware of it and can seek responses. I am aware that a bit of politics is being played on this issue in some parts of the state. I wish to make it very clear that the government I lead is about preserving the coral reef and the fish for future generations.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I take the interjection from the Minister for Public Works, because he, along with the Minister for Primary Industries, has been very committed to this. We are on the side of the fish. I urge people not to play short-term politics when talking about the conservation of not just the Great Barrier Reef but also the fish on it, which are integral not just to the survival of the reef but also to the tourism industry. It is easy to play cheap politics; it is hard to play a constructive role when talking about conservation. I understand the political dangers of the government doing the right thing here, but no-one should be under any illusions; we are determined to do the right thing in the interests of the reef, the fish and the tourism industry. We are prepared to cop the criticism, but we want some sensible debate. It is now time for people to respond to the plans that we have put out.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Australian Airlines; Vandalism, Chung Tian Buddhist Temple

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.41 a.m.), by leave: This Sunday will be the dawn of a new era for Cairns and the tropical north—indeed a new era for tourism in Queensland. The first Australian Airlines 767-300 aircraft is scheduled to take off from Cairns on Sunday afternoon. I believe the Minister for Transport will be there to see it happen. In fact, the Minister for Tourism would also be there except that she has already been to Cairns this week and she will be at the Indy on Sunday, which is an important occasion for all of us.

The inaugural flight due to touch down in Nagoya and Osaka in the early evening, Japan time. Very early the next morning, the first inbound Australian Airlines jet will carry Japanese tourists into Cairns, and will then make a connecting flight to the Gold Coast, thus extending the tourism bonanza to the state’s south-east. By late November, the airline’s wide-bodied jets will be
shuttling to and from Cairns and Nagoya, Osaka and to Fukuoka, Japan, Singapore, Taipei and Hong Kong. The Qantas subsidiary plans to operate all-economy services, initially with four Boeing 767-300s, with plans to increase the size of the fleet.

There will be daily return services between Nagoya and Cairns; daily return services between Osaka and Cairns; three weekly return services between Fukuoka and Cairns; three weekly return services between Singapore and Cairns; three weekly return services between Taipei and Cairns; and daily connecting services between Cairns and the Gold Coast. When in full swing, Australian Airlines says it will deliver 26 weekly services, 7,000 inbound passengers each week, 350,000 international tourists for Queensland, and an estimated injection of $500 million into the state economy.

I congratulate businesses, residents and authorities of the tropical north for working overtime to maximise the opportunities spinning off from Australian Airlines. They have not missed a beat, and the government has been delighted to work with them, particularly the Department of State Development. The arrival of Australian is further proof of the value of the government's business attraction program.

Often the Minister for State Development, Tom Barton, and this government get criticised for these programs. Let me make it clear that if Tom Barton had not negotiated this deal on behalf of the state government Australian would not be going to Cairns. Is this incentive program worth it? The answer is yes. I say to the tourism industry in Cairns: do you think it is worth it? I bet they will say yes also. I wish to put on record that this is exactly why the government does this, that is, to ensure that we get the jobs and opportunities that go with it. I thank Tom Barton for the effort he and his department have put into this.

To secure an operational hub in Cairns, we offered payroll tax refunds, training assistance and joint marketing. Every dollar should have been spent. I fully expect our efforts to be repaid many times over. Local suppliers, such as caterers and cleaners, stand to reap contracts worth an estimated $25 million from Australian. As I said, the Department of State Development has been working with local firms to help them cash in on opportunities. Tourism Queensland has teamed up with industry and the airline to run a three-year marketing campaign conservatively valued at $16 million. Our partners in this campaign include the Australian Tourism Commission, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, the Gold Coast Tourism Bureau, the Gold Coast airport and the Cairns Port Authority. Industry backing will augment the value of the campaign by about 20 per cent.

The far north is always an exciting place, and tourism—highly dependent on an energetic workforce—is one of the industries helping to build the Smart State. But rarely has there been such a time of excitement as the present for the tropical north and tourism in Queensland.

This is one of the other reasons I made the comments this morning in relation to the Chung Tian Buddhist Temple at Rochedale South. This is not just about the important issue of multiculturalism. We have to realise that in terms of the tourism market the message we send to Asia is vitally important to the jobs of the 150,000 people working in the tourism industry. This is not just the right thing to do to support all Australians; there is an underlying business advantage as well, and that is what it means to our tourism market.

I have been handed an additional brief in relation to the point I made before in the matter of privilege. It states—

Shortly after midnight a person entered the grounds of the Chung Tian Buddhist Temple in Rochedale South. The intruder used a sledgehammer or an iron bar to sever the heads from five statues. There was security evidence of the intruder. There are no suspects at the moment. Police are treating the matter within the framework of the heightened security following the recent terrorist attacks.

I again reiterate what I said before in terms of our commitment to supporting the Australian Chinese community. Hopefully, later today the Minister for Natural Resources and I will have an opportunity to visit the temple.
behalf of the government. It is our recently released policy Creative Queensland—The Queensland Government Cultural Policy 2002. It encourages the development of cultural tourism and promises to deliver more jobs for Queenslanders. This policy represents a new approach to the arts and culture in Queensland. It is a key part of the Smart State. I hope all members will take an opportunity to read this policy. In light of time, I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my statement in Hansard.

Leave granted.

For the first time, we will have a whole-of-government approach to the arts with departments being encouraged to work together to increase employment and training opportunities in the cultural and creative industries.

All departments and agencies will acknowledge that arts and cultural programs are core business for the Government and that they all have a role to play in delivering those programs.

In line with our Smart State vision, the policy focuses on using new technologies and on promoting cultural tourism and creative industries.

The growing importance of cultural tourism has been highlighted by the success of the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art which draws visitors from interstate and overseas.

The economic potential of our creative industries will be further enhanced through the development of a Cultural Export Policy to take Queensland's arts to the world.

In this year's State Budget, $196 million dollars was allocated to the Arts portfolio.

This policy is a further sign of our commitment to the creative industries, a sector where many new jobs are emerging.

This policy is the result of extensive consultation with industry experts, the arts and cultural sector, individuals and groups across Queensland.

It will foster leadership and professional excellence in the arts and should well and truly put paid to any suggestions that Queensland is a cultural backwater.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Teacher Recruitment

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.47 a.m.), by leave: Last week, our government launched a series of recruitment commercials for television and cinema promoting teaching as a career. The aim of the 10-week campaign—with six weeks on television and six weeks in cinemas with a two week overlap—is to encourage our school leavers, university graduates and mature-age people who are contemplating their career options to consider teaching. Teachers have a real opportunity to make a difference in young people's lives and to shape the community of the future. The campaign aims to attract bright, enthusiastic people to state school teaching, providing the best education possible to students. The commercials feature the personal reflections of two current school teachers, and other teachers are used in the general footage.

As school and university students are currently considering their options, now is the perfect time to encourage them to think about teaching as a career. Students have until 17 January to make final changes to their course choices. I am happy to assure the House that, while there is no teacher shortage in Queensland at present, there is a need to plan for the future. Currently, there are 35,000 teachers employed in state schools in Queensland and many more in our non-state system. Approximately 450 additional teachers will be needed next year in the state system to meet growth alone.

One of the two commercials is aimed at attracting males to the profession of teaching. Males make up just 28 per cent of the teaching work force in Queensland state schools, which falls short of the 35 per cent target set in Education Queensland's male teachers strategy to be achieved by 2006. Since 1995 the number of male teachers in the state system has reduced from 33 per cent to the current 28 per cent. That is a five per cent decline in seven years—a decline which I believe we must arrest. The House of Representatives' report on boys education released this week also highlights the need to attract males to teaching. Some of Queensland's strategies to address this have been noted in the report as positive examples. TV and cinema was chosen as the best advertising media to reach the target audience—16 to 24 year olds—who research shows have a high consumption of TV and cinema, higher than the rest of the population.

Since Monday morning when the 1300 number that was advertised opened, I am pleased to report to members that already there has been a good response. There have been 63 calls to the 1300 number advertised and 24 emails to the web site. I am also pleased to report that some
universities—the University of Queensland and Central Queensland University—have reported to Education Queensland an increase in course inquiries directly related to the advertising.

Earlier this year the Premier, the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth, Matt Foley, and I launched *Queensland the Smart State: Education and training reforms for the future*. This reform package offers the most exciting changes to education in decades. Our government is investing in education in the Smart State with more teachers, better training and new technology. There has never been a better time to teach. These advertisements are part of a wider workforce renewal plan, just like the career change program, and the aim is to have the best people standing at the front of our classrooms teaching. Teaching is a profession that offers many rewards, many that last a lifetime. I would like to take the opportunity to encourage Queenslanders to make a difference and teach.

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

Queensland Government Cultural Policy, Creative Queensland

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Youth and Minister for the Arts) (9.51 a.m.), by leave: With the new cultural policy Creative Queensland referred to earlier by the Premier, this government is building on a strong cultural tradition. From the oldest of Australia's art forms—ancient Aboriginal rock art to the 14-year-old music festival Livid—Queensland is rich in cultural heritage and cutting-edge arts. This state has been a fertile ground for international, national and local success stories in film, television, writing, dance, theatre, music and visual arts. Creative Queensland provides the first whole-of-government framework to underpin the government's significant investment in arts and cultural development.

There are three key ideas in Creative Queensland: the first is that art and culture are the business of the whole of government, not just one agency; the second is an affirmation of respect for indigenous culture as fundamental to our identity as a community; and the third is an affirmation of regional arts, not just on the basis of giving people a fair go but as part of our cultural diversity—celebrating the many voices in the choir. Creative Queensland is about enhancing individual and community wellbeing, increasing jobs and training, enhancing economic development, and strengthening community capacity and renewal. It is also about government doing its business smarter. Creative Government, a companion document to Creative Queensland, illustrates our whole-of-government approach. It profiles cultural activities undertaken by government departments and agencies. The message is simple: whether the government is constructing an office building, running a school, delivering disability services, providing corrective services or planning a busway, culture matters and is an integral part of the business of government.

Creative Queensland sets out a policy framework for government that encompasses people, communities, places, collections and traditions, and creative enterprises. New initiatives in the Creative Queensland policy include an annual creative fellowship to recognise leading Queensland artists; a small business start-up program, including skills development, to assist new businesses in the cultural sector; a cultural export policy to take Queensland's art and culture products to the world; and an indigenous cultural network to link a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural activity and new facilities in Brisbane.

Creative Queensland is accompanied by five snapshots which profile key areas of investment: indigenous arts and culture, children and young people, creative enterprise, regional communities, and jobs and training. The Creative Queensland cultural policy will position this government as one that values culture and the arts and is prepared to engage all departments in achieving the Queensland government's vision for Queensland—that is, to be a culturally dynamic place, rich in diversity and experiences, where ideas and talent are supported, where artistic and cultural pursuits are encouraged and where the economy is enhanced by excellence in creative innovation. It will be a cultural policy for all Queenslanders. I table the cultural policy Creative Queensland and its companion document Creative Government.

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

Queensland Institute of Medical Research Awards

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy) (9.55 a.m.), by leave: On Monday night it was my pleasure, and indeed privilege, to present the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Awards. The work done
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sugar Industry

Hon. T. A. Barton (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for State Development) (9.58 a.m.), by leave:

Following the signing of a memorandum of understanding in relation to a joint approach to supporting the sugar industry by the federal and state governments, we are now implementing the state's $30 million package of support. Immediately after the signing of the agreement with the federal government, I undertook consultation meetings in five major sugar producing centres—Bundaberg, Mackay, Ayr, Ingham and Cairns. I wanted to provide information to the industry and the communities that depend on them as soon as I could. I also wanted to hear their views on the way forward and how both governments can work with them.

The meetings were attended by a range of stakeholders in the sugar industry—growers, millers, harvesters, union organisers, local businesspeople, councillors and several members of this House. I found that, out of my discussions with stakeholders, there was a real willingness to work with the government. I have written to all growers and to local authorities with information on the package. Our package is regionally focused.

In each region we will have a regional action group composed of individuals with a commitment to change and innovation in the sugar industry. These individuals will be drawn from a range of backgrounds, including cane growing, milling, business or community activities. They will have an important role in advising the state government on regional priorities for government assistance and in commenting on proposals for support from the Sugar Innovation Fund. We are very hopeful that these regional action groups will also serve a similar purpose for the federal government. We are awaiting advice from the federal government on agreement of the composition of the regional action groups.

This week the state government will advertise for sugar resources officers, one for each of the following regions: the north, Herbert River, the Burdekin, Mackay, Bundaberg and the south. These officers will support the work of the regional action groups, coordinate government service delivery for the sugar industry and help innovative people in the industry develop their ideas. They will be a presence on the ground, working to ensure that the sugar industry and the communities that depend on it enjoy the greatest benefits from the significant support being provided by the state government. The guidelines for eligible projects for assistance under the Sugar Innovation Fund will be available this week on our web site and through state development centres. We hope to have our regional action groups and sugar resources officers working on the ground in November.
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Motor Vehicle Theft

Hon. T. McGrady (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province) (10.00 a.m.), by leave: Motor vehicle theft is an issue which affects our community each and every day, and it is certainly something which the government and the Queensland Police Service take very seriously. With this in mind, I am pleased to report to the House on some preliminary findings by police. They have estimated that in the last financial year the number of reported motor vehicle thefts has decreased by about 15 per cent. That equates to about 3,010 fewer reported offences for motor vehicle theft in the 2001-02 financial year as compared to the previous year. No-one in this House would doubt that motor vehicle theft is an issue in our community and, as far as I am concerned, I would love to see the day when we have no motor vehicle theft at all. But I am encouraged by the fact that we have seen a significant reduction in this sort of crime over the last 12 months.

I am also pleased to report that Queensland continues to lead the nation when it comes to combating motor vehicle theft. According to the latest figures produced by the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council, Queensland recorded about 30,000 fewer motor vehicle thefts than New South Wales in the last financial year and about 15,000 fewer than Victoria. In relation to the number of thefts per 1,000 people, we recorded the lowest rate in Australia, with 4.2 thefts occurring for every 1,000 people. In New South Wales, the corresponding figure was 7.1; in Western Australia it was six; in Victoria it was 6.8; in Tasmania it was 5.3; in South Australia it was 7.7; in the ACT it was 7.5; and in the Northern Territory it was 5.3. We were second only behind Tasmania in recording the largest single reduction in the number of thefts over the last financial year.

I am advised by police that the recovery rate of stolen motor vehicles in Queensland remains at about 80 per cent to 85 per cent. The police and the government cannot rest on this record alone. Motor vehicle theft is a very serious offence and the police will continue working with the community to reduce the number of thefts throughout our state. However, I am encouraged by these preliminary figures, as should all members be, and I trust the good work by police will continue into the future.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Aboriginal and Islander Communities

Hon. J. C. Spence (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have this month lost two respected and long-serving leaders. I pay respect to them today and express condolences to their families, communities and colleagues. Yarrabah community leader Councillor Lloyd Fourmile and Kuranda elder Mr Lance Riley were exceptional men whose loss will be keenly felt in both the indigenous and broader community. Both men were candidates in the ATSIC elections and had long histories of serving their people with great dedication and loyalty. Mr Riley had a reputation for valuing his culture and teaching his children and others the importance of traditional values and language. Lloyd Fourmile was renowned for his commitment to the Yarrabah community and was a former chair of the Yarrabah Council and the Aboriginal Coordinating Council. We honour the achievements and the lives of these men. Their contributions will be remembered and revered now and in the future.

Last week I travelled to the Torres Strait to open four new community facilities worth more than $3.7 million. I also launched a new crime prevention manual, Kaineddiibipiitli, specifically developed for Torres Strait Islander communities. The manual was based on Yaldilda, a similar resource successfully developed for mainland indigenous communities, and provides details on existing crime prevention initiatives in the Torres Strait and the process of planning and executing new strategies. On Badu Island the $1.2 million Aragun Child Care Centre provides modern, safe and educational facilities for the care of up to 44 young children, and I congratulate the council and staff of the centre for their efforts in securing funding for and developing what is not only a wonderful new facility but also a great investment in the future of young Badu Islanders. The new council chambers on Badu Island have been constructed at a cost of $700,000 and are one of 14 new Torres Strait Islander chambers constructed under a three-year capital works initiative. On Moa Island I opened two Islander Board of Industry and Service stores at St Pauls and Kubin.
These stores, constructed at a combined cost of $1.8 million, provide modern shopping facilities and refrigerated storage for fresh foods.

It is a great privilege to travel to remote islands in the Torres Strait. It is a beautiful part of the world and such trips give me the opportunity to not only open new and important government funded facilities but also see some of the innovative work being undertaken by Queensland indigenous communities. For example, the St Pauls Island Council on Moa Island has established a training consultancy that offers structured and VETEC accredited courses up to diploma level in business and administration, trade based literacy and numeracy, instructional skills and workplace assessment and community housing. The council has established an air conditioned training facility and is currently developing an accommodation hostel for trainees.

Also on Moa Island the Kubin community is the base for a collective of internationally renowned artists led by Dennis Nona from Badu Island, Billy Missi and Victor Motlop from Mabuiag Island and David Bosun from Moa Island. These artists have studied mainland art courses and now specialise in the recording of ancient stories on lino prints as well as the portrayal of changes in contemporary island life. They successfully toured their first exhibition, Dugong My Son, over three years to venues including Canada and England and are the first group from the Torres Strait to exhibit overseas. Since then, the collective has entered a number of group exhibitions around Australia, including the Silk Cut Art Awards, the annual Fremantle Print Awards, the Telstra Art Awards and Painting Native Title Business, a four-year touring show launched in July at the Queensland Museum. Yesterday the group travelled to Melbourne to launch their new exhibition, Seven Stars, which also features local dancers and song and will tour nationally and internationally to locations including Vancouver, London, New York and Paris.

These artists work from a very humble shed at Kubin with relatively simple equipment, but they are hoping to expand their workshop into the old retail store and create the first Art and Craft Development Centre for Torres Strait Islander artists in the region. They are committed to maintaining their traditional culture as well as providing inspiration and training for a new generation of aspiring artists. They have successfully created an enterprising artistic movement, one which I am sure will bring great fame and fortune to their community and to the entire Torres Strait.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Drought

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.07 a.m.), by leave: Today, along with many other members of this parliament, I will be accepting an invitation from the Premier to attend an ecumenical service at St John’s Cathedral to pray for rain. We need prolonged soaking rain, and when we get that we need some more. Unfortunately, the advice from the government’s Queensland Centre for Climate Applications for the next three months is poor, with probabilities of receiving median rainfall less than 40 per cent right across the state. Tonight I will also be joining some of the driving forces behind the Farmhand Foundation Appeal, including Peter Holmes a Court, ahead of the major concert and telethon to be held on Saturday night. In Queensland, a special event will be held at Clifton on Saturday.

I reported to the parliament yesterday about a new measure of assistance for drought declared primary producers in Queensland, and I reiterate that proposal to honourable members. The government’s Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority is prepared to consider providing its drought declared borrowers relief in the form of an interest-only repayment option. This option offers farmers the capacity to reduce their repayments and commit those funds elsewhere whilst not increasing their debt. I also encourage drought declared producers with loans from commercial lenders to inquire if they would provide similar interest-only options. I have been very encouraged in general by the response of the banks to the drought. I met with representatives of the banks in July and have been encouraged by the information provided by the Australian Bankers Association, including its reference to the interest-only option. I would urge producers to contact the DPI’s farm financial counsellors through the DPI call centre if they want assistance in approaching their commercial lender. The government provides a range of assistance measures and has a detailed drought policy. In addition, an industry working group was established earlier this year and I will be meeting with that group next week.
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Ecotourism

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Tourism and Racing and Minister for Fair Trading) (10.09 a.m.), by leave: Queensland is positioning itself to be the world leader in ecotourism. Ecotourism has long been a priority for Queensland and has led the way down the path to sustainable tourism. The industry segment is fast outgrowing the niche market tag. In Queensland, ecotourism is forecast to grow at 10 per cent to 20 per cent a year as an increasing number of visitors seek environmental tourism experiences. It is vital we manage this growth wisely. Resources need to be managed responsibly to achieve the right balance between ecological, commercial and cultural sustainability.

Queensland has by far the largest number of nature and ecotourism operators in Australia, with some 800—or around 30 per cent—of the national total. Recognising this, the government developed the Queensland Ecotourism Plan, which was launched in 1997. The plan aimed to provide leadership in the areas of planning, development, management and marketing for ecotourism. It is five years since the original plan was launched, and as most of the actions have been successfully implemented a review was timely.

The revised plan, the Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2003-2008, maintains the original key objectives—environmental protection and management, ecotourism industry development, infrastructure and community development. We have included a new focus on research, which was supported by industry feedback. The vision espoused in the plan is for Queensland to be the world's leading ecotourism destination, with government, industry and community working in partnership and adopting best practice planning, development, management and marketing.

The revised plan will help us achieve an even better understanding of the different needs of international markets and enable us to tailor our marketing and product accordingly. It will also continue the process of developing a better management system for our protected areas. I officially launched the new plan at the International Ecotourism Conference in Cairns yesterday. I seek leave to table the Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2003-2008.

Leave granted.

Ms ROSE: Our standing on the world ecotourism stage was highlighted by hosting the Cairns conference, the first such gathering held in Australia. The Queensland government and Tourism Queensland were major sponsors of the conference, which is a fitting finale to the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002. The conference attracted delegates from all over the world and is addressing issues ranging from indigenous and cultural tourism to building ecologically sound resorts. The potential outcomes are enormous and will impact on the future of ecotourism.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Tractor Safety

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.13 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to be able to announce today new measures being put in place by this government to reduce the unacceptably high number of tractor rollover fatalities and injuries in Queensland. Under proposed new regulations, all tractors in Queensland workplaces that were manufactured after 1981 will be required to be fitted with a rollover protective structure, or ROPS—a steel rollbar designed to help protect the driver in the event of a tractor rolling over. These proposed regulations would affect tractors not just on farms but also in workplaces including schools, golf courses, local councils and resorts and in industries such as landscaping.

This government has been working to improve tractor safety since a National Occupational Health and Safety Commission report released last year showed that Queensland had more tractor related fatalities than any other state or territory in Australia. Seven people were killed in tractor rollover accidents in Queensland in 2000, four people died in 1999 and a further three died in 1998. Tractor rollovers account for nearly half of all tractor related deaths on farms in Queensland.

Right now there are an estimated 100,000 tractors operating in workplaces in Queensland, and about 40 per cent do not have a ROPS. It is estimated that some 20,000 tractors will have to be fitted to comply with the new regulations.

As I said, under the new regulations, due to come into effect early next year, ROPS will be mandatory on all tractors manufactured after 1 January 1981. Tractors built before 1981 that are operated by an employee will also be required to have a ROPS fitted. That means that all
employees operating a tractor in Queensland will have the added protection of these safety devices. Where a tractor is used in an orchard or inside a building, where the risk of rollovers is minimal, a ROPS will not be required.

In an effort to help owners meet the costs of these new structures, the regulations will be phased in over four years and a subsidy will apply for all WorkCover policyholders who have a rollover protective structure fitted during that period. The rebate will be $250 for people who fit a structure in the first or second year. That is about one-third of the average cost of $800 of a standard rollover protective structure. A rebate of $200 will be offered on a ROPS fitted in the third year of the phase-in period, and $150 will be offered in the fourth year. I hope the higher subsidy offered in the first two years will encourage people to fit their tractors sooner and perhaps save a life sooner.

At the same time, my department will be introducing a new advisory standard on the use of seatbelts in tractors that will require all tractor owners to carry out a risk assessment on any work to be done, and in high risk work a seat belt must be worn. I would like to thank the many stakeholders throughout Queensland who made significant contributions to the impact statement that was issued for public consultation in September last year. I took members of my Industrial Relations Parliamentary Committee to Proserpine recently to witness first-hand the types of ROPS used on tractors around the state and to talk to workers about their support for these types of protection.

I sincerely believe, and so do many key stakeholders, that these new regulations will help save lives and help prevent the many serious injuries that have hurt not only the rural industry but also many other workplaces right around the state.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Computer and Internet Usage

Hon. P. T. LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Innovation and Information Economy) (10.17 a.m., by leave: I have some great news. That is, as the Smart State we are eclipsing the rest of the country when it comes to using computers and the Internet in our homes. All members can read about it in this new survey by the Office of Statistical Economic Research of household Internet and computer usage in Queensland.

Mr Schwarten: Can we get it on the Net?

Mr LUCAS: The minister can read about it on the Net. The good news is that it shows how willing we in the Smart State are to embrace technology—logging on at home and enjoying the convenience of shopping online, sending emails and photos to friends and family, keeping up with the household finances and even doing our taxes.

In Queensland, almost 70 per cent of households now have a computer at home. The national average is 67 per cent. More than 55 per cent of Queensland households have Internet connection. The national average is 52 per cent. These results show why we are the Smart State.

The best news is that the biggest increases have been in communities that had the least access in the past. The member for Mackay will be pleased to hear that 66.5 per cent of adults in his region have computer access at home—up from 56 per cent last year. Internet access in his region has also jumped to 55 per cent this year. I am happy to inform the members for Mount Isa and Gregory that Internet access in their areas also jumped by 11 per cent in a single year. In fact, most regions showed an increase in computer access rates.

But there is more good news. Our seniors have shown that age is no barrier to learning computer skills. The over 65s recorded the biggest increase in the rate of computer use—almost doubling from last year—so that now 40 per cent of our senior citizens are computer savvy. That is the fastest growth rate for any age group.

Put simply, Queenslanders are embracing the Smart State message and seeing the value of a home computer and Internet access for themselves and their children. The highest use for the Internet in our homes is for research and study at 73 per cent, and for emails and social communication at 71 per cent.

Of course there is still room to improve. Cost is a factor, as only 46 per cent of people with an income of less than $11,000 have access to the Internet, compared with 80 per cent of people earning $51,000 or more.

Mr Mickel: How are we going in Logan?
Mr LUCAS: The highest usage rate is in south-east Queensland, and Logan is part of that. But the great news is that other parts of the state are very close behind and catching up at a fantastic rate.

Employment and education also come into it, as unemployed people and people who have not completed senior high school are less likely to have home computer and Internet access. We already have great programs in place, such as the Community Skills Development Program, which provides funding for basic IT training to communities with a population of 10,000 or less. Our IT Skills Training and Role Models program provides funding for programs that promote IT as a career. Just recently I announced our Tech Survival Skills program to target disadvantaged groups so that no-one is left behind.

This survey shows that the government is on the right track and that our community based IT skills programs, our provision of government information and services online, and lobbying the federal government for improved telecommunications services for the bush are strategies that are working.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.20 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That general business order of the day No. 1, Care of Terminally-ill Patients Bill, be postponed until a further resolution of the House.

Motion agreed to.

INTERNET BROADCASTING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.20 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That
(1) The House authorise the publication and broadcast over the Internet of the audio of its proceedings;
(2) Where possible, the broadcast of the audio is to be accompanied by an indication of the member speaking and a description of the subject of the debate;
(3) That the Speaker and the Clerk be authorised to do all things necessary in order to give effect to these orders.

Motion agreed to.

OVERSEAS VISIT

Report

Dr WATSON (Moggill—Lib) (10.21 a.m.): I table a report and supplementary documents on a trip that I and the member for Barron River undertook to Namibia. The purpose of the trip was to represent the Queensland parliament at the 48th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference held from 7 to 16 September 2002 at Windhoek, Namibia.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Firefighter Assistance

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (10.21 a.m.): I give notice that I shall move—

That in the light of the prolonged drought and subsequent critical fire risk, that this government ensure that land under its control has adequate firebreaks; that access roads used by firefighters are clear of debris, including overhanging tree limbs to provide maximum protection for firefighting personnel, volunteers and civilians; and that the government review the scope of equipment available for firefighting.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (10.22 a.m.): I give notice that I will move—

That the Justice Legislation (Variation of Fees and Costs) Regulation (No. 1) 2002, subordinate legislation (No. 223) 2002 tabled in the parliament on 3 September 2002 be disallowed.
PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS
Government Secrecy

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.22 a.m.): We have now seen three more instalments in the secret state agenda of the Labor government. The first instalment was the Treasurer's refusal to answer another question that we have asked on the state government's performance through the QIC in investment returns. These sorts of answers were provided to us during the past financial year and they have been readily available to us from the minister. But all of a sudden, when the returns have crashed by 13 per cent—from a predicted 7.8 per cent down to minus five per cent—the Treasurer has clammed up and is covering up. He is saying, 'Go to the web site.' We went to the web site, but even the QSuper officers cannot provide us with the assistance there, because we cannot get the figures that we want, which are the monthly overall returns and the year-to-date returns.

The second instalment was Queensland Health's refusal under FOI to provide the list of cancelled operations for category 1, category 2 and category 3 operations. This information was provided just on 12 months ago—at the end of last year—but now, all of a sudden, the department says that it cannot provide it. This morning we read the pathetic excuse in the paper where the Health Minister—again hiding—trotted out the poor old director-general to do all her work and blamed failing computer systems. Again, that is another blatant example of a cover-up.

Finally, the Minister for Primary Industries was asked a question about the VERs—how many people they are pushing out of the Primary Industries Department. On the basis that it might cause people embarrassment—and we did not ask for any names—and on the basis that it might destroy confidentiality, the minister has now refused to tell this parliament the number of the VERs, where they are located and from what sort of classification they were.

This parliament and the public of Queensland should have those three major pieces of information but, because they are bad news, this government has clammed up. It is a part of a deliberate plan by this government to keep away all of the bad news about the ever-increasing mismanagement that is occurring under this government.

Time expired.

1,000 Footprints Walk

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (10.24 a.m.): On 13 October, on behalf of the Health Minister I attended a remarkable event—the 1,000 Footprints Walk celebrating the milestone of 1,000 bone marrow transplants done in Ward 9D of the Royal Brisbane Hospital and the Royal Children's Hospital. The event celebrated the work of the bone marrow transplant units and their supporting agencies, the Leukaemia Foundation and the Children's Leukaemia and Cancer Society.

Nearly 2,000 people walked across the Goodwill Bridge—and I have to say that this is a great bridge and it is perfect for this kind of event. The bridge was filled with people who had banners, balloons and T-shirts adorned with the photos of smiling transplant recipients celebrating their new lives. Toddlers and teenagers joined retirees all with the same common goal: to celebrate the work that the bone marrow transplant unit and Ward 9D had done in giving them new hope and new lives.

As a testament to the amazing bond between staff and patients, the families of patients who did not survive the rigorous process of transplantation due to either a lack of suitable donors or, more importantly, the curse of infection came to give thanks to the efforts of the transplant team. Reunions abounded. Fellow patients, nurses and doctors from the past 14 years came. I confess to a number of reunions of my own—of friends, colleagues and past patients. People came from as far as Cloncurry and Cairns. I spoke to many of them. They said that they came not just because 1,000 bone marrow transplants was a fantastic milestone but also to publicly support the staff of Ward 9D who suffered so much distress last year.

I thank the minister for giving me the opportunity to represent her at the walk. I have said in this House before that the minister and I understand the commitment and personal sacrifice that nurses, doctors radiation therapists—all hospital staff—make when they work in cancer units, and perhaps it is a special, professional, personal understanding that other members may not have. As an MP, to share thanking those staff with those people was a real privilege for me. The bone marrow transplant units at the Royal Brisbane Hospital and at the Royal Children's Hospital are world class.

Time expired.
Noumea Trade Mission

Mr BELL (Surfers Paradise—Industry) (10.26 a.m.): It is trite to say that if producers of goods and services here can obtain orders overseas, then that affects favourably on employment in Queensland. I am delighted to report that the trade mission from the Gold Coast to Noumea in New Caledonia, which ended last Wednesday, was a great success. The mission was led jointly by the mayor of the Gold Coast and me. Exhibitors such as language schools, Griffith University, St Hilda’s College and also producers of goods such as biscuits, confectionery and tea—which surprisingly is grown near the Gold Coast—were very successful.

I cannot report a result as yet, but a great deal of work was done in obtaining medical evacuations to the Gold Coast instead of to Sydney, as has been occurring for many years, and also a major submission has been made to Aircalin, the New Caledonian overseas airline, to operate flights directly to and from Coolangatta airport on the Gold Coast. I personally participated in a number of those negotiations and I am quietly confident of a happy result in a few months’ time.

I will be presenting a report as required. However, I thought that I should signal to the House at large that there are great opportunities not just for the Gold Coast but also for other producers elsewhere in Queensland. Queensland is highly regarded in New Caledonia. The cost of goods and services there is about two and a half times the equivalent cost here. For example, I bought a filled roll and a can of soft drink in the square in Noumea for lunch one day and it cost the equivalent of $17. I believe that as Queenslanders we should explore the opportunities in New Caledonia. Perhaps now is the time to revive the now defunct New Caledonia Queensland business cooperation committee, which operated through the Premier’s office a few years ago and of which I was a member.

Time expired.

Women in Parliament

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (10.29 a.m.): As everyone in this House knows, our Labor government has the largest number of women in parliament in Australia, and the affirmative action rule got up recently at the national conference in Canberra. I was disappointed to read recently in the Queensland Country Life that the National Party failed to ensure more women could be preselected. This failure has rightly been condemned by the party’s women’s federal council. I note that the failure prompted WFC’s Pam Stallman to call for an overhaul of the party’s preselection procedures to ensure that more women were preselected. There were only two women among 13 National Party MPs and senators, and of course there is only one state female member.

Imagine my surprise when I read about the inaugural Hog’n’Dog Pig Shooting Competition held near Richmond recently. I was heartened to see a photo of the member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson, with women in the wet T-shirt competition. Whilst we could expect that Bob Katter would sponsor the fast eating dog competition, it was good to see Vaughan using a unique forum to drum up support for women by way of sponsoring the wet T-shirt competition. This must be a new way to recruit women into the National Party, but what I want to know is whether the member for Gregory actually got to pour the cold water over these lovely country girls. I think Sir Joh might have a problem with this form of recruitment. Once upon a time people in the National Party were treated with respect. Remember the delicious scones? I fear that refining the recruitment process will need more than a wet T-shirt competition but, then again, what a perfect weekend for the National Party. Nothing like fast eating dogs, dead pigs and breasts!

Mr Johnson interjected.

A government member interjected.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Nurses

Mr HORAN (10.30 a.m.): I refer to the Minister for Health’s statement in parliament on 1 November 2001 claiming that for over five years she has been addressing the issue of nursing shortages in this state. I also refer to the minister’s statement from as late as 17 September this year claiming that from day one her government recognised the local, national and global nursing
shortage. The minister's department is attacking the nurses at the Industrial Relations Commission, claiming that there is not a nursing shortage. Is the minister misleading parliament on this issue, or is the minister's department misleading the Industrial Relations Commission?

**Mrs EDMOND:** Neither. The reason is that way back before I was Health Minister, when I was in opposition, there was an international nursing shortage. There was a huge shortage in Queensland and we had an exit rate of nurses of about 23 per cent under the Health Minister at the time. There was a shortage—

**Mr Horan** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! We will hear the answer.

**Mrs EDMOND:** Not only that, it is an international shortage. But Queensland has led the way in addressing this issue. How have we done that? As soon as I became minister—and I am sorry I could not do it two and a half years earlier—I started working on it. As a result of the task force and the recommendations it made that I have been implementing, we have now the lowest vacancy rate of almost anywhere in the world. I was in Copenhagen not long ago and was a little bit surprised on the opening day of parliament, because what did I see?

**Mr Horan** interjected.

**Mrs EDMOND:** I didn't miss parliament; I have never missed parliament. At the opening of parliament in Copenhagen, doctors and nurses were marching on parliament to demonstrate about the shortage of nurses. It is a universal problem. But Queensland is leading the way in addressing that. In fact, the 700—

**Mr Horan** interjected.

**Mrs EDMOND:** If the member was not so rude and ignorant I might be able to tell him something. The things that we have been doing—providing scholarships, addressing the attraction of nurses into the work force, the web site that we set up to advertise nursing as a career—all have had a huge role to play. We now have the lowest rate of nursing vacancies probably anywhere. The vacancies we have are more than filled with casuals and agency staff. I am not saying that there is no shortage in particular areas—and no-one has—because there are. In Doomadgee, for instance, all of the vacancies—

**Mr Horan** interjected.

**Mrs EDMOND:** Mr Speaker, he is so rude. In the years he has been in parliament he has not learned anything about listening. There are geographical places where it is very difficult to recruit and where all of the staffing needs are filled with agency staff.

**Mr Horan:** They are working double shifts.

**Mrs EDMOND:** They are not working double shifts. We have been addressing these issues for a long time and we have had tremendous success. That is why the Senate report took into account all of the things we are doing when it was looking at it. We are seeing the benefits of the strategies. We have reduced the exit rate to about half of what it was under the man sitting opposite bleating and being so rude. We have attracted new nurses. We are recruiting new nurses. We have record numbers of nurses in our training schools. We have actually filled the quotas. We are now advocating for more training positions.

**Public Liability Insurance**

**Mr HORAN:** My second question is directed to the Treasurer. I refer to the group insurance scheme for not-for-profit organisations which the Treasurer and the Premier promised in a media release of 27 August would enable community groups to purchase affordable public insurance, would compare favourably to market rates and would provide cover broader than the market is generally offering. Treasurer, why then was the Gympie Gold Festival quoted a premium of more than $15,000 under your government scheme when AON, your brokers, were able to privately offer a premium of $10,400? Why was the Yandina Community Centre quoted a premium of $4,177 under your scheme when a private broker was able to offer a premium of $1,420? Why then was the Gayndah Fishing Club quoted a premium of $3,700 under your scheme when in 2001 it paid only $681?

**A government member:** What else have you got?

**Mr HORAN:** There is another one for you. Why then was the Hungerford Sports and Gymkhana Committee quoted a premium of $18,000 for one day’s cover under your scheme
when in 2001 it paid only $1,800 for an entire year’s cover? Why have the Treasurer and the Premier so shamelessly misled community groups by promising that the group insurance scheme would reduce their insurance costs?

Mr MACKENROTH: The premise under which the Opposition Leader has put that question is wrong. We did not promise that we would reduce costs from what they had paid in previous years, which is the premise of what the member put in his question. In fact, the group insurance scheme intends to provide organisations that could not get insurance the opportunity to get insurance. Every one of those groups have actually been offered insurance. When the member quoted AON as actually getting a cheaper quote for an organisation, AON is the organisation in fact doing it for the government anyway.

In relation to the underwriters for our scheme, Suncorp, we have been negotiating with them in relation to their being the insurer of the government scheme. I might say that we have not been happy with some of the quotes that they have given and we have informed them of that. We are continuing to negotiate in relation to that matter. Basically, at this stage we have entered into a very short-term contract, with the potential for us to continue it. Unless Suncorp is prepared to offer a reasonable deal to organisations through this, we will not finally sign up with them. We will make sure that all groups in Queensland know that Suncorp did not give them a fair deal.

Goodwill Bridge

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: I note that last Monday was the first anniversary of the Goodwill Bridge. Can the Premier inform the House whether the Goodwill Bridge has been a success?

Mr BEATTIE: I am only too delighted to do that. The Minister for State Development and I were there to cut a celebratory cake to highlight the first year. Indeed, Monday was the first anniversary of the Goodwill Bridge and I want to highlight some of the great benefits that have come to this state.

Mr Bredhauer: The audience of The Fat the other night obviously appreciated the Goodwill Bridge.

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the minister for that interjection. Only those watching the program would know what he meant, but it was actually very funny. Next time I get an invitation, minister, I will send you.

Mr Mackenroth: Everyone wants to be what you’re on.

Mr BEATTIE: I am getting a lot of help here today and the interjections are better than what I am about to say. The bridge has been a hit with the people of Brisbane and visitors from other parts of Queensland, interstate and overseas. That attitude came across clearly from the bridge users I spoke to on Monday at an informal ceremony marking its first birthday. Let us look at the statistics. The knockers said that it would be a white elephant, but the pedestrians and cyclists who use it every week—and there are 60,000 every week—have proved them wrong.

That weekly figure translates into about three million trips a year, making the Goodwill Bridge the preferred crossing point for pedestrians and cyclists travelling between the southern end of the city and South Bank. In addition, it is actually good for the environment; it gets people out of cars. The figures have been provided by the South Bank Corporation, which conducted a headcount in the final week of the October school holidays and the week following that. The count was carried out 24 hours a day to give an accurate picture of who is using the bridge and when. There is evidence that the bridge is becoming part of a regular routine for the thousands of commuters who jog, walk or cycle their way across it.

The Goodwill Bridge is also proving to be popular with tourists, offering uninterrupted views of the city and South Bank. It has also been the setting for a few marriage proposals, I am led to believe, but so far no-one has been married there. We will have to wait and see. It is not just the people using the bridge who think they are on a winner; the building and construction industry has also recognised its innovative design with a number of awards. These include the 2002 Urban Design Award from the Queensland branch of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and the 2002 Architectural Steel Design Award from the Australian Institute of Steel Construction.

The Goodwill Bridge has featured in several big events in Brisbane in the last year, including the Riverfestival, the Riverfeast, the Riverfire fireworks spectacular, charity walks and Christmas and New Year’s Eve celebrations. The way in which it has been embraced by the community shows just how fitting its name is. The opposition has sought to oppose this bridge at every occasion.
Mr Bredhauer: That doesn't stop them using it.

Mr BEATTIE: That does not stop them using it. I say to the people who visited the bridge—and there were three million trips over the past year—that the opposition would never have built it; it is opposed to it. Every time someone in Brisbane uses the bridge, they should remember that the opposition oppose their using it.

Airtrain

Mr JOHNSON: I refer the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads to Lord Mayor Jim Soorley’s plans to turn the Airtrain into his own personal gravy train by using his current position to promote and elevate himself into a position of equitable gain. Given that Councillor Soorley has been one of the major impediments to the implementation of the integrated ticketing of public transport services in south-east Queensland over the past decade, and having regard to his enviable interpersonal skills and pleasant disposition, I ask: does the minister believe Lord Mayor Jim is the most suitable person to revive the flagging fortunes of the Airtrain project?

Mr BREDHAUER: I will answer the honourable member’s question in a number of ways. First and foremost, it is not true to say that the Lord Mayor has been the single biggest obstacle to the implementation of integrated ticketing. As we announced during the budget this year, we are in fact proceeding with integrated ticketing. As I announced last night, it is part of a much wider reform of public transport services in Brisbane and south-east Queensland, which will be known as TransLink. Our government will actually deliver integrated ticketing for the benefit of public transport users in south-east Queensland. But importantly, we will do that in cooperation with the Brisbane City Council and Brisbane Transport, Queensland Rail and the other 18 providers of public transport services in south-east Queensland.

It will be a revolution in public transport and the most significant development in public transport in south-east Queensland in decades. In particular, the TransLink operations that we propose will bring the administration, coordination and integration of public transport services under one roof for the first time in a very effective way to develop the integration of public transport services.

In respect of Airtrain, as the honourable member would know, because most of the development of the Airtrain project occurred during his time in government, although we were the ones who saw the final sign-off on the documentation and the construction of the project, Airtrain is a fully private sector funded operation. It is a private company which is run independently of government and in which the government has no say over matters like who it might appoint to its board. The government has no say and no interest over who may or may not be appointed to the board or, might I say, the terms or conditions under which any person who may be offered a position on the board is engaged. The state government has absolutely no control and no influence. If it wants to offer that position to Jim Soorley, there is not a thing that we can do about it; it is their business. The fortunes of Airtrain will depend on a range of matters, not the least of which will be its administrative arrangements over the coming years. Let me make it abundantly clear that the state government has had nothing to do with any approaches to the Lord Mayor about this. We have nothing to do with the conditions on which he may be engaged or appointed. The state government has no control and no influence over the direction the private company may take in this matter.

Indigenous Art

Ms BOYLE: I ask the Premier and Minister for Trade: what recent initiatives have the government undertaken to promote Queensland indigenous art in overseas markets, bearing in mind the significant possibilities for improving business and employment opportunities for indigenous people?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the member for Cairns. As the minister just reminded me, the member for Cairns has taken a very keen interest in the arts and in particular in this area. I thank her for her question. I very recently had the pleasure of promoting Queensland indigenous art to a most discerning audience in Berlin. Members will notice in the document tabled by the Minister for the Arts today that exporting art was highlighted. It shows how important exporting art is not only from the point of view of exports per se but also in giving indigenous people an opportunity to break the cycle of disaffection. That is on page 22, and I refer all members to it.
On Sunday, 13 October I officially opened the Queensland-Berlin Indigenous Art Exhibition at Ludwig Erhard Haus in Berlin. Despite being the coldest 13 October on record for Berlin, with unseasonal snowfall, about 300 people attended. Their venture into the inclement weather was richly rewarded. The exhibition was stunning and unique, the first of its kind outside Australia. There has been very strong interest in Germany in particular in indigenous art, and in Berlin especially. That is one of the reasons the exhibition was held there.

On show were 19 aluminium and bronze cast sculptures from Aurukun, five paintings by Badtjala woman Fiona Foley, and 12 paintings by three prodigies from the Lockhart River Art Gang—Rosella Namok, who was there, Fiona Omeenyo, and Samantha Hobson. While Germans have for some time appreciated indigenous Australian art, this Queensland art was new to them. It is so fresh and contemporary that many Berliners were surprised to learn that most of the artists hail from remote and, in some case, socially disadvantaged communities.

This exhibition opened new doors into Europe for our indigenous artists and their communities. Art has enormous potential to break the poverty and welfare cycle for individuals, families and communities. The exhibition ran for five days, and was seen by an estimated 2,000 people. A painting sold on the spot, but the long-term benefits are expected to be much more significant and enduring. That is due largely to the efforts of a small group of people who were on hand in Berlin to organise, explain and promote the exhibition. As I mentioned before, Rosella Namok, perhaps the best-known member of the astounding Lockhart River Art Gang, travelled from her home on eastern Cape York to help make the exhibition a success.

Mr Bredhauer: Fantastic.

Mr BEATTIE: As the local member and minister said, she is fantastic. She is a delightful person.

Ron Hurley, a Brisbane based artist who chairs the reference panel of the government's indigenous export project, was indispensable as the show's curator. Brisbane art dealer Andrew Baker and Matt Tobin of Urban Art Project travelled privately to Berlin to assist the exhibition. They liaised with key people in the Berlin art world, and found a museum keen to exhibit the works. Organisers of an Asia-Pacific Art Triennial, which is supported by the State Chancellery in Berlin, want to exhibit indigenous Queensland art in September 2003. This inaugural Berlin exhibition has opened the eyes of a sophisticated audience to Queensland indigenous art.

I table the remainder of my speech for the information of the House.

Girder Supply, Queensland Rail and Department of Main Roads

Mrs PRATT: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries. Mr Les Torrens supplies girders to the Department of Main Roads and Queensland Rail and is reportedly one of only two people who supply girders to Queensland Rail. He currently has enough orders for Main Roads and Queensland Rail to fill his quota by the year 2003. As he cannot obtain access to any more logs from DPI Forestry until 2005, if the timber task force's submission to Cabinet is enforced, I ask: will the Department of Main Roads and Queensland Rail be forced to cease work and repairs until the year 2005 when girders can again be obtained? Were girders taken into consideration at the time of the RFA? Will the government uphold the terms of the RFA compensation package if Mr Torrens is forced to close?

Mr PALASZCZUK: I really think that the honourable member should redirect that question to the Minister for State Development or the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads. Since the member has raised the issue, I will make representations on her behalf to both those ministers and give her an answer as soon as I can.

Vegetation Clearing, Satellite Detection

Mr PITT: I ask the Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines: can he inform the House whether Smart State technology is helping the Beattie government to successfully detect and prosecute persons who illegally clear vegetation without a permit?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Beattie government is committed to protecting Queensland's threatened and endangered native vegetation species and will prosecute any person who illegally clears land without a permit. Smart State technology is helping my department detect and prosecute persons involved in illegal tree clearing. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines uses satellite imaging technology to monitor land
cover changes and provide data for the government's Statewide Landcover and Trees Study—SLATS. This satellite imaging is also proving to be a useful detective tool in helping identify where land is being cleared and who is responsible.

During the past 12 months there have been 24 successful prosecutions of vegetation clearing offences under the Vegetation Management Act and the Integrated Planning Act. A large number of these cases have been picked up from satellite imagery used to monitor vegetation in Queensland. For example, one such case resulted last week—15 October—in the Cairns Magistrates Court imposing Queensland's largest ever fines for illegal clearing. Two companies and an individual were subjected to fines totalling $22,500 and costs of more than $17,000 for clearing 15 hectares of lowland rainforest near Bramston Beach south of Cairns. The land in question was prime habitat for the cassowary, a nationally endangered species.

My department has also substantially increased its capacity to investigate and prosecute cases of illegal clearing. Regional compliance coordinators have now been appointed. They will coordinate the investigation of all compliance issues arising within their regions. From 1 April 2001 until 17 October 2002, 1,131 notifications of alleged illegal clearing have been received. Four hundred of those cases have been investigated and finalised. Fourteen prosecutions are currently before the courts. A further 731 investigations are under way. There are currently five appeals before the Planning and Environment Court and one before the Land Court.

Not all investigations result in court prosecutions. My department has a wide range of other options available including warning notices, trespass notices and compliance-enforcement notices. Penalty infringement notices will soon be introduced, further reducing the need to prosecute. In some cases it is more effective to order the land-holder to restore the area cleared. There are currently 15 cases involving remediation of illegally cleared vegetation.

The government is serious about enforcing the state's vegetation management laws. The clear message is that if you intend clearing, you must apply to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines for a permit. Those who flout the law will be prosecuted. It is not a case of if you get caught, but when.

Queensland Racing Board

Mr HOBBS: My question is directed to the Premier. As the Premier would be aware, a vacancy exists on the board of Queensland Racing—formerly known as the Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board. He would also recall the controversy generated when the Minister for Racing, Merri Rose, interfered in the QTRB selection process and used a second, secret selection panel to appoint her own chairman. Given that the minister's actions are now the subject of a lengthy and very serious Crime and Misconduct Commission investigation for which she is about to be interviewed, given that the racing industry has no confidence in his minister, and given the large and detailed workload placed on the board, will he take the responsibility to conduct the selection process for the new board member of Queensland Racing?

Mr BEATTIE: Let me say at the outset that all members of this House were saddened at the death of George Pippos, who was a great Queenslander. Both the member for Ashgrove and I said some things in this House at the time. I am sure everyone would join me again in expressing condolences to his family.

In terms of the replacement for George Pippos on the Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board, we need to go back and have a look at the act. Section 11K of the Racing and Betting Act 1980 provides that a selection panel may appoint a member to fill a casual vacancy in the QTRB. The Racing and Betting Regulations 2001 provide for the minister to appoint a selection panel consisting of three persons. Before appointing a selection panel, the minister must consult with relevant persons involved in the thoroughbred racing industry that the minister considers to be appropriate.

A number of precedents have been set in appointing previous selection panels and the minister intends to maintain conformity with these precedents. Accordingly, she will appoint one person to sit on the selection panel. As I understand it, the minister will request the chair of the QTRB to provide her with the names of representatives of the Queensland racing industry to serve on the selection panel. As with previous selection panels, these representatives should consist of one person—who cannot be a member of a committee of a TABQ club—to represent the interests of non-TABQ clubs, and one person to represent the interests of TABQ clubs. A TABQ club is a club where the majority of the races conducted by the club in the previous
financial year are TABQ club-covered races. Further, persons who have previously served on a
selection panel are not to serve on another selection panel.

As selection panel members will have access to highly confidential personal information
concerning potential applicants, all selection panel members will be required to sign deeds of
confidentiality in which they undertake not to disclose information gained by them in the course of
performing their duties as selection panel members.

The minister has requested the QTRB to provide her with the names of two persons who are
eligible to be members of the selection panel by 1 November 2002.

**Opposition members interjected.**

Mr BEATTIE: Could you guys just cool it? I am just explaining—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: If the Leader of the Opposition wants to move for an extension of time, I am
happy to give him the answer. The reality is that under the terms of the act what the minister is
seeking to do is quite appropriate. She is seeking to do what the act provides. The member for
Warrego has made all sorts of wild allegations—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I understand that there are matters which the CMC is examining which—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The CMC issues have nothing to do with the minister's responsibility or her
behaviour in relation to these issues. As I understand it, they relate to a report that was leaked.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: As I understand it, the CMC investigation related to the leaking of a document
from Crown Law. It has nothing to do with the minister's behaviour. Under those circumstances,
there is no need for anything to be done in relation to the minister, other than for her to do her
job.

**NASA Telescope**

Ms MOLLOY: My question is directed to the Minister for Innovation and Information
Economy. I would like to know whether more secondary schools in Queensland are likely to use a
NASA telescope that has been built in south-east Queensland and that has been sponsored by
the state government.

Mr LUCAS: Two weeks ago I spent a night stargazing in the middle of a cow paddock in
Nanango and I was delighted to be accompanied by the member for Nanango, along with a
group of other people as well.

**Opposition members interjected.**

Mr LUCAS: No, we were there. The good news is that I was announcing $25,000 well spent
by the Queensland government in relation to a fantastic project, because that is how much the
state government contributed to have a NASA telescope erected which is set to inspire countless
young Queenslanders into careers in space astronomy and astrophysics.

The Smart State—and the opposition will be delighted to know this—is a haven for rocket
scientists. Those opposite are keen on being the rocket scientists of politics, but we want the real
rocket scientists of the future in the Smart State. This telescope is the first of its kind in Australia
and is part of NASA's global Telescopes in Education program. The Queensland University of
Technology installed and will manage the telescope, which is also used by QUT science and
engineering students. It also opens a whole new world of science and IT to school students.
Students can log in and use special software to move the lens by remote control. They can then
take a photo of a constellation or star group to study. It is simply a matter of getting the software
and clicking on a galaxy. The telescope then slews to take a photograph of that galaxy and then
a high-powered picture is taken. There are also similar telescopes in Chile and the United States,
and when in Nanango we were directing the one in the United States to take photographs as well.

So far two schools have been involved, and there were some wonderful secondary school
students from the Nanango State High School. I was also speaking with students from the Sunset
State School in Mount Isa. Both schools' students took part on the night using the telescope and
in a video hook-up to a NASA astronaut in California. This is great news for science in the Smart
State and is a fantastic opportunity for our students to learn about astronomy. And who knows:
they might make interesting discoveries or be inspired to be tomorrow's astronomers or engineers.
One thing about students in the Smart State is that they like hands-on and practical demonstrations. This is not about a $100 telescope in the backyard; this is a $500,000 telescope that kids in these schools can use regardless. This is about equality of access. I was also delighted to work with Jim Barclay, the owner of the property where the telescope is located, who coincidentally, as I discovered, resides in my electorate during the day. Telstra and other sponsors have very proudly supported the installation of this telescope. The software is relatively inexpensive. I look forward to working with other schools with a view to rolling out the software throughout the state. Again, this is about demonstrating science in action to our school students. We have smart students, great schools, and this is about supporting them even more.

**Firearms Control**

Mr QUINN: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to his alarming admission that of all the guns reported stolen during the last four years in Queensland there are still 2,930 unaccounted for, the vast majority of which are undoubtedly still in the hands of criminals. I ask: given that the minister would have now collated the figures on the number of missing and unaccounted for firearms, can he advise this House how many of these weapons are hand guns and, more importantly, how many are semiautomatic and automatic hand guns? This is obviously a figure that the minister would have already provided the Premier with ahead of his meeting with the Prime Minister tomorrow.

Mr McGrady: I thank the member for the question. It was interesting to note that on the Susan Mitchell program this morning the federal Minister for Justice indicated that there is a problem right around the world and certainly right around Australia with stolen guns. That is an issue which obviously concerns us. I can give this House an assurance that every single stolen gun in this state is under active pursuit and active investigation by the Queensland Police Service. However, I want to widen this debate a little further in the three minutes I have. Members would have seen the headlines this morning that the Prime Minister has seen fit to now make a contribution to the debate on weapons. On behalf of the Queensland government, I certainly welcome the initiative by the Prime Minister. Let me also inform the House that there will be a police ministers meeting in Darwin in a couple of weeks time and the No. 1 issue on the agenda is weapons, particularly hand guns and concealable weapons, because it is a very important issue and people are now clamouring for changes to the rules. I also note that the Leader of the Opposition made some claims this morning that we should not change the rules. The question I would ask the Leader of the Liberal Party is this: does he agree with Mr Horan's comments?

Mr Quinn: You answer my question first.

Mr McGrady: I will answer the question. Coming back to the real issue, the real issue is not about the 4,000 or so guns which are missing; the real issue today is about the 50,000 guns which have come into Australia illegally, the 50,000 guns which have happened to get through the Customs Service. What I and the other state ministers are suggesting is that the federal government should be allocating additional resources to the Customs Service to stop the importation of illegal hand guns and concealable weapons. We have accepted the fact that there are approximately 4,000 stolen guns out there in the community, but the real issue which has to be faced by the federal government and other governments is the 50,000 illegal guns that get through the Customs Service. That is what Senator Ellison and Mr Howard should be investigating. I again say that any sensible proposal which the Prime Minister is prepared to offer on Thursday will certainly be considered by the Queensland government and no doubt by the other state and territory ministers when we meet in two weeks time.

**Railway Apprenticeships**

Mr MULHERIN: I refer the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads to Queensland Rail's annual apprentice and trainee intake, and I ask: can the minister advise the House how many OR apprentices and trainees will be recruited in the 2003 intake and what percentage of these will be based in regional Queensland?

Mr Bredhauser: I thank the honourable member for the question, because the work that QR is doing in conjunction with this government on apprentices and trainees is very important. When in Mackay, the member for Mackay and I had the opportunity to travel down Black Mountain in the cabin of a coal train, which was quite an experience, and then drive the new tilt train, which is due to come into service next year and which will be a fantastic service for the people across the length and breadth of Queensland, particularly from Mackay to Cairns.
In 2002 QR employed 35 apprentices, and I am very pleased to advise the House today that in 2003 Queensland Rail will more than double its annual intake of apprentices from 35 to 78. In addition to the 78 apprentices, QR will offer 80 traineeships across the state. Next year’s intake of apprentices will see a boost in the number of electrical, mechanical fitters and electronic apprentices, reflecting the strong growth in QR’s business in those fields. Further opportunities exist in a range of occupations including carpentry, plumbing, painting and decorating, business administration, horticulture, information technology and telecommunications. This is about QR in the Smart State offering opportunities for people to take up these apprenticeships.

Importantly, given our focus on regional Queensland, almost 70 per cent—that is, 51 of the 78 apprenticeships—will be located in regional centres across Queensland. This includes 18 in Rockhampton, and I was in Rockhampton the other day with the members for Rockhampton and Fitzroy announcing a $200 million program to upgrade coal locomotives and coal wagon rolling stock. There will be seven apprentices in Townsville, and I was in Townsville the other day with the members for Townsville and Mundingburra looking at the tilt train and the new station. There will be five in Mackay—in the electorate of the member who asked the question, four in Yukan, two each in Bowen—in which the Minister for State Development has an interest—Gracemere, Maryborough, Moranbah, Callemondah and Jilalan with additional positions in Pring, Toowoomba, Gympie and Ipswich.

The remaining 27 apprentices will include seven on the Sunshine Coast, five at Redbank, three at Mayne railway yard and two at Coopers Plains. In respect of Redbank, I have been talking to the members for Bundamba, Ipswich and Ipswich West in the last couple of days about a couple of issues that the Redbank workshops have raised with me, and I am sure they will welcome this news. Funding has come from two sources. The apprenticeships are being funded by QR through its annual budget but also importantly through the Beattie government’s Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program. It is great news for the people of Queensland.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Beaudesert, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from the Humpybong State School in the electorate of Redcliffe.

 Schools + Parents; Life Education Program

Mr LINGARD: My question is directed to the Minister for Education. I refer to the 24-page full-colour Schools + Parents magazine, complete with a photo and message from the minister and plenty of plugs for the Beattie government. It was reproduced more than 700,000 times and distributed to Queensland’s schoolchildren by the department. I also refer to the series of full-page advertisements placed in newspapers on weekends to self-promote the initiatives of the department. Finally, I refer to the threatened closure, because of the government’s funding cuts, of the Cooloola-Noosa Life Education program, which provides drug education and healthy living advice to students. A notice signalling the closure of this program was distributed to parents along with the glossy Schools + Parents magazine. Why does the government believe it is more important to fund its own self-promotion and political propaganda than a service that provides Queensland kids with the tools to say no to drugs?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The Schools + Parents magazine is a very important tool to communicate with Queensland parents about the very many changes that are happening in education. It has proven popular not only with schools and parents in the state system, it is now being distributed to schools and parents in the non-state system.

All schools that I know of in Queensland do a very good job of producing a school newsletter to tell parents what is happening in the school and what is happening for children and teachers at that particular school. But it is not possible, and not reasonable I think, to expect schools to be able to tell parents about the much broader statewide and system initiatives that are happening. So the government seeks to inform people on issues that affect all schools—providing information about the green paper that is out there for public discussion at the moment and giving some very practical advice about issues such as head lice, healthy lunches and a range of other things. While the member for Beaudesert may not be interested in those types of issues, I can assure him that the parents of Queensland schoolchildren are. Head lice is a huge issue. Our government will continue to accept our responsibility to communicate with parents about what is happening in our education system.

I refer to the recent Courier-Mail advertisements. Again, we have an obligation to tell people what is happening in relation to the reforms we have talked about. I continually get questions from both teachers and parents particularly about the proposed preparatory year of schooling. It
Involves a number of complex policy issues and it was very important, in my view, to make it possible for people to know how they could ask more questions and how they could get more information.

In relation to Life Education, as the member should be aware that is something that has been the subject of a great deal of debate in this chamber, mostly in the last term of our government. A decision was taken—our government stands by it—that the drug education in Queensland schools should be compliant with the national drug education strategy, which was endorsed by the Commonwealth government and all state ministers at a time when there was a mixture of both conservative and Labor state ministers.

All state, territory and federal ministers for education have endorsed a set of principles about an appropriate way to do drug education in our schools, and Life Education is not compliant with those principles. The principles essentially identify that the best form of drug education is conducted as part and parcel of curriculum in classrooms by teachers on a daily basis as part of their subjects. It can be complemented by the sort of work that is done by Life Education, and many of our schools do contract Life Education for the services it provides. They are not a substitute for drug education on a daily basis as part of the curriculum with trained teachers. Those schools that are doing this find it useful. If that service has a problem, it needs to talk to the executive director and talk to the principals to make sure it is providing a service that is relevant to those schools.

Jailhouse ROC Ball

Mr McNAMARA: Can the Minister for Police and Corrective Services please inform the parliament about the benefits of the recent Jailhouse ROC Ball held in Maryborough's new prison, both for the community and the Flying Doctor Service?

Mr McGrady: I thank the member for Hervey Bay for the question. I suppose one of the reasons he asks the question today is that he is very proud of the major contribution from the people of the Wide Bay, including the Hervey Bay area.

The Labor government took a decision some years ago to construct a prison in Maryborough. We made no apologies for the reason we took that decision—simply to create jobs for a very depressed part of the state at that time. That decision has certainly proved to be the correct one.

A number of months ago I received a telephone call from a person who asked one of my staff if they could have a Jailhouse ROC Ball in the new prison before it opened. Because of my age, I did not know what jail house rock was! I did check, and I recall my father telling me what jail house rock was all about. They said to me, 'This bloke is absolutely mad. He has gone off his brain.' However, being a can-do government, as we are, we decided there could be something in this.

To cut a long story short, we gave approval to have the Jailhouse ROC Ball held in the prison. Warren Truss, Lawrence Springborg and Henry Palaszczuk were there. They tell me that after I left early Lawrence did an impersonation of Chad Morgan. The bottom line is that the good people of the Wide Bay raised some $43,000 for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The Queensland government donated $2,000 to pay the insurance costs for the night.

That is not all the good news. This prison will soon be used as a film studio. I have given approval for a three-day film shoot to occur. Up to 20 locals will be employed. Not only have we raised $43,000; we will also see 43 movie stars from the Wide Bay. Rumour has it that the member for Hervey Bay will take a lead role.

This is what happens when the state government and the local community get together. The local media played an absolutely fantastic role. In fact, Mr Palaszczuk and his good wife led the floor to do the final waltz. Altogether, it was a great night. I did state that whilst this facility is known as the Maryborough Correctional Centre, the evening really should see its name changed to 'convention centre' because of the activities that took place that night.

Time expired.

Queensland Police Service, Privatisation

Ms Lee Long: My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I refer to an article in the Cairns Post earlier this month which suggests that the police force could be the next thing to become privatised. I ask: is there any truth in this? If so, could it result in
significant rises in the levels of fines to meet profit targets? For example, an $80 or $130 speeding fine could go up to, say, $500 or more.

Mr McGrady: Next the member for Tablelands will really believe me when I say that I am too young to appreciate jail house rock! I make it perfectly clear that there are absolutely no plans whatsoever to privatise the Queensland Police Service. It is crazy. What the member may be getting mixed up with is that there is—there has been for some time and there will be in the future—some debate as to whether some of the services police officers now provide could be done by some people in the private sector. Those services cover issues such as speed cameras and some of the roles inside police stations.

I take a view that there could be some roles that trained police officers currently carry out which in actual fact could be done by civilians. That already happens. In fact, last year we employed 68 civilians. Of course, it will not happen at least until 2005 because we have a policy, set in concrete, whereby we will be employing at least 300 police officers every year. So we cannot employ 300 police officers and at the same time employ additional civilians.

My view is that we train police officers at the academy and that they should be out there doing what they have been trained to do, which is to catch the criminals, not sitting behind desks or computers. So that is where the member may be getting mixed up. The Police Service in Queensland is a professional outfit. They do an excellent job, but there could be scope for more civilians being employed to let the police officers do what they do best. However, that is not going to happen until 2005—until the commitment that we gave has expired.

Housing Shortage, Rural and Remote Areas

Mr Livingstone: I refer the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing to the need for additional housing in rural and remote parts of the state, and I ask: what is currently being done to address this shortage?

Mr Scharten: I thank the honourable member for the question. I also thank him in advance for donating some 160 houses up his way. The reality is that earlier this year I instructed the Department of Housing to purchase some 160 homes from the old Amberley RAAF base. As part of the Year of the Outback contribution, and bearing in mind the fact that there is an acute housing shortage in the bush, these houses have been made available to all councils west of the Great Dividing Range to whom I wrote early this year. Mind you, having said that, most councils have, in fact, expressed some interest. So the member will find that the houses from up his way will end up in places such as Normanton, Surat, Bedourie, Hughenden, Julia Creek and so on. So far, some 30 have gone to those areas and, as I say, there are 160 available.

Yesterday, I noted that the member for Gladstone had something to say about a housing shortage in her area. I notice that the member for Gladstone was critical of the federal government, and I thank her for that. But the reality is that, despite what the member says, Gladstone has not been short changed. Since I have been the minister, $18 million has been spent in Gladstone and some 74 homes have been built in the member's electorate. So it is not true to say, as the member has said in the media, that this government basically does not care about Gladstone or the housing problems there. In fact, out of the housing stock, 20 houses have been earmarked for Gladstone to resolve some of that crisis. They are on their way and there will be a number of them ready for Christmas. So I reiterate that it is untrue of the member for Gladstone to suggest that this government is not doing anything about the housing issues in that area.

But who is not doing anything about housing is the Commonwealth government. The housing ministers are going to Hobart on Friday, and I notice that Amanda Vanstone has said in the Senate that basically the meeting is just going to be a talkfest. We are facing a housing crisis in Queensland and we are facing a housing crisis in Australia. Even the Prime Minister is talking about affordable housing being a problem. Of course, he is talking about affordable housing being $700,000 homes in Sydney. But that is the group he represents. I am concerned about the group who cannot pay $120 a week to rent a house in Queensland. That group of people is getting bigger and bigger and bigger. Make no mistake, we are facing in Australia the greatest crisis in housing since the Second World War.

I again renew my call on the Commonwealth government to hold a housing summit—to get all the stakeholders around the table to try to find a solution and a way through this. It is no good for the federal minister, the federal government, or the Prime Minister to simply pay lip-service to
this. We continue to lose funds out of capital funding in Queensland and the crisis is getting worse.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Maroochydore, I welcome a second group of students from Humpybong State School in the electorate of Redcliffe.

Medical Indemnity Insurance

Miss SIMPSON: I refer the Minister for Health to the latest information from the Rural Doctors Association Queensland indicating that there are no private maternity or procedural services being performed anymore—at all—at Innisfail Hospital and no maternity at Gympie. Emerald has only one doctor delivering babies and he is reportedly at breaking point. Longreach doctors have announced that they plan to pull out next year, because they do not have faith in Queensland Health's medical indemnity cover. I ask the minister: how long will she let health services deteriorate in Queensland before she provides written assurance to doctors that they are covered unless proven criminally negligent in a court of law?

Mrs EDMOND: The issue of medical indemnity for doctors is a very vexatious one and is causing a lot of concern for doctors, particularly in the private sector. The AMA, both federally and in the state, have indicated that they are getting very anxious because, as we approach yet another deadline set by the Commonwealth government, 31 December, without any sign—

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mrs EDMOND: We have already passed one of their deadlines in July and they extended it for six months without any indication of how the federal government is going to address the major, major issue that is causing concern, which is UMP and its circumstances at this moment.

I believe that there are a number of options that the federal government is looking at. But doctors are getting increasingly anxious about what they are being left with. They are telling me that they do not believe that they can afford to continue doing public work. They are going to have to increase their private workload to pay for the huge increases and the call, as it is put, by the federal government to try to bail out UMP. That is one of the reasons that they are leaving the public sector. They are saying that they have to do more private work where they can charge more to cover the huge increases in fees. That is a problem.

In terms of public indemnity, we have a working group that is working with the AMAQ. We have worked with the rural doctors and extended those services. In fact, the rural doctors have indicated their support for the measures that we have introduced. That will continue to proceed but, of course, that is not going to address the major concerns that the doctors have about the lack of any indication from the federal government about what they are going to do about the problem of their private practice and UMP.

Courts, Closed Circuit Television

Mr STRONG: I refer the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice to the plan to equip the new Brisbane Magistrates Court with state-of-the-art technology, including closed circuit television in courtrooms. I ask: what plans does the government have to provide these closed circuit TV facilities in other courtrooms around Queensland?

Mr WELFORD: I thank the honourable member for his question and his interest in the importance of technology in courtrooms to protect victims and vulnerable witnesses in our court system. Our government recognises that for many victims and special witnesses such as children, the prospect of having to give evidence in court can create enormous anxiety. We believe that our courts should provide justice for the whole community, particularly victims of sexual assault and children whose vulnerability can make the courtroom experience intimidating or even traumatising.

As a further step towards the practical protection of these vulnerable witnesses, I am pleased to advise that we are accelerating the installation and renewal of closed circuit TV facilities in courthouses around the state. Although our government has for some time had a policy of including CCTV in all new or refurbished courts, we are extending these vulnerable witness facilities to as many Queensland courts as possible. This financial year we will at least double the previous year's budget for the installation of closed circuit TV. This will enable us to pick up the pace in regard to both the installation of new closed circuit TV systems and the replacement of outdated systems.
The use of CCTV means that evidence can be given from a separate room in the court precinct. This is particularly important for those who have to give evidence against their accused. In Brisbane, these systems are already in place in the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal and the District Court; the Brisbane arrest court in Roma Street; and in Magistrates Courts at Caboolture, Wynnum and Cleveland. Systems are also in place in the Supreme Courts at Townsville and Cairns; the District Courts at Rockhampton, Gladstone, Southport, Maryborough, Maroochydore, Beenleigh and Ipswich; and in the Magistrates Courts at Toowoomba and Mount Isa.

In a number of those locations, access to closed circuit facilities is shared between the Magistrates Courts and the Supreme Courts or District Courts. The location of sites of our new closed circuit television installations is currently being finalised, but systems have been earmarked for the new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex, the new Richlands courthouse and the refurbished Mackay Court House.

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

PRIVILEGE

Vandalism, Chung Tian Buddhist Temple

Mr Beattie: I rise on a matter of privilege. The Chung Tian Temple I referred to before is actually in the Springwood electorate. I have spoken to Barbara Stone, the local member, and Michael Choi. Both of them will be joining the Minister for Natural Resources, Stephen Robertson, and me at a visit to the temple at 2.30 this afternoon following the pray for rain service at St John’s Cathedral. I remind all members about that service. I want to indicate very clearly that we will be going to the temple to send a very clear message that we want tolerance and understanding in Australia. We will not as a government support any acts of violence against any other Australians.

CHILD CARE BILL
Second Reading

Resumed from 22 October (see p. 3913).

Mr Lee (Indooroopilly—ALP) (11.30 a.m.), continuing: As I was saying, these services will be known as stand-alone child care services. The standards that they will be required to meet are that the carer must be at least 18 years old, that the carer must have public liability insurance and that the carer must not care for more than six children under the age of 12 years at any one time, not including the carer's own children who are at least six years, and no more than four children under the age of six, including the carer's own children. Carers in stand-alone child care will also be required to have a positive suitability notice under the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000. There is no intention to regulate care provided by parents or relatives of a child or care in the child's own home provided by independent babysitters or nannies.

As I mentioned earlier, some services will be specifically excluded from being a child care service. For example, the bill provides that a child care service does not include the following: a service for providing preschool education conducted by a school; a service for providing primary, secondary or special education; a service principally conducted to provide therapeutic services, residential facilities, instruction in a particular activity, for instance dance, music or a sport, tutoring, coaching or religious instruction or a recreational activity, for instance a camp or a party; a service for which ordinarily the children in care are entirely or mostly different on each occasion child care is provided, for instance resort care for children of guests at a particular resort; a service in which the only child care provided is holiday care, adjunct care or care of children who are at least 12 years of age; and a licensed care service for foster care under the Child Protection Act of 1999. This legislative framework will encourage the implementation of innovative service models that enhance the service quality required to respond to the changing needs of families and of communities. I am happy to support it.

I would like to speak very briefly about a couple of issues separate to the legislative framework of the bill. I believe that there is a great need in our current climate for some genuine long-term demographic planning when it comes to the provision of child-care centres and of such places. I spoke with a number of residents in Graceville over the last couple of weeks. They raised a concern with me that in their area, where of course there is a large number of young families, places at child-care centres, kindies and preschools fill up very quickly. The difficulty is that
because in the Graceville area there are a lot of community-run centres there is no financial incentive for private providers to fill in the gap. This is in no way meant as a criticism of our very high quality local community child care, preschool and kindies. Rather, I guess it is a criticism of a federal government that on the one hand is keen to encourage people to have children because of a declining birth rate in this country, but on the other hand is not really keen to do any really serious planning or serious preparation for the child care needs of those people.

Another concern I have is that in suburbs close to Brisbane city there is a lack of child care and day care places. I know that a lot of my constituents like to drive to work and would like to drop off their children at a child-care centre near their place of work. It gives them perhaps an extra 15 or 20 minutes in the car so that was on-site child care in the morning and the same in the evening. This is a great concern of theirs. I know that there are a number of large businesses which do have the financial capacity to provide on-site child care but which do not. It is high time the federal government took some genuine action in this regard.

There have been a lot of reports recently in newspapers about the amount of money that child-care centre owners stand to make from the floating on the stock market of shares in child-care centres. My concern is that while there is a lot of money to be made I do not think there is any real obligation under any federal government act relating to these centres to provide that parents of children in the centre be represented on the boards of those companies. I know that there are a number of high fliers and movers and shakers and people of the likes of Andrew Peacock and Michael Kroger who find themselves on the boards of these companies, but there is a genuine public interest in the federal government legislating so that entities such as child-care centres which find themselves floated on the stock market are required to have the parents at that centre represented on the board. I think that is something that certainly needs some attention. With these words, I am delighted to support what is a very fine bill.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (11.37 a.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Child Care Bill 2002. I must say that since becoming a member of parliament this bill has been the one bill that I have been most lobbied on. Choosing the child care that best suits yourself and your child can be one of the most difficult decisions a parent can make. Today we have choices of long day care centres, after school hours care and home based care such as family day care. Whatever the choice, it is important that all children are safe and receive quality care and attention.

In my electorate I have all those choices I have mentioned available. I have St Edwards outside school hours care with Mrs Paulette Simpson, John Paul College outside school hours care with Mr Scott Ingram, Springwood Central after care with Ms Wendy Littlejohn, Rochdale South State School before and after school care with Ms Iman Nassif, Chatswood Hills outside school hours care with Miss Vicky Dark, Slacks Creek-Daisy Hill outside school hours care with Ms Tammy Stockill, Calvary Christian College outside school hours care with Mrs Kylie Parker, Shailer Park outside school hours care with Mrs Sandra Morrison, St Matthews after school and vacation care with Michelle Brown, Kimberly Park PCYC before and after school care with Ms Kay Dennis, and Springwood Road State School outside school hours care with Mrs Melinda Tocchetti. Early childhood care is also catered for with the Loganholme District creche and kindergarten with Bernadette Rodgers and Helen Curtain. They are doing a fantastic job in caring for our young people.

Visiting the centres is certainly fun. When I attend meetings we all sit on very small chairs at very small desks. I thank the children for sharing their facilities with us at those meetings. I know that the parents are very happy with the centres and I hear them when they speak at the meetings. As I said before, I have been lobbied by many groups and individuals regarding this bill. It was actually Phil Tomkinson and other members of the Slacks Creek P&C who raised issues with me regarding the draft bill. I then spoke to Mr Gary Cisloswki, the state President of the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Association, regarding the issues the organisation was raising. He is a good bloke. He was very good at the Rochedale High awards last night, too. I am pleased to say that the concerns he raised with me were resolved. I must say that the consultation with key stakeholders has been extensive. I congratulate Minister Judy Spence, ministerial staff and departmental staff on this consultation and for listening to and acting on the concerns of stakeholders.

Josie Bien, President of the Queensland Care and Providers Association, has also been contacting me regarding this bill. I know the minister will be answering Josie’s questions during the committee stage. Springwood Road State School P&C president Mike MacArthur raised with me his concerns regarding after school care, such as having to meet the building and facility requirements in line with the current national standards to be consistent with the new bill. I am
pleased to say that $4 million has been committed to assist school-age services to meet building and facility requirements.

The Queensland government has a strong commitment to supporting the provision of quality child care for Queensland families. We have also recognised the need to provide for a qualified and skilled work force and better employment and training opportunities for childcare workers. The need to ensure the qualifications reflect the diversity of the child care industry, promote career pathways and reflect the needs of families using child care is a priority. It is estimated that child care and early education services employ over 20,000 Queenslanders, with an estimated investment in infrastructure of over $1.4 billion and a contribution to the state economy of over $350 million per annum. This represents a significant work force making a major contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of the state.

The employment and retention of qualified staff in child-care centres is a major issue for the child care industry and impacts on the quality of service provided. There is also broad support from parents in the child care industry for child care staff to be well trained and appropriately qualified. In recognition of these views and available research on the subject, the new legislation proposes to set new standards for staff qualifications. The new legislation introduces minimum qualification requirements at the Certificate III level for all centre based services, excluding school-age care. The aim is to improve the skill level of childcare workers and create career pathways to increase the retention of qualified workers in the sector.

While training institutions indicate that enrolments in child care training courses are generally maintained at a high level, anecdotal information suggests that many students who undertake child care studies choose not to work in child care services on completion of their studies for a variety of reasons, including the fact that the study is used as a stepping stone to gain entry into university courses. In response to these issues, the government has developed and implemented, in consultation with the sector, the Queensland Child Care Industry Plan 2002-2005; implemented, in conjunction with the Department of Families and the Department of Employment and Training, the statewide training strategy, which targets flexible and affordable training options for staff currently working in child care services; negotiated the implementation of an apprenticeship system for child care; and commissioned research into employment and training patterns and trends in the Queensland child care industry.

Consultations with the child care sector during the development of the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2002-2005 identified access to training as a significant issue impacting on the availability of qualified staff. The Queensland government has helped to address this issue by committing more than $4.26 million over three years towards the cost of implementing a statewide training strategy for childcare workers. The strategy includes a general statewide response and one which is specific to the needs of indigenous workers in the cape, the gulf and the Torres Strait.

Features in the Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care—RAATSICC—component include the employment of three local coordinators to provide face-to-face assessment of the skills of workers accessing the strategy and to develop training plans for the individuals accessing the strategy in the RAATSICC communities. The assessment of acquired skills is focused on flexible assessment that includes one-to-one oral and observational assessment wherever possible. Assessor/mentors have been employed in each community or cluster of communities by the managing TAFE institute to mentor workers through learning and assessment resources and to assist coordinators in the assessment process. Resources are being developed, including learning resources and assessment guides, which accommodate the cultural training needs of these communities. The strategy is currently available until the end of June 2004 and there has been an extremely positive response to the strategy, with over 3,000 enrolments, including over 170 enrolments by indigenous workers living in remote communities.

The government has also helped to introduce the children's services apprenticeship in collaboration with the Queensland Community Services and Health Industry Training Council Incorporated and other relevant stakeholders. This is the first diploma-level apprenticeship for the child care sector in Australia and has been specifically designed to meet the growing need within the child care sector for qualified staff. The apprenticeship has been designed so that the participants may also take the option of exiting after one year with a Certificate III in Community Services (Children's Services), which is the qualification that will now be required for child care assistants to work in services under the new legislation.
The initial idea and impetus to develop an apprenticeship came from the training working group, which is facilitated by the Department of Families. The training working group evolved through the child care forum, which was established in February 1999 to inform the development of the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2002-2005. The forum provides a point of referral for the exchange of views and information on child care in Queensland between parents, government and the child care industry. The child care forum has also taken a leading role in the development of the Child Care Industry Plan, which was launched by the Hon. Judy Spence, Minister for Families, in March 2002. The industry plan was developed through the collaborative efforts of diverse stakeholders within the child care sector and marks a significant milestone in the development of collaborative partnerships within the industry. The plan endeavours to address many of the challenges facing the child care industry and will strengthen and promote the industry and enhance the viability and development of child care services.

The plan has three main themes that will be focused on over the three years—human resources and training, research, and information technology. The government has also commissioned the National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research to undertake research into training and employment patterns and trends in the child care industry. This topic was identified as a priority in the development of the Queensland Child Care Industry Plan. The research project will explore issues related to employment trends within the child care and early education sector—training, suitability, availability and accessibility and retention of qualified staff. These important initiatives of the Queensland government support and acknowledge its strong commitment to supporting the provision of quality child care for Queensland families.

At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned that I had been lobbied by childcare workers and associations who wanted to be part of the consultation process. Lisa Wallace and Vicky Dark, from Chatswood Hills State School after school hours care, were certainly interested in being part of that consultation process. I often run into Vicky when I do my grocery shopping. We have had many conversations in the freezer section of the supermarket regarding training requirements in the bill. While at first Vicky was quite apprehensive, I know she is now enthusiastic about doing more training and study. I know that she will do well and I wish her every success.

This government recognises the significant role that the child care industry and its workforce play in regard to this state's future. Extensive consultation for the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2002-2005 and this legislation indicated broad support from parents and the child care industry for child care staff to be well trained and appropriately qualified. In recognition of these views and the research that is available on the subject, this new legislation sets new standards for staff qualifications.

The current legislation for child care articulates the qualification levels required for people to work in long day care centres as a director, assistant director or group leader and for people wishing to work as a family day care coordinator. In addition, the legislation gives the Department of Families’ chief executive or a delegated officer the discretion to issue a certificate of endorsement for an unqualified person to work in any of these positions if special circumstances exist and the person is deemed fit and proper. This provision was seen as a necessary developmental measure at the time of the introduction of the current legislation when the child care industry was in its infancy. This new child care legislative framework builds on the existing framework and proposes the introduction of a minimum qualification requirement for assistant childcare workers as well as the removal of certificates of endorsement.

Consultation with the child care sector has also identified the need for additional training and career path opportunities for childcare workers. Whilst these proposed changes would have increased the standard of care, it was acknowledged that it would have placed existing staff in centres under considerable pressure to ensure they met licensing requirements. In addition, the current training scheme would not have met the initial impact of increased demand for training by the sector. In response to these issues, the Department of Families and the Department of Employment and Training have developed a three-year training initiative, the Child Care Statewide Training Strategy. The strategy aims to improve the overall skill of childcare workers in Queensland by providing a range of training options to assist the sector in meeting the qualification requirements in the existing and proposed legislation.

In regard to qualifications, it is also important to recognise that major changes have occurred in education and training over the past five years. For example, teachers are now required to undertake a fourth year of study to gain teacher registration, and the Australian qualifications framework has been applied to the child care field to provide qualifications pathways in home based and centre based contexts across the whole of childhood.
In light of these changes, the new regulatory framework incorporates a recognition of qualifications in accordance with the AQF and takes a competency based approach to the recognition of qualifications. Under the proposed new legislation, all qualified carers in a centre based care centre will be required to be adults unless they are assistants who are 17 years of age and studying. In centre based services other than school-age care services, the proposed qualification requirements for staff in centre based services are as follows: directors need an Advanced Diploma in Community Services (Children's Services) or a three-year qualification in early childhood or child care services, for example, a bachelor degree, from a higher education institution; a group leader will need a Diploma in Community Services (Children's Services) or a two-year qualification in early childhood or child care services from a higher education institution; the assistant will need a Certificate III in Community Services (Children's Services) or a one-year qualification in early childhood or child care studies from a higher education institution.

In recognition of the fact that staff may not have the necessary qualifications and may need time to commence an appropriate qualification course, the following provisions are proposed. In regard to centre based services other than school-age care services, the legislation will allow a licensee to engage people without the necessary qualifications in certain circumstances. For a director: if a person does not have the relevant qualification for a director, that person may be engaged as a director provided they have qualifications as a group leader and start the relevant qualifying course within six months of being engaged in the position and complete the qualification within the prescribed finishing time. The 'prescribed finishing time' means a time that is twice as long as the period in which the course would have been completed by a person undertaking the course through full-time study.

For a group leader: a person may be engaged as a group leader if they have the qualifications necessary as an assistant and they commence a suitable course within three months and complete the qualification within the prescribed finishing time. For an assistant: a person may be engaged as an assistant for the purpose of meeting the qualified staff-child ratio if they are 18 years of age and they commence a suitable course within six months and complete the qualification within three years. A person may also be engaged as an assistant if they are 17 years old, provided they are studying.

For school-age care services the relevant qualifications that will be acceptable will be broader than early childhood or child care studies and will include, for example, primary school teaching and human movement. This is in recognition of the varying nature of these types of services and the value of multidiscipline teams. A school-age care service will be required to have at least one person with a group leader qualification. At least one carer for every 30 children will be required to be qualified, but that qualification need be only at the Certificate III level, and once again in the broad range of educational fields.

People without a qualification may be engaged in a school-age care service for the purposes of meeting the qualified staff-child ratio provided they commence a relevant course within six months of starting work and complete the course within three years. No prerequisite qualification is required. In addition, to assist in the transition to a licensing framework it is proposed that the staff in school-age care services will have five years from the commencement of the legislation to complete their qualifications. Similarly, RAATSICC services that are currently unlicensed will also have five years from the commencement of the legislation to complete their qualifications.

Family day care also plays an important role in the consultation process of the bill. Daisy Hill Family Day Care lobbied me in a unique way. They invited me to their Easter Frolic in Daisy Hill Forest. It was during this fun day that I was able to meet with carers, parents and children to discuss their concerns and any questions they had regarding the draft bill. On the day, the Easter bunny did lose his basket of Easter eggs but I am pleased to say that fortunately the children found the eggs before they melted. I must thank Sue Salisbury and Jack Salisbury and all the children for assisting the Easter bunny on the day. I must also congratulate many of the carers who do a great job in ensuring that our young people have the care and attention they deserve.

During consultation, the family day care sector indicated that a transitional provision was needed for coordinators who were not required to obtain a qualification under the 1991 legislation. The legislation has therefore been redrafted in order to cater for these coordinators by providing a transitional provision. Feedback from the family day care sector regarding the provision that required at least one full-time coordinator, or equivalent, to have an early childhood qualification indicated that this would cause difficulties where there was only one coordinator. As a result of this feedback, the legislation has been amended to provide that in family day care schemes which require more than one coordinator, at least one coordinator must be early
childhood qualified. However, the legislation does not specify the number of hours this early childhood qualified coordinator is required to work. In a service with only one coordinator or equivalent, the requirement for a coordinator with an early childhood qualification has been removed, thus accommodating the needs of smaller services in remote areas.

It is also proposed that all qualification requirements contained in this legislation will be reviewed in three years. I firmly believe that the changes to the qualification requirements will build on the existing framework and set new standards for staff qualifications, ensuring that the state has a responsive, high quality and sustainable child care system.

This bill certainly does support high quality child care services that provide safe and secure care for children and I congratulate the minister on bringing this bill to the House. I know she understands child care, being the mother of two wonderful sons. I would also like to thank the departmental staff who answered my questions right up until the last minute yesterday. I also thank the ministerial staff who were always available when my residents and groups wanted information. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—Lib) (11.55 a.m.): With just over half of Australian children aged under 12 years receiving some form of child care, the child care industry plays an increasingly large and important part in family life. Many parents would not be able to participate in the work force or study or train without outside assistance to care for their children. The child care industry, as well as preschools and kindergartens, contributes over $350 million to the Queensland economy. The industry employs over 20,000 Queenslanders and has an estimated investment in infrastructure of over $1.4 billion. Therefore, the impact of child care services on the economic wellbeing of our state cannot be underestimated.

In her second reading speech to the Child Care Bill 2002 the minister stated that the bill seeks to increase the level of regulation of the child care industry to maintain high standards of care and safety while ensuring that services are positioned to provide flexible service delivery, thereby responding to the needs of parents. The bill builds on the minimum standards of the current Child Care Act 1991 and its regulations.

The bill establishes a licensing system for child care services which now include school-age care services. It regulates the way child care services are conducted. It sets standards for persons who provide child care, particularly through increasing the minimum qualification requirements based on competency. The current Child Care Act will be repealed upon commencement of the new legislation but transitional provisions are set out in the bill, particularly to cater to the needs of current childcare workers attempting to meet the new qualification requirements.

The necessity for a high standard child care industry has never been more important. The trend is for both parents to work or engage in study for increasingly longer, and often irregular, hours. There is a growing demand for care to be not only affordable and sufficiently flexible to respond to those needs but also to provide a safe, nurturing and educational environment for children of all ages.

The types of child care services have become more complex but tend to be regarded as formal or non-formal. Formal child care services are those that have formal arrangements with government in terms of funding or licensing under the current Child Care Act. Informal child care services are those more private arrangements between parents and the child care provider and are not subject to licensing but may, in some cases, be required to meet minimum standards.

Most licensed child care services under the current Child Care Act are commercial operators—around 40 to 60 per cent—and around 90 per cent are centre based. School-age care services, currently unregulated, comprise about 25 per cent of the market and are predominantly run by community based organisations operating from school sites. Most child care services are located in Brisbane and the numbers in rural and remote areas tend to reflect the population distribution. Most children who attend licensed services are four years old or under, and it appears that family day care providers care for the largest proportion of children under two years old.

The child care industry is expanding significantly in response to families' social and economic changes and their diverse needs. As of 30 June 2001, there were 1,979 formal child care services in Queensland with capacity to care for over 120,000 children. Long day care centres provide care for more than 21 children at one time—up to a maximum of 75—and operate for more than 20 hours a week. These centres appear to be the main providers of care, with 914 centres in Queensland as at August 2000. This represents about 60 per cent of formal care providers. Of course, they must be licensed.
Family day care is child care provided in a private home by a person who is approved under a family day care scheme licensed under the current Child Care Act and the Child Care (Family Day Care) Regulations. Carers must have a certificate of approval. They are licensed to care for up to seven children per carer and there are conditions on the ages of the children. Licensees employ coordinators who regularly visit to coordinate, monitor and resource the services. Most are community based not-for-profit organisations. Family day care may be more flexible for parents working non-standard hours or rotating shifts.

One of the major issues facing families who put children into day care of any sort is affordability. There is no regulation of the fees charged by child care services, with the costs to parents varying across the different types. The most expensive appears to be long day care at over $3 per hour. According to the Commonwealth 1999 census of child care services, it costs a Queensland parent around $155 a week to place their child into a long day care centre. School-aged care costs around $24 per week before school and $40 per week after school and the figure is $101 for vacation care. Queensland and the Northern Territory have the lowest service fees of all states and territories, the variation between which are due to factors such as different licensing restrictions on child-staff ratios, award wages and whether the service charges for additional services such as meals.

The Commonwealth government child care benefit makes the cost of approved services or registered carers more affordable to families. The amount received depends upon family income, with families earning less than $30,806 per year being eligible for the maximum rate of $135 per week for one child in approved care who is not a school child, and that figure increases per child up to three children. Rates for a school-age child are 85 per cent of the non-school child rate. High income families are still eligible for a partial benefit and no benefits are provided for using care that is not approved or registered.

Members of the House may be interested to know how this financial help from the federal government compares to assistance offered in England. One of my daughters-in-law is currently expecting our first grandchild and intends to continue work after spending a period of time at home with her baby. It will cost them 1,000 pounds per month to have their child in child care and they will receive no benefit whatsoever. When we in Australia and Queensland think we are badly done by, we should compare ourselves to other places in terms of adequate child care. I should say that my daughter-in-law will place her child in a child-care centre provided within the financial institution in which she works but which is run by a private entity. It is a good centre and is handy to her workplace, so she will be able to see her child at lunchtime and it is handy to take and pick up the child before and after work. However, 1,000 pounds per month will leave a very severe dent in the income she will make.

The recent government reviews of the legislation were prompted by the belief that, while the current Child Care Act was innovative when it commenced almost a decade ago, problems have begun to emerge as it becomes dated. Prescriptive requirements lack flexibility and have created barriers to responding to the changing needs of families and to the growing expectation of governments, parents and the community. The existing standards do not appear to facilitate the provision of non-standard services to support shiftworkers. There is not only a lack of consistency in standards across service types but also an overlap of some standards. There are also issues about gaps in coverage, particularly failure to encompass school-age care, and there have been ineffective enforced mechanisms to ensure compliance. The Child Care Bill goes some way to try to restore these inadequacies.

Representations have been made to me by a number of associations. I want to record their concerns and would certainly like the minister to answer their concerns when she sums up the debate. The Queensland Professional Child Care Centres Association is the peak private long day care child-care centre industry association in Queensland and certainly has a very good history over its 28 years in the industry. It supports a large number of families—over 25,000—and looks after more than 35,000 children in 290 private long day care child-care centres throughout the state. The association has said to me that it recognises that the 1991 Child Care Act and regulations have become dated and need to be upgraded, yet the association presents an unarguable position that the new legislation must be practical and workable, and that has been the thrust of anyone who has contacted me with their objections.

The association is concerned that certain aspects of the bill have not been fully assessed due to the fact that much of the detail is contained in the revised regulations, and of course the regulations are not available. This is of great concern for a number of people in the industry—that is, until the regulations are made clear and tabled, they are not really going to know the full
enforcement of the bill. While the regulations may not be ready at the moment, it is incumbent upon the minister to spell out the content of those regulations so that there is not this concern in the community. As outlined by the association, one of its primary concerns revolves around a provision in the bill to allow changes to staffing levels of centres at certain times of the day. Proposed section 63(1) states—

A licence condition for a centre based service may provide for 1 or more periods during a day, totalling not more than 2 hours during the day, to be rest periods for the service for the purposes of this division.

My understanding is that the association's concern is about staffing during that particular period of time, which may result in increased staffing and increased costs. Another concern raised by the QPCCCA pertains to the Building Act. During the consultation process, the association advised that existing centres that comply with current requirements would not be assessed against the new Building Act because the Building Act is based on former requirements. There are in fact many new requirements, including windows behind toilets, all fans below three and a half metres to be guarded, 53 millimetre step heights from outdoors to indoors, and partitions between toilets and other provisions, which are creating some concern for that association.

I also want to raise concerns expressed to me by the Sunshine Coast Carers Network Support Group. This is a very good group and a number of people operate this service in my own electorate. It wrote—

Dear Mrs. Sheldon

We are writing to express our very grave concerns about the proposed legislation before parliament at the moment that will restrict the outings that we provide for our children in family day care.

Our children go to the library for story time, they go to play groups with other children in care, they go on pick ups to and from school, visit parks and also at times go shopping. We as carers can see the learning results from these activities. This is also why so many parents choose family day care as opposed to a child care centre for the many varied aspects of the child’s day in family day care.

We feel the new legislation is unrealistic, unreasonable and unmanageable by carers already stretched to the limits by quality assurance requirements.

It is our opinion that these restrictions are not in the best interests of the children, and after all that is our main priority—the well being of the children in our care.

We hope you take our very real concerns into account when the final decision is made.

I am taking those concerns into account and will inform my constituents of the minister's response.

Also on the same issue, I have received a number of letters from parents. One letter from a parent at Moffat Beach states—

I am writing to express my concern about the proposed legislation that will restrict the outings provided by my day care provider. I have used the family day care system for four years and I have always encouraged trips and excursions because I can see the learning that results from such events. My children go to the library once a week for story time, they go to play group and carers activities during the course of the week, they do school pick up, visit the park and very occasionally they go to the supermarket. I do not support anyone who proposes to take these events away from my child and I know many parents who will feel the same way.

Children need exposure to regulated activities that will stimulate their desire to learn. My care provider goes out of her way to do this in a safe and controlled environment. Any new restrictions placed on carers should be extremely well thought out and should take into account the whole purpose of home caring. If I wanted restrictions I would have chosen a day care centre not a home based system.

She would also like to know what the minister says about that. Similarly, the Queensland Care Providers Association has written to me. In a nutshell, those who have contacted me overwhelmingly spoke out against the proposed restrictions, supporting the view that they were unrealistic, unreasonable and unmanageable by staff of schemes already stretched to the limit by quality assurance requirements. This does seem to be a genuine concern which I would like the minister to answer when she sums the debate up.

Finally, I want to read to the House comments I have received from representations from C&K, the kindergarten association. It states—

It is C&K's view that the proposed legislation is based on flexibility for licensees and convenience for families rather than the object and principles in relation to children it purports to be promoting. There is no evidence of current research or best practice in early childhood reflected in the bill or regulations. In contrast, if this legislation is passed the flaws in the current regulations will become law, allowing licensees to increase profits and children to pay the price. C&K believes that the current minimum standards will be further eroded if the Draft Bill is passed. Clearly the Department of Families, Queensland has failed to design legislation that will protect children and promote their wellbeing while attending child care services.

The minister might like to address that when she replies to the second reading debate.
Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (12.09 p.m.): I am happy to rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002. This bill is the culmination of a number of years of careful and thorough planning and development. In 1998 the Department of Families began to develop a strategic plan for child care which would incorporate a review of the current regulatory framework in place for child care services in Queensland. In late 1999 the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2002-2005 was released. One of the key outcomes from this strategic plan was the development of a new regulatory framework that would promote flexibility and innovative service delivery.

The current regulatory framework for child care in Queensland operates through a system of licensing. This licensing system comprises the Child Care Act 1991, the Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991 and the Child Care (Family Day Care) Regulation 1991 and prescribes certain types of child care which are required to be licensed. This current framework does not regulate all types of child care in Queensland; for example, school-age care, preschool as defined under the Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 and various types of informal care.

Throughout the life of the current regulatory framework, a number of problems have been identified with the present act and regulations. While the current legislative framework was considered best practice at the time it was developed, a number of factors have contributed to the need for change, including an increased demand for greater integration of child care and early education services to enhance the equity of provision for three- to five-year-olds; gaps in service provision to particular groups and the inability of some types of licensed services to respond to emergent needs; the growing need to provide child care for some children throughout their whole childhood and not just in the years before school; rapid changes in and market pressures on the child care industry; viability issues resulting from unplanned growth in the numbers of child-care centres; increased numbers of families making informal arrangements for the care of their children; the increasing cost of child care and the impact this has on people's ability to remain in or enter the work force; the limited mechanisms for families to influence the provision of care and education services for their children; and major changes in the way the Commonwealth government provides subsidies and the quantum of these subsidies for public and private centres. The member for Indooroopilly touched on these issues a moment ago.

As a result of these concerns, in late 1999 the Department of Families began to develop a proposed new regulatory framework for child care in Queensland. In order to ensure any legislation reflected the needs of parents, children, service providers and the community, the Department of Families undertook extensive consultations on the proposed new regulatory framework. Parents were consulted during the statewide consultation process undertaken for the strategic plan, and copies of a consultation paper on the proposed new legislation were sent to all parents and citizens associations and parents and friends associations. Further consultations with the child care sector occurred in March and April 2000, and these consultations helped to inform the proposed new regulatory framework and the drafting of the bill and regulation.

An exposure draft of the bill and regulation was released in late 2001. The department held statewide consultations on this exposure draft between December 2001 and April 2002. Over 52 consultation sessions were held throughout the state, with sessions being held with government departments, local government authorities, peak organisations, departmental staff and child care services. Regional offices invited all child care services to attend sessions in their local area. Depending on the needs of a particular area, sessions either were held for each service type—family day care, centre based care, school-age care—or covered all service types in one session.

Consultation sessions were held in Brisbane, Logan, Redlands, Gold Coast, Caboolture, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Roma, Hervey Bay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Longreach, Mackay, Cannonvale, Mount Isa, Townsville, Cairns, Atherton and Innisfail. Each session ran for two hours. The sessions focused on the provision of feedback and questions and answers. Feedback on the exposure draft of the bill and regulation was due to the department by 31 March 2002 and could be provided in a number of ways, including via the Internet, by telephone or by written feedback. The draft bill, regulation, information paper, building standards and feedback pro forma were made available on the Department of Families’ web site prior to consultation sessions being held, allowing participants time to read the documents before attending a consultation session.

In May and June 2002 a further four small focus group sessions were held with representatives from the family day care, centre based care and school-age care sectors. The purpose of these focus groups was to work through some of the more difficult and contentious issues raised during consultations. Further consultations were also held with departmental staff at
this time. Finally, three round table consultations were held with peak stakeholders in August to focus on a small number of outstanding issues.

This extensive consultation process enabled participants to be informed about the proposed child care bill and regulation and the proposed child care building standards and have opportunities to provide feedback. Additionally, the strategy enabled Department of Families staff to get feedback on the draft bill and regulation prior to finalisation and to assist the sector in understanding the direction of the new legislation.

The bill contains a number of key changes in the approach to the regulation of child care in Queensland. For example, the bill reduces duplication in standards which are covered by other legislation. It moves away from prescribed service types. It establishes a framework in which standards are set and monitored, depending on the number of children being cared for, the number of hours children are in care, the ages of the children and the setting of the service. It introduces standards that allow for flexibility in service delivery whilst maintaining high standards of care and safety for children in care.

It expands the framework to include school-age care services for the first time. This type of care has to date had access to Commonwealth funding for parents but has not been required to be licensed. That is a very important change, in my opinion. Finally, it incorporates recognition of qualifications in accordance with the Australian qualifications framework and takes a competency based approach to the recognition of qualifications.

The issues which the bill addresses have been identified over the life of the current act and include the prescriptive nature of the system, ambiguity of terms leading to inconsistent interpretation and lack of effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance. I believe that the licensing system in the bill allows for a more flexible approach to service provision without lowering standards.

As a mother of a young child in care much of the time, these issues are very important to me. I chose family day care over centre based care for Louis when he was nine months old. I wanted one day a week to give myself a break and to get back into some writing and some part-time work. At that time I wanted him to be cared for in a family setting, in a home environment. At just over three, he now has two family day carers. Last week he had his first day at a centre based care service—or a kindy as we call it—where he fit right in because of the extensive contact he has had with other children through play group and in care and the extensive and varied experiences he has been able to enjoy while in family day care over the last couple of years.

What is most important to me as a parent? I think it is what is most important to all parents; that is, safety first and then choice and flexibility. It is important not only for working women and families; it is important also for children. Child care, kindy and family day care provide an opportunity for kids to become socialised, to learn new things, to become comfortable with different people and to be in different situations. These are learning experiences for our young people. That is why I support and understand women and families who seek to access care for small children for reasons other than a return to work—looking for work in itself, seeking to retrain or re-enter the work force after having a baby, or seeking time for themselves, especially if they have other children in the house to care for. For those reasons child care provides a welcome relief and freedom for women and is desperately important. I mention this because I understand how hard it is for women to leave their precious little people in the care of our people.

Mr Reeves: It is hard for fathers, too.

Mrs REILLY: And fathers. I keep referring to families and parents, although as I am the only driver in the household it is my role to actually take and leave said child. I know that it is hard for dads, too, but in my case it is not dad who does the dropping off and picking up so far. However, I am sure that he will be doing that now that we take our child to a child-care centre that is within walking distance of home.

The reason I mentioned the need for child care for families who are not seeking care for their children for the purposes of work is that recently some letters to the editor in my local paper have accused parents—mothers in particular—of using child care as a dumping ground because they are too lazy to be mothers. I found that to be offensive and I took objection to that. Child care is there not only for families with two working parents: it is there for families however they are made up. Of course, many centres have a policy of providing places to working families or single parents first—and that is fair enough. That is why choice, flexibility, innovation and having a range of types of care situations such as family day care and community kindergartens are so important. Parents, whatever their circumstances, their family make-up, their personal or professional
situation, their age, their ethnicity, their race or religion want one thing more than anything in their choice of child care and that is the peace of mind that it can give them—knowing that their child is being cared for in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment.

I want to add that in recent weeks I have been visiting my local child-care centres. Of course, as a mum, in recent years I have checked out a number of my local centres—almost all of them. A growing area such as Mudgeeraba and other areas on the Gold Coast have a lot of child care facilities. I want to report that I have been overwhelmingly impressed by the quality and high professional standards of the services in my electorate in particular. Indeed, I think that we are very much spoilt for choice on the Gold Coast. The YMCA administers a first-rate family day care scheme, which ensures that only the very best quality carers and the very best home environments offering a broad range of family types are chosen. Child-care centres ranging from long day care to community based kindergarten and creche programs and brilliant Montessori programs and centres on the Gold Coast ensure that Gold Coast parents have a wide range of programs and care situation types to choose from.

In general, the industry and local operators have such a good reputation that when I sought word of mouth referral from friends or community members for somewhere to take Louis, there was no centre that was not recommended or highly spoken of. But with rapid population growth on the Gold Coast, in particular in the hinterland, demand is very high and child care places are rarely available if people want them at short notice. So parents can expect and know that they have to put their children on a list and wait weeks or months for long-term placements.

I want to congratulate the YMCA Gold Coast north family day care scheme—they are the organisers with whom I have had the most to do in recent years—and also the many centre operators whom I have met with recently and, in particular, the new centre that I have chosen at Tallai. They have demonstrated a commitment to providing quality services of a high standard to local residents.

I have spoken to many directors and owners about the proposed bill, regulations and licensing requirements and I have spoken to parents and carers as well. The feedback that I have received has been extremely positive in the main and I am confident that the concerns that have been raised with me—and they have related to issues such as flexibility of service, recognition of prior learning, particularly within the Montessori schemes, competency based training and learning that has been conducted outside the programs that we are possibly used to in Queensland, the accreditation process, and a number of other staffing issues—are or have been adequately addressed through the improved framework. I am happy to continue to talk to the minister and the minister's staff about those issues in more detail and how they relate to the services in my electorate.

I look forward to working further with my local child care providers and with parents to bring these issues to the government's attention. It is very important to keep doing this, because these are fluid and dynamic environments. These are growing little people and their needs are different and their needs change on a regular basis. These environments provide the very vital building blocks of early education as much as day care, a care environment, or a babysitting environment. They are the start of these little babies' education. So we need to make sure that child-care centres are continually monitored, evaluated, improved and supported.

Finally, I want to thank the Mudgeeraba community kindergarten for a great night at their annual fundraising fashion parade on Saturday night. They demonstrated their commitment and their endeavours to provide community care and a good creche and kindergarten program. They have about 38 families involved in the centre and over 100 people attended their fundraiser, which typifies the community support for this very important, very well thought of service. I particularly want to thank them for the courtesy and the hospitality that they showed me on that night and congratulate them on their work and their endeavours. I also thank the minister and the minister's staff for the continued updates, briefings and information packs that have been made available about the bill. That has really been of use. That has helped me to be able to go out into the community and talk through some of the issues with the carers and directors. For all of those reasons, I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.25 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002 and acknowledge the work and commitment of the many child care organisations in the Mount Ommaney electorate. Child care and early education services are important to the state of Queensland as the support of families and the care of children is of critical significance to the future of our society. As such, it is a key responsibility of this government. These services are
providing care and education to the youngest Queenslanders every day. They are also contributing to the development and education of tomorrow’s parents and leaders.

In regard to the rights of children in child care, the feedback from extensive consultation for the development of this legislation indicated that the Child Care Act needed to reaffirm matters such as that the dignity and the rights of the child should be respected at all times, that programs and services need to respond appropriately to the needs of indigenous families and their children, and that programs must reflect the age and needs of children. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child promotes the right of all children to be brought up in a spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. It emphasises positive outcomes for children and requires that children be protected from abuse.

In response to Australia’s commitment to the declaration of the rights of the child, the objects of this legislation are based on the objects of the Child Care Act 1991, which have been updated where necessary to reflect the spirit and scope of this new regulatory framework. The objects of the bill are to protect and promote the best interests of children receiving child care. The ways in which these objects are achieved include establishing a licensing system for child care services, regulating the way child care services are conducted and setting standards for persons who provide child care. The guiding principles articulate how the legislation is to be administered and how licensed services are to be conducted. These principles are based on the statement that the best interests of the child is the paramount concern and that child care should be provided to a child in a way that protects the child from harm, respects the child's dignity and privacy, promotes the child's wellbeing and provides positive experiences for the child. The principles also state that licensed child care should be provided to a child in a way that stimulates and develops the child's creative, emotional, intellectual, lingual, physical, recreational and social potential. In regard to programming, activities and experiences for child care services, such as long day care, school-age care, kindergartens and family day care, the bill outlines that the licensee must ensure that all child care provided under the licence is provided under an appropriate program that is designed to stimulate and develop each child's creative, emotional, intellectual, lingual, physical, recreational, and social potential.

While the new regulation has not yet been finalised, it is my understanding that it will require that the licensee must ensure compliance with it and that the programs must have regard to the number of children at any one time, the age of each child and the time the child is in care and how often the child is in care. In addition, I believe the following provisions also reinforce the intent of the legislation to promote positive outcomes for children. The Department of Families must have regard to whether the child care service is conducted or proposed to be conducted principally within an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and the culturally specific needs of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children. The bill retains the provisions of the Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991 which relates to the reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect. Under this regulation, child care licenses are required to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect which has occurred at the child care service. The department must have regard to the guiding principles of the act when making decisions. For example, the department may decide not to issue a licence on the grounds that the service does not respect the dignity and privacy of children in its care. There are also requirements for licensees in respect of their suitability for the position.

Whilst suitability notices are issued through the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Department of Families has additional grounds for refusing an application from a potential licensee. For example, in deciding a person’s suitability to conduct a child care service, the department may consider any convictions of the person for an offence against another law of Queensland or a law of a another jurisdiction that involved a child or was otherwise relevant to a person's suitability to conduct a child care service. The department must be satisfied that the licensee is complying with the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2000 in relation to the engagement of each carer and the staff member of the child care service. For example, the licensee will need to keep copies of suitability notices as evidence of compliance with the Commission for Children and Young People Act. The department will also have the power to issue a prohibition notice if it is satisfied that there is an unacceptable risk to harm the children. These provisions reinforce the intent of the legislation to promote positive outcomes for children. I believe the bill recognises the importance of ensuring children’s safety and also the importance of the school-age care services.

The new regulatory framework introduces some significant, exciting changes for the child care sector in Queensland, including the licensing of school-age care services for the first time.
The current regulatory framework is based on prescribed service types and does not regulate all types of care that is occurring in Queensland, such as school-age care. As members may be aware, school-age care has been identified as the fastest growing sector within the child care industry. The broadening of the licensing framework to include school-age care recognises this growth and the importance of these services. In doing so, it also seeks to provide benefits for children and families in Queensland in terms of helping to ensure quality and safety. Extensive consultations with the sector and parents during the development of the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005 indicated that there was a need for child care for children throughout their whole childhood and not just the years before school. The Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005 identified this issue and proposed that regulated standards be introduced for school-age care. The initial statewide consultation process for the new regulatory framework indicated that the school-age care sector wanted more than regulated standards. The sector wanted to be licensed and comparable to other forms of centre based care and be required to meet the same standards as licensed services. In view of this feedback, services that cater for school-age children only, including preschool children, and operate before and after school, or before and after school and before and after school holidays, will be required to be licensed. These types of services are referred to in the bill as school-age care services. Services that provide child care only during school vacation periods will not be regulated by the legislation.

The last statewide consultation process on an exposure draft of this legislation was conducted between November 2001 and April 2002. In the light of feedback from these consultations, some significant changes were made to the exposure draft. The final version of the bill takes this feedback into account and reflects the considerable consultation with key stakeholders in the sector. One of the most significant changes is in relation to who can apply and hold a licence in a school-age care service. The exposure draft of the bill required that a licensee be a person who either is an individual or corporate body. This would have had the effect of excluding parents and citizens associations from holding a licence to operate a school-age care service. In view of the feedback and extensive consultation with the P&Cs, particularly the Sherwood State School P&C in my electorate, the legislation has been amended to allow P&Cs to apply for a licence and for the department to take enforcement against a P&C as a separate entity.

The feedback during consultations also indicated that school-age care services needed longer than three months to apply for a licence and that more than 90 days was required for the department to consider the application, given that approximately 600 school-age care services will need to be licensed for the first time. Feedback also indicated that services would need longer than three years to meet the building standards. The legislation has therefore been amended to allow two years for services to apply for a licence, with the licensing being staggered across the two years, and five years to meet building standards. The building standards are based on the building requirements of the Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991. As well as these requirements, the standards contain specific building requirements for school-age care services based on the national standards for outside school hours care and include indoor and outdoor space requirements, the number of toilets required and kitchen/food preparation requirements. These national standards were released in 1995 and school-age care services have been working towards meeting these standards. In addition, the proposed building standards for child-care centres are written as performance based standards to allow for flexibility and innovation. The standards focus on outlining the intention or rationale behind each requirement, making it possible to achieve the objective in more than one way. Therefore, the licensee of a service may be able to offer an alternative solution that would be acceptable.

In recognition of the licensing of school-age care services, a 2001 state government election commitment was made to provide $4 million over three years to assist in the upgrade of existing school-age care services in Queensland. The first funding round was conducted in 2001-02 and allocated $1.2 million to 68 services. Funding of $1.9 million is also available in 2002-03 to assist school-age care services to upgrade facilities to meet licensing standards in the proposed new child care legislation. A further funding round will be held in 2003-04. Whilst the impetus to licence school-age care services arose from the sector, it is acknowledged that implementing these changes will have a significant impact on the sector. Therefore, in regard to qualifications, staff of school-age care services will have five years from the commencement of the legislation to gain their qualification. In addition, in recognition of the varying nature of school-age care services and the value of a multidiscipline team, staff will be able to gain qualifications that are broader than early childhood or child care. These include a range of therapies, education, behavioural science and sport and recreation. This list of qualifications for school-age care was broadened to...
accommodate feedback during consultations. The government has committed more than $4.26 million over three years toward the cost of implementing the statewide training strategy for childcare workers. This has been in response to concerns raised in regard to the number of qualified staff in child care and the difficulties that staff have had in accessing affordable, flexible training.

The strategy, being undertaken jointly with the Department of Employment and Training, is enabling workers to participate in an assessment of these existing skills and knowledge at no cost and to access child care training at subsidised rates. There has been an incredible response to this strategy, with a high take-up rate by child care staff. School-age care services have particularly embraced the strategy, with approximately 25 per cent of the over 3,000 enrolments coming from the school-age care sector.

The Child Care Bill provides a solid regulatory framework for child care in Queensland, and the licensing of school-age care is an integral part of this framework. The licensing of school-age care will strengthen current requirements and ensure that services are better placed to accommodate the needs of Queensland parents and their families. I congratulate the minister, her ministerial team and her department and thank them for all of the briefings they have given us. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.40 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Child Care Bill 2002. I congratulate the minister and the government on the implementation of this piece of legislation. I will not speak for too long on this bill because the shadow minister, the member for Cunningham, has already canvassed the issues adequately.

This legislation sets guidelines and standards to establish a licensing system that regulates the way child care is conducted and industry standards are set in Queensland. Anyone who heard me speaking on this subject in this House 12 or 13 years ago would think that my comments today represent a bit of a turnaround from my previous views.

Ms Spence: I was just thinking that it is good to hear you talk on the Child Care Bill.

Mr JOHNSON: I am pleased to hear that. I am a very honest person. I admit that from time to time I have a turnaround in my beliefs.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: My colleague the honourable member for Cunningham has had a fair bit to do with this, as has my other colleague the member for Southern Downs. But to quote Bob Dylan: ‘the times, they are a’changing’. People’s needs are changing. We live in an environment of change. I do not want the minister to sidetrack me, because I think she will be very happy with what I have to say. We have agreed on a lot of things lately and I hope we continue in that vein.

Ms Spence: A bit of a worry.

Mr JOHNSON: It is a worry. I have great respect for what the minister is trying to do.

There is no doubt that people’s needs are changing. We have to accept that change responsibly and embrace it in order to get the best outcomes for the community. I read in Hansard some of the contributions from members on both sides of the House. Importantly, we are talking about the formative years of our children. We are talking about preschools, kindergartens, creches, family day care, long day care and after school care for children. This is about the care and protection of our children in these facilities.

I wish to highlight the need for child care facilities in western towns and particularly in my electorate. We have very satisfactory child-care centres in Longreach, Emerald and Charleville. But for places such as Barcaldine, Blackall and some of the larger centres trying to put full-time care in place, there are costs involved and also restrictions and requisitions. Not all that long ago I went to a meeting in Barcaldine, where concerned citizens and the council are trying to get a facility up and running.

Importantly, mothers are also professionals with skills to offer the community, whether they be teachers, nurses, police, physiotherapists or whatever. Many mums want to re-enter the work force. Those people want to make a contribution to society in either a skilled area or an unskilled area. I believe it is the government’s responsibility, in conjunction with local councils, to put in place child care facilities that will assist them to make that contribution.

In relation to child care facilities, my biggest concern is that we need trained professionals managing and working in those operations. Many people have been subjected to scrutiny recently, be they teachers or whoever. We want to create an environment that is safe and
The government has a responsibility to provide a platform for all forms of child care to be closely monitored so that these facilities are able to ensure the total safety and protection of children and their carers. This minister and other ministers have remarked in the past about child-care centres being placed in government buildings. Society's needs have changed. However, we have to make certain that our children's environments are the best available. The learning techniques, social skills, medical skills and other needs of our young children should be fully catered for. We need to have trained professionals working in these centres.

Also, I wish to refer to the work of the Uniting Church in my area in providing day care and children's playgroups in isolated and remote areas. For example, they hold a fun day at the Betoota races and provide care for the children. I do not think that these types of organisations receive enough praise and thanks for the work that they do. Truly, they are very professional people and they are doing a great job. Today, I say thanks to the Uniting Church for its great work. It has been doing this job over a long period of time. These people have certainly touched the hearts and the homes of many young people. I know a lot of country mothers certainly wait for the day when the Uniting Church people come around to provide that service and take the kiddies for a day and play with them or organise activities so they can learn other skills.

This is all part of the formative years of our young people, regardless of where they live—whether it is in remote western Queensland, north Queensland, greater Brisbane, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast or our large regional towns throughout the state. I say to each and every member of parliament here today that I believe it is our responsibility as the elected representatives of the people of this state to put in place safe, protective environments for our children. It is vital that parents who decide to put their children in these types of institutions as they go off to work know that those kiddies are going to be looked after in a safe and proper environment.

I say to the minister that this is a very good piece of legislation. I believe this legislation will further enhance the benefits to our young children and also enhance the benefits for those families who are dislocated during the time of work. I thank the government for this piece of legislation.

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (12.51 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002. The choice a parent or guardian makes in relation to who will look after their children when they go to either work, study or participate in other community or training opportunities is, quite frankly, one of the most important choices that they will ever make. Being able to feel confident that your child is in a safe, emotionally secure environment, and an environment that is conducive to a mix of both learning and play, is paramount.

The range of child care services that a parent can access during a child's life changes over time. My own experience as a parent was to access a whole range of child care services: family day care when the children were babies and toddlers, kindergarten, preschool and long-term day centres when they were preschoolers, and before and after school care when school started. May I say that some of mine are still in after school care.

The experience that I have had as a parent—and I know other members would have this experience—is echoed by many members of our community. There is a great desire for flexibility of the service to meet the needs of working parents, and in particular parents who may be
shiftworkers. But there is also a need for rules and laws which give confidence about the quality of care. These are the major objectives, I believe, in any parent’s mind.

The Child Care Bill 2002 aims to regulate the provision of child care services in Queensland to give confidence to parents and guardians. It does so by the use of a regulatory tiered approach in relation to appropriate standards for various child care sectors. The bill defines what is a child-care centre. It sets out requirements for staffing numbers in relation to the number of children being cared for, the hours of care and the age of the children in care, as well as the setting of the service. A key feature of the bill is to include the regulation of school-age care programs. In the electorate of Aspley we have very large school programs. Up to 70 children can be accommodated in schools after hours. They do lots of activities in very busy environments in the city. The bill also introduces minimum qualifications for staff, and I would like to talk about that in a little more detail later.

The objects of the bill are to protect and promote the best interests of children receiving care, and it does so in a threefold way, namely by licensing systems, by establishing regulation for the conduct of a service and by setting standards for service provision. The bill is underpinned by principles that care should be conducted in a manner where the child’s care is paramount, where parents are supported in the development and care of their children and where child care occurs in an environment that involves both parents and the community.

Licensing occurs for both centre based services and home based services. May I say that the licensing for centre based care is for one centre only. That ensures that individual centres are able to be better scrutinised rather than having a whole series of centres. Home based services are licensed for one or more homes. That is a practical approach, particularly in relation to family day care programs.

Licences have effect for no longer than three years. Part of the licensing program requires the CEO to be satisfied that the service complies with the Commission for Children and Young People’s Act 2000 in relation to the employment of staff. It also ensures the suitability of premises for child care. The culturally specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are considered in the bill.

The bill confers powers to suspend or revoke a licence, with urgent suspension of a licence if it is indicated. This provides for action to be taken to protect children and also to protect the reputation of quality child care services from rogue operators remaining in the industry. The bill moves to ensure minimum standards for carers and is specific in relation to the numbers and definition of the carers engaged. The move towards ensuring that carers have suitable training is one that is consistent with many childcare workers in Aspley’s own professional education trends. Many workers in child care services in my electorate have, over the years, embraced the need to seek further qualifications and training—training that improves the outcomes for child care and enhances the professional images and outcomes of childcare workers. This is an indication of the commitment of quality childcare workers, and I congratulate them on their endeavours.

The bill also includes responsibility for a quality assurance process to be developed by a service. It does so through the requirement for services to have up-to-date written policies that are available to parents and guardians. It is a responsible way to achieve consistent quality care across the child care sector.

The Child Care Bill 2002 is very significant legislation. The Child Care Act 1991 was, at the time, benchmark legislation, and the review and introduction of this bill has come about because the Beattie government is committed to ever improving child care services. This bill is a result of a comprehensive review of the current regulatory framework and standards in child care. It is debated here today after extensive consultation. I know that it was wide-ranging consultation which required much input from many groups with information about many aspects of child care service providers.

May I say that in my previous life—which I can hardly remember now—I was a professional officer in aged care for the Nurses Union. That particular job gave me great insight into the responsibility that government has to ensure quality care for vulnerable members of our society. I commend the minister for her commitment to children in care. I know that not all the interests and desires of service providers are agreed to in this bill, and indeed that not all Labor desires and interests are agreed to. However, the outcome is balanced. It is a balance that ensures that the best interests of children are provided for in terms of quality, safety and efficiency. The bill achieves that balance and I congratulate the minister on that.
Over 6,000 children live in the electorate of Aspley. There are excellent after school services, long day care services and home based services looking after them. I thank the Aspley service providers, childcare workers, parents and community groups who have contributed to the consultations connected with the review of the legislation and the subsequent bill before the House.

I would like to thank the minister, her hardworking committee and her staff for their efforts in relation to this bill. At the end of the day, I cast my parent eye over this bill as well as my legislator analysis, and the parent in me said, 'Well done and congratulations.' I know that the outcome for children will be welcomed by my fellow parents. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002 and have great pleasure in doing so. There has been over two years of extensive consultation on this bill with the child care industry, with the community and with parents and this bill provides flexibility for the delivery of quality child care services. As a parent myself, I want to comment on the rights of parents with children in child care. In consultations conducted to assist in the development of the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005, parents frequently claimed that they did not know a lot about the child care services attended by their children and felt little power to influence the services. Typically, parents would like to be kept well informed by the child care service and to feel that their views are respected. However, they are looking for realistic ways to achieve this given their work and other time commitments. Whilst a parent is generally regarded as being the father or mother of a child, the Child Care Act 1991 defines a 'parent' as also including a person who is acting in place of a parent of a child.

The present child care legislation gives parents the right to observe activities being provided in the service at all times, to receive information and policies relevant to the child care service, to receive information about grievance procedures and to have access to records kept on their child. In addition, parents using child care services have the right to experience respect for their needs, their views and culture; to know about their child's progress within the child care setting; to expect that a child care service will understand parents' work and other time commitments and find realistic ways to achieve effective communication with them; and to be actively involved in decisions that affect their children.

Last week I had the very pleasant duty of opening a family room at the Great Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE in Townsville. I found this to be unique in that a room was set aside and modelled to be a family room where working parents with a sick but not contagious child could bring that child to the family room and still carry out their work at TAFE. Breastfeeding mothers can also use this room to change their baby's nappy and there is a section set aside for them with a computer and phone to enable them to continue working. This is very innovative. When I was breastfeeding I remember how difficult it was to go to work or even do the shopping because there was nowhere to go for such things. Many people do not respect women who are breastfeeding and think that a six-week-old baby should be eating a hamburger. I applaud the Great Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE in Townsville because this is extremely commendable. This room allows for the continuation of breastfeeding a child, and we all know that is much better for them.

Returning to the Child Care Bill, the definition of 'parent' in this bill is more inclusive than the current legislation. It was drafted to better reflect the present complexity of families and also to reflect the tradition and customs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The definition of a parent of a child includes—

(a) for any child—the spouse of a parent of the child; and
(b) for an Aboriginal child—a person who, under Aboriginal tradition, is regarded as a parent of the child; and
(c) for a Torres Strait Islander child—a person who, under Island custom, is regarded as a parent of the child; and
(d) a carer of the child under the Child Protection Act 1999.

The bill also comprehensively defines a 'guardian' of a child as meaning any of the following persons—

(a) a person who is recognised in law as having all the duties, powers, responsibilities and authority relating to the child that, by law, parents have relating to their children;
(b) a person in whose favour a parenting order is in force under the Family Law Act 1975 (Commonwealth); and
(c) a person who is entitled to the care and custody of the child under the Adoption of Children Act 1964.
There are also definitions for both 'spouse' and 'de facto' under the proposed new legislation for child care. Schedule 2 of the bill provides that the spouse of a person includes a de facto spouse of the person and that a de facto spouse means—

... either 1 of 2 persons, whether of the same or the opposite sex, who are living together on a genuine domestic basis in a relationship—

(a) based on intimacy, trust and personal commitment to each other; and
(b) that is normally considered by the community to indicate the persons are a couple.

The new child care legislation acknowledges that parents have rights that extend beyond those outlined in the current child care legislation. The new legislation consolidates those sections in the present act that deal with parents’ rights and strengthens and updates them where necessary.

For example, the bill provides that the licensee of a child care service must prepare and keep up-to-date written policies about the conduct of the child care service, including policies on the participation of parents, students, volunteers and others in the conduct of the service and processes for dealing with any concerns of parents, guardians, staff members or carers. The licensee must give a copy of a policy on request to a parent or to a guardian of a child in care. The licensee of a child care service must also prepare and keep up to date a role statement for each position in the service and give a copy of the role statement for a position on request to a parent or guardian of a child in care. The bill also provides that parents or guardians must be allowed access by stating that whenever child care is being provided to a child in the course of a licensed service, the licensee must ensure that the child's parents or guardians are allowed access to observe the provision of the child care. This provision does not apply to the extent that compliance would allow access in contravention of an order of a court or a tribunal.

Importantly, the bill puts a stop to what are known as exclusion agreements. An exclusion agreement means an agreement or part of an agreement under which a licensee is exempted from a liability for negligence relating to a loss or injury suffered by a child in care, or a child in care or a parent or guardian of a child in care indemnifies the licensee against a liability for negligence relating to a loss or injury suffered by the child. The bill specifically provides that a licensee must not enter into an exclusion agreement with a parent or guardian of a child in care and an exclusion agreement entered into after the commencement of the bill by a licensee and a parent or guardian of a child in care is of no effect.

Finally, the bill requires licensees to obtain and keep current a policy of public liability insurance. Adequate insurance protects parents, children, staff and licensees from the sometimes severe financial consequences of matters of public liability. The current regulations for child care services and family day care schemes require licensees to maintain insurance in the minimum amount of $5 million. This minimum amount of insurance in the current day is not seen as sufficient and, consequently, the legislation has increased this amount to $10 million. These provisions clearly articulate the important role parents and families have with regard to child care and provide them with the ability to exercise certain rights in relation to their child. I commend this bill. I believe that our children are not only our present but also our future. They are so important. We need to ensure that proper practices are put in place to protect and look after them so that they can grow up and be wonderful people in our community.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (2.39 p.m.): As many other speakers have already said, in the Child Care Bill we are dealing with part of the community that is not only very valuable but also very vulnerable. Parents entrust their children to organisations in one of the options available for child care. Those parents expect from the care provider a high level of vigilance, a high level of concern and the provision of stimulation and activities that will help with the development of the child.

I know that many parents seek child care not because they do not want to be at home with their children but because economically it is necessary for them to have a second income. There are other situations in which, for the benefit of the parent—either the mum or the dad—they go out to work to fulfil their own potential and to contribute very constructively to the community. There is a real mix of reasons people seek child care. It is only fair and reasonable that that child care is guaranteed as much as possible to be safe and appropriate.

I commend the child care providers in my area—not only the private providers but also the after school care providers, the in-home care providers and those that provide programs for holiday care. I have met a vast majority of private child care providers and facilities attached to schools—kindies, et cetera—and I would have to say that, without exception, the people who work there really do have those young people's best at heart.
Gladstone is a shiftworking town, with quite a number of enterprises working 24-hour rosters—three eight-hour rosters or two 12-hour rosters. That means that the previous structure of child care does not suit. It may have been appropriate for eight-hour shifts, but with 12-hour shifts there are situations in which both parents in a family are working at the same plant or at different plants but still with the 12-hour roster. It means that extended care is essential.

The member for Cunningham spoke about the concerns of the Queensland Professional Child Care Centres Association Inc. I, too, want to raise a couple of its concerns. I will be most interested in the minister's response. The member for Cunningham raised the apparent contradiction in relation to compliance with the Building Act. In one part it appears that a child care facility will remain appropriate provided that the building was compliant prior to the passing of this bill. However, another part of the bill before us states that the director-general has to assure himself or herself that the building complies with the Building Act, and there is no qualification in that statement. Therefore, on a reading of the bill and the way it does appear to contradict itself, some facilities could be faced with significant cost in upgrades. I seek the minister's clarification as to whether there is an anomaly or I have misunderstood the provisions.

One part of this bill is a case of 'what goes around comes around'. I remember when my children were small, one in particular—I will not name her, because if I do she will say something not very nice to me when I get home—refused to use the kindy toilets because there were no partitions and no doors. That was the requirement then; it had to be all visually accessible. She was affronted at this. She was only about three. She would go before she left home and would hang on for the rest of the day and refuse to go. I notice the bill will require partitions again. It is probably trite and really unimportant, but I think for a lot of kids who are private people the reintroduction of partitions will be welcome. I know that what goes around comes around and in a few years' time they will probably say that we have to get rid of them again, but I know that for some children it is a big issue of personal privacy. I will be keen to see how that works out.

The bill introduces a requirement under the Commission for Children and Young People Act for criminal history checks, including complaints and charges that have not resulted in a conviction, to be taken into account. That legislation created a degree of uncertainty. I had not realised the extent of the retention of concern until one of the service clubs in my electorate asked me only a few months ago to come along and talk to them about this legislation.

They are a group of people who hold functions for young people only on a yearly basis and they were affronted that they, as upstanding citizens, were going to be required to have a blue card. As it turned out it was not necessary. It was a one-off function once a year. They had not made any inquiries but they had not realised that they were not obliged to have the blue card.

Over the period of the evening when we had the discussion and then questions and answers, it became obvious that they were more comfortable with the legislation after understanding the reasons for it—the fact that the most predatory of people often get involved in areas where children are left by parents with a belief that the children are in safe hands. Therefore, I believe that if there is any reaction to any requirement for screening, an explanation will answer the objection of 99 per cent of people. There may still be a degree of questioning—'I'm an upstanding citizen. Therefore why do I have to be checked?'—but in most cases that is removed. I think for all parents the knowledge that all people looking after their children do not have a history of complaint, charges or arrest is incredibly important.

I believe that the Queensland Professional Child Care Centres Association Inc. wrote to all of the members of parliament. I will quote from its letter to me and then raise a couple of issues. It sent me a copy of *Child care for children*, which was first published in 1998 and refers to a practice called EduCare. The letter states—

> ... 'EduCare' will mean:
> - A better education system
> - Parents who can have a family and a job
> - Population growth is encouraged
> - More jobs, careers, investment and revenue
> - Health, welfare, training, counselling and advisory networks serving the community
> - Less juvenile crime.

These benefits can only accrue to Queensland with smart legislation. If Queensland is to be the Smart State, then Queensland child care legislation needs to:

- Spend Smarter—let private capital achieve the quality standards and efficiencies in child care that are absent in other sectors
Regulate Smarter—listen to the experts in delivering long day child care, the operators themselves, when developing legislation.

Market Smarter—work with the industry to effectively disseminate information and educate operators.

The current proposed legislation is failing on all three points. I am very concerned about that. The consultation process is set out in the explanatory notes—who the minister met with and who other members of this chamber might have met with. I am very concerned, though, that such an important and high-profile association feels so strongly about this legislation. I would be interested to understand why it has failed to be satisfied by the legislation as it is currently drafted.

Ms Spence: They just couldn't get everything they wanted.

Mrs Liz Cunningham: Okay. I hear that—that they did not get everything they wanted. However, it is a fairly strong objection to say that the legislation fails on all three points.

In relation to that objection, one of the issues that it raised relates to the guidelines being placed on centre based services. The explanatory notes state in relation to clause 32—Licensed capacity is only relevant for centre based services. (A licensed capacity will not be specified for a licensed home based service, such as for a licensed Family Day Care Scheme.)

I wondered about the rationale for that difference. I know that ceilings are put on numbers to ensure that there is appropriate room for the children and that an appropriate ratio between children and supervisors can be regulated. Why is it seen as appropriate that there is a different application given to the centre based services and the home based services?

The other issue that the QPCCCAI raised and also the Child Care Industry Association raised is contained in a press release. Again, it is strongly worded—and I acknowledge the minister's response earlier. The media release refers to the new requirement to have lunch periods covered by additional staff. The media release states that there must be at least two adults present at the centre based service at all times. As I understand it, lunchtimes are usually taken during rest periods. I have to tip my hat to some of these services, because for them to be able to get every kid to lie down at the same time has to be a gift. I could never do it and I had only three children.

When these young people are lying down having a rest the care providers are saying that it is at that time that they roster the lunches so that the demand on the supervisors, the caregivers, is reduced or minimised and, therefore, the need to replace those people is removed. I can understand in theory the reason for having the two adults present at all times, but if it is not practical, if it is right that there is a lack of qualified caregivers—and just to my mind the process of rostering people on for these lunch hour periods in itself is a tremendous challenge—I would be interested in hearing the rationale for that. If lunches are taken during those rest periods when the demand is reduced, what has occurred to engender concern in the minister and the minister's staff to require this new obligation that two adults be present?

I want to read from the media release, a copy of which was sent to me and, no doubt, to all other members. Again, it is strongly worded. Probably what concerns me as much as anything is the strength of the dissent. In relation to the bill, the media release states—

The Minister has not listened to her own Advisory Forum or senior industry representatives, and has ignored four years of consultation in favour of advice from other groups who do not have to meet these high quality standards.

The Minister's failure to understand the issues involved are exemplified by her decision to make centres replace staff during staff lunch times.

This policy requiring several thousand extra staff throughout Queensland cannot be achieved with the current child care staff shortage in Queensland, and is not backed up by any evidence of safety issues.

...
Children are so important to us. We need to do everything to ensure that their health and their safety are attended to as well as their stimulation and growth. In achieving those goals, we must also make sure that the standards that are set are achievable and practical. I would be interested in the minister's response to those issues that I have raised.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (2.53 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Child Care Bill 2002 and, in particular, to focus my comments on the family day care provisions of the bill. The government values and remains committed to family day care. Family day care is an important type of child care service in Queensland, which provides a high quality service that is responsive to the individual needs of families.

A family day care scheme is a network of individuals providing child care and developmental activities in their own homes for other people's young children. These individuals are organised and supported by a central coordination unit. The unit supports carers, arranges the placement of children, monitors the care provided and undertakes the necessary administrative responsibilities. Whilst family day care is primarily aimed at children from birth to five years, it also assists school-age children up to the age of 12 years and beyond in special emergency cases. Schemes operate in both urban and rural communities and provide a range of flexible care, including long day, part-time, occasional, emergency and before and after school care.

The Department of Families has been consulting with the child care sector regarding the development of the new child care legislation since 1999. During these consultations, the child care sector has indicated support for a new regulatory framework that provides clarity, promotes flexibility and innovation and encompasses all forms of child care. The proposed legislation reflects a move away from using the prescriptive services types, because this has been problematic under the current system. Instead the bill and the regulation use objective criteria rather than labels to determine whether a service is required to be licensed and the standards that a service is required to meet.

One of the key criteria is the setting of the service, that is, whether it is home based or centre based. Under the draft legislation, family day care is licensed home based care. The Department of Families has explored with the parliamentary counsel whether there can be a reference to the term 'family day care' in the legislation. As a result, there is an example in the regulation that specifically utilises the phrase 'family day care scheme'. Whilst there is no other reference in the draft legislation to long day care, kindergartens, limited hours care and family day care, that does not mean that these terms cannot be used in practice. In fact, the terms can and, no doubt, will continue to be used by the sector and the department. Family day care will remain as an identifiable and valued form of care within the community.

Although the legislation no longer prescribes service types, services will still be able to call themselves a family day care scheme. The Department of Families will still use service types as a means of identifying services for parents through its child care information service for data collection such as annual censuses and Productivity Commission reports and other publications. Additionally, the department is developing useful resources to assist the people who use the legislation to understand their obligations. Resources will be developed specifically for family day care for the benefit of licensees, coordinators, carers and parents.

The legislation aims to make linkages with other pieces of legislation and existing processes such as the Commonwealth accreditation system and the national standards for family day care for the purpose of streamlining the regulation of child care services. However, it should be recognised that the state legislation sets a minimum standard for service delivery with a focus on safe and suitable child care whereas other standards may be more broadly focused.

Throughout the consultation phase, the family day care sector has raised concerns about the exposure draft of the legislation not accommodating the operation of playgroups or allowing carers to visit each others homes. Recently, I received correspondence from Ms Glenys Bergmann, a care provider with the Pioneer Family Day Care in the Mackay area, who raised with me her concerns about restrictions outlined in the section regarding carers coming together, playgroups and excursions. Ms Bergmann believed that these restrictions did not acknowledge the diversity of family day care or consider the individual requirements of families who value family day care because it offers an extension of the home environment. Ms Helen Royes, a coordinator at the Pioneer Family Day Care, and a good friend, also raised concerns with me that the bill would place unrealistic restrictions on carers. She said that she understood that the legislation was seen as necessary to create guidelines for child-carer ratios and make child care a more accountable sector, but was concerned that the bill treated family day care in the same way as
child-care centres, not giving enough attention to the fact that family day care has a different emphasis and aims to provide a more open and flexible environment for children and families who require child care. Ms Royes said that carers coming together was an important part of the flexibility provided by family day care and said that there were various scenarios where carers come together outside of the home such as at Christmas parties or playgroups held at community halls.

The exposure draft of the legislation provided that for the purposes of calculating the numbers of children receiving child care, all of the children receiving care at the home must be counted, even if some of the child care is being provided by someone else. This was because in previous consultation on the proposals for a new regulatory framework the family day care sector was clear that it would be unacceptable for two adults to be registered as providing care from the same home. Feedback from the family day care sector indicated that it is the practice of many carers to attend other carer’s homes to participate in informal playgroups for short periods of time.

The family day care sector strongly indicated that there was a need to have provisions that allowed carers to come together in each others homes—for example, for mentoring purposes—and therefore cater for larger numbers of children. Additionally, there was a need to allow for carers coming together on a regular basis in halls or other buildings under the supervision of a coordinator from the service. As a result of this feedback, the legislation has been amended to provide for carers coming together in each other’s homes and in other places. Some limits have been placed around how this would occur to ensure that two or more carers do not spend all of their time at one another’s home or at another place which would clearly be unacceptable. I spoke to the Minister for Families in relation to the concerns of the family day care sector in my electorate and was pleased that the minister had listened to the family day care sector and responded with these amendments, designed to accommodate carers coming together. I hope that the amendments will address many of the concerns held by family day care providers in the Mackay region.

Whilst the new child care regulation has not yet been finalised, it is my understanding that it is proposed that the regulation will further detail the requirements for playgroups and excursions involving two or more care providers. For example, one of the proposed provisions currently allows for two care providers to come together for not more than three hours in a day, providing that each of the children being provided with care by the carers during the period is ordinarily provided with child care by one or more of the carers at other times. There is no limit on the number of times per week this type of playgroup can occur, providing it does not occur for more than three hours in a day. This will accommodate carers visiting one another on a one-on-one basis, including for the purposes of mentoring and to meet quality assurance requirements.

These provisions and others relating to playgroups which have been developed in close consultation with the peak bodies for family day care in Queensland, namely the Family Day Care Association of Queensland and the Queensland Care Providers Association, recognise the need to accommodate playgroups in family day care whilst ensuring that safety is maintained and risks are considered. There are four providers of family day care in the Mackay-Whitsunday region—Mackay Family Day Care, Pioneer Family Day Care, the Valley District Family Day Care and Whitsunday Family Day Care.

Pioneer has been in operation for 19 years and runs with about 40 carers catering to the needs of more than 220 children, which represents about 150 families in the urban area of Mackay north of the Pioneer River. Mackay Family Day Care services approximately 205 children from families in the urban area of Mackay south of the Pioneer River and including Sarina, with 50 registered day care mums. The Valley District Family Day Care has been operating for nine years and covers the Pioneer Valley region. Based in Mirani, they provide care for families in Walkerston, Finch Hatton, Eton, Marian and Mirani and are also licensed to provide family day care in Moranbah. Unfortunately, in Moranbah they are having difficulty finding registered day care mums in order to establish the service in Moranbah where there is a real need. Whitsunday Family Day Care has experienced a similar problem. Their service has been going for 18 years and it currently has 19 registered carers providing care for 107 families or about 150 children throughout Proserpine, Airlie Beach, Cannonvale, Stratdickie and other localities within the Whitsunday shire.

All four services have waiting lists and all have expressed the difficulty in finding registered carers. That indicates that there is a real need to recruit and train people for these positions. It is a special kind of person who is willing to take on the care of another person’s child or children in their own home. I would like to place on record my admiration for family day care providers in the
Mackay region for their dedication. Carers are remarkable people who nurture and love children as if they were their own—and they do so with large groups of children. Family day care offers the comfort and flexibility of having children cared for in a home environment, but parents still expect the highest quality of care and safety. It is a fact, however, that most accidents occur in the home, especially among young children. Family day care providers must be extra vigilant and dedicated in their provision of care. This is another reason why changes to legislation concerning child care are necessary. The great environment that family day care provides must be offset with reasonable rules that will ensure the safety of children, because that is paramount to this legislation.

As a parent of three young boys under the age of five, I know that when we go to a park—probably about once every six or eight weeks—with three other families with children under the same age we notice in that environment that whilst we all are having fun there is a risk. This was brought home one day when one of the children escaped from under our eyes while we all were chatting. One of them nearly fell over an embankment below which was a tiled area. When we do go for our Sunday morning brunch at Mulherin Park, named after my great uncle—

A government member: Named after those five sons.

Mr MULHERIN: No. It is named after my great uncle John Martin Mulherin. The adults take turns in supervising the children as they run amok in the park. As I said earlier, this is really about protecting the most precious asset we in this country have, our children. Family day care provides a unique child care experience for children in which they are engaged in the real life of the home. I applaud the minister on introducing legislation which was well overdue. The minister does a remarkably great job in the very difficult portfolio of Families, Disability Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. I also thank the minister's staff and the staff of the department for the consultation they engaged in with the community. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (3.09 p.m.): As my colleague the honourable member for Mackay said, we seem to be thanking the minister for most of the bills she brings in. She has brought in difficult bills, bills that have necessitated a lot of hard work. She is courageous for putting her foot in the water and making sure that we have good legislation in Queensland. I thank also the minister's hardworking and dedicated staff who have kept us fully informed.

Child care has become one of the most important issues for young Queensland families today. The Child Care Act was introduced 10 years ago—a very long time as families go—and the structure of families in Queensland has changed dramatically. Therefore, it is imperative that the act keeps pace with society's needs. Young families want to see their children given the best start in life. Many families have both parents working and it is very important to them to see that their children receive the best. We must all remember that the support of families and the care of children is of critical significance to the future of our communities.

The quality of our family life is important to all. Child care plays a significant role not only in supporting parents in the work force—after all, without outside assistance both parents would not be able to go to work each day—it also allows them to take up training opportunities, study and hobbies such as painting, and to get on with their lives. In the minister's words, to grow Queensland we need a smart and flexible work force. That says it all. If we do not have a good child care system we will not have that. We need to be able to give people the opportunity to go to work, to study and not be worried about where their children are and how they are getting on.

Over the past 10 years the structure of our families has changed immensely. We as a government need to take note of that and ensure that our services reflect these changes. Families have changed because they are not as large as they used to be. My wife and I have five children. The two office staff who work for me, Tracey and Monica, also have five children each. Their children are a bit younger than mine and are going to school. I know how important it is for them to have good child care facilities that are flexible and that allow them to be able to work and also go out at night. Child care facilities are not just for care during the day. These days, child care facilities also look after the children of shiftworkers.

How can a young married couple today wanting to have a family pay off a house and buy furniture on one wage? They cannot afford it. It is very difficult. We need to take one burden off their back and make sure they have good child care facilities. Today people are working longer hours for less pay than ever before. I know the Industrial Relations Minister is listening to this and is taking note. People are working harder and harder and for longer and longer hours.

Ms Spence: It is up to Gordon to do something.

Mr PURCELL: We would like the minister to do something about that.
Allowing parents to go to work will help to reduce unemployment. If the Premier has said it once he has said it probably a half a dozen times in this place: Queensland has the highest participation rate of any work force in Australia. If we want to reduce unemployment we need to allow people to go to work and have good child care. We need to allow them to further their education and training. Child care also allows people to take part in life and community decision making, which is important.

The other side of the equation is that children are given a wonderful opportunity to come together to play and learn in safe surroundings. Therefore, the object of this bill is to protect and promote the best interests of children receiving child care. The ways in which this can be achieved include establishing a licensing system for child care services, regulating the way child care services are conducted and setting standards for persons who provide child care.

The proposed legislation represents the results of a comprehensive review of the current regulatory framework. It has also reviewed the standards of child care and has relied on extensive consultation with the sector and other key stakeholders to inform it in regard to the development of the bill. This bill aims to regulate the provision of child care services throughout Queensland using a regulatory tiering approach to develop the appropriate standards for each sector of the child care industry. This will alleviate some of the confusion out there now and allow parents to make a very informed choice. The bill defines the scope of what a child care service is for the purposes of determining which services are required to be licensed. Again, it will help parents to make a decision on what sort of care is right for their needs and their needs as a family.

In addition, the bill sets out the requirements in relation to staffing and qualifications, the conduct of the service and operational matters, and monitoring and enforcement powers. The key new directions of this regulatory framework include the introduction of performance based standards, the regulation of school-age care programs through a system of licensing, and the introduction of minimum qualifications. The purpose of the new regulatory framework is to address concerns with the existing child care legislation by reducing duplication of those standards, which are covered by other legislation; moving away from the prescribed service types; establishing a framework in which standards are set and monitored depending on a number of variables—for example, the number of children being cared for, the number of hours children are in the care, the ages of the children and the setting of the service; and introducing standards that allow flexibility in service delivery.

All of those changes can only enhance the system we put in place with the introduction of the act nearly 10 years ago. These are positive steps towards keeping pace with the times. Children and parents will benefit from these amendments. Also, the people who offer child care services and run facilities will benefit from these changes. I noted what the member for Mackay said earlier about people in the child care system complaining about the bill and how it will operate. I also have had a number of such complaints but there have also been congratulatory comments from people running very good child care centres with very high standards and with well trained and well paid employees. If we are going to lift standards and these people are going to continue to operate in the child care industry, they need to make sure that there is a bottom line so that we do not lower the standards. This bill will help to do that.

I wish to mention also the people who work in the child care industry in the electorate of Bulimba. We are very fortunate to have some great child carers and child care facilities in our area. That number has grown steadily from when my children were young, 30-odd years ago. Thank goodness; there were not a lot of services around in those days. These days young parents are much more fortunate in that they have a choice. There are a lot more services on offer. Parents of children from school age to university are looking for a one-stop shop in their local area where they can get child care services, schooling, and before and after school care if they need it when their kids are going to school.

A number of people in my area do shift work. Managing that is difficult. It would be easier if both parents could take turns looking after the kids, with one working a shift while the other is at home. But that can be very hard on a family. One couple I know both do shift work and have to get their children looked after at night. That was relatively easy once they found the right person. They just take the kids over to their place, they are put to bed and then fed breakfast in the morning. That is a great way to look after the kids. Those sorts of services are needed.

I congratulate all of those people who work in my area and do a great job looking after our children and offering child care services. Our children are precious. They are our future. Let us
give them the best and continue to do so. I congratulate the minister on introducing the bill and commend it to the House.

Ms Nolan (Ipswich—ALP) (3.20 p.m.): The social acceptance of child care has become much more widespread in the last few years. It is not so long ago that women, such as my mother, who were at the forefront of women who were going back to work when they had children were made to feel bad for leaving the home and for leaving their children in the care of others. It is not so long ago that there was a very conservative view in our community that a woman's place—and particularly a mother's place—was in the home.

I am a big believer in child care. I believe that as part of, I guess, a multifaceted way of bringing up and caring for children, children who go to child care can gain better social skills than they would if they were simply at home with their mothers. They can gain, I guess, better intellectual development and better intellectual stimulation than they would if they were simply in the home. So I am a supporter of child care as one aspect of the good raising of children. It does not just give mothers the opportunity to work, to make their own choices and to make their own way in the world; it also gives children a real opportunity for intellectual and social development.

While our society's attitudes have changed enormously in the last 30 years or so since mothers started going back to work in a big way, there are still, sadly, some in the community who promote a very conservative view of the role of women. Sadly, I think the leader of that view is the current federal government which seems very intent on promoting the notion that women probably should be at home looking after their children.

I believe that one of the ways in which we can promote the importance of child care as part of good parenting is to develop a strong, well-regulated network of child-care centres in this state. The maintenance of high standards in child care is extremely important in maintaining the credibility of child care, in maintaining the safety of children and in promoting their development. At the same time it is important, of course, to maintain an economically viable industry. It seems particularly important now to have a good child care industry in the absence of genuine paid maternity leave in Australia.

The development of this bill has been a real balancing act, with the challenge being to develop a reasonably consistent and transparent regulatory regime across the diverse sectors of centre based care, family day care and the previously unregulated area of outside school hours care. Through the development of this legislation I have been involved in consultations with the outside school hours care providers and, more recently, the family day care providers. While the process of developing this legislation has been very lengthy, I am happy that both the minister and her department have made a genuine effort to be consultative and to talk to many people about this bill.

What I want to talk about today is the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005 which has been the process through which the principles of this legislation have been developed. Choosing child care is one of the most critical decisions a family can make. This government has worked hard to make this decision easier by providing more flexible options, upgrading existing services and insisting on standards to improve our children's safety.

We know that the shape of family and community life has dramatically changed. Families are more mobile, isolated and smaller. Even in a regional area such as Ipswich we find that a lot of young people move away and, hence, do not have the support of extended families which is an important part of a traditional child care network.

Workplaces have changed: the way we work, the hours we work and what is needed to support families. These have all undergone significant change. The fact is that we can no longer presume that the support and systems that we had, or our parents had, will be what is needed or wanted by today's communities.

The availability of child care plays a significant role in supporting the work force participation of parents. Many parents, without outside assistance, would not be able to go to work each day, study, and take up training opportunities. It is estimated that child care and early education services, such as preschools and kindergartens, employ over 20,000 Queenslanders, with an estimated investment in infrastructure of over $1.4 billion and a contribution to the state's economy of over $350 million per annum. This represents a significant work force making a major contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of the state.

I guess the recent move to bring those child care services into the mainstream economy has been one of the biggest changes that we have seen in our economic structure in recent years.
Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that most parents work. Only about one-third of dependent children in couple families and half of those in lone parent families now have a stay-at-home parent. When the youngest child is one to two years old, 50 per cent of mothers are in the paid work force. This leaps to 68 per cent when the youngest child is aged three to four years. About two-thirds of employed mothers whose youngest child is aged between 0-4 years worked part-time in 2000. Increasing flexible working hours means that people are working longer, as the member for Bulimba said, and, just as importantly, are working outside standard working hours. For many families, both parents must work to earn a living wage, and that means unsociable working hours or unpaid overtime.

For all Queenslanders to enjoy a high standard of living, wherever they live, there are a number of things that we need to do with respect to child care. These include the need to: ensure that child care and early education services are of a high standard, supporting children's increasingly diverse and complex pathways of learning and development; ensure the delivery of integrated education, health and family support services that improve the quality of life of all Queenslanders; encourage employers to recognise and support the family needs of employees, so that employees' skills and knowledge are utilised to their full potential and are retained for the benefit of industry and business; promote family-friendly policies that support Queensland families; ensure that appropriate child care services are available to those who need them; acknowledge the direct contribution of the child care industry to both the economic and social strength of this state; and understand the importance of child care in facilitating work force, education and training participation, and understand how we can assist in reducing unemployment.

This government has responded to those challenges. In October 1999, the government launched the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005. This plan identifies a vision, priorities and directions for child care over the five years to 2005 and is designed to reflect the dynamic and changing nature of Queensland, the needs of families and the child care industry. The vision of the plan is 'Child care—valuing children, supporting families, and contributing to the social and economic development of Queensland'. The plan identifies 12 principles. The first is that good quality child care and early education services which support parents in their child rearing, and children's development, are important investments for the future of our state. Children have the right to be cared for in safe environments in which they can learn and play. Child care services should support and address the changing needs and cultural features of families and communities. Parents with young children should be recognised as important contributors to the social and economic development of the state. Appropriate, flexible child care directly supports Queensland's social and economic development. All parents should be able to participate in paid employment and community life. Access to child care is vital to jobs and job security and economic and social mobility for Queenslanders. Cultural diversity provides both social and economic benefits to our state. Queensland parents should have access to services which meet their needs. Integrated service delivery is an important factor in the provision of quality child care services and contributes to the quality of life of Queenslanders. Regulatory efficiency contributes to quality, flexible and innovate child care services. Finally, collaborative relationships between government and stakeholders are vital to success.

A key step in this process is the development of a new regulatory framework that supports the provision of sustainable, high quality child care services which are sufficiently flexible to respond to the diverse and changing needs of families. Today we are debating the outcome of this key area with a bill which delivers these outcomes and which responds to the expressed feedback from parents and key stakeholders. It represents a strengthened regulatory framework for the provision of child care services. As I said earlier, the bill is the result of widespread and extensive consultation with stakeholders, the industry and parents. An exposure draft of the proposed new legislation was publicly released in 2001 for consultation. This followed extensive consultation with the sector and key stakeholders over the past two or three years. During this period there was widespread discussion about what was needed to deliver a regulatory framework for a modern child care industry.

I am pleased to say that this bill has been developed in recognition of the fact that the availability of good child care services is important to this state for both social and economic reasons. The bill has been drafted so as to ensure that our state has a responsive, high quality and sustainable child care system. I believe that the bill has managed to do that. I believe that it has managed to promote a system that working parents can have faith in so that they can go to work safe in the knowledge that their children are being well cared for. I believe that the bill
intrinsically understands that child care can bring enormous benefits to young people, and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (3.31 p.m.): I rise to briefly make some remarks in relation to the Child Care Bill. First of all, I congratulate the minister and her department for introducing this legislation of great significance because of the area which it covers—that is, children: the most precious possessions, if you like, of all of us in this state. I appreciate that a great deal of care and effort has gone into the preparation of this legislation.

The honourable member for Ipswich recounted the fact that there seems to be a view in some quarters that the woman's place should be in the home. When I was a child—which was much earlier than when the member for Ipswich was a child—that was the fact of the matter. It was rare for women to work. If they did, it was because they were a widow or in a difficult situation. Over the last generation or two the situation has changed enormously and the reality is that both parents have to work today. Often they both work because they want to or they want to pursue careers while balancing having and rearing children. However, a significant proportion of parents who work do so because they have to, not because they want to. It seems to me a shame that children in that instance sometimes miss out. It has often been said that some of our social problems such as drugs, crime and so on are related to a lack of parental contact, control and connection with children. That should also be taken into account.

I received a representation from a constituent who, with his wife, runs a child-care centre in Toowoomba. They are concerned that the bill contains a provision that two persons be present during what they call the 'sleep time'—that is, the middle of the day when the children take a nap. In that regard, they were concerned that they would have to employ extra people to cover those times. I went to the child-care centre. I do not know how many children are there normally—

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: I bet they enjoyed your visit.

Mr SHINE: They were all asleep at the time and probably did enjoy it in that event. There were about 70 or 80 children, as it is quite a substantial centre. There were children of different age groups in different rooms. The understanding of the proprietor is that under this provision there will have to be two adult persons present in each room while a group of children sleep. Proposed section 65 of the bill requires, as I read it, that there be two adult staff members present at the centre; that is not the same as two adults being present in each room where children are sleeping. That is my understanding of it. Proposed section 65 of the bill relates to a centre based service—that is, basically one which is not a home. Hopefully that is the correct interpretation, but I would ask the minister at the appropriate time to give us some views on that. This proprietor was concerned that the stated views of ministers in the past that we should have a system of flexibility and affordability should be maintained for the future.

The only other issue I want to raise was the report of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee in relation to some aspects of the bill, particularly in relation to the legislation having due regard to the rights and liberties of individuals. We have become used to legislation of this type in relation to prohibition notices issued by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in relation to schoolchildren and others, and now of course in relation to child care. In my view it is entirely appropriate that legislation should be extended which gives protection to our children. There are, perhaps from a civil libertarian point of view, some concerns that the rights of the individual need to be protected as well in trying to balance those competing interests between an individual's rights on one hand and the ideal of the protection of our children on the other.

One area of concern is that a non-suitability notice or a negative notice can be given not only where a person has been charged with an offence but has been charged with an offence which did not proceed to conviction. This of course is pertinent at the moment when one considers the Volkers case where the person was charged but the Crown did not proceed and therefore there was no conviction. In that instance, if he were to apply to be a childcare worker no doubt the commissioner would have to give a negative notice saying that he had faced a charge even though there was no conviction. That concerns me.

People can be falsely accused and charges laid fairly lightly. We would hope that our system of justice ensures that their lack of guilt will be proved down the track, but in my experience of life the ideal is not always met often because of a lack of resources to defend such actions. However, the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, which obviously did a great deal of work in relation to this bill, did not make stringent criticisms of the bill, although I do refer honourable members to the Alert Digest because there are important matters of other natures raised in it. Overall, I certainly commend the minister again for this legislation and commend the bill to the House.
Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (3.39 p.m.): As a new father of four weeks, one day, six hours and about 20 minutes, I think it is entirely appropriate for me to talk on the Child Care Bill. I inform the House of the birth of Brianna Therese on 24 September. Brianna Therese and her mother, Megan, are doing fine, and her father is coping reasonably well, too. They will be coming to visit parliament tomorrow.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: On the bus?

Mr REEVES: No. If the member had been listening to the last speech I made before the baby arrived, she would have heard that buses do not have capsules yet. The Brisbane City Council should be thinking about putting them in. I did catch the bus to visit them twice when they were at the Mater Hospital. I had planned to go there at the birth, but things happened a bit too quick at 2.30 in the morning and the buses, unfortunately, do not run at 2.30 in the morning.

I think it is entirely appropriate for me to talk on the Child Care Bill. Obviously its contents will be of extreme interest for Megan and me over the coming years. They are also of extreme interest to the people of Mansfield. With just over half of Australian children aged under 12 years receiving some sort of child care, the child care industry has an increasingly large and important place in family life. It employs over 20,000 Queenslanders and has an estimated investment in infrastructure of over $1.4 billion.

On 30 June 2001 there were about 1,979 formal child care services in Queensland, with a capacity to care for over 120,000 children. There are different types of child care. Long day care centres represent about 60 per cent of formal care providers. Family day care is child care provided in private homes by persons licensed to care for up to seven children. There are conditions on the ages of those children. Limited hours or occasional care centres provide care for fewer than 21 children at one time, operate for less than 20 hours per week and do not provide care to any one child for more than 12 hours a week. Then of course there are the kindergartens, which provide care for children between three years and school age. They operate up to six hours on a school day. Finally there is school-age care. Obviously many of the school-age care facilities are run by the parents and citizens associations. These are run very effectively.

The government has supported this through funding. About two and a half years ago the Mansfield State School received funding for a block. The care facilities at Mansfield State School are extremely well run, as they are at all of the other schools. The centre is run so well that it is overflowing. There may be a need in the future to build another block at Mansfield State School because the demand for these places is increasing.

As many speakers have said, these facilities give both parents the option to continue careers and give children the experience of mixing with others. Many of these services within the schools are very effectively run. In fact, some of them have become a bit of a fundraising arm for the local P&C. Those funds can be put back into the running of the after-school and before-school care and can also be directed into other parts of the school. A fair bit of money goes through the centres, and rightfully so. They need to be run effectively and standards need to be put in place for that.

The government announced its intention to develop the new legislative framework for child care services in the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005. It was formed by the efforts of the child care forum, established in February 1999, within eight months or so of the Beattie Labor government coming to power. The Child Care Strategic Plan identified a number of issues. One was that the growing number of parents working non-standard hours or undertaking shiftwork were not adequately catered for. I am convinced that is still the case. Many people are working non-standard hours and undertaking shiftwork and they are not being catered for correctly.

The strategic plan also identified insufficient services for catering for children from non-English speaking or indigenous backgrounds. It also found duplication, inflexibility and lack of coordination of regulatory mechanisms. It found that children need child care throughout their whole childhood—up to 15 years of age; that there was insufficient school-age care at school
sites; that the affordability of services impacts on parents’ ability to work or study; and that there was limited ability for parents and employers to have input into planning and decision making. Those were the major findings of the strategic plan released for 2000-2005.

In March 2002 the minister launched the Queensland Child Care Industry Plan 2002-2005. It showed that staff turnovers and difficulties with training and recruitment were identified as the major issue within the industry. Ten million dollars will be invested in new technologies, training strategies and research. Over three years the government will spend about $4 million on capital upgrades of child care services.

A further initiative is the introduction of child care and family support hubs to amalgamate child care, early childhood services, family services, health services and education services under the one roof at various locations around the state. With new initiatives and the education and training reforms, there is no reason schools cannot become the one-stop shop—providing care for babies to the kindergarten to the preschool. The schools do not have to be the ones running it. They could come up with an arrangement whereby private operators use school properties to run their services so that people within the community know that if they need child care it is there. Most schools are very close to the hub of local communities. I am sure that will all be looked at as part of the education reforms.

A person who conducts a child care service in which child care is regularly provided to at least seven children for reward must obtain a licence under this legislation. It will be an offence to operate in such circumstances without one. We really need to congratulate the minister for bringing this into legislation, because it is needed in many industries, particularly the child care industry. Our children are so important to us. Over the last four weeks I have found that out more than I ever knew. Yesterday was the most amount of hours I had spent away from the newborn. I did not know I would miss someone so much. I got home at about 9.30 after a school awards night but, unfortunately, she was asleep. I could not wake her up.

There will be two types of child care services for the purposes of licensing. The first is centre based child care services; that is, a child care service not provided in a home. It will include currently regulated types of care such as long day care, occasional care and limited hours care and will now also include school-age care. The second type is home based services; that is, a child care service provided in one or more homes.

The bill is careful to ensure that children’s centre based or home based care remain protected by legislation while they are on excursions or being transported to or from child care places, which I think is vitally important. Some other features of the legislation are that the licence will be for three years. Currently, under the Child Care Act the licences are for two years. A corporation can hold a licence, but it must at least have one individual who will hold the licence as a nominee for the licensee. Parents and citizens associations may hold a licence for school-age care services and will be treated as a corporation for licensing purposes.

This was a major concern when the draft legislation was released. I think that the minister knows that I made strong representations to her and the department on that matter when we received briefings regarding the draft legislation. It was important that we found a solution to the parents and citizens associations holding licences. As I said previously, they do a very effective job and they will continue to do an effective job. It is vital that we ensured that they were able to continue to offer this service. I congratulate the minister, her advisers and the department on finding a way around the legalities of the situation to ensure that parents and citizens associations could run child-care centres, because they do an effective job. It was important that we found that solution. I congratulate the minister and her department on doing that. I know that the parents and citizens associations of the schools of my electorate spoke to me about this issue, as well as the QPCA. Gary Cislowski, the president, made personal representations to me, as he is also president of Rochedale State High School, which is in my electorate. I must say that he is a fine principal. I was happy that the minister listened to our concerns and found a solution. I commend her for that.

As a government, we showed our commitment to the P&Cs by putting in $4 million over three years for school-age care facilities. As I said previously, many of the schools in my electorate have received funding for their P&Cs and they are very happy to receive it. Also, many of the school and community base child care services receive funding from the Community Gaming Benefit Fund. I know that the Garden City Community Child Care Centre received some funding for their soft play area from the gaming fund. That is just another great example of how
the gaming fund helps our community and of the government’s commitment to the provision of child care services and facilities.

One of the key objectives of the legislation is to address the duplication in the agencies involved in setting standards for licensed child care services. One of the key areas that has been identified as creating duplication is the building standards for child-care centres. Currently, local authorities are responsible for ensuring that buildings are constructed in accordance with relevant building legislation. The Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991 also contains building requirements that are monitored by officers from the Department of Families. That often results in duplication in the monitoring of building standards. To avoid this duplication, the building requirements of child-care centres do not appear in the bill and will be incorporated in the Building Act 1975. Copies of the proposed building standards were made available at the same time as an exposure draft of the legislation. Local authorities or private building certifiers will be responsible for ensuring that child-care centres are constructed in accordance with the standards that are outlined in the Building Act 1975. Their role is to ensure that the building work for which they are engaged complies with all requirements within their area of jurisdiction. However, individuals planning to build and operate child-care centres will still refer to the Department of Families for information relevant to the licensing and operation of child-care centres. The building standards are based on the building requirements in the Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991. As well as these requirements, the standards contain specific building requirements for school-age care services based on the national standards for outside school hours care and include indoor and outdoor space requirements, the number of toilets required and kitchen/food preparation requirements.

These national standards were released in 1995 and school-age care services have been working towards meeting these standards. Feedback during the consultation for the new regulated framework indicated that school-age services needed longer than three years to meet the building standards. Therefore, the legislation has been amended to reflect the needs of the school-age care sector and these services will have five years from the commencement of the legislation to meet the building standards. That gives them time to plan and implement some changes that may need to take place and also gain the funding to be able to do that.

Some participants in the consultation sessions were concerned about the ability of school-age care services to meet the proposed building requirements. The government has already identified and responded to these concerns with its 2001 state government election commitment to provide, as I said, over $4 million over three years to assist in this. The first funding round was conducted in 2001-02 and allocated $1.2 million to 68 services. Funding of $1.9 million is available in 2002-03 to assist school-age care services to upgrade facilities to meet the building standards as part of the proposed child care legislation. In addition, the building requirements for child-care centres are expressed as performance-based standards and, therefore, will allow for flexibility in how services can meet these requirements. The standards contain acceptable solutions that meet the performance criteria. Individuals who do not wish to use the acceptable solution proposed in the standards could offer alternative solutions. The building certifier and the Department of Families will determine whether the alternative solutions meet the performance criteria and is acceptable.

If at any time the chief executive is concerned that the licensee is no longer meeting the building standards, the chief executive may require the licensee to provide a fresh certificate confirming that all of the building standards are being met. Child-care centres built after the commencement of this legislation will have to comply with the standards in the building legislation. Existing licensed services will not be required to be reassessed against the proposed building standards when the new legislation is introduced. That is because the new standards are based on the current requirements in the Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991 and, therefore, existing services will meet the proposed new building standards. If an existing licensed service undertakes renovations that require development approval, the building works will be assessed against the new building standards. In addition, if the chief executive is concerned that the licensee is no longer meeting one or all of the building standards, the chief executive may require the licensee of an existing service to provide evidence from a building certifier that the building meets the new building standards.

Currently, the department is also investigating the implications for remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services within the proposed legislation. Under the current legislation, those services are not required to be licensed as the services that they provide fall outside the prescribed service types. However, under the proposed legislation, some of these
services may be captured within the regulated framework because of the way in which 'child care service' is defined.

There are issues for the remote area Aboriginal and Torres Islander services related to meeting the proposed new standards because of the nature of the services and their isolation from other services and support. One of the most significant issues for these services involves meeting the basic building and facility standards. To date, these services have been able to provide innovative, responsive and culturally appropriate services within the indigenous communities in north Queensland. It is proposed to include these services with other previously unlicensed services, for example, school-age services in the transitional provisions to allow those services two years to apply for a licence and five years to meet the building standards.

The Department of Families will work closely with the services and develop transitional plans with each service to plan how each will work to meet the requirements of the legislation over the five-year transitional period. The Department of Families will continue to link with the Department of Local Government and Planning to ensure that the timing of the commencement of the child care legislation and changes to the Building Act 1975 are linked.

As I said at the outset, I congratulate the minister and her department on doing a great job in the area of child care services. Many families in the Mansfield electorate need the services of child care. In a lot of those families, both parents work or the sole parent or carer has to work. In fact, the need for child care services is growing, not lessening. As I said, as a person who has been a father now for some four weeks, one day, six hours and 40 minutes—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Liddy Clark): I might have to cite repetition soon.

Mr REEVES: By the way, I have a very good photo here, too, of the lovely Brianna Therese. I am sure that child care services will play an important part in my life. However, just like everybody else in the community, close relatives will play a strong role in nurturing our child when mum and dad have to go about their professional duties. I commend the minister and the department for their excellent work. It has been a long process. The previous minister, Minister Bligh, was also involved in this process. I commend the bill to the House and congratulate the minister.

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (4.00 p.m.): Mr Acting Speaker, child care services in Queensland, both centre based and home based family day care, are amongst the best in the world. We have a solid regulatory framework, and I support this bill as it strengthens this framework. Parents and carers need not feel insecure. Parents and carers need not feel guilty about placing their children in child care in Queensland. There used to be a lot of guilt and pressure put on women particularly and families generally for putting their children into long day care. Thankfully, some of those attitudes are changing and in fact we are seeing research to show that, where children have access to good preschool and good quality child care, many of them are developing good social skills; in fact, some of the crime prevention commentators are saying that this helps in preventing later antisocial and criminal behaviour. It is very important that people use child care in a balanced way and that they have confidence that in Queensland we have a very good quality system.

The majority of centres and home based providers offer high quality care, education and support for children, whether it is the after school care program at Watson Road State School, the Uniting Church sponsored child-care centre at Forest Lake, family day care or any other child care service. Parents in my local area can be confident that their children are in good hands. To maintain this standard, governments must remain vigilant in monitoring services, and child care providers who breach the regulations must be pounced on quickly. Child care industry members, parents and government decision makers have a lot in common. We all want high standards of safety and care for children. We differ, however, on how much flexibility there ought to be in regulations and practices governing child care services.

In debates about regulation, many private providers will continue the fight to minimise their costs and defend their profit margins. Parent advocates and many of the community based peak
Some of them have also said to me that they want the government to hold firm to the ratio of having two staff on during breaks and rest periods in centres. Many private operators have argued that this puts an unnecessary cost impost on their service. I understand that the minister has held further discussions with relevant peak bodies and may be prepared to find a middle ground where one staff plus a floating staff member is acceptable for supervision of children over two years of age. I share concerns, however, about any compromise to ratios that have existed there for a long time in law—I think since the early 1990s or late 1980s. Several family day care providers have raised concerns with me about the proposed three hours per day limit on activities for children beyond the day care provider's home. They argue that, particularly in regional areas, distances and driving time can be lengthy and to regulate a three-hour limit is too limiting.

The P&Cs in my area, as other members have stated, are feeling much more relieved about changes in relation to their status to run their after school care programs. They were pretty worried initially when they thought they might not be able to hold licences and to continue their services. I commend the child care industry stakeholders, parents, child care unit officers and the minister for working for such a long time to shape this legislation. It takes a lot of negotiation, a lot of compromise. Everyone has been required to compromise, but overall the level of cooperation appears to have been very high. I want to say, however, that I was very disturbed to find that at least one private operator ran a campaign in which children were encouraged to add their artistic creations to proforma lobbying notices urging the government not to stop their access to child care. I do not know if parents gave permission for this to occur. Regardless, this stunt is nothing short of child exploitation.

In talking about the needs of children, I would also like to take a brief minute to put on record my desire to see a more stable and peaceful world for children in the future. I may be stretching the friendship a little here and breaching the standing orders in regard to relevance, but I guarantee that I will take one minute or a little more. My hope is that all political and religious leaders can devote their influence and resources to tackling the causes of terrorism to make our world a safer and fairer place. Terrorism and the hatred underlying terrorism is borne out of deprivation, both moral deprivation and economic deprivation. It is borne out of inequality, poverty and oppression. It is also important that political leaders remain vigilant on gun control. We have seen from the shooting spree at a kindy in Dunblaine a few years ago that children are often the innocent victims of out-of-control gun owners. We must now move quickly to control the illegal import of guns and also the use of hand guns and access to hand guns throughout Australia. Whether children are in child care or in their own homes, children must be fully protected. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (4.06 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002. The role of government in setting and monitoring standards is strongly supported in Queensland. However, to ensure regulatory efficiency there must be a clearer interface and less overlap between Commonwealth standards and different standards within the state. The Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005 identified that where possible the new regulatory framework should not duplicate existing legislative standards which impact on child care. This means that, where appropriate, standards that are already located in other pieces of legislation will not be duplicated in the child care legislation. Instead, the child care legislation will refer service providers to those other pieces of legislation.

This legislation contains a number of key changes in the approach to the regulation of child care in Queensland. One of these is the reduced duplication in standards where they are covered by other legislation. These changes include—the building standards for child-care centres are written as performance based standards and will be incorporated appropriately into the Building Act 1975; the Traffic Act 1949 will apply in relation to some aspects of the transportation of children in child care—for example, in relation to appropriate restraints, road safety and driver authorisation and accreditation; and the responsibility for the workplace health and safety...
standards applying to persons working in child care services will remain with the Department of Industrial Relations under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995.

When looking at programs at a child care service, the department will also take into consideration whether the service has accreditation from the National Child Care Accreditation Council or is affiliated with the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland. The department will no longer be responsible for processing criminal history searches as it currently does under the present legislation. Under the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000, the commission is responsible for processing criminal history checks for certain categories of child-related employment and for issuing suitability notices. People working in and involved with child care services will be required to have a positive suitability notice and will need to apply to the commission for that notice. The licensee of a service will be required to keep originals or certified copies of the suitability notices as part of their records so that he or she can show departmental officers at any time that all people working in the service have been properly screened.

The standards relating to fire safety will be dealt with under the relevant provisions of the Fire and Rescue Authority Act 1990, for example, fire and evacuation plans, fire safety installations and maintaining means of escape from buildings.

All child care services will need to comply with the requirements of the Food Act 1981, the Food Hygiene Regulation 1989, the Food Standards Regulation 1994 and any national standards introduced by the Australian New Zealand Food Authority in relation to food preparation standards.

Health issues such as the immunisation of children in child care and the exclusion of children from child care for health related reasons will be dealt with under the Health Act 1937 with appropriate linkages in the child care legislation, for example, in relation to recording the vaccination status of children.

Staff will satisfy the prescribed first aid competency if the person has completed the first aid training prescribed under the regulation and if the competency has been updated as prescribed under the regulation. In addition, the training needs to be conducted by an authorised entity leading to a senior first aid certificate or a certificate in the area of cardiopulmonary resuscitation. The Department of Emergency Services will determine these competencies and licensees will be required to keep records of them.

Benchmark qualifications will be linked to the Australian Qualification Framework for the vocational sector and the higher education sector for bachelor and postgraduate qualifications. The recognition of qualifications will be in accordance with the Australian Qualification Framework and a competency based approach will be taken to the recognition of qualifications. In regard to the recognition of overseas qualifications, the department may also take into account the National Office of Overseas Skill Recognition assessments.

Whilst the new child care legislation includes additional performance requirements in areas such as these, it will at least not duplicate existing ones. In hearing of all of those regulations under different acts I am reminded of how things have changed in Queensland and elsewhere in Australia over the past 25 or so years. I remember well when I had my first child, Rachelle, in 1969 that I was attending university. In the first year of her life I was able to take her with me to many of the lectures and to leave her with friends on a casual arrangement as necessary. However, as I moved into fourth year and then masters studies it was not possible to take her with me and I searched around for somebody suitable to look after her during those hours when I would be absent at university. On the recommendation of a neighbour I found a wonderful lady named Maria Pender. Maria looked after children of various ages in her home as required. She did not mind having the children for one hour, four hours or even eight hours. She did not mind whether they were daylight hours or evening hours. She did not mind whether they were weekends. She did not mind whether they were variable hours that changed from one week to the next. She was a splendid lady who loved the children she cared for, provided them with a safe environment, and the children became, as did my Rachelle, quite attached. There was at no stage any sense that my child was in any way unsafe, yet I would be sure, looking back on the circumstances in those years around 1970, that Maria and the flat in which she lived did not comply with all of the regulations of today. She was not required to then. Those casual arrangements for what now would be termed family day care were okay. The standards then were lower than they are today.

Although it may be so that those caught up in all of the regulations and standard setting of the year 2002 may bemoan that situation from time to time and wonder whether the quality of
care has really improved, the situation of responsibility and accountability for child care providers and for the governments that supervise them is such that we have no choice other than to regulate to protect our children. As we commonly say, they are the future. To have standards of care for them that are less than reasonable is not acceptable and would leave us open not only to criticism from our own constituents, the people of Queensland, that we as a government were not doing our job, but would probably also leave open various parties to legal action were these standards not in place. Therefore, the best that we can do in the setting of these standards is to make sure that there is not duplication and confusion at least across the numbers of government departments involved and across the levels of government. I particularly commend the minister and her staff for the efforts put in in this regard.

The other thing we can do and have done in regard to this bill is consult widely and steadily with all of those who will be affected by this legislation and, most importantly, by the various child care providers around the state. I am pleased to say that I was present for some of the consultations in Cairns. These were attended by family day care providers, long day care providers, child care licensees and directors, those in the whole range of after school care provision and even concerned parents and representative groups. Each of them had a different perspective on the sorts of standards that we are bringing in in this legislation. It certainly has taken considerable wisdom and steady and sensible discussion over a long period to reach a fair balance between the needs and difficulties of different child care providers and of those mothers, fathers and children who will be the users of their services.

I believe that a sensible way forward has indeed been found where we can set standards that are commensurate with the year 2002 while being mindful of the impacts that there will be on those who provide child care, giving them time, of course, to comply with the new legislation and not bringing in regulations and provisions that will be any more costly than necessary for these centres for the child care providers and thereby for those who will pay for their services.

The key changes within the bill are these. There are changes to emergency care arrangements. The 10 per cent increase in a centre's licence capacity for emergencies will be changed to allow only one child or a sibling group in emergencies. A very important area of change is that of qualifications. There will be a new requirement in the legislation for all qualification requirements. Staff will have six months to enrol in a course and three years to complete it. $4.2 million has been allocated for a statewide training strategy.

I must admit to having some sympathy for those good ladies, rather than men, in generations past who have not been qualified in any formal way and who would not meet the standards of the modern age in terms of their qualifications and yet who have in their time provided valiant, loving, caring and safe management of the many children who have been under their wing and been well looked after. It is a sad thing that simply looking after children and doing the best for them is not sufficient. That is not sufficient these days in a business that now is a professional business and where it is appropriate to look for formal qualifications, not simply experience. I think we are being sensitive to that situation in the present circumstances by allowing time for people to consider their enrolment. I think we are also being reasonable by putting money towards the statewide training strategy and making sure that the opportunities for training reach out right across Queensland to regional cities and country towns where training options might not be easily and always often provided.

A third area of key change within the bill is transport. New requirements will be placed on services when transporting children in child care services. The new limits will ensure greater protection in transporting younger children. For example, a second adult will be required if there are any more than four children under school age being transported. This was an issue about which there was considerable discussion at the consultations I attended in Cairns. I am pleased to say that the child care providers who were present were adamant that those who have not been meeting standards such as those that we will be bringing in are wrong. We heard reports that, for example, one adult only was driving a van with as many as eight, nine or ten children under the age of five with no other adult present. That is not safe transport. It may create some difficulty in planning and adjustment for agencies to ensure that two adults are present if there are more than four children in a van or other transport. Nonetheless, that is appropriate. We know of the high rate, unfortunately, of accidents on our roads. We know that other drivers are not always driving competently and within the law. To have our children put at risk with a lack of care, at a time when the driver's attention must be on driving and not on what is happening with the children in the back of the bus, is not appropriate. Thus these standards are necessary and appropriate.
The fourth area of change is that for playgroups. There will be new requirements for the operation of playgroups in home based care. The requirements will place limits on the number of children and adults gathering, the frequency of these gatherings and the premises in which playgroups operate. The changes are designed to increase safety and consistency across the state in the operation of these groups. At the same time, we recognise that occasional operation of groups who get together with a significant number of parents do not constitute a regular playgroup and will not be required to meet these requirements. What we do recognise is that there have been some—I would hope only a small number around the state—who have been using the playgroup title to really conduct a day care centre from their homes inappropriately and avoiding the necessary standards. We will ensure through this legislation that that is much less likely to happen.

The fifth important change affects P&Cs and after school care. P&Cs will be able to hold licences for school-age care services under the proposed new legislation. When the minister announced this, it was particularly welcomed by the wide range of P&Cs who are associated with after school care in particular, but school-age services in general, in the Cairns area.

I would particularly like to comment on the issue of consultation. I have several child care providers in the area of Cairns who are not entirely happy with the bill. They have expressed some concern about the requirements for the numbers of staff who should be present, particularly during the middle of the day hours. I know that this is a matter that the minister will address during her reply later this evening. Several of them have said to me, 'But you have not consulted.' In fact, they are confusing consultation with getting their own way. We have consulted, and widely so, over a long period of time. There are many records of those consultations and of the issues that were expressed by all of those present. The letters that various people have forwarded to me or to other members of parliament are on record. They have been copied and forwarded to the minister for consideration by her department. That is consultation. However, consultation does not mean that each and every person who expresses a particular suggestion or recommendation gets what they want. Of course, that is not possible. In the end, it is government's responsibility to show the wisdom of balancing all of the comments, issues and concerns put before us and deciding on the way forward where there is conflict. I stand by the minister and her department for the excellence of their consultation mechanisms, and particularly the repeated opportunities that people have had to make sure that we really have understood the concerns that they have shared with us.

The last issue that I would like to address is that of affordability. I note particularly the good summary that is presented in the Queensland Parliamentary Library's research brief—Child Care Bill 2002. The brief summarised the situation very well and I would like to draw members' attention to several of the comments contained within the research brief.

There is no regulation on fees charged by child care services, with the cost to parents varying across the different types of care. The most expensive appears, logically, to be long day care where generally the charge is over $3 per hour. According to the Commonwealth 1999 census of child care services, it costs a Queensland parent around $155 a week to place their child into a long day care centre. School-age care is around $24 per week before school and $40 per week after school and $101 for vacation care. Queensland and the Northern Territory have the lowest service fees of all the states and territories, the variations between which are due to factors such as different licensing restrictions and staff-child ratios, award wages and whether there are service charges for additional services such as meals.

It is important to recognise that the Commonwealth government does make a significant contribution to the child care benefit, which is for the cost of approved services for registered carers and contributes to making child care more affordable to families, particularly those who have a limited family income. The amount received depends upon the family income, so that families earning less than $31,000 per year are eligible for the maximum rate of $133 per week for one child in approved care who is not a school child. This increases per child up to three children. Rates for a school child are 85 per cent of the non-school child rate. High income families are still eligible for a partial benefit, although this is somewhat controversial. No benefits are provided for using care that is not approved or registered.

I believe we have found an appropriate, modern and safe way forward for the child care industry—for all of those who love looking after children and who wish to make it their profession, while at the same time balancing the needs of children and their families. I commend the bill to the House.
Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (4.26 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002. The degree of interest in this bill both inside the parliament with so many members contributing today, and outside the parliament, is a clear commentary on how our society has changed over the last 10 or 20 years. Child care is now a vital social, economic and political issue which sits squarely in the middle of many of the big issues which dominate debate in the media, in parliaments around the country, in shopping centres and at backyard barbecues.

Child care is one of the most important issues for young Queensland families as they try to juggle the priorities of work, home, sport and community. Child care is a vitally necessary service across all socioeconomic sectors of our society. My wife, Judith, and I have been extensive users of the services of the child care industry as we, like so many other Queensland families, have tried to balance work, study and other commitments while raising our children.

The Limited Hours Child Care Service run from the Neighbourhood Centre at Hervey Bay provided vital quality child care for us when our children were quite young. Judith was working part-time at the local university and my flexibility was limited by the demands of legal practice. A few hours of child care here and there were vital, just to keep the house running with groceries.

The Condy Park Kindergarten and Preschool, which has been operating in Hervey Bay for more than 40 years, helped us juggle family arrangements for three years before our children were at school. It is an outstanding institution in my community which has now started helping a third generation of children on their way to a new life. We are still occasional users of after school care in order to fit around our work, social and family commitments. That juggling is certainly made very complicated by my being here for about 17 weeks a year, and this might be an appropriate time to thank Judith once again for somehow managing to keep it all together on the home front with only part-time help from me.

We have been very lucky in that overwhelmingly our experiences with child care have been very positive and our children have benefited greatly from caring, dedicated and thoughtful child care which has helped our children to grow and develop. Judith served as president of the Condy Park Kindergarten and Preschool Committee for a year during its move from its old buildings at Pialba to its new residence on Old Maryborough Road, and perhaps more than many families the legal and financial issues involved in running a child-care centre were frequent topics of conversation around the McNamara kitchen table a few years ago.

Accordingly, I am aware of the financial and legislative issues which underpin the operation of child care facilities and I am firmly of the belief that this new legislation is designed to ensure that Queensland has an economically sustainable child care system which provides high quality, sensitive and responsive care for our children. There is no doubt that the Child Care Act 1991 and its subordinate legislation were due for an update as they lack the ability to meet the changing needs of our community. I am aware that there has been very substantial consultation with, and feedback from, the industry and the draft legislation has been amended to reflect that industry input.

The new legislation unashamedly seeks to increase standards across the industry by requiring qualification benchmarks for childcare workers. This includes the licensing of school-age care services for the first time as well as expanding the number of offences for which operators may be liable. These are important issues as the care of our children is a critical requirement which we as law-makers must address on behalf of our communities. But the bill does strike a balance fairly between the financial needs of the child care industry and the rights of parents to expect quality child care when they pay for it.

There has been a very significant change in the types of child care which we are demanding now, and in particular school-age care services have grown substantially. The requirement that these services be licensed recognises this expansion and sets certain requirements which I welcome. Similarly, the requirement that staff be either studying towards appropriate qualifications or actually hold appropriate qualifications reflects the broad societal move towards appropriate training and skilling across every sector of the work force. The child care industry has been heading in this direction for many years and is to be broadly congratulated in this regard.

This bill is detailed in its approach and reflects the need to tie licensing criteria to appropriate measurements. Issues such as where the service is being delivered—that is, either at home or in a child-care centre—and the numbers and ages of children and the length and time of care are all explicitly taken into consideration in setting carer to children ratios. I am certainly aware of the lobbying of organisations such as the Queensland Care Providers Association Inc. and the
In particular, the requirements for playgroups and excursions involving other carers in licensed home based care has been explicitly raised with me by carers in my electorate of Hervey Bay. I note that the initial proposed legislation did not accommodate the practice of more than two carers gathering in playgroups and for excursions. The provisions of clause 96 of the bill are, I think, balanced and sensible. The new bill is drafted to recognise that home based care services receive an advantage by carers coming together to share ideas and provide peer support, as well as allowing children opportunities to socialise more broadly and participate in a larger range of activities.

Importantly, however, the bill sets out safeguards around the frequency of such gatherings and the number of carers and children participating. I think we would all feel more comfortable with that in that it is appropriate. The imposition of reasonable limits to these activities is necessary to ensure that children do not attend playgroups all day every day. One of the fundamental benefits of home based child care is regular sleep times, structured events and a home environment, and this legislation will protect that.

Some suggestions have been made that the new bill will mean that carers will only be able to meet together for playgroups for three hours a week and that carers will not be able to leave the house with children for more than three hours once a week. This is untrue and the new legislation is quite clear in this regard. There is no time limit on carers leaving the house to shop, pick up older children from school or attend to other chores. There are, however, appropriate limits on the amount of time child carers can come together at one another's house or in other child care places. These vary depending on the number of carers and the age of the children. In relation to excursions, there is no limit on the number of hours in a day that can be devoted to an excursion but there is a limit of not more than once per week for any one child. This is balanced and sensible.

The new bill also provides for a more flexible range of services to operate with specific conditions on their licences. The transitional provisions for staff already working in the child care industry are also appropriate to allow staff to meet new requirements within a reasonable period of time. I congratulate the minister in particular on backing up these reforms with the $4.2 million Child Care Statewide Training Strategy so that the bill's objective in terms of upskilling are achievable. I commend the minister and her staff for the lengthy consultation and for the numerous amendments to the draft bill which were in response to those community and industry concerns. The Child Care Bill meets the needs of parents and children first and foremost, which is how it should be, and clearly aims for quality, safety and affordability across the sector. Childhood should be a time of joy and discovery and play and happy learning. For many kids it is, but it should not be a matter of good luck. This bill aims to raise and enforce standards which are in the interests of all children.

I am delighted to be able to be here today to debate this bill because travelling with me this week is Kitkat, the class travel buddy of the 2K Legends from Kawungan State School. Kitkat travels with 2K class members’ parents to their workplaces and files email reports back to the class about what he has seen. I am very pleased to inform the House that Kitkat will be reporting to 2K about the debate in this place on this bill. He will be letting the class know that legislation about the care of children is of vital concern to the parliament of Queensland.
electorates like mine require before and after school care centres. The working families who make up the bulk of my electorate work irregular hours. The distance travelled to work requires children to be dropped off early in the morning and some of them are picked up as late as 6 p.m. The centres are vital to avoid the latchkey children syndrome.

One of the largest centres is operated at the Logan West Community Centre. It has a large city council built facility which has established a well-deserved reputation for the care it offers children. I commend the coordinator Lale Christ, who works under the director Leanne Dean, for helping to establish a number of out-of-school-hours care centres throughout the Logan West area. Another centre which deserves to be mentioned today is the St Bernadine’s Catholic School in Regents Park which offers a highly successful program for working families from throughout Regents Park School.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Mr MICKEL: It is an excellent school in providing first-class facilities and choice for Catholic families in the Logan West area. This centre operates at the rear of the school site and is a genuine help to working families. This group was concerned about the building requirements in the new act and feared that the increased training would impact adversely on their staff. On their behalf I ask the minister to allow them time to get their facilities upgraded.

Honourable members would be aware that working families in young suburbs—according to the ABS, Logan is the second youngest electorate in Queensland—often establish their careers, build and pay off their houses, pay for recreational activities and have to find the spare cash left over for child care. As a result, there is little in the way of disposable income for extras like fundraising for the expansion of child care facilities. That is why I am appealing to the minister to give this facility a little bit of time if it needs to upgrade. The facility is excellently run by Mrs Jacki Dowling and her staff. As I said, it provides a wonderful support service to working families. The facility’s fundraising activities in the past have been supplemented by funds raised with the community benefit fund whilst the school grounds have been supplemented by the Community Jobs Plan, and this school has been an excellent participant in that scheme. It may be that this facility applies for funding from the $4 million earmarked for capital upgrades in the bill for child care services. I would hope that it is the outer metropolitan areas that are given a sympathetic hearing by this government when it comes to the application of that $4 million for capital upgrades.

Another first-class service is operated by Jenny Whitehead at the Boronia Heights State School out-of-school-hours centre. This wonderful community has funded its own centre and has accessed the Community Benefit Fund to enable it to upgrade and fit out its facility. It is a very valuable facility to the working families in the suburbs of Boronia Heights and the Park Ridge area. Parents work hard to administer the facility and they are very proud of the service they offer the community.

I also commend the hard work of the Browns Plains parents and citizens organisations, spearheaded by Kevina Drew and Glenda Hughes, and Mrs Carmel Wilcox and her administration team at the school, who recently initiated an out-of-school-hours facility at the school. The school received federal funding and battled to establish the facility, which is now a huge success and enjoyed by the families in the Browns Plains area. It will not surprise me if in the coming years this facility has to be expanded, such has been the demand for services from that facility. Again, this may be a facility that has to come back to the state government and apply for funding from the $4 million that has been approved in this bill.

I also commend the Logan West Community Centre and the Greenbank State School P&C and its administration team, headed by Ms Christine Quinn and Karen Nowell. Logan West has auspiced this facility, called Gumnut House. It has been a runaway success for families in the Greenbank, Boronia Heights and Munruben areas. This is an area that has little in the way of community infrastructure facilities. The school community secured the former cafe facility at the PA Hospital and relocated it at Greenbank. It is an absolute delight of a facility to visit. It is heavily used now by the families in that area. Funds were used to modernise it. It relied heavily on volunteer workers, who worked so tirelessly to make the facility a success. I understand from my recent discussions with the school community that this facility will now be fully booked. In other words, we are doing what we can in the outer metropolitan areas to provide these much-needed services for families who work so far away from the areas in which they live.

There is also a great need in the West Logan area for another facility, this time at the Yugumbir State School, which is seeking funding to provide an out-of-school-hours facility. The
Logan West Community Centre team is actively engaged in auspicing the facility, but I understand that approval for this must firstly come from the federal government. The school community admin team is working through the various processes. I am told that there is a huge demand in this part of Regents Park for yet another facility to service the families in the Heritage Park and Regents Park areas.

There are many kindergarten centres in Logan West which are privately run. I also commend the number of playgroups which operate out of Estramina House in the Regents Park area, which provides a playground facility and a gathering point for very young families who have very young children who are pre preschool age.

I understand from the second reading speech that the minister has been trying to strike a balance between increasing the regulation of child care and ensuring adequate facilities. I want the government to understand, however, that the outer metropolitan areas do have special needs, because young families are without the established support networks. On occasions mothers with young children or single mothers need a break—a respite—so that they can go about basic chores.

In the past my own family was in that situation, when my children were very young. My wife needed time to attend to business matters or little things—little things that we often take for granted such as getting a haircut. People with very small children need to place them somewhere just for a bit of occasional care so they can attend to those basic needs. I praise groups such as Baptist Family Day Care, which in the past provided an excellent service for just that very circumstance, particularly in regional towns. The women caring for the children were mothers themselves—qualified by motherhood. That was probably the only qualification they had, but for them and for us it was a very important qualification. They were tremendously caring people who are still our friends today.

I also praise the seniors groups who in the past helped coordinate some in-house care. My children idolised the woman who catered for them and, I must say, on occasion spoiled them. I am pleased that this legislation will not try to overregulate those sorts of people who were providing a very valuable service to people such as myself, because it meant that my children could be cared for at home, in familiar surroundings. So I do applaud the minister for not trying to overregulate what was and is a very good system for some families.

This legislation also requires training for people in the facilities. I noticed some resistance to this in the out-of-school-hours groups in my electorate. Again, there is a difficulty in outer metropolitan areas, where women are required to travel large distances to get to the training institutions to undertake the study. That in itself can be a tremendous hurdle. Again, I appeal to the government to show some understanding where there may be a reluctance for women to have to get into town or visit the various TAFE institutes to undertake that study. There may be a reluctance because they had some poor educational experiences themselves or there may be a reluctance because of the tremendous distance they have to travel. So I do appeal to the minister to have the department show some understanding for those people when they have to go about the business of upgrading.

I am very grateful to the minister, however, because when groups in my area were upset and a bit concerned about these things we all came into town together and the minister made her staff and the departmental advisers sit down with us and take these ladies through the problems and the fears that they had. It was by that process of a good old-fashioned yarn and a cup of tea that we were able to work out a lot of these issues. It is very important to give encouragement to those people, to not have them think that they are going to be loaded with a great cost burden when they are already struggling to provide a basic service. So I will watch with interest on behalf of the people I represent to see how this legislation is being implemented.

My final appeal is to the minister to recognise—I know that she does, because she taught down in the Browns Plains area—that the outer metropolitan areas particularly have special needs when it comes to out-of-school centres, because of the distances parents travel. It is important. I know that this government understands it, but I will be damned if I can see that the federal government ever understands it, because for it the outer metropolitan areas do not seem to exist when it comes to supplying basic services.

I have spoken with the shadow minister. I know that he is coming to understand the special needs outer metropolitan areas have. When I was first running he was down there in Park Ridge helping to try to get rid of me. He should understand the needs of outer metropolitan areas because on that occasion I was triumphant. My appeal to all governments is to understand young
families in outer metropolitan areas. As I said, I will be watching this legislation to make sure that it does not have a heavy cost burden on those very vital facilities.

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (4.47 p.m.): In the last 30 years we have witnessed significant changes in Australia’s patterns of work and family life. No change has been more significant than the rise in the number of women returning to full-time or part-time work after having children. Like many of my contemporaries, I was raised in a family where dad was the main breadwinner while mum stayed at home with my brothers, sister and me. But this is no longer the norm. Working mothers are today’s reality. Whether or not you are one of the old school still clinging to the view that a mother’s place is in the home, the reality is that this is no longer an option for many families.

Many of today’s mums have no choice but to return to work soon after having a family, and few families can afford the luxury of having one partner stay at home full time to care for the children. So while researchers continue to debate the benefits or otherwise of child care, the fact remains that such services are a necessity for thousands of Australian families. In fact, the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999 census of child care services revealed that 51 per cent of Australian children aged less than 12 years used some type of child care. No doubt that figure has risen over the years since.

With that in mind, it is important that parents are able to feel confident about and comfortable with the quality of care being provided for their children. The Beattie government’s Child Care Bill 2002 is about maintaining that parental confidence by providing the state’s child care services with a strong framework in which they can deliver quality care while at the same time allowing them the flexibility to respond to the needs of parents.

There is little doubt that Queensland’s current child care legislation is in need of an overhaul. The legislation was drafted in 1991 and was appropriate for its time. But times have changed and there is a need to put in place legislation that better reflects and supports today’s child care industry. The government’s Child Care Bill aims to address a number of key problems that have been identified in the legislation over the years, the most important of which has been the prescriptive nature of the current system. In the minister’s speech, she covered in some detail the new approach to child care in Queensland that will be adopted with the passing of this legislation and I certainly do not propose to cover this ground again. Instead, I will touch on several key initiatives within the Child Care Bill that I believe have the support of most Queensland parents.

As I said earlier, the bill before us today is about flexibility—flexibility for child care providers and flexibility for parents. One of the major concerns identified by stakeholders has been the lack of provision for child-care centres to vary the standard requirements with respect to staffing ratios at different times of the day or even to allow for a regular variation or increase to the licensed capacity of a centre for different times of the day. This bill will deliver this flexibility, thereby ensuring that centres are better able to accommodate the needs of parents. For example, a child care service may now be able to apply for a variation in its maximum numbers to accommodate additional school-age children in its after school care programs. This legislation also provides flexibility that will allow for more innovative services to operate, such as those who wish to operate overnight to meet the needs of shiftworkers. Coming from an industry background where shiftworkers spend a lot of their time working long hours during the night, there have certainly been times in the past when I have been able to identify that it would have been great if we had been able to put children into some sort of child care service. Previously, it has not been viable to provide such services because of the restrictive nature of the staff-to-children ratios. Clearly, flexibility is required as full staffing ratios would not be needed at times when most children are sleeping.

Similarly, problems have arisen in the current legislation with respect to staff-child ratios during staff lunchbreaks, which usually coincide with children’s rest periods. The flexibility provisions within this legislation will enable child-care centres to apply for a regular variation to staff-child ratios during these times. That is commonsense stuff.

Another example of the government’s recognition of the need for increased flexibility within child care services is the new emergency care provision. Many families would have experienced emergency situations during which they needed to place a child or children in child care. I think that the member for Logan in his contribution to the House reflected on that need. For example, a parent may be called into work unexpectedly on their day off or may be needed to lend support or assistance during a family crisis and emergency. How many times do we find that happening in our lives? We all know that it is not always possible for a parent to have their child cared for on
these occasions if, for instance, numbers at the child-care centre are at full capacity. Interestingly, Queensland's current child care legislation makes no formal provision for child care services to provide emergency care in situations such as those that I have mentioned.

During the consultation process for the proposed legislation, it was clear that there was general support from both child care service providers and parents alike for the inclusion of formalised emergency care provisions. This legislation does just that, but it also imposes a limit of one extra child or a sibling group. This is an important condition in that it means that the child care services will now legally be able to respond to the emergency care needs of parents, but at the same time they will have to guarantee that safeguards remain in place to ensure that the demands of the other children in care are met. That is very important. Therefore, the provision will not be able to be abused, but will still be there for genuine emergency cases. That is good news for both parents and for the service provider.

As I mentioned previously, the current legislation was drafted some 11 years ago. Since that time, the child care industry has not only grown significantly but also it has developed a much more professional outlook. According to the last census of child care services, 54 per cent of long day care staff held formal qualifications. Therefore, it is appropriate that the new legislation seeks to reflect the growth towards a more professional industry by looking at increasing the minimum qualification requirements for child care staff. Times have certainly changed and today's parents expect to be able to leave their children in the capable care of suitably qualified professionals. This bill seeks to introduce a minimum qualification for assistants—a move supported by the government's pledge to the industry through its $4.2 million child care training strategy.

I understand that there is general support from the child care sector for the introduction of minimum standards for all staff. However, some concerns have been expressed by the private sector with regard to the availability of qualified staff to fill those positions. I believe that this may be just a short-term problem and I genuinely believe that the move to have all staff hold minimum qualifications will encourage the growth in the professionalism of the industry and, in turn, lead to increased interest in those people who are seeking to pursue a full-time career in child care. Currently, there is a perception—misguided though it is—that being a child care assistant is an easy job that anyone can do. I know that is not the case. It is an exhausting, challenging and no doubt a thankless job.

Ms Keech: Very rewarding.

Mr PEARCE: It would no doubt be very rewarding. As all members know, anything to do with children—making them happy and enjoying their life and better preparing for them life—is very rewarding for any of us.

I think that the introduction of minimum qualifications will work towards removing this misconception and will give assistants a degree of professionalism. It will also encourage them to pursue a career path within the child care industry. I think that is a great move, because every worker likes to have some goals to be able to go out and work for and achieve in their lives. So if we give these people a career path, it will make them more dedicated, more professional and more determined to do a good job. I think that everybody in this House would agree that most parents support changes that are about promoting professionalism within this significant industry.

One of the problems identified in the current legislation is the ambiguity with respect to an area that has long been a concern, and that is first-aid qualifications. Although child care service providers make every effort to ensure that their centres meet strict health and safety requirements, accidents are inevitable when toddlers and young children are involved. We see that happen all the time. So there is a need to ensure that suitably qualified staff are on hand at all times to respond to accidents, emergencies, or when a child falls ill. The new legislation seeks to clarify the existing provisions with respect to first-aid qualifications. Previously, there was a belief that all staff at a centre must be qualified in first aid. That was never the intention of the existing legislation, but this misconception has arisen because of the ambiguous nature of the act. The bill before us today clears up any ambiguity by ensuring that at least one staff member with a first-aid qualification is present at all times when child care is being provided. Once again, this provision is about promoting flexibility for child care service providers, who will now be able to organise staff rosters accordingly. At the same time, this provision provides reassurance to parents that someone will always be on hand should the worst happen.

One of the more interesting facets of the new legislation is the introduction of a requirement to license school-age care services for the first time. The current legislation makes no provision for such a service. A lot of people have been asking about this for a long time. Instead, most school-
age care providers have operated in accordance with the national standards for outside school hours care. However, these standards are not enforced by either the Commonwealth or state governments. Like the remainder of the child care industry, the school-age care sector has become more professional in recent years and it is important that the new legislation reflects this trend.

I understand that there is strong support from the child care sector for this licensing change. It is also pleasing to note that the government has responded to feedback during the consultation process by ensuring that P&C associations will be able to apply for a licence to provide school-age care services. Through this and the other provisions I have touched on today, the Beattie government has demonstrated its commitment to supporting the development of a highly professional child care industry within this state. In continuing to foster the development of Queensland as the Smart State, it is inevitable that we take a closer look at those industries which have such a major influence on our children who, after all, will be the leaders and managers of tomorrow. The Child Care Bill 2002 is an important step in the right direction in cementing Queensland's position as the Smart State. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (5.01 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002. This bill applies to established forms of centre based care such as long day care and kindergartens whilst also applying to an extended range of centre based service types such as school-age care. Moreover, this bill has been drafted so as to support improved service planning, innovation and the flexible delivery of services that meet the diverse needs of Queensland families. The new legislation moves away from prescribing individual service types—for example, kindergarten and long day care—to providing broader definitions in the act. The key variable within this system will be the setting of the care, whether it is centre based or home based. This change will allow for emerging needs to be met through this more objective licensing system, and government will also have the ability to monitor and enforce basic standards for those types of care not licensed.

Under the bill, centre based child care services that cater for seven children or more will be required to be licensed. Services that are now known as long day care centres, limited hours care centres, occasional care centres and kindergartens will all be forms of licensed centre based care.

One of the key questions raised in the consultations for the proposed new legislation was whether or not there would be provision for emergency care in the bill and regulation. I am pleased to say that the legislation does have provisions that allow a service to care for one additional child or sibling group in certain circumstances. Initially, the draft legislation proposed that services could care for up to 10 per cent more children in emergency services. However, concerns were raised in feedback on the draft legislation that this was unsafe and that more safeguards were needed to ensure the provision is not abused; for example, parents need to be advised that additional children are being cared for.

As a result of the feedback, the bill has been amended to remove the 10 per cent cap and replace it with a limit of one child or sibling group. A provision has also been included that parents must be notified when emergency care is being provided at the centre in a particular group. Feedback from centre based services has also led to changes to the qualification requirements in the proposed new legislation for these services. Statewide consultations indicated that there was general support for the introduction of minimum qualification requirements. However, there was some concern over the qualification requirements for group leaders as it was suggested that giving those staff six months before they had to commence study for a relevant qualification was too long a time.

Additionally, it was suggested that, if there is a separate school-age group within a long day care centre, the carer for that group should be able to have one of the broader qualifications listed in the legislation for school-age care—for example, sport and recreational studies—rather than be limited to a child care or early childhood qualification. It was also noted that people who are studying bachelor qualifications need longer than three years to complete their course. As a result of the feedback, the following changes have been made to the bill. Firstly, the inclusion of an additional provision that all of the qualification requirements must be reviewed in three years; secondly, providing that a group leader has three months before they need to commence study; thirdly, where school-age care children are accommodated separately in the centre based service—for example, long day care—the qualifications of the carers can be made from a broad list of qualifications applicable to carers in school-age care services; and, fourthly, if a person is studying a bachelor degree then the person has sufficient time to complete the course; that is, time it would take to complete the course part-time.
The exposure draft of the proposed new legislation provided that all assistants employed in licensed centre based services must hold or be undertaking study in relation to a relevant qualification. Limited hours care services, which mainly operate in remote or rural areas with small numbers of children in attendance, indicated during consultations that it would not be viable for these services to comply with this requirement in regard to their third assistant. Under the present legislation, this person would not be required to be qualified, and limited hours care services report that they often use an unqualified volunteer such as a parent as a third staff person where there are 15 or more children. In response to these concerns, it was proposed to exclude the third staff person in limited hours care services from the qualification requirements. The bill has therefore been amended to provide that, where a service caters for up to 30 children, one assistant is not required to be qualified.

The issue of first aid qualifications for staff in centre based care services was also raised during consultations. The proposed provision requires that someone with a current first aid qualification must be present whenever the child care is being provided in the context of a licensed child care service. In consultations there was a diverse response to this proposal, including the view that the legislation should require all carers to have a current first aid qualification as well as the opposing view that the proposed provision supports the outcomes based focus of the new legislation; in fact, more than one person in a service will have to meet the qualification for the licensee to be able to demonstrate how he or she will meet the requirement at all times. Additionally, the cost and accessibility of first aid qualifications, particularly in remote and rural areas, means that it would be impractical to require all staff to have such qualifications.

As a result of the feedback, it is proposed that the provision be retained, but guidelines will be developed to assist licensees in developing appropriate practices to support the requirement. The proposed provision is consistent with the approach adopted in legislation in other states, including New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. I believe that the bill balances the baseline standards for the child care sector with relevant considerations in relation to what is in the best interests of families and children in terms of quality, safety and affordability as well as what is achievable in the sector. As a mother, I know how important child care is to every family. Every parent wants the best child care for their children. I was fortunate to have family day care based child care and I salute those mums for their dedicated care. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (5.07 p.m.): The principal rationale for child care legislation is to provide a strong framework that aims to ensure the safety of children. In the minister's second reading speech she said—

Child care allows many people to be able to take part in community life and decision making and provides opportunities for children to come together to play and learn in safe surroundings.

Child care is therefore more than just the provision of safe places for children to be cared for. It also enables parents to participate in the economic and social activities of their local communities. In past eras such involvement was facilitated in many cases by the existence of larger and more cohesive extended family units. The changing nature of families and the increasingly complex and changing nature of communities and the workplace have rendered such opportunities obsolete for a growing number of parents. Child care is in many respects filling the void created by these circumstances.

This bill puts into place a new licensing framework and introduces a number of new standards and requirements. Essentially the bill provides that there can be both licensed and unlicensed child care operations, both of which will be regulated at various levels. A person who conducts a child care service in which child care is regularly provided to at least seven children for reward must obtain a licence. There are two types of child care services for the purposes of licensing: Firstly, centre based services, which includes kindergartens and school-age care programs; and, secondly, home based services, which is the old family day care model which is provided in one or more homes.

School based child care services have been included in the bill for the first time. Increasingly, schools are offering such services to parents and, given the growth in this sector, it is entirely appropriate that it is regulated to ensure that the expectations of parents and the interests of children are met. Unlicensed child care services will be referred to as stand-alone services. These are the old backyard child care services and will apply to people who provide care for up to six children in their own home on a regular basis for reward. Whereas these services will not be
required to hold a licence, they will have to meet some minimum standards. For instance, the carer must be an adult and have public liability insurance cover.

One of the important sections of the bill applies to the increased qualifications required of childcare workers and management. The bill proposes that the minimum qualification for a childcare worker will be a Certificate III level traineeship that all staff must have. In the 2002-03 budget, Employment and Training Minister Matt Foley and Families Minister Judy Spence announced a $6 million allocation for the Statewide Child Care Training Strategy. This will deliver around 700,000 annual hours of curriculum training to childcare workers, with a specific allocation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care industry workers. The child care industry is currently experiencing a training surge as a result of this strategy. Workers are seeking to acquire the mandatory entry-level qualifications, and existing workers, group leaders and directors without accredited qualifications are commencing training or skills assessment.

Under the Child Care Statewide Training Strategy, existing workers will be able to have their specialised skills recognised and new workers will have the opportunity to undertake quality training with an on-the-job component. In June, the two ministers jointly announced Australia's first child care apprenticeship. The Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services), a three-year apprenticeship, will offer a nationally recognised qualification for people wanting to work as group leaders and assistant directors in the industry.

The development of this apprenticeship by the Queensland Community Services and Health Industry Training Council was a recognition by the child care industry of the value of engaging qualified staff. The introduction of the new children's services apprenticeship means that young people can start to think seriously about a career in child care while they are still at school completing their senior year. This concept dovetails neatly into the government's proposed reforms to senior schooling outlined in the green paper Education and Training Reforms for the Future. It will outline a range of measures that aim to make senior schooling fit better with vocational education training and work, and the child care industry is well placed to take full advantage of the opportunities that will be available to young people from these reforms. The Department of Employment and Training has identified child care as a strategic training priority for the 2002-03 financial year. This decision and the other initiatives I have mentioned demonstrate our commitment to support training activities which enable the industry to meet the challenges of upskilling existing workers and training a growing workforce.

The bill introduces a number of mechanisms to ensure the safety of children and the quality of care provided. These include provisions on the maximum number of children to be in care at any one time and the number of staff required to be present at a centre. One key issue for home based services related to the proposed limits on the number of children in a home based care situation. During the consultation process it was recognised that special attention was needed to cover the situation where two or more carers met at the one home or went on a group excursion. The bill provides for the continuation of such practices subject to some safeguards to be prescribed by regulation. On that note, I wish to pay tribute to the excellent services provided by the Bramble Bay Day Care Association which, although based in the Sandgate electorate, services constituents in my electorate. Both I and the Minister for Industrial Relations and member for Sandgate met with the association to discuss its concerns about the early drafts of the bill. The issue of home based carers meeting at each other's homes and also going on excursions was a significant issue raised by the association during our meeting. I am pleased that the minister has addressed that issue in the bill.

The Nudgee electorate is also well serviced by many school based community, church and private child care providers. Before and after school care programs have become increasingly important and necessary services provided by many schools in my electorate. I note that the Department of Families is continuing with its program to assist school based services upgrade their facilities to meet the new standards required by legislation. I have a number of schools in my electorate that are making application for support under this worthwhile program.

Another significant aspect of the bill is the increased monitoring and enforcement provisions. Authorised officers will have increased powers of inspection and the chief executive of the department will have the ability to suspend or cancel licences. Compliance notices can also be issued to remedy contraventions of the legislation. This is a refreshing reform of important legislation. I congratulate the minister and her department on its development and also thank the many participants in the child care industry, many of whom came from my electorate, who have provided constructive feedback on the draft legislation. I commend the bill to the House.
Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (5.15 p.m.): I rise in support of the Child Care Bill 2002. There is nothing more important in terms of the responsibilities of this Labor government than protecting children. With a dynamic and changing work force, child care must be flexible and innovative and allow for families to achieve that balance between work and family life. No longer is the working week Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. In many industries with shift work it is seven days a week, 24 hours a day, making child care issues all the more important. The purpose of this bill is to change the current legislation to provide flexibility for child care while strengthening the screening procedures which protect the safety of our children. Extensive consultation has provided the framework for this bill. Consultation was undertaken with many interested parties, including all sectors of the child care industry. This included TAFEs, indigenous groups and church and school organisations. A draft proposal of this legislation has also been available for public comment for some months.

One significant amendment is that the screening process which applicants must go through in order to be granted a suitability notice has been expanded. Currently, a criminal record check is standard practice. Under this legislation it will now be possible for the Commissioner for Children and Young People to take into consideration complaints and charges that have not resulted in a conviction. This amendment underlines the fact that this government considers the interests of the child as paramount while still allowing for the protection of workers in the industry. There are factors built into the legislation which protect those individuals from receiving unfair treatment. It is necessary for the commissioner to consider the exact circumstances surrounding each individual's criminal history. The right to privacy of each person is treated with respect. There is a delicate balance between protecting the rights of children and upholding the rights of carers. This legislation strikes that balance.

The bill contains significant safeguards which protect the interests of affected individuals. Any person who is prohibited by this process from providing care to children has a right of appeal to the Children's Services Tribunal. The bill represents a toughening of enforcement powers and recognises the importance of ensuring children's safety. I am pleased to say that the proposed legislation also serves to clarify specific areas which have proved problematic under the current legislation and provides key mechanisms to close loopholes and ensure that children's safety is paramount when making licensing decisions.

The current Child Care Act 1991 and subordinate regulations prescribe the duties and responsibilities of licensees with regard to the delivery of child care services. Therefore, the onus of responsibility for service delivery resides with the service provider. The current child care legislation in Queensland is widely regarded as the most prescriptive in Australia. I think it should be recognised that the majority of child care licensees are diligent in observing legislative requirements and are willing to cooperate with the Department of Families in ensuring that they have a clear understanding of the requirements of the act and regulations. The penalties on conviction for most offences against the Child Care Act range from the imposition of a fine to the revocation of a licence. However, prosecution is not the only solution. We must ensure there are effective and efficient support and monitoring services and that complaints are dealt with effectively. The strategic plan supports the development of a compliance monitoring mechanism that provides incentive for compliance as well as a regime of fines commensurate with non-compliance and frequency of non-compliance.

The bill therefore contains all of the inspectorial powers necessary to ensure that departmental officers have the power to monitor child care services, including the power of entry. The licensing of school-age care services is timely recognition that this sector has expanded and should be required to meet certain requirements. The school-age care sector has been working towards these standards for some time and broadening of the licensing framework provides benefits for children and families in terms of helping to ensure that we have quality and safety. More staff will be required to hold qualifications or to be studying towards an appropriate qualification. This will lead to higher quality child care services across the state. This government's $4.2 million Child Care Statewide Training Strategy will greatly assist workers in obtaining these qualifications.

I believe that this bill contributes significantly to the protection of our children and to improving the lives of working families. I am happy to commend it to the House.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (5.20 p.m.): It is important to acknowledge the key factor in the Child Care Bill, and that is that this bill concerns the safety of our children. This bill seeks to improve the accountability provisions and the standards that apply to a range of child care services with the key aim, of course, of increasing the safety of our children. Nothing could be
more important. My own daughter Kelsea spends three days a week in day care. There is nothing more important than the quality of the care that is provided to her. On that note, I would certainly like to thank Miss Julie and the other staff members of the day care centre who look after Kelsea. I believe they provide a fantastic service and I have nothing but admiration for the care and love offered by the staff of that child-care centre.

This bill, however, needs to balance competing interests. Some people ask if we have the balance right in this bill. My answer in 2002 is yes, I believe that this bill does have the balance right. The previous 1989 legislation was also thought to have the balance right. However, it is important to acknowledge that legislation is a fluid entity and is not static. It needs to move and progress with the times. Many other speakers this afternoon have mentioned how society has changed in the last 11 years. So have the child care needs of the population changed in that time. Therefore, legislation needs to be fluid and change with the times. I compliment the minister and her staff on reviewing the legislation and making it relevant to the existing needs of our society.

That does not mean that this legislation will not be reviewed at some time in the future, based on feedback and changes in society. I do not think any member of the government has stood up in this House today and said that this bill cannot or will not be improved at some time in the future. However, today, in the year 2002, in my opinion this bill strikes the happy balance.

What is the balance? At this stage I should acknowledge the extensive consultation process undertaken by the minister. In the consultation process we had people arguing that the requirements in this legislation are too strict and too tight. Other stakeholders in the consultation process have said that the legislation is not tight enough and is not strict enough. Everything is about balance. Is everybody happy with this bill? No! Do we have the balance right? As I keep saying, yes, I believe so.

Mr Purcell: Are we happy with the minister? Yes!

Mr ENGLISH: Yes. What happens if we increase the restrictive requirements on child-care centres? If we ask for a ratio of one to one, carer to child, we will increase the safety of our children, and that is a good thing. However, what will happen? The cost to those centres will go through the roof. Those costs will have to be passed on to the consumer—that is you, me and people like us. Can working families afford the increased cost of child care? What will happen if those increased costs are not passed on? Centres will close down hand over fist. Every day we will read in the newspaper about another child-care centre closing down. This will have a significant impact on working families. Is that what this government wants to see? No!

Due to the federal government’s mean-spiritedness we have already seen a limitation placed on child-care centres. Do working families now have difficulty accessing child-care centres? Yes! So why would this government want to take action that potentially closes centres? Why would we take action that potentially increases costs? This government is not about that. We do not want to make the requirements too restrictive or too tight.

However, what happens if we loosen the requirements excessively? Of course, we would decrease the safety of our children. Our children would be exposed to unnecessary and unrealistic risks. Is that what this government wants? No! It will have the positive effect of not closing centres and increasing costs to the consumer. This is all about balance. It is all about balancing the safety of our children with affordable child care and a realistic number of centres that working families can access.

This bill has the balance right. As I said before, the minister has consulted extensively on this bill. Is everyone happy? No, most definitely not! I am happy to stand in this House and defend this bill because this bill will do two things: it will maintain a high level of safety for our children and it will maintain reasonable costs and reasonable access to child care for working families. This bill has the balance right and I commend it to the public and I commend it to this House.

Mr POOLE (Gaven—ALP) (5.28 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Child Care Bill 2002. For many years now our modern society has relied heavily on child care facilities. It was a great concept introduced in the early 1990s by a Labor government. It freed up mothers and solo parents and allowed them to seek gainful employment in the workforce. It also allowed small children to mix with others, gain new skills and learn something different in their little lives—all contributing to the transition to later learning as they reached school age. Maybe that did not mean much to the coalition. When it came to office in the mid-1990s it immediately undid all the good work Labor had done and slashed more than $300 million from child care funding nationwide.
I was an official with the LHMU when this happened and I can vividly remember the pain and suffering of both owners of child-care centres and the workers at those centres. Staff cuts were inevitable as numbers fell dramatically. Employees were terminated so suddenly that most could have been deemed to have been unlawful dismissals. In hindsight, the owners had no alternative than to do what they did in order to survive. It is all history now and we must work with the funds that we have and changes must be made. We now have this legislation before the House. It has been framed around extensive consultation with stakeholders including owners, workers, parents and community interests.

This government recognises the critical role this plays in the average life of many Queenslanders and also recognises that, after 10 years of being in force and after once being the benchmark of child care legislation, times change and more flexibility is required for families. This legislation brings just that—it brings a balance by increasing the regulation of the child care industry and also allows commonsense while still maintaining high standards and guarantees the safety of small children. This legislation introduces new requirements in respect of the transportation of children and the operation of playgroups in family day care and allows parents to actually know about the staffing level requirements in centre based care. The legislation also requires a strengthened qualifications structure for its staff already in the child care industry. The Beattie government has made more than $4 million available statewide to assist workers in gaining extra training to meet these requirements.

This legislation also responds to community needs by allowing child care facilities to operate with specific conditions on their licence. It also outlines that a licensee must make copies of a range of policies available for parents and ensure that staff members are aware of these same policies and that licensees maintain these policies. It directs licensees to report harm to children. This does not mean a slight injury but something that ought to have been checked by a doctor. I do not intend to cover all parts of the reforms as I am sure that others before and others to follow will and will no doubt cover a wide range of the new legislation. Finally, I must thank the minister and her staff for the hard work and the research that has gone into putting this bill together. As a parent of two small sons, Kim and Connor, I will be very happy to send my boys off to child care as soon as possible.

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (5.31 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Child Care Bill 2002. During my time in politics I have been involved with the child care issue in many ways. In fact, as an endorsed candidate for the seat of South Brisbane in 1977 I noted a survey of the East Brisbane State School by the University of Queensland’s social work unit which discovered that 37 per cent of children attending that school were latchkey children—that is, they left school each day with a key around their neck and went home to nobody. I remember discussing that issue at the newly formed East Brisbane Community Centre, which I was secretary of. In many ways, that centre was by far one of the best learning curves I had as a potential member of parliament.

Those involved in that centre thought that we ought to do something about providing care for these children before and after school. In fact, with support from the social work unit of the university that community centre set up the first out-of-school-hours care centre in Queensland. Nowadays that kind of care is an integral part of just about every P&C and every school community, because there is a need to meet the gap between mum or dad either going to or coming home from work and children starting and finishing school. No school principal would allow the dumping of a child at 7 o’clock in the morning in the school grounds without some sort of organised child care, and rightly so.

The centre then decided to run a vacation care program. Local police confirmed that the creation of that program reduced the number of juvenile offences in East Brisbane. It stopped young people from going around the streets aimlessly looking for something to do. I was also involved in setting up a family day care program in the area run by two unbelievably wonderful coordinators who expended much energy to get a toy library to travel on a day-to-day basis to the homes of family day care centres. In those days there were community based child care services. The East Brisbane Community Centre decided to set up a service at the centre. At that time the fee was an 80 per cent salary subsidy. It was not means tested, but the fees were very small. The care provided at those community based care centres was wonderful, even though in today’s world there is an argument in terms of equity. Today it costs something like $155 in fees for long day care. If a family is earning less than $30,000 a year, there is a $133 subsidy. Those levels for lower income people are comparable, but that figure is less if the child is of school age—that is, it is only 85 per cent of that.
Those involved in politics are always confronted by the issue of child care. When door-knocking as a candidate after my re-found wisdom to run for politics again I spoke to many Army wives around the Enoggera area. I discovered that they had two issues that were most important to them, and I must have gone to 100 houses in the area where the woman's husband worked at the Enoggera Army base. Two issues confronted those people: the first was the quality of their housing—it was not up to scratch—and the second was the lack of child care facilities.

When the Labor government came to power in 1989 a child care service was established in the area. When the Labor Party won government in 1989 it put substantial amounts of money into child care, but unfortunately it was one of the few things we did well at the time in family services; we did not dedicate enough resources to that area. That was an important issue. This bill continues on from the 1991 legislation. It does a very good job in meeting its goals of regulating child care services, of establishing a licensing system and of looking at the qualifications and the quality of people who work in the child care industry.

I would assume that, like all other members, I was lobbied by a number of providers of long day care in my electorate and from outside my electorate about their concerns. However, I was upset when they put out a press release saying that they had no confidence in the minister because the arguments that they put during the long and positive consultation process were not accepted. I have often discovered that people tend to think that consultation really means that they should get exactly what they want, and I will give the House an example. The Minister for Health and I had to address safety issues with regard to Route 20 after the Goss government was elected. We wanted a crossing over Pickering Street because cars were running into trains and we needed to do something about that. One group said that they were concerned about the same issue and became part of the consultation process. However, when the crossing was opened they were there with placards saying that people should vote against Jim Fouras because they did not like the final outcome. But they were part of a very full consultation process.

There is no doubt that the people lobbying me about this bill argued that there needs to be a balance and a nexus between the quality of child care and the affordability of child care. Nobody could disagree with that. Child care agencies are arguing that this legislation will badly impact on child care itself. They believe that the fact that the bill contains a provision to have a minimum staff of two during lunch hours would increase the costs of child care by $30 per child per week. I do not think that that can stand up to any rational analysis. Certainly there would be a bit of an increase, but it would be less than $10 a week.

It is interesting to note that provisions relating to staff levels to be maintained during the day were contained in the 1991 legislation. It should be noted that some child-care centres are actually meeting that requirement. We have a situation whereby people are arguing that this requirement is very onerous and there is something wrong with this legislation—so wrong that they have to issue press releases saying that they have no confidence in the minister—when that requirement was being met and was part of the 1991 legislation. All we are doing now is ensuring it is met.

Some in the consultation process said to me that minimum qualification standards—I think it is level III—would lead to a demand for increased wages. If people are better trained to give a better quality of service, I think that should be addressed. It would certainly go before the industrial commission as a need to give people increased wages.

I note that in the last month or so child-care centres have been listed on the stock exchange. Each of the listed centres has gone gangbusters. The listed price has been exceeded day after day. That indicates that this is a viable and very profitable industry. The child care industry is a large employer, employing more than 20,000 people. Some $1.4 billion has been invested in that industry.

One of the major arguments against this legislation was that in some way it was unfair. For example, people representing long day child care centres were saying that family day care, creche and kindergartens and out-of-school-hours care were being treated much better in this legislation because there are not the same requirements on them as there are on long day care. In fact, the aim of this legislation is to set consistent standards across comparable child care settings. The long day care centres are competing against other long day care centres. There are different circumstances in out-of-school-hours care. I do not know how the legislation can be seen to be discriminatory, because those environments are totally different.

There is no doubt in my mind that qualified staff contribute to a child's overall development. There is also no doubt that group sizes, staff numbers and staff-child ratios can impact on the
quality of care provided. There is also no doubt that poor quality care can impact on a child's social and language development. Those issues go hand in hand with the need for affordable and quality child care. That is the issue that makes me say to the critics, 'You made your argument, but not too well.' There is a large amount of research indicating the value of qualified staff in a child's early development.

It should be noted that the minimum standards of European and other OECD countries are still well ahead of what is being nominated here. It should also be noted that there are specific transitional provisions in this legislation. There is no callous attempt to put people into extreme difficulty. This bill accommodates staff currently in the industry to meet the new qualifications. There is a training fund of $4.2 million to assist in this process. A person currently working in a child-care centre will be regarded as qualified while they are undertaking appropriate courses. What could be fairer than that?

Ms Keech: It is a generous package.

Mr FOURAS: It is certainly well thought out. The many issues in this bill, such as emergency care, have been well canvassed by many members. I do not want the Deputy Speaker to bring me into line for being tedious or repetitious. I have been known to be tedious, but I will try not to be repetitious.

This piece of legislation does meet its goals. Concerns raised with me by those lobbying against this legislation relating to accountability, the licensing system and minimum educational qualifications have been addressed and put together in a piece of legislation that will stand the test of time. Particularly the long day care operators should welcome the fact that they will get quite a bit of assistance in training.

There is no doubt that there have been longstanding issues with staff turnover and difficulties with training and recruitment. The minister said that some $10 million would be invested in new technologies, training strategies and research. We are not just imposing conditions; we are trying to provide the resources to make them happen. I was delighted when I saw a press release from the minister indicating that she had found $2 million to introduce family support hubs, which would amalgamate child care and early childhood services with family, health and education services. They are the sorts of initiatives that go hand in hand with this legislation.

I am pleased to support this legislation. I think the need for child care will continue to increase. I know that having to put a couple of children in day care creates enormous problems for some families. Family incomes of up to $60,000 a year do not provide much subsidy, so it is difficult. In the end, I think the right for a woman to work and be part of society is fundamental. I do not think any of us should be judgmental as to whether the place of a particular woman is in the home or in the workplace. It is a matter of choice.

Mr Terry Sullivan: Or whether a father stays at home.

Mr FOURAS: A very good friend of mine in the electorate is a lecturer at QUT and his wife is a very senior social worker. They have actually taken it in turns to be house parents. That is the makings of a very good relationship. Their decision was to stay at home with their children. I have been diverted enough by the member for Stafford. I conclude by commending the bill to the House and congratulating the minister on a job well done.

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (5.48 p.m.): I rise today in support of the Child Care Bill 2002. The Beattie government has never shied away from ensuring the wellbeing of our most valuable assets, our children and our young people. The Child Care Bill 2002 continues in this tradition. It is about maintaining the protection of children in child care and promoting their best interests. It will do this by establishing a licensing system for child care services, regulating the way child care services are conducted and setting standards for persons who provide child care.

Over the past 10 years or so the nature of work has changed enormously. On the one hand, a lot of new jobs created have been casual jobs. On the other hand, many are required to work longer and inflexible hours. Factors such as this combine to make family life a stressful balancing act between work and family. The current legislation has been in operation for nine years. At its introduction it was benchmark legislation, but over time it has become dated and now needs to be replaced with responsive and flexible legislation that will address the anomalies in the present system.

The Child Care Bill 2002 brings the regulatory framework that will assist in providing high quality child care services and making sure that they are flexible in order to respond to the diverse and changing needs of Queensland families. It is obvious to everyone that parents want a high
level of child care services for their children and that the great majority of providers are eager to
do all that they can to ensure this.

I have a number of very good child care providers throughout my electorate of Broadwater.
One such establishment is the Bonny Babes Childcare Centre at Hope Island. Recently I was at
that centre to represent the Minister for Fair Trading and to launch the About Baby & Children's
Safety booklet—the ABCS. The ABCS booklet is another smart initiative from the state
government through the Office of Fair Trading that is about ensuring the safety of our children. It
is a free publication that provides parents and carers with practical advice for ensuring the safety
of their young children. In this state, far too many children are seriously injured or worse each year
and many of those accidents could be prevented. The ABCS publication is a practical tool for
Queensland parents or professionals working with young children. I encourage both groups to get
themselves a copy of this valuable resource booklet. While launching the booklet, I had an
opportunity to see first-hand the dedication of the staff at Bonny Babes. The facilities are first rate
and there is obviously pride taken in the quality of service that they provide. I thank Bonny Babes
for their assistance in providing the premises for the launch and I commend them on the
operation of their business.

It is quality providers such as Bonny Babes which will recognise the need for this new
legislation and, no doubt, welcome its introduction. This new regulatory framework has been
influenced by an extensive consultation process that began in April 2000. An issues paper was
developed and released to assist in the provision of feedback and consultation sessions were
held across the state. Out of this feedback, draft legislation was developed and in turn was the
subject of consultation. That was conducted between November 2001 and April 2002. There were
sessions held across the state with service providers, sector representatives, peak organisations
and government departments. This highlighted areas that needed further revision and that
revision has been incorporated in the final version of the bill.

There will always be competing views that need to be taken into account when developing
new legislation. I am confident that that range of views has been successfully balanced in this
legislation. All in all, I believe that this is sound legislation that is good news for Queensland
families. I congratulate the minister and her department and I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MOLLOY (Noosa—ALP) (5.52 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of this bill because it will
provide a framework of legislation that will lead to the better provision of child care services for the
children of Queensland. Over the past 30 years the increase in female participation in the work
force has increased dramatically. Today, few families can afford the sheer luxury of either the
mother or the father remaining in the home to provide the primary care of their children. Because
the nature of the family unit has altered and because of the choices that women and men make
regarding their work and home commitments, the child care industry has flourished in the free
market and done very well. With any industry, regulations are needed to be put into place to
enhance the delivery of service, which brings me to saying that our children, our nation's most
precious resource, deserve the kind of care that this bill intends to provide and
regulate—balanced, high quality, accountable care.

As a working mother, as an enrolled nurse juggling the task of caring for young children,
working shiftwork and studying—in other words, being a supermum—I am well qualified to
comment, having accessed child care services that complemented my extended family help. I
was one of the fortunate parents who had, and still has, a wonderful husband who shares the
responsibility of being primary caregiver. But the need to go to work and study for both of us often
meant that we had to rely on family day care, long day care centres, and kinder-creche facilities.

The issues arising from having to place children in care need to be addressed sensitively and
intelligently. Hence the minister's departmental staff engaged in extensive community
consultation. The licensing of child care services is fairly self-explanatory. For the purposes of
licensing, there will be two types of child care services. One would be a centre based service and
the other a home based service. When we leave our child with another adult, we need to know
that those people know what they are doing and that they will make informed, intelligent decisions
when caring for our children. The bill will impose more rigorous minimum qualifications. I am of the
opinion that commonsense, a good general education and post-secondary qualifications are not
too much to ask. This minimum qualification will not only enhance the care that our children
receive but also it will lift the benchmarks, the self-esteem and the informed decisions that carers
will make and provide when delivering the service.
For family day care, home based care, to have a great team leader to coordinate the group of carers—generally mums themselves—makes all the difference to how the home based carer survives. With the team leader being also a coordinator, she is able to share her knowledge base, inform the other carers and provide the support that home based care mums need. Often it is a very lonely experience for people caring for maybe seven children in their own home.

The staffing levels will require two people to be present over the lunchtime period. Yes, that will increase the impost on the owners of the child care facilities. However, we are only too aware of the kind of abuse that can arise when there is only one adult present. This occurred historically when child care was provided or when aged care service was provided throughout Australia. So if anyone argues the toss over that small item, I think that they should go back and have a look at history and then they might change their minds. Yes, it might be difficult to attract someone to work for two hours, but there are a lot of people out there who are on pensions who just might appreciate a little bit of extra money in their kick and they might like to share some time with our beautiful kids. The child of a friend of mind was involved in a hideous situation with Mr Stinky in New South Wales. That kind of situation should not be allowed to occur in Queensland child care facilities.

I congratulate the family day care services in Tewantin. Last week I dropped in to visit them while I was out in my mobile office. I would also like to thank the shopkeepers and others who dropped in to say hello and thank them for their friendly welcome. One of my constituents, Keith Allison, from Noosa Coast Guard also stopped and spoke with me. As the children from the Tewantin Primary School got off the bus and walked past us, they all said hello to 'Captain Keith'. Keith is a 25-year serving JP and spends hours and hours at the Tewantin Primary School as a volunteer. This is definitely an example of community based care. I thank Keith for what he does as a volunteer for our lovely children.

Many speakers who have spoken before me this evening have teased out the benefits of this new legislation. Through the introduction of this bill, this government has shown that it is committed to the high quality care of our children. Yes, we need to be ever vigilant to protect children and support the child care industry. I congratulate the minister and her staff on listening to their community and responding.

Debate, on motion of Ms Keech, adjourned.

**FIREFIGHTER ASSISTANCE**

*Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (5.57 p.m.):* I move—

In light of the prolonged drought and subsequent critical fire risk, that this government ensure that land under its control has adequate firebreaks, and that access roads used by fire fighters are clear of debris, including overhanging limbs to provide maximum protection for firefighting personnel, volunteers and civilians, and further that the government review the scope of equipment available for fire fighting.

The predicted bushfire hazards that the state is facing over the coming summer months are extreme and all possible methods to reduce the loss of vegetation, homes and possessions and, most importantly, lives must be utilised. There exist grave concerns among those who are at the front line of firefighting.

The cause of these concerns does not hinge on just our ability and preparedness for rural fire services to handle any potential fire outbreaks but also on the causes and effects of fires and individual community preparedness and awareness. Before going too much further, I am not taking away or minimising the fact that this government has seen fit to increase funding to rural fire services. The government has supplied protective clothing, walkie-talkies and other necessary equipment. The problem arising from reports from many of the rural fire services is that the firebreaks on crown land have not been kept free of rubbish build-up, that burn-offs on crown land have not be conducted in the winter and that the firebreaks are not only not maintained but also in some cases are not wide enough. It is amazingly frightening to see flames leaping across the existing badly maintained firebreaks as they pass between the tinder dry treetops. The claim that forestry and national parks are adequately staffed, with their constant letting go of or not replacing transferring or retiring staff, is questioned. It is recognised that forestry land is farmed in terms of plantations and is considerably cleaner than national parks where no weed and rubbish control is practised. In some shires—and I use Cooloola Shire as an example—approximately 45 per cent of such land is crown land.

In an idealistic world the lighting of fires would be left to mother nature, but we cannot rely on her being the only fire starter; we can rely on some pyromaniacs putting property and lives at risk.
One of the biggest concerns is this deliberate lighting of fires by firebugs. Based on previous causes for fires in Queensland and other states, these firebugs are primarily responsible for the dreadful toll on property and resources. Crown land policy of closing forests and allowing this build-up of combustible material allows them plenty of opportunity. This closing of forests has been described in the United States as neglect through mismanagement. It has been recognised that the germination of seeds, et cetera, has been cited as the major reason for closing the forests to allow for forest regeneration, has in fact opened the forest to more intense, hotter and longer burning fires which, in turn, is more devastating to both the forest and wildlife—not to mention the threat to those asked to protect homes built along the edges of these forests.

One indisputable fact is that the existing laws have not been a deterrent to firebugs. Disturbingly, there is the possibility that no law exists which will deter the psychologically dysfunctional people who seek to destroy property and endanger lives. Education of the effects backed up by possible graphic footage to show the effects of such acts, shown throughout the education system, may bring the message home to some. However, firebugs, despite being a major cause of serious fires, are only part of the problem. No community is immune, whether rural or coastal, and we have seen the recent reports coming from New South Wales.

Water sources are rapidly dwindling and it may sound dramatic to say that in some areas the lack of water will restrict the ability to fight fires. If we think that is pie in the sky, just ask the people in towns such as Blackbutt at the top of the range who are suffering extreme water shortages but are surrounded by forestry in an area which is experiencing tinder dry conditions. They are currently endeavouring to tap into the Wivenhoe pipeline but experiencing native title delays. Without the water, they are at the mercy of many a bushfire.

The member for Bulimba visited my electorate recently and he was met with the expression 'green drought'. For those members who do not know what a green drought is, it is when an area has had minuscule amounts of rain just enough to have dry parched brown grass turn green. But it does not grow. It looks good but it does not even cover the ground. The feed in the Nanango electorate should be knee high at this time of year—not the height of the edge of a 20c piece. This year is the first time I have seen roses dry on the bush as if they were dried for flower arrangements and crumble to dust at your touch. It is dry out there, conditions are critical and everything must be done to ensure the safety of our firefighters, volunteers and civilians. Not to do so will constitute a dereliction of our duty of care. This brings us to the very people we rely on to stop these tragedies—the SES personnel, the volunteers that put their lives at risk every time they go out to fight this fire curse.

I refer to an article in the Courier-Mail on 27 May which stated that a confidential report by the government appointed Linton inquiry team warned that the roles and tasks of many State Emergency Service units might have to be cut back so the state government could meet its duty of care to volunteers. It says that Queensland's 60,000 fire and emergency volunteers face needless risk because of poor training and a chronic lack of resources. Does that mean emergency workers may not be protected by WorkCover if injured because of serious equipment and training flaws? If so, what is the government proposing to do to rectify that?

If the fires are to be as bad as predicted, that is one issue that should be addressed with urgency not only to meet WorkCover requirements but other issues raised in the report. The report is very critical of some SES groups with primary response roles which do not have the necessary equipment. Some volunteer units do not have sufficient radios, and a large proportion of the radio equipment is outdated and in need of replacement. The report summarises the following four main points: massive problems with communications including 28 black spots around the state; no statewide induction training for new emergency service volunteers; volunteers having to pay 50 per cent of boot costs and many complaints about respirator quality; and about 30 per cent of surveyed firefighters had no radio training. It is a disgrace to allow such an important service to deteriorate to the extent it has. The report also warned that in a major incident involving several brigades it would mean the incident controller could lose communications due to the high volume of radio traffic.

The government report also found that only a very low percentage of Rural Fire Brigade volunteers had obtained even minimal level competency. If the Linton inquiry team report is accurate in its findings that chronic underfunding would not allow the RFS and SES to support modern volunteer emergency organisations adequately, it is an indictment on the incompetence of this government. It is human lives we are talking about. It is people's homes and properties, and it should be a priority of the government to ensure that everything is done to protect them.
In January the federal minister put forward a proposal for an army of unemployed to be sent into the bush during winter to fireproof forests if the state governments agreed. Trained adequately, it could be an avenue worth pursuing. The Queensland SES minister was quoted as saying—

"...the scheme might have some merit in bolstering Queensland fire hazard reduction program."

After the report by the Linton inquiry, it appears to me that it should have been acted on immediately, but was it? We have just come through winter and I ask the minister what has been the outcome of that proposal and what would have been the advantages to every Queenslander? We have one very dangerous situation facing us, and any disastrous outcomes will rest fairly and squarely on the government's failure to act. Hazard reduction has proved invaluable in other states, but according to the minister—and I quote him from the same article—

"We have a policy in Queensland where not only our rural and urban firefighters, but other departments such as Primary Industries, Natural Resources and the EPA have hazard reduction programs as well."

Well, earlier this year I wrote to the minister on behalf of concerns by a council and citizens in my electorate over the removal of hundreds of tyres that were a fire hazard. Months later, the EPA was still arguing about who was responsible for that hazard. I hope the EPA is reducing fire hazards at a much faster rate. Most members will know that my husband is an agricultural pilot and we have often been amazed that Australia does not utilise a valuable fire fighting tool located in every crop growing area. In Canada, America and New Zealand many larger crop spraying aircraft have been and still are used to aid in fighting fires in areas which are difficult for firefighters to work reasonably safely, but small enough not to need the likes of Elvis. Elvis's benefit in one season has been well documented. Many agricultural aircraft have a far greater capacity than some of the helicopters we see used on TV. I ask the minister: has the utilisation of these aircraft been considered; and, if so, what was the objection when, as I stated before, these aircraft are used in other countries?

It was interesting to read in the *Weekend Australian* on 30 December last year that a leading CSIRO researcher, Phil Cheney, warned that more prescribed burning off is the only way to guarantee a reduction in fire risks, but urban sensibilities and ignorance often thwart such programs. He said that the fuel on the ground is the only thing we can manage. Mr Cheney said—

"If you want to reduce the intensity of the fire, you have to reduce the amount of fuel producing the heat. In the Blue Mountains it was said that there was a lot of criticism from the public who do not like burn-offs. People's concern about smoke has been one of the key factors hindering agencies in doing prescribed burning."

Mr Cheney also said that many people do not understand the fundamentals of fire. The establishment of the Regional Forestry Agreement and the virtual closing of many forests has seen the removal of state grazing permits. These permits allowed the grazing of cattle amongst the trees, but not all of the annual shedding of bark and other rubbish discarded by our unique flora was kept to a minimum. The rapid proliferation of our native undergrowth and its annual dieback was kept in check.

Over the past few years we have seen the build-up of this combustible material which in some cases has become an almost impenetrable wall and which in the current extreme conditions will only compound the difficulties our fire fighting services will be confronted with when the time comes as it inevitably will. History has shown us repeatedly the truth of these words. I only hope I am wrong.

*Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM* (Gladstone—Ind) (6.08 p.m.): I second the motion moved by the member for Nanango. Many rural landowners are frustrated with an inequity of obligations. They see that by state government they are placed in a position where they must maintain weed control and fire breaks and must adequately manage their land holdings; however, they look to their neighbours, in many instances the state government, and see that forestry holdings and national parks are not accorded the same obligations. Most landowners recognise that with the amount of land that government has in its custodianship it would be impractical, in fact so expensive, to have them all manicured. But landowners are asking for an obligation to be taken by government, as required of landowners, at least to ensure fire safety, particularly in vulnerable areas.

In my electorate there has been a number of instances where fires have come down through Kroombit Tops. On a couple of occasions it was as a result of a controlled burn that went out of control and, in other instances, it has been because there has been a build-up of fuel and campers or other visitors to the national park have thrown out cigarettes and started fires. In one
instance, landowners were fighting these fires for weeks in an endeavour to bring them under control. Not only was a lot of government land destroyed; a lot of privately held land was also destroyed.

There is a group of people on whom we rely on a regular basis, because of our climate, topography and way of life, for our safety—our full-time firefighters, our rural bush fire brigades, the SES and also the civilian landowners who fight fires on a voluntary basis in an endeavour to save as much property as possible so that grass is available for grazing purposes. Over the last few years, with these prolonged dry spells, we have had just sufficient rain to create a body of grass, which dries off and creates a major fire hazard. This year has been even worse. Tonight’s news showed that there were significant fronts in about five different areas of the state.

This motion recognises the need for management of our rural estates—our forestry and national parks—as I said, in an even-handed manner, and places on government some obligations to ensure that appropriate firebreaks are put in place in vulnerable areas and that in those places where firefighters have to access properties and national parks forestry areas they are protected as far as possible, for example, through the removal of overhanging limbs.

The previous speaker mentioned programs that would be available from the federal government in terms of traineeships and other opportunities to put young people and others into rural areas in order to reduce the fire hazard. I believe that is an obvious choice and one that, with a management strategy, could be very quickly put in place. In clearing this fire hazard, there are skills that can be learnt—skills with chainsaws, machinery, and the management of land. I believe that is an option this government should actively pursue.

As I said, we wait for the time in my electorate—and I do not believe we are unique—that the fires come. It is usually every couple of years. Almost invariably, part of the contributor to the fire problems is the lack of management of our forestry and national park estates. This motion calls on responsible government. I do believe that a management plan could be put in place to recognise the cost to government but also to recognise the value of grass to our rural landowners and to ensure that all members of the community, whether it is the landowner, their stock or the firefighters who so valiantly fight the fires, are given the maximum protection possible.

Hon. M. F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland) (6.12 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

Omit all words after ‘that’ and insert the following:

This House commends the Beattie Government for the proactive way in which it has prepared for the forthcoming fire season including the provision of specific support funding for volunteer rural firefighters and SES volunteers, the ongoing work of the Inter-departmental Committee on Bushfire Management, the good work being done across Queensland by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, particularly its Rural Fire Service staff and volunteers in undertaking, across the state, systemised hazard reduction burning to reduce fuel loads. This House also recognises that Queensland’s firefighters are better prepared than ever before to meet the bushfire threat, with urban and rural fire stations having recently taken delivery of dozens of new firefighting vehicles.

The paramount concern in any debate about bushfire preparedness is safety—the safety of the public and the safety of the men and women who put their lives on the line to contain bushfires. There is no expectation from this government that firefighters, both urban and rural, should put their lives at risk to fight any fires. The Beattie government has been extremely proactive in preparing for the upcoming bushfire season, which is predicted to be the worst since 1994. This year’s record $558.6 million budget for Emergency Services has a focus on planning, prevention, response and recovery from emergencies and disasters such as bushfires. This budget will significantly improve emergency service delivery to communities throughout Queensland and extend the duty of care obligations to volunteers, which previous members have spoken about. They would, of course, be aware that a record $16.4 million of that budget will be spent this financial year on dedicated rural fire activities.

The Beattie government is continuing to deliver improved fire services to Queensland communities, with more fire stations and vehicles and new and enhanced fire prevention and safety programs. Since 1998 under the Beattie Labor government fire services in Queensland have received massive injections of additional funding. These funds have gone into ensuring the best possible delivery of fire services to the community. It often surprises me that it has taken a Labor government to deliver to the rural fire services. We have done that more than any Tory conservative government has. They ignored it. We provided the funding.

Let me go now to the Linton coronial inquiry mentioned by the member for Nanango. We have put forward the volunteer support packages for the Rural Fire Service and the SES.

Mrs Pratt interjected.
Mr REYNOLDS: I am directing this to the member for Nanango and I would like her to listen to what I am saying. We have put together those duty of care packages. The Courier-Mail article referred to by the member is redundant. We offer full WorkCover and also public liability. That has been said in this House many times. Can I say that this state is on its own in terms of the hazard reduction burning that we do to reduce the fuel load. In terms of the comments made on helitankers, I refer the member to the answer that I gave to the shadow minister, which is in yesterday’s Hansard; it would take about another five minutes to address that now.

The good news is that Queensland’s firefighters are better prepared than ever before to meet the impending bushfire threat. During the cooler months, urban and rural fire stations have taken delivery of dozens of new rural firefighting vehicles. We have 18 new fire trucks and trailers expected to be delivered to brigades from the record rural fire budget allocated this year by the Beattie government. We have been gearing up for a very difficult fire season. The fires that have started at the moment are serious. The men and women of the Rural Fire Service, our urban firefighters and auxiliaries are out there doing a very good job. There have been literally thousands of preventive hazard reduction activities carried out by the state’s almost 50,000 urban and rural firefighters in conjunction with private land-holders. There has been a very close relationship between the agencies and the departments, which other speakers will speak on tonight as well.

The fact of the matter is that—and I know the National Party in this House hates to hear it—the National Party ignored the Rural Fire Service. It has taken a Labor government to look after its friends and our friends in the bush. It has neglected it and it knows that. It should look at the figures and at the additional training officers. We now have a training officer for every division. When the National Party was in government it had four. It was a disgrace. I know it has not moved tonight’s motion, but the National Party let down the Rural Fire Service and has never done anything for it.

Mr Johnson: You’re a joke.

Mr REYNOLDS: And the member knows it. He should look at the figures.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order!

Mr REYNOLDS: If the member looked at the figures, he would know what he was saying.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The minister and—

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Gregory and I warn—

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister! I am on my feet. I will warn you under standing order 124.

Mr Johnson: He started it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Another word and you will be named under that standing order—both of you. If there is one more word, I will warn them both under standing order 124. I will have some order in the House.

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (6.18 p.m.): I second the minister’s amendment. In doing so, I thank the honourable member for Nanango for the opportunity she has given the House to draw attention to the serious bushfire danger that we face this year. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service estate currently comprises almost 12 million hectares of land, which includes national parks and other protected areas. Fire management is a critical element in the management of this estate. In the winter of 2001 my department oversaw very extensive fire management and controlled burning covering many times the area addressed in New South Wales. As a result, the circumstances in Queensland last summer were very much more benign than those in New South Wales.

I want to be very frank with the House. Fire management, backburning and the like occurs typically after there has been some rain, when it is safe to do so. As a result of the fact that there has not been any rain there is extra danger this year because we have been unable to do as much backburning as we were able to do last winter. What we have had to do is undertake an
innovative program. The Minister for Emergency Services and I have been working together in order to do that—to establish a program to compensate for the effect of the extremely dry winter.

I outlined to the House last month a joint exercise between the minister's department and my department to assist in enhancing cooperative fire management arrangements, in particular in vulnerable areas. The five sites that were identified for the joint exercise included Noosa National Park, Pine Ridge Conservation Park, Magnetic Island National Park, Bribie Island and Brisbane Forest Park. The whole idea of it is that backburning and fire control that would not be safe to do without the involvement of the Department of Emergency Services would be safe to do in a national park if they were involved. That is what we are seeking to do to compensate, to whatever extent we can, for the effect of the hot, dry winter and the fact that we have not been able to do the extent of backburning that we would otherwise have been able to do.

I am advised that the first of these exercises will be conducted next week. Next Monday, a joint exercise will happen at Bribie Island and next Tuesday at Pine Ridge Conservation Park. The remaining exercises will occur soon after. The extremely hot, dry winter has created difficulties. To whatever extent we can by this innovative program of cooperation between these departments we will ameliorate those circumstances.

This should not distract our attention for one moment from the fact that we are facing a difficult summer. There is no level of human activity which can overcome the forces of nature. The Australian bush is a harsh place and a dangerous place and we need to treat it with extreme respect—and this summer with more respect than ever.

Currently, Queensland Parks and Wildlife staff are attending major fires at Lamington, Girraween, Main Range, Jimna, Palmgrove/Presho, Blackdown Tableland and Byfield and assisting with other fires on adjacent properties that may affect Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service land. At Lamington, a fire which started on private property west of the park was contained yesterday. At Girraween the fire is contained on the New South Wales side of the border. At Main Range the fire is contained against previous burning and crews are monitoring and extinguishing any spot fires.

At Jimna, three crews have been attending the fire since Sunday. At Palmgrove/Presho three Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service crews are on the ground with support from DPI Forestry. At Blackdown Tableland a breakout has occurred and an incident management team has been established. At present over 540 Queensland Parks and Wildlife staff are specifically trained in fire management and based at 130 centres throughout Queensland to manage land under the control of the service. My department has also established over 18,000 kilometres of fire breaks. Graders and other heavy machinery have been ensuring that these fire breaks are regularly maintained over several months leading up to this fire season. These operations are conducted in conjunction with grazing lessees and DPI Forestry staff where appropriate. I thank those private citizens and the department for their contribution.

We cannot eliminate the entire risk of fires spreading to our national parks but we have put in place mechanisms to help minimise the risk. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff are keeping the public informed as national parks and recreation areas become closed. A total fire ban is current for areas west and south of Brisbane. I would like to thank the officers of my department and the Department of Emergency Services for their hard work and dedication under difficult conditions.

Time expired.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of the motion moved by the member for Nanango. The fact is that the motion deals with the safety of our fire officers and our fire crews and the way in which this government is handling their safety. It also deals with efforts to minimise the effect of the fires that we are currently seeing throughout Queensland.

In this House on Tuesday, 22 October, the Minister for Emergency Services responded to opposition questions about Queensland's lack of aerial firefighting capabilities. In his response he criticised the federal government for not being capable of coordinating a national management plan for emergency services—a point he continued to make in the media during that day. What the minister does not realise is that while he is sitting on his hands and—excuse the French—throwing a wobbly as we have seen in the House here tonight, our bushfire risk is looming and our firefighting methods appear bleak in comparison. Even as we speak fires are advancing through our rural areas in Queensland. It is not difficult to look out the window tonight and see the blanket of smoke and dust that is moving in on Brisbane.
Premier Beattie asserted that the focus of the Beattie government was on ‘proactive prevention and mitigation’—and I will repeat those words—‘proactive prevention and mitigation’ in order to prevent having to use the technology of aerial firefighting. It is my bleak pleasure to break the heart of the Premier and the minister by pointing out that proactive prevention does not mean just putting out a press release.

The recent fires in the Girraween National Park emphasised the importance of planned burns. I think if we look at that national park we will find that it has been quite a number of years since a planned burn has taken place there. We need fire breaks and appropriate fuel reduction methods. Perhaps at a later date when I have more time I will be able to raise these issues with the minister.

Perhaps the minister should ask some of the local Ballandean residents what they think of his fuel reduction policy and his decision not to employ any aerial capabilities. Perhaps the Premier should ask those who lost so much in those recent fires just how effective the government’s proactive prevention method really is. Perhaps he should talk to some of the firefighters and residents affected by the ferocious New South Wales bushfires where aerial firefighting capabilities were deployed. He could ask them how many lives were saved, how much property was saved and how much further devastation was prevented by using aerial firefighting capabilities. Maybe now, after this recent spate of ferocious bushfires, the minister and the Premier will realise that there is more to proactive prevention than just putting out a press release.

Perhaps after witnessing the tragic loss of life that bushfires can wreak upon a community, the Beattie government will consider providing aerial firefighting capabilities to ensure the safety of Queensland communities. As shadow minister, I am aware of at least two organisations that have contacted the minister’s office in regard to providing such a service. At this stage I understand they have received no response at all from the minister. I understand that one of those organisations worked very effectively last year in New South Wales alongside the helitanker.

Many honourable members will remember the tragedy which took place at Linton in Victoria in 1998 when five Country Fire Authority volunteers perished when their tanker was engulfed by fire following a sudden wind change. In the wake of the tragedy in Linton, Queensland was given a stark warning of the possible risks facing its tens of thousands of fire and emergency volunteers. Following the coronial inquiry, the Beattie government undertook a so-called ‘warts and all’ review of the state of fire and emergency services in Queensland. But, in typical Beattie government style, the report was deemed confidential—too politically damaging for release in the public domain.

Leaked sections of the report have indicated that rural fire brigades and State Emergency Service volunteers face needless risks because of poor training and a chronic lack of resources. This report, however, would do no more than reinforce what volunteers and emergency services workers have been telling me and fellow members of the National Party—that they are critically underresourced, poorly managed and inadequately covered. The Beattie government has kept this report secret to avoid the process of accountability.

Time expired.

**Ms Molloy (Noosa—ALP)** (6.29 p.m.): Agencies from several government departments have worked together to ensure Queensland is fully prepared for the current fire season. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has been working closely with personnel from the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and rural communities—a whole-of-government approach. DPI Forestry has developed world-class fire response initiatives to limit damage and financial losses from wild fires in and around Queensland forests.

DPI staff receive fully accredited firefighter training and DPI Forestry now has upwards of 400 staff qualified as firefighters located throughout the state. During fire emergencies they can also work with firefighters from other government agencies, including OPWS and local fire brigades. The 2001-02 fire season saw a number of wildfires threaten Queensland’s production forests, but all were contained before any major losses occurred.

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan:** That’s because we have a fire management strategy.

**Ms Molloy:** I take the interjection from the very clever member for Pumicestone. Much of the thanks for this can go to the Beattie government’s extensive efforts to coordinate world-class fire response systems. For example, DPI Forestry has worked with firefighting teams from other government departments and rural firefighting bodies, including firefighters from the Queensland...
Parks and Wildlife Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. The organisation has developed specific initiatives to limit damages and financial losses from wildfires in and around Queensland production forests.

These include setting up a fire control room in Beerburrum to coordinate responses to forest fires in south-east Queensland, with more control rooms planned for Toolara and Tuan; designing statewide fire responses in line with the world-standard Incident Control System developed in the United States and adopted by many Australian fire management agencies; setting up the Yarraman forestry office as a multiagency fire control centre in line with the ICS standard; developing annual interagency firefighting exercises covering all DPI Forestry regions; entering a partnership with the Queensland Police Service’s Crimestoppers unit to prevent arson in Queensland forest plantations; entering a partnership with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Cooloola Shire Council to create a Cooloola Shire Fire Hazard Management Group; introducing aerial prescribed burning in the south-west region, particularly low-flying precision burning in valuable cypress areas which has negated the need for ground-lit burns that damage the pines; and providing firefighting training to timber industry personnel. These efforts have brought about a large, coordinated and highly-skilled interagency forest firefighting resource which will stand us in good stead for the upcoming fire season, which is predicted to be one of the worst since 1994.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is also doing important work to assist with fire preparedness. The department recently established a fire detection web site to bolster the state’s emergency response to bushfires. This web site assists Queensland’s Rural Fire Service to quickly locate and track active fires throughout the state. It is also used by land holders, natural resource managers and the Australian Defence Force. The web site is a strategic firefighting tool which generates its information from the department’s satellite receiving station at Indooroopilly which processes images acquired from three United States satellites that pass over Queensland up to 12 times a day.

Since late 1994 the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has been implementing fire prevention strategies on all land throughout the state under its control. With the endorsement of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has published a fire management manual which outlines the strategies and procedures to reduce the risk of fire emanating from unallocated state lands and unmanaged reserves throughout the state. Officers of the department form part of the interdepartmental committee on bushfire management.

The role of this committee is to provide a forum for coordination of policy and procedures relating to bushfire management in order to achieve a consistent, comprehensive and whole-of-government approach to the management of bushfire hazard reduction and suppression activities. Selected officers of the department have been given firefighting training and have participated in field exercises and controlled burns within their respective areas. I take this opportunity to congratulate the minister, his departmental officers and all our firefighters throughout this state who do a magnificent job. They cannot do any more than best practice, which is what they are doing at the moment. Congratulations, Minister, and well done.

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—Ind) (6.34 p.m.): I am pleased to rise to support the motion moved by the member for Nanango—that is, that the government become a responsible landholder which responsibly controls fires on its land and responsibly stops those fires from spreading to the land of neighbours. I readily recognise that rural fire brigades in my electorate have received additional and better equipment within the last 12 months. However, complaints concerning slack fire prevention and control and escaping so-called controlled burn-offs from national parks and other government controlled land are becoming common in my office. I am forced to say that, generally, fire control and controlled burning on Fraser Island have been a disaster. I understand that the National Parks office at Eurong has paid for a study defining on what days controlled burning will take place. Fires have been lit and supervised as defined within Public Service hours, but fires do not recognise Public Service hours. Such controlled burning just does not work and Fraser Island has suffered accordingly.

In mid-2000 a fire broke out at Whatoomba on the northern end of the island. Backburning was undertaken and escaped. That fire burnt for four months and came very close to the Orchid Beach settlement. The combined impact of that fire and the drought have made the northern end of Fraser Island look like a scorched desert. I have numerous photos of trees such as swamp mahoganies close to the Orchid Beach settlement killed by the excessive heat of that fire—a sure sign of a fire out of control and severe damage. In September 2001 a controlled burn west of
Maryborough in what was then a state forest reserve and what is now controlled by National Parks escaped into a neighbouring national park and developed two fire fronts. Then the fire invaded a private property. National Parks sent two men and a utility. The local rural fire brigades eventually sent in five units. In November the same fire invaded the same property from the same national park. Two private bulldozers were hired to cut firebreaks and the eventual outcome was significant damage to private property.

I understand that National Parks now has access to satellite data which is updated every two hours and identifies fire outbreaks. Additionally, I understand that National Parks is currently developing detailed plans to prevent and control fires. Such news is very welcome, but unless National Parks has the staff to take advantage of the technology and to implement the plans then the disaster is inevitable. National Parks does not have the experienced staff to adequately cope with the land now under its control, especially in a year such as this. I sympathise with the minister and his staff. As far as I and other more experienced people can see, a fire disaster is highly likely unless National Parks is provided with an adequate budget and more experienced staff.

By comparison, I belong to a group of adjoining graziers. We plan our burning cooperatively. When we burn we are well equipped and we burn at dusk on days when the wind is suitable and the temperature is suitable. We stay with the controlled burn until it has burnt out. In 30 years we have never had a controlled burn escape. I quote this only to emphasise that controlled burning can be carried out without mishap if the burn is carried out by an adequate number of people adequately equipped and working at the correct time. Unfortunately, National Parks has acquired a great deal of additional land but has not acquired the additional budget and the experienced staff needed. I sympathise with the minister and adjoining land-holders.

Mr STRONG (Burnett—ALP) (6.38 p.m.): I firstly rise to respond to the member for Mirani's comments about aerial response units. What he said was not necessarily the case. QFRS does have an aerial response. It uses a rescue chopper for reconnaissance. It brings in aerial firefighting equipment on a needs basis. In relation to the comments of the member for Maryborough, I would hate to hear what the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service people up my way have to say when someone says that they only work Public Service hours. Considering the amount of fires last Christmas in my area, that is not necessarily the case and they would take offence at that.

Queensland rural firefighters are better resourced and trained than ever before to meet the impending bush and grassfire threat. As the minister mentioned earlier, in recent months urban and rural fire stations have taken delivery of dozens of new firefighting vehicles. Birthamba and Elliott Heads received their firefighting equipment in only the last few weeks.

Hundreds of reduction burns have been conducted to reduce fuel loads. Additional training officers have been appointed. There is more than $3 million allocated for personal protective equipment, radiocommunications and general firefighting equipment such as slip-on units, hoses, knapsacks, rake hoes and drip torches. It should also be remembered that Queensland has a unique system whereby urban and rural firefighters work side by side in fighting blazes.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has long held the view that the AIMS-ICS operational management system was way ahead. During the New South Wales bushfires at Christmas and new year this management system for bushfires was displayed to agencies across the country. Not only did it pass with flying colours; other states have been prompted to follow our example. Queensland's ability to respond with joint rural and urban fire crew task forces was also held up as the way ahead. This system was employed just recently at the devastating fires on the Granite Belt.

However, it must be remembered that firefighters can only do so much in terms of protecting property. The onus is also on land-holders to responsibly fire-manage their properties. People living in rural areas or people in metropolitan areas whose houses back on to the bush need to be prepared for the worst. This is just by general house cleaning—cleaning debris and overhanging branches from their houses as well as clearing roofing gutters. Anyone considering controlled burning on their property must first contact their local fire station or fire warden to obtain a permit and get further advice.

An important point the minister and the fire chief have made many times before is that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will not place the lives of its staff and volunteers at risk. It is unfair and unconscionable to jeopardise the safety or wellbeing of our firefighters in order to protect property or the environment, especially if the owner or occupier of that property has not
taken any steps to reduce their fire hazards. The safety of firefighters will not be placed at risk due
to poor fire management by property owners and managers. I am sure there would be members
of this House who would agree.

I think it is also important to point out to the House the great efforts of local councils in
addressing grass and bushfire risk. The Gold Coast City Council's bushfire management plan,
developed a few years ago in conjunction with local fiers, has long been held up as one of the
best of its type, not only in Queensland but also in Australia. Likewise, in recent years a range of
other local governments in the south-east of the state, where the greatest bushfire threat is, have
developed their own plans. Many local councillors in the electorate of Burnett are also volunteer
rural fiers, confirming the close relationship of councils and the Queensland Fire and Rescue
Service. These local plans, combined with the proactive actions of the state's 50,000 urban and
rural fiers, will provide land-holders with the support they need to protect their homes.

The bush and grassfire risk Queensland is currently facing has been highlighted publicly and
to parliament several times in recent weeks and months. Just last week the Courier-Mail ran a
large story highlighting that more than half of Queensland is regarded as having a high grass and
bushfire risk, according to the latest information collected for the Queensland Fire and Rescue
Service. That risk analysis reveals that 57 per cent of Queensland was considered to have a high
grassfire risk, 22 per cent a moderate risk and 21 per cent a low risk. The only reason large areas
of the state have moderate or low risk is that the ongoing drought has resulted in vast areas of
Queensland having little or no vegetation. As the minister said earlier, Queensland is well
prepared to meet the upcoming bushfire season with a well-coordinated interdepartmental
approach to any fires that may develop.

Time expired.

Mr JOHNSTON (Gregory—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.44 p.m.): In speaking to
the motion moved by the member for Nanango the member for Noosa said that Queensland fire
authorities are fully prepared. There is no doubt that Queensland fire authorities are fully
prepared—they do a great job with the resources they have available to them—but it must be
remembered that one of the principles of society is to do the right thing; that is, not to turn our
backs on life. Pyromaniacs are in the same mould as terrorists. They terrorise communities.

The Ash Wednesday fires in Victoria and the fires south of Sydney last year resulted in
innocent people losing their lives and/or losing their property. Good fiers and volunteers put
their lives on the line because of irresponsible idiots. There have been fires this year at
Ballandean. One lady has already lost her life. Please God, we are not going to see anyone else
lose their lives in Queensland this year.

We must be prepared whether fires are started naturally or by foul means. National Parks
should not be excepted from the rule. They must burn back during the winter months. They must
manage their resource in the same way as anybody else. They must be responsible in their
actions. With a dry season such as we are currently subjected to, those national parks will be an
inferno waiting to happen, in the same way as any other property that has abundant fuel.

I refer to the eucalypt type forests that are found in not only the eastern corridor of
Queensland but also in dry stretches of the arid inland. Unfortunately, a lot of it does not have a
blade of grass to pick your tooth, let alone burn. We must be prepared for the worst. At the same
time, we must not be putting the lives of innocent citizens and fiers at risk because of the
irresponsible and gutless actions of so many cowards out there who want to see somebody else's
life a misery, the same as theirs is a misery.

Governments must show leadership on fire prevention, fire control and fire safety. I am not
saying that the government is not showing leadership on these issues, but the elimination of that
fuel is absolutely paramount. I know that through the eighties and early nineties we had some dry
times, but we are seeing one of the driest periods since about 1965. That requires burning back,
the establishment of fire breaks and the clearing of fuel around homes.

I have seen homes in suburban Brisbane with leaves in the gutters and eucalypt leaves on
the roofs. If a fire started there, the whole neighbourhood would be burnt out. I urge the minister's
inspectors to do a proper and full-scale inspection of all property in urban Brisbane, or anywhere
in the state for that matter. That is precisely what this motion is all about—providing a safe
environment for the citizens of Queensland, regardless of where they live. At the same time, the
losers are the ones who do the right thing.
All the money in the world will not fix the problem. The only way to fix the problem is to throw commonsense at it. Commonsense is to put fire prevention measures in place to eliminate the problem before it even starts. Commonsense involves burning back, taking precautionary measures and having water tankers at hand. There is a situation tonight at Mount Kynock in Toowoomba. It is ablaze. The member for Toowoomba South, the Leader of the Opposition, has spoken to the Premier this evening because of the grave situation there. The town is half blacked out. Traffic lights are on the blink. Water is a scarce commodity there at the moment.

Even the Aboriginals, who were in control of this continent for so many thousands of years, burnt off at the right time of the year, but we do not see rhyme nor reason in doing that. This motion moved by the member for Nanango is a very responsible one. It seeks to ensure true leadership on this issue. I urge everybody in this House to support this motion.

Time expired.

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (6.49 p.m.): In rising to support the amendment moved by the minister, let me say firstly that in the electorate of Fitzroy, which covers some 44,000 square kilometres, I have 39 rural bush fire brigades. I know very well the commitment of those rural fire brigade members. I know how much of their time they give, at times putting at risk their own lives to protect the community and the property of those in their districts. They go out and they work very, very hard to make sure that the people in their area, if they can possibly get away with it, do not have to suffer the heartbreaking that bushfires can bring.

I have a very close working relationship with many of the rural brigades. I can say confidently in this place that rural fire brigade members acknowledge and appreciate the commitment of Labor governments over the past 12 years in upgrading the firefighting fleet and the provision of safety equipment. Under Labor governments, Queensland’s rural bush fire brigades have become efficient, effective fighting units. This is a big improvement on the demoralised underfunded firefighting units that were allowed to flounder under the National Party.

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr PEARCE: The member should not sit opposite yapping away trying to tell us that we are not committed to looking after rural fire brigades in this state, because we are and we are very, very proud of what we have done.

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! The member for Darling Downs!

Mr PEARCE: I am glad to see that they are all awake. Following the disastrous fires in New South Wales in early 1994, an audit was commissioned of operational preparedness in the event of widespread bushfire activity in Queensland. A recommendation from that audit was for the setting up of an interdepartmental committee to coordinate fire management and responses across government. A committee, currently under the chairmanship of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service assistant commissioner of rural operations and with representation from the major government land management agencies as well as the Brisbane City Council and the Bureau of Meteorology, meets on a regular basis.

The role of the committee is to provide a forum for the coordination of policy and procedures relating to rural fire management in order to achieve a consistent, comprehensive and whole-of-government approach to the management of bushfire hazard reduction and suppression activities. The committee has brought about a high degree of commonality and compatibility across the agencies in the area of training, equipment, incident management and communications. As a result of this high level of cooperation, a joint incident control room has been established at the Beerburrum Forest Station and joint exercises involving the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the Department of Primary Industries, Forestry and National Parks personnel were conducted at a number of centres, including Yarraman and Maryborough prior to the fire season.

The use of the Australian interagency incident management system/incident control system ensures that there is uniformity of command and control at multiagency incidents, thus enhancing operational effectiveness and, more importantly, the safety of firefighters. This is about everybody working together and understanding where they are going.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is not only involved in fire suppression and hazard reduction during the cooler months, it is also committed to bushfire safety, education and keeping the community informed about fire activities and potential threat. Before I go on, can I just say one thing: unfortunately, government agencies and firefighting services can do only so much.
Everybody who represents rural electorates knows this. The public and those in the line of fire
must accept that they have a responsibility to be proactive in preparing themselves and their
property for a fire that could erupt without warning. We all know how that happens. Those
members who come from the land would know how fast a fire can get going and how fast it can
move. Every individual has a responsibility to make sure that they prepare themselves and their
property for fire just as those government agencies that have a responsibility to look after land
must do whatever they can. This is about everybody working together to ensure that the best
precautions are put in place. Even then under severe circumstances where we have out-of-control
fires, the best prepared situations can still erupt into a situation where people can lose property
and lives.

This year, firefighters have been particularly concerned about people living in semirural and
urban fringe areas. Already a number of fires have threatened communities around Queensland.
The most recent example has been the tragic loss of life and property experienced by the
residents of the semirural townships of Ballandean and Glen Alpine in the south-west of the state.

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

**AYES, 51**—Attwood, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham,
Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lee, Livingstone, McGrady, McNamara, Miller,
Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reilly, Reynolds, N. Roberts, Rodgers,

**NOES, 20**—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Kingston, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone,
Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Sheldon, Simpson, Watson. Tellers: Lester, Springborg

Resolved in the affirmative.

**Question**—That the motion, as amended, be agreed to—put; and the House divided—

**AYES, 51**—Attwood, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham,
Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, McGrady, McNamara, Miller,
Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reilly, Reynolds, N. Roberts, Rodgers,

**NOES, 20**—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Kingston, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone,
Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Sheldon, Simpson, Watson. Tellers: Lester, Springborg

Resolved in the affirmative.

**ADJOURNMENT DEBATE**

**Hon A. M. BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (7.06 p.m.) I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

**Sugar Industry**

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (7.06 p.m.): The sugar industry feels very much betrayed
by the so-called rescue packages recently handed down by both the state and federal
governments. It is painfully obvious that neither government cares about our primary producers
anymore—whether they be in sugar, fishing, timber, dairying, racing, tobacco or even the small
miners as they charge destructively down the road of globalisation and user pays. The sugar
industry is appalled at the Queensland package which consists of a meagre $30 million over four
years. That is about the cost of the footbridge over the Brisbane River. It equates to about
$7.5 million per year spread across some 5,000 cane farmers in Queensland. The $20 million so-
called low interest money made available in the budget at more than six per cent interest has
proven to be a failure as I understand only one grower has found it useful—and that for just
$23,000 or so. If that almost non-existent uptake does not tell this government it has no idea of
what assistance farmers really need, I do not know what would. The rate of the low interest loan
scheme is far too high and, more importantly, I think it is set at a level at which the Beattie
government would get a real rate of return. They want to make money on the deal and they call
that helping!

When people gouge Queenslanders in times of trouble by overcharging for groceries or
petrol after a cyclone, it is I believe called profiteering. That perhaps may be a better description
of the low interest package that members opposite are trying to disguise as help. The
government's own publication *The Way Forward* speaks of four-year periods. Those time frames
may be well and good for an industry with time on its side, but that is not something the sugar
industry has. It needs help and it needs help now. There is no secret about what the sugar
industry needs. Among other things, it needs a sure market to bring about an ethanol industry; but this government and the federal government have proven themselves unable to move any faster than a wet week of Mondays. Perhaps it is the same sense of urgency which has this government's Health Department delivering waiting lists of more than four years for some services in my electorate. It is a continuous source of dismay for me to see this government operate in a way which is so irrelevant to the average Queenslander.

The sugar industry, with its tens of thousands of Queensland jobs at stake, is a clear example. The Beattie government thinks it has put together a good package. Industry representatives say it is so bad that they cannot accept it. Industry members say that it will not help anyone at all. Everyone but the government appears to think it is nothing short of a betrayal. I call on the members opposite to listen to those average working Queenslanders who are telling them loud and clear that with what they are doing right now they are no help at all.

Glasshouse Mountains Ulysses Club

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (7.09 p.m.): The Ulysses Club was first formed by Stephen Dearnley and five of his mates in their 50s and 60s in Wollongong in 1983. There are now close to 1,800 members who simply share a love of motorcycle riding. The club is for the more senior motorcycle enthusiasts. Between 40 and 49 years, members are considered juniors, and at 50 years members become a senior member. The Ulysses are Australia wide. A club in the Caboolture area was established in 1992 and now the Glasshouse Mountains Ulysses Club has around 250 members. Every year, the club fundraises for many local groups and individuals who need a helping hand. I was fortunate to be present when the club has handed over cheques to the local Donnybrook Rural Fire Brigade and, more recently, provided $500 to the Caboolture Special School for some shades to cover playground equipment. They have also donated to Make-a-Wish, the cancer and leukaemia foundations, Camp Quality, Aspley Special School, Toogoolawah Respite Centre, Linville Picnic Races, the Salvation Army, Hazeldene Rural Fire Brigade, Caboolture War Veteran's Home and the Arthritis Foundation, which is the club's primary charity.

Some of their routine and regular jobs include visiting aged persons homes and conducting the annual Toy Run which has taken in the Caboolture and Redcliffe hospitals. They volunteer at the local yearly air spectacular, the aero museum display days and recently the Farm Fantastic as parking attendants, helping with security and general cleaning duties. They have also lent support to foster groups, cerebral palsy sufferers, both adults and children, and have helped raise money for wheelchairs and other medical aids. The club has been recognised with a number of awards including a special Australia Day Award in 2000 in recognition of its efforts in fundraising within the Caboolture shire and a Year of the Volunteer Award from the Queensland government in 2001.

On Premier Peter Beattie's recent visit to Bribie Island where he officially opened the Pumicestone state electorate office, he was given a Ulysses escort by my friend Terry Crompton to a social barbecue organised by Labor members and supporters. The Glasshouse Mountains Ulysses Club is an honorary member of the Caboolture Aero Club and meets there every Wednesday evening. Many members see the Ulysses Club as their family. They love to get out whenever they can, ride together in this great country of ours and follow the club's motto of 'Grow Old Disgracefully'. I congratulate all members on their continued efforts in making a difference to many people's lives. We all are very proud of you.

Rural Medical Services, James Cook University School of Medicine

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (7.11 p.m.): Recently, I was made aware that the first intake of students studying medicine at the James Cook University School of Medicine are approaching the halfway milestone of their studies. I offer my full support to these students who upon graduation have the potential to significantly improve health services in many rural and remote areas of Queensland. I understand that of the 64 students who initially enrolled in the first intake of this degree in Townsville approximately 40 per cent were of rural background and 50 per cent were from north Queensland. One such person with a rural background is a student by the name of Kate Gibson. Kate was accepted in the first intake at JCU's Townsville based medical degree after spending her first year out of high school studying a correspondence degree in rural science with the University of New England and as a jillaroo on her parents' 182,000 hectare Chudleigh Park property.
In January 2000, Kate was quoted as saying that ‘rural people are used to doctors just passing through’ and ‘it is important that doctors stay in western towns and become part of the community’. When Kate faced the interview panel prior to being accepted into her degree, she told the panel that she wanted to give something back to rural communities and she wanted career fulfilment not in the city but in the inland. Kate's approach to her studies and outlook on her impending career are to be commended. She will play an integral part in the survival of rural communities and in the health and wellbeing of the populace of such.

Of course, there is no doubt that many other students studying medicine have similar desires to help those in rural and remote communities. The large percentage of students hailing from areas outside large metropolitan areas certainly hints towards the possibility of their going on to provide health services in rural and regional sections of the state. There are a great number of vacancies within the health sector in north Queensland at present, with many small towns and rural communities struggling to attract and retain health professionals. The issue of these health shortages in non-urban areas is one that needs to be addressed without delay. I am fully supportive of the commitment that this first intake of medical students in JCU’s School of Medicine has demonstrated in carving out a future for themselves in the field of medicine as well as hopefully progressing to become caring health professionals in the communities in which they are so desperately needed. I think it is commendable that we have these young people who are prepared to make the sacrifice and provide the necessary inputs as far as their studies are concerned.

Outdoor Recreation; Dirt Biking

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (7.14 p.m.): Last week I attended the launch of the 2001 South East Queensland Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey. The survey was released by the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport, the Hon. Terry Mackenroth. I congratulate the Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation on the research it conducted. This research contributes to its 1998 study which highlights the huge demand for outdoor recreation, particularly in the south-east corner of Queensland. The activities undertaken by people in the great outdoors in south-east Queensland include picnicking, walking or nature study, camping, bicycle riding, horse riding, water activities, driving two-wheel-drive and four-wheel-drive vehicles, driving other vehicles, riding on motorised watercraft, riding on non-motorised watercraft—I prefer to call that sailing—abseiling and rock climbing. I am proud to stand here today and say that I undertake many of these activities.

To show that the government is responding to the demand for outdoor recreation, I wish to compliment Steve MacDonald, the manager, and his staff in the Regional Landscape Unit within the Environmental Protection Agency. Steve and the government in general are attending to the needs of the outdoor recreation community in a number of ways; for example, through the Heritage Trails Network.

Dirt bikers are a very much neglected group in society. We spend thousands of dollars supporting a wide range of sporting activities. I do not think that all levels of government acknowledge what the dirt biking fraternity contributes. We laud many other sporting heroes, yet we have not heard of dirt bikers such as Chad Reed, who came second in the World 250 Championships in 2001, and who came first in the 125 East Supercross Championships in America this year; Stefan Merriman's was first in the world Enduro championship last year and second this year; and Shane Watts, Andrew McFarlane and many other dirt bike heroes are out there flying the flag for Australia and are competing on the world stage. However, they do not get the media recognition they deserve. In many ways, they do not get recognition from all levels of government.

It is important that all levels of government acknowledge what is occurring in the great outdoors and contribute in a range of ways towards fostering these activities. Dirt bike riders are sometimes seen as antisocial, yet this is an extremely physical activity. Most dirt bikers are law-abiding citizens. It is just that they choose to undertake this activity in the great outdoors. I am a dirt bike rider. I care about the environment. I wish to ride in environmentally friendly ways in areas that are managed to minimise the impact on the environment. I would like to see all levels of government acknowledge that this is a sport that some people choose. I do not choose to play chess, but some people do. I do not knock their sport. I would like the government to support dirt biking.
Drivers Licence Renewal Fees

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (7.18 p.m.): Only a matter of weeks ago we were debating a disallowance motion in relation to increased fees for licences. Mrs Nell McEachran is 85 years old. She went to pay her drivers licence today. From 21 October the cost of a one-year licence rose. It was $11.75. When she went to pay for her licence today it was $22.95. There is a licence fee of $8.95 and an administration fee of $14. The minister justified those increases by saying that he was introducing a more cost neutral basis on which to renew these licences. What appears to have been overlooked is the fact that there are people in our community who are only allowed to renew their licence for 12 months and, therefore—I hope inadvertently—will be penalised because of these rises in licence fees.

I believe someone at 80 years of age cannot renew their licence for more than a year. Every year they have to undergo a medical, have their eyes tested, obtain a letter from their doctor and take that to the Department of Transport in order to have their licence renewed. The purpose of the cost increases was that if a person only renewed their licence for 12 months they were increasing the administrative costs to the Department of Transport. A two-year licence went from $23.50 to $31.90, a three-year licence went from $35.25 to $48.85, a four-year licence went from $47 to $49.80 and the cost of a five-year licence remained the same.

I am asking the Minister for Transport to give recognition to the fact that there are sectors of the community who can only renew their licence for 12 months. It is inappropriate and inequitable that those people are disadvantaged in an area where they can do nothing about it. If she had a choice and could renew her licence for four years or five years and face only a small increase or non-increase, the argument could be justified for the one-year, two-year, three-year, four-year and five-year licence. This lady's complaint shows that there are a number of people in our community—the more senior people—who can only renew their licence for 12 months. I ask the minister to review this structure so that these people are exempt from the fee increase. They go back to $58.75 divided by 5. In this way they are not disadvantaged by the obligation that the government places on them because of their senior years.

We all have elderly people in our electorates—many of them in their eighties—because we have a much more active community. These people like to retain their licences. I would hate to see them disadvantaged. I seek the minister's response.

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**Rick Thornberry and Anthony Mundine**

**Hon. K. W. HAYWARD** (Kallangur—ALP) (7.21 p.m.): Tonight I rise to speak about two young men, who will box each other at the Carrara Basketball Stadium on the Gold Coast on Saturday, 2 November. These two men are a Queenslander, Rick Thornberry, and a New South Welshman, Anthony Mundine. I am informed that the Carrara Basketball Stadium is in the electorate of Di Reilly, the member for Mudgeeraba.

This is one of the biggest sporting events to occur in Queensland this year, with the stadium nearly sold out as of today and enormous pay-for-view television interest. As I have said in this parliament before, boxing is a minor sport in Australia compared with most of the world. The member for Redlands probably found one that is a bit more minor when he just spoke about dirt bike riding. However, compared with the rest of the world boxing is a minor sport in Australia. The disappointment in that for Rick Thornberry is that he is better known in the United Kingdom and Europe than he is in Queensland.

Anthony is a different matter, having carved out a career as a top class Rugby League player before switching to professional boxing. By any standard of any member of this parliament, he is a publicity magnet who is sought after by the media for his comments or opinions on most things. That is where the differences between both men end and the similarities begin.

Both these men have very close family involvement in their preparation for boxing events. Rick is trained by his brother Noel at Gatton, and Anthony is trained by his father Tony at Redfern in Sydney. Both have fathers who were professional boxers. In fact, Tony Mundine fought for a world title against one of the great boxers, Carlos Monzon, before there was an alphabet of boxing organisations and only one title in each weight division. Both Rick and Anthony are superbly fit and determined athletes working to a training schedule so demanding and so time consuming that few of us here could even think about it.

These schedules reinforce the closeness of family involvement between brothers in Rick's case and father and son in Anthony's case. Most other advisers, to the extent that they are sought, are invisible or simply do not exist, such is the bond between boxer and trainer. The
realilty is that people who make claims about how they provide advice are generally fooling themselves. Perhaps the only person who has any public profile, apart from the individual boxers and their trainers, is Anthony’s manager, Khoda Nasser. Khoda is a hard working, very intelligent, loyal young man who is no way overstates his role in the Mundine camp—certainly when he has spoken to me. It is a pleasure to see him sitting in the parliamentary adviser’s box this evening.

Both boxers have previously fought in world title bouts and have been defeated. That is why this fight is so important. The winner will receive another opportunity for a world title shot and to fulfil their ambition to be champion of the world. I wish both boxers a safe passage through the fight. I am sure the thoughts of many people will be with them as they do battle to realise their dreams.

Roadworks, Maroochydore

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (7.24 p.m.): I rise to speak on some significant issues concerning my electorate of Maroochydore. It is a fast growing area. I know many members can get up in this House and mention how they have a great need for road infrastructure. This applies equally to the Sunshine Coast. This matter has been felt right across the area. The key regional centre, which has been identified as Maroochydore, has felt the brunt of that.

I want to speak about two studies, one which is about to begin and another which is coming to the end of its timeframe. These studies are looking at the future roadwork needs of my electorate. I have been critical of the length of time it has taken for the Pacific Paradise road study to be completed. It is not yet finished but one of the last consultation phases is set to begin with some of the options going on display at the Maroochy Airport—otherwise known as the Sunshine Coast Airport—between 2 November and 16 November.

I urge local residents to look at this road option and have their say. It proposes a bypass option for the community of Pacific Paradise. It looks at how to reduce through traffic in that community while diverting traffic onto the Sunshine Motorway further north, and altering the configuration near the Twin Waters entrance due to the increase in development in that area. A lot of community concerns have been taken on board but this will be the last opportunity for people to have their say in regard to this plan.

I believe that the state government needs to do all it can to ensure that the recommendations that come out of this process, subject to the community's final consultation, are taken on board and put into the next road implementation plan as soon as possible. I refer there to next year's road implementation plan. I am concerned that this road study, which was agreed to by my colleague Vaughan Johnson when he was Minister for Transport and Main Roads, and which has been taken over by the current minister, has taken so long. I urge that the proposed roadworks are put into the future budgetary process.

The Sunshine Motorway 2032 study is about to begin. Once again I urge Sunshine Coast residents to be involved in the consultation process. This is about upgrading the interchanges in the road corridors and networks surrounding the Sunshine Motorway. It is about more than the motorway itself. It is about recognising the need for a secondary road network. This will be in consultation with the Maroochy Shire Council.

I am also flagging to the Mooloolaba community that we need Maroochy Shire Council to look at the long-term parking and planning in that area, particularly in regard to a possible park and ride facility being set aside near the motorway.

Whitsunday Tourism Awards

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (7.27 p.m.): The Whitsunday Tourism Awards were held last Saturday, 19 October. The night saw the gathering of local tourism operators, community leaders and Whitsunday residents in a Proserpine transformed to Las Vegas for the night to celebrate our vibrant tourism industry and witness the presentation of awards to outstanding operators and individuals in 23 categories.

We in the Whitsundays are blessed with many fantastic tourism venues and operators. I certainly did not envy the judges in their task of selecting winners from the field of high quality nominees. However, I was absolutely delighted that the award for significant festivals and events went to an event funded by the state government and coordinated by our local Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff. This was the celebration of the Whitsundays community day on Whitehaven Beach. This event was held as part of the centenary of federation celebrations last
year and involved the transportation of over 2,000 locals to Whitehaven Beach on Whitsunday Island. While the event was coordinated by QPWS staff, it was in every way a true community event with the Whitsunday Shire Council and a plethora of local businesses and community groups pitching in to ensure the success of the day.

Some of the groups who were so generous in their support in celebrating the Whitsunday event were winners themselves at the awards night. Fantasea Cruises won three awards, including the category of significant tourist attraction and unique accommodation. Both of these awards are associated with the Fantasea Reef World pontoon which is moored on the Great Barrier Reef and provides a wonderful reef experience for visitors. Hamilton Island Limited was also a big winner at the awards, picking up four awards.

The 2001 Hahn Premium Race Week hosted by Hamilton Island won the major festivals and events category while recognition was also given in the categories of meeting and business tourism, tourism product marketing and luxury accommodation. Obviously Hamilton Island Ltd is a very professional outfit that offers a most desirable product. This year the award for outstanding contribution by an individual was presented to Whitsunday Shire Council Deputy Mayor Tolma Camm for her vision and dedication to the creation of the Queensland Marine Academy based in the Whitsundays. Tolma has enormous energy and determination and certainly deserves the accolades she has received.

On a bittersweet note, this year the major tour and transport operators award went to Heliaust Tourism, a company that provides air transport in and around the Whitsunday area. Sadly, the recent air tragedy in the Whitsundays had connections to this group. I know that we all wish managing director Alan Sweeney and his staff well for the future. On that note, I pay my respects to the family and friends of the victims of the terrible Piper Cherokee crash that took the lives of six people on 26 September. The 2002 Whitsunday Tourism Awards were a great success and I place on record my congratulations to all nominees and winners, many of whom I have not had time to mention individually tonight. The tourism industry in the Whitsundays is vibrant and exciting and the level of competition for awards is extremely high, making these awards very prestigious. I am now looking forward to the Queensland Tourism Awards on 29 November where I am sure the Whitsundays will be a shining light.

Land Titles

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (7.30 p.m.): A constituent in the Nanango electorate was extremely shocked to be told by an unofficial source that his properties in the Kingaroy area had caveats placed on them by several businesses. He was even more surprised to find that he apparently had been credited with property in Brisbane—at Indooroopilly in fact—which also had caveats against it and that he supposedly lived there as well. The only reason my constituent became aware of these things was through a personal friendship with a member of an institution he dealt with regularly who informed him that his properties had caveats on them. My constituent employed the services of a solicitor in an endeavour to find out how this had occurred and hopefully to resolve the matter. During the solicitor’s research as to how this had occurred it was revealed that a person of the same name residing in the Brisbane area was presently involved in bankruptcy proceedings.

A quick online search of the Legalco online information system revealed that the Queensland Department of Natural Resources valid title search statement, which was easily obtained, was in fact incorrect. How many other Queenslanders have found themselves in similar circumstances and who are currently paying or will pay in the future for a system which apparently has no appropriate checks and balances to ensure errors are not made when placing caveats on property? How can caveats be placed over my constituent’s properties when not only is he not the person involved in the bankruptcy but his wife, who is a joint owner, has a completely different name? There appears to have been no identity or ownership checks made and no verification that the owner of these properties was in fact one and the same person.

Where were the checks by the solicitors acting for the businesses placing the caveats on the properties? Where was their duty of care to their clients? Are there no processes DNR must follow to ensure that proof of ownership is made before any person’s properties have caveats applied to them? Surely the owner must be advised by the Titles Office that a search had been undertaken concerning his properties. Why was there not an onus on the bank to notify their client? Why, when all DNR correspondence was sent to and responded to from Kingaroy, was no notice sent
to the Kingaroy address? If my constituent had attempted to borrow money on his assets, buy anything on hire purchase or conduct any number of other transactions he would have been unable to do so. Access to all credit information is readily available. Who is to say that such information has not already been accessed and in years to come my constituent is subjected to adverse reactions of those with whom he would choose to deal?

It is so easy to have one’s name added to the bad credit rating list but extremely hard to have it removed. In fact, it is five years before it is removed if no other breaches occur. His reputation could have been seriously sullied through no fault of his own. In truth, how do we know that it has not been already? If the unthinkable occurred—and no-one would want this to happen—and constituents were involved in a fatal accident, how would their children know that the parents were in fact not bankrupt? How would they know to fight the gross wrong done to their parents and their reputation? Who is going to reimburse this constituent for the costs involved? I have brought this matter to the attention of the House in the hope that the minister will tighten current legislation to ensure that this type of situation does not occur again to any other innocent Queenslander and seek the minister’s response.

Agnes Waters Police Station

Mr STRONG (Burnett—ALP) (7.33 p.m.): Last week I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the Agnes Waters Police Station with Minister Tony McGrady and Commissioner Bob Atkinson. It has been a hard slog for the community of Agnes Waters—

Mr Nuttall: Not as much as Woodgate, mate.

Mr STRONG: No, that is true. I would say it would be equal. Woodgate is nice; Agnes Waters is nice, too. The community also had a gravel road that was one of the worst yet it had a high usage rate. I cannot name all of the people who had a hand in these improvements, but I will name a few who seemed to be the leading lights of this push. They were Ian Growcott, Councillor Josie Meng and Councillor Tom Jefferies from the Miriam Vale Shire Council. Apart from these people being involved in most other issues in the area—state emergency services, medical health and so forth—these people have been lobbying for the police station for quite some time. As with most people in Agnes Waters, they have a good relationship with Constable Simon Young who has been doing the job more or less on his own for the last couple of years working out of a house. One can imagine a police officer working from the house in which their family lives and the calls they would get and people fronting up on their doorstep early on Easter morning and especially during Christmas. That made it very difficult for Simon to fulfil his commitment to the community.

Before the construction of this facility, members can imagine a police officer having to make a round trip to Bundaberg with a criminal. It takes about three to four hours—a long time for the police officer to be away from the area considering that all that was needed was a lockup. I commend the people of Agnes Waters. It is a tremendous facility. It is a separate police station with a lockup for two. There is also the house of the officer in charge and additional accommodation for relieving officers. This is a tremendous asset to the community. I must mention in passing that someone has left their stuffed toy near their seat, so I would ask the attendants to attend to that. As I said, I commend the Agnes Waters community and commend the minister for the development of this facility. Although I played a small part in it, it was a pleasure being there.

Time expired.
Motion agreed to.
The House adjourned at 7.37 p.m.