WEDNESDAY, 26 MARCH 2003

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

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Honourable members, I have to report that today I received from the Auditor-General a report titled *Audit Report No. 6 2002-03: results of audits performed for 2001-02 of local governments*, and I table the said report.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Suncorp Stadium

Mrs Edmond from 934 petitioners requesting the House to ensure that in relation to the Lang Park parking plan the city council considers the aspect of mobility of permits for permit holders (ensuring they can freely move around the proposed catchment on match days, not just restricted to our street) and consider a 15 minute time constraint as opposed to 5 minutes in finalising the permit plan for the benefit of residents.

Mooring Regulations

Mr English from 236 petitioners requesting the House to review the current mooring regulations with a view to requiring tenders and dinghies to adhere to Marine Service Queensland's mooring standards but exempting them from application and annual mooring fees.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

South Sea Islander Foundation

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.32 a.m.): Later today I will be hosting a fundraising lunch for a tertiary scholarship scheme for Australian South Sea Islanders. Australian South Sea Islanders are members of a proud community which has contributed much to the development of Queensland. However, our treatment of South Sea Islanders and their descendants has until recently not been something of which we can be proud. Many South Sea Islanders were kidnapped or tricked into coming here in the 19th century to work in our rural industries. Many men, women and children were treated as slaves. South Sea Islanders and their descendants have suffered racial discrimination and social and economic disadvantages and many of them are still living in conditions well below the standard of living enjoyed by most of us.

As part of our efforts to help Australian South Sea Islanders overcome these disadvantages my government is keen to support the scholarship program. The program is an initiative of the Australian South Sea Islander Community Foundation, which has been established to help people of South Sea Islander heritage gain a tertiary education. It is an initiative which reflects my Smart State vision for Queensland and my government's vision. The foundation has been set up under the umbrella of the Public Trustee's Queensland Community Foundation, meaning no administrative fees are drawn from donations. Therefore, every dollar given to the foundation benefits Australian South Sea Islander students. The initiative has the full support of the board's patron, Mal Meninga, a proud Australian South Sea Islander who is an excellent role model for the community. The scholarship scheme is all about trying to create more role models like Mal—in business, education, medicine, industry and agriculture.

To date, two Queensland universities—James Cook and Central Queensland—have each offered two permanent scholarship places. I am delighted to announce that a third Queensland university, the University of the Sunshine Coast, is joining the program. It will offer a scholarship place from the second semester this year. I would also like to congratulate the winners of this year's scholarships. They are Celeste Corowa and Casey Geissmann from Central Queensland University; and Karen Andrew and Belinda Arrow from James Cook University. I wish them well with their studies. If they become half as good a role model as Mal Meninga they will be doing well.

I thank members of the Australian South Sea Islander Community Foundation Board for their contribution to this program. I urge all members to lend their support to an initiative that is helping to right some past wrongs and that is opening up opportunities for talented Queenslanders. I also wish to thank those members who will be attending the lunch today.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.35 a.m.): Negotiations are under way on the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services, and this should help Smart State companies increase the export of services through reducing red tape. This would mean more jobs for Queenslanders.

Services account for roughly a fifth of Queensland's exports and are a major contributor to job creation in Queensland. Services are a major focus of the Queensland Government Trade Strategy—Export Solutions. The Education and Training Industry Export Strategy aims to double Queensland's education and training export earnings to $1 billion and establish Queensland as a leading, quality provider in Australia.

Liberalisation of access for Queensland services exporters to overseas markets will directly support the government's trade goals by providing improved export opportunities. In other words, if we can get access to their markets it will mean jobs at home. At the same time, the government is aware of community concern about the General Agreement on Trade in Services and a perception that it could have a negative effect on the delivery of public services. I make it very clear here and now that the Queensland government will not support any proposal during these negotiations that is not good for trade and good for the delivery of public services. In particular, the government will not agree to any proposal that has negative effects on the delivery of educational and health services. I also note that the agreement explicitly exempts measures aimed at protecting public safety and public morals. They are a matter, and will continue to be, for our sole responsibility.

The Commonwealth is consulting with the Queensland government on its proposed initial offer, which responds to requests from some World Trade Organisation members for the liberalisation of certain aspects of Australia's services sectors. On Monday, as I had previously indicated to the House, cabinet endorsed a response to the Commonwealth in respect of its proposed initial offer. Information on the Commonwealth's proposed initial offer to the World Trade Organisation has been provided in confidence at the request of the Commonwealth, and I am not at liberty to outline the contents of the proposal. That is a matter for Mark Vaile and the federal government. If they wish to release it, we would be quite happy. However, I believe it is essential for the Australian offer to be made public so that the public can understand exactly what is being discussed. Secrecy in this case, and in all cases, would breed suspicion. We need to reassure the public that there is no threat to public services by being open and transparent. I will be writing to the Commonwealth Minister for Trade to reinforce this view.

This government will continue work with the Commonwealth to not only ensure that the interests of Queensland's community are protected but also to identify areas where requests can be made of other countries to deliver better access for Queensland's services exporters. I have provided that information to the House as a result of issues that have been raised with me.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Export Solutions

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.38 a.m.): I wish to highlight some recent trade achievements. Our push to increase the number of export companies entering the export market under our Export Solutions strategy for trade is delivering results. With one in four jobs in our regions and one in five jobs overall depending on exports, a thriving exports sector is critical to achieving our Smart State goals of boosting economic development and creating more jobs.

Export Solutions, our strategy for exports, aims to increase the number of new exporters by 20 per cent by 2006. This financial year alone we are aiming to add 120 new exporters to the ranks of Queensland firms competing on the global level. We are well on the way to achieving that target, with 94 firms entering the export market for the first time as at the end of February.

However, we are not only directing our efforts at the private sector. My government is actively pursuing opportunities in the aid and development sector for private companies and government agencies. The push has been so successful that Queensland has moved from fourth to second place in terms of the total value of AusAID contracts secured by Australian states and territories.

In the 2001-02 financial year, Queensland firms secured contracts worth almost $96 million in what is a knowledge-intensive area. So this is another example of the Smart State in action. Some of the contracts won by Queensland companies include APAC Health Systems' $7.8 million contract to deliver the Solomon Islands Ministry of Health Institutional Strengthening Project; GRM International's $16.4 million contract to deliver the Papua New Guinea Targeted Training Project and Uniquest's $4.08 million Samoa Immigration Project. In addition, agencies such as Queensland Health, the Queensland Police Service and Education Queensland are participating in aid and development projects throughout the Asia Pacific.

Our overseas trade and investment missions have played a key role in opening up new export markets and securing international aid and development projects. The trade missions, which I have led, are essential for developing and maintaining productive, high-level, government-to-government trade relationships that will deliver increased export performance, targeting global supply chains and major project opportunities for Queensland firms and consortia, and

promoting Queensland's key export sectors to current and potential international trade partners. The benefits to be gained are spelt out in a number of cases in my ministerial statement. I seek to incorporate it in *Hansard* for the information of all members.

Leave granted.

The benefits to be gained from such trade missions were clearly highlighted during my trade mission to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, India and Singapore in February.

During the mission I have high level access to a number of influential decision-makers in these markets.

In Dubai, I announced the opening of Charters Towers Gold's office at the Gold and Diamond Park; the company has since reported a strong initial response to its move into Dubai.

In India, I witnessed the signing of a Licensing Manufacturing Agreement between Queensland firm, AV Syntec, and Indian firm, Chembond Chemicals. Under the agreement, Chembond will manufacture AV Syntec's range of surface coatings, adhesives and anti-corrosion products.

In India, I also announced that Queensland firm, AWS Clinical Waste, has been awarded an $820,000 World Bank contract to install their systems in 11 district hospitals.

MIM Process technologies has also recently signed a contract to supply a new ISASMELT furnace to Indian mining giant, Sterlite, for a copper smelter and is also supplying them with IsaProcess copper refining technology for a new refinery in India.

In Singapore, I witnessed the signing of a Smart State health education agreement between Griffith University and Singapore's Cornerstone Training Centre. Griffith University is one of only two education providers to have received Singapore Ministry of Education approval for its Bachelor of Nursing (post-registration) program. It is the only major nursing provider at present to have received accreditation from the Singapore Nursing Board and Ministry of Health.

I also led a trade mission to the UK and Europe in October 2002.

In Germany, I showcased Smart State technology which can use waste coal and methane gas to generate electricity.

I also opened an exhibition of Indigenous art in Berlin, exposing the German market to paintings and cast metal sculptures which had never before been shown outside Australia.

I also identified potential opportunities for collaboration and partnership between the biotechnology industry in Bavaria and Queensland. As a consequence of the German visit, Professor Horst Domdey, the Managing Director of BioM will visit Queensland next month to continue discussions on a Queensland-Bavaria strategic agreement based on biotechnology.

A whole-of-government Memorandum of Understanding was also signed in Ireland on my behalf by the Director-General of the Department of State Development.

The Department of Main Roads' commercial arm, RoadTek, the Consortia of Pacific Infrastructure Alliance and Transcore are pursuing trade and investment opportunities in Ireland.

Vietnam is also an emerging market for Queensland, a fact underscored by my visit there in March 2001.

My government has worked extremely hard to build close, mutually beneficial contacts with Vietnam.

That hard work has led to several commercial outcomes including contracts worth almost $13 million for the export of beef and dairy cattle and related services and training being signed and delivered in Vietnam. A further $12 million in contracts is under negotiation.

We also facilitated negotiations between Queensland companies Weathered Howe Engineers, Forgan-Smith Architects and Vietnam's Quang Ninh Province in 2002 .

This resulted in the signing of a groundbreaking heads of agreement in January this year for the commencement of master-planning on a $65 million sports complex in North-east Vietnam.

This project is expected to generate at least 15 new jobs in South-east Queensland alone.

Export Solutions also focuses on innovative ways of getting firms into markets via international supply chains.

A targeted supermarket export initiative is being actively pursued to build market demand for Queensland products.

This has resulted in 25 Queensland food processing companies supplying products to Singapore's NTUC Fairprice and Cold Storage supermarket chains as well as Wellcome and Park 'n Shop Supermarkets in Hong Kong.

Annual export sales are likely to exceed $3 million.

During my recent visit to Singapore, I met Cold Storage representatives and our discussions resulted in a decision to include an additional 12 Queensland food companies in a "Best of Queensland Selection" food promotion running in 30 Cold Storage supermarkets until the end of this month.

Queensland wines are making their mark in the United States.

During a trade mission in March last year, I announced Ballandean Wines had sealed a major deal with South Carolina's biggest independent wine distributor, Capital Wine and Beverage. Two years earlier, I showcased Ballandean's products at a Sister-State signing ceremony with the then South Carolina Governor, Jim Hodges.

Queensland firms are also increasingly succeeding in entering the supply chains of major international mining projects.

For example, a Brisbane-based procurement consultant contracted by the Department of State Development, has introduced more than 40 Queensland suppliers of mining equipment and services to the New Caledonian mining company SLN. To date, 23 of these firms have begun negotiations with SLN; two of them are new exporters. This market entry model has achieved purchase orders and contracts valued at more than $1.7 million, exceeding the sales target of $1.5 million.

Under our South American Mining Initiative, contracts worth more than $10 million have been signed by mining firms targeting opportunities in South America. Through the efforts of Queensland's three South American-based In-Market Facilitators, 80 Queensland-based companies have received advice or assistance.

Participation in the knowledge economy is one of the keys to future export growth and making us the Smart State and we are actively encouraging Queensland firms to take up opportunities in this sector.

Successes include HOK Sport's winning bid to design the Nanjing Sports Park precinct for the 2005 China National Games, a project worth approximately $400 million.

MIM has secured ISASMELT contracts worth $40 million. The Queensland Government utilised its long-standing relationship with China to help MIM secure contracts for ISASMELT technologies.

In Hong Kong in June 2002, I officially opened the University of Southern Queensland's Information Centre.

The Centre was established to increase student enrolments from Hong Kong and attracted almost 200 enrolments in its first student intake.

I would like to mention some additional contracts secured by Queensland firms.

A partnership between GRM International and Sinclair Knight Merz has resulted in a recent successful tender to the Philippine Department of Agriculture/Asian Development Bank for the 'Grain Sector Review and Assistant Project.' It is worth almost $1.5 million.

During my trade mission to Papua New Guinea in December last year, I announced that two Queensland companies had won contracts under the World Bank Mining Sector Institutional Strengthening Technical Assistance Loan to Papua New Guinea.

Terrasearch, based in Townsville, has won a $1.8 million contract to undertake the 'Institutional Strengthening of the Geological Survey and development of Geological Information System Capabilities. This is the company's first export contract.

Brisbane-based company, Exa-Min Technologies, has won a $250,000 contract to undertake the 'Strengthening of Departmental Mineral Tenements Management.'

The Queensland Department of Public Works recently won a $109,000 United Nations contract to review the vehicle procurement procedures for peacekeeping operations.

We are serious about promoting exports.

I want to congratulate the private and public sector companies and agencies making their mark overseas.

I encourage those thinking of entering export markets to take the opportunity to join our trade missions and talk to State Development about Export Solutions and the assistance which may be available under this strategy.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Education and Training Reforms

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.41 a.m.): As members would know, my government has a fixation and that fixation is education and the Smart State. Some might scoff at the Smart State mantra, but their children will not. Among this government's proud boasts is the path we have now placed Queensland on when it comes to education. Be it adding another preschool year, establishing an earn or learn ethos, sharpening the links between high school and TAFEs, or filling the Commonwealth's void and funding universities, we will not slacken when it comes to education. 'Queensland the Smart State: Education and Training Reforms for the Future' is not just a document title with a cute name; it is

a blueprint for this state's future. This is about enhancing our children's prospects in a fiercely competitive world.

Last week, the Education Minister, Anna Bligh, the Employment, Training and Youth and Arts Minister, Matt Foley, and I announced another milestone in taking this state on that path. We announced that around 23,000 Queensland year 10 students will make history when more than 200 schools and 11 TAFE institutes across the state trial the next phase of the Smart State educational reforms.

From July, seven trial areas are to host trials that have the specific task of ensuring that young people between the ages of 15 and 17 are either at school, at work or in training. They are Toowoomba and Roma; Townsville and Mount Isa; Mooloolaba and Murrumba; Gold Coast north and Logan-Beaudesert; Corinda and Ipswich; Fraser-Cooloola and Isis-Burnett; Rockhampton and Emerald. The trials will specifically target the pathways and goals for year 10 students. They will also offer flexible options for school, work and training for students in years 11 and 12. These are the first steps in helping our young people to be earning or learning. As a government, it is vital that we give young people every chance to succeed. It is proven that higher qualifications and training are essential in this highly competitive world.

The government will also provide $11.7 million over the next three years for education and training providers to identify and trial programs and services that re-engage young people who are at risk of leaving learning. Year 10 students could benefit from work placements with employers, flexible timetabling, career education programs and an expanded range of vocational education and training options. We already have working examples to build upon.

The Woodridge State High School is about to appoint a pathways project officer, who will liaise with schools, TAFE colleges and universities in order to show students a distinctive pathway of learning and alternate ways to gain credentials and recognised qualifications. At Beerwah State High School, every student at the school, including high academic achievers, must complete a certificate I in work education. Students are required to complete at least one module of a comprehensive career education course that requires a 60-hour commitment.

These trials that we announced last week sit well with the trial of a preparatory year for children before entering year 1, which is already under way at 39 schools throughout the state. We are not going to stand by idly and neglect young Queenslanders and their future, because we need to make sure that the government is playing a role—and we are. Apart from continuing the existing traditional support for our schools, be warned: if you are a preschooler, upper secondary student or a TAFE or university student, the Smart State is there for you. The Smart State will nurture you and ensure your future. The Smart State is for everyone.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Gold Coast Community Cabinet

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.44 a.m.): Finally, I would like to report that our 59th community cabinet meeting on the Gold Coast was a great success. I want to thank everyone for their support and I seek to incorporate in *Hansard* a report on it for the information of all members.

Leave granted.

Paddy's Day this year was special in that Cabinet met on the Gold Coast.

That meeting—as part of our 59th Community Cabinet—was the fifth time my cabinet has met on the coast since election in 1998.

It is interesting to note that in the preceding 40 years—Cabinet had only met there five times in total.

Our meetings have also been in a two-day format as well.

And what's more Mr Speaker you would think that such a meeting would have a lower number of deputations given the frequency of our visits—in fact it is quite the reverse—we had a record 170 formal deputations.

While there I announced that I have asked Merri Rose to head our local MPs to formulate a response for Cabinet on the schoolies submissions we sought earlier in the year.

I have also invited the Member for Surfers Paradise and the Member for Robina to have input into Merri's group before she takes their submission to Cabinet.

While on the coast we met on the Sunday at the magnificent Tallebudgera Outdoor Recreation Centre where an $18 million redevelopment is under way.

Earlier Mike Reynolds and I officially opened Queensland's most expensive ever fire station at Surfers. The $3.1 million centre is a beaut.

Judy Spence the Families Minister and I also presented local carers with certificates of appreciation.

Anna Bligh released information including that five of the State's 10 newest schools are in this area with another one to open next year.

Matt Foley detailed how we had spent more than $21.5 million in getting more than 6000 Gold Coast jobs in our Breaking the Unemployment Cycle strategy—since 1998 we have created more than 50,000 jobs State wide

Health Minister Wendy Edmond had a series of upgrade and allocation announcements including that Ophthalmology services on the Gold Coast are set to receive a $500,000 boost.

One-off funding has been granted to the Gold Coast Health Service District to employ an additional full time ophthalmologist for six months and an orthoptist for 4 sessions a week.

An orthoptist performs the standardised pre-operative requirements enabling a greater number of patients per session to be seen by the ophthalmologist.

On Monday morning Innovation Information Economy Minister Paul Lucas outlined how a Gold Coast based company has secured a multi-million dollar deal to distribute a high-tech, fibre optic dental curing tip throughout the US.

We also announced improvements between Robina and Gold Coast Airport will form part of the staged extension of the Gold Coast passenger rail line south from Robina.

This was part of Transport Minister Steve Bredhauer's release detailing that the draft impact assessment study (IAS) report Part A for the proposed rail route from Robina to Stewart Road, Tugun has been released.

Cabinet also agreed that that around 23,000 Queensland Year 10 students will make history when more than 200 schools and 11 TAFE institutes across the State trial the next phase of the Smart State educational reforms from July.

We announced seven trial areas—including the Gold Coast—to host the trials that have the specific task of ensuring young people between the ages of 15 and 17 are either at school, at work or in training.

It is part of our "learning or earning" Smart State education fixation that we have

While on the Coast I also congratulated the Raptis Group for adding more excitement to the coast when officially opening the first of their three towers at Surfers.

The 40-storey Skyline Tower I opened is the second stage of a four stage, $400 million redevelopment.

I was last there in October 2000 to open Chevron Renaissance so it was a great pleasure to return to further celebrate the company's success as a leader in the development of first class tourism facilities on the Gold Coast.

The first stage of this development was the retail precinct known as Chevron Walk which has been a major catalyst in revitalising the heart of this great Australian tourist destination.

It's also secured national acclaim by winning the Urban Development Institute of Australia's 2001 inaugural retail development award.

The third stage of the Chevron Renaissance project—Skyline North which will be 50 storeys high—is under construction and scheduled for completion in August next year.

The fourth stage of the project is the third and final tower, Skyline Central, which will be 40 storeys.

This project has involved a workforce of hundreds for more than three years—and more than 350 people will be employed at peak times on the Skyline Central tower during the next year.

That's great news for a Government which has job creation as its main priority.

You all know how important my government believes this part of the state is.

We have played a major role in fostering the growth of the Gold Coast and will continue to do so.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that on the Sunday and again on the Monday we detailed to all present work is progressing well on our $115 million Gold Coast Convention centre.

Our next Community Cabinet meeting is in Townsville on April 6 and 7

At that meeting we estimate we will pass the 25,000 barrier for the number of Queenslanders who have taken the time to come and tell us their issues.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Comalco Alumina Refinery, Gladstone

Hon. T. A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for State Development) (9.44 a.m.): More than 300 Gladstone businesses are sharing in $130 million worth of business coming from the construction of Comalco's $1.5 billion alumina refinery. The construction of this major project in Gladstone is providing a great boost not only for Queensland industries but also for the nation's industries. To date, the value of commitments given by Comalco is worth some $803 million and the percentage of commitments to Australian business equates to 84 per cent.

Comalco has previously told the Queensland government it expected that this project would have 80 per cent Australian content. So they are currently exceeding their commitments in this area. This is good news for domestic businesses. Gladstone is also reaping substantial benefits from the project. Comalco has advised me that purchase order commitments in Gladstone are

worth $56 million and subcontract commitments in Gladstone total $74 million. That means that some $130 million has been committed to the local Gladstone businesses.

In addition to these commitments, Comalco's work force is predominantly from the Gladstone region. Comalco has also advised me that of the current work force of 864, 613 workers are local. That is a very significant 71 per cent of the work force. The company has said that this level of local employment has exceeded expectations and was due in part to the skills development programs established by the company and TAFE and on-site upskilling of local tradespeople. This project, when complete, will not only have substantial benefits for Australia's balance of payments; its construction is also providing substantial benefits to Australian industries and the local Gladstone community.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Maryborough and Townsville Rail Contracts

Hon. S. D. BREDHAUER (Cook—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads) (9.46 a.m.): Maryborough employment has been boosted via a $61 million Queensland Rail contract for 11 new diesel locomotives. EDI Rail has won the QR contract for the manufacture, testing and commissioning of the 11 new 4000 class diesel locomotives. Local Maryborough firm Walkers will carry out the majority of the work. This contract means jobs for approximately 40 Maryborough workers. It is great news for the many Walkers' employees and their families who are now assured of continuity of employment, but also great news for local suppliers and the local economy.

Many in this House will be aware of Maryborough's proud history in locomotive construction. Funding of contracts worth $400 million in the term of the Beattie government allowed Walkers to carry on that proud tradition. On the 10th of May I will be attending a fundraising ball organised by the Maryborough Chamber of Commerce and the Maryborough and Hervey Bay Show Society on Maryborough's historic railway platform. Showcased at the ball will be the new Brisbane to Cairns tilt train, alongside other Maryborough-built trains, including the 1873-built Mary Ann and the steam train the Brown Bomber. Queensland Rail has long been a contributor to employment in Maryborough throughout much of Queensland's history. With last week's announcement, that proud tradition will continue.

QR is also ensuring jobs for Townsville workers. A $41 million QR contract awarded to Siemens Ltd to rebuild three existing coal electric locomotives as prototypes means 18 months of employment for Townsville workers at Goninans North Queensland. This new rolling stock will support QR's burgeoning coal haulage business, which in the past decade has continually set Australian records, with 135 million tonnes hauled in 2001-02.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Great Walks of Queensland

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (9.48 a.m.): Late last year I launched the Great Walks of Queensland. The four concept papers released on the Great Walks of Queensland were the great walks in the Whitsundays, Mackay highlands, Fraser Island and the Blackall Ranges on the sunshine coast hinterland.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr WELLS: I thank honourable members for their support for those projects. The concept papers provide information of the route and highlight features and facilities of each Great Walk. Concept papers for the Gold Coast hinterland and Wet Tropics Great Walks will be released in the near future. We have advanced beyond the planning stage. Works have now commenced on the Great Walks for Fraser Island, the Sunshine Coast hinterland and the Whitsunday.

Ms Jarratt: Hear, hear!

Mr WELLS: I note the enthusiasm of honourable members, particularly the honourable member for Whitsunday, because at the start of this year she and I stood on a vantage point in the Conway National Park and could see the rainforest-clad mountains sweeping down to a jewelled sea dotted with the emerald spots of the Whitsunday Islands. We knew then just what a terrific program this was. I actually had the opportunity to visit three of the Great Walks of Queensland and held local launches of the Fraser Island, Whitsunday and Mackay highlands

Great Walks. The Great Walks project is an excellent example of how we are demonstrating our commitment to sustainability.

Mr Wellington: Hear, hear!

Mr WELLS: I thank the honourable member for Nicklin. The project balances conservation of nature with the opportunity for Queensland families and tourists to enjoy our special places. For example, works to create the Whitsunday Great Walk have included weed removal, feral pig and dog control, and seed collection for revegetation of an old logging road as well as construction of the track and camping areas. The Great Walks of Queensland is also undertaking an innovative application of the government's Creative Queensland policy. Art and environment projects will be undertaken for each Great Walk.

Mr Foley: Hear, hear!

Mr WELLS: I thank the Minister for the Arts for his support and his inspiration. Artists will be able to respond to the special natural and cultural values of each Great Walk and have their works displayed in public exhibitions. This will result in exciting outcomes for both the Great Walks and the arts community, including increasing awareness of the connection between arts and the environment, employment for regional artists and strengthening community capacity and identity through the arts.

Staged openings across Queensland are planned. The Fraser Island and Whitsunday Great Walks will be open to walkers in July 2004. I thank the honourable member for Hervey Bay for his support of that project and his coordination of the community response has been integral in the progress we have made. It is planned that the next Great Walk to open will be the Wet Tropics in December the following year and the Mackay highlands and Sunshine Coast hinterlands projects completed at the end of 2005. The Great Walks of Queensland project heralds an exciting future for bushwalkers, environmental protection, education and tourism.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Suncorp Stadium

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (9.52 a.m.): I report to the House that construction on Suncorp Stadium is nearing completion. Suncorp Stadium is the largest construction project ever undertaken by the Department of Public Works in the history of Queensland. It is a significant investment for Queensland, generating more than 3,400 jobs during the construction phase. Currently, there are around 800 workers on site, almost double the number who were working there last July. This is a true indication that we are at the business end of the project. They are playing a vital role in constructing Suncorp Stadium using more than 40,000 cubic metres of concrete, 2,750 tonnes of roofing, 500,000 concrete blocks—that is enough to stretch from here to Nambour I think—29 kilometres of timber battens, 11,000 square metres of glass, 11,000 square metres of carpet and 15,000 litres of paint. This will deliver 30 food and beverage outlets, 31 bar outlets and 37 keg rooms. Members will be relieved to know that there will also be 88 toilet blocks. To maximise patron's comfort, there will be 320 televisions and two 60 square metre video replay screens.

Ms Spence interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is a very interesting story. I can tell members this: there is nothing more interesting in football if you have not got toilets. All the above figures give a clear indication that the 52,500 spectators will be very well catered for in a world-class facility. The contractor is in continuous consultation with Department of Public Works project managers and the operator to ensure that critical works are completed in time for the first football match on 1 June.

The best gauge that the stadium is well on the way to completion is to simply drive past the site. One can see that all the tower cranes have now been removed as the last part of the roof has been installed. The final large mobile crane will be removed this week. The completion of the roof is a significant milestone in the construction program, as now the pitch will be clear to begin ground preparation work necessary before the turf can be laid. The turf is expected to start being laid toward the end of April. I have inspected the turf and it is indeed the best quality Queensland turf around. I am sure that the Broncos and Newcastle Knights will both enjoy playing on this world-class pitch. It should prove to be the highlight for the Knights, who will no doubt be sent home having sacrificed their two points.

The first 7,000 new seats have arrived on site for installation. Sebel will be supplying the seats while Queensland steel and tube company Orrcon Steel has already started installing tubing to support the seats. Orrcon has supplied more than 700 tonnes of steel for this project. For those of us who like to have a meat pie at the footy, I am also pleased to report that the first kitchen will be handed over later this week. The catering company will commence staff training in this kitchen. We are now about to let the last major construction tender for the project. This is for the resurfacing of the bitumen in Castlemaine and Chippendale streets adjoining the stadium. Members would be aware that electricians on the site voted to go on a four-day strike over the lack of resolution to their current enterprise bargaining dispute. I must stress that this is a general dispute not specific to this site only. However, the advice I have received is that this dispute will not impede other finishing trades continuing to work.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Indigenous Communities, Governance

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) (9.56 a.m.): In late 2001 and early 2002 the Queensland government conducted consultations in remote indigenous communities about the Cape York Justice Study report handed down by former Justice Tony Fitzgerald in November 2001. There were some very clear messages from those consultations. Firstly, residents of indigenous communities stressed the need for something to be done about alcohol abuse and violence. The government responded to these calls for action with new legislation last year and is currently assisting communities to develop alcohol management plans. A second major area of concern raised in the consultations was the need to improve governance in indigenous communities. In fact, in our consultations the issues around governance received as much attention from community residents as the problems of alcohol and violence.

This reaffirms the numerous reports and consultations over the years that have questioned the adequacy of the current legislation to meet the governance needs of indigenous communities. We are taking up the challenge of reforming the legislation for indigenous community governance, the community services legislation. Today I am releasing a green paper on the review of indigenous community governance and I table a copy of the documents for the information of the House. 'Making Choices About Community Governance' will lay the foundation for a new legislative model for good governance in Aboriginal communities in Queensland. The paper sets out a range of options to improve the current system of governance for Aboriginal councils. In doing so, it builds on the recommendations of bodies such as the Aboriginal Coordinating Council, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence and the Legislation Review Committee of 1991.

Issues considered in the green paper include what good governance means for indigenous communities, who should manage the various services in the community, how councils are elected and ways of improving governance practices through corporate governance and accountability measures. The major themes are the need to provide a sound legislative framework for good governance and the need to provide flexibility for indigenous communities to organise their governance arrangements in the most effective way for their circumstances. Broadening the level of community participation in council decision making is a key goal of the proposed options. Too often the current legislation has operated to exclude important groups, including women and traditional owners, from a role in community governance. The government will be seeking feedback on the green paper until the end of May 2003. All Aboriginal deed of grant in trust communities will be visited in this process. The feedback will lead to a white paper setting out the preferred model of governance. This will form the basis of new legislation to be drafted later in 2003.

This government is aware of the serious difficulties confronting indigenous communities. Strong and effective governance that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of residents is essential to meeting the challenges. It is also necessary to achieve social and economic sustainability for the future. Through the green paper review, the government is committed to working with indigenous communities to develop the tools they need for effective, accountable and responsive community governance.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Biosecurity

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (9.59 a.m.): Last week, on the eve of the war in Iraq, the Department of Primary Industries received advice from the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry requesting that Australia's national animal health networks, both government and industry, adopt a heightened level of alertness over the next few months. The federal government does say that it has no information that suggests any substantive threat exists. Nevertheless, it has urged us to be particularly aware of any indication that could signal the occurrence of a highly contagious disease or any other unusual or unexplained adverse animal health event.

Obviously the Queensland government takes that advice seriously. The Animal and Plant Health Service within the Department of Primary Industries has alerted its regional managers, laboratory managers and emergency response and other staff members. In addition to that, the DPI has provided this advice to the Queensland government agencies involved in foot-and-mouth disease preparedness.

The Queensland government has been increasing its investment in and commitment to biosecurity in the wake of foot-and-mouth disease and mad cow disease outbreaks overseas. While we are free of those diseases and we boast one of the best environments in terms of clean and safe food production, we cannot afford to be complacent. We must continue to be vigilant and we must continue to reassure our consumers here at home and overseas of the quality of the food we produce. Our ability to produce quality and clean food is a major asset, particularly in our region, where the issues of food security take on increasing importance.

We note the federal government's advice, particularly as it comes at a time of war in Iraq. The Queensland government has increased investment in and commitment to biosecurity in the areas of disease surveillance, training, diagnostics, field veterinarians and stock inspectors, public education and compliance. As a state we also participate in a range of national committees such as the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Scam Smart Campaign

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Tourism and Racing and Minister for Fair Trading) (10.02 a.m.): Queenslanders can guard against falling victim to scammers by becoming scam smart quick smart. Later this morning I will launch the Office of Fair Trading's new Scam Smart campaign. It is time Queensland consumers and businesspeople fought back and beat the crooks.

There is an alarming number of scams out there, and the cost to the community is quite devastating. In 1996-97 the Australian Institute of Criminology estimated that fraud costs the community $3.5 billion each year. New research will be released later this year, and we can expect that figure to have grown substantially.

The Office of Fair Trading is aware of one young man who recently sent $10,000 to the phoney El Gordo lottery scheme that emanates out of Spain. Fair Trading recently heard from someone whose mother had sent tens of thousands of dollars to various schemes over a number of years. Sadly, these are not isolated stories.

Fair Trading continually seeks to boost awareness levels of scams. Figures from the latest Queensland householder survey, in November 2002, show that 55.7 per cent of people have heard or read advice or warnings issued by the Office of Fair Trading about scams and fake lotteries—an increase of almost 14 per cent in 12 months. We will continue to issue regular scam warnings, but it is becoming increasingly important for Queenslanders to know how to identify common scams before they hand over their cash.

The Scam Smart campaign will be our most intensive and targeted communication and education campaign against scams. It aims to teach consumers and businesses how to recognise and avoid common scams so they can protect themselves in the marketplace. The campaign will target common scam types such as work from home schemes, Nigerian chain letter/email scams, itinerant traders and door-to-door schemes, bogus charity collectors, investment/pyramid schemes, invoice and telephone fraud, and competition/phoney lottery scams. The campaign will be rolled out state wide over the next three months. Activities include

shopping centre displays, community talks, a direct mail campaign and an extensive advertising and promotional campaign.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

State Rural Leasehold Land Strategy

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.04 a.m.): The Beattie government is committed to achieving the sustainable development of Queensland's natural resources. As part of this overall goal my department has been developing a new long-term strategy for the future management and use of state rural leasehold land. State rural leasehold land is mainly used for grazing and agriculture purposes and covers approximately 65 per cent of Queensland. There are over 8,000 rural leases covering an area of approximately 86 million hectares.

The draft State Rural Leasehold Land Strategy I am releasing today for public comment—it has also been circulated to members in the chamber—has been developed over the past year in close consultation with key government, rural industry, indigenous, environmental and community stakeholders. It addresses a number of key concerns in respect of state leasehold land, the most significant being environmental decline, security of tenure for lessees and opportunities for advancing indigenous interests. Importantly, it provides a policy framework for the achievement of sustainable management and use of rural leasehold land through the protection of the environmental, social and economic values in the land, and recognition of the various interests in rural leasehold land.

This strategy marks a major step forward, with a strong emphasis on providing incentives for better natural resource management outcomes and achieving greater certainty for land interests. To achieve these core goals, the strategy proposes the introduction of a more flexible, performance based lease management system based on rolling leases of 30-, 40- and 50-year terms. It proposes that leases be granted in return for an on-farm conservation commitment by lessees based on regularly audited property resource management plans, as well as voluntary agreements addressing indigenous access and land use issues. This approach provides for regular 10-year top-ups of a lease term as an incentive to reward good performance and, importantly, provides lessees with the opportunity to achieve an indefinite lease term, provided they achieve environmental performance outcomes.

Certainty is the key word here. This approach provides leaseholders greater certainty in terms of their security of tenure. It ensures our land resources are better protected against further environmental decline by making conservation a condition of the lease, and it provides indigenous Queenslanders with greater certainty of native title rights through access and land use agreements.

The Beattie government believes a sustainable future for Queensland's rural leasehold land is best achieved by linking security of tenure with natural resource management, environmental performance and recognition of native title interests. My department is today forwarding copies of the draft State Rural Leasehold Land Strategy to more than 6,000 leaseholders as well as key stakeholder groups and all members of parliament. The closing date for public submissions is Monday, 2 June 2003, and I encourage all interested parties to provide the government with their comments on the draft strategy.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Teachers Union

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.07 a.m.): As Minister for Industrial Relations, I am pleased this morning to announce that the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission has ordered the Teachers Union to end its campaign of disruption to our children's education and that these long running negotiations are now set down for arbitration.

After what has been nine months of difficult negotiations with a union that is renowned for confrontation, this government believes that these negotiations are where they should be—before an independent umpire. It has been disappointing, however, that we have had to apply to the commission to order a union to stop its unlawful industrial action. Both parties were told on Monday by the commission that negotiations would proceed directly to arbitration. Yet despite this decision, the union proceeded with its campaign of industrial action. Let me be very clear about

this. The union's industrial action and disruption to students' education is unlawful. It is very clearly spelt out under section 149 of the Industrial Relations Act. Under the act, the union has been ordered to stop the industrial action from 4 p.m. today.

In the last two months the Teachers Union has breached the law at every step. It breached the law by taking industrial action three weeks before the determination had concluded. It breached a direction from the commission when the commission agreed to assist in talks between the parties. And it has openly breached the protocol document for good faith bargaining, which, I might remind the Teachers Union, not only they but also 17 other unions signed up to as the basis of good faith bargaining in this state.

In newspaper reports today they have clearly breached all the accepted standards for without prejudice and confidential negotiations. The *Courier-Mail* report this morning is accurate in that the government was prepared to negotiate the provision of additional teachers into classrooms and did explore the possibility that some of these teachers might be redeployed from the 6,000 non-classroom teachers employed by Education Queensland. Contrary to the union's claims in the report in the paper this morning, it was the QTU negotiators who identified reading recovery teachers as a possible source of teachers who could be redeployed into the classroom.

How could the government successfully negotiate with a union leadership hell-bent on acting outside the law, hell-bent on breaching confidentiality and hell-bent on acting dishonestly? This union is historically renowned for failing to negotiate. It is the only union in the 52 agreements we have with our 170,000 employees that has a determination because it could not reach agreement in the last round of enterprise bargaining in the year 2000. It is only one of two unions within both the public and the private sector in Queensland that has been unable to negotiate an agreement.

Only four times in the history of enterprise bargaining in Queensland has a union and a government had to seek arbitration. Three of those times has been with the Teachers Union and in negotiations not only with this side of politics but also with the other side of politics. Teachers must be disappointed that their wage rise has been delayed by the irresponsible actions of their union leadership. This union came to the negotiating table nine months ago with a $6 billion claim. It was not fair and reasonable then and it is not fair and reasonable now.

Despite the QTU efforts to describe this dispute as a class size dispute, it has never accepted the government's wage offer. Contrary to the public claims by the president of the union, QTU negotiators have continued to seek wage outcomes significantly above 3 and a half per cent.

I would like to remind members of the House that the Teachers Union received the largest wage increase of any union in the last round of enterprise bargaining. No other union got close to the 14.75 per cent pay rise that this union received, and as a result Queensland teachers became the highest paid teachers in the country. Our offer of 3 and a half per cent—like 50,000 other public sector workers who have agreed so far in this round—would have kept the majority of our teachers as the highest paid in the country, and our teachers would have received a pay rise from almost a month ago.

We welcome the decision by the commission to put this matter directly into arbitration and to end the union's industrial disruption to our children's education. We look forward to arguing our case for a fair and reasonable outcome, not just for the government as an employer but also to balance our responsibility to the broader community which, after all, is paying for this wage rise.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Discharges and Appointments

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.13 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

(1) That consequential to his resignation as a member, Dr Kingston be discharged from the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee.

(2) That the member for Lockyer, Mr Flynn, be discharged from the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee and appointed to the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee.

(3) That the member for Surfers Paradise, Mr Bell MP, be appointed to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.13 a.m.): I give notice that I will move—

That the Food Production (Safety) Regulation 2002 (Subordinate Legislation No. 353 of 2002) tabled in parliament on 25 February 2003, be disallowed.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Ambulance Levy

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.14 a.m.): I give notice that I will move—

That this parliament supports the principle that no individual or business should pay the proposed ambulance levy more than once.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Media Reporting

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition (10.14 a.m.): In the last 24 hours we have seen some extraordinary statements from the Premier with regard to the operation of the media in Queensland and concern about fairness of reporting insofar as the government and individuals are concerned. This is far more about the blowtorch going to the Premier's belly than any real, genuine concern which he has with regard to press accountability.

The real concern is that, if the government moves in any way whatsoever to make the media in Queensland or Australia accountable to a freedom of information regime or a press Ombudsman, then what it seeks to do is undermine one of the fundamental tenets of our democracy and something which has been enjoyed in the Westminster system over a long period of time, and that is freedom of the press. Just because the government does not like something which is being reported does not necessarily mean that it is wrong and does not necessarily mean that it should take steps against those who are reporting it.

What I think would be a more proactive and productive thing for the Premier to do is to go to the Fitzgerald report. I know that honourable members opposite talk so much about the Fitzgerald report. However, I would say that the Premier should adopt 3.9.3—

Consideration should be given to establishing an all-party parliamentary committee to monitor the cost and workings of Ministerial and departmental media activities, including press secretaries, media units and paid advertising. This committee could analyse whether the money is being spent on informing the public, or distributing propaganda for political gain. It could also bring to the attention of Parliament any misrepresentation or misinformation emanating from the administration.

This would be a far more proactive and responsible approach from this Premier in ensuring accountability for public moneys that are spent in disseminating and distributing information in Queensland, rather than the way in which his government has been distorting and manipulating government advertising of $70 million a year.

Time expired.

National Exchange Proprietary Ltd

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (10.17 a.m.): Today the Minister for Fair Trading, the Hon. Merri Rose, will be launching the Scam Smart campaign to lift the lid on common scams. Both the minister and the Office of Fair Trading take seriously their responsibility to warn consumers to be very, very wary of potential traps and scams and are to be commended for their actions.

Last week a Pine Rivers resident brought to my attention one such potential trap for the unsuspecting. This trap recently received media attention in New South Wales and prompted warnings from the New South Wales Office of Fair Trading, and it has now made its way to Queensland. This resident owns 19 AMP income securities valued at about $78 each, totalling around $1,500. She has just received a letter from a Melbourne based company, National

Exchange Proprietary Ltd, offering her $10 per security. If they were just ordinary AMP shares, an offer of $10 per share would be tempting, given AMP shares are trading for around $7.50 per share at present. While she ignored the offer, she is concerned others may be taken in by the scam and wanted to bring it to public attention.

I point out that it is not illegal for National Exchange to make this offer. It is legally entitled to do so, but investors should be warned to be aware of unsolicited offers to purchase shares. In fact, ASIC through its FIDO newsletter has just nominated National Exchange Proprietary Ltd for its 2003 'Pie in the Sky' awards and also issued a general consumer warning. In nominating National Exchange, ASIC states—

> This company has become notorious for making offers to buy shares well below market price at the time, expecting some people getting the offers won't know or check the price.

I would like to warn all Queenslanders of the potential financial loss they might incur if they accept offers by National Exchange.

Time expired.

Schoolies Week Task Force

Mr BELL (Surfers Paradise—Ind) (10.20 a.m.): I really should be using this timeslot to make some very colourful statements about the schoolies task force which has been appointed to investigate schoolies on the Gold Coast. It will consist purely of Labor members who will report in secret, and the report will be excluded from freedom of information. Whilst I might have personal confidence in the members who will comprise that task force, the exclusion of the member for Surfers Paradise and the secrecy will hardly engender public confidence. However, I do not really rise to make that point anymore but to praise the Beattie government and in particular the Minister for Police for his announcement last week of additional police numbers on the Gold Coast, particularly the augmentation of the police numbers who will man the Cavill Mall police post. Others may have lobbied the Police Minister and I did, too, but I must say that I was always well received and I appreciated his courtesy and cooperation. The result is appreciated by the electorate of Surfers Paradise and on their behalf I say, 'Thank you'.

I well recall that when the first police post was to be opened, Councillor Baildon, then the area representative, and I as mayor were in fear and trepidation because the Police Commissioner of the day refused to man it at all. It was only due to the intervention of a rather foresighted Police Minister of that day that the police post was in fact manned. It taught me a valuable lesson—that the Police Minister is not restricted to matters of policy but can actually make a valuable and practical contribution to policing. I say, 'Thank you, Mr Mackenroth' in retrospect. But to the Police Minister today I say, 'Don't stop.' Like little Oliver, we want more.

Iraqi Refugees

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (10.22 a.m.): I have been asked by many church and community members in Brisbane to support the national call for an act of grace. The act of grace statement is a push by the National Council of Churches and refugee advocacy groups for the Howard government to grant residence to all refugees currently on temporary protection visas who have been law abiding. The act of grace calls for the release into the community by Easter this year of asylum seekers who are not a health, identity or security concern. Prime Minister John Howard has subjected the 3,700 Iraqi refugees who have fled to Australia to escape the tyranny of Saddam Hussein and thousands of others to further violation on our own shores. Yet, one of the justifications Prime Minister Howard gave for sending troops to war was to free the Iraqi people from tyranny. What hypocrisy!

Mr Howard knows that right now there are women, children and men behind razor wire in detention under his government's direction. Mr Howard knows that in some instances fathers of families are in the community on a TPV while their wives and children languish in detention. I and millions of Australians do not support the war on Iraq, and I sure do not support the hypocrisy of John Howard. Not in our name, Prime Minister, will you treat inhumanely the refugees who come to our shores. In our names as Australians, I support the call upon the parliament of Australia to grant an act of grace to refugees this Easter. In our names, I urge the Prime Minister to provide humanitarian aid to the refugees from Iraq who are the victims of this horrendous war. In our names, I urge him to bring home safely our courageous troops before Easter this year.

Racing Industry

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (10.24 a.m.): Standing resolute, the member for Mount Isa and Police Minister firmly declared that 'over his dead body' would they cut any race meetings out of the Mount Isa Racing Club. It has happened—from 25 to 15, and where is the member for Mount Isa now? We have seen the member for Charters Towers try to stand up for all the small businesses that will have to pay the ambulance tax twice, but where is the member for Mount Isa with these dreadful cuts to race clubs, epitomised by what has happened in Mount Isa? It has happened all over the state and we hear absolutely nothing from those Labor members who have seen race clubs in their electorates decimated or in fact be part of those 32 clubs which no longer will race at all. What about Cooktown? Where is the Minister for Transport in that respect? Cooktown has lost its three meetings and in fact there is virtually no racing anymore on the cape because they have closed down virtually every track. He should hang his head in shame.

The member for Mount Isa said it would happen 'over his dead body'. Well, his carcass will join the carcasses of all those race clubs around Queensland that will be destined to be finished, never race again, or cut so drastically that they will not be viable any longer. This is an important industry, the third biggest industry in Queensland. It provides jobs to a whole range of skilled and unskilled employees. It provides enjoyment and is part of the social structure. The member for Charters Towers was the only ALP member to join us in opposing the ambulance tax. I hope that the member for Mount Isa, after standing up and saying 'over his dead body' would they cut race meetings in Mount Isa, will join us in the fight to save country racing in Queensland, because only the National Party will stand up for country racing. The Labor Party does not care. The Labor Party has become the enemy of small business. It has become the enemy of race clubs in Queensland—

Time expired.

Transport Infrastructure Funding

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (10.26 a.m.): It has been a month since I drew the attention of the House to the brutal blow to Queensland's motorists by federal Transport Minister Anderson's Auslink report to withdraw 100 per cent funding for national highways and the grave concern felt in Toowoomba with respect to his decision to lower the priority of Toowoomba's Warrego Highway as it relates to Warwick's Cunningham Highway. Honourable members will recall I was puzzled—yes, even bewildered! Why were National Party state MPs mute when it came to raising this issue with Anderson? As chance would have it, these state MPs have been thrown a lifeline—a further opportunity to redeem themselves—a chance to stand up for the bush! Yes, a chance to approach and persuade their federal leader, the Deputy Prime Minister.

This time the issue is the Melbourne to Darwin Inland Rail Road. I refer to an article in last Thursday's Australian *Financial Review* entitled 'Conflicting Signals', which confirms Mr Anderson has, in effect, all but put an end to this visionary project in that he has refused the promoters the same favoured monetary regime as he has approved for the promoters of the dubious Alice Springs-Darwin line. He has failed to agree on behalf of the federal government to fund the construction of the infrastructure where road meets rail—level crossings, traffic overpasses and signalling. And he has failed to sensibly, realistically and genuinely negotiate with NSW for their track.

The economic benefits to Queensland of this line are huge, including increasing the usage and significance of the Port of Gladstone and assisting in the development of the Bowen Basin and, from a transport perspective, its construction would cater for the doubling of the Australian freight task over the next 10 years as the ancient coastal track on the eastern seaboard cannot be expected to take up the strain. Already the Newell Highway is congested with 2,000 semis per day. State National Party MPs will meet Anderson at Dalby this weekend. Will they grasp the opportunity? I call on them to be bold, to stand up for this Chifley-inspired imaginative project, to stand up for inland Australia, and to stand up for projects that relate to it, like Toowoomba's second range crossing. The solution is in Anderson's hands. Show us your effectiveness with your own leader!

Members interjected.

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

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gregory, I am on my feet! I call the member for Caloundra.

Ophthalmology Services

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—Lib) (10.28 a.m.): On a number of occasions I have brought to the attention of this House the parlous state of health services on the Sunshine Coast, which of course is indicative of what is happening throughout the whole of Queensland. Now we find that pensioners cannot get any service at eye clinics on the Sunshine Coast, nor can they get it at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. A patient—and he has asked to be named in this House—a Mr Medley, has tried repeatedly, as have his doctors, to get treatment on the Sunshine Coast. He needs cataract surgery—and urgently. This letter he received the other day from the Royal Brisbane Hospital states—

Dear Mr Medley,

Receipt of this letter confirms that your ophthalmology (eye clinic) new case referral letter has been received and processed by the ophthalmology department at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. We are unable to give you an appointment, owing to excessive demand on the service, and request that you attend your referring doctor or local medical officer to make alternate arrangements.

His local medical officer has also contacted me and said that the only reason he was sent to Royal Brisbane is that there were no services that he could access or get into on the Sunshine Coast. Obviously, there are no ophthalmology services at Royal Brisbane, either, when people are being told not even to go on a waiting list but to go back to the Sunshine Coast where indeed there are no services. I ask the minister—how is this man supposed to get medical services? He cannot get them on the coast or at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. What is the minister's suggestion?

Ms Edmond: He has been told what to do and in this instance it is to talk to a GP.

A government member interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We will not have a debate.

Mrs SHELDON: He has, actually. I take the minister's interjection where she said he should contact his GP. It was his GP who spoke to me, minister. I think it is essential that this man is looked at, that he does get a service; otherwise justice has not been done.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.30 a.m.): I refer the Minister for Health to documents obtained by my office after much difficulty under the government's 'freedom from information' regime which show that across Queensland this government is failing to meet targets in all but the least urgent category of emergency treatment at public hospitals. The documents I now table show that in the June quarter of last year emergency departments in Queensland hospitals failed to meet the 100 per cent target for seeing category 1, resuscitation, patients within the required time; only 72 per cent of category 2, emergency, patients were attended to within the required time; only 57 per cent of category 3, urgent, patients were attended to within the required time; and only 57 per cent of semiurgent patients were attended to within the required time. I ask: has the situation improved for the December quarter, and does the minister expect any improvement in the March quarter, which concludes on Monday of next week?

Mrs EDMOND: The member has raised these issues around the state. He went around the state talking about how long people were waiting before they were seen by a doctor. In fact, he made claims that they were waiting over eight hours when in fact that was the time to admission. As most people who have a clue would know, waiting for admission does not mean people are not being seen by a doctor. Often while waiting for admission people may be seen by a doctor, either to be stitched up, have x-rays and pathology, have wounds dressed or even be resuscitated—a whole range of things. His claims around the state were erroneous and were answered by the various districts, which were most disconcerted by his lack of knowledge and the fact that he went around making hysterical claims and frightening elderly people.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We will hear the answer to the question.

Mrs EDMOND: Honourable members may have heard me on one or two occasions over the last year speak about the difficulty emergency departments are having coping with the increasing numbers coming through, and particularly the huge increases in categories 4 and 5. I can see members nodding. Some people actually listen when we are talking about this and are aware of the increases in categories 4 and 5, which are having a huge impact on our emergency departments. Even when we have people with lower-level injuries or illnesses coming into the emergency department, the simple fact that we have more of them slows down the processing of people with serious injuries. That is why we are concerned about the Commonwealth government dumping these patients on us rather than providing proper or adequate GP services after hours and at a rate people can afford.

I gave some figures yesterday. Royal Brisbane Hospital had a 9.2 per cent increase over two years. But we had figures last year that showed the Royal Children's Hospital had a 21.5 per cent increase in emergency visits in one year. No state government can support that. This is an issue in states around Australia. We have pumped money into extra funding for emergency departments. We have pumped in extra resources. But we cannot keep up with this while the Commonwealth increasingly withdraws funding.

The biggest question that the Leader of the Opposition has to ask is whether the Commonwealth Minister for Health will bother attending the next meeting of health ministers and start putting dollars on the table to address these issues. Some of the issues being discussed include the interaction between GPs and emergency departments. That is one of the key issues. Aged care funding is another key issue. We want to see a Commonwealth coalition government that has the guts and which is interested enough to come to the meeting. If they cannot send us someone who is interested enough to come to the meeting, it should be dealt with by the premiers.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr SPRINGBORG: Again, I refer the Minister for Health to documents detailing the performance of emergency departments in Queensland public hospitals.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr Beattie: Say that again? There was too much noise.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Is this a bit of an exercise at buying time? I ask: why is it that in almost all cases patients presenting in regional areas are receiving a level of service well below that of metropolitan areas? Is it not the case that regional Queenslanders and regional hospitals are being forced to bear the brunt of chronic underfunding and maladministration of our health system by the minister's government?

Mrs EDMOND: If only it were so simple. The only thing simple about this is the member opposite and his questions. We have increased funding to every regional hospital in Queensland every year that I have been the Health Minister. The only area that we have problems with now is that we cannot even get a commitment from the Commonwealth government that it will fund us at least to the equivalent of last year. They will not even commit to that. They are not even committed to using the same basis we had this year. That is outrageous. That is why services around the state are under threat. If the federal government does not meet those funding commitments, we will have to cut services. They are pulling out a whole range of services already. They are saying that they are not interested in funding safety and quality in the future. They are not interested in funding the National Health Development Fund, which has put extra services into hospitals around Queensland. They are not interested in funding any of those and they are not interested in even discussing the funding.

The state government has increased funding since I have been minister by, on average, over six per cent each year. That funding has flowed more than ever before into regional areas. We have improved services dramatically. We have provided extra outreach services. The member for Caloundra referred earlier to ophthalmology services at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. She is not aware that the reason they are not giving out appointments now is that we put in an extra $500,000 to fast-track them; were they to give out appointments now they would not be of any value. The member should not say all of this rubbish; she should tell the patient to talk to his GP.

The letter to the GP, the referring doctor, is saying, firstly, to check that they do not just need new glasses. Many people being put on the list were in need of new glasses, not an ophthalmologist and surgery. Secondly, we will be introducing new measures to allow optometrists to offer a greater range of services. Thirdly, we are putting in $500,000 to fast-track services at the Royal Brisbane Hospital, just as we have at the Gold Coast and Robina hospitals.

Interruption.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Burleigh, I ask honourable members to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of a delegation from the Gyeonggi Provincial Assembly in the Republic of Korea, led by the Assembly Chairman, Hong Young-Kee. Welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Resumed.

Gold Coast Service Delivery

Mrs SMITH: I direct a question to the Premier. The Gold Coast continues to be one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland. I ask the Premier: can he give a tangible example of this government's support, which reflects a responsive government meeting increased demand in services on the Gold Coast?

Mr BEATTIE: I certainly can. I thank the honourable member, because I know that she has been fighting very hard, as have other government members on the coast, to improve services in their electorates. Indeed, on Sunday, 16 March I was delighted to join the Emergency Services Minister, Mike Reynolds, Gold Coast MPs Christine Smith, P. K. Croft, Robert Poole and Lex Bell and some very happy fire station officers to celebrate the official opening of the $3.1 million new station at Broadbeach. We are providing services. The opening was my first event attached to our hugely successful 59th community cabinet meeting on the Gold Coast on that Sunday and Monday.

Ensuring the safety of all Queenslanders and all people who visit Queensland is something that my government takes very seriously. This new station is evidence of this. It is the most expensive new fire station ever built in Queensland's history. It provides state-of-the-art facilities for the 10 personnel who will be on duty 24 hours a day. Apart from the station's increased room, improved training facilities and better telecommunications, there is also a new $564,000 Scania appliance. This will be a tremendous asset to the Gold Coast community and it will provide a valuable service to locals and visitors to the surrounding area.

The Surfers Paradise Fire Station is the second busiest fire station in Queensland—after the Roma Street Fire Station in Brisbane—attending to more than 3,200 fire calls a year. The Surfers Paradise Fire Station is responsible for an area stretching from Main Beach to Nobby Headland and west to Robina. The area is particularly busy due to the many national and international tourists who flock there each year. We all know what the Gold Coast means to Queensland tourism, as it hosts such spectacular events as the Indy. The new fire station means that all tourists and locals can be confident that they have a new, professional, state-of-the-art, fully computerised facility in which firefighters can respond efficiently to emergencies. I am particularly pleased that this is a fire station designed by firefighters for firefighters. The station has been designed practically, using innovative ideas, and the many stakeholders who have been involved in that design are to be commended.

One of the biggest risks for the station is high-rise residential and tourist accommodation. As opposed to high-rise office buildings in Brisbane, for instance—which are predominantly used for commercial purposes with peak occupancy during the day—in Surfers Paradise the majority of high-rises are where people live 24 hours a day. Therefore, maintaining a high level of fire safety in these apartments is a priority. Every high-rise building on the Gold Coast is subjected to a regular fire safety inspection. That is not an easy task, with over 340 apartment buildings on the Gold Coast, 203 of these buildings being in the Surfers Paradise area.

Fire crews at Surfers Paradise are also responsible for safety inspections in more than 420 nightclubs, hotels and restaurants. It is all because preventing an accident is half the battle in

ensuring the community's safety. The former minister, Stephen Robertson, and I inspected this station some time ago. I saw what it was like. So did Stephen. I have to say that I am delighted that we have now built a brand new fire station. Surfers Paradise was entitled to it and I am delighted that my government has delivered.

Gold Coast Hospital

Mr QUINN: I direct a question to the Minister for Health. I draw the minister's attention to documents tabled this morning detailing the performance of emergency departments in public hospitals, in this case, the Gold Coast Hospital. In the June quarter last year, only 28 per cent of category 2, that is the emergency category—the second highest category just below patients requiring resuscitation—were seen within the recommended time, that is 10 minutes. I ask the minister: why is it that on the Gold Coast only 28 per cent of these patients are seen within the required time against a metropolitan Brisbane figure of 59 per cent and a statewide figure of 72 per cent? Why is this dismal outcome also reflected in level 3, 4 and 5 patients on the Gold Coast? In short, why are Gold Coast residents being treated as second-class citizens by the minister and her government?

Mrs EDMOND: An analysis of the patient and doctor and nurse ratio on the Gold Coast shows that they are one of the best in terms of staffing-to-patient ratios in the state. The issue is one of data collection. The latest Gold Coast figures have improved dramatically as a result of changes in the data collection. I understand that the Gold Coast—

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mrs EDMOND: No, it is only the Gold Coast. If the member looked at the documents, I think he would see that some of them actually say that the Gold Coast statistics are questionable because of the data collection. I understand that they were collecting the data in batches, whereby they entered it all at a given time rather than when it actually occurred. That meant that the computer reported the time that the data was entered rather than the time that the treatment was given.

Gold Coast, Transport Planning

Mrs CROFT: I direct a question to the Premier and it is in regard to Smart State planning for the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast is Queensland's second largest city and is continuing to grow and grow. I ask the Premier: what efforts is the state undertaking to ensure that our future is enhanced by quality, smart planning being undertaken now?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the member for Broadwater for her question because, as she knows, this government is committed to improving services on the Gold Coast. There can be no question of the level of commitment that my government has towards the Gold Coast's transport needs both now and in the future. On Monday, 17 March I joined the Transport Minister, Steve Bredhauer, the Tourism Minister, Merri Rose, and other government MPs, including the member for Broadwater, to launch the Robina to Tugun rail draft study report, which the Minister for Transport had provided to cabinet earlier in the day. We detailed that public transport service improvements between Robina and the Gold Coast airport will form part of the staged extension of the Gold Coast passenger rail line south from Robina. We released a draft impact assessment study for the proposed rail route from Robina to Stewart Road, Tugun.

The reports provide a practical action plan for improving public transport services on the Gold Coast in the coming decade. The draft IAS report, part A, identifies the proposed route, station locations and park-and-ride facilities for the rail extension from Robina to Stewart Road, Tugun while examining the environmental, economic and social impact and benefits of the proposed rail line.

We all know that the coast is one of the nation's

fastest growing—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We are hearing an answer to a question.

Mr BEATTIE: I would think that the opposition would be interested in the Gold Coast. I know that we are.

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: We are interested and we will be delivering for the Gold Coast. Even if the member is not interested, we are interested in the Gold Coast. We all know that the coast is one of the nation's—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: They are not interested in the Gold Coast. We are. Let the record show that we are. We all know that the coast is one of the nation's fastest growing—

Dr Watson interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The member represents Moggill. He does not even know where the Gold Coast is. It is at the end of the M1 that we built. We all know that the coast is one of the nation's fastest growing regional areas. As the population grows, so too do the transport needs of local residents.

I have to say that that was a great M1 that the Minister for Transport built. Are we delivering for the Gold Coast! This smart planning news is good news for the Gold Coast. It again reinforces the government's commitment to improving transport infrastructure in the region. It comes on top of the federal government's announcement last week that it will match our $120 million commitment to the Tugun bypass.

But there is more. Also earlier this month, Steve Bredhauer and the Gold Coast Mayor, Gary Baildon, announced that the Gold Coast light rail feasibility study had reached two key milestones, with the end of the needs assessment and the identification of route options. So in a nutshell, I say to the member for Broadwater that we are delivering on the issues that matter: the fire station, of which she was at the opening; and we have now resolved the issue in relation to the Tugun bypass, and I thank the Minister for Transport for that and the Minister for Tourism. Also, the Minister for Police has announced not only new police but additional police. We are delivering to the Gold Coast, because it is important.

Wooroolin State School; Wondai State School

Mrs PRATT: I direct a question to the Minister for Education. Wooroolin State School and Wondai State School, to name but a couple, have reportedly been informed that their budgets are to be cut drastically. I ask the minister: how many state schools have been earmarked to have their budgets cut? What is the projected saving to the government? As the government has stated previously that per head these small schools are very costly to run, is this cutting of small school budgets to be an ongoing trend? Is this measure designed to eliminate small rural schools?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for her question, because it gives me an opportunity to put beyond any doubt that there are no budget cuts to any schools in Queensland. Allocations of funds to Queensland state schools are on the basis of enrolments. I am not familiar with the circumstances of the two schools that the member raised, but I would be happy to go and have a look for them. The only reason that those schools would have any reductions in their budgets is if they have lost a significant number of enrolments.

There are no budget cuts to any schools in Queensland. The staffing and budget allocation models which have existed for a number of years continue to exist without change. So if there is any particular issue at those schools, again I would be happy to have a look at it. The only basis on which any school in the member's electorate or any other electorate would see any decline in the school budgets is if there was a significant decline in student enrolments. Can I also put beyond any doubt that our government supports small schools in rural and regional Queensland. We understand that the only way we can ensure that all Queenslanders, wherever they live, have access to a good quality education is by supporting those schools which are small and often in very isolated places. We understand that those schools need support. We will be continuing to provide that.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Stafford, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from Holland Park State School in the electorate of Greenslopes. Welcome.

University Places

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: I refer the Minister for Education to the fact that at the start of the year she released a statement warning about the increasing numbers of aspiring university

students who would miss out on a place unless the federal government committed significant new funds to the sector. I ask: can the minister inform members of this House, many of whom have a personal family interest in student access to university, how many Queenslanders missed out on a university place this year and what kind of impact the demand for tertiary education in this state has had on university course cut-offs?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for his question. He is the father of four university students, so he has a keen interest in this area and understands the pressures placed on families during those years. It is my unhappy job this morning to report to the House that there has been a comprehensive failure by the Commonwealth government to ensure that access to universities in Queensland keeps pace with our enrolment growth. At the start of 2003 the early estimates suggest that almost 15,000 applicants missed out on a university place this year. That is, 3,000 more young Queenslanders were denied a place this year than were denied a place last year. It is an extraordinary trend and part of a disturbing trend right across Australia.

With the education and training reforms that our government has put in place, we hope to inspire more young Queenslanders to aspire to university. We hope that those reforms, which will see more young people finishing year 12 or a vocational qualification, will aspire them to university education some time in their lives. This is no doubt going to put more pressure on universities. The pressure on university places has a very serious effect on access to university, and this is most evident in the tightening of entry requirements.

What it means in simple terms is that this year, for example, the OP required for nursing at Griffith University's Gold Coast campus jumped two rankings in one year to OP 9. The OP for a Bachelor of Education in primary schooling at QUT jumped from OP 10 last year to OP 7 this year. That means that those people who would have actually got a place last year with an even better result will miss out this year. For those young people who happen to be born in this cohort where the Commonwealth is denying enrolment places, they will be denied a place that would have been open to them last year.

In a country like Australia, we ought to be able to ensure that if people have the ability they have the chance. It should not matter if they live in Barcaldine or Bondi. It should not be an accident of their birthplace that determines whether they will get access to a university place. If they have the ability, then we have to make sure that we have a system which ensures that they have the access. What will be required to ensure that in Queensland with our growth figures? It would require upwards of 800 fully funded new commencing undergraduate places in each of the next five years to halt the current slide in participation rates.

Dr Nelson's higher education review is expected to be announced very soon. I would advise members to look out for what it is that the Commonwealth government and the federal Education Minister—who so far has failed to deliver anything to schools, anything into the training sector, anything into the higher education sector, and particularly anything into high growth states like Queensland—do in that review and to ensure that it does see extra places so we can make sure that young Queenslanders get the chance they deserve.

Police Resources, State Crime Operations Command

Mr SEENEY: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to the State Crime Operations Command budget, obtained under FOI from his department because he previously refused to provide this level of detail in answer to questions on notice, and I table the document for the benefit of the House. In particular, I refer to the $580,604 that has been wiped from the budgets of eight specialist police investigation squads. I also refer to the figures in the document which show that $235,844 has been cut from salary expenditure from specialist squads in the last year, $206,926 has been cut from overtime payments for those squads and $103,257 has been cut from operational shift allowances for those squads. I ask: do these budget cuts to specialist crime squads represent a softening of his government's attitude to serious crimes like child abuse and drug offences in Queensland?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question. As I have mentioned in this place on many occasions, the Queensland government provides a budget to the Queensland Police Service and the Queensland Police Service is responsible for the allocation of that budget. However, let us look at some of the sections of the Police Service to which the member refers. The first one I think he referred to was the Organised Crime Investigation Group. The actual expenditure of this group in 2000-01 included $175,000 in imprest costs. This imprest represents cash held for purposes such as covert operations and a number of other activities. This imprest

cost no longer shows in the expenditure of the Organised Crime Investigation Group. It is reported as expenditure for the crime operations branch. With regard to the State Drug Investigation Group, during the same financial year a new cost centre code was established for the illicit laboratory investigation team. Its expenditure is no longer attributed to this particular budget.

The point I am making is that the opposition is not comparing apples with apples. If the member opposite so desires, rather than stand here today in the three minutes I have available to me to answer the question, I am more than happy to get somebody to explain to him exactly how it is now working. The bottom line is that, when we have given the Queensland Police Service an 8.2 per cent and a 6.1 per cent increase in its budget, it is entirely up to the administration of the Queensland Police Service how it allocates the funds we give it and to which particular areas it allocates it. The member is barking up the wrong tree.

If I was given an extra half hour here this morning, I could demonstrate—and I will demonstrate in other places later on today—just how wrong, wrong and wrong again the member is in trying to imply that there has been a reduction. The bottom line is that, if we give the Police Service an increase in the budget figures well above the CPI figure, it is entirely up to the Police Service how it allocates its resources. Again, based on the information which I have, the member for Callide is wrong.

Employment Programs, Coalition Policies

Mr LIVINGSTONE: I ask the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth: is he aware of the Liberal and National parties' policies on supporting employment programs? Could the minister give an example of what the Beattie government is doing in regional areas such as the electorate of Southern Downs?

Mr FOLEY: The Liberal and National parties' policies are to abolish employment programs. That is what they did when Mr Springborg and Mr Quinn were in government last time. They abolished jobs training and placement projects, local employment and enterprise facilitation projects along with the Public Sector Traineeship Program. They even abolished the portfolio position of minister for employment. It is what they will do again if elected to government.

When they released their joint policy statement on 24 February this year, which I table, they were strangely silent on employment programs. It is no wonder. Their slash-and-burn policies would take vital support away from the battlers seeking jobs in their own electorates. Let us take for an example the Opposition Leader's own electorate of Southern Downs. Under the Beattie government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, 499 people have received help or jobs, with provision of assistance of $3.3 million.

Let the Opposition Leader come clean about their position on employment programs. Let him go to the Stanthorpe Shire Council and tell it whether it would receive programs such as the $36,380 it got to assist the Wallangarra Heritage Centre with providing jobs for three people with clerical traineeships. Let him go to the Allora-Hendon rail corridor and tell the Southern Downs steam railway whether it would receive the $151,990 it got under the Beattie government's Community Jobs Plan, which provided jobs for 13 people following an earlier project which had provided jobs for 11 people. Let him go to the Stanthorpe Shire Council and explain to it about the Stanthorpe Shire Railway and Heritage Project, which this government funded to the tune of $48,653, providing jobs for five people. Most of all, let him go to the Warwick sawmill, where 43 people lost their jobs, and explain why they would not be providing the sort of assistance that this government has provided—the $16,153 in job preparation assistance and worker assistance.

This is about a Labor government providing assistance to battlers to help them get a fair go in the labour market. The opposition is strangely silent about its intention to go back to the bad old days of former minister Santoro, when it cut and slashed all of these employment programs. Do honourable members remember the derision of the former Leader of the Opposition that they were painting rocks white? The attitude of opposition members has not changed under the current leader.

Police Resources, State Crime Operations Command

Mr JOHNSON: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to the State Crime Operations Command budget, obtained under FOI from the department because the minister had previously refused to provide this level of detail in answer to questions on notice. In particular

I refer the minister to Task Force Argos, which deals with sexual crimes against children. That budget has been cut by 10 per cent in the last year. Why has the budget for Task Force Argos been cut by 10 per cent in the last year? How will this affect the investigation of sexual abuse of children?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the shadow minister for the question. There is a difference in expenditure for Task Force Argos which is attributed to salary variations. Task Force Argos is only one team within the Sex Crimes Investigation Unit and does not have an established staff strength. I am advised that staffing changes arise from the operational priorities of the task force. Any movement of staff in or out of the squad often creates vacancies in salary expenditure. Over the past three years there have been around 100 staff movements associated with the task force in response to numerous operational priorities across the Sex Crimes Investigation Unit.

The point I make again, as I did in response to a question from the member for Callide, is that we as a government provide the Queensland Police Service with additional operational funding year after year after year. It is up to the executives of the Queensland Police Service how they allocate the funding.

The Leader of the Opposition this morning picked up the Fitzgerald report. Those of us on this side noticed that moths were flying all around it. It was probably the first time it had been opened. I suggest to the opposition that it read the parts about the Queensland Police Service in particular and about the role of the Police Minister. It is spelt out quite clearly. It also spells out the role of the Queensland Police Union. I as the minister understand my role. It is a pity the opposition does not understand the role of the Police Minister.

Police Resources, Gold Coast

Mr LAWLOR: My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Can the minister outline to the House the implementation plan for the 46 extra police officers he recently announced would be going to the Gold Coast district?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question. I also thank him and his six colleagues for the work they have done in recent times in bringing to the attention of many people the problems associated with the Gold Coast area. I recently told this House that the Gold Coast has some unique problems. I think most of us here would accept this. The Police Service had an internal inquiry to see whether there was a need for additional police because of the unique problems facing the Gold Coast.

A few days ago I announced that there would be 46 extra police officers allocated to the Gold Coast by 30 September this year. Today I will outline to the House just how we will allocate these positions. During April the district will receive an injection of 14 extra officers, followed by 18 in June, 15 in July and 19 in September. Anybody who adds those numbers up will discover that they do not add up to 46; they come to 66. The commissioner has given a guarantee that by September the area will have an extra 46 police officers. Because we have allocated 66, there will be scope to move some of those people. People who have retired and people who have applied for transfers will be facilitated and at no time will the number ever go below the additional 46 which we have promised and committed.

It is interesting to read the comments attributed to the Leader of the Opposition. He is saying that the 46 extra police officers should have been appointed yesterday or indeed last month. The question I have for the Leader of the Opposition is: where would those 46 have come from yesterday? Would they have come from Stanthorpe, Toowoomba, Callide, Gladstone or from other parts of the state? If those opposite are going to demand that the 46 officers should have been appointed yesterday, they have to tell me where they should have come from.

I remind the Leader of the Opposition once again that this Beattie Labor government has injected 1,400 additional police officers. We are injecting some 307 new police officers this year, as well as an additional 48 civilians.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Toowoomba South, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from Holland Park State School in the electorate of Greenslopes, along with students and teachers from Moreton Downs State School in the electorate of Murrumba.

Police Resources, State Crime Operations Command

Mr HORAN: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to the State Crime Operations Command budget, obtained under FOI from the department because the minister has previously refused to provide this level of detail in answer to questions on notice. In particular I refer to the Organised and Major Crime Squad, which deals with organised crime in Queensland, whose budget has been cut by 16 per cent in the last two years. With this budget of the Organised and Major Crime Squad now $600,000 less than it was two years ago, how will this affect the investigation of organised and major crime in Queensland?

Mr McGRADY: As I mentioned before, and I will repeat it again, the moneys are allocated to the Queensland Police Service and they allocate it according to their priorities. I also replied to the member for Callide that I will be making a detailed statement later on today because the information that they are trying to put across to the people of Queensland and to this parliament is not factually correct.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr McGRADY: I can if the member wants me to. The actual expenditure of the organised crime investigation group in 2000-01 included $175,000 in imprest costs. This imprest represents cash held for purposes such as covert operations. In subsequent years the imprest was consolidated to another cost centre code for the use of the entire crime operations branch covert operations. This imprest no longer shows in the expenditure of the organised crime investigation group. It is reported as expenditure for the crime operations branch.

Regional Centres Program

Mr PEARCE: My question is directed to the Minister for Local Government and Planning. Can the minister inform the House what her department has done recently to improve the cultural life of central Queenslanders, in particular the people of Rockhampton?

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: I thank the member for Fitzroy for the excellent question. I am delighted to inform the parliament this morning that artistic activities for central Queenslanders have been enhanced, thanks to a joint state government and city council project to refurbish the historic Walter Reid building to provide a cultural centre in Rockhampton. This magnificent cultural centre, which I officially opened on Friday night in the presence of the local member for Rockhampton and the members for Fitzroy and Keppel, highlights what can be achieved when the state government works closely with a council for the benefit of their local communities.

The $3.6 million refurbishment will now provide residents and visitors with a superb community facility that acts as a focus for cultural and creative activity in central Queensland. It is an important asset for the people of Rockhampton and will provide an added stimulus for the local economy by giving tourists yet another reason to visit that tropical city.

The state government contributed more than $1.7 million to the project through a subsidy to the Rockhampton City Council under the Regional Centres Program. I would like to thank the people of Rockhampton for their wonderful hospitality, and I congratulate the mayor, councillors and staff who made this project possible in partnership with this state government. In particular, I congratulate the deputy mayor, Del Bunt, and the council's manager of community services, Tom Upton, who were the driving forces behind the project. Special recognition must also go to my cabinet colleague, Public Works and Housing Minister and the member for Rockhampton, Robert Schwarten, who lobbied successfully on behalf of the city to secure the state funding that made this wonderful project possible.

The Regional Centres Program is just one of the subsidy schemes administered by my department that is making a very real difference to the lives of Queenslanders living in regional communities. Introduced by the Beattie government three years ago, the regional centres program began with $50 million to provide dollar-for-dollar funding to councils to assist with improving social and economic infrastructure in regional centres. This initiative has been extremely popular, creating a boost to business in regional cities and towns, providing hundreds of short-term and long-term jobs and providing a diverse range of exciting projects for regional communities.

Some fine examples of this program at work are Yeppoon's foreshore redevelopment that I officially opened on Australia Day, with a crowd of some 7,000 people enjoying the new face of Yeppoon. Burnett shire has also used this program to develop its foreshore very successfully. Gympie has a new city centre, and in my electorate of Bundaberg the funds were used to build a

PCYC centre. I can say that this government's recent announcement of a further $40 million to extend this program for another three years will provide even more benefits for regional cities and towns and their communities and has been keenly welcomed across Queensland.

Gladstone State Development Area

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: My question is directed to the Minister for State Development. The minister outlined this morning the benefits industry has brought to the community of the Gladstone electorate and the broader economy of Queensland. Part of the impacts from industry is the current plan by government to increase the state development area. A large number of those valuations forwarded to affected landowners recently have been rejected as inadequate. In the negotiations which follow such rejections, will the minister's department take greater account of the inflated land prices in the region and also the difficulties these residents face in replacing their current properties with comparable properties in our region?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question because this is an issue of great concern to the residents of the Targinnie Valley, and as the member is well aware there is unprecedented growth occurring in Gladstone at this point in time. I met with residents in Targinnie Valley mid last year on several occasions. As a result, I also put a consultant, the Rowland Group, in place to have a look at a potential exit strategy for residents in the Targinnie Valley, who were being adversely impacted by the industrial development that was beginning to surround them, about whether they would wish to exit or not.

As a result of that and as a result of further public consultations, I took a decision, I think on 19 December last year, to Executive Council to extend the Gladstone state development area to include the Targinnie Valley and to stand in the market for a period of five years to purchase those properties.

As a result, the government also appointed independent valuers—and I stress they are valuers who are independent of government; they are not our government valuers, though we have paid for them—HTW Central Queensland, to give valuations from which the department would make offers to those residents. We are in the process of making offers to those residents now. I think at this point in time 10 residents have had offers put to them, and we expect there would be another five per week until all 92 or 93 people have had offers put to them.

I want to stress that we asked those valuers in considering the property values to also take into account values around the area, because we were conscious that there is no recent history of properties changing hands in the Targinnie Valley because of the impact of industry there. That is, the old sales prices would not necessarily reflect proper values.

We hope the valuers have got it right, but as a safeguard the department has already advised—and this is part of the process that I want to stress for the benefit of those residents today—that we will pay for their own valuers to value those properties. We will also pay for their legal fees. As a result, there should be a conference between the property owners and my department to consider negotiating those prices. I cannot determine what that outcome could be, but there is a proper process in place because we want to give them a fair price for their property. That is the whole basis of the exit strategy that was put together, and that has a bit of water to go under the bridge as yet.

We have to be very careful that proper values are used because this is public funds that we are talking about, and I do not want to create precedents that have an impact on any other purchases by the government of property for whatever reason around the state, which is why we have done it in this manner. I would urge those residents to be patient with the process. If they are unhappy with the valuations, they should get independent valuations and we will negotiate on that basis with them.

B-Doubles; River Road, Dinmore

Ms NOLAN: My question is to the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads. I refer the minister to the review of River Road, Dinmore as a designated route for B-doubles, and I ask: can the minister advise the House of the outcomes of the review and whether the Department of Main Roads is planning any resumptions in the area?

Mr BREDHAUER: I thank the honourable member for the question. River Road is the designated B-double route between the Cunningham and Warrego highways. As a result of a proposal by New Hope Australia to open the new mine at Acland, which I understand the Premier

had the opportunity to open about 10 days ago, there was concern about the possible impacts of the transport of that coal on to Stanwell through the River Road, Dinmore area. Some 750,000 tonnes of coal were to be transported from Acland.

I want to thank all of the local members for the support they have given me in helping me to work through this issue. I think probably the best outcome that we have seen in relation to resolving these concerns was an agreement that was reached between QR and New Hope Australia with the support of Queensland Transport and other government agencies which has resulted in two-thirds of that product coming from the Acland mine going on rail. So it is not being transported on the road at all. Two-thirds of it is being transported by rail, and I think that is a great outcome for everybody concerned.

There was concern, though, about a number of other issues. I initiated a review of B-double traffic on River Road. Some of the residents' concerns included safety and noise issues, heavy vehicle traffic concerns and particular concern that there would be a concentration of heavy vehicle traffic if a curfew were imposed on River Road, which was one of the suggestions that had been made. There are other businesses in the area, such as Australia Meat Holdings, which would also have been impacted by the curfew. We went through the process in quite some detail. We received over 30 submissions from the local community in response to the review of the B-double route, including the transport industry, local businesses, local schools and residents and other government agencies.

I can advise the member that the review is now complete and that as a result of the review no curfews will be imposed on River Road, which I understand is in line with current community expectations. We are also working with the council with a view to considering a reduction in the speed limit on the road. This is a good outcome. It is a good outcome for the community and for the businesses in the area. I also advise that DMR and local government are to commence negotiations with respect to planning for future access between the highways to reduce long-term impacts on River Road, and that will give us a long-term solution to that problem.

I heard suggestions from one local councillor that the government was seeking to resume properties along River Road. I reassure local members that that is not the case. We have no intention of resuming properties along River Road. I would particularly like to thank the member for Bundamba for her efforts in helping us to negotiate these issues with her local community. She has recently requested that I attend a meeting with the Dinmore State School P&C. I am happy to advise the member today that I will be fitting that in my diary in the next couple of weeks and I look forward to meeting with them.

Police Resources, State Crime Operations Command

Mr HOBBS: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to the State Crime Operations Command budget obtained under FOI from the minister's department because previously the minister has refused to provide this level of detail in answer to questions on notice. In particular, I refer to the State Drug Investigation Group, which deals with major crime in Queensland, where the budget has been cut by 14 per cent in the last two years. In answer to similar questions today, the minister stated that reallocations are up to the Police Service; however, clearly targeted budgeting announced by the government with great fanfare is obviously not getting through. Why has the budget for the State Drug Investigation Group been cut by 14 per cent, or close to $500,000? How will this affect the investigation of major drug crime in Queensland?

Mr McGRADY: Can I emphasise once again that the budget over the past three years for the State Crime Operations Command has increased. This increase is due primarily to labour costs. In 2000-01, expenditure was $39.6 million. In 2001-02, expenditure was $42.7 million. In the current year, estimated expenditure will be $45.5 million. Indeed, as I said three times this morning, there are variations in the three different groups to which the opposition has referred. As regards the one that the member for Warrego just asked about, during the financial year 2001-02 a new cost centre code was established for the illicit laboratory investigation team. Their expenditure is no longer attributed to the former budget. The bottom line is that we have increased expenditure on this particular item, the full item, by about 15 per cent over the last three years.

What members opposite do not understand is that within that framework there have been different cost allocations which have changed. I repeat again—in 2000-01, expenditure was

$39.6 million, and this financial year it is estimated to be $45.5 million. If members opposite can explain to me where the massive cuts have been, I will sit down and discuss it with them.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Callide can debate this afterwards.

Community Renewal Program

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: My question is directed to the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing. The Community Renewal Program has made a significant difference to the people of my electorate of Woodridge since it started in 1998. Can the minister inform the House of how community renewal has improved local communities right across the state?

Mr SCHWARTEN: My colleague to my right, the member for Inala, told me that he could sell his house for several thousand dollars more than he could a few years ago as a result of community renewal. I thank him for that interjection. I also want to place on record my indebtedness to the members for Waterford and Woodridge for the 500th project that has been announced and which I signed off on just a couple of weeks ago. Since its inception in 1998 the Community Renewal Program—

Mr Seeney interjected

Mr SCHWARTEN: Look, everybody knows you're not the full quid. There is no need for you to give evidence of it. You give proof to the fact of vacancy between your ears.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr SCHWARTEN: The truth is that since 1998 this government has committed some $53 million to this invaluable program. That has been money very well spent. The latest project, No. 500, that I signed off on—in fact, there are now 510 projects that I have signed off on—is this $3 million project that the members for Waterford and Woodridge have supported, an aquatic community centre in their area which is costing $3 million. It is a classic example of how this program works.

I thank the Treasurer and Minister for Sport for committing $1 million to that project. Community Renewal committed $1 million, as did the Logan council. That project will be of enormous benefit in that area, not the least of which is that it will enable the constituents of the member who has so ably supported this to teach kids to swim. It has been found in that area that there are kids who go to school who simply cannot swim a stroke. Why? Because there is not a pool available for them to learn to swim. If that does not make a difference in people's lives, nothing does. There are 15 Community Renewal Program centres throughout Queensland. I thank each and every one of the members who are associated with them—from Cairns right down to Logan.

The fact is that whether it is out at Inala where we produced 400 laptop computers for the year 8s to assist them with computer literacy—I wish someone would give me a laptop so I could learn something about them—or the Eagleby boardwalk in the member for Albert's electorate, these programs are about government doing what government should do, that is, grassroots involvement by rank and file people in the community, making decisions through their local members on what is best for them. It does not matter whether it is a bus service from Springwood to Logan, which had never existed before, the boardwalks or programs to help young men behave themselves in Manoora.

Private-Public Partnerships in Education

Ms LEE LONG: My question is directed to the Minister for Education. I understand that the New South Wales Labor government is proceeding with public-private partnerships over the construction of nine new schools, despite the opposition of that state's teachers federation. Is the Beattie government considering the introduction of public-private partnerships for any aspect of the provision of education in this state?

Ms BLIGH: The Beattie government released its policy on public-private partnerships about 14 months ago. It was the subject of consultation for about six to eight weeks. It was done under the auspices of the Minister for State Development. Cabinet accepted that and put in place guidelines for any public-private partnership in education or in any other area of service delivery. Under those guidelines we have currently gone out to public tender for a public-private partnership for the redevelopment of the Southbank TAFE, including the possibility of involvement of

Brisbane State High School as part of an education precinct. I think it has been the subject of possibly in the vicinity of 17 press releases and launches. I can also assure the House that there have been numerous meetings with the relevant trade unions—the Teachers Union, the Miscellaneous Workers Union and the Queensland Council of Unions. The proposal and the guidelines accepted by our government are vastly different from those put in place by not only other states of Australia but also other jurisdictions. We are very aware of some of the concerns and have taken them into account. I am happy to provide those public announcements to the member.

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

PRIVILEGE

Gold Coast Hospital Data Collection

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy) (11.30 a.m.): I rise on a matter of privilege. In answer to a question from the member for Robina I stated that there were problems with the data collection at the Gold Coast Hospital, and some disparaging remarks were made by members opposite. I draw the honourable member's attention to page 2 of the document he tabled, which states—

Variation in waiting times may reflect delays in data entry rather than delays in clinical response.

These are working documents for management—I draw the member's attention to that—rather than for political point scoring. I also draw attention to the fact that almost every page in the document comments on the new process being implemented at the Gold Coast Hospital. I can tell the House that as a result of the improved data collection system at the Gold Coast Hospital and the implementation of a new fast-track system along with the increased staff that we put in at the end of last year, which has been well recorded in the media down there, the February figures—the last available figures—indicate that 100 per cent of category 1 patients are being seen immediately and 70 per cent of category 2 patients are being seen within the allotted time.

PRIVILEGE

Gold Coast Hospital Data Collection

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (11.32 a.m.): I table the March quarter figures, which are almost identical to the June quarter figures, and they are not subject to any 'data' problem.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Resumption of Committee

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) in charge of the bill.

Resumed from 25 March (see p. 772) on clause 19—

Mr WELLINGTON (11.33 a.m.): I note the explanatory notes state that clause 19 inserts a new subdivision related to the forfeiture of leases. Could the minister please clarify what constitutes forfeiture of leases? What is the difference between a conviction and an infringement notice fine? Does an infringement notice fine constitute a conviction?

Mr ROBERTSON: No. Infringement notices do not result in convictions. Infringement notices are similar to, for example, a speeding ticket; if the fine is paid, no conviction is recorded. In the circumstance that the member for Nicklin mentioned, where someone may have an infringement notice and then for a subsequent offence a conviction, that does not constitute the two convictions that may trigger a review of the lease.

Mr ROWELL: During the debate last night I asked the minister a question with respect to the statute of limitations and the complexity where there is a range of ownerships of property through trusts or whatever else. In the event of a person being fined or penalised as a first offence and then committing a second offence, if they have interests in a number of properties is it likely that a conviction could result in their forfeiting a lease to properties other than the property that the conviction relates to?

Mr ROBERTSON: In relation to the circumstance the member outlined, it is important to state that forfeiture of a lease is not something that would be done lightly. Every consideration would

be given to the submission put forward by the leaseholder in terms of the show cause notice. The reasonableness test would apply. That would be taken into consideration in terms of any decision that a minister, in this case me or anyone who comes after me, would take into consideration before terminating that lease.

Mr ROWELL: The point that I want to make is that in the worse case scenario, where a person has offended on two separate properties and where there is a diversity of interests between those two properties. Is it possible that that person could forfeit either of those properties where other people are involved? I can understand that, yes, representation would be made by him in a show cause situation. But in the worst case scenario could that happen? Importantly, a lease might be split between two different sectors, with common interests in all sectors. Could another person who may not have offended wear the consequences of the forfeiture of that lease?

Mr ROBERTSON: I understand the point being made by the member for Hinchinbrook. What I said previously is that there would be an expectation that in a circumstance such as the member has outlined the reasonableness test would always apply. The problem with ruling it out definitively as perhaps the member is seeking is that myriad different cases or examples may apply. By and large, it would be highly unlikely in the circumstance that the member outlined for a lease to be forfeited under those conditions. The only reason I cannot go any further than that is that we would have to look at the specific circumstances applying to each individual case. But as a general rule in applying the reasonableness test and knowing the gravity of a decision to be taken to forfeit someone's lease, every consideration would have to be given to the individual circumstances applying. I think that is a fairly reasonable response to the circumstance that the member has outlined. I am happy to put on record that, as far as I am concerned as minister, I understand and appreciate the gravity of a decision and the implications and outcomes of a decision to forfeit someone's lease. It is not something done lightly. It is done only after full consideration of all of the circumstances. Whether it be me or any other person in this position, including members opposite, individual circumstances weigh on our minds in coming to any decision. As I said, in putting this on record, I understand the gravity of decisions that would be taken in this respect, and the member has an assurance that whilst I remain in this position—and with confidence any other person who may come after me—there will be due consideration of the individual circumstances. That is why the clause says 'may', not 'will'.

Mr WELLINGTON: I wish to follow up on the minister's comments. For example, could the minister comment on a scenario where one business partner has been doing the wrong thing and where this could trigger a conviction and possibly the forfeiture of the lease? What if that party was aware of the worst case scenario and said, 'I'm going to remove my interests from this land and no longer be a partner or have an interest in this land' so that the other partner or partners do not run the risk of having that lease forfeited?

A party who has been involved may say, 'Look, I am aware of the worst case scenario. I do not want to run the risk that my other business partners may face the forfeiture of the lease, therefore I will remove my name from the lease, remove my name from the interest so that the other three or four or five parties can continue.' Can the minister please comment on that?

Mr ROBERTSON: If the person's name gets removed from the lease, then that person would no longer be the leaseholder. Therefore, the two-conviction trigger for a consideration would not apply.

Mr Wellington: Although the lease may be in the name of the other parties as well.

Mr ROBERTSON: That is right.

Mr Wellington: So the lease would continue?

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes.

Mr HOBBS: I have a couple of points just in clarification of the original question by the member for Nicklin and the minister's response. The minister said that if somebody paid the fine, it is not a conviction. What happens if a person elects to pay the fine and undergo remediation—admit guilt rather than go to court? Does that mean that that particular person then would not have a conviction?

The other point that I want to make is that yesterday we did not really get to talk a lot about the right of appeal. On a couple of occasions the minister mentioned that that appeal goes to the Land Court. In fact, under the principal act, that appeal goes to the minister. It is an application for internal review that the minister has to assess in the first instance. It is only on an appeal

against the minister's internal review that the leaseholder would be able to go to the Land Court. This is Caesar judging Caesar. The minister makes a decision in relation to the forfeiture. The internal review goes to the minister. He makes that decision. Then the leaseholder would have to go to court.

That is why this legislation is flawed. I do not think that a person can go straight to the Land Court as the minister suggested. Under the principal act, people cannot do that. Some of things that the minister would have to consider in his internal review would be the value of improvements, the boundaries of the land being resumed, the unimproved value of the land to be sold by the mortgagee in possession, for instance, or maybe the value of commercial timber. The Land Court has enough difficulties as it is adjudicating on these matters. Later on we will talk about where the jurisdiction should lie—the Land Court or the Magistrate's Court. They are a couple of points that I would like the minister to answer.

Mr ROBERTSON: In relation to the member's first question, the answer is yes. In relation to the subsequent issue that the member brought up, I am informed that the process of internal review is a process of long standing, including during the time that the member was the Minister for Natural Resources.

Mr Hobbs: You have changed the whole thing around now. Before, it was the Land Court. You didn't actually go to the minister. It now goes to the minister. You have changed the rules. That is why I am asking.

Mr ROBERTSON: It goes to the minister. If need be, it gets internally reviewed. If the aggrieved person is still unhappy with the results of that internal review, that person has the right to take it to the Land Court. I thought that I actually clarified that yesterday in terms of an exchange across the chamber. It may not be reflected in *Hansard*, but I certainly did mention that late yesterday afternoon.

Mr SEENEY: I think that it is worth putting on record the fact that this is an example of why the minister needs to explain these things as part of this debate. He did not give us that information yesterday. That is a different position. The chamber now understands a different position from the one that the minister gave in an explanation yesterday. It illustrates how important it is for the minister to give the parliament all of the information in regard to these clauses, because the potential is there for them to have particularly severe effects. Although the issue has now been clarified, it illustrates the lack of a genuineness in the minister's answer yesterday.

Question—That clause 19, as read, stand part of the bill—put; and the Committee divided—

AYES, 61—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Beattie, Bligh, Bredhauer, Briskey, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Lucas, Mackenroth, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 16—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, Rowell, Seeney, Sheldon, Watson, Tellers: Lester, Hopper

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clause 20—

Mr SEENEY (11.52 a.m.): At the beginning of this debate on clause 20 I want to read from the explanatory notes that the minister has provided with the bill before the House. I want to do that so that there can be no mistake about what clause 20 entails. The explanatory notes state—

Clause 20 inserts a new part 2 of s 255, indicating that section 24 of the criminal code does not apply in proceedings against a person for a tree clearing offence. This clause in effect removes the defence of 'an honest and reasonable, but mistaken belief.'

That is what the explanatory notes say about clause 20. Clause 20 removes the right that a person has—that we all have in just about every other situation—to plead as a defence to a charge that we honestly and reasonably acted in a way that we thought was right. This clause seeks to take away what is a fundamental part of our legal system—that is, that people who act honestly and reasonably, believing what they are doing is right, can plead that as a defence for a charge that is brought against them. That is a fundamental part of our legal system. It is something that has been part of our legal system for centuries.

However, the bill before the House is about vegetation management—not the most horrendous crime in the world, I would suggest, as bad as it may be if it is breaking the law. There

are certainly worse crimes that one could commit within our society than falling foul of vegetation management legislation. But this bill seeks to take away from people who do fall foul of vegetation management legislation one of the fundamental legal tenets that we have all enjoyed. It seeks to take away the right that a person has to plead that they were acting honestly and reasonably and that they believed what they were doing was right. What possible justification can there be for such an attack on basic civil liberties, on basic legal rights? It is interesting—

Mr Cummins interjected.

Mr SEENEY: The member for Kawana makes an interjection about my regard for civil liberties. He may well make the same flippant comment about people such as Terry O'Gorman who have expressed exactly the same concerns in the public media that I am expressing in this parliament today. It will be interesting to see how all the Labor leftie lawyers who occupy cushy positions in the backbench in this government approach this erosion of fundamental legal rights, how they justify to themselves and their constituents this attack on the civil liberties of one particular group of Queenslanders.

It is incumbent on the minister to explain that to this parliament before this clause is passed into law, as it undoubtedly will be, given the lopsided balance in the House and the fact that the government has 66 seats and can basically do what it likes with regard to any group of Queenslanders. It is incumbent on him to explain why on earth this particular clause that makes such an attack on our fundamental legal system and our fundamental civil rights needs to be included. Why is it needed? How can it possibly be justified in this legislation? Once again, it is important to see this bill against the background of vegetation management legislation in this House and in this state over the last three years. Once again, that background is critically important in understanding just how unjust and how unfair and how unnecessary the implementation of this particular clause will be when it is passed into law.

In the period when the vegetation management legislation was first introduced into this House by the former failed minister, Mr Welford, until even today there is a huge amount of uncertainty out in the general community. There is a huge amount of ill preparedness in the Department of Natural Resources. The data upon which the Department of Natural Resources operates—the data that it makes available to land-holders upon which it makes these decisions about whether or not it is acting honestly and reasonably and upon which it makes these decisions about whether or not its actions are honest and reasonable—is and remains—

The CHAIRMAN: Can I suggest to the member for Callide that in his contribution to the second reading debate he made this case very strongly. I do not see that he ought to take 10 minutes to remake it here. It is relevant and the member is speaking to the clause properly, but I think that he is repeating himself. So on the basis of tediousness, I just say that in the interests of this House I do not think he has to keep on repeating the same argument in this chamber.

Mr SEENEY: I do not think I have repeated the argument in my contribution on this clause. It is critically important. I cannot overemphasise the importance of it. While it might be tedious for Labor backbenchers who do not have constituents who will be affected by this erosion of fundamental legal rights, it is critically important for my constituents. It is critically important for a particular group of Queenslanders. It is essential that these points are made.

This is something I am very uncomfortable with. Not only I but also other members of the community, outside of the group of people who will be impacted upon, have expressed extreme discomfort with this. It certainly requires extensive consideration in this chamber. It is one of the more fundamental parts of this legislation. I can assure the minister that we will be opposing this clause, which seeks to erode those fundamental legal rights and take away the defence that there was an honest and reasonable but mistaken belief.

Mr HOBBS: A number of issues raised by this particular clause need to be explored. As a result of this clause, the act will provide that the defence of a reasonable and honest but mistaken belief that led to the commissioning of a tree clearing offence does not apply and that, where the defence applies, the prosecution must negate it. An example of such a mistake might be a mistake in interpreting a map.

There is nothing in the principal act that dictates that that map should show exactly the satellite points to delineate what the land-holder can in fact clear. The minister has taken away all of the rights of the land-holder, but the CEO can put out a dodgy map! All of the permits that have been issued in the past would have basically been rough guidelines. So the people the minister is taking to court, as well as the additional 2,000 cases he is going to examine under this new legislation, will not be able to use the reasonable excuse that the map was bad.

We know that the maps were bad in the past. We know that on previous occasions the satellite points were 100 to 150 metres out because the Americans changed the satellite. They have changed it again in recent times. We also know that a pencil line on a map represents 100 metres. There is a significant area that needs to be clarified. The minister really needs to put something into this legislation that will make it quite clear that the CEO needs to clearly delineate the area to be cleared to enable the permittee to define the area on the ground.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I rise to add my concern about the inclusion of this clause to omit the defence of an honest and reasonable but mistaken belief. The maps upon which landowners rely are notoriously inaccurate. That point has been made to my office, even in my small electorate, which would be on a small scale by comparison with the electorate of Gregory or some other western electorates, where there are not as many points for reference as there would be in the more closely settled areas.

I gave this bill to a constituent in my electorate—a lady who lives in town but who is looking for a rural property. After reading this clause she said, 'If you are from a town situation, how do you know about these matters? I would not have known and I am looking for property.' She has interests in horses. She said, 'I would have started chopping down trees as soon as I could.' She wanted to create a dressage area and so on. The property she buys may have exemptions under the Land Act. I am not saying that some of what she does would be outside of the act's allowance. However, in my speech at the second reading stage I asked what mechanisms are in place to ensure landowners who purchase rural land are made aware of their obligations in relation to land clearing. My recollection is that that question was not answered.

People are inundated with new rules, regulations and obligations that we create here in this parliament and by regulation. There is a plethora of documents. I defy the minister to disagree with the statement that nobody would look at every single element of a change of location. They would not look at all 19 departments of government, all of the regulations and everything else that goes with them. Unless the department is going to have an ongoing and blanket information program to ensure people are aware, without any doubt, of their obligations on land clearing, then the removal of this defence is inequitable and I will not support it.

Mr ROBERTSON: I will deal with all three contributions in this answer. I refer to the comment that this is some sort of extraordinary provision. Once again, had the opposition done its research it would have been aware that this provision has existed in the Forestry Act 1959 for many years. So precedent already applies.

In terms of the challenging contribution of the member for Callide and his interpretation of the Criminal Code, section 36 of the Criminal Code provides that section 24 and other defences do not apply to regulatory offences. That is what is contained in the Criminal Code. It is not as he interprets it. The reason for its inclusion in the bill is that section 24 is the most frequently raised defence.

As the member for Gladstone would be aware from her years on the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee and before that on the Subordinate Legislation Committee—we sat on that committee together—as a principle, ignorance of the law is not a defence. That principle is taken forward in this legislation. Frankly, that anyone in the state of Queensland would not know that there are tree clearing laws—they may not be aware of the details—I find a little difficult to believe, given that every week, if not every day, in media, whether it be print, radio or television, tree clearing laws are talked about and prosecutions are highlighted to the extent that I would believe there is a general awareness in the community that tree clearing is not something that land-holders can do as of right.

Finally, I alert members to the actual provisions of this clause. They talk about things such as maps and so on. This clause relates to a permit, not maps. It relates to the requirement for a permit, so a lot of the contributions made by members opposite are erroneous.

Mr HOBBS: What an extraordinary statement! I just cannot believe what I am hearing. Let us try to get our minds around this. The minister is saying that this is not about maps but about permits. People apply for a permit for tree clearing which must be accompanied by a map. They go together. The minister did not answer my question. We have highlighted an issue that I suspect the minister is unable to answer.

The point is this: for all those people who have had permits issued, some of whom will be investigated, some of whom will be fined and some of whom are already undergoing that process, those maps are inaccurate. The minister is retrospectively taking away the right of people to say that the map was wrong. The minister cannot do that. Mugabe would be proud of him.

Mr Robertson: We are not doing that. Read the clause.

Mr HOBBS: We have read the clause, we have read the principal act, and that is exactly what it says. The legal advice we have is along those same lines.

Mr Robertson: You are absolutely hopeless and embarrassing.

Mr HOBBS: The minister can shoot the messenger, but the reality is that he does not understand the issue. He is saying that a map is not important because it relates to a permit.

Mr Schwarten: He did not say that at all.

Mr HOBBS: He did say that. The question which I would again ask of the minister is: will he change the regulation or will he not pursue those people who have been issued with permits without accurate mapping? Those people should not be taken to court retrospectively. He should start this process from now. If everyone knew that was the case, that would be reasonable. Every map that goes out needs to be accurate and give accurate GPS points. We are talking, in some cases, of areas of 20,000 hectares. We are talking about larger areas. There may well be smaller ones, too. We need to have a map, and that map must be accurate.

Mr SEENEY: Is the minister going to respond or not?

Mr Robertson: I will wait for all the useful contributions to come forward first.

Mr SEENEY: The points raised by the member for Warrego definitely deserve a response, and the arrogant attitude adopted by the minister does nothing to proceed this debate.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Firstly, I suggest that the member for Callide address all his comments through the chair. Secondly, the minister is not suggesting that he is not going to comment. I do not think those comments do much for the debate. I suggest that we debate the clause.

Mr SEENEY: This clause, as I said before, is critically important. There are some essential elements that need to be addressed, and they need to be addressed in a lot more detail than the almost frivolous attempt that the minister made in his first response.

This is essentially about the accuracy of the department's mapping and the accuracy of the department's data. If a land-holder operates under an honest and reasonable but mistaken belief that this clause takes away from them, they can, as the previous two clauses indicated, be subject to the forfeiture of the lease. It is critically important. Let us look at some examples to clarify what sort of effect this clause will have on people.

There are innumerable examples. I am sure even the minister would not deny that there are innumerable examples of departmental mapping being horribly wrong in that period of time from when the Vegetation Management Act was first introduced and now. I know of examples where areas were shown on maps to be endangered vegetation only to turn out to be cultivated crops because the technology was not good enough to differentiate between them. I have seen a number of maps that indicate a particular area is an endangered ecosystem only to go there and find that it was cleared 50 years ago and is a grass paddock. I know of examples where a mapping system showed areas thought to be of-concern ecosystems. The one example I am thinking of turned out to be a paddock of lantana.

A government member interjected.

Mr SEENEY: If the member who interjects would like, I can show him the areas. I can show the minister, just as the departmental officers have been shown. That is the background. The person who acted reasonably and honestly but under a mistaken belief based on that data now finds themselves devoid of that defence. They cannot under this proposal say, 'We thought we were doing the right thing because the department maps showed this to be a particular category, and we went ahead and acted on that data, which we reasonably and honestly believed to be right.'

I think the point that the member for Warrego made is a very good one. If we are going to pass this into law, then do it from here forward. Do not use this provision to pursue people who were caught up in essentially what was the result of his own department's incompetence—or ill-preparedness, probably more fairly—for the political agenda that was driven by the previous minister and by the government. It would be wholly unjust and unfair to prosecute and to pursue those people because the department was so ill-prepared for the legislation that was introduced here for political purposes.

In a whole range of situations there was uncertainty as to whether a permit was needed or not. It has probably been clarified now, but in the months immediately following the introduction of

the legislation there was even conflicting advice from departmental officers about whether or not a permit was needed. Is the minister going to use this provision to go back and prosecute those people and tell me that that is somehow fair, just and moral? Absolutely not! It cannot be argued that that is so.

If we are going to have this provision, and obviously we will, then let us have it from here forward. Let us be a bit fair and reasonable about it. Even the member for Rockhampton, who is not known for his reasonableness, would probably support that concept.

Mr WELLINGTON: I would like to ask the minister how crucial is the presence of this clause in the bill and the future act to maintaining the integrity of the intent of what he wants to achieve as a result of this bill becoming an act of parliament? I put on the public record that I certainly have reservations and significant concerns about the effect of the removal of the 'honest and reasonable but mistaken belief' defence. If this clause 20 were not there, would that have a significant minimal effect on this bill when it finally becomes law?

Mr ROBERTSON: In relation to the question asked by the member for Warrego, the answer is no. In relation to the question asked by the member for Nicklin, unfortunately the member for Callide did not quote the whole relevant paragraph in the explanatory note. What happens is that the exclusion of the defence requires a person to exercise due diligence before commencing vegetation clearing, including getting a permit. It is, in our view, important that this provision does enter the statute book.

Mr HOBBS: The minister said that a permit and a map do not go together. Let me give him a dinky-di example of what has happened. This is a letter which he might find familiar. A letter from a land-holder states—

My experience in recently having a Regrowth Permit approved through DNR Charleville Office reveals the following:-

After two attempts to map the regrowth area there are still mistakes unresolved. The errors include an area that has been cultivated for about 20 years yet is classified as an endangered area as if it were in an uncleared virgin state. There is no salination or erosion either.

An area mapped as an 'of concern' dominant community, which must not be disturbed, is in fact a 70 year old clearing where hardly a tree exists.

The same Officer had mapped another area and explained that it had not been cleared under a Permit. When pressed, it emerged that he had overlooked the relevant Permit.

...

Another Officer confused the area under current litigation with a totally different area, and explained that he thought it was in the litigation area. There was even an Authority to Clear regrowth on land that had never previously been cleared.

Then your Principal Investigations Co-ordinator became involved in mapping the area which is subject to litigation. I was sent a map ... which was badly in error ... A second map arrived, apologising for the first errors. However the second map also contains a number of errors.

... Two Officers from the Herbarium inspected areas which were in dispute. Their inspection revealed that thousands of acres of Lot 5 were incorrectly mapped as 'of concern' when in fact they were 'not of concern'. Despite admissions of the errors, the promised corrections have not been made five months later.

Surveyors attest that it is impossible to locate Permit area boundaries on the ground with the maps supplied with permits.

Rangeland scientists attest that permits can be botched.

This is what has happened. How can people possibly go out there and use this legislation when the maps are inaccurate? There is the absolute evidence of what has happened. The minister's own people cannot get the maps right.

The CHAIRMAN: Before calling the member for Callide, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from Peachester State School in the electorate of Glass House.

Mr SEENEY: Unfortunately we seem to be deteriorating to a situation where we get only one word answers from the minister. But it is important to clarify this point about whether this clause will be applied to people who supposedly have committed offences in the years between when the Vegetation Management Act was first introduced and now. It is important to clarify this.

The CHAIRMAN: Can I make an observation? I have heard that point being made five times this morning. The member has made it three times on this clause.

Mr SEENEY: With the greatest respect—and I do respect the chair—I want the minister to answer the member for Warrego's question. The minister did not do that. I want to make sure that I clearly understand the minister's position. Can the minister clarify that this provision will be applied to people who allegedly committed offences in that period of uncertainty? Will the minister

clarify whether somebody who acted honestly and reasonably in 2001, in 1999, immediately after the Vegetation Management Act was introduced or on the day that the Vegetation Management Act was introduced but who has apparently since been shown to have had a mistaken belief will be denied this defence? If that is the minister's intention, I think that really is a gross unfairness in terms of what people understood were their responsibilities under the new act. It could not be confirmed by departmental officers at that time. There were differing opinions. A wide range of advice was being given, quite apart from the arguments about the mapping, which are very valid. But quite apart from that there was such confusion. It was such an overheated political situation that it would be grossly unfair if that is the minister's intention. I think the minister really should confirm, if that is his intention, why it is necessary.

In the second reading debate the minister highlighted the fact that there was a 100 per cent success rate in prosecutions. Are there prosecutions out there that either are pending or are going on where the minister needs to strip from the defendant this right? Is it the case that the minister needs to strip from people this right so he can maintain his 100 per cent prosecution rate? That is what the minister needs to tell the committee. The member for Nicklin's question was very valid—why do we need this? Is it the case that the department has some prosecutions ready to go where to succeed in those prosecutions, to maintain its 100 per cent success rate in prosecuting people, it first needs to strip away this fundamental legal right that has been so roundly criticised not just by me or the land-holding community but by people who are renowned civil libertarians in this state? This committee deserves better than a one-word answer from the minister in regard to those quite profound issues.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I trust the minister will accept this question in the spirit that it is asked. There has been talk about the maps, about information that is distributed to landowners and upon which they take action in land clearing. This clause removes a defence that I imagine in many circumstances would be used by landowners in good faith. If information provided to landowners is inaccurate or outdated, will this clause preclude them from using the defence that the information of the maps, past or current, was inaccurate?

Mr ROBERTSON: In response to the member for Gladstone, no.

Opposition members interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: You both have had three chances. I hope that the member is not inferring that the chair is not doing a proper job. The member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr ROWELL: With your forbearance, Mr Chairman, I might talk about another clause in the legislation that relates particularly to this clause. Can I do that?

The CHAIRMAN: No, you can't. The member for Hinchinbrook cannot get up on a particular clause and say that he wants to talk to another clause. What am I supposed to say to that? That is ludicrous.

Mr ROWELL: If I can raise the issue that there is some inconsistency in the legislation, will you allow me to talk about another clause?

The CHAIRMAN: No.

Mr ROWELL: In other words, if there are inconsistencies in the clauses, we cannot actually raise them? We have no ability.

A government member interjected.

Mr ROWELL: Never mind about the galah from Rockhampton over there.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The member will resume his seat. We have a clause before the committee. The member can talk about the impact of that clause on the legislation.

Mr ROWELL: It is quite evident that there are two rules for different groups within the community. I just want to raise this because it is particularly important. When we look at the farming community and at corporate bodies, it is quite clear that there is some inconsistency within the legislation. I want to quite clearly point this out.

The CHAIRMAN: The member will resume his seat. I rule the member out of order.

Question—That clause 20, as read, stand part of the bill—put; and the committee divided—

AYES, 58—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Beattie, Bligh, Bredhauer, Briskey, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 18—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Sheldon, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Hopper

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clause 21—

Mr WELLINGTON (12.34 p.m.): I ask the minister: how did he determine five years to be the appropriate relevant period?

Mr ROBERTSON: Simply, we considered five years was a reasonable period.

Clause 21, as read, agreed to.

Clause 22—

Mr SEENEY (12.35 p.m.): Clause 22 deals with enforcing compliance with the act. However, it also involves enforcing compliance with a number of powers that officials will be granted if this bill is passed and becomes part of the act. I think there are a number of issues in this compliance enforcement section that deserve to be clarified and which have not yet been canvassed as part of this debate. If we take the enforcement provision included in clause 22 and read it in conjunction with some of the powers being given to officers in other parts of this legislation it is not hard to see us arriving at some rather difficult situations.

I would like to ask the minister a series of questions in regard to the compliance enforcement provisions of clause 22. Proposed subsections (1), (2) and the first part of (3) are fairly self-explanatory. Compliance notices can be issued if the officer 'reasonably believes'. Once again, we come back to the 'reasonably believes' provision. All of the arguments we have already mounted about the unreasonableness of the approach that had been taken by some departmental officers certainly apply here also. This proposed section sets out the process if an officer reasonably believes that people are committing or have committed tree clearing offences. The authorised person may give a notice—these so-called compliance notices—requiring the person to do a number of things. Firstly, it may require him to stop committing the offence. If the officer is acting reasonably and judging the situation reasonably and believes that an offence is being committed, it is fair enough for him to require a person to stop committing the offence. However, proposed subsections (2)(b) and (c) introduce a completely new issue. They state—

(b) stop committing the offence and rectify the matter; or

(c) rectify the matter.

It is very open as to what that means. What are we talking about when it says that an officer can require the land-holder to rectify the matter? Are we talking about rehabilitating areas? Are we talking about a rectification that will take a long time to be effective? Subsection (3) says that the 'compliance notice must state' and lists a few things that we would expect the compliance notice to state, for example, why the official believes the compliance notice is necessary and what the offence is. That would be part of any compliance notice. But subsection (3)(d), once again, deals with the issue of rectifying the matter. It states—

(d) if the notice requires a person to rectify a matter—

(i) the matter the official believes is reasonably capable of being rectified; and

(ii) the reasonable steps the person must take to rectify the matter; and

(iii) the stated reasonable period in which the person must take the steps.

Are we talking about a rehabilitation situation where what is required in terms of rehabilitation will be part of this compliance notice? Surely if that is the situation, there is a huge expectation on the officer to be able to make those types of judgments and include them in the compliance notice issued, presumably, when he first becomes aware that an offence is being committed. We are talking about native vegetation. If the situation is going to be rectified, it needs to be rectified over a long period. It would take decades in some instances. Subsection (5) states—

(5) If the person does an act, or makes an omission, in contravention of the compliance notice—

and this is the important part—

the official may use reasonable force and take any other reasonable action to stop the contravention.

What on earth does it mean in the real world to say that an official may use reasonable force and take any other reasonable action to stop the contravention? We are talking about people who are sent out to determine whether vegetation is being cleared. What sorts of actions is the minister contemplating these people will take when he drafts a bill stating that they can use reasonable force and take other reasonable actions?

Once again, the arguments that have already been mounted in this debate about the reasonableness of the past actions of those officers are certainly relevant. Subsection 6 states—

Any reasonable cost or expense incurred by the official in doing anything under subsection (5) may be recovered as a debt owing to the State by the person.

At first reading, that seems to mean that any cost that the official incurs in using reasonable force or taking reasonable action to stop a contravention is a debt owing to the land-holder against whom the contravention notice is served. If we think about that in practical terms and we think about that against the background of the lack of reasonableness, or the interpretation that has been used by these officials about what is reasonable, we find that it opens up some quite horrendous possibilities in terms of what may be incurred as a debt to the land-holder.

Initially, I would like to hear the minister respond to some of those points and perhaps we can explore some of those real-life examples after he has responded. It is important that we understand what these subclauses mean. Once again, that is very much dependent on that issue of reasonableness. It is very dependent on departmental officers acting reasonably. There has been enough reference in this debate and there have been enough real-life experiences to bring into doubt the fact that land-holders should automatically assume that departmental officers are going to act reasonably or, at the very kindest, it is fair to say that the definition of what is reasonable action on the part of departmental officers has proven to be very different in real-life experiences that have occurred since the introduction of the Vegetation Management Act. I would certainly like to hear the minister's response and I will certainly explore some examples with him following that response.

Mr ROBERTSON: I will try to deal with all of the issues that the opposition spokesperson raised. It is important to state that we are dealing with a case where someone is caught illegally clearing their land.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: Indeed. There are two things that happen. In terms of the compliance notice, the first thing that happens is that the person is required to stop clearing. I am dealing with subclause 2 here, which states, firstly—

Stop committing the offence.

That is stop the bulldozing. Then subclauses (b) or (c) apply.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: The member is correct. The term 'rectify' means remediation, replanting or rehabilitating the land that has been cleared illegally, which can form part of the compliance notice. Obviously, that is not something that can occur immediately, as the opposition spokesman has mentioned. In some cases, rehabilitation can take many years. That is why the provision is inserted to determine a reasonable time to complete that work.

Obviously, if we are in the middle of the drought or if we are in a dry season, to require replanting when there is no rain would be a stupid thing to do. Therefore, the flexibility is given to the officer to provide a reasonable time, relevant to the circumstances that may apply to a particular piece of land, for this rectification, rehabilitation, replanting—whatever. In some cases, it will not be replanting. In some cases, it will just be leaving the land alone—such as brigalow country—to regenerate naturally as it does. So depending on the circumstances applying in any particular part of the state, that rectification notice would reflect those circumstances.

The member had a difficulty with subclause 5, the use of reasonable force. That allows the vegetation management officer to do things such as enter a property by cutting a bolted gate or stopping a bulldozer from continuing to clear. It is that kind of reasonable force that is required to stop the offence continuing and, again, relevant to the circumstances that may apply to any particular case.

In relation to the costs of contravention, if the officer is trying to stop the clearing continuing and costs are incurred in doing that—in stopping someone engaging in an illegal action—it is considered reasonable that the costs of stopping that illegal action should not rest with the people of Queensland; it should rest with the person who is undertaking the illegal activity. I should say, as I have mentioned all along from my second reading speech right throughout the debate, that we are trying to take away the economic imperative, or the economic benefit from people who illegally clear their land. It is one thing to go through the courts and cop a fine, but as a result of the clearing, the people who engaged in the illegal clearing get an economic benefit, because the land is cleared. It can become grazing country. So in some respects, whilst the court may hand

out a fine of whatever—it might be $900, it might be $1,500—we are left with land that has been cleared and the person convicted of illegal tree clearing continues to enjoy the benefit of his illegal action. So provisions such as this one are about taking away that economic benefit of undertaking that action.

Mr WELLINGTON: My question to the minister is in relation to the powers that the officials are going to have once this bill becomes law. How many authorised people are there in the department? Does the minister have an idea? We are talking about the people who will actually have these powers. Ten? Twenty? Thirty? Fifty? One hundred?

Mr Robertson: I am informed about 20.

Mr WELLINGTON: Will there be any vetting to ensure that these public servants are suitable to undertake these enforcement roles? Yesterday I asked a question of the Premier in relation to vetting of public servants who have police-like powers, and this really goes to the heart of what that question was about. By way of comparison, if a person wants to become a police officer they have to go through a pretty strenuous and strict vetting process to make sure, for a start, that they are a suitable type of person to take on that enforcement role. What vetting process will the minister or his department undertake to ensure that the staff who will have the powers proposed in this clause will be vetted to ensure that they and, more importantly, future staff are suitable and appropriate to undertake these enforcement powers?

Mr ROBERTSON: I appreciate the question being asked by the member for Nicklin. Obviously at the point of employment vetting and selection processes are undertaken to determine the best candidates for these positions, including criminal history checks. That is something that occurs for all public sector workers as a matter of course. That is one end of the issue. But I think the far more important part of the issue is that we ensure that these people are properly trained in a whole gamut of issues that apply to being a vegetation management officer. I am informed that one of the things that we are undertaking is nationally accredited training for all of these officers to ensure that they are provided with the appropriate skills and knowledge to carry out their work to the best of their ability and to the best of our expectations.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: The compliance notice is going to be attached as an encumbrance to the property title, and the bill provides that as soon as practicable after the compliance notice is given the CEO has to advise the registrar of titles in writing of the giving of the notice. The question is going to sound pedantic, but I do not mean it to be. There will be a period of time that will elapse between the issuing of the compliance notice and the CEO's advice to the registrar and its actually being entered into the land title. In purchasing a property, the solicitor acting for the purchaser usually does only one search prior to the purchase. That could show the title as clear of all encumbrances. They very seldom—I do not know of too many instances—do a second search for any new matters after the decision to purchase the land is made. Will the department put in place a mechanism to advise new purchasers who may fall into that time span of that new encumbrance, particularly in light of the onerous penalties included in this bill for non-compliance?

Mr ROBERTSON: I do not think the member for Gladstone is being pedantic. I think it is a point well made and I give an undertaking that we will look at putting in procedures to close the gap that may exist. As the member I think is suggesting, it would not be a widespread problem; nevertheless, it is an issue that would need to be looked at whereby we close that gap to the minimal possible extent between the issuing of the compliance notice or a prosecution or what have you and the entry into the land title of the encumbrance. We will certainly have a look at that. I think it is a point well made.

Mr SEENEY: I think in the minister's response to my first contribution to this clause he effectively destroyed any argument that he may have been able to make about the requirement for the enforcing compliance provisions at all when he spoke about taking away the economic imperative for people to engage in illegal clearing. The whole thrust of this legislation is to make the penalty such that there is no economic imperative. That of course, if one accepts that—and I do—begs the question of why there needs to be these enforcement powers in relation to compliance. If the legislation itself is going to achieve that end, is that not going to ensure compliance? Why do we need this clause to give these quite unusual powers, as the member for Nicklin set out, to a number of officers who may or may not be able to exercise those powers effectively? That is an argument that the minister illustrated well enough in his first response. It effectively, as I said, destroys any argument he could mount for the inclusion of this clause. But the clause is here and we must look at the detail of it.

The other point I wanted to raise following on from the minister's first response relates to that part of the clause which requires the inclusion within the compliance notice the reasonable steps a person must take to rectify the matter. It is the rectification that I want to talk about. I understand the arguments that the minister mounted about stopping the actual transgression or the committing of the act, but let us talk about the rectification provisions that are addressed by proposed subsection (d)(ii) and (iii). Let us look at an example where the reasonable force and reasonable action that is granted to these officers by proposed subsection (5) is applied to the rectification part of the compliance notices. It would seem to follow that these officials are being granted the power to use 'reasonable force and take any other reasonable action to stop the contravention'.

If the conditions are included with the compliance notice in relation to achieving the rectification—and, as the minister said, that could be a range of things such as leaving it alone in the brigalow country and it will regenerate, it could be fencing it off in other situations and allowing it to regenerate, it could be some sort of a replanting program depending on the ecosystem of where we are talking about or it could be a range of other things that could be part of the rectification process—and if a land-holder contravenes those rectification conditions that are set out in the compliance notice, it would follow from this clause that an official may use 'reasonable force and take any other reasonable action to stop that contravention'. Let us go back to the example. If the land-holder does not fence off the area, the official can fence it off or take reasonable force or any reasonable action to ensure it is fenced off. So he can fence it off himself or get a contractor to fence it off. If the land-holder does not replant an area, the official can once again take any reasonable action and any reasonable force to have it replanted or engage a contractor to do it.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I am coming to that. Don't you worry about that. I have not forgotten about the situation that would enable all of those costs to be debited to the land-holder. So all of those costs of rectification that are incurred in the use of that reasonable force and the taking of those so-called reasonable actions are the responsibility of the land-holder. In the extreme situation where, for example, it is a replanting situation, those costs could be quite enormous in terms of replanting and any sort of work that is necessary to ensure that that replanting is successful. We are talking about quite considerable costs. In fact, those costs would be, in my view, more likely to be more than the value of the cleared country—considerably more value than the cleared country. Those are the powers that this bill gives to these authorised officers and allows them to exercise under these compliance notice powers. They are quite extensive powers and there is no provision for appeal. There is no provision for a land-holder to appeal against them.

Time expired.

Sitting suspended from 12.59 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Progress reported.

HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 25 February (see p. 53).

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (2.31 p.m.): I am pleased to rise to speak to the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill on behalf of my colleague the shadow minister for health. The shadow minister regrets not being able to be here to debate this legislation. However, she felt that it would be a disservice to the people of Queensland to pass up the opportunity to participate in a Taiwanese conference on gender mainstreaming. She is attending the conference at the invitation and cost of the Taiwanese and is also taking the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Tourism regarding opportunities to further tap into Asian markets for Queensland tourism, a subject close to the heart of her electorate of Maroochydore.

Contained within this omnibus bill are some very sound measures, various housekeeping measures to bring legislation into line with current practice or to redress administrative errors, and a number of amendments which are of serious concern to the opposition. I will deal first with the housekeeping measures.

The bill includes an amendment to the Health Act 1937 to allow Queensland Health to fulfil its obligations under the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996 to report to registrant bodies regarding health practitioners, nurses or veterinary surgeons misappropriation, self-

administration or unauthorised prescribing of controlled or restricted drugs without contravening Queensland Health's privacy policy. Clearly, it is essential that registrant bodies have access to such information to enable them to make appropriate decisions about the fitness to practise of a registrant. The opposition has no objection to this provision to bring the legislation into line with their privacy policy, which is based on the national privacy principles.

The opposition also supports amendments to the Pest Management Act 2001, which are minor in nature with the exception of the insertion of a new definition of 'fumigant' to clarify that the use of household fumigants such as mothballs are not subject to the act.

The proposed amendments to the Private Health Facilities Act 1999 and the Radiation Safety Act 1999 to simplify the process for notification of standards under those acts are sound, although it is disappointing that the bill also has to contain provisions to validate certain standards that were not notified correctly.

I will now turn to the measures in the bill that the opposition considers strongly positive. Amendments to the Health Rights Commission Act 1991 will clarify that complaints can be made and investigated on behalf of users of the health system who have since died and that where the complainant dies during the investigation of their complaint the complaint can be continued on their behalf.

We saw in Monday's *Courier-Mail* Queensland's hospital care reported as amongst the worst in the nation in terms of medical errors. Where people have suffered as the result of medical errors or inadequate care in Queensland hospitals, it is essential that they and their loved ones have access to the Health Rights Commission. This amendment acknowledges the importance of allowing the Health Rights Commission to continue to pursue a complaint where the complainant has passed away or to pursue a complaint brought by a family member after a health system user has passed away. This process is important not only to loved ones left behind but also to all Queenslanders in terms of addressing any weaknesses in our health system.

Another of the measures that the opposition is pleased to support is the amendment to the Medical Practitioners Registration Act to make provision for retired doctors to continue using the title 'Dr'. The new category of non-practising registration overcomes the problem, which quickly became apparent when the act commenced in March last year, that retired doctors would not be able to use the title 'Dr', as is their custom. Given that anyone who has a PhD can use the title 'Dr', and given the many years of service to the community of retiring doctors, it is only fitting that retired medical doctors are able to continue to use the title they have earned.

The proposed non-practising registration is a good balance between retired doctors' rights and protecting the public. Registrants in this category will be able to use the title 'Dr' and refer to their medical qualifications but not use restricted titles such as 'medical practitioner' or 'specialist'. As 'non-practising registrant' suggests, these doctors will not be permitted to provide any form of medical service. To be eligible for this category of registration a person must, of course, have the relevant qualifications and be considered by the medical board to be a suitable person.

Further amendments of the Medical Practitioners Registration Act are of greater concern to the opposition. These are amendments that extend protection from civil or criminal liability to bodies or persons who provide advice to the board about the standard of postgraduate medical education or—this is where our particular concerns are—registrants who are required to practise under supervision. We, of course, support the appropriate scrutiny of postgraduate medical courses and conditional registrants who need to be supervised to ensure they are practising in a competent manner. However, we do have concerns about the natural justice issues regarding the redress that conditional registrants have to concerns levelled against them. I understand that such registrants must be provided with a statement of reasons if new or extended conditions are placed on their registration and that they also have avenues of appeal. However, at the committee stage the opposition will be seeking clarification regarding registrants' access to the detail of any information that may be being used against them.

We also have some concerns regarding amendments to the Hospitals Foundations Act 1982 and will be seeking assurances from the minister at the committee stage that changes to the consultation requirements for appointments to the foundations will not result in a 'jobs for the boys' situation where a minister can quietly appoint any mate whom they wish to reward at that time.

Our most grave concerns regarding this legislation are reserved for amendments to the Freedom of Information Act and Health Services Act 1991 which provide for a ridiculous level of secrecy for hospital quality assurance committees. The Health Services Act 1991 enables the

minister to declare approved quality assurance committees to investigate health care processes and outcomes in hospitals and identify opportunities to improve the design and operation of health care systems. These committees are subject to strict duties of confidentiality. The act prohibits the disclosure of information created by or given to committees in proceedings before a court, tribunal, board or person.

In her second reading speech the minister referred to the Safety and Quality Council's July 2002 national report of qualified privilege, implying that this report called for the exemption of quality assurance committees from freedom of information legislation. The council does report that some practitioners are reluctant to take part in quality assurance activities because they are fearful they will be exposed through freedom of information. These references to freedom of information are included under the heading 'Checks and balances in qualified privilege laws'.

It is drawing a longbow that the report calls for exemptions from freedom of information laws. To give members an idea of the types of issues that the government is seeking to shield from scrutiny of Queenslanders, I would like to read from an example in the report. That example states—

> At one hospital over a four month period 28 patients had at least one ERCP ... This is an investigation in which an instrument is passed through the gullet, stomach ... and into the bile duct system near the liver and pancreas. A dye can be injected and X-rays can be taken of the bile duct system.

This legislation proposes to keep all documents related to quality assurance committees secret. While quality assurance committees are subject to reporting requirements, I understand that the briefing the office provided the shadow minister did not include significant details of the form this reporting takes because no quality assurance committee has yet been required to report.

There is more than enough information about Queensland Health that is kept secret by Queensland Health: emergency waiting times; the number of cancellations and postponements for elective surgery; access block; and the number of times when ambulances are forced to bypass hospitals because emergency rooms are underresourced. The opposition opposes any increase in secrecy by Queensland Health that is not truly driven by privacy considerations. We will be opposing the clause that amends the Freedom of Information Act in this way.

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (2.40 p.m.): I rise to support the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003, which amends 19 health portfolio acts and the Freedom of Information Act. Before I discuss one part of the bill, let me once again recognise the many health practitioners, both practising and non-practising, who will benefit from this legislation. I recognise most of them as dedicated and committed health care workers in our community who attempt to make people's lives better, and it does continue to be a battle for them.

We have consistently called on the federal government to address the doctor shortage because Queensland public hospitals are being adversely affected by the shortage of GPs and the difficulties that people have in accessing GPs who bulk-bill or work after hours. This, of course, is not a criticism of our GPs. But the federal government does continue to shift a significant financial burden onto the states by its continual refusal to address these problems.

The federal government also needs to allocate more Medicare provider numbers and to create more doctor training places. Queensland universities continue to turn away young Queenslanders who want to study medicine because there is a shortage of places. This is disgraceful when we have about 1,000 overseas trained doctors in the system because there are not enough Australian trained doctors. The federal government has short-changed the Queensland public health system. They short-changed us to the extent that we would have been able to perform 11,000 elective surgery procedures in one year alone.

Let me turn back to the bill, which will amend the Hospital Foundations Act 1982. That will make the process for appointing members to hospital foundations much more streamlined and flexible. With the Acting Deputy Speaker's indulgence, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Townsville Hospital foundation, whose contributions continue to make our hospital a state-of-the-art facility and world class despite claims by members opposite to the contrary.

In recognising the fine work of the nine foundation members, one of whom is Ken McElligott, a former Labor Health Minister and a tireless community worker, I would like to add my congratulations to the magnificent nine who continue to offer such generous support to our community. I believe this board meets approximately every two months and on an as-needs arises basis. The contributions that they make include funding research initiatives to advance our understanding of disease and health care. They support the training of health professionals. They

purchase lifesaving diagnostic and therapeutic health equipment, and support and play an active role in health promotion in the community.

The Townsville foundation has completed stage 1 of the Centenary of Federation garden, which the Premier opened in September of last year, and it is a magnificent project adding an artistic and spiritual dimension to the hospital. They have substantially contributed to Ronald McDonald House, and that is a very important facility, and they have provided support for a number of other worthwhile projects. Members are able to influence the wider community in their fundraising efforts, and I thank them.

Their payroll deduction program is nothing short of brilliant, and I would like to say well done and thank you to all those regular donors. With members' tenure expiring at the same time with this new legislation, the streamlining will mean that the important contributions that they make in maintaining high standards of health care will be even more effective. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (2.44 p.m.): I rise to support the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. This bill amends 19 Health portfolio acts and also the Freedom of Information Act. I will address only a couple of issues in relation to the act. Others members will address the other issues.

These amendments, particularly to the Health Practitioners (Professional Standards) Act 1999, will allow the Health Practitioners Tribunal and Professional Conduct Review Panels to operate far more efficiently. These bodies deal with disciplinary matters involving registered health practitioners. These proposed amendments will provide greater administrative flexibility in the constitution of the tribunal when conducting directions conferences and also full hearings.

The bill also allows the review panels to use any form of communication and to make decisions about matters before the panel or to delegate the holding of pre-hearing conferences to the secretary of the panels. I have some personal experience in relation to one of the effective means of communication which will be available to the review panel, and that relates to teleconferencing particularly, but email would also be an expeditious and effective means of communication.

I was on the Racing Appeals Authority for about seven or eight years, and during that time the chairman, Mr Leo Williams, introduced teleconferencing, which saved a considerable amount of money because prior to that the whole tribunal would have to travel to Cairns or Townsville together with the support staff and sometimes stay overnight. So it was a very costly exercise. With the implementation of the teleconferencing facilities, it saved a great deal out of the Racing Appeals Authority budget. The amendments will also enhance the effectiveness of the disciplinary system for health practitioners.

The bill also amends the Hospital Foundations Act 1982, which deals with the appointment of members of hospital foundations who, as we are well aware, are heavily involved in fundraising for medical research projects and also for the purchase of equipment. At the moment the appointment of members to hospital foundations is a fairly cumbersome procedure, and the amendments to the act will allow the minister to consult with entities that the minister considers have an interest in the purposes or objects of the hospital foundation.

Following that consultation, the minister may nominate a person as a hospital foundation member if the minister is of the opinion that that person has an interest in and is able to assist in achieving the foundation's objectives. I suppose the main object of that foundation is their ability to raise money. So that would be an important criterion. Any member would also be able to be appointed for a term of up to five years, which gives additional flexibility.

While we are on the issue of the hospital foundation, I must make mention of the Gold Coast hospital foundation, which is a good example of members of the community contributing to the running of the Gold Coast hospital. The chairman is the Mayor of the Gold Coast, Gary Baildon. The secretary is Richard Olley, the district manager of Queensland Health. The treasurer is Bronwyn Morris, and the members are Eda Beck, Prof. Anne McMurray, Heather Haynes, Dr Steven Weinstein, Dr Brian Bell, Colin Little and Alan Midwood. Those people are ably assisted by the development manager, Beth Dermoudy.

That foundation has been responsible for raising tens of thousands of dollars over many years for the Gold Coast Hospital. The foundation receives no government subsidy and consists of those members, who meet on a regular—I believe monthly—basis. I have been to at least two of their meetings. They are all unpaid volunteers. As I have already mentioned, the development manager, Beth Dermoudy, is the only employee. Funds raised enable the hospital to purchase

equipment. Research is funded for the Gold Coast Hospital and also the surrounding health services through community groups and events and functions. The foundation runs art unions, raffles and fundraisers such as Melbourne Cup day functions and so on. These funds are then passed back to the hospital to enable those purchases to be effected. With those few words, I commend this bill to the House.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (2.51 p.m.): I rise this afternoon in order to place on record my misgivings regarding the clause of the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 which deals with the provision to exclude quality assurance committees from the application of the Freedom of Information Act. This government has repeatedly professed to be an open and accountable government, yet it drafts legislation such as this. No health facility should be exempt from FOI applications. The public has a right to know exactly how their local hospital stands in regard to quality assurance. Without openness and accountability, the public would never know whether or not their hospitals have complied with necessary guidelines and regulations. One would think that providing the results of QA committee reports would end up working in favour of health facilities and that they could show improvements which need to be made. Subsequently, they can identify how these problems have been rectified and improved upon. That could only be a positive.

I find it really sad that anything is taken away from the public in terms of their right to knowledge, particularly of public health facilities, especially when their taxes are paying for most of them. This just seems to go along with so many issues that I have come across, particularly in my electorate. Staff members who work in the Gympie Hospital are in fear of coming out in public and talking about what is really going on in their hospital. This legislation just seems to continue that fear and is an attempt by this government to keep people's mouths shut about what is really going on. It is really a backward step in terms of the openness and supposed accountability of this government.

One also has to think that, if someone somewhere has nothing to hide, accountability and openness just follows on from that. I believe that this is horrendous; once more we find that fees for FOI applications have increased. This is another example of, to quote the Leader of the Opposition from this morning—'evidence of freedom from information' —this government being hell-bent on putting that into place. I am sure that the bill would have been supported by the opposition side if it were not for this restriction on FOI applications, which is certainly not democratic.

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (2.55 p.m.): I rise to support the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. It is another significant health legislation amendment bill that amends some 19 Health portfolio bills and the Freedom of Information Act. It is evidence once again of the broad-reaching and extensive portfolio work that this Minister for Health is constantly undertaking. The simple size of the Health portfolio and the budget needed to run our world-class health service is immense.

I commend the minister for her tenacity and attention to detail in the legislative program. Apart from the Minister for Health's great capacity for work, I am pleased—no, relieved—that the minister not only works hard but also understands health. I say 'relieved' because I have sat in this House for two years—and in particular this week—and thanked the people of Queensland for their commonsense in electing a Labor government to run the state and a Labor minister to run the health system. I am horrified to think of the prospect, no matter how remote, that the National and Liberal parties should ever get their hands on health again. Why? Because they simply do not understand health. They do not understand how the health system works. In fact, I am not surprised but I am yet again disappointed that members opposite intend to oppose this bill with respect to the changes to the Freedom of Information Act, because it shows that they fail to understand the practical application of quality assurance in health. It is just another reason why I am relieved that this Minister for Health is in charge.

Understanding health is pretty simple. For instance, this morning we had a lot of discussion about emergency departments. If people cannot afford to see a doctor because bulk-billing and Medicare is being strangled to death by a federal government that does not support a universal health system for all Australians, they go to a public hospital emergency department. It is a shame that members opposite do not understand that those people who end up in an emergency department just want to see a doctor—any doctor. They are rightly concerned about their own health, perhaps their children's health. When a local doctor is unaffordable because bulk-billing is terminally ill under this federal government's care, they often have only one choice—to go to a public hospital emergency department.

The problem with this, of course, is that there is another group of patients with another compelling reason for going to an emergency department. They are either seriously or critically ill or injured and they also are heading to a public hospital's emergency department—and rightly so. The fact is that a public hospital emergency department, whether it is at Caloundra, Caboolture, Royal Brisbane, Gympie, Kingaroy, Townsville—in fact, anywhere in Queensland—

Mr Wellington: Nambour.

Ms BARRY: Yes.

Government members interjected.

Ms BARRY: Thank you, members—anywhere in Queensland. When those emergency departments become clogged with people all wanting health care who are upset, who require some form of health care service, what happens? They are all sitting there in the emergency department. They have to be triaged. What is triage? It means that the nurse who is on duty must assess each and every one of those people in the emergency department to determine who is the sickest and who will be seen first.

Members opposite do not or will not understand that this is a time-consuming process that requires a great deal of skill. Our health professionals in our emergency departments are amongst the best in the world. The questions of the opposition in this House show that they fail to appreciate what the job of triaging involves and, frankly, I find that disturbing. I recommend that they perhaps ask the Minister for Health, who does understand what is involved in triaging in an emergency department, to explain the process to them. She understands it. Perhaps she can explain it to them. When an emergency department becomes a traffic jam, the end result is distress. Everyone gets distressed—patients, families, nurses, doctors, allied health people, the clerks doing the medical records, wards people, everybody. They all operate in a stressful environment. Time lines are extended and mistakes are made.

The answer is not to waste good air by looking at a way to criticise our emergency departments but to go to the cause of the problem. The active euthanasia of bulk-billing by National-Liberal federal governments is the reason that general practitioner patients end up in our emergency departments. The failure of members opposite to fight for Queensland's share of funding for health care from their mates in Canberra is their great shame. I am pleased that they are not in charge of health. Members opposite, in addition to failing to understand how the health system works, also have some memory loss. Without revealing my age, I remember a National-Liberal government that was in charge of health. In my nursing days under a National-Liberal government, emergency departments were clogged for hours and hours. Wards held such excessive numbers that patients were accommodated in TV lounges. In fact, at a ward at Prince Charles the places that occupied the TV lounge were called beds 41 and 42. People lay in those beds for days and weeks on end. The National Party allowed our public hospital buildings to fall down around the ears of sick Queenslanders and their staff.

Mr English: They must have Alzheimer's disease.

Ms BARRY: Sadly, that is right. My memory of the Nationals and Liberals in charge of health is very sound. I have bad news for members opposite. They reigned over a health system that was in decay despite the very best efforts of Queensland Health professionals. It took this Beattie Labor government to rebuild Queensland public hospitals across this state into a world-class system where the buildings now equal the high quality of the staff. The phoenix rising out of our new hospitals through $2.8 billion—$2.8 billion—worth of statewide health building programs leaves their memory of neglect in the distant past.

Mrs Edmond: All state dollars.

Ms BARRY: The minister is right. They may have a short memory, but government members know that today Queenslanders use modern, well-equipped health services that are world class. Before honourable members think that I do not remember the modern history of Liberal-National governments, let me tell them that I do.

Let us talk about enterprise bargaining. Members opposite had the hide to come in here and beat up a story about EB. I have bad news for members opposite. In the history of modern enterprise bargaining the only EB—the only EB—that has not been fully funded was the one made when the National Party was in office. I can remember the words distinctly. They were called productivity benchmarks. They meant staff cuts, bed reductions and increased workloads. Members opposite should tread lightly on matters of EB, because they might find that their record means they are in need of emergency care. When those Queenslanders with sound memories

decide to jog their collective memory at the ballot box, their abysmal record on Queensland Health will be remembered. But they should not despair; they are in luck, because their appalling record on Health is now being challenged by their federal counterparts.

The bill amends 20 acts. I wish to comment specifically on the freedom of information and health services legislation. It is a change that encourages greater participation in the activities of quality assurance committees. I stand here today as someone with a very sound knowledge of quality assurance committees. It is a change that will ensure that these committees, far from becoming secret, are able to perform their functions effectively. The process involved in ensuring that Queenslanders have access to safe and high-quality health care services requires a great deal of planning, reviewing and hard soul-searching by health practitioners in Queensland.

Mistakes can and do happen. Despite the best intentions, skills, equipment and knowledge, health professionals deal with people. The human body is unpredictable. The expectations of consumers and families are so diverse but they all have one thing in common—they hope for the very best of outcomes. Mistakes are costly in terms of humanity, health and dollars, which is why it is important to continue to strive towards a health system in which mistakes are minimised. But the challenge in doing so is to be able to have frank and honest investigations and discussions into mistakes that do happen. Failing to examine how a mistake has occurred is the greatest enemy to improving health care. To that end, this bill will amend two acts and, by doing so, will ensure that health professionals can have those discussions with quality assurance committees in an environment that promotes frank and open discussion about the circumstances that led to the adverse incidents. This does so by exempting not the discussion but the documents in progress.

Some of the workings of committees will be freed from the application of the Freedom of Information Act. I am familiar with the anxiety and distress experienced by health professionals who make mistakes. In addition to dealing with the adverse outcomes of their mistakes, which can be as simple as inconvenience/discomfort for a patient or, unfortunately, disability and even death, health professionals must face a raft of inquiries and processes that follow making mistakes. After facing the many accountability forums—their own health tribunals, coroners courts and the Health Rights Commission—it takes a great deal of further courage to be prepared to have their actions further examined by a quality assurance process.

Health professionals understand that honest and frank discussions about how, why and when a mistake was made have the capacity to prevent the same problems recurring. The preparedness of health professionals to work to ensure mistakes are prevented is always evident to me. However, I know there is a reluctance from health professionals to participate in quality assurance activities because of the potential medico-legal liability arising from the participation. It is for that reason, more so than any other, that they would be reluctant to participate in further examination. The minister understands this, because she understands the quality assurance process.

The bill provides protection for health professionals when giving information to quality assurance committees. The bill is very clear. It requires that the final reports from such committees are made available to the public—no secrets. It in no way inhibits the freedom of information rights to access personal records. The bill takes away uncertainty for health professionals. It allows them to participate fully in quality assurance programs that have as their goal the prevention of mistakes. It is a wise decision by the minister—a decision by a minister who understands Health. The bill is well considered and it will make a real difference to improving health care in this state. I commend it to the House.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (3.06 p.m.): The Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2002 is a wide-ranging bill in terms of the number of acts affected by the amendments it makes. I do not intend to go into those in any detailed way. However, I take the opportunity, bearing in mind the nature of the bill, to bring to the attention of the House some concerns in my electorate in relation to health care generally and also to bring to the attention of the House two institutions within my electorate that I think are very deserving of mention when discussing legislation of this nature.

The first concern I wish to raise is that of doctor shortages. I realise that Toowoomba, unfortunately, is not that much different from a lot of other areas of Queensland and indeed Australia. The shortage about which I am speaking is probably more prevalent in regional and rural areas of Queensland than perhaps it is in city areas. Nevertheless, it is a definite and actual shortage about which I speak. Up until about five or 10 years ago, Toowoomba was a desirable place for medical practitioners to settle in, because of its many great attributes. When government members travelled to Toowoomba last October to hold our historic caucus retreat

they would have been made aware of those attributes, which also appeal to many people in the medical profession.

However, the delightful situation where we had adequate numbers of medicos has disappeared. Retiring doctors are not being replaced. Younger doctors do not seem to be in existence. There is a misconception about where Toowoomba is. For example, some students think that being based in Toowoomba for their training is doing country service.

Ms Boyle: Cold country service.

Mr SHINE: I reluctantly take that interjection from my friend from Cairns, who comes from that tropical condition up there.

Mr Wilson: Far too hot.

Mr SHINE: As the honourable member for Ferny Grove says, it is far too hot. Nevertheless, that happy position of having adequate numbers of doctors has deteriorated.

I take this opportunity to call on the federal government quite seriously to address this problem that, as I said, is being experienced in areas throughout Australia. I call on the federal government to do so not just because there is a deficiency in the number of GPs available to the public but also because it is having an adverse and draining effect on the public hospital system. The shortage of GPs necessarily means that people are turning up, in some instances in droves, at public hospitals. It is unfair to then expect hospitals to operate as efficiently as we would like.

Another reason why people are turning up at hospitals is that doctors are not bulk-billing as they used to. The most obvious way to rectify this would be for the federal government to address the amount of the Medicare rebate. I call on the federal government to increase the Medicare rebate to a reasonable amount. It is only realistic and fair for the medical profession, who have to face large costs in running a sophisticated practice these days in terms of technology, wages, rents and so on, to expect to be paid adequately for the extremely important work that they do for most of us in the community who from time to time become sick.

In terms of the lack of practitioners, another area of concern is that the federal government has failed to provide an adequate number of provider numbers and to create more training positions for doctors. Years ago when there were suggestions of overservicing in the medical profession, it was considered perhaps prudent for the then federal government to look closely at this area. Of course, now the tables have turned completely and everyone is crying out for more doctors. Clearly, this matter is in the hands of the federal government and I ask it to address it as quickly as possible.

Allied with that is the provision of adequate training centres. As we know, in that regard Queensland is suffering a huge shortage. There have been quite reasonable calls for the provision of an additional medical school on the Gold Coast. So rather than Queensland having to depend on about 1,000 overseas doctors providing a service for Queenslanders, as it does now, let us concentrate on having Queensland doctors providing that service.

I would like to refer in a little bit more detail to the problem of the decline in bulk-billing, to which I just referred in passing. In an article in today's *Courier-Mail* titled 'A political health hazard' journalist Matthew Franklin prophesied that, notwithstanding the war in Iraq, one of the issues that will come to haunt the current federal government at the next election will be the decline in bulk-billing under the Medicare system. In that article he stated that, basically, there are three negative effects concerning the advice given by Dr Phelps, the President of the AMA, to doctors not to bulk-bill: firstly, it will necessitate the poor being turned into beggars seeking charity from GPs; secondly, if GPs show no charity, the poor will flood public hospital emergency departments even more so than they are now; and, thirdly, meanwhile doctors will raise their fees. That means that, in effect, we have social divisions being exacerbated by such a policy.

All members know the GPs in their electorates, and probably we know a lot of medicos in all sections of the profession. By and large, the people in the profession who I know are sincere, dedicated professionals who are dedicated to the welfare of their fellow humans. Nevertheless, I see some merit in Mr Franklin's argument that these negative effects to which I have referred could occur if the federal government does not address this problem. Of course, quite apart from the political effects that it may cause, it would cause the loss of the Howard battlers to the coalition. From my perspective, I think that he has lost them anyway for a number of reasons, quite apart from this issue.

In his article, Mr Franklin asserted that Howard should remember that in 1972 and 1983, people voted in droves for Whitlam and Hawke respectively over issues such as public health

coverage. Mr Franklin then went on refer to the effect of the war in Iraq, which we probably have not thought about too much at the moment. The major and most pressing effect of the war, other than the effect on those who are fighting it, will be the lack of public moneys available for services such as health care and education. This will have to be addressed. We have been promised no war levy such as the East Timor levy. So the money will have to come out of general revenue—

Mr Mulherin interjected.

Mr SHINE: It may yet be coming, as the honourable member for Mackay says—who knows. But there is only so much money to go around and, as I fear, will health suffer as a result? Will education suffer? We will wait and see.

I would like to refer to the Toowoomba Hospital Foundation in terms of the legislation that is before the House. I want to pay recognition to the work of that hospital foundation under the chairmanship of Ray Taylor and his committee. They raise all of the money associated with the work that they do through public subscriptions, race days and the Children's Hospital Appeal, and they also receive some income from car parking and the coffee shop at the hospital. One large donation of $120,000 this year from the Pure Land Learning College, which is the Buddhist organisation in Toowoomba, should be acknowledged. The persons on that committee are the chairman, Ray Taylor; deputy chairman, Michael Browning; secretary, Gerry Landy; members, Noel Williamson, Roslyn Reilly, Brenda Tait, Horst Brosi, Ray Inglis, Dr John Andrew Cumming, Judy March, and Karen Roach; the ex officio member, Kym Volp; and the foundation staff, Peter Rookas, the executive director; Rosemary Davis, who is the executive support officer; and Anna-Louise Warrener, who is the administrative officer. All of those people deserve appropriate recognition.

Finally, I refer to the impending opening of the Toowoomba Hospice. Hopefully, the official opening will be in May or June this year. The building was started in July 2002 and will accommodate at any one time six patients. The six beds operate on a stand-alone unit on a site close to the Toowoomba Hospital. It is anticipated that, in total, there will probably be on a yearly basis about 140 people. The home will be for terminally ill patients. It is not an aged care home and will provide care for people of all ages. It is intended to provide palliative and respite care for the terminally ill and it belongs to the Toowoomba community. The facility will cost about $600,000 a year to run and I am very, very pleased to acknowledge and thank the Minister for Health, the Hon. Wendy Edmond, for the state government's agreement to contribute on a yearly basis half this cost for, I think, a 10-year period at this stage.

On top of that, there is $30,000 of recurrent funding from the state government, and $100,000 of state government funding was committed to the project to get the ball rolling. The community itself raised the entire amount for the building of the facility of about $1 million and it was great for Toowoomba to do that. The community will have the necessity to continue to raise funds to supply that additional $300,000 that the government is not supplying on a yearly basis, but it has that well in hand. There is a wide degree of support within the Toowoomba community in this regard. Volunteers will be required to help run the hospice itself with a supply of at least 100 regulars to work different hours. This is a much-needed boost to palliative care services in the Toowoomba district. I want to acknowledge an organisation called TRUST, the Toowoomba Rehabilitation Unit Support Team—

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: A superb team.

Mr SHINE: It is a superb team, as my friend says, under the chairmanship of Graham Barron. I also acknowledge Heritage Building Society, which has been a huge benefactor in this project. I again want to mention Mr Barron for his leadership and perseverance and a couple of other people who together with me have met with the minister on a number of occasions—that is, Steve Davis and Paul Hilton—which has enabled us to arrive at very acceptable conclusions with respect to their negotiations with the government. Again, I acknowledge the government's support for this project and commend the bill to the House.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (3.21 p.m.): I am also pleased to rise in support of the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill with all of its complexity. Many of the clauses in the bill relate to issues of great importance in the field of health today for governments as well as the consumers of health care services. One of the smaller matters that is part of this bill relates to the Medical Practitioners Registration Act. There was concern that numerous retired doctors might not be able to use the title 'Dr', as is the current custom, with the proposed changes to the registration act. I am pleased that it has been decided that they will be able to continue to use this term. It is a small thing but an important thing, at least as a symbol. Doctors in our society have, by and large,

been well respected and highly regarded for the importance of their work not only in looking after our routine health care but for saving our very lives on occasions.

There is no doubt that doctors are one of the most important groups in our society. What a pity we do not have more of them, and we could have. There certainly are enough school leavers applying to enter schools of medicine—enough who would make the commitment to the long years of study to become a general practitioner and even further years of study to become a medical specialist—if only the places were available. It is the federal government's responsibility to decide on the placements for medical education, the schools for medical education and the number of places within those schools. At the moment Australia has about 1,000 overseas trained doctors in the system simply because there are not enough Australian trained doctors. What a pity! What a pity, too, when we think of the future needs, particularly in rural and regional Australia, for more doctors and the willingness there is amongst young people in particular, although there are some older people who would like to change careers, who want to become doctors. How much easier the health system would be if we were to train more. It is a simple yet significant solution towards future health issues, particularly now that we have the ageing of the baby boomer generation to contend with.

Unfortunately, there are also other issues on which the federal government's short-sightedness is holding back the future. I was horrified to hear that the federal minister, Kay Patterson, had not even attended the meeting with other health ministers from around Australia in February this year to discuss the Australian Health Care Agreement. Fancy not attending! Fancy simply denying that the problems are there. Fancy not, as they say, facing the music. This was an incredibly poor performance on the part of the person who holds one of the most responsible jobs in the whole country. What she might have had to face is the fact that if the federal government had acted on the recommendations of an independent arbiter for the last agreement Queensland would have received $166 million more over the past five years. The federal government has dudded Queensland. That is the truth. Queensland would have received $65.4 million more last year alone if the Commonwealth had followed the recommendations of the independent umpire.

I ask members to think for a moment about what that would have allowed us to do for the people of Queensland. The Queensland Minister for Health, Wendy Edmond, has been quoted as saying that the $65.4 million that we did not receive from the federal government would have been enough to perform 11,000 surgical procedures, including 2,079 hip or knee replacements and other orthopaedic services and 1,427 cataract or other ophthalmology treatments. The waiting lists would have all but disappeared, particularly in those fields. The service particularly to older Queenslanders, those who more frequently need hip replacements and cataract surgery, would have been very significant indeed. I was interested to read an article by Stephen Smith, the federal shadow minister for health and ageing, who has been attempting to make some very constructive suggestions to the federal government on health policy and how we could do it better.

Stephen Smith has suggested that redirecting the subsidy to fund private hospitals rather than health funds would more easily allow the Commonwealth to put in place direct strategies to reduce the pressure on public hospitals. I support him in that suggestion. I am a strong supporter of the place that there must be for private health practice in this country. I believe in private health insurance and have private health insurance myself. It is important that we balance the public and the private systems. If the private system needs more assistance, as I believe it does, then a direct payment to it from the federal government may be a much more effective option than the present system.

Mr Stephen Smith has also raised other options for the rebate, including means testing, capping the payment of the rebate and taking the rebate off ancillaries or specified ancillaries. For example, taxpayers are currently paying 30 per cent of the cost of subsidising classical music CDs, second-hand golf clubs and even camping tents—lifestyle products that bear only a remote relation to health. Removing the rebate from ancillaries would allow the Commonwealth to redirect—wait for the figure—$625 million per year towards other health areas. That is a very large amount of money for the states to be missing out on in their public health systems which is being put into ancillary benefits for the relatively rich rather than even directly into private health care.

There are other aspects of the bill that I want to comment on as well. One of these is the concern expressed by some opposition members to the changes to freedom of information and access to information relating to quality assurance committees. It takes some understanding of quality assurance committees and how they work for honourable members opposite to

understand why it is quite appropriate to quarantine them from freedom of information. If in a hospital setting, for example, a multidisciplinary health team is to sit around and discuss their business of surgery for the last month which requires them to think laterally and comment on what has gone well and what has not gone so well and include administrative staff in that meeting to talk about the paperwork and the throughput in terms of waiting times, that discussion has to be free flowing. It should not be monitored by the *Courier-Mail* or opposition members of parliament present who might use the thoughts of those present at the meeting during their brainstorming and their discussion against them. It is right and proper that those quality assurance committees should be able to discuss freely without the risk of defamation actions or a suggestion that might have seemed like a good idea at the time being made public. It is right and appropriate that freedom of information not apply.

There are some other important elements of the bill, but I would like particularly to take a minute to give recognition to the amendments to the Hospitals Foundations Act. These amendments will make the process for appointing members to hospital foundations more streamlined and more flexible. This is a good thing.

I must say that we are very fortunate in Cairns and far-north Queensland in having the Far North Queensland Hospital Foundation. It was established in 1997 under the provisions of the Hospitals Foundations Act 1982 and has been gradually increasing in status and importance over the years since its establishment. Presently the foundation operates the multi-storey car park, vending machines, volunteer services, the specialist medical equipment hire service and now also the Sea Breeze Cafe and television service at the Cairns Base Hospital.

In 2001-02 the foundation contributed over $100,000 to purchase equipment and fund support for health care in far-north Queensland while also completing construction of the $340,000 Sea Breeze Cafe and installation of the $180,000 television system. Telephones were also installed beside each bed in two wards, and it is intended by the foundation to provide this service to all beds throughout the hospital as soon as switchboard lines become available.

The foundation's fundraising activities took on new proportions in 2001-02. It achieved a record income result. Local businesses and the public embraced the major fundraising appeal for the purchase of a paediatric transport cot. Having raised already more than 75 per cent of the $135,000 needed for the cot, we are expecting that this year the full amount of the funds will be raised and that the paediatric cot can then be purchased.

I recognise the good people who have worked so hard on the foundation: the chairman, Dr Ken Chapman; the deputy chairman, Mr Russell Beer; and members, Mr Graham Coonan, Mrs Cheryl Campbell, Mrs Pat Bailey, Mrs Sharon Jones and Mr Brett Grosser. I also recognise the good service given by the previous district manager of Cairns, Marlane Byrne. She has left us now and there are many of us in Cairns who wish her well. Presently her job is being filled by the acting manager, Mr Kevin Hegarty. I recognise the good service also provided by Dr Michael Humphrey as the JCU representative on the foundation. Unfortunately Dr Humphrey has recently left us and taken a position in Western Australia. There are, therefore, some vacancies on the council that I hope will shortly be filled.

To Mr Scott Pickard, who is the general manager of the Far North Queensland Hospital Foundation, and to his volunteer coordinator, Jo Hardie, I give my sincere respects and congratulations. Their efforts are much appreciated by the broader community, as are the efforts of all of the volunteers who work in the program at the hospital. Not only are they reliable and committed and do they give very many hours in the cause of the hospital and its efficient services; they provide a very considerable comfort to patients and to relatives at a time when they are often anxious and distressed. Their efforts of maintaining at all times a willingness, a friendliness and an eagerness to help are sincerely appreciated. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (3.33 p.m.): The Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill amends 19 portfolio acts and the Freedom of Information Act. One of the amendments refers to the Hospitals Foundations Act 1982 and aims to provide a more streamlined and flexible process for appointing members. It will reduce the frequency of appointments whilst ensuring that an appropriate level of accountability is maintained. This bill provides that all appointments may be for a term of up to five years, which will avoid the turnover of one-third of the members every year.

There are currently 12 foundations throughout Queensland. Each of these is made up of members from businesses, community organisations and academic institutions and senior health administrators. As members will be aware, hospital foundations make an important contribution to

maintaining high standards of health care in this state, particularly through fundraising for medical research projects.

I mention the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation. The foundation is a public benevolent institution and is entirely dependent upon the generosity of the community. Over the past 17 years the foundation has raised over $88.7 million to help provide the finest medical treatment, ground-breaking research and the very best in medical facilities for sick and injured children. For example, the team of specialists based at the Royal Children's and Princess Alexandra hospitals have been saving lives through a technique they pioneered that totally revolutionised international liver transplant procedures. The Brisbane technique, as it became known, allows surgeons to cut down an adult liver for transplantation into a small infant waiting desperately for this one chance to survive. The team has maintained a success rate of 90 per cent for paediatric transplants. It is wonderful to know that our state's sickest children have been given a second chance at life by these dedicated surgeons.

Among the unsung heroes are the researchers in the Clinical Virology Research Unit. They have developed a test that has cut the time taken to diagnose the meningococcus bacterium from three days to just one hour. This is a deadly disease that can kill within 24 hours. The development of a rapid diagnostic test by the CVRU team now gives real hope to children struck down by this disease. The results mean that the CVRU and the Royal Children's Hospital are gaining a reputation in the scientific community for being at the leading edge of diagnostic techniques.

Volunteers are often the lifeblood of any organisation. The Royal Children's Hospital established the volunteers information desk in 1998 with approximately 20 volunteers. It has now grown to include 130 tireless workers, many of whom have been with the service since day one. During the past year they have worked 20,000 hours helping about 50,000 people—an outstanding effort. Also, the foundation's 12 administration volunteers help keep the foundation's administration costs to a minimum. In the past year they have worked 3,000 hours and stuffed about 200,000 envelopes. We all know how exhausting stuffing envelopes can be!

Hospital foundations also support the training of health professionals through scholarships, fund research programs that will either find cures or drastically improve the outcomes of medical treatments for children, and provide high-tech equipment for advanced diagnosis and treatments that make a huge difference to our children's hospital care. The amendments proposed in this bill will facilitate the continued smooth running of the hospital foundations in hospitals in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (3.37 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. I believe there are a number of areas of concern in this bill which the government would do well to reconsider. My first area of concern is the amendments to the Freedom of Information Act 1992 as they relate to the operation of approved quality assurance committees. The explanation for the changes as given in the accompanying notes is of itself pretty clear. My concern is with the end result, which is that the matter of the quality of the health care provided to Queenslanders is in the hands of bodies which are exempt from FOI.

Earlier this sittings I spoke about the minister's secret squirrel report into public hospitals. Now we see quality assurance matters disappearing from the process of freedom of information. Surely there is a better solution to this state's health issues than wrapping them up in brown paper and sticky tape and hiding them away from public scrutiny.

I am also very concerned about similar amendments to the Health Services Act 1991. Those amendments appear to me to be very sweeping and result in information from or about quality assurance committees being immune from any statutory requirement or legal process. Health care is of the highest public interest, yet here we have the issue of its quality being removed not only from public scrutiny but also from the examination of any statutory or legal process. Final reports may well be made in public, but it appears that no-one will be able to make any proper examination of the basis of those reports. Is this not several steps past too far?

I come now to the issue of the appointments of board members under the Hospitals Foundations Act 1982. In particular, I am concerned about the possibility that this proposed method of what will essentially be ministerial appointments may lead to the same kind of upset and disagreement that we have seen recently in the racing industry.

There are more than enough concerns with health service provisions in Queensland without making changes that have every likelihood of creating more concerns. Amendments to the Medical Practitioners Registration Act 2001 appear to me to be appropriate and allow for

reasonable control of the use of terms such as 'doctor' for those who have retired from the medical profession. However, one aspect does concern me, and that is clause 45 of the bill. It inserts section 150D, which specifies that the Police Commissioner may be required to provide a written report on an applicant's criminal history.

I believe this is a clear invasion of privacy, especially so in this case, as anything which related to the person's practice of medicine while performing as a doctor could and should have been dealt with by the relevant professional or industry bodies at the time. Remember here we are talking specifically about those who have retired. As such, I do not think there is any justification for this provision. Minor changes to the Pest Management Act 2001, the Private Health Facilities Act 1999 and the Radiation Safety Act 1999 are simply tidying up some technical areas of those acts.

I also want to comment on the level of consultation as outlined in the explanatory notes. Nowhere in any of the lists of bodies and organisations does there appear to be any that represent patient interests or rights. Nor do there appear to be any that specifically represent the interests of rural Queensland. In relation to matters dealing with freedom of information and privacy issues on criminal records, no civil liberties groups were asked for input. In the main, it was the government asking the government if the government's proposals were okay. Not surprisingly, it appears the government told the government that the proposals were okay. Some I think are okay but some are not.

Let us see if this government is willing to listen to anyone but itself. It should, because what it tells itself and what the reality is appear to be two very different things. It tells itself, as the Health Minister indicated last sittings, that it has a world-class system in place, yet I note a *Courier-Mail* article this week about a medical error action group report which includes a number of Queensland hospitals allegedly being among the worst performers in Australia for medical errors. The same article has the minister saying research has shown as many as 10 per cent of hospital admissions resulted in adverse events. Worse, at least half of those apparently were preventable.

Our hospitals are overstressed and underfunded. The answer is clearly not to try and manage away people with real needs but to keep the hospitals we have, upgrade them and provide more. Local arguments add to that reality. As the Minister for Emergency Services discovered, the southern tablelands road across to Cairns has so many bends it can make well people ill. For ill people, it is even worse. For tablelanders the Cairns option is a difficult one not only because of the transport issue but because the hospital down there cannot cope anyway. I have spoken in this place about people having to wait in ambulances and in storerooms, yet the Beattie government's Health Minister says she presides over a world-class service. I do not think so. I do not think so at all.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (3.43 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise to speak to the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to make a couple of comments about the health care system generally before speaking about some specifics of this bill. I and other members of the House today have spoken about the true threat posed to the health care system both in Queensland and in Australia generally, and that is the attack upon bulkbilling by the Howard federal government.

I get many complaints about the waiting times in the accident and emergency wards of our hospitals. It is important to realise that the numbers do not lie. Members of the opposition and the federal government may decide to put a spin on this issue, but facts do not lie. As we have seen the numbers of bulkbilling visits decrease, we have seen an increase in triage levels four, five and six in admissions to the accident emergency units of our hospitals. These figures do not lie.

People with minor complaints have been unable to access bulkbilling doctors. They are concerned. They have a pain, they have a medical problem, they are seeking comfort and reassurance. They cannot access bulkbilling doctors because bulkbilling doctors are like hen's teeth. So where do they turn? They turn to the comfort and the reassurance of the public health system, and it is important that that system be there for them. But it is important to acknowledge that the underlying cause of their turning to the public health system is the failure of this federal government to adequately fund the Medicare system.

I am only 40 years of age and yet I can remember when vast percentages of doctors bulkbilled. I can remember driving down the street and seeing bulkbilling signs everywhere. That is no longer the case. As I said, trying to find a bulkbilling doctor in my electorate is very, very difficult. This federal government should not be absolved of its responsibility for its negligence and its impact on the public health care system. I believe the federal government has an obligation to

prop up the Medicare system, to defend this bastion of egalitarianism and to increase the Medicare rebate. This way we will encourage doctors to come back to the Medicare fold and to be able to deliver a service to the public at the same time as trying to financially make ends meet.

Another issue relevant to my electorate of Redlands is the shortage of GPs. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Laurinda de Wytt and the great work she does on the bay islands. Dr de Wytt has been searching for the last two years to try to find a locum or a doctor to assist her with her practice. The federal government's much vaunted regional GPs scheme has not been a significant benefit to the people of the bay islands.

Because of the ridiculous rulings about what constitutes a regional centre, my people on the bay islands do not fall under this scheme. As I said, Dr de Wytt has been searching for a doctor to assist her in that practice and is finding it very, very difficult. As a result, my people on my bay islands are having to wait a number of weeks in some cases to get an appointment with Dr de Wytt or be up for the additional expense of catching a ferry from the bay islands over to the mainland and then catching a bus into the hospital or seeking other private medical attention elsewhere in my electorate.

This is an unreasonable cost on my people. Also, one of the most important aspects of a therapeutic relationship is trust. In a lot of cases my local people want to deal with a local doctor and not someone from the mainland. They cannot do that because of the federal government's failure to provide support to Dr de Wytt and other doctors in my area. As I said, I call on the federal government to increase the number of Medicare provider numbers and to increase the number of training places available to doctors. The federal government seems to deny that we have a shortage of doctors.

At this point in time I should also make comment on some of the specialist colleges and their attitudes towards certifying people. In a lot of cases these specialist colleges behave like some of the worst excesses of unions from many, many years ago. Despite the fact there were doctors out there with the skills and the knowledge to be certified to practice in particular areas of speciality, the specialist colleges will refuse to issue them with the relevant certification not because they do not have the skills, not because they do not have the training, but for one reason and one reason only: to protect their market share, to keep the shop closed and to ensure a dollar return on their investment.

In relation to the specifics of this bill, I take up the member for Aspley's comments about freedom of information and quality assurance committees. We in this House have spoken long and hard about the public liability insurance problem. This government has taken a number of active steps to try and keep cases out of court, to resolve them before reaching the court and legal system, and to put those mechanisms in place. We have been supported in that by the opposition. I compliment them for so doing.

However, here is a mechanism where we want to enable doctors and people involved in incidents that could be litigious to be able to admit what went wrong, why things went wrong and to protect them in some ways. We are facing some hostility from members opposite in that regard. This is about trying to keep cases out of court, about allowing people to make honest and open expressions about what happened and what went wrong and to give them protection in doing so. I support that. It is important to acknowledge, though, that at the end of the day the final report of a quality assurance committee will be a publicly accessible document. So, there is no attempt at secrecy, as claimed by the member for Gympie. This is about trying to improve medical outcomes for the people. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (3.52 p.m.): The introduction of privacy laws may at times have impeded the reporting and gathering of information which may be vital to the health and wellbeing of an individual or indeed within the realm of health services may influence how future treatment is delivered to others. It is thus of vital importance that these laws ensure the ability of bodies such as quality assurance committees to carry out their valuable work free from the constraints which our privacy laws may place upon them and also offering protection from freedom of information laws which, if followed, may prove to be not in the public interest. We all recognise that we now live in a very litigious society and these days it is often the case that when an operation or medical procedure has a poor outcome a patient or family member may look for someone to blame. Similarly, persons who serve on bodies such as quality assurance committees must be protected from litigation. This legislation will indemnify members of such committees.

The responsibility placed upon our doctors, nurses and all health professionals is indeed onerous. There is a very fine balance between protecting a patient's identity while at the same

time enabling information to be gathered which will lead to improvements in the quality of our health services. This legislation will have no effect on the ability of the patient to access their own medical records under freedom of information. That is, after all, a very important personal right. With the release of certain information to committees comes a duty of confidentiality which must be maintained except in cases such as information required by a medical practitioner for further treatment or by Red Cross when tracing blood products or their donors and recipients. Any public disclosures of information will be included in the Department of Health's annual report and will ensure any information will not identify any individual. These requirements have all been carefully drafted to act in the best interests of patients and the ongoing improvement in medical services.

As medical science advances, so we need to constantly be adjusting our laws to keep pace. If we do not encourage disclosure of information by protecting individuals, we limit knowledge and impede progress which in certain circumstances could be life saving. Unfortunately, I have witnessed quite a number of very sad cases where a loved one has died and family members have wished to have investigations carried out by the Health Rights Commission. They may have even had an investigation under way before the death occurred. In the past, most of these cases lapsed when the patient died. I have had a very close, personal friend in this position. I was beside her bed as she breathed her last breath. Sadly, she left behind a grieving family who believed justice was not done and remain with their unresolved feelings to this day. There is no reason why an investigation should cease once a person has died. In fact, I believe it is essential, if important information is to be gleaned, to not only allow grieving family members to feel satisfied but also to advance medical knowledge. This bill will ensure clarity of this issue.

I believe most medical practitioners act in the best interests of their patients and conscientiously carry out their duties. However, in the case of negligence, malpractice or plain incompetence, we need to ensure the tribunals and review panels who judge these cases have adequate flexibility to both carry out their investigation and hearing and then deal with disciplinary action.

The bill also deals with drug dependency issues within the medical and veterinary professions. Sadly, certain individuals who may have difficulty dealing with the stress of their position and who have access to drugs succumb to the temptation. These are very sensitive matters, and it is essential that information passed to registration bodies does not infringe privacy provisions.

Before I resume my seat, I wish to commend the doctors, nurses, administration, allied health workers and staff of the Logan Hospital. In 98 per cent of cases, we hear glowing reports of the care they give to their patients. Medical advances now require highly skilled personnel who deal on a daily basis with people in crisis. We all in this House will acknowledge the work, often under stressful conditions, which is performed 24 hours a day in our hospitals. I, like many others, feel betrayed by our federal government which still refuses to address the serious reduction in bulk billing by doctors, the shortage of both GPs and specialists and thus is responsible for the long delays in our emergency waiting rooms. This situation simply must not be allowed to continue.

I thank the minister for her commitment to the health of all Queenslanders. In Logan City, we have our first class public hospital with a private unit on the same site and will shortly see our new community health facility taking shape, a $7 million commitment from the Beattie Labor government. In conclusion, I commend the minister and her staff for these measures which I am sure will offer greater protection in many areas of the health profession and the bodies which oversee the delivery of these services.

Mr FLYNN (Lockyer—ONP) (3.58 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly to this quite important bill. In doing so, I make it known that there are many aspects of this bill with which we have no exception at all. The bill is quite sensible, particularly the idea of doctors being allowed to call themselves 'doctors' following their retirement. Many of the clauses appear to be machinery by clarifying issues that make the health system work in a more acceptable way. However, as I said in this House just recently, the health portfolio is not an easy one. Nobody has pretended that it has been. It is one that concerns everybody who ever has been ill, been in hospital or visited a doctor because they have an ongoing illness. It is one of the things that makes us all feel most vulnerable. We need the utmost faith in our health system, the people who deliver those services and those who facilitate the delivery of those services, specifically the Queensland government in this instance.

As I mentioned before, we have seen so many instances recently, whether fair or unfair, where the health system appears to be failing. Largely it is a question of perception, but we do

seem to be faced with the fact that the government is producing data in different ways. It can take one set of statistics to produce one chart and, using the same set of statistics, produce another chart, with the two telling a different story. It is tempting when cracks seem to be appearing in the system to paper over them by presenting statistics in a somewhat misleading way. The minister should be aware that people have a perception that this is what governments do. Governments of all colours have been guilty of this in the past. We have to be seen as totally clean and aboveboard and as presenting figures that represent the true situation.

The member for Tablelands mentioned the same issue. The government appears to be trying to wish away the problems by providing different interpretations of data and the restructuring of financial and human resources. At the end of the day, the results do not lie. It can play around with the game plan as much as it likes, but at the end of the day it has to produce the results. It appears that Queensland Health has had difficulty in doing that. I do not think members of the public complain just for the sake of their health—no pun intended—and nor does our media continually produce reports of what appear to be cracks appearing in the system just for the sake of it.

My main problem with this bill was addressed by the member for Redlands, who mentioned that the exemption for quality assurance committees would eventually have no effect because the final report would be available for public scrutiny. The Freedom of Information Act always seems to be under attack. It can do as much good as it can do evil, but in the main we have to have clear and transparent behaviour by the government. We are seeing further exemptions on an almost daily basis. We need full and unfettered disclosure of all information. However, that has never been possible. There is a variety of reasons, and it seems the primary one is that on occasions it may be against the public interest. I do acknowledge that. I note that this is the line the government appears to be taking in seeking to have quality assurance committees exempted.

The concept concerning information pertinent to the giving of evidence in court proceedings creates the perception in the public mind that medical professionals are in some way protected. We know through the insurance crisis that that is not the case, but there is still that perception. I acknowledge that these details, as mentioned earlier, will be available to public scrutiny eventually, but not during the pertinent time that those details might be required. While quality assurance matters are under consideration by the committee it may be pertinent for that information to be made available.

It could be argued that the maintenance of the quality of health care would be better served by full and open disclosure to people having a legitimate stake in any medical issue. If this is so, there is greater incentive to perform to the very highest standards of care, ensuring greater safety to patients. The idea that some information may be incorrectly interpreted is always a risk, and that will not change. Although the processes of a quality assurance committee may be slowed by the requirement to provide information whilst its considerations are under way, the work will be done eventually and the objectives achieved.

As I said, the issue of doctors being referred to as such on retirement creates no problem. This has been the case in many countries for years. However, I query why criminal histories should be required. Surely at that stage of a doctor's career it is somewhat irrelevant for a criminal history to be taken so that he or she can be called a doctor. They are a non-practising registrant, and his or her criminal history should have no bearing. I am suspicious of this requirement and ask the minister to take that into account in her summing up. Perhaps she could elaborate on this apparent invasion of privacy and the risk justifying it.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (4.04 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly on the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In particular, I would like to comment on the establishment of a new category of registration called non-practising registration. This new category is not without restrictions. It will be restricted to a person who has been registered as a medical practitioner in Australia or overseas. That person must be a suitable person, and the medical board will take into consideration matters such as the existence of any convictions for an indictable offence or the cancellation of registration under the act.

While I recognise the need for people to expect doctors to practise only if they can do so competently and want ease in recognising practising doctors, I can also see how a doctor who has spent many years maintaining his or her skills would like to keep that title. I recognise this through my own experience with our family doctor. The late Kevin Hobbs was the doctor who brought me into the world.

Ms Nelson-Carr: A wonderful doctor.

Ms STONE: He was the best man I have ever known. He continued to be my family's doctor throughout my childhood, through my teenage years, and I continued to use him throughout my young adult years. When he retired it was a sad day for all of my family. Finding a doctor we trust and admire is very hard. Doctor Hobbs was more than a doctor; he was a trusted friend and someone I looked up to. It did not matter where we lived; Dr Hobbs was our doctor. We could go to him at any time of the day or night. Whether he was practising or retired he would always be Dr Hobbs to me. He earned my respect and that of my family and many others in the Kelvin Grove and Red Hill community. A doctor such as him deserves to be known as a doctor no matter what stage of life he or she is in.

It saddens me that the federal government does not seem to be able to get through its head what having a family GP in the community is like. The family GP has been eroded thanks to the federal government. We talk about male school teachers being role models for single parent families. A family doctor is one of the best role models we can have. He was someone I aspired to be like. Our federal government does not consider the role of the family doctor important anymore. It is bad enough that our families are missing out on the medical attention they need in their local communities, let alone that they are missing out on a trusted friend and ongoing medical records—all because the federal government will not do anything about Medicare provider numbers and will not give training providers to universities for our young people to become doctors. Federal government members have probably had a family doctor they admired and wanted to be like, yet they go along on their merry way and turn their backs, saying, 'We don't turn up to meetings. Why should the federal Health Minister turn up for a meeting?' I find it disgusting. It is about time all of us in Queensland stood up and said, 'Enough is enough!' We should start petitions, just as federal members have, in support of Medicare. Medicare is a casualty of the Howard government and it is about time we did something about it.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: They cannot see the problem.

Ms STONE: They do not have to wait eight days for a doctor. They probably just ring up their mates and book in. The average person does not ring up a mate, they have to wait eight days for a doctor. As I said before, there are restrictions that come with this amendment. Unlike the federal government, we actually care about the health system. We have done the right thing by the health system. Unfortunately, I cannot say that the federal government has done anything right for the health system.

A very important part of this bill is the amendment to the Health Rights Commission Act 1991. This bill clarifies that health service complaints may be made on behalf of deceased users of health services and that complaints can continue to be dealt with after the complainant has died. I believe the community expects this type of complaint to be investigated under the statutory functions of the Health Rights Commission, and this bill will validate the commissioner's rights in regard to responding to this type of complaint.

I note also that the bill amends the Hospitals Foundations Act 1982 and will establish a more streamlined and flexible process for the appointment of members to a hospital foundation. I am sure this will be welcomed by foundation members.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the House of the wonderful work that the Logan Hospital Auxiliary is doing. At this moment, the Logan Hospital Auxiliary has 60 registered volunteers. In 2001 the group raised $142,000, and in 2002 the group raised approximately $111,000.

Mr Purcell: Well done!

Ms STONE: They are a fantastic group. I congratulate the president, Janette Baurton; vice-president, Bernice Francis; secretary, Aaron Schouter; and treasurer, Jill Regeling on the great work that they do.

Mr Briskey: What an outstanding mob.

Ms STONE: They are outstanding. They are hardworking, dedicated women and men and they do a fantastic job. Not only do they provide important funds to their hospital; they also provide companionship and a caring hand for patients. I applaud the great work that they have done and will continue to do. In common with the member for Woodridge, I hear great things about the Logan Hospital. I hear about the hospital's caring staff and the service that they give to our community. I, too, would like to thank them for that.

There are many important parts of this bill that I could speak about, but I believe that my Labor colleagues have done that well. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the ministerial staff, particularly Michael Dart. I have spoken to Michael about certain issues on different occasions—not only in relation to this bill—and I would like to thank him. I would also like to thank the departmental staff for the hard work that they have done in formulating the bill. On that note, I congratulate the minister and commend the bill to the House.

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (4.10 p.m.): It is my great pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I welcome the amendments, as other speakers have, detailed in this bill—

Mr Neil Roberts interjected.

Mr BRISKEY: I think Michael Dart is an outstanding officer. He has been of great assistance to the member and me over a long period.

I welcome the amendments detailed in the bill and, in particular, I would like to talk briefly about the amendments to the Medical Practitioners Registration Act 2001. These amendments will allow a retired medical professional who obtains non-practising registration to retain the use of their title and refer to their medical qualifications. That is an outstanding amendment.

I want to refer to a letter that was sent to me by Dr Meredith Foxton, now retired. In that letter she stated that she would like to retain the honorific title of 'doctor', even when retired. Further in the letter, Dr Foxton stated—

... Most of us have carried this title for up to fifty years and are known to the people by that title. Other professions and the Services and in this case other States, are pleased to offer to their retired members continuation of their title.

Meredith Foxton—Dr Foxton as we all know her—has practised for many years in the Redlands. There would not be anyone who has lived there for more than five years in the Redlands who would not know Dr Foxton. She is an outstanding professional and I am very, very pleased that the amendments that are contained in this bill will allow her to continue to use that important honorific. We have always known Meredith Foxton by the title 'doctor' and she will continue to be known by the title of 'Dr' Foxton.

The amendments also provide protection from liability for certain bodies or persons who provide information to the Medical Board of Queensland for the purposes of the act. The key amendments in this bill to the Medical Practitioners Registration Act establish the new category of registration called non-practising registration. People who are granted non-practising registration will be permitted to use the courtesy title 'doctor' and refer to the medical qualifications that they hold. However, they will not be allowed to use the titles that are restricted under the act. For example, a retired surgeon will be allowed to use the title 'doctor' and refer to himself or herself as a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, but would not be permitted to use the restricted titles of 'medical practitioner' or 'surgeon'. A person will be eligible for non-practising registration if the person is, or has been, registered as a medical practitioner and is a suitable person to be a non-practising registrant.

Mrs Lavarch: It is the district manager looking for you, Darryl.

Mr BRISKEY: And what an outstanding district manager he is, too.

Mr Purcell: A retired surgeon, he is. He wants to cut you off.

Mr BRISKEY: This gives me an opportunity to say a quick word about the Redland Hospital, which is an outstanding medical establishment and one that I have been to on many occasions, unfortunately. Also in the area is the Mater Private Hospital, which is a new private hospital that is co-located with the Redland Hospital and which is doing marvellous work, too, to look after the people of the Redlands. The matters that the Medical Board may consider in deciding on a person's suitability for non-practising registration do not relate to the person's fitness to competently and safely practise medicine but relate only to matters relating to the person's integrity, for example, whether the person has been convicted of an indictable offence.

The standard condition on non-practising registration is that the registrant must not practise. A non-practising registrant who practises would contravene that condition, which would be an offence against the act. Non-practising registration will be available only to practitioners who do not undertake any form of medical practice irrespective of whether any remuneration is received. Semi-retired practitioners who wish to continue to practise in a limited way, for example, by writing prescriptions or referrals for their relatives or friends, will need to maintain their general or specialist registration. This is necessary for the main objective of the act to be achieved, namely, to protect

the public by ensuring that health care is delivered by registrants in a professional, safe and confident way.

Currently, all retired or semi-retired doctors can continue to hold general or specialist registration simply by paying their annual registration fee. However, recency of practice requirements will be developed under the act in the near future. These are requirements that, if met, demonstrate that a doctor has maintained an adequate connection with the profession and should continue to hold registration. Recency of practice requirements should be able to be developed in a form that will specify what requirements must be met by doctors who wish to continue to practise in a limited way. For example, semi-retired doctors who intend to write prescriptions or referrals only for family or friends may need to satisfy only some of the recency of practice requirements to maintain registration. The medical profession will be consulted during the development of recency of practice requirements. I am very pleased to welcome the amendments and commend this bill to the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McNamara): Order! Before calling the honourable member for Gladstone, I remind members of the need to turn off phones in the chamber, particularly when members are speaking. Even if they are set to vibrate, they will interfere with the sound system.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.17 p.m.): Health care is one of the fundamentals to people's quality of life, their enjoyment of life and their ability to participate at all levels. That is why matters of health become such emotive issues in our electorates.

From my perspective, this bill has the potential to impact positively and negatively on the service provision of Queensland Health. I would like to congratulate the minister on the changes to the Health Rights Commission's powers to remove the doubt about health service complaints and the Health Rights Commission's ability to deal with those complaints. Often, particularly in the case of older people, a complaint to the Health Rights Commission which is commenced prior to the person's death is commenced by a member of the family concerned about the care that the older person is receiving and, therefore, is proceeded later on by that same family member. However, irrespective of the age of the person, this amendment gives the power to a third party to continue a complaint with the Health Rights Commission irrespective of whether they were the initiator of the complaint or, as a family member, the substitute complainant after the death of the person receiving treatment.

I believe that is a very sound amendment. This is an emotive area—one that can have a damaging effect on the remaining family members, not just in the short term but in the long term if they feel that a grievance is not adequately addressed and investigated. I commend the minister for that, because for many families this right will ensure closure in many circumstances where the treatment of a loved one is under question or where there are some issues to be dealt with prior to that family being able to finally accept the death of someone they care about. I commend the minister for those retrospective changes to the Health Rights Commission Act.

However, I would, along with other members in this chamber, express my very great concern about the changes to the approved quality assurance committees. The minister has said that members of these committees appear to be constrained in their contribution to the committee because they feel that in many ways they could be exposed and that the documentation they may bring to committee meetings would be available under FOI. The exemptions under FOI are extensive. We went through the implications of FOI exemptions when the change in fee structure—the increased charges—were applied to the FOI Act. However, on the basis of the work that I have had the opportunity to be part of with the various committees—only two of them—over a period of time in this parliament, it has been demonstrated to me that the ability to exempt material from FOI is extensive, whether it is on a personal basis or whether it is information that is not in the public interest.

The amendments that the minister is making to the act through this bill are an attempt to remove from public scrutiny the actions of certain members of the hospital fraternity. I will qualify that, because I, like everybody in this chamber, believe that the people who work in our hospitals do a brilliant job. The doctors, the nurses and the domiciliary staff work really hard under often trying conditions. A previous speaker in this debate said that these committees discuss what went wrong, who has done the wrong thing, who has made a mistake, which health service provider has made a mistake and that it is about keeping cases out of court. My concern is that if there is not adequate supervision and adequate transparency on those incidents where something does go wrong systemic problems will be overlooked or recurring problems of a particular person will be overlooked or in some ways sanitised or hidden from scrutiny. I believe that that is an outcome

that will ensue as a result of the scrutiny that is being removed by the amendments contained in the bill.

It was stated that the final report will be available in the public arena. It is very easy to present a final report absent of many of the facts that are in interim committee documents or in more detailed committee documents to the point where the final report sheds no real light or information on the procedures, whether that is the Health Department or anyone else. Therefore, it is of little comfort to those people who may have concerns about health care provision to say that the final report will be available. I have had it said to me by a number of people in the health care area that if they express a concern about health care provision—whether that is a lack of staff or the way in which resources are managed—they are reminded very quickly about the confidentiality provisions that they have with the code of conduct under Queensland Health. It is on the basis of the reminder that they are certainly counselled to keep their concerns confidential.

It is our role in this parliament to not necessarily make personal and aggressive criticism of the minister but to represent our communities' concerns when health care is either unavailable or only available within a significant period of time. I have raised in this chamber and with the minister in letters and through other communications the concerns of my community in terms of the hospital. That is not to say that people, when they do finally get treatment, are not grateful for the service that they have received and are not complimentary about the staff, both the nursing staff and the other medical staff, who handled them. They are. But the complaint that I get the most is the time taken to access services or the distance that has to be travelled to access medical specialities.

I commend the minister—and I am not sure that I have raised it in this House in this new year—for the appointment of the new oncologist. It is very welcome. I know that those having oncology treatment in Gladstone at the moment have expressed their gratitude in the media for the new oncology service. These are a group of people already under great physical, medical and emotional strain. The fact that the need for them to travel is significantly reduced is welcomed. However, I continue to get complaints about the lack of specialities across-the-board and raise that issue with the minister. I agree with previous speakers in that there are problems in relation to the College of Surgeons. There are problems in relation to the federal government and its willingness or unwillingness to make provider numbers available. Having recognised those federal deficiencies, we still have to come back to the fact that we are in a state jurisdiction and it is felt that the actual funding that gets spent on the ground where the doctors and nurses work is being pressured by other demands within the medical system. One of the issues raised with me is the growth in middle management—not medical staff but paper shufflers. I am sure that the minister will have a shot back at me about that, but that is certainly one area that has been raised with me.

Mrs Edmond: You complained when we lost three nurse managers.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I wanted them to go back to clinical service. That is why I complained about it. I complained because the nurses were working long hours and wards were closing, yet three senior nurses were given VERs when there were staff on the ward who were absolutely—

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Wards are closing. The children's ward has moved into the maternity ward and all the time—

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Because they keep getting referred. The minister needs to understand the community reaction when she raises that issue. More and more people are being referred away because either there are no specialities or not enough room—in fact, there is plenty of room. The wards are closed. They are being referred away but then the minister throws back at us that our patient numbers are dropping. The last time the minister said that, it went down like a lead balloon in the electorate.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I would challenge that and so would the community. The perception and the reality is that outpatient services have changed. They have been through a cycle of new programs. Years ago a person just sat and waited in the outpatients area. They could tell by the length of the line ahead of them how long they would wait. They might have waited three or four hours, but they saw a GP because, depending on the hospital size, there was a bank of four, five

or six GPs who were seeing people for colds, flus and ordinary medical issues—the ones that the minister now says should go to their GP. Then hospitals went through the stage where patients would make an appointment. That was in place for a little while until it was found that people made the appointments too far ahead and forgot to turn up for their appointment and then hospitals would only take appointments for the ensuing three days, and that created frustration as well. Hospitals have now turned to the triage system where a person turns up and they are triaged as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 and they wait their turn.

There have been instances where people have not been seen and I have sent letters to the minister about this. One man in particular went to the hospital with flu-like symptoms. He waited for six hours and left. Rightly—and I thank the minister for it—the minister wrote and apologised for the wait. There had been some system breakdown and this gentleman actually went home. He was too sick to sit and wait to be seen by a doctor. So outpatient services are seen to be deteriorating. Specialist services in rural Queensland are seen to be deteriorating. I again say to the minister that for her to say that our patient numbers are dropping is a red rag to a bull, because one reason for that which has just been remediated is the oncology situation. They were not seen in that hospital because the oncologist stopped coming and they had to be sent to Rocky and Brisbane. That is why patient numbers dropped. That is why the minister saying that patient numbers are dropping is inciting anger.

I commend the Mater Hospital for its co-location and want to finish on a positive note, and that is to thank the minister for the allocation or the awarding of the contract for the construction of the Boyne Valley clinic to enable construction to proceed. Boyne Valley is an isolated community in terms of accessing emergency medical services. Mary Faint has worked there, as her mother did before her, for many years and has provided not only a physical service but also a comfort to the residents to know that they have quick access to somebody with clinical first-aid qualifications who can provide immediate help while waiting for an ambulance or the medivac helicopter to attend.

There are a couple of sawmills up there. God forbid that it should happen, but accidents are usually quite horrific. Therefore, the presence of some medical person to give initial treatment until more extensive services arrive is more than welcome.

The staff who work at the hospital do an excellent job, but they are working under very trying circumstances in a community that is growing. The growth area is in heavy industry. The community's perception—the minister says that services have not been reduced but certainly the public's and my perception is that they have—is that these services are reducing and that access locally to specialists is reducing when the community is growing exponentially and those industries that are being attracted to the area are process industries with quite dangerous procedures in terms of the mechanical work that occurs and also potentially quite damaging results in terms of emission of toxic gases if there were an incident. Health is a basic service for quality of life. We need to build our health services, not diminish them. I commend those concerns to the minister.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (4.31 p.m.): This small but significant bill's primary objective is to ensure that the body of legislation dealing with the registration of medical practitioners, the lodging of complaints, obtaining personal health information and appointing health related board members is updated to reflect current community reforms. The Medical Board of Queensland, all health practitioner registration boards, the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Queensland, the Queensland branch of the Australian Medical Association, the Queensland Nursing Council, the Health Rights Commissioner, the secretary of professional conduct review panels and the Queensland Nurses Union were consulted about the proposed amendments. The cost for government to implement these reforms is regarded as insignificant and will be catered for through the normal departmental budgetary process. The bill will also not have any significant financial impact on external bodies such as the AMAQ.

I address my next comments to the amendment of the Medical Practitioners Registration Act 2001. The Medical Board of Queensland can deem a person a non-practising registrant. A person will be eligible for non-practising registration if the person is or has been registered as a doctor or medical practitioner and is a suitable person to be a non-practising registrant. In deciding whether an applicant is a suitable person, the board may consider whether the applicant has been convicted of any relevant offences, whether the applicant's registration has been adversely affected or any other issue relevant to the applicant's suitability to be a non-practising registrant.

Under this act it is proposed to grant approval to the board to determine the suitability of applicants following a criminal history check. This power to obtain criminal history records is one

that should be used with discretion, and I trust that appropriate guidelines will be put in place regarding use of these powers. The board may consider the applicant's criminal history, and this can include whether the applicant has been convicted of an indictable offence. The board may also consider an offence against any health practitioner legislation or an offence relating to the practise of the profession when deciding if an applicant for non-practising registration is a suitable person to be registered. I would assume that issues of criminal malpractice will be sufficient to make an applicant ineligible.

The provision of this information will assist the board to decide whether an applicant is a suitable person to be a non-practising registrant. As non-practising registrants will be able to use the title 'Dr' and refer to their qualifications, it is important that the board has access to this information to satisfy itself as to the integrity of non-practising registrants.

The bill specifies through clause 45 that the board may require the Police Commissioner to provide a written report about the applicant's criminal history. I am sure that Commissioner Atkinson will ensure that these matters are dealt with diligently. I am also assured that, while some would regard the exercise of this power as adversely affecting an individual's privacy, the investigations will be undertaken with maturity, diplomacy and tact. The full criminal history of the applicant will not be able to be obtained, nor should it be. The objective is to ensure the applicants for non-practising registration are trustworthy and honest. I support this bill and congratulate the minister and her staff on their efforts in this regard.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (4.34 p.m.): This bill amends a number of Health portfolio acts. One amendment is to the Medical Practitioners Registration Act in respect of the rights of retired doctors to continue to use the title 'Dr'. The bill contains a number of conditions and protections to ensure that the rights of both retired doctors and consumers are protected, and these have been comprehensively outlined by other speakers.

An important amendment relates to the provision of qualified legal liability protection to persons who give advice and reports to bodies such as the Postgraduate Medical Education Foundation of Queensland. The foundation advises the Medical Board on training standards for medical practitioners, and it is prudent to provide protection to people who give such advice to ensure that full and frank advice is given to those who determine the standards applying to the training of our health professionals.

Another important amendment relates to the Health Rights Commission Act. The proposed amendments make it clear that complaints may be made on behalf of a deceased person and that complaints can continue to be heard after a person has died. This is an important amendment, particularly for people who have died in circumstances which are being questioned by their families or carers. I currently have a tragic case in my electorate where the family has genuine concerns and a need to be satisfied that the standard of care provided to their son in the final days of his life was appropriate. This is an important amendment which clarifies that his family is able to pursue the matter with the Health Rights Commission should they so choose.

I wanted to say a few general words about our health system, which I believe is amongst the best in the world. From time to time the media and the opposition highlight issues which reinforce the incorrect notion that our health system is in crisis or disarray. For every negative story about our health system that is published or highlighted, I believe there are 100 positive stories to counter it. I am regularly hearing from constituents about the positive experiences they or a family member have had in our public health system and about the professional and dedicated staff who provide our health services. In particular, I hear about the professionalism and care provided by our doctors and nurses who staff our hospitals and the various other health services located in community settings. This is the real story of our public health system, and we should highlight it at every opportunity.

Last year's state budget demonstrated again the government's commitment to maintaining the high standards of service available in our health system. The Health budget increased by 6.7 per cent, sustaining the significant increases that have occurred in previous years. It provided for an additional 200 front-line health staff to improve service delivery across a range of areas, and there was a $248 million allocation towards capital works and new equipment in hospitals and community health services.

Half a million dollars of that allocation was put towards the establishment of a new community health centre in the Nundah area to service my electorate. Both the member for Clayfield and I were delighted with the minister's decision to dramatically improve community health service delivery in our electorates with this allocation. Overall, the new Nundah area

community health centre will be a $5.1 million investment in our electorates. Services to be provided include child community health services, adult community mental health services, child and youth mental health services, youth drug and alcohol services and women's health visiting services. The Department of Health is currently considering a range of possible sites for the centre, and we eagerly await the commencement of construction. A very detailed project definition plan has already been developed, and as soon as the site is determined construction will commence.

I take this opportunity to talk about some of the other important state health service facilities in my electorate. I do not have a hospital directly placed in the electorate, but we are ably serviced by both the Prince Charles district health facilities and the nearby Royal Brisbane Hospital. Major public dental services are delivered to my electorate by both the Sandgate and Stafford dental clinics and a smaller clinic at Nundah.

I also take the opportunity to mention the wonderful service provided by the school dental health service in both state and Catholic schools in my electorate. My wife is a dental therapist who works in the Redcliffe region, and I therefore have first-hand knowledge of the professionalism and dedication of the dental officers, therapists and assistants who work in that service.

Mental health services have received significant levels of increased support by the government. In the last budget, an additional 85 extra staff were funded to enhance the delivery of mental health services across the state. In my electorate I have a community mental health facility referred to as Nundah House. Nundah House offers a range of services to patients and also acts as a drop-in centre where people can access and develop support networks which are essential to their wellbeing.

A little over a year ago Queensland Health provided a one-off allocation of $144,000 to cover renovations to Nundah House and also to fund the position of a project officer. One of the key roles for the project officer was to oversee the development of an ongoing management model for the centre. Particular focus was to be on establishing an arrangement or arrangements with other service providers to ensure ongoing delivery of support services at Nundah House.

For a range of reasons, a new management model was not able to be finalised in the 12 months provided for under the original funding. Given the important role and services provided at Nundah House, both the member for Clayfield and I made representations to the Minister for Health about extending the work of the project officer. The minister has recognised the need in this area and we are pleased to thank her for ensuring that this work will now be funded to the end of the year. Nundah House is an important mental health facility in my electorate, and it is important that we find an appropriate management model to ensure its continued delivery of support to mental health patients on the northside of Brisbane.

In closing, I want to mention two other significant health services in my electorate: first, Ashworth House, a nursing home which provides excellent care for its residents at Zillmere. Ashworth House has a very dedicated staff and a team of volunteers who work tirelessly to improve the standards and quality of life for the people who live there. I was very pleased that the minister included Ashworth House in the first round of major upgrades that will be made to our state-run aged care facilities. Residents will derive great benefit and comfort from the airconditioning that was funded under this program, and again I thank the minister and the department for that investment in my electorate.

I also mention the quality care and services offered by the North East Community Care, an aged persons respite service located at Northgate. The government provided a total of $426,000 towards redevelopment of this service which was originally located in the member for Clayfield's electorate. I have tried to be positive in my contribution in this debate, but there is one problem in our health system that I do want to make some brief comments on, and that is the demise of Medicare and the additional stresses this is placing on our public hospital system, particularly in our public emergency departments.

The federal government is taking us down a worrying path which may ultimately lead to a dual health system, one for the rich and one for the poor. The federal government's refusal to adequately support the Medicare system, and particularly bulkbilling, is causing significant distress to families and placing undue additional demands on emergency departments in our public hospitals. Medicare statistics show that the cost of visiting a GP who does not bulkbill has risen by over 44 per cent in six years. This higher cost of visiting a doctor is forcing families to choose between seeing their doctor when they are ill or staying at home and toughing it out.

This is obviously not a sound principle on which to base a health system. It is also forcing more and more people into the public health system emergency departments. The opposition has made no mention of this crisis in our health system and instead has endeavoured to sheet blame onto the state government when the real undermining of our public health system is being pursued by their Liberal and National colleagues in the federal government. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (4.43 p.m.): Whilst the opposition supports the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, it has reservations about clause 4. Can I say from the outset that this piece of legislation is important for a number of reasons, although I think clause 4 has been screwed down somewhat by the government. I know many members have spoken this afternoon about the registration of doctors. I say to the minister that this is a very worthwhile issue that she is touching on here in relation to doctors who retire and whether they call themselves doctor or mister as a result of their professionalism.

I want to make reference today to the issue of regional practitioners. In the days when I went to school we did not have OP scores. A lot of those people in my time and probably many other members of parliament here—and I see the member for Toowoomba North nodding; I know he is a professional man in the area of law—did not need an OP score to reach certain heights. The point I am making is that many of the young men I went to school with went on to be doctors, vets and lawyers, and a lot of them worked very hard. I know they did not come top of the class.

Mr Neil Roberts: But some of them became politicians.

Mr JOHNSON: Absolutely. I take that interjection from the member for Nudgee. I am not a professional person, but I do respect professional people. They play a very important role in our society. The point I am making this afternoon is that I believe the bar has been lifted too high for many people who want to pursue a professional career. I say to the minister today that whether people want to be medicos or physiotherapists they have to pass certain criteria. It concerns me that maybe we are losing good men and women who want to pursue a professional career.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: We have to have a realistic approach.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: Hang on a second. The minister is in a leadership role in this state. It is not about knocking—

Mrs Edmond: We have been lobbying the federal government for years.

Mr JOHNSON: Fair comment. The minister knows how difficult it is to get doctors and nursing staff into country areas. When we talk about nursing staff, we need to look at the shortage of midwives that we have not only in country areas but right around the state. In my own electorate of Gregory and in many of our good country hospitals, mothers cannot give birth to their infants because the maternity section does not operate because of the shortage of these professional people.

The minister and I have spoken on numerous occasions about this problem. I think this is an area which we can address: the reopening of some of the training facilities in these country hospitals. We can get people from high schools in local towns who want to stay in those areas and pursue a professional career. I know they can only train as enrolled nurses a lot of the time, but if we can start off in that field I think we are a long way down the track of providing a more professionalised career path for these young people if they do want to become a registered nurse.

One young woman from Emerald in my electorate was a schoolteacher, and after five or six years she wanted to become a doctor. She studied to become a pharmacist in Brisbane, and I hope soon we will see that lady become registered as a medical practitioner. That is an example of the bar perhaps being too high. As that young woman has progressed in her teaching profession, she has become more qualified and has found that she can go and study science and ultimately medicine. I think we have to allow people to pursue this career path.

The other area I want to touch on today, as the shadow minister responsible for the portfolio, is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy. I have said it in public forums, I have said it in the print media, I have said it in this parliament: I congratulate Minister Judy Spence for the line that she has taken on alcohol abuse in many of our northern communities and Aboriginal and Islander communities. This is another area where we need to educate young people. That is what it is all about: education. We need young people in those communities to see that there is a worthwhile

life out there for them. To quote the Premier's line, we have already lost one generation. I think we have probably lost two or three generations, the truth be known, and we do not need to lose anymore.

At the end of the day, we cannot help what colour we are, but we can do something about helping those people. We are well on track to doing that. If we can educate people in professions such as nursing, medicine and teaching, we are a long way down the track to addressing many of the problems within Queensland's boundaries. Again, I am not saying that the bar is too high in terms of medicine, but it may be in many other areas.

Mrs Edmond: We need more students.

Mr JOHNSON: Absolutely. We need to look at ways and means of getting these people into institutions without saying, 'No, you do not have the qualifications or the ability to progress.'

I refer to the gem fields clinic in my electorate at Sapphire where Anne Payne is the resident sister. She is back on duty after a period where there were many problems. I have spoken with the director of health services in the Central Highlands, Ms Kerry Windsor, in this respect. Ms Windsor has informed me that she is very keen to see the services at the gem fields upgraded. She is working to get a resident doctor in place. There is much alarm at the moment in relation to the residents at the gem fields. They do not want a cutback in their existing service. If a doctor cannot be provided, we want the existing facility retained and maintained at the existing level Anne Payne is providing. She is a very professional sister, doing a very professional job. I have spoken with Ms Windsor on numerous occasions, and she has assured me that she wants to improve this service. I want to assure the people of the gem fields that I have raised this issue. I trust that the minister will provide an assurance that there will not be a cutback but an improvement in services, whether it be with a resident doctor in practice or an upgrade of facilities under the stewardship of Sister Anne Payne.

Mrs Edmond: Hopefully we will get a GP.

Mr JOHNSON: Kerry Windsor has told me that. I support that. I know the other community leaders support that. But we do not need to create a climate of fear that they may not retain what they currently have. Many people think that maybe there will be a wind back of services. I appreciate the minister's assurance that rather than a wind back there will be a growth in services.

I now refer to the Birdsville Hospital. Last Tuesday I attended a public meeting in Birdsville. I pay tribute to Frontier Services for the great job it has performed in Birdsville since 1923 in providing medical services and/or a medical facility in that centre. Birdsville has certainly come a long way. There is an indigenous and non-indigenous composition to its population. It is one of those communities that works very closely together for the betterment of its people.

The Diamantina Shire Council, under the leadership of mayor David Brook, convened a meeting last Tuesday in Birdsville to address the issue of the upgrade of the existing facilities and where Frontier Services stands. No doubt the minister is well aware that Frontier Services says that it is not in a position to upgrade that facility and cannot see the way clear for the next five years in terms of any improvements. However, the current facility is old. It was built in 1953 after the former facility was destroyed by fire. It is virtually obsolete when it comes to modern medical practices. It is about providing a clean, air-conditioned facility where consultations can be held in a professional and confidential way.

The community is totally supportive of a new facility. I know that there were no representatives of Queensland Health at the meeting last week, but members of the federal government and federal departments were there. I hope that the minister sees the merit in supporting that community with a new facility. Frontier Services has very kindly donated vacant blocks of land adjacent to the existing facility for the purpose of an upgrade. I hope that the minister can see merit in supporting this very worthwhile initiative.

A lot of people think that Birdsville is only a small, remote outpost in the far south-western corner of the state providing a service for only about 120 people who live close to the town. But at race time some 6,000 people visit that community, and thousands of people visit that area on a daily basis throughout the year, especially in the winter months. That is certainly another tax on that community. I urge the minister, as the custodian of health in this state, to support this project. Hopefully we will see the provision of funds—perhaps jointly through the federal and state governments—for the construction of a new facility. The new facility at Bedourie is working very well, and something similar to that would be very advantageous in the Birdsville area. I know that the Diamantina Shire Council would love to hear of the minister's support for that concept.

I refer to the Freedom of Information Act and the Health Services Act. One proposal is to allow approved assurance committees to investigate health care outcomes in hospitals and identify opportunities to improve the design and operation of health care systems. These health care committees are subject to strict rules of confidentiality. The act prohibits the disclosure of information. We all know that. In this modern day and age, everybody knows about the confidentiality of files in relation to patients, et cetera. The act prohibits the disclosure of information created or given to committees in proceedings before a court, tribunal, board or person.

In terms of this report calling for the exemption of quality assurance committees from the freedom of information legislation, we have to respect exactly and precisely what this legislation is about and what freedom of information is about. A lot of matters have been kept from the public, and there are a lot of issues that the minister knows doctors cannot divulge. At the same time, we do not need to keep people totally in the dark. The most important thing is security of those files and security of information. I urge the minister to make absolutely certain that the checks and balances are put in place in this respect. We do have concerns about freedom of information; we cannot have just anybody and everybody knowing exactly and precisely what is contained in someone's files.

Mrs Edmond: I'll explain it. I think your concerns are unwarranted, but I will explain it.

Mr JOHNSON: I thank the minister for that. While I am on my feet, I refer to the issue of district directors. I know that we have a new district director in Emerald, Kerry Windsor. I have been working fairly closely with her of recent times in relation to a series of issues that have been of concern to the people of the Central Highlands. June Lithgow is also working very closely with the people in the central west. Those two women are well and truly entrenched in their positions. Patty Scott, the former south-west director in Charleville, has now transferred to Gympie. I put on record today my sincere thanks to Patty Scott for the professional way in which she executed her duties as the custodian of Queensland Health in the south west.

Mrs Edmond: She is only acting at the moment in Gympie.

Mr JOHNSON: She has gone from Charleville and I do not know whether she will be back. I wish to highlight to the minister that she did an exemplary job. She is an approachable lady and is very understanding of the health needs in the south west. I can assure the minister that wherever Patty Scott is she will be with a very good advocate for health services in Queensland. She was always approachable. She was always happy to address issues. People like her always make the job a lot easier. Wherever Patty goes in Queensland Health, I wish her well. If she does get the top position in Gympie, she will do an exceptional job. Although the opposition supports the legislation, we have grave reservations about clause 4.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (5.01 p.m.): This bill amends a number of pieces of legislation under the portfolio of the Minister for Health, Wendy Edmond. These amendments will add to an already world-class health service provided in Queensland. I am always pleased to support the minister and her staff for working to continually improve our existing health services.

Ms Keech: A great minister.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I note the support of the honourable member. Previous government speakers have highlighted the benefits of the amendments and have also expressed their thanks to the Queensland Health staff. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to my colleague the member for Mundingburra and Parliamentary Secretary to the Health Minister, Lindy Nelson-Carr, for keeping me up to date with pertinent health statistics.

Ms Nelson-Carr interjected.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: The member for Mundingburra and I have had many interesting and magical talks on various Health issues. I would also like to thank Michael Dart for providing my office with some statistical information. Incredibly, $12 million is spent every day on health services.

I wish to inform the House of a letter I recently received from a constituent who had had open heart surgery. Admittedly, he was a private patient, but he had his surgery at Chermside in the public Prince Charles Hospital. He complimented every aspect of the hospital and staff and said his treatment was exceptional. However, he did have to travel to Redcliffe for his post-operative care. Whilst that was not an insurmountable burden to him, mainly due to the fact that he had a full-time carer who drove him to the classes, he was concerned by the fact that some

people opted out because it was too far to travel or some people did not have a full-time carer and could not drive themselves. He believes, as I do, that this post-operative care is imperative to the overall recovery of patients like himself who have had this type of surgery.

Ms Keech: It is extremely important.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: It is extremely important. My assistant electorate officer, Helen Gibson, gathered statistics for the Health Department and found that over 700 people in the catchment of the Caboolture Hospital had had some form of heart surgery in the past 12 months. I issued a press release indicating my desire to contact people who had had some form of heart surgery in the past 12 months and asking them whether they had had the same problems my constituent had with accessing post-operative support. My office received 24 inquiries and from these we decided that we would approach the Minister for Health to see whether we could establish a local cardiac support group in Caboolture.

Ms Keech: What a great idea.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I thank the member for Albert. I encourage other honourable members to do the same. I express my sincere gratitude to the minister. She has been most enthusiastic about the idea and has provided my office with information on the process of setting up such a group. A number of interested people met with me and Helen Gibson in Caboolture last week and it was decided to go ahead and write an official letter to the minister to seek support to form a cardiac support group. Helen, through my office, will provide secretarial support. I eagerly await a reply from the minister and in the meantime my office will set up a public meeting to officially form the group. All interested members of the community will be invited. Judging from the interest it has generated so far, the meeting should be well attended.

Ms Keech: What sort of support do you think you'll be able to offer?

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I am inviting the local member for Glass House, Carolyn Male, who has expressed an interest, and I have also spoken to a number of doctors and am hoping they will attend, too. I have spoken to senior staff at the Caboolture Hospital, and they have expressed some concern about how the group will be resourced. I have passed on these concerns to the minister, who is in the process of investigating their concerns. I hope to report to parliament on a successful outcome in the near future. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (5.05 p.m.): In rising to support this bill I will quote in full a letter from a resident of Warana, one of the many suburbs I am very proud to represent. It is headed 'Top hospital care' and states—

> After reading and having all the criticism we have had about Nambour Hospital and staffing, I would like to turn that around. I have been discharged from Nambour Hospital and I cannot speak highly enough of the way I was cared for from the doctors in charge of me through to the nursing staff, down to the cleaners and tea ladies. Nothing was too much trouble for any of them and always with a smile. All medication was explained, plus why it was being given. We must always remember they are all professional people who have studied to reach the top levels and as such deserve the best from government for funding. Special thanks to ward 2E and 2C.

Let me assure the Queensland parliament that the *Sunshine Coast Daily* regularly receives such letters of praise. Many such letters often berate the whingeing and whining vitriol and poison venom that continually flows from the conservative's health spokesperson. State issues are obviously not a priority, as we note her absence from Queensland parliamentary duties in this House as the health legislation is debated.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: Where is she?

Mr CUMMINS: I have been told she is overseas. Queenslanders realise that Labor has rebuilt the state's health system, the largest health capital works program ever undertaken in our nation's history.

One of Queensland Health's greatest assets is its staff. In November last year the Sunshine Coast community welcomed the new building and MRI scanner at the official opening of Nambour Hospital's new clinical services building and MRI— magnetic resonance imaging—unit. The four storey building and MRI unit are part of the hospital's $29.1 million redevelopment program. The new building includes an expanded emergency department, five new operating theatres, a new intensive care unit, medical records area and provision for future oncology cancer treatment services. The MRI unit will be used in cancer diagnosis to detect tumours of the brain, spinal cord, lung, liver, bone, prostate, endometrium and breast. The installation of the MRI scanner has vastly increased diagnostic capabilities in the Sunshine Coast region. MRIs have advantages over other diagnostic equipment such as x-rays because there are no long-term effects on the patient. It is vital that we provide this state-of-the-art scanner and one of the most powerful diagnostic

imaging tools available close to where Nambour people, and indeed all Sunshine Coast people, live at an affordable cost.

The Nambour redevelopment is one of the final major projects in the state government's $2.8 billion statewide health building program, which has seen about 150 hospitals and community health centres built or redeveloped across the state. Through this program Queenslanders in regional areas of the state now have access to the sorts of health services and health technology they could not even have imagined just a few years ago. The final stages of the redevelopment have included upgraded birthing suites, refurbishment of the former intensive care and operating theatre areas into new accommodation for allied health services, new offices for the anaesthetic department and a new chapel.

On behalf of Sunshine Coast residents, I thank the minister, the cabinet—the entire government—for providing such great services to the residents of the Sunshine Coast. The Nambour General Hospital and the Caloundra health service form part of the Sunshine Coast health service district network of services that provide a comprehensive health service to Sunshine Coast residents. Over the past five years the population of the Sunshine Coast has virtually exploded and it is now the fastest-growing region in the state. One of the major difficulties with that level of population growth is that it puts a tremendous strain on existing services, particularly health services.

It is also an unfortunate fact that a great many people who can afford private health care or, indeed, have private health care take advantage of the public system, placing an even greater burden on resources. This factor is illustrated in an independent report written by a senior research fellow, Ms Julie Smith. The report states that a—

... new report on private health insurance says the Howard Government's support for the industry strongly favours wealthy households.

Working with new taxation figures the Australia Institute has estimated that around half the current $2 billion public subsidy for private health insurance is going to the top 20% of taxpayers.

The report itself states in part—

Some affluent Australians may believe they are improving the fairness of the system and helping Medicare by taking out private insurance but the extent of the public subsidy and its unequal distribution exposed in this study means they are being misled.

The report states further—

The report also suggests that the (Federal) Government policy is allowing private health funds to cream off the most profitable part of Australia's health insurance market while leaving an underfunded public hospital system to provide care for the bulk of those with urgent or chronic healthcare needs.

The article citing the report appeared in the *Australian Financial Review*. The *Courier-Mail* also stated—

Queensland will demand the Howard Government boost public hospital funding after accusing it of squandering taxpayer money on private health insurance.

The most compelling argument in regard to the equitable provision of taxpayers' money for health care and services was highlighted in the federal government's 2002-03 budget, in which hospital service did not even rate a mention. How can the federal government deny the states funding for essential services such as health? Every Queensland resident should join our government in lobbying the federal government to increase its funding for education and our universities. I happily support this, because we need to increase the number of doctors and specialist services.

Whilst it is extremely difficult to make up for the lack of infrastructure and forward planning by conservative governments, the Beattie government has recognised the need in the Sunshine Coast region and allocated vast sums of money in an effort to improve the situation. For instance, funding and services at the Caloundra Hospital have been improved and expanded substantially since 1998. In fact, funding for Caloundra Hospital has increased by more than $1 million since the term of the coalition government in 1998. Staff numbers have also increased from 68.05 full-time equivalent staff in 2000-01 to 84.85 full-time equivalents in 2001-02.

In January this year, we on the Sunshine Coast received some very good news from the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, who announced that four dentists had been appointed to the Sunshine Coast. The three graduates and one experienced dentist have started work with the Sunshine Coast Oral Health Service, which provides free care for pensioners, the unemployed and their dependants, and holders of Seniors Cards. The Queensland dental health service is the largest in Australia and has again been put under increased strain since the federal government decided to stop funding dental care for pensioners and the unemployed in 1996. While other

states either reduced services or introduced co-payments, Queensland did not and now provides a service with a budget of approximately $110 million a year. Our public oral health staff do a magnificent job in treating a large number of people and the appointment of four new dentists on the Sunshine Coast is particularly good news, given that there is a national shortage of dentists. These appointments will mean a more timely service for clients of the Sunshine Coast Oral Health Service.

But that is not all. Sunshine Coast residents will also be pleased to know that dental surgeries at Kawana, Caloundra and Noosa will also undergo an $85,000 refurbishment as part of the Sunshine Coast's $5.8 million funding boost in the 2002-03 budget, which is definitely something to smile about.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, it is definitely only from the state budget; we cannot rely on the federal government, which continues to prop up the rich end of town while ignoring those who need a hand up.

A well-appreciated government service is breast cancer screening. BreastScreen Queensland's Nambour service has celebrated 10 years of providing breast cancer screening and assessment services to women in the Nambour and Sunshine Coast area. Since its opening 10 years ago, the Nambour service had screened thousands of women, with approximately 22,500 women screened last year alone. I must give full credit to the staff of the Nambour office for providing a very important service to my community. Four of the original staff, Dr Sue Fox, medical officer; Margie Watson, clinical nurse consultant; Umi McKenzie, chief radiographer; and Leanne Jones, administrative supervisor, have been with the service for the full 10 years and recently were present at the cutting of the cake to celebrate the centre's tenth birthday. As the minister will acknowledge, I wrote to her about some issues that that service has raised. I know that the minister will take on board those concerns.

It would be remiss of me if I did not commend the Cittamani Hospice Service, which is located at Palmwoods on the Sunshine Coast. That service provides home based care services. I have visited them and I can say that they are a very compassionate, dedicated and hardworking group. Also in Buderim in my electorate is Bloomhill, which is another Sunshine Coast based group of dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly for those who are ill and suffering.

In closing, I take this opportunity to advise parliament of a marvellous project within Nambour that is being undertaken by the Reed Property Group. It has been confirmed that 70 Windsor Road is the future site of the Sunshine Coast Hear and Say Centre. I would like to commend Harry and Margaret Reed and their son, Ken, and his family, because they thoroughly deserve the applause of this House for their ongoing support of the project and, indeed, the great community spirit that they show throughout the coast in fundraisers. I know that the minister appreciates, as we on the Sunshine Coast do, those who put in and do volunteer work. Without that, we would not be able to deliver to all Queenslanders. I commend the minister and all her staff, without naming them individually, and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (5.17 p.m.): In rising to support the bill, I want to make some general comments about the health care system and the good work that this minister and this government is doing. I ask both the opposition and the crossbench members to look at the context in which this health legislation is being considered. At the moment we have a federal government that is taking away funding from the state for housing and disability services and is removing places and funding for tertiary education and health. The federal government is failing the people of Queensland dramatically and the members of the opposition and the crossbenches are failing their constituents if they do not get up and start to fight for federal money for Queenslanders.

It is not possible for any state government to pick up the tab that traditionally has been picked up by the federal government. The social safety net that Labor put in place over decades is being ripped apart by a heartless and cowardly federal government. They are cowards because they are hiding behind world events—and events that touch everybody's heart—to get away with blue murder in these other social spheres. What they are doing in housing is an absolute disgrace. Not only have house prices risen so dramatically that it is difficult for first home owners to find affordable housing; the federal government has also dramatically slashed funding so that it is almost impossible to meet the demand for public housing.

The federal government does not care if people are out on the street. It does not care if people cannot get to a doctor. It does not care if people at Deception Bay have to wait for a week

to see a GP. The federal Health Minister is an absolute disgrace for saying that the postcode area for Deception Bay is the same as Wickham Terrace and that therefore we have enough doctors per population so she does not have to give any more GP provider numbers. It is an absolute disgrace. This is part of ripping away social equality, the notion of equity and the notion of a safety net which will pick up all citizens.

There has been some criticism from members opposite, and I note that a One Nation member spoke about facilities in her particular area. I would invite her to travel anywhere in Australia or overseas and come back and then be critical of this health system. Located within my own electorate is the Prince Charles Hospital. Keith McNeil is one of the world's top cardiothoracic surgeons. He has come from Papworth Hospital in England and has chosen to come back to Queensland. Any hospital in the world would want Keith on their staff. We have got him. It is not just a matter of Terry Sullivan looking after the people of his electorate, because the Prince Charles Hospital services northern New South Wales, all of Queensland, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific islands and the south-west Pacific. There are people from every electorate represented here who have received cardiothoracic procedures at the Prince Charles Hospital. Within a couple of hours, they can be flown to a facility that is second to none in Australia and one of the top four or five in the world.

On a regular basis helicopters fly over my house in suburban Stafford and land on the oval at Prince Charles Hospital. They are bringing either a patient or an organ for transplantation, and that hospital is doing world-class major medical procedures. Yet members opposite complain about a half an hour's drive or an hour's drive in their area. In suburban Brisbane people drive for an hour to an hour and a half to get to many things. Let us get some sense of reality in this debate. Let us see what we have and find out where the real failures are, and the failures are not with this minister and with this government. It is Howard, Costello and Patterson who have dramatically failed the people of Australia in their dereliction of not providing proper health services. A medical resonance imaging machine at Prince Charles Hospital was chosen by GE Medical Services as only the fourth in the world for it to fund. It chose a Queensland hospital—the first outside of North America—and to work with the Queensland government, which provided something like $3 million. It saw the expertise; it saw the infrastructure; it saw the support. It saw the excellence of this hospital system and GE Medical Services, which is one of the top researchers in the medical sphere, chose Queensland. To have members opposite constantly criticising this health system is a disgrace.

I am proud that this legislation amends a whole range of things, one of which is to amend the hospital foundation legislation. Again, as with many other members here, hospital foundations do fantastic work. I want to read into *Hansard* the names of the people who have done such great work at Prince Charles Hospital: Peter McInnes, the chair; Dr Colin Brennan, the acting chair; Cheryl Burns; Michael Clearly; Ron Coxhell; Peter Hall; Ted Howard, who does a great job also as chair of the Prince Charles Hospital District Health Council; John Leach; Chris Mullins; Neville Sandford; Malcolm West; Michael Wilson; and John Wylie. They are backed up by a support staff consisting of Theresa Scanlan, Don Bambry and Hilary Drennan. Those people allocated half a million dollars two years ago and almost $600,000 in the last 12 months to research facilities.

By the way, it is not just doctors at Prince Charles Hospital who benefit from this. The hospital has collaborative links with universities and other hospitals and undertakes adult and paediatric cardiology and intensive care research, research into cardiovascular medicine, cardiac surgery and heart valve operations, clinical support, community health, geriatric medicine, heart and lung transplants, medical imaging, nursing research, thoracic medicine, orthopaedics, palliative care and psychiatry. All of that is funded through the research foundation. This minister has seen that there has been a little problem in replacements for members of those boards. She has brought in these very practical, sensible amendments which will make it easier for replacements and appointments to be made to the hospital foundations. The act currently provides for members to be appointed on a rotational basis, and the amendments that the minister is introducing in this legislation will make that even better.

Hospital foundations, as we know, are not-for-profit organisations. They play an important role in promoting research and delivering not only quality health services; for example, at the Prince Charles they run the Breeze Cafe. The Breeze Cafe has a turnover of over $1 million and provides a great service for staff, patients and visitors. So it is not just the health services; it is the personal support and the money that is raised by the foundation. I support not just the Prince Charles Hospital Foundation but hospital foundations throughout Queensland. I support the

minister. After being a member of her committee for a number of years, I know her commitment to health. I know that she keeps us up to date with what is happening. I thank her staff and Queensland Health personnel who come to our regular briefings to the caucus committee and let us know what is going on. We do appreciate their expertise and the long hours they put in. This health system is equal to the best in the world. It is about time some members of this House stopped knocking the system and stopped hiding behind the fact that certain errors will occur. They will occur in any sphere.

My last comment relates to an article in the paper recently, which I notice the Manager of Opposition Business picked up on, where the person said that medical errors are made in various hospitals. There are two things about that article. Firstly, it is a voluntary reporting scheme by a private individual who has no standing in the medical sphere and has no access to the true figures. We have, on the other hand, the Health Rights Commission, which not only has formal investigative powers but a duty under the act to show in its annual report the sorts of problems it has to address and the areas where those come from. If anyone wants to look at what the error rate is in medical procedures, they should go through something like the Health Rights Commission and also look at the various agencies that have been set up to minimise problems. When we consider that there are literally tens of thousands of patients every week with very complex procedures in Queensland hospitals, we do not just a good job but an excellent job. Our health system is great. We need to support it. I support the bill before the House.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (5.27 p.m.): I rise to participate in debate on the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I do not intend to repeat comments made by previous speakers. Suffice it to say that when I was first elected in the parliament I was speaking to a long-serving member of parliament and we were talking about ministers and portfolios. The member said, 'Peter, if you want to give a minister a challenge, give them Health.' I think that is pretty accurate. There is no doubt that the minister certainly has had a challenge in a difficult portfolio. I certainly recognise it is very difficult. There is not enough money to go around and her departmental staff face the challenge to try to make it go as far as possible and, more importantly, ensure that the funds go where they are needed as a priority.

I take this opportunity to reflect on the Nambour Hospital. I take my hat off to the doctors, the nurses and all the support staff. They do a jolly marvellous job. The member for Stafford said very passionately that so often all we hear is criticism of our health service. We should be jolly proud of the health service we have in Queensland and very proud of the staff and the people who give not just—

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr WELLINGTON: Thank you, Minister. Our doctors, nurses and support staff do not just go through the motions of 9 to 5 or 7 to 3, or whatever their shift is; they give 120 per cent. They are there before they are due to start work and many times they are there after they are due to knock off, still working. They are not putting in claims for overtime but they do it because of their commitment to the health service. I also echo the sentiments of the member for Stafford, maybe not with his degree of passion, but I certainly support him and his claim that the federal government is not pulling its weight on funding health in Australia. It is so easy to pass the buck to someone else. I certainly believe that the federal government has a long way to go to come up to standard. All levels of government certainly have a role to play, but communities also have a role to play in trying to assist in finding the funds to provide a service. I note that the amendments in this bill enable the health foundations to operate more effectively, and I have to say that the Nambour Hospital's foundation does a jolly marvellous job.

Community members go out of their way to raise funds to assist in providing the essential services that we sometimes now take for granted. So often members of the community demand, require and expect services and they jump up and down if they are not delivered. Sometimes I wonder where the heck all the money is coming from. It is coming from taxpayers' pockets and it is coming from donations from the community.

We have seen a very significant property boom on the Sunshine Coast. I echo the sentiments of thanks of the member for Kawana, who spoke about Harry Reed, his wife, Margaret, and their son, Ken, and their willingness to get involved in the community and support so many worthwhile community projects. I suppose that is what business is about. Sometimes we think that businesspeople are just about making dollars. I hold in high regard the businesspeople who give something back to the community.

When I was first elected, the previous government had been working on a redevelopment of the Nambour Hospital. This Labor government has continued that rebuilding program. I can recall sitting in my office in Nambour and receiving a visit from Pastor Frank van Ophen, who is a member of the local ministers fraternal. He was in a very distressed state, concerned that the redevelopment of the hospital was not going to provide an improved location for the hospital chapel. We went up to the hospital and had a look around. The existing chapel is in the backblocks of the grounds. He said, 'We have been trying and trying to make sure that in the hospital redevelopment the chapel is closer to the emergency department—close to where it is all happening, close to where the grieving is taking place and close to where we can provide the important service that we do.' Pastor Frank van Ophen is not paid. He is a volunteer who gives so much to the people in need at the hospital.

It was not very long before we saw a change in the senior management of the Nambour Hospital, with a new district manager in Martin Jarman. I met with Martin and he said, 'Peter, leave it with me.' I take my hat off to Martin Jarman. He took a personal interest in ensuring that the redevelopment gave a proper location to the new chapel. That news was received with a great deal of relief by Pastor Frank van Ophen and the ministers fraternal.

The next stage was trying to furnish the chapel. Pastor Frank told me that Queensland Health could not fund it. I raised it with Martin and he said, 'I have other priorities. I cannot furnish your chapel. See what the community can do.' Pastor Frank went to every community group. He is still going to community groups. I then introduced him to the Blackall Range Woodcrafters Guild. He met with them and it was not long before the Blackall Range Woodcrafters Guild gave a commitment to make furnishings for the chapel a priority project. I put on the public record my thanks and my constituents' thanks for their willingness to get involved in such a worthy project. They were ecstatic and enthusiastic. We are certainly looking forward to the official opening of the hospital chapel. If the minister is on the Sunshine Coast or is able to attend, we will certainly invite her to that opening. The minister is always welcome to visit Nambour Hospital. I know that sometimes we may not agree on various issues, but the minister always ensures that I am able to get a whisper in with requests.

The real concern I have for the future in relation to Nambour General Hospital goes to the funding formula the department currently uses to fund the services at Nambour. I have a personal concern that the formula does not accurately reflect the significant growth that is taking place on the Sunshine Coast. I have had meetings with departmental staff. I have regular meetings with the district manager, Martin Jarman. I appreciate his frankness. I also have regular meetings with nurses, doctors and staff at the hospital, who have raised concerns with me. I in turn raise those with Martin. One message that has been consistently raised for some time is that the funding formula does not reflect the real significant growing pains we have on the Sunshine Coast.

I acknowledge that during the last budget growth money was provided to the hospital, but sometimes we need to realise that the hospital may not be able to simply balance the books because of the pressures it is under. When doctors are told that they have to wind back services, or whatever the appropriate wording is, the community responds because of the expectation. I simply ask the minister to see how we can review that formula in this year's budget in order to provide more funding to the Nambour Hospital. Whenever the minister is on the Sunshine Coast she is welcome to visit Nambour and I will take her for another tour. There are many building projects for the hospital precinct that we are keen to pursue. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy) (5.35 p.m.), in reply: As the previous speaker indicated, Health is a challenging portfolio. A lot of issues canvassed today are way outside the issues that are the subject of this bill. I will be focusing in my reply on the matters covered by the bill. I do welcome discussions with members at any time about issues they have in their electorates.

One of the things I think we all have to recognise is that there will always be demands that we cannot meet. Everybody would like cardiac services at the end of their street, without having to go anywhere. Everybody would like to have excellent, unpaid for health services wherever they are. There will always be demands that we cannot meet or specialties that we cannot provide right across the state. We have to keep those specialties together to retain the high level of expertise that comes from focusing on that particular specialty.

I thank members on both sides of the House for their support. Some areas of concern were raised by members opposite. I will address the areas of concern generally, rather than go through all of the points that people made. I suggest that undue concern has been raised about some aspects of the bill, particularly the FOI provisions. I will deal with those in a moment.

I congratulate the member for Beaudesert on doing a great job. He did not get the briefing. I point out that I was invited to be the keynote speaker at the conference the member for Maroochydore has gone to. I declined because parliament was sitting and I thought it was more appropriate that I be here. I would have loved to go to Taiwan and be the keynote speaker, but we have our own requirements.

In relation to the Hospitals Foundations Act the member for Beaudesert raised whether we are going to create more jobs for the boys. Can I suggest that he may have meant also for the girls, in this day and age? These amendments have come about because of undue delays in reappointing people. We go through a long, convoluted process. We ask for nominations, people make nominations and we go back to the foundation to ask how they feel about those nominations. We ask for three nominations, even for a casual vacancy. We are trying to speed things up. Often the foundations are left in limbo for long periods of time while we go through that process.

This provision does not take away from the responsibility I have to consult with various bodies. It just speeds up the process. If I wanted to, I could now appoint basically whom I wanted. I just have to ask them to be nominated by someone and go through the process. This is really about making the process a bit more efficient. It is an issue that the foundations have asked be addressed.

I place on record my gratitude to the foundations. They do a fantastic job wherever they are. I do not think I have ever refused membership of a foundation. I work on the principle that if somebody wants to come in and raise funds for one of our hospitals I am happy to see them on board and doing it. If members know of people who are interested in being actively involved in raising funds for the hospitals, they should let me know.

I turn to medical practitioners registration amendments. The member for Beaudesert raised concerns about natural justice for doctors who are conditional registrants. They do have proper appeal processes and, in the end, the final result is that they can appeal to the District Court if they are unhappy with the decisions that have been made.

On the issue of retired medical practitioners, someone raised concerns about whether their criminal history should be considered by the Medical Board. When the Medical Board is assessing the suitability of a retired doctor for non-practising registration, they also look to what impression that title of doctor gives. A doctor has to be fit and proper to be registered with the board. There is an assumption that those people who are continuing to use that title will also be fit and proper people, and that has the support of all the participants for this measure. I do not think anyone else has suggested that we should take away those provisions.

I guess the most contentious issue is the amendments to give protection to quality assurance committees. I accept that the member for Beaudesert was not at the briefing and could not ask questions. I think there is some confusion about this. One member seemed to suggest that we are talking about accreditation committees, which play an important role in accrediting. They are third-party accreditation committees. The participants of those committees are usually from interstate. They are qualified assessors. Queensland qualified assessors go into other states and review hospitals for accreditation processes.

Those processes have nothing to do with what we are talking about here. They will continue. We are working towards having 100 per cent of our hospitals accredited, hopefully by the end of this year. At the moment we have 85 per cent of our hospitals accredited with 100 per cent in the southern zone, 93 per cent in the central zone, 60 per cent in the northern zone and those that have not already got it are in progress.

What we are talking about here is an issue which was first raised with me a couple of years ago, and I have to say that I was rather hesitant to amend the FOI. But the issue was raised, and I think my concern increased as a result of the Bristol inquiry. I think the member for Aspley is the only other member in the House who would have taken a keen interest in the Bristol inquiry. The Bristol inquiry concerned hospital staff and clinicians being hesitant to raise concerns about poor practice in cardiac surgery in neonates—babies—in Bristol during the period 1984 to 1995. We ended up with an inquiry in 1998, and I think they looked at 50-odd cases. Twenty-nine of those babies died because of the poor clinical skills of the doctors involved, but no-one was game to speak out because they were concerned about litigation against them if they raised questions about another clinician's practice. So we are not talking about normal accreditation committees. We are talking more about clinical quality committees where clinicians may raise concerns about other clinicians in confidence and with some protection, without it being put in the public domain.

It may be that a review of cardiac services at a paediatric hospital reveals a concern that the numbers of children having poor outcomes is higher than what we would expect. If that got into the media, it would cause a lot of concern and outrage; people would be jumping up and down. But actual further examination might show that the reason for those poor outcomes was that those bubs were in very poor health to start with. Their outcomes were always looking very poor, with or without surgery. It is that type of quality committee that we are talking about.

The reason there have not been a lot of reports is that, while we have had the legislation to set in place quality assurance committees since 1991, in actual fact we have very few. We have the paediatric morbidity committee, which has been split into two committees. It reports publicly, but it is largely statistical data: so many babies were born, so many died, the cause of their death and at what term.

While there has been a lot of talk about the adverse events that can take place in a hospital, these committees are about trying to pick precursors to those events and dealing with them before they become entrenched. It is about trying to see the warning signs in regard to a clinician and having the openness within those committees to be able to address those matters without prejudice, without risking litigation. If we say to a surgeon, 'We do not think you should be doing a certain kind of surgery,' we are taking away his livelihood. He may sue over those comments, particularly if they get in the public domain.

The push for this has not come from Queensland Health. It has not come from the government. It came to me via the Australian Council for Quality and Safety and its chair, Bruce Barraclough, who was a pre-eminent surgeon before he took on that position permanently, and the specialist colleges and the AMAQ. They have put to me that, rather than restricted information, there is no information at the moment because quality assurance committees have not been set up in various hospitals. This will enable the provision of more information in that the final reports of those committees will be accessible.

One thing I hope we have learnt from the Bristol experience is that, instead of trying to cover up bad experiences or events, we should be trying to learn from them so that they do not happen in the future, and that is exactly the role of these committees. I know there have been a lot of conspiracy theories about governments trying to hide information. I point out to members that they heard in this House only today that there is pretty free access to FOI. We put on the Net all of our elective surgery information. All of the data on emergency departments that was used in the House today has been accessed under FOI. We really believe that unless we give some protection to these committees, they simply will not function; the work simply will not be done and we will not see the improvement in standards that we hope to see.

I hope that has explained those issues to members opposite who had concerns. I thank members for their genuine interest and their support across-the-board, and I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy) in charge of the bill.

Clauses 1 to 3, as read, agreed to.

Clause 4—

Mr LINGARD (5.48 p.m.): Despite the minister's comments, our most grave concerns regarding this legislation are still reserved for the amendments in clause 4, which provide for, we believe, a ridiculous level of secrecy for hospital quality assurance committees. The act enables the minister to declare approved quality assurance committees to investigate health care processes and outcomes in hospitals and identify opportunities to improve the design and operation of health care systems.

These committees are subject to strict rules of confidentiality. The act prohibits the disclosure of information created by or given to committees in proceedings before a court, tribunal, board or person. In her second reading speech, the minister referred to the 2002 national report of the Australian Council for Quality and Safety on qualified privilege, implying that this report called for the exemption of quality assurance committees from freedom of information legislation. The legislation does report that some practitioners are reluctant to take part in quality assurance activities because they are fearful they will be exposed through freedom of information.

These references to freedom of information are included under the heading 'Checks and balances in qualified privilege laws'. It really is a long bow in that the report calls for exemptions from freedom of information laws, we believe. This legislation proposes to keep secret all documents related to quality assurance committees. The opposition opposes any increase in the secrecy. Does clause 4 not allow practitioners and hospital management to hide incriminating documents from the public by protecting them from freedom of information?

Mrs EDMOND: This clause has nothing to do with individual patients' histories, et cetera. People still have access to that. Once a quality assurance committee has examined the information and the quality issues, it is required to make reports publicly available. The reports must include information about the committee's functions, membership, outcomes of its activities, et cetera. No, I do not think it is a long bow to suggest that this is covering up anything. In fact, this will enable quality committees to act, allow people to participate in them and make reports available that were never available before.

Mr LINGARD: Backbenchers referred to the fact that clinical files will always be available to patients and that an exemption applies only for the duration of a committee investigation. Is there any time limit for the resolution of investigations? How long can documents be parked in these committees and hidden from the public?

Mrs EDMOND: Patients' files are accessible by the patients now. In most cases, other than patients with a mental health condition or in a few very exceptional circumstances, we make patients' files available to them without going through FOI. It is just done as an administrative matter. Most of the other matters of genuine information seeking are done through the local health district rather than even coming anywhere near the minister's office or my having an overriding say on what happens. Of course, those decisions are made by the information officer. In terms of how long the committees will debate, it will depend. It is hard to give a hard and fast rule. If you look at the Bristol issue, that went on from 1984 to 1995. There then was an inquiry set up in 1998 by a Lord, who undertook an investigation. Because of the enormous amount of material, he said that they could not possibly investigate all the material. They investigated only a select number of records, just to get a gist of it. It is very hard to say that it would depend on what they were looking at. It is hard to give a hard and fast rule. Certainly, I believe—and I believe it happens now—that where there are serious systemic issues that need resolving, those come to light fairly quickly and are dealt with fairly quickly. This gives clinicians the ability to speak openly and freely in front of their colleagues about their concerns in terms of perhaps another clinician's clinical practice or about the way we are treating patients. It may be the way that people have been treated for a long time that they believe needs to be re-examined, without leaving them open to possible litigation.

Mr LINGARD: The minister referred to the Bristol inquiry. Has the minister's department ever considered that there might be other reasons that practitioners are unwilling to participate? Is it not possible that a practitioner has something to hide and that the last thing we should be doing is helping them to hide those matters? Because this is my third question on the clause, I ask the minister about these QACs. My understanding is that they have to report only every three years and that at this stage no QAC has really been operating that long.

Mrs EDMOND: The Queensland Paediatric Quality Council and the Queensland Maternal and Perinatal Quality Council was approved under the Health Services Act in 2001, but previously those two quality assurance committees operated as one committee and they did report. That was then called the Queensland Council of Obstetric and Paediatric Morbidity and Mortality. That is the only one that has been established for any reasonable length of time. The QA committee reported annually since at least 1997. They do not have to report more than every three years, but currently it reports annually.

Question—That clause 4, as read, stand part of the bill—put; and the Committee divided—

AYES, 58—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Choi, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Fouras, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 21—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Sheldon, Springborg, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Hopper

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clauses 5 to 37, as read, agreed to.

Clause 38—

Mr LINGARD (6.01 p.m.): Clause 38 removes the requirement for the minister to consult with certain people before making appointments to hospital foundations and, instead, leaves this up to the minister's discretion. The minister has given an explanation, but I ask: what sort of people would have been too burdensome for the minister to consult? Even though she has said it, can she guarantee that there will be no appointments for the boys or for the girls?

Mrs EDMOND: I have already explained this. It is about making the process more efficient. It does not take away the right to consult with anyone. It frees it up a bit and makes it more efficient.

Clause 38, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 39 to 50, as read, agreed to.

Clause 51—

Mr LINGARD (6.02 p.m.): I refer to the notices of reason. Can the minister explain what details notices of reason give to registrants? What do they include?

Mrs EDMOND: If the board decides to impose a supervised practice condition on a person's registration, it must give that person an information notice about the decision and the reasons why they are putting that supervision or practice on them. It enables that person to have a full explanation so that, if they disagree, they can ask for a review or appeal the decision. Part of the information notice must include the reasons for the decision and explain to them what their appeal rights are.

Clause 51, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 52 to 67, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

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

SITTING HOURS; ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (Leader of the House) (6.05 p.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That notwithstanding anything contained in the standing and sessional orders for this day's sitting, the House can continue to meet past 7.30 p.m. Private members' motions will be debated between 6.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. The House can then break for dinner and resume its sitting at 8.30 p.m. The order of business shall then be government business followed by a 30-minute adjournment debate.

Motion agreed to.

AMBULANCE LEVY

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6.06 p.m.): I move—

That this parliament supports the principle that no individual or business should pay the proposed ambulance levy more than once.

The Opposition moved this motion in parliament today because we are very concerned about the inequitable nature of the government's proposed ambulance tax, which will take effect in Queensland from 1 July this year. From the outset we have said that we are prepared to be constructively involved in any debate to ensure that an equitable process for properly funding a world-class ambulance service can be adopted and implemented in this state. However, we have always said that it needs to be equitable. I reinforce the point: it needs to be equitable, it needs to be fair, and it needs to come after a considerable degree of debate, proper consideration and deliberation. To date, we have not seen that from this government.

What we have seen is a litany of mistakes and bad policy decisions from the government dating back to when it came into power in 1998, and that has contributed to the problems that we currently see in the Queensland Ambulance Service. The principal reason for the government having to raise a tax to fund the Ambulance Service in Queensland is that the current subscription

scheme has become unviable because of the government's unfunded 1998 election promise to provide free pensioner transport services in Queensland.

The Opposition has no problem with the government having a mandate to introduce such a scheme. Quite clearly, it went to the people of Queensland and said that it wanted to do that. Our problem is that that promise was not properly costed and it has not been properly funded. According to a government policy document from 1991, the scheme would cost $21 million per annum. However, in September last year the minister told this parliament that the cost of providing a free pensioner ambulance service in Queensland was $117 million. That is almost $100 million per annum more than the government originally promised when it was in opposition in 1998.

Mr Horan: Just a little mistake.

Mr SPRINGBORG: It is just a little mistake! It is just a little Labor Party accounting mistake. It is the sort of mistake that people can expect from the Labor Party. They may call it little, but it has had quite a significant impact on the state budget and finances, and on the Queensland Ambulance Service. Despite what the Premier contends, the introduction of a new ambulance tax is not about providing a better ambulance service; it is about providing the same ambulance service, but the government has to find additional money to provide that service because of its unfunded 1998 election commitment.

We saw the government go out there and say, 'We have to raise this additional money and we are going to do it through local government rates.' It did not take very long for the Local Government Association of Queensland and the opposition to chase them away from that. It is very interesting to note also that the Labor Party cabinet in November of 2000 actually considered and deliberated upon a cabinet submission that indicated that the promise of 1998 to provide a free pensioner ambulance service was having an impact on the subscription scheme, an impact on the QAS, and that cabinet needed to consider the introduction of a levy or some other means in order to properly fund the service. That is beyond dispute. Leaked budget papers indicate that.

I will fast forward to an interview on 612 ABC Radio on 5 November 2002. Minister Reynolds—the minister responsible—sat there in his chair and told the radio announcer that there is no consideration for a levy scheme for Queensland. Then the government came out with the disastrous and now thrown out rates levy scheme. That now brings us to the situation that we are facing today, and have been so for the past couple of weeks, and that is that the government is proposing to place this levy on the power bills around Queensland. That is demonstrably unfair and unjust.

How do we know the real situation of the ambulance subscription scheme in Queensland? We do not know. We have never seen the figures. They have never been opened up to scrutiny. We do not know what the unfunded liability is. We do not know what the projects are. We do not know what the situation is with the QAS. So how can we be part of working with the government on a solution when we do not know those things. Even the government has been unable to provide the necessary information with regard to how much is going to be collected and how it is going to solve the problems of the QAS.

The principle of this motion is simple. Basically, it states that no individual or business should have to pay this new ambulance levy twice. What is wrong with that as a principle? Even one of the government's own members, the honourable member for Charters Towers, has been listening to what is being said in her electorate. I would say that all honourable members have been picking up this concern as people come into their electorate offices and as members go around to their shows and other community groups and activities. There is no doubt that, in my electorate office, this issue has been the biggest one since the public liability crisis and the lack of effective insurance for community groups and also for businesses and individuals. So there is no doubt that this is an enormous issue. I commend the honourable member for Charters Towers for at least having the courage to go out there and say that this is a problem and that she is going to try to do something about it.

I have one example that has been presented to me, which relates to a Palm Cove tourist operator, Bob Shaw, whose accommodation business has 18 accounts. He will pay $1,584 for this ambulance tax. Mr Shaw has contacted Ergon about consolidating accounts, but he is waiting to hear back from them. The irony for Mr Shaw is that three-quarters of his customers are international tourists who are not covered by the Queensland Ambulance Service. Mr Shaw contacted the Kelvin Grove headquarters of the QAS and was told that, despite the fact that he would now be paying more than $1,500 a year in ambulance tax, his international customers

would not be covered if they used the Ambulance Service. They will get a bill. Is that fair? Is that equitable? Is it fair and equitable that small business people or individuals who have more than one house are going to be paying more than once? Is it fair that people are going to be paying two, three, four, five, six, seven or eight times? Or is it this traditional Labor belief that if people own a property or a small business, they can afford to pay?

No doubt, many of these people will be able to pay the levy, but they will be paying it reluctantly. It will impact upon their bottom line. But it is the principle that is the issue and it is the principle that the government needs to be concerned about. I ask the members opposite to stand up and justify how it is right that a person has to pay 18 times, that a person has to pay 10 times, that a person has to pay five times, or four times, or even twice. I ask members to stand up and justify that. They cannot justify it. A struggling small business person, an individual who owns a couple of houses, for example, or in one case that was raised with me, a person who has a home but down the road there have been vandalism problems—and this is a suburban issue—and they have put a security light on a power pole and there is a meter on that, they have to pay. The meter does not even clock up more in the electricity account a year than what that person will have to pay on that meter for the ambulance levy. How is that just? How is it just that small businesses that run building operations are going to have to pay on multiple sites when they are building homes? How is that just? It is just not fair and the government should know that it is not fair.

I am talking about something that has to be equitable and it is something that has to have public support. What the government is proposing does not have public support and it is not equitable. It is fundamentally unfair, it is flawed and it seriously needs revisiting. These people who are concerned about this issue are not going to let government members forget this and they will remember this right up to the next election. And they should remember it. The reason is that people will generally accept something that they believe is for the greater community good. They know that a well-funded Ambulance Service is for the greater community good. But they will not accept something that fundamentally shifts the burden of paying for it from one side of the community and puts it unfairly and unduly on another part of the community. By and large, those people who have more than one power account—those people involved in small businesses, such as those people who have a hairdressing salon and also own their own home—will pay twice. Some people in small business have their home, a storage shed—or a couple of them—which nobody visits so there is really no real risk of a workers or somebody in the community being hurt, yet those people have to pay the ambulance levy on that shed as well. They may also have a small manufacturing site. So this is wrong. It is a simple principle and it needs to be addressed and the government should support the motion.

Time expired.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.16 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Southern Downs. I believe that the members of parliament would recognise that he has a fair argument. I think that the basis of the debate that we are having is the presumption that we have a fully funded and operational Ambulance Service that we all agree with—and I am sure that everyone in the House agrees that we need that. But the fact of the matter is that the proposal that the government has before it currently is an unfair tax. It takes from the businesspeople in our community, those people who have worked hard to build up something, the right to be treated equitably in terms of what they do in the community. The fact that many businesses and people throughout our community will be paying multiples of $88 is the reason that we are having this debate tonight.

I think that any fair Australian would recognise the fact that community services such as the QAS are elementary and should be supplied by the government. If it is not, it is going to impact on individuals throughout our community in an unfair fashion. I think that this motion that we are debating would be recognised throughout Queensland as a fair motion and something that should be brought before this House.

In my own electorate office, I have received calls from people throughout my electorate about this issue. Currently, the highest number of electricity accounts held by people in my electorate is 10. I think that it is quite unfair that individuals should be asked to pay 10 times $88 a year to fund the Ambulance Service when we also have people in our community who will virtually pay nothing—people who use caravan parks, people in boarding houses. They are the areas in our community where there is great inequity.

This levy proposal is pretty typical of the government in terms of how it has mismanaged a whole range of things. The reality is that after a number of efforts of trying to raise funds for this

service, the government settled on probably the one of least resistance, which is putting a levy on electricity bills, which a huge number of people throughout Queensland pay. I refer also to people such as builders who, when they build a house, put up a builder's pole. That builder's pole might be there for a month, it might be there for three months, it could be there for 12 months. But on every one of those poles—and a building contractor could have eight or 10 of those poles throughout the course of a year—the builder will be paying a levy.

The fact that the opposition brought this debate to the House tonight is not about trying to attack the government but about trying to bring some reality to the debate to ensure that people throughout the community have an effective ambulance system and an effective QAS operation which is funded equitably by the community. The fact of the matter is that the government itself is to blame. When the then Leader of the Opposition made the promise of free ambulance cover for pensioners and Seniors Card holders in 1998, it was funded with a $20 million budget allocation. In the period from 2004 to 2006 it requires funding of $135 million. So it is behind the eight ball. It was a badly funded promise. Even though the opposition supports a free ambulance service for pensioners and the disadvantaged in our community, the reality is that it has to be properly funded. The opposition at that time did not do its homework. It made a blatant promise that it could not keep and now the businesspeople in our community are seeing the results of that.

It is fairly typical of this government in that it has made a number of promises during its lifetime that it cannot keep. It is like allowing the kids to be in charge of the cookie jar—that is, to expend funds that they do not have and to make promises that they cannot fulfil. At the end of the day, the people in our community who are trying to achieve are the ones who will pay. It is completely unfair. It is a total disgrace. The government should go back to its advisers or whoever put this idea forward and look at it again and come back with something that is reasonably fair to the community. If the government cannot fund it and it wants support from the community, it should be equitable and fair to all right across the community.

Time expired.

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (6.21 p.m.): I move the following amendment to the motion—

Delete all words after 'supports' and add 'the universal ambulance cover provided by the proposed Community Ambulance Cover.'

It makes sense for both businesses and homes to pay for ambulance cover. Nearly half of all ambulance call-outs are not to homes. Call-outs to homes make up about 55.71 per cent. People do fall ill on business premises too! They do fall ill in shopping centres. People are injured in crashes while using business vehicles. To provide for an ambulance at home, it is important for people to pay—that provides for that ambulance in that ambulance station. For people to receive an ambulance at work, they need to pay for that ambulance as well in terms of a local station. The same goes for cars, as well as business cars, that use it. To reduce multiple billing in country areas—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! The spokespeople on the opposition side were heard in silence. I ask the same privilege for the Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. To reduce multiple billing in country Queensland, exemptions will apply to accounts which relate only to farming sheds and farming pumps. When conducting activities of a public benevolent nature, non-profit organisations are also exempt. But if people still feel that they have a special case, we have created a Community Ambulance Cover Implementation Unit in the Treasury Department to listen to them and make recommendations to the government on any changes that should be made. People can contact that unit by phone or by email at cac@treasury.qld.gov.au.

What all this means is that about 412,000 Queensland families will save money, as the $88 community ambulance cover is 10 per cent less than the current family subscription rate of $98. If the subscription scheme had been retained, the cover is more than $40 less than the projected cost of a family subscription. It would have had to have gone up. If the subscription scheme had continued, the family rate would have risen by about 33 per cent to $130. So people are saving money. Those who were in the family scheme are saving money—412,000 of them. Community ambulance cover is being shared throughout the community as widely as possible to keep the charge down, which is why both residential and business accounts are being charged. To collect

the charge only through residential electricity accounts would have raised the charge to over $100.

As a yearly charge of $88, community ambulance cover should not impose an undue financial burden on business. It is $22 a quarter. This equates to 24c per day. Business is free to pass on the cost to customers if they choose. Let us take as an example a business with a turnover of $50,000 a year. To recoup the ambulance cover from customers would require prices to rise by 0.18 per cent, less than 1c for a $2.50 meat pie or 3c to 4c for a $20 hair cut. Show me a business that says it cannot afford to put up its prices by less than two-thousandths of one per cent to save a life. To put this in context, CPI increases by around 2.5 per cent per annum. That is almost 15 times the price increase in this example. For a business with a turnover of $100,000 per annum, the difference rises to 30 times.

Non-subscribers will no longer face the risk of having to pay up to $755 for ambulance services once community ambulance cover is introduced. On 1 July 2003 all Queensland residents will be covered for essential ambulance services anywhere, any time across Australia—the first time ever for Queensland. Community ambulance cover is replacing the ambulance subscription scheme and ambulance transport costs for Queensland residents to spread the cost of ambulance services more evenly across the community. Funds raised by community ambulance cover will be spent on ambulance services—on those world-class ambulance officers and paramedics. The Queensland Ambulance Service needs a predictable, long-term funding source to maintain its world-class service standards.

Other reasons for the Queensland Ambulance Service's subscription scheme not meeting the rising cost of ambulance services are a growing and ageing population, changes in medical practice, a reduction of bulk-billing, a reduction of 24-hour emergency facilities and the federal government's 30 per cent health insurance rebate not being extended to the QAS subscription scheme. I have written to the Prime Minister alerting him to the introduction of the community ambulance scheme and requesting that he ensure that health premiums are adjusted in line with this. I have also written to him asking for him to consider putting it on the Medicare levy. He has written back to me indicating that his government is looking at it, and I table that letter for the information of the House.

Time expired.

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (6.26 p.m.): I rise to second the amendment moved by the Premier. Through the actions of this government, every Queenslander will soon have ambulance cover anywhere in the country. As a result of the proposed scheme, no Queenslander will ever again face the prospect of an expensive account for emergency ambulance transport. The Queensland Ambulance Service does an outstanding job and it deserves certainty. It deserves to have a certain funding base. It needs that to continue to maintain its world-class service standards. There are a number of reasons behind the growing difficulties in funding our Ambulance Service. They include the changing needs of our population, and we have an ageing population and a rapidly growing one here in Queensland.

Ambulance services over the last 10 to 20 years have seen dramatic changes in medical practice. They are no longer simply transport vehicles but are in fact paramedics of a highly skilled nature. We have seen chronic reductions in bulk-billing and 24-hour emergency service facilities and, importantly, the federal government's 30 per cent health insurance rebate was not extended to the QAS subscription scheme. I think it is important to understand in this debate that many people covered by private health insurance for ambulance cover mistakenly believe that their funds are actually going to support the ambulance scheme. In fact, they only go to the ambulance if they use the ambulance. So a person can pay their private health insurance for a number of years and believe that they are contributing to the presence and the ongoing sustained need of the Ambulance Service when in fact it is not going in there at all.

Mr Purcell: It only goes there for code 1. So don't just break your leg; have a heart attack and nearly die.

Ms BLIGH: The member is absolutely right. People genuinely believe they are contributing through their private health insurance but in fact it does not sustain the scheme.

The Beattie Labor government, while making the tough decisions to ensure that Queenslanders have a properly funded ambulance service, has not entered into this proposal with a closed mind. In fact, we have already demonstrated considerable flexibility in moving away from a rates based payment system to one funded through the electricity scheme. We have sought and are continuing to seek detailed information on the situations that energy account

holders might find themselves in and how we can best structure a levy to limit any onerous liability on people while ultimately respecting the need to raise the required revenue.

On announcing the decision to collect the levy through electricity accounts, an implementation unit was set up within Queensland Treasury. This implementation unit has met with and continues to liaise with the various stakeholders such as Agforce, Commerce Queensland and the Local Government Association of Queensland in an attempt to get the best structure for the scheme and to avoid undesirable anomalies.

The Community Ambulance Cover Implementation Unit has received many letters. All of these will aid in the construction of the forthcoming legislation and ensure that exemptions are applied in an effective and coherent way. Members are entitled, and obliged in my view, to bring the concerns of their constituents to the attention of that unit. I also applaud the member for Charters Towers, because she has brought to the attention of that unit the needs of her constituents, as I know other members have done. I encourage all members to bring to the attention of the unit those difficulties. While not all requests can be accommodated, the scheme will in the end raise funds in the vicinity of $110 million.

It is easy to come in here and make cheap shots out of individual cases. The work of developing government policy requires more than that. It requires careful and thoughtful deliberation. Those issues will not be solved here tonight. They will be solved by a consideration of the merits of each and every case in a considered way that determines the ramifications in the implementation across the whole of the scheme.

The need for exemptions has already been recognised. Farm sheds and pumps will be exempt, providing relief to our rural producers. Non-profit organisations conducting activities of a public benevolent nature will also be provided with an exemption. Following on from these, the government, through the implementation unit, is actively pursuing other ways in which the levy can be best structured to share the burden as equally as possible across the community.

I applaud the development of this new scheme. It will stand as one of the great legacies of a reforming Beattie Labor government. It will give much-needed and long overdue certainty to the Queensland Ambulance Service. I commend the amendment to the House.

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (6.31 p.m.): I comment once again on how this government blatantly amends these private members' motions to a direct negative. It is probably the only time we ever see an amendment to a motion being a direct negative. Once again, the motion moved by the opposition will not even be voted upon.

One of the most upsetting aspects of being a parliamentarian is watching as an opposing political party makes rash promises before an election and then watching as these promises are not kept, especially when the public believes that they will be. It is blatant deception. The first promise made to the public of Queensland related to a five per cent unemployment rate. We could see quite obviously that a five per cent unemployment rate could not be reached. This is a similar promise.

A promise was made before the last election that Labor would provide free ambulance services to all pensioners and that the scheme would cost only $21 million. It was a blatant lie, a blatant deception. It was quite obvious that if pensioners were to get free ambulance services the ambulances would be used blatantly by these people—whether they wanted to come in from Roma or Charleville for medical meetings with doctors or whatever. It was quite obviously going to cost more than $21 million. We could see that, but the public was deceived. When the cost reached $117 million the government suddenly realised that it had to do something to find the money. There is no argument with the philosophy that ambulance services should be supported. The argument is about the fact that the government has a debt of $117 million. It said to the public that it wanted only $21 million, so it now has to find the extra money.

Labor has a philosophy that government should support all of the things the people deserve. That is not the opposition's philosophy. It never has been. We talk about private enterprise and about people in the community working for some of these things. It is all right to give people things all of the time, but a government that gives people everything they want ends up being a government that takes everything they have got. That clearly happens in communist type countries. It clearly happens in socialist type countries. We will find that exactly the same thing will happen here.

This government has now started to promise everyone in Queensland ambulance services whenever they reckon they want one. So everyone who needs to go from Roma to Brisbane for a medical appointment will want an ambulance because that is exactly what pensioners get now.

The difficulty is that they do not come down to Brisbane just for an operation. They come down for an initial meeting. They come down for an operation that maybe gets cancelled. So there will be a blatant use of ambulances, which has occurred since the government has given pensioners completely free ambulance services.

Now the government is promising the people of Queensland a completely free system and is saying that it will be able to pay for it out of this levy. It has already made a blatant promise about the $21 million. The real cost reached $117 million. We can guarantee that this system will blow out and that within a couple of years the government will be back here saying, 'We need more than $88.' It will cost far more than $88! What will happen to every sporting club that wants an ambulance? Supposedly they have put money up for an ambulance. Does every sporting organisation that thinks it deserves an ambulance get one?

Will every person in the Ambulance Service now get all of the things they need to run the service? With the fire levy, everything went all right for a little while, when they got their initial lot of uniforms. But after a while they realised that they wanted more and more. The system copped more and more. The government has made so many promises that it will not be able to give to the people exactly what they want. As I said, a government that believes it can give people everything they want is a government that can take everything they have. That is exactly what is happening here.

There will be so many anomalies with rural people, with their pumps and their sheds. There will be so many anomalies with people who have two and three businesses. There will be so many anomalies that the government has not catered for. But of course the government has to take their money because it needs all the money it can get. It made one mistake: it imposed this upon the people of Queensland. It is making another mistake and it will continue to make these mistakes because unfortunately that is the ALP philosophy.

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (6.36 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment and, on behalf of the people of Bundamba, to commend the Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Emergency Services for developing a universal scheme for Queensland ambulance cover.

Community ambulance cover is designed to be shared throughout the community as widely as possible to keep the charge down, which is why both residential and business accounts are being charged. The motion put by the opposition seems to lack any understanding of how the levy has been calculated and what powers the state may have in this regard. I take this opportunity to explain to members opposite the intricacies and assumptions on which the levy is based.

Mr Lawlor: So pay attention.

Mrs MILLER: They should pay attention. In determining the number of electricity accounts that will attract the community ambulance cover charge, the commencement point was in fact the 1,650,000 franchise customers of Energex and Ergon. This is generally reflected as 90 per cent domestic accounts and 10 per cent non-domestic accounts. As the government is continuing to honour and directly fund its commitment to provide free ambulance services to pensioners and Seniors Card holders, we have to then remove these accounts from the revenue base.

In recognition of significant multiple billing in rural areas, a downward adjustment has also been made for sheds and irrigation and stock and water pumps used for farming purposes. Also deducted from the commencement point is an estimate of core infrastructure for local governments, for example accounts relating to water and sewerage facilities and state government agencies such as police stations and courthouses. Accounts in the name of Commonwealth agencies have been excluded based on advice that the Constitution precludes a state placing the charge on accounts related to Commonwealth owned property without the Commonwealth's agreement. An increase in the number of accounts could then be included to account for facilities with on-supply arrangements.

Adjustments were also made to the customer base not covered by Energex and Ergon, including country energy customers in the Goondiwindi and Inglewood areas. Estimates of these various adjustments were based on a variety of data sources, such as information from the Office of Energy, high level data from Energex and Ergon, ABS statistics and the Department of Families. Due to the nature of some of these adjustments and estimates, it is not possible to provide a definite quantum of collection from either domestic or non-domestic accounts. However, one could estimate that approximately 10 per cent could be collected from business.

I take it from the opposition's motion that no business would pay the levy, as owners would claim to have already paid it on their principal place of residence. Why should the burden be

placed only on families and on households? I assume that is what the opposition proposes—either that or short-changing the Ambulance Service. To collect the charge only through residential electricity accounts would have raised the charge to above $100, unfairly burdening families and households. Moreover, businesses have the added ability of passing on and recouping costs incurred through their operations.

I would also point out that for businesses the community ambulance cover will, depending on the individual circumstances, attract a tax deduction. Needless to say, despite the opposition's simplistic approach to this issue, this government has been considering options to extend exemptions in certain circumstances where collection would appear onerous. However, unlike the opposition, the Beattie Labor government is intent on ensuring that the Ambulance Service is not short-changed and that it is provided with a scheme that works.

In this regard, the work of the Community Ambulance Cover Implementation Unit has already been spoken about this evening, and I know many members have already made comments and referred comments to this unit that have assisted in its deliberations and ongoing discussions. Despite the objections of members opposite, the Beattie Labor government will succeed in providing ambulance cover for all Queenslanders and will make sure that the service is properly funded so that it can continue well into the future. While the exact details of the final scheme will be available when the legislation is introduced into this House, one thing can be counted on, and that is that no Queenslander will receive an invoice from the Queensland Ambulance Service for transport used after 1 July.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.41 p.m.): I am proud to support this particular motion because it is about fairness. This ambulance tax is so unfair to the small business community of this state. We just heard the previous speaker talk in derogatory terms as though small businesses do not have families. Small businesspeople all have a residence. They all have families. They will all be paying the ambulance tax at least once. Why should small businesspeople in our community be singled out to pay up to 10 times?

If the member wants to give an example like that, there are some people in the community on high salaries and probably some in this House who have a residence and no other place with an electricity account and they will pay it once. But some young woman starting a hairdressing salon will have to pay at home or a flat where she lives, and she will have to pay it at her hairdressing salon. There are other struggling businesses attached to shops next door. Ergon or Energex see that as a separate place and they will charge them twice, so they will pay three times. This is so unfair.

The unfairness is compounded by the fact that it comes from a panic move by this government. We have had three massive budget deficits in a row. Then the government played a cruel hoax on people by promising a free Ambulance Service for seniors that would cost $10 million and it cost $117 million. Then it raced around in a panic and came up with a system to hit all ratepayers. That was found to be unfair because some people have multiple rates. It was also rejected by local government. So they scrapped it and looked around for some other scheme.

This scheme is very similar to the rates scheme; that unfairness is maintained. It is unfair on people who have more than one electricity account. People everywhere believe that the ambulance should be properly funded, and businesspeople are saying they agree with having to pay, like everybody else, on their residence. What they are going to have to do is unfairly bear the burden. A number of examples have been given.

I want to comment on the speech given by the Premier tonight. He gave a very childish example when he tritely tried to play this down and talk about percentages and decimal points of a pie. Anybody who has run a business knows that they have to round off to 5c these days. Everybody knows how hard it is in the competitive world to pass on these costs. Everybody knows that in business this will not be the only cost.

Last night in this House we debated a doubling of licence fees for real estate agents, travel agents, people involved in security businesses, second-hand businesses, pawnbrokers businesses and so forth. People have to pay workers compensation, workplace health and safety, superannuation and a whole plethora of fees, levies and charges. Now they will have to pay the ambulance tax and, in many cases, pay it a number of times.

We have seen examples of anomalies, with builders having builders' poles on sites where they are constructing a house. The average builder might build six houses a year, and he is going to have to pay those accounts a number of times. He probably has a workshop or a storage

shed, and he will have to pay on that as well as paying at home. What about those people involved in security? I know of a fellow in Toowoomba who has two or three places where people will be paying separate electricity accounts as renters, but he has a pole up for security and he will have to pay on that. There are many examples, and it is going to hit so hard when these accounts come through.

Our motion tonight provides fairness. If everybody in this state, as best we can manage it, pays once—except for seniors and pensioners, who are exempted under current arrangements, which we support—then we have a fair system. We heard the previous speaker. They cannot even estimate how many accounts will be paid by business and how many accounts will be paid by residents. A motion has been put forward by the Leader of the Opposition tonight. That motion is fair: everybody will contribute, including sports clubs, junior Rugby League clubs and so forth. They will be paying for this, but they will have to pay again because they will have to pay for the ambulance to be in attendance. There is anomaly after anomaly, but the biggest anomaly of all is the 185,000 small businesses in Queensland that will have to pay this ambulance tax multiple times.

Time expired.

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (6.47 p.m.): We were promised positivity by the opposition a few weeks ago, but have we heard any positive contributions by the members opposite? No positive attitude, no plans of how they would fund the ambulance scheme, no positivity. We just heard the former leader talk about junior Rugby League clubs. I have news for him. Junior Rugby League clubs are already paying the ambulance levy in their insurance cover now. Having been involved in junior Rugby League clubs, I know that as part of their insurance cover they subscribe to the ambulance now. Now they will not have to. It will be a lot less paying one electricity charge of $88 a year than paying per player in a football club, as they used to have to.

We do not hear any positivity from those opposite. We do not hear any ideas, plans or models from them. All they want to do is whinge, whinge, whinge. The opposition has endeavoured to highlight inadequacies in the building arrangements, but I support the universal cover provided for the proposed community ambulance cover. Funding a world-class Ambulance Service is an issue being confronted by all Australian states since the federal government provided the 30 per cent rebate to private health funds and denied advantages to states reliant on ambulance subscription.

Why has the opposition not complained about the hike in health insurance rates that occurred last week? Once again, the taxpayers are funding the rich. We do not hear from those opposite when more pressure is being put on our health system. Why are they not going to Canberra and telling their Liberal-National coalition mates to get off their backsides and help the public health system and the emergency services system? As the Premier has said, we would love to have this covered under Medicare as part of a universal system, but the federal coalition will not allow it. So I say to those opposite: go to Canberra, be positive and get them to allow us to maintain a great Medicare system—a system which the federal Liberals and Nationals are trying to destroy, aided and abetted by those opposite.

In funding the world-class ambulance service, we were confronted this financial year with a projected shortfall of $14 million. Changes had to be made. It is the Beattie government that will deliver on this. On many other occasions we have clearly demonstrated that we are prepared to make the difficult decisions. Introduction of the community ambulance cover demonstrates this government's commitment to maintaining and funding a first-class ambulance service for all Queenslanders. We are not about adopting the coalition's 'put it on the bankcard' strategy that it used to fund fire services during its last term in office. Under the community ambulance cover, the vast majority of Queenslanders will now contribute to the cost of providing ambulance services. The vast majority of Queenslanders are winners under this new agreement. Pensioners, Seniors Card holders and Gold Card veterans will not be charged the community ambulance cover on their principal place of residence if they are in receipt of an electricity concession. More than 412,000 families, totalling 1.2 million people, will receive a financial benefit from the introduction of the CAC.

Under the current QAS subscription scheme, family subscribers were paying $98. If the scheme were to be retained, this amount was projected to increase to $130. Under the new scheme, subscribers receive significant discount by paying just $22 per quarter, or 24 cents a day. I mentioned in a previous debate that many single subscribers said, 'Oh well, I was not in the scheme but I had to use the service and it cost me $755; I am now a member.' Many people, particularly single subscribers, were reluctant to join, but this covers them. The community

ambulance Cover ensures that all Queenslanders will be covered anywhere in Australia. For the first time, the less fortunate in Australia no longer will be worried about receiving QAS accounts because they have not paid or cannot afford the ambulance subscription.

Businesses will contribute, but the government expects that businesses will pass on the cost to customers. Business owners are being encouraged to contact their tax adviser or the Australian Tax Office to obtain advice on tax deductibility. What about the contribution of those opposite? Not once did they say that businesses can claim this tax and pass the cost of it on to consumers. When we work it out, the cost to consumers will be minute. As the Premier said, it is not much in terms of a meat pie. Businesses can claim this levy in their tax returns just as they can claim a number of—

Time expired.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (6.53 p.m.): I also would like to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition about this inequitable tax that Queensland business in particular is forced to pay. I have probably had as many calls in my electorate office about this issue as any over the last couple of years. Everybody recognises the need for a well-equipped ambulance service; there is no question about that. But many businesses in rural Queensland are doing it very tough at this time. We in Western countries are experiencing a range of issues, such as drought. Prior to Christmas, we attended a briefing at the Red Cross and were told of some of the major problems faced by people in rural areas. To simply pass on an inequitable charge, as suggested by the Premier and many other members opposite, is totally unreasonable. What about the problems of the sugar industry at this time? What about the desperate state of many businesses? I see shops closing almost daily. People are saying to me, 'We are flat out continuing the situation we are in at present.' These are service industries. There are people on whom a lot of those communities are very dependent. They have hydraulic services, spare parts services, and so on. Some pay the ambulance tax not just once but two or three times because often they have one business premises but there is a storage house somewhere else in which there is another meter. Of course, in quite a few instances they reach a point where not only must they pay the ambulance tax but superannuation and workers compensation. It is not just talking about meat pies; it is talking about business costs.

I can assure honourable members that such business costs in many areas are quite horrendous and that they do add up. It is totally unfair that such business operators are then slugged with an inequitable tax as sanctioned by this government. This is an anti-business initiative, an initiative not supporting business whatsoever. There are some 185,000 small businesses throughout Queensland. In many instances, they do not have the capacity to pass on the tax. If they do pass it on, the cost accrues to people who probably do not have the ability to pay the additional amount, be it a small amount. But it does affect their business outcomes. What about the situation on farms? Those on a farm who have a pump and a shed do not have to pay additional tax on such infrastructure, but if they have another property on which is a pump, a shed or some other electrical equipment they pay two and three times.

There is a logistical nightmare in terms of caravan parks. Yes, they have a system of multi-metering. People come and go. There are periods of time when caravan parks, particularly in north Queensland, do not have high accommodation rates. Sometimes in the wet season there are virtually no people staying in caravan parks, but they still have to pay this inequitable tax levied by this government. Of course, the Premier says that if they do not pay up it will turn the lights off. That is not a fair and reasonable way to treat businesses that support this state, the owners of which are working their guts out to ensure that they provide a service for so many people. However, the Premier is saying, 'Well, if you don't pay this inequitable tax—not that you have not paid it once; not that you have not probably paid it twice but three and four times—we will turn your lights off.' That is totally unfair. This government does not want to open up its books, nor demonstrate where the costs are increasing. The government did promise $21 million for pensioners. Then, all of a sudden, that figure blew out to $117 million. The government cannot contain the figure. And it has got itself into all sorts of trouble, so it is talking to Energex and Ergon about collecting the tax for it.

Time expired.

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (6.57 p.m.): This debate has had the lot. We have had the sugar industry. I tell you what, I never thought we would hear 'the communists are under the beds' again. The only reason we had communists under the beds under the Nationals is that people had to lie there because they could not get a decent ambulance to take them to the hospital,

because it was not a properly funded service! We would not even need this debate tonight if people did one thing—voluntarily subscribed to the Ambulance Service. We need to work out how to get people to voluntarily subscribe. In the absence of that, what do we do? We have a current system where people who subscribe financially carry non-subscribers. Members opposite have referred to equity. What is the equity in that? If the non-subscribers use the system, invariably they are chased up to pay what they owe. The opposition says it does not want people paying more than once. I must say that that is a novel proposition for the National Party. The difficulty facing Queenslanders is to get everybody to pay even once. How many do not pay even once? One million people. One million Queenslanders are non-subscribers. We have not heard from our friend the Leader of the Opposition as to how he will get those people to pay voluntarily just once.

Some people are paying twice now—that is a fact. They are subscribers in private health funds who have emergency ambulance cover and who subscribe to the ambulance. They do not understand that we spend more than $2 billion in Australia to encourage people to take out private health cover. Forty-four per cent of Australians have done just that—and there is the rub. People are opting out of ambulance subscriptions, leaving a financial shortfall because they are in private health funds with ambulance cover.

The Queensland ambulance system only receives the funds from the health funds when the service is deemed payable from the insurer to the Queensland Ambulance Service, so the burden is carried solely by ambulance subscribers. Members opposite are on about equity. Can they tell me what is fair about that? There is nothing fair about it.

As a state government it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a levy that is fair to everyone. That is why the Premier has written to the Prime Minister to ask for the levy that is fair to everyone. Taking the money out of the Medicare levy is a fair system. Everyone would pay. Over the years the Queensland government has tried to secure this, but what has been the result? It has been rejected out of hand.

The Leader of the Opposition should convince his federal government to support this proposal. I wish him the best of luck, because the federal Health Minister was too arrogant even to attend a health ministers' meeting to discuss health issues. It will hardly be interested in funding a national ambulance system. In the absence of federal government cooperation, we have this proposal.

The opposition says that it wants business to pay once. As I have said, that is a novel proposition because it is certainly not the principle that the National Party endorsed when it introduced the fire levy. Stage 1 of the National Party fire levy introduced a levy for residential houses, units and—wait for it—vacant land. Those are all the things that the opposition now says are unjust, but when in government it did precisely that with the fire levy. In 1985, what did the National Party do? It introduced a levy for owners of residential, commercial and industrial properties. So it was okay for the National Party to levy businesses more than once, but apparently it is the ruination of small business when we do it. Its hypocrisy is complete.

I congratulate the member for Toowoomba South. He said all of this without breaking into a smile. The Oscars are over, my friend. He would have qualified. Where do members opposite get off coming in here and crying crocodile tears about small business? The fact is this: the National Party is the party of prayer. It will spend all night praying for you and, as it showed by the fire levy, it will spend all day preying on you. I do not want to see a return to the bad old National Party days when dedicated ambulance officers had to go around to shopping centres with a pocket full of tickets raffling off a few dead chooks wrapped in cellophane to help fund the Ambulance Service.

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

AYES, 56—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reeves, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Purcell

NOES, 21—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Sheldon, Springborg, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Hopper

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

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

AYES, 56—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reeves, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Purcell

NOES, 21—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Sheldon, Springborg, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Hopper

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Sitting suspended from 7.12 p.m to 8.30 p.m.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Resumption of Committee

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) in charge of the bill.

Resumed from p. 819 on clause 22—

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. Madam Chairman, I draw your attention to the numbers in the chamber.

Quorum formed.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Ms Male): Order! A quorum is present. We will go into committee. We are up to clause 22.

Mr ROBERTSON: Prior to the adjournment of this debate, if I recall correctly, the member for Callide, in discussing clause 22 of this bill, raised some concerns about the issuing of a compliance notice. If I recall correctly, he raised concerns about why there was a right of appeal to the issuing of that compliance notice. I draw the member's attention to new section 274B, which outlines the right of appeal. It states—

The person may appeal to the court against the official's decision to give the compliance notice.

Mr Seeney: The rectification provisions—can they appeal against rectification provisions?

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes, they can.

Mr Seeney: Yes, they can?

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes, they can.

Mr Seeney: And they can appeal to the Land Court about that?

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes, they can.

Mr HOBBS: The minister just referred to new section 274B, which refers to the right of appeal as an appeal to the Land Court. On my reading of this bill, that new section refers to an appeal to 'the court', that is, the Magistrates Court. Can the minister clarify that? I think it should be the Land Court. What does the minister think it is?

Land matters are very complicated. Anyone who has listened to the debate today and listens to it tonight will realise how complicated land matters are. We are only going to touch the surface. The reality is that land matters are terribly complicated. That is why for 104 years in Queensland the Land Court has been in place to handle these matters. While I am sure that all the people who sit in the other courts that we have in Queensland can manage many issues, the reality is that the Land Court is a specialist court. I really believe that the Land Court should be the court that handles land matters. Perhaps the minister could answer the question.

Mr ROBERTSON: I can confirm that it is the Land Court that the appeal would go to. I refer the honourable member to schedule 6, which is the definition of what constitutes the court. It states—

"Court" means the Land Court established under the Land Court Act 2000.

Mr HOBBS: I thank the minister.

Mr SEENEY: I appreciate that some time has elapsed since I first made a contribution to this clause and I appreciate that the minister may not have remembered some of the points that I asked him to respond to. The point that I wanted the minister to respond to related to subclause (5) of this clause, which states—

... the official may use reasonable force and take any other reasonable action to stop the contravention.

Subclause (6) states —

Any reasonable cost or expense incurred by the official in doing anything under subsection (5) may be recovered as a debt owing to the State by the person.

I take it from the minister's earlier comments that we have confirmed that those reasonable actions that the compliance notice can impose upon a land-holder include rectification and that that rectification, as we agreed in our earlier exchanges, can vary dramatically depending on the situation and can be quite extensive and could be quite expensive. I take it from the minister's earlier comments that the land-holder has a right of appeal against those rectification provisions.

I am interested in how the minister sees this power of reasonable force and reasonable action in terms of rectification. It is one thing to have this power of reasonable force to actually stop something happening that has a short time frame and, presumably, the action can be taken quickly. I certainly do not agree that there is a necessity or any requirement for that to be part of this legislation. I ask: why? Have there been any examples where officials have needed this power to use some sort of force to stop what they believed was a contravention in the first place? Perhaps the minister could refer to those examples if they have occurred.

The issue of the rectification of a contravention is something else altogether, because it could conceivably extend for 10 years or 15 years and it could include a whole range of things, including the re-establishment of vegetation. It could actually include the thinning of regrowth to try to return the vegetation to something like it was, if that is the intent of the rectification provisions in the compliance notice. As the minister would know, certainly a number of vegetation types in Queensland actually regrow much thicker than their original coverage if they are cleared.

There is a whole range of expenses that certainly extend over a long time. I presume that the drafters of this legislation recognised that, because further down in the clause they deal with the whole question of transferring those responsibilities—those conditions—that are listed on the compliance notice to future owners. The clause allows for those conditions to be attached to the actual land title so that they can be transferred.

I would like the minister to provide clarification in regard to some issues. Firstly, I ask for clarification regarding the requirement for this reasonable force. Have there been any examples? What does the minister see this reasonable force constituting, given that we have already spoken about the differences in the understanding out there in the real world of the term 'reasonable'? How on earth is it going to be applied for the period of any sort of meaningful rectification, given that the minister has recognised that that may extend over a long time?

Mr ROBERTSON: I think I understand what the honourable member is getting at. I have already, prior to the adjournment of this debate earlier, outlined examples of what constitutes reasonable force. But I am happy to once again inform—

Mr Seeney: You haven't dealt with the rectification issue, which is the main issue.

Mr ROBERTSON: As I was saying before I was interrupted, I am happy to outline once again what constitutes reasonable force. For example, it could be cutting a padlock, forcing a gate, obstructing a bulldozer with a vehicle, cutting a fence or removing a barricade. In terms of the second point that the honourable member made, I am actually reluctant to get into a debate with the honourable member because what he is asking me to do is to somehow legitimise the act of illegally clearing vegetation.

Mr Hobbs: No, remediation.

Mr ROBERTSON: Remediation would not be necessary unless the land-holder had not conducted an act of illegal tree clearing in the first place. I am reluctant to get—

Mr Seeney: Where has it been necessary? Where has it been necessary to use force?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am reluctant to get into this particular debate because—

Mr Seeney: We can tell you're reluctant to get into the debate, but you're going to have to.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Ms Male): Order! Let the minister finish.

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you, Madam Temporary Chairman. I am reluctant to get into a debate about the details of rectification orders because I am not prepared to place on record here tonight instances of how land-holders who have engaged in illegal clearing might put to their advantage rectification orders. The simple fact remains that the provisions that are being debated tonight are about rectifying or addressing issues of illegal acts. It is unnecessary to get into the level of detail that the member is seeking to get into—

Mr Seeney: It's very necessary. You explain.

Mr ROBERTSON: No, it is not. If the member for Callide wants to go down this path, then what I will start suggesting is that the National Party condones illegal tree clearing.

Mr Seeney: But you know that's not right.

Mr ROBERTSON: What the provisions contained in this bill provide for are quite reasonable provisions with respect to rectification and it is unnecessary to seek the level of information the member is seeking in the theoretical construct which he is doing here tonight. It is quite plain from the provisions of this bill what would be required of a land-holder. Can I suggest that the answer to the member's question is simply thus: if people are concerned about what they may be required to do and the expense that they may have to go to in rectifying or rehabilitating land as a result of illegal tree clearing, then they should not illegally clear trees in the first place.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, we have quite a serious situation here. The minister has been asked to explain what this rectification is. It is the minister's bill before this House. This is the House of the parliament. The minister should be able to explain to the people of Queensland what he is proposing. If he cannot give some examples of what he is proposing for the laws of the land of Queensland, it is quite a serious situation. Does the minister know what he is proposing or does he not know? We have a suspicion that perhaps he does not know exactly what he is doing with this particular bill. His lack of explanation does confirm our belief that perhaps he does not know what he is proposing. He said a while ago to us that it is quite clear in the plan. Can the minister please tell us what it is. He has to be able to give us some examples. How on earth are members from both sides of the House able to go out into the broader community and say what sorts of things we are talking about when we talk about rectifying?

Question—That clause 22, as read, stand part of the bill—put; and the committee divided—

AYES, 50—Attwood, Barry, Bligh, Boyle, Briskey, E. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Foley, Fouras, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 18—Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Johnson, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Springborg, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Hopper

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clauses 23 and 24, as read, agreed to.

Clause 25—

Mr SEENEY (8.53 p.m.): Clause 25—

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr SEENEY: The member for Mansfield wants to continue to interject. We can all go home, if you like. All you have to do is give up and withdraw the legislation. Then we can all go home. Acknowledge that this is a flawed piece of legislation, give in and we will all go home.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Ms Male): Order! The member for Callide will address his comments through the chair.

Mr SEENEY: Otherwise we are going to be here for a while. The member for Mansfield should get used to it.

Clause 25 inserts a whole new section into the Land Act. Section 400A deals with powers for authorised officers to enter properties. It is worth noting that the Land Act contains considerable powers for authorised officers to enter properties. The powers contained in section 400 of the Land Act seem at first glance to be adequate. I believe that, if we are going to be asked to insert into the Land Act a whole new section to give authorised officers who are charged with administering the Vegetation Management Act powers that other authorised officers do not have, then we deserve an explanation of why it is necessary. That is the least anyone who is going to vote on this clause needs.

Why is it necessary for officers who are charged with administering the Vegetation Management Act to have a whole series of powers over and above what the Land Act grants to authorised officers engaged in administering other acts? I can think of a range of such officers. There are officers whose responsibility it is to monitor the welfare of animals in terms of preventing cruelty.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I will read the heading of section 400A for the minister, because he obviously has not read it. It relates specifically to 'power to enter places for monitoring and enforcing compliance with tree clearing provisions'. There is a whole section of powers that are specific to that group of officers. They are not powers that are enjoyed by officers involved in detecting animal cruelty.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr SEENEY: It is not stipulated in the act. Why are these officers being given powers that are specific to them? That is the question. Why is their job different from the jobs of authorised officers who have a role in administering other acts such as the Water Act? Do vegetation control officers require a specifically defined set of powers? I know of no reason why that should be the case. Once again, I ask the minister for some examples. Where has the administration of the Vegetation Management Act been hampered by the lack of entry powers for authorised officers?

The powers currently contained in the Land Act are quite extensive, and they differentiate between freehold land and leasehold land. So it should ever be that there are different powers in regard to entry upon freehold land that belongs to an individual. The Land Act is quite specific in setting out the powers required. The crucial question to be answered before we change the existing situation is: how has the existing situation been found to be wanting? How has that hampered the administration of the Vegetation Management Act? They are the questions I believe the minister must answer before he asks the chamber to decide upon this clause.

Mr ROBERTSON: The honourable member refers to these provisions being inserted in the Land Act. They are by and large the same provisions that exist within the Vegetation Management Act. That is the precedent that has been set. The honourable member acknowledges that the Vegetation Management Act works in terms of these provisions. That is why they are being inserted in the Land Act.

Mr HOBBS: I have a few concerns about this clause. Obviously the warrant under clause 25 is a special warrant. This is the first time a warrant has been required for this sort of thing in Queensland history, so the minister is breaking new ground. I refer to the general powers after entering places. In the past permission had to be gained before an authorised officer gained entry to a property. Again, we are breaking new ground.

There is nothing in this bill that talks about the fact that a particular officer has made every reasonable attempt not to have noxious weeds on that particular vehicle. If, for instance, we are talking about a whole parthenium area and an officer has come from that particular region to another region for that same purpose, they can do that.

The minister mentioned earlier the code of practice, but that does not work, as we have seen. What guarantees do we have that every precaution has been taken and that there are no noxious weeds on a particular vehicle that enters a property? In the past the landowner at least had an opportunity to talk about that issue, and that is quite an important issue.

This is the first time—and the minister mentioned this to me—that a government has talked about having criminal history checks done on land-holders. The minister might snigger about this, but the reality is that the government is again breaking new ground. This is the first time in Queensland's history that he is asking for criminal history checks on the general populace to find out whether they have had a tree clearing offence. In the past we would be talking about drug barons or criminals of great note, but now the minister is asking people to do a criminal history check on dad. It is not looking all that flash out there!

A provision in the bill states that assistance should be provided to ensure that people cooperate. Can the minister give us an example of what this means? For example, if an authorised officer enters a place, how can reasonable help be provided? If a person's wife or family is on the property, is the minister expecting them to go out and provide assistance to convict the father, the mother or the brother? Is he saying that, if they do not provide reasonable help, they will then be subject to fines? I think up to 100 penalty points or some such number can be imposed, which is quite substantial. Perhaps the minister could answer those queries.

Mr ROBERTSON: All I can say is that I am sure all members are indeed refreshed and challenged by the honourable member for Warrego's unique point of view.

Mr SEENEY: That really is a pathetic response from the minister, and this parliament deserves better. Any parliament deserves better than that, but we particularly deserve better when we are looking at a clause in legislation which introduces a whole range of powers. It gives to authorised departmental officers a whole range of powers that almost turns them into police,

even though as the member for Nicklin made the point earlier that we have no guarantee that these people are in any way qualified to exercise these powers or are in any way vetted in terms of their suitability to exercise these powers, but they are being given these powers for one specific purpose.

In the first contribution I made to this clause, I asked you to justify why this particular group of people needed those powers. You chose in a belligerent and arrogant way not to even attempt to answer that.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Ms Male): Order! I would ask the member for Callide to address his comments through the chair

Mr SEENEY: What I want to do now is list the powers, because in my first contribution I dealt specifically and deliberately with the powers of entry because that is the first part of the clause. The clause, however, imparts a range of powers to authorised officers once they have gained entry, which the initial subclauses give them authority to do. Once they have gained entry, these authorised officers have the power to require the production of documents. They have the power to require a person to produce documents, whether or not those documents will incriminate the people who are being required to provide the documents. They are being required to provide those documents to their authorised person.

They are required to lend assistance, whatever that might constitute, and the bill talks about 'any reasonable assistance'. Once again, it is widely open to interpretation about what 'any reasonable assistance' as referred to in the clause might constitute in the real world. These authorised officers have not only the power to enter the place but also quite remarkable powers once they get onto the place. They can require any document they want to ask for. They can require any assistance from a particular person on a property, and they can impose quite stringent penalties upon people if they refuse to provide that assistance and refuse to provide those documents.

Not only can these authorised people go on to a person's property; they have the power to try at least to force those people to provide the means of their own conviction. When they get on the place, they have the power to force the land-holder to do the job that we would expect would be the role of an investigating officer or a compliance officer. Rather than going on to the place and doing the job that they are charged with, this clause gives them the power to require the land-holder to do the job themselves, to almost convict themselves. Later on in the bill we find that they are to be held liable for the cost as well.

It is a huge leap in terms of legislation. This is a huge issue. In parliament tonight we saw the minister refuse even to justify or explain these clauses. That is inexcusable. It is inexcusable to introduce to the House legislation that constitutes changes of this extent and not be prepared to explain it. It was not explained in the second reading debate, because the second reading debate does not get to this level of detail. But it is this level of detail that is important to the people who will be impacted by the legislation. It is this level of detail where the conflicts will arise, where the injustices and the unfairness in the application of this legislation will become apparent.

Time expired.

Mr ROBERTSON: When we strip away all the hyperbole, exaggerations, half-truths and untruths of members opposite, it comes down to one simple answer, that is, the provisions contained in this clause are found in a multitude of bills that have been passed over many years by this parliament across a range of industries. This is not something specific to leaseholders or freehold landowners in rural parts of Queensland; it is commonly found in a range of acts. If only the opposition had actually done some homework, it would have come up with that same observation.

Mr HOBBS: If the minister is so wise on these matters, perhaps he could tell us—

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr HOBBS: That's right—because you don't know; they aren't there. This is the first time this has been done.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Ms Male)**:** Order! The member for Warrego will address his comments through the chair. Minister?

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you for the call—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: No, I wasn't calling you. Resume your seat. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you. There are three simple answers. I referred to the fact that noxious weeds are a serious issue. Wash-down facilities have been set up by the minister's department, and that costs a lot of money. Under this legislation, what process can give us confidence that unauthorised vehicles will not illegally access property? With respect to criminal history checks, the minister said that this provision is in every act. It is not in this act. It has never been in the Land Act; it has never been in the Vegetation Management Act. Why does the minister want to do this? Tell the parliament. Tell the people of Queensland. Why? Tell us. Why does he want to do this?

Mr English interjected.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for Warrego!

Mr English interjected.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I will not have this yelling in here. I want to hear what the member for Warrego has to say, and members will listen.

Mr HOBBS: I asked a question about 'reasonable help'. Can the minister give some examples of what that really means in relation to a family? If an authorised officer arrives on the doorstep, what is a family expected to do?

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr ROWELL: I would like to relate a situation of which I am aware in terms of the current legislation. I had a constituent who had a small block of land of about 17 acres. This block of land had a swamp of about five acres in it. Because of a fire, the rural fire brigade pushed a track through it. I know the minister is bending his head and is a bit disappointed in what I am saying, but I am trying to relay a real live situation of what happened in terms of the act as it stands. Subsequently, this person was dobbed in—I suppose that is the best way I can express it—because he cleaned up the area where a mess had been created by the rural fire brigade. He also cleared some undergrowth. He cleared this undergrowth thinking that this area of about 12 acres would not be an issue. The whole area had been cleared previously, but because of the nature of that piece of land close to the sea where wattle trees grow there was an issue in terms of these trees reaching 70 per cent of their full growth. This happened within a very short period. The gentleman believed that he was quite entitled to thin out this area.

As I said, he was dobbed in by a group of people who had aspirations about what the environment should look like, even though it was his land and he believed that he was not doing the wrong thing. As a consequence, a group of officers from the Department of Natural Resources turned up and he was summoned on his mobile to the effect of, 'Come down here immediately; we want to talk to you.' He indicated to me that the process of the officers interrogating him about the situation was equal to any star chamber. They accused him of doing the wrong thing and said that they were going to take him to court.

Mr Livingstone: Did he have a permit?

Mr ROWELL: He did not need a permit. Does the member not understand? He was just thinning the growth under these trees. It was well within the period of time in which regrowth would have taken place. He was very upset and told me quite clearly that he had been to the police station a number of times in relation to sensitive issues. He is involved in business in the town. He said that he never experienced anything quite like—and I am relaying this as factual information—the interrogation process imposed by those officers. I did not provoke him or ask specifically whether he believed that the Vegetation Management Act was abhorrent to his belief. I did not impress that upon him. He came to me in the first instance and I asked him about the particular problem.

What is proposed here is far more draconian than what was in the previous legislation. There was the capacity, if he had done the wrong thing, to fine him. It is quite clear that this was not the case. If a person were in a similar situation and probably had done the wrong thing—and there is a requirement relating to a criminal check on their history, et cetera—it would have put him and his family through a great deal of trauma. Why is it necessary to go any further than the previous provisions of the Vegetation Management Act? From what I can understand, there was no need to go through the process that he had gone through just simply because he cleared some undergrowth on a block that had been damaged as a result of the rural fire brigade trying to clear a break through the property. It is totally unreasonable that a range of much more draconian

processes will be exercised on persons who for whatever reason may have cleared land without a warrant but who may have been entitled to clear that land anyway, because they were not abusing the Vegetation Management Act as it stood.

I understand that no proceedings were taken against this gentleman, but it is just the experience that he went through. I know that this is a bit mundane as far as the minister is concerned, but if one is on the receiving end of what has been imposed on people so far—and now we are to experience something probably far more draconian—people will wonder just what Queensland really is all about. I would like the minister to respond.

Mr ROBERTSON: Not for one moment do I dismiss the concerns expressed by the member for Hinchinbrook's constituent. That is why I ask the member to write to me about the concerns and experience of that constituent, so that I may have it investigated.

Mr WELLINGTON: My question to the minister relates to clause 25, which, as the explanatory notes indicate, inserts two new divisions that cover monitoring and enforcement provisions for tree clearing, and other provisions about authorised officers. What checks will the minister undertake to ensure that his officers will act responsibly and with reasonableness when they exercise these extensive powers?

Earlier this afternoon, the minister advised that one of the elements of the bill was and will be the crucial training that those officers will undertake. My second question is: what guarantees will the minister provide to Queenslanders that before this bill becomes an act and before those officers are allowed to exercise those extensive powers, there will be proper evaluation of the officers and that they will have to pass proper accreditation tests? My final question is: what training does the minister propose they will have to undertake? How will he evaluate whether they pass that training or they fail?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am informed by my department that the appropriate training will be provided to those officers to ensure that the exercise of those powers is obviously within the provisions of the act. As I have explained to other members, the powers are not extraordinary as officers in other jurisdictions have quite similar powers. An example that springs to mind straightaway is officers charged with responsibilities for occupational health and safety who have right of entry provisions. Therefore, these powers are not extraordinary, as I have explained already.

Training is being provided. Should any vegetation management officer or compliance officer act beyond the powers that are provided by this act or act in a way that is contrary to standards applying across the public sector in general, then any member of the public—including a member of parliament where such a matter is brought to their attention—is able to pursue those matters through appropriate independent authorities.

As the member for Nicklin would be aware, it would not be appropriate for me to judge the conduct of public sector officers. We have independent authorities to do that for us. That is one of the fundamental pillars of—

Mr Seeney: But you are responsible for their actions.

Mr ROBERTSON: As I was saying before I was unfortunately interrupted, it is not appropriate for me or any minister to judge the voracity or otherwise of alleged misconduct of officers of any department. There are independent bodies. I will just remind members of the House of the extraordinary event we saw this morning when the opposition leader waved a copy of the Fitzgerald report before the parliament. Unfortunately he did not pass it on to the deputy leader because, as the member for Nicklin would know, we have independent bodies in place to independently investigate such allegations.

Mr WELLINGTON: I realise that we do have independent parties, but the minister's bill and future act gives departmental staff clear powers that are unique to their role as enforcement officers. I want to be assured, and I am certain that Queenslanders want to be assured, that the minister will have a proper training program.

Again I ask: will the minister provide a copy of the proposed training manual and training program to the House and to Queenslanders so that we can feel confident that when we look through the training program at what the exercises will be and what evaluations will be undertaken we will be able to say, "Yes, we think that's fair and reasonable"? I do not believe that that is an unreasonable request. Will the minister provide a copy of the training program that the officers will have to undertake before they get accredited to do the enforcement work that this bill and future act will give them the power to do?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am happy to assist the member for Nicklin with that request. If after this debate or indeed tomorrow he wishes to contact my office, we will facilitate such provision of information.

Mr Wellington: Thank you, Minister.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I call the honourable member for Hinchinbrook, and I remind all members to address their comments through the chair.

Mr ROWELL: I acknowledge what the minister proposed as far as my constituent is concerned. What would be the process if I wrote to you? What happens from there on? Do you actually pass it on to some tribunal?

Mr Robertson: You get a reply.

Mr ROWELL: That will be nice.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The member will address his comments through the chair.

Mr ROWELL: The minister probably erred to some degree, too, in not addressing the chair.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I have asked the minister to address through the chair as well, thank you.

Mr ROWELL: I will get a response of some kind. However, at the end of the day, if it is proven that there is some concern with respect to the issues that he has raised, how does that proceed? How do you evaluate that process, if I refer it to you? I am not being pedantic about it. I simply want to ensure that there is no retribution, there is no—would members look at the antics of the minister!

A government member: You're not going through the chair anyway.

Mr ROWELL: I am going through the chair. It is important that there is no retribution against this person, because there are a few little issues to tidy up. Can the minister guarantee that that will be the case? Can I tell my constituent that I have spoken to the minister in parliament and was told quite clearly, "Write a letter about the issue"? I want to be guaranteed that if I do go to him, nothing will happen that will reflect on him adversely.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am actually saddened somewhat by the contribution of the member for Hinchinbrook, who suggests that if a constituent of his has a problem with decisions made by my department or the actions of an officer of my department and brings that to my attention, it may result in some form of so-called retribution. As I said, I am actually quite saddened by that suggestion, Marc. It was unnecessary.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The minister will address his comments through the chair.

Mr ROBERTSON: Whilst from time to time we may have significant points of difference across the chamber, one thing that binds us in this place is that we respect the representations of members of parliament on behalf of their constituents, irrespective of what party or philosophical belief we may have. The member did not need to do that. Nevertheless, I am still happy to guarantee that if there is a legitimate concern presented to me by him or, indeed, any member of parliament about my department, it will be investigated without fear or favour. If there is any suggestion that an other than appropriate response is received by any constituent beyond my own response, I would view it extremely seriously. As I said, I think it is unfortunate that the member would make such an allegation, with no detail, in this chamber. I think that probably a lot of people would be somewhat uncomfortable with that.

Mr ROWELL: I thank the minister for his response. The reason I raised the issue was the way in which this man was treated in the initial approach that was made to the man. As I said, it was almost star chamber tactics, which he believed were completely unwarranted for what was involved in the area that he cleared and what he had actually done.

But it is pleasing to hear the minister say that it will go no further than going through the process. I respect the fact that the minister is the minister and from time to time I approach him and generally I get a good response. I am not saying otherwise. But sometimes the issue goes a little bit beyond the minister. I want the minister to be aware of the gravity of the situation when this man was approached. It was quite serious, from what he has told me and I have no reason to say otherwise. But I thought that it was important that I raise this issue with the minister if a similar circumstance happens with other people. The minister is now imposing greater restrictions and penalties and even tighter impositions on people as a result of this legislation.

Quite simply, if a person has had a bad experience, that person can get to a point where they do not want to report what happens in relation to people from government departments who approach them. I just want to make absolutely sure—and I think that the minister has confirmed that with me—that in the event that a person such as I approaches the minister on behalf of a constituent, that person will be dealt with fairly.

Mr SEENEY: Clause 25 is quite an extensive clause. A number of members on this side of the chamber have certainly pursued a number of issues that deal with the powers of entry, the powers of seizure and the powers of authorised officers to require information and require assistance. However, the section of clause 25 that is the most unacceptable and, in my view, the most obnoxious is the last part of it, which inserts a new subdivision 6 into the act that deals with the obtaining of criminal history reports. In that respect, I would now move amendment No. 5 standing in my name, which seeks to delete from clause 25 all of page 36, lines 1 to 29—

5 Clause 25—

At page 36, lines 1 to 29 and page 37, lines 1 to 4—

omit.

Mr SEENEY: This section deals with obtaining criminal history reports of land-holders. Like the other powers that are granted in this clause to authorised officers, it should not be taken lightly and it really should be accompanied by a very detailed justification by a minister who is proposing to insert this clause into any legislation. That is not just my opinion; it is the opinion of leading civil libertarians in the state. They have certainly expressed that opinion.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr SEENEY: Too right. I love that third-party endorsement. It is important to put on the record that leading civil libertarians in the state have publicly endorsed the concern that I express here tonight, and so they should. They understand the attack that this constitutes on people's civil liberties. They understand the unnecessary extent of the powers that are being granted in this clause to authorised officers who, as has already been made apparent in debate on this clause, we have no guarantee are qualified to discharge those powers. You bet I am pleased to get third-party endorsement from people such as the Queensland civil libertarians.

I can well understand how Labor Leftie lawyers squirm when they have to vote for legislation that is being condemned by people such as Terry O'Gorman. I can well understand the discomfort that is being felt by the member for Southport, because this part of this clause is obnoxious. It is obnoxious to anybody who has any understanding of civil liberties, fairness, or decency.

If we treat people like criminals, they are more likely to act like criminals. If we treat people in this manner, we are certainly not going to get the type of cooperation and assistance that we would usually get from people who are in contact with government departments. This section assumes that there is at least some chance that the person who is the occupier of the land that is going to be entered is somehow a risk, that they somehow have a criminal history that needs to be checked. If that were not the case, then why is it necessary to check criminal histories?

Once again, I ask the minister the same question that I have asked a number of times: when has this power been necessary? When has the lack of this power hampered the administration of the Vegetation Management Act to date? When has the lack of this power hampered the administration of the Land Act to date? What sort of situations have arisen that make the inclusion of this power in this clause of this legislation necessary?

They are the questions that I believe the minister needs to answer. If there are no answers to those questions—and I believe that there are none—then this part of the clause is totally unnecessary. The granting of these powers to these officers is unnecessary. The parliament should strike it out.

Time expired.

Mr ROBERTSON: What an extraordinary contribution by the Deputy Leader of the National Party. So breathtaking was the spin that he pursued in relation to this matter: every notion of not just being tough on crime, but on the causes of crime, which they seem to espouse. I have to say that I just cannot wait to be able to relay your contribution to my ministerial colleague Tony McGrady or, indeed, the Attorney-General for the next time you want to stand up and talk about tougher penalties for people who break the law. What an absolute arrant load of nonsense you just spoke.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Ms Male): Order! The honourable minister will address his comments through the chair.

Mr ROBERTSON: Once again, I inform the honourable member that, when he talks about these extraordinary powers, perhaps I can help him for the future by providing him with a copy of the WorkCover Act, the Nature Conservation Act and the Explosives Act. If the member had done any homework, as any responsible shadow minister should do when coming into this chamber to debate legislation, he would have at least come across those three acts.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am trying to keep it simple for you, brother.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Ms Male): Order! The minister will address his comments through the chair.

Mr ROBERTSON: I gave the member three. I could give him a lot more, but I know that his attention span is a bit short.

Mr WELLINGTON: I wish to speak in support of the amendment moved by the shadow minister, simply because I believe that this is blatant discrimination against the farming community in the state of Queensland. I say that after listening to the minister's response to that amendment.

We have hundreds and hundreds of acts of parliament in Queensland and the minister has just rattled off three or four acts that he says contain similar powers. My challenge to the minister is that, if this is such a significant issue, where are all the case histories that he can put on the table in this chamber that demonstrate that there is such a serious concern with the rural community in Queensland that we need to have such a blatant clause where—

The chief executive may ask the commissioner of the police service for a written report about the criminal history of a person if the authorised person reasonably suspects the person may be present at the place where the authorised person enters the place under subdivision 1.

I do not have a problem if it was a case that in all of the acts in Queensland which give our public servants these powers we see these similar checks and balances, but I cannot find this in, by and large, the other acts in this state where our officers do have those powers. Yes, the minister has referred to a number of acts, but there are many other acts. Let us take the family services sector where there are problems and our family service officers are placed in positions of conflict and stress. We do not see these similar powers there, or I am not aware that we see those similar powers there. I simply say that unless the minister can give a more reasoned response I certainly will be supporting the amendment, because I believe it is blatant discrimination.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am always prepared to give the member for Nicklin a reasonable response because I find that his questions are, by and large, usually reasonable. I am not too sure if the member was here during the actual debate when we spoke about these particular provisions. I understand the member's concern about these powers and their necessity. What I outlined during my second reading speech were circumstances where, if you like, the basis of these particular provisions are fundamentally health and safety considerations for officers in my department. In many of the cases that have resulted in our considering this provision, officers work alone and they work in remote locations which are far from any immediate help or assistance. If we go beyond what the National Party has alleged whereby apparently I am accusing all farmers of being potential criminals—if we pass by that hyperbole and get to the crux of the matter—I have as minister, as my chief executive or director-general has, a responsibility to ensure the protection of the health and safety of employees under our charge. From time to time if an officer has a concern about his or her own safety in investigating a complaint and requires further information, that officer may approach the chief executive or his senior delegate to have a criminal history check done on that particular person.

I will give the member an example. In small country towns life revolves around the pub. A lot of gossip and information gets exchanged around the pub and people know what is going on generally around the place. They may get a bit of information passed on to them that so and so has been in a bit of strife and that may just trigger a concern in their mind that, 'I've got to go out there next week and investigate a complaint. I'm feeling a bit uneasy about it. How serious should I take the bit of gossip I've heard?' In terms of ensuring or at least providing a level of protection for that own officer's health and safety, this check is done. That is not dissimilar to what any other investigating officer can do in at least three other acts which I have just tabled here tonight—and there are many others—and what those acts provide for.

There is a whole range of protections in terms of privacy of the person whose criminal history will be checked as contained in other provisions in this bill. So this is what is purely driving us. There is no suggestion for one moment that there is a mob of dangerous criminals out there whom we need to check on before we step onto their property, but there is a reasonableness test that must be applied in terms of protecting the health and safety of officers who are doing work on behalf of the Queensland government. As I said, there is a range of protections for the privacy of the individual contained in this act.

Mr Seeney: Take a police officer with you.

Mr ROBERTSON: What a wonderful interjection—'take a police officer with you'. 'Take a police officer with you' is what the opposition spokesman just said. That is exactly right, because that is why we are doing the criminal history check. If a concern comes up through such a check, they get on to the police to get them to accompany them to do the actual investigation. Thank you, Deputy Opposition Leader, for that moment of lucidity, for that moment of absolute brilliance that just came before you. Thank you very much.

Can I finish my contribution, member for Nicklin, by saying this: there are a number of examples already in place that have been brought to my attention whereby the health and safety of my officers has been put at some risk by actions of land-holders. In one case, an officer's motor vehicle was rammed by a land-holder. In a second case, an investigating officer was buzzed by a crop duster which resulted in that person being reported to CASA, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. In other case, the family of an investigating officer was threatened by a land-holder outside of the actual investigation. These result in legitimate concerns being felt by workers—by employees—of my department as to their health and safety. We believe as a result of that the provisions here are reasonable.

Mr WELLINGTON: This is my last comment in relation to this clause. In relation to those examples that the minister just provided—if a criminal history search had been undertaken on those cases, would that have provided that there was a genuine risk to the officer?

Mr ROBERTSON: Member for Nicklin, that is impossible for me to answer because it is not my health or safety that was at risk. Each individual has their own frame of reference as to what constitutes a risk to their health and safety. It is a personal thing. I cannot tell the member what those individual officers may have done had these provisions been in existence. That is asking me to speculate, which I obviously cannot do.

Mr JOHNSON: I just cannot believe what I am hearing this evening from the minister. We heard the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister make reference to the complexity of this clause and the ramifications of this clause if we do not deal with it in a responsible fashion. I find what the minister just said deplorable—that is, talking about innuendo and what people hear in a pub about somebody who may be going to do something. We hear lots of things in hotels. No doubt, Mr Chairman, you have heard lots of things in hotels, but do you go away and follow it through as proof? What sort of a country do we live in? I heard the minister follow the shadow minister on ABC Radio last Friday when he referred to 83 other government agencies or other bodies that have their own inspectors or police type inspections of different agencies in relation to the particular portfolio area in question, but I find this offensive for the people we are trying to defend—99.9 per cent of whom are innocent, law-abiding citizens. The real issue is that this is an invasion of the privacy of innocent, law-abiding citizens. The minister will eliminate cooperation by this type of process.

I believe that what the minister is doing here is instilling fear into many of these land-holders. That will be the result of this legislation if it is passed in its current form. The shadow minister has moved this amendment in a very responsible, fair way. I urge the minister, as the custodian of this department, to make certain that he gives it serious thought before he rules it out. This is something that I believe will come back and haunt the minister and the government.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: The member should listen for a moment. The minister is creating an environment of uneasiness for the inspectors he is asking to uphold the act because at the end of the day nobody will have any respect for those people if they use bully-boy tactics to run across people's boundaries and enter people's properties in an improper way.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: Absolutely. As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said, the minister is putting those people in a very compromising situation. I represent those western areas and I

know that people in those areas have done it pretty tough. There is a penalty in the legislation of $7,500, or 100 penalty units. That is a pretty hefty fine in anyone's language. A lot of these people do not have a bent razoo to bless themselves with. They are trying to improve their properties. One case I know of involves a very good citizen who is trying to improve his property. But what are the inspectors doing? They are forcing this bloke into a situation where all he wants to do is fight back and retaliate through the courts. The reason he is retaliating through the courts is that he believes he has been treated unfairly. The minister does not understand the system. I see the minister grinning, and I give him more credit for that.

Fitzgerald himself said that there should be one Police Service. If the minister believes that there will be a criminal element out there then he should get the police to check it, not these people. As the member for Nicklin said, these people are not trained in certain aspects of the law in the way a police officer is and they are not trained to be doing things that police officers should be doing. That is where this system breaks down. There are no checks and balances to give people the right to pursue this issue. I believe the minister should give serious thought to this.

I have spoken to constituents who were trying to get fodder permits just prior to Christmas, before the rain. Because of the seriousness of the situation some of these people were making it very difficult. The minister is not even listening. The situation was aggravated by some of these people because they just wanted to play ducks and drakes and did not want to go and do inspections. They did not want to assist these people. I argued with one of the departmental officers about a fodder permit and the issue of mulga country. I said, 'I have lived on mulga country all my life and nobody knows mulga country better than I do. Back in the 1965 drought I saw mulga paddocks cleared of every mulga tree. Today those trees have grown back bigger and better than ever.' This departmental officer said, 'Is that so?' I said, 'It is so, and I can take you and show you where it is.'

I do not believe that the minister is giving fair consideration to this very important part of this legislation. The amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition should be given due consideration. At the end of the day, all this provision will do is make this part of the legislation more complex. It will make it more difficult for inspectors to go about their jobs in the proper fashion.

The great majority of land-holders are great people who want to and will cooperate. If you go on to their places they will give you a cup of tea, a feed or whatever. That is one of the unwritten charters of the bush. People care about people. If the government is to put these people in a situation where criminal checks are run on them, because of fear of the inspector—that is all it is, fear of the departmental officers—the minister will find that nobody will cooperate. We will drive these people underground and it will be a no-win situation all round. I urge the minister to give consideration to this.

If the minister cannot see merit in the amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, he should reason with us to try to put in place a better system and I am sure that the shadow minister will give bipartisan support to that. The minister should not shrug his shoulders and walk away. The situation here—

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: I am serious about this. This is a very serious situation. Nobody wants to see people painted as criminals or would-be criminals. We have a Police Service to look after that aspect of society. All we want is for a reasonable system to be put in place, where a reasonable outcome can be arrived at which the minister, the shadow minister and everybody in this parliament is happy with so we can get an outcome that will be advantageous to the Department of Natural Resources and the people who are trying to develop their properties in a responsible and cooperative way.

Mr HOBBS: I am pleased to support the amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. For 150 years or so, the government of the day has not needed this. The minister provided three examples—three examples in 150 years—of where it might be needed. I will give the minister an example of the reason this is occurring. It involves a guy called Ray White. Some of the departmental people rang him up and said, 'Mr White, we want to come and talk to you.' He said, 'Come out. That is fine.' They gave him the impression that they wanted to talk to him about his knowledge of vegetation management in his particular region. They went to his place and talked for about two hours.

Mr Shine: You have made this speech five times.

Mr HOBBS: I have, and I am making it again because the minister has not heard it yet. I am pleased that the member for Toowoomba North is in the chamber tonight. This particular person—

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Member for Warrego, are you telling the committee that you have made this statement five times?

Mr HOBBS: Not this point, no. This is a very important bit. The important part is that after about two hours this person realised that he was being taped by these departmental officers. He did not even know that he was being taped. Is it any wonder that now the government has to try to put in place this sort of legislation? The government has lost the plot in relation to vegetation management in Queensland. Is it any wonder that the government has to try to do something?

Earlier the minister mentioned pub talk. You can pick up all sorts of stories in the pub, as the member for Gregory said. The reality is that they might not always be right.

Mr Johnson: You can even get a fight in the pub.

Mr HOBBS: That is right. You can get a fight in the pub. The previous minister and the current minister are more on the nose out there in the bush than the officers are. The minister probably has not been threatened in the meantime. We obviously have the minister under a bit of pressure.

Mr Seeney: Great civil libertarian.

Mr HOBBS: That is right. We have the great civil libertarian in the chamber. I refer to Mr O'Gorman's recent comments. The minister might like to comment on that. He said that, the way he saw it, this was a very draconian piece of legislation which was really trampling on the rights of land-holders. I am sure that the minister, being the civil libertarian that he is, would agree with those comments of Mr O'Gorman.

Should there be a case where an authorised officer has some concerns about going somewhere—in every industry I guess there is always someone who has some troubles—there would be no problem at all in ringing up the local policeman and he would go out. We do not need this legislation for that to occur. We have all lived in towns where we know the local policeman. They are always there and they will help. They are cooperative. They would go out. We do not need George Street to pass legislation to tell them to go out and do their job. Quite frankly, there is no need for this.

While the minister was out of the chamber, I mentioned that a local policeman would go out anyway. He does not need this legislation to go out and assist in an extremely rare case that may crop up. The minister has mentioned three cases. Three in 150 years is not a great deal. There may have been a few in the past. There are always a few cases here and there, but I do not think we needed it in the past and I cannot see that we need it now.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! This discussion has been going on for some time. Can I say quite clearly that the member for Gladstone is never in the category of taking too much time. I always find her comments to the point and very concise. However, can I remind other members of the House that it costs a lot of money to have parliament sitting. I suggest that members do not repeat what has already been said. The standing orders are very clear about people not being repetitive. The argument to me sounds the same from a different door. It is getting a tad repetitious.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Earlier during the debate I requested clarification from the minister that a criminal history check was required to reassure officers who might be attending a property where the person on the property had a history of violence. The minister confirmed that that was what it was for. In rural Queensland many of the landowners have weapons licences, and to obtain and retain those weapons licences a criminal history check must be done. In many cases, in the instances that we are referring to that would be covered by this bill, the same people would apply. These people have a regular criminal history check so that they can keep weapons. Weapons contravention would not be an issue if they have a history of violence. It does not cover issues like being rammed with a car.

There were several instances cited by the minister, and I know that he ridiculed the member for Callide when he said they could always take a police officer with them. The fact is that, under a number of other acts that relate to the same geographical area to which this legislation will apply, the current procedure is that if an inspector of a department—I am thinking of stock inspectors and animal welfare inspectors—suspects because of their interaction with a property owner or because of general knowledge in the area that their safety is at risk, they are currently

empowered to request to be accompanied by a police officer and that occurs. But I would have to say it does not occur very often, because the majority of country people are not unreasonable. If they are, it is usually because they have been provoked.

The minister has said enough for me to know that he is not going to agree to the amendment moved by the member for Callide. Would the minister give an undertaking to this House that in 12 months' time he will report on the number of times the issuing of a criminal history report has occurred under this legislation? I am asking that for this reason: up until now, not necessarily under the Vegetation Management Act—

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Okay.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am happy to say yes to that. I think that is an appropriate request.

Mr QUINN: I have a concern with subdivision 6, proposed subsection 400ZA, page 36 of the bill, the chief executive's power to obtain a criminal history report. It states—

> The chief executive may ask the commissioner of the police service for a written report about the criminal history of a person if the authorised person reasonably suspects the person may be present at the place when the authorised person enters the place under subdivision 1.

The concern I have about this is that there may be a number of field officers who, for whatever reason, could be termed nervous Nellies and every time they are tasked to check on possible illegal tree clearing on a property they may as a matter of routine request of their CEO a criminal history check of the person on the property.

My reading of this clause is that the chief executive would then ask the commissioner for police to provide that criminal history check. Does the Police Commissioner have any discretion as to whether or not he should provide that check to the CEO? That is the first question. If so, where is that in the act, or is it in the police powers legislation? Secondly, what guarantee do we have that the CEO will utilise some discretion? After all, what CEO would refuse one of his officers the possibility of a criminal history check with the weight on his mind that, if he refuses, something might happen when the officer goes out to the property, there might be an accident of some description, and then what?

What I think will happen is that, every time an investigating officer requests a criminal history check from the CEO, the CEO will automatically grant that request as he will want to err on the side of caution and the Police Commissioner will then provide it. It does not say 'the Police Commissioner may'; it simply says 'may ask the commissioner of the police service for a written report'. The Police Commissioner is not given any discretion under this particular provision.

I think there might be a couple of nervous Nellies in the field, the CEO will err on the side of caution and the Police Commissioner as a matter of course will provide reports. I am afraid that, once this becomes the mentality within the investigating officer ranks, all officers as a matter of course will ask for these reports. I think this is going too far under that set of circumstances.

I would have liked a clause which says that once an investigating officer makes a request of his CEO for a criminal history check, some reference is made back to a senior police officer within that district about whether that request goes ahead to the Police Commissioner. In many rural areas the police know most of the landowners intimately, they know who is a reasonable person and who is unreasonable, and they can then make a professional judgment based on the knowledge of the person and the history of the person in the community.

I think that is a far safer way of handling what I think is a very sensitive matter. We do not want to open the floodgates so that criminal history checks are sought as a matter of course by investigating officers, with no discretion being exercised by either the CEO or the Police Commissioner. This is an unfettered power that this parliament ought not give investigating officers. I would counsel the minister to put in some checks and balances such as a referral back to the local senior police officer for a considered view about whether or not a particular check ought to be granted.

Mr ROBERTSON: With respect to the member for Robina, there is a fuzziness to his logic. The member referred to the case where a nervous Nellie may get into the situation of requesting a criminal history check every time they do an investigation. Of course, that then goes to the chief executive. The member raised a concern that the chief executive may not be prepared to exercise his or her discretion as to whether that request is passed on, yet the member wants to give to the police commissioner some strange interventionist power as to whether or not that application should be granted. Prior to the member speaking, the member for Gladstone put

forward, I thought, a far more reasonable position that proposed to release details of how many times over the previous 12 months an application for a criminal history check had actually been received. I have agreed to that provision. Of course any chief executive who receives a request for a criminal history check would view that request seriously. We would expect the CEO to do so. However, we would also expect if a particular officer were making repeated requests that the CEO would also question whether that officer—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am trying to help you, Bob, but your mate—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: Let me finish then. We would also expect any manager worth their salt to look at that behaviour and question whether or not there is a problem. I accept what the member is saying, but I am satisfied that the checks and balances are necessarily there. As the member for Gladstone suggested, if we look at statistics 12 months hence we can see if there actually is a problem before going down that path or some other path that the member is suggesting.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: It has been pointed out in a conversation that we are facing an election. Would the minister give us that report before an election? With due respect, the Premier has said it will be next year, so that is 12 months?

Mr ROBERTSON: I will give it to you in 12 months. I do not know when the Premier is going to call an election. I will guarantee you something in 12 months.

Mr JOHNSON: This issue is very serious. I cannot stress that enough to the minister. I believe that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has canvassed this very well. He has moved this amendment because it is serious. The minister said that the old legislation has been working 100 per cent satisfactorily. Why on earth are we to put in place these harsh, stifling types of amendments to the legislation just to slow down a process or make it more difficult? 400ZA provides—

The chief executive may ask the commissioner of the police service for a written report about criminal history of a person if the authorised person reasonably suspects the person may be present at the place when the authorised person enters the place under subdivision 1.

In all honesty, commonsense will prevail. The Commissioner of Police telling his officers, whatever town they are in, if a person has a criminal conviction—what does that have to do with the chief executive of the Department of Natural Resources for god's sake? Subclause (4) provides—

The chief executive must examine the report and identify, to the extent it is reasonably practical to do so, offences involving the use of a weapon or violence against a person.

If that person in question has a criminal record, they will not have a weapons licence for a start, because that is well and truly set in granite in the weapons legislation. So that counts that out. All the minister is really doing is drawing the crabs. I know people in the minister's department who will not or even do not want to talk in fear of reprisals from their superiors. This is serious. I am not making this up. I can name people, but I do not believe it is appropriate to do so. I would like to talk privately to the minister afterwards and relate what is going on in some of these places. The minister only paid half attention to what the member for Warrego said. The member for Warrego has identified very precisely just how grave is this situation. We do not need to further complicate or compound the problem anymore. I appeal to the minister to give serious consideration to putting in place a revised clause on page 36.

In terms of the confidential document, what if the chief executive officer says to one of his senior executives in the regions that someone has a criminal record and has three or four other people working under them? We talk about going to the pub. Are these people going to keep that totally confidential? Can we trust those people not to talk to somebody? How do we know it will not get out? Where is the confidentiality in that? Fitzgerald referred to one Police Service. We will have one million defacto Police Services here. The Premier is in the chamber this evening. I appeal to the Premier. This is a very serious issue. The Premier realises just how serious is the land clearing issue. I urge the Premier to ask his minister tonight to look closely at this. We need an outcome that will not jeopardise anybody or put departmental officers or land-holders' safety in question. Who wants to be delving into somebody's private life? If there is a criminal history, let the police handle that—not the departmental officers of the Department of Natural Resources or some other department. I ask the minister to show consideration so that we can get an outcome advantageous to the people of Queensland.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question is that Mr Seeney's amendment be agreed to.

Mr Johnson: We came here to get a reply from the minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, he didn't wish to reply. There is no necessity for the minister to reply.

Mr Johnson interjected.

The CHAIR: Order! I am not going to debate that. The member will resume his seat. Under standing order 124, I warn the member. I now call the member for Gregory.

Mr JOHNSON: I am not here to aggravate the situation. This is a very complex, serious issue.

A government member interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: All jokes aside, we are trying to reason with the minister, with the government, to get an outcome advantageous to all people, whether they be pastoral people who want to clear and develop property, or Department of Natural Resources officers who want to go about their business in a professional way. We want to see that.

The shadow minister, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, has moved this amendment so that we can have a reasonable and fair outcome that will be advantageous to both parties. I think it is only fair that the minister, in final summary on this particular clause to which the shadow minister has moved an amendment, should respond.

Mr Beattie: This exists in 83 other acts of this parliament. It is not a revolution.

Mr JOHNSON: We know that, but with all due respect to the Premier, the situation has been further aggravated by the way that things have been done.

A government member: Oh!

Mr JOHNSON: This is serious. Members opposite can say "Oh!" all day. They should visit some of the people we are talking about. Even some departmental officers will tell them that they do not like what is going on, and they are damn good law-abiding citizens too. There should be no "Oh!" in this debate.

Mr Seeney: It'll worsen it.

Mr JOHNSON: Absolutely, it will make it worse. This is a very serious situation. I plead with the Premier to talk to the minister. Even if we could hold the clause over or perhaps do as the members for Gladstone and Robina suggested. The shadow minister did not move this amendment for something to do. We would all like to go to bed too, but this is too damn serious.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I refer to the member's comment about the shadow minister moving an amendment. The member had 10 minutes to speak initially, and he said exactly the same thing. He is being repetitious.

Mr Johnson: I am not being repetitious.

The CHAIRMAN: We can check the *Hansard*. The member is being repetitious. He made exactly the same comments when he spoke to this amendment before. I will let him go because he is so upset and so precious.

Mr JOHNSON: I am not upset. I am trying to reinforce a very valid point that needs to be canvassed properly and in depth. I call on the minister to please respond and tell us how he thinks we can achieve an outcome here. The minister does not want to see this go the wrong way. I plead with him to respond on whether or not we can have an outcome. It may not be tonight; it may be down the track sometime. I believe this amendment is reasonable.

Mr WELLINGTON: I move, under standing order 107, that the minister be heard.

The CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order.

Mr WELLINGTON: Chairman, I have moved a motion that the minister be heard under standing order 107.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I want to clarify something. It appears that members opposite are suggesting that I have some authority to demand of a minister in the committee stage that he or she respond or behave in a particular way. I have no authority at all. If ministers wish to respond to a comment, they may. If they do not wish to, they do not have to. The member has no authority to move that motion because I have no authority to ask a person to respond. I have no authority at all.

Mr ROBERTSON: I will just say this: with due respect to the member for Nicklin and what he is trying to do, we are debating an amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Opposition members have spoken to the amendment, as is their right. It now goes to a vote.

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

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

NOES, 56—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reeves, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Purcell

Resolved in the **negative**.

Question—That the clause, as read, stand part of the bill—put; and the committee divided—

AYES, 56—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reeves, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Purcell

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

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clause 26—

The CHAIRMAN: I call the member for Callide, but before he speaks I notice that there are four amendments to this clause which are consequential. Would the member like to move them en masse?

Mr SEENEY (10.36 p.m.): Yes. I move amendments Nos 6, 7, 8 and 9.

6 Clause 26—

At page 37, after line 12—

insert—

'(1A) An authorised person must not, in exercising a function under this Act, state anything to another person that the authorised person knows is false or misleading in a material particular.

Maximum penalty—100 penalty units.'.

7 Clause 26—

At page 37, line 13, after '(1)'—

insert—

'or (1A)'.

8 Clause 26—

At page 37, after line 20—

insert—

'(1A) An authorised person must not, in exercising a function under this Act, give another person a document containing information that the authorised person knows is false or misleading in a material particular.

Maximum penalty—100 penalty units.'.

9 Clause 26—

At page 37, line 27, after '(1)'—

insert—

'or (1A)'.

Mr Chairman, as you say, all of those amendments relate to clause 26. Clause 26 inserts into the Land Act a new section that deals with false or misleading statements. It inserts into the Land Act a further section 403B, which deals with false or misleading documents.

Basically, I do not have any difficulty with what the clause does in terms of inserting those sections into the Land Act, except for the fact that it restricts those sections to one particular group of people. Essentially, the amendments that I have moved extend those provisions to everyone who is involved in this area, because it is only fair that if one particular group of people is going to be limited by a particular section of the Land Act, or held accountable by a particular section of the Land Act, it is only fair that the rest of the people who are involved, at least potentially, in a disputed situation are held accountable in the same regard.

That is exactly what this series of amendments do. The provisions that are being inserted relate to false and misleading statements and false and misleading documents. New 403A(1) states—

A person must not state anything to an authorised person that the person knows is false or misleading in a material particular.

New section 403B(1) states—

A person must not give an authorised person a document containing information that the person knows is false or misleading in a material particular.

It is fair enough that people are unable to either provide false or misleading information or false or misleading documents deliberately to an authorised officer. However, it does not require those authorised officers to be bound by the same levels of responsibility in terms of making false or misleading statements or providing false or misleading documents. That is what it should do and that is what this series of amendments seeks to change. These amendments set out to make this clause applicable not just to land-holders but also to the authorised officers with whom they have to deal.

Tonight, on a number of occasions I have asked the minister to demonstrate why particular elements of his legislation are required and what examples there have been in the recent past that would justify particular elements of the legislation. He has been unable to do that. I suggest to the chamber that there are a number of well-publicised examples that certainly reinforce the need for the amendments that I have moved to extend these provisions to authorised officers as well as to land-holders. There are a number of well-publicised examples where departmental officers have certainly been misleading in their statements, if not dishonest. There are any number of examples where departmental officers have provided documents that are misleading, if not dishonest. Certainly, most of the early mapping data that was made available by the Department of Natural Resources when the Vegetation Management Act was first implemented was misleading, to say the least. If the minister wanted to be honest about it, he would agree that most of those maps were inaccurate. Yet they were provided by the department to land-holders as the basis upon which this Vegetation Management Act was to be implemented.

It cannot be argued that a lot of the department's early publications in terms of the information about the Vegetation Management Act were certainly misleading. They were certainly misleading. They certainly added to the confusion that existed at the time about what the responsibilities of land-holders were with regard to particular areas of vegetation. The information was misleading. It added to the confusion and it certainly created the background against which this legislation should be seen by the parliament. I have already made that point a number of times in this debate, and it is a very relevant point. We cannot look at this legislation in isolation. We have to look at what is being proposed here against the background of what happened in respect of the vegetation management legislation when it was so botched by the Premier and the former minister, when it was turned into a political football and used for base political purposes at the expense of any reasonable acceptance of the legislation. It cannot be denied that a large number of statements were misleading.

There are a number of instances where it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that statements that have been made by departmental officers were simply dishonest. The example that I used earlier in this debate about the evidence tendered in the Anchorage court case at St George that was found under cross-examination to be totally lacking in integrity is perhaps the best example. It is perhaps the most widely publicised example. Anyone who doubts the ability of departmental officers to act in a less than reasonable manner—to act in a manner that would certainly be covered by any definition of a false or misleading statement—should take the time and the trouble to read the transcripts of that court case and to make themselves familiar with what the departmental officers did in relation to the evidence that was given there and how lacking in integrity that evidence was and why the department ran a mile from that court case when that evidence was tested in a court of law.

They are the sorts of examples against which this particular clause should be seen. No-one would support false or misleading statements from anyone in any context. Nobody should support that, and we do not set out to do that in terms of this amendment. What we set out to do is bind departmental officers—the government officials—to the same level of responsibility and integrity that they require from land-holders. That is fair and reasonable. There has been a lot said in this debate about the reasonableness test. Indeed, this legislation rests to a very large extent—almost too much of an extent—on the so-called reasonableness test. I ask every member of this House to apply that test to the amendments that have been put forward tonight; and if they are going to vote against these amendments, then explain why they are not reasonable.

Why is it not reasonable that departmental officers be bound by the same levels of responsibility and the same requirements for integrity and the same requirements for honesty that they themselves require of land-holders? In fact, they should be bound to a higher level than the land-holders, because theirs is an official position. Theirs is an official responsibility. They by their position have been granted quite extensive powers under the legislation under which they operate and those powers are being substantially extended by the passage of this bill through this parliament tonight. Of course they should be bound to a much higher level, and that is why the amendment that I have moved contains a penalty unit level that is twice—exactly double—the penalty unit that the minister has suggested should apply to land-holders, because government officers have a greater responsibility to be honest and to be straight forward and to ensure that their statements and the documents that they produce are not false and misleading. I commend the amendment to the House and I ask every member to apply the reasonableness test before they decide which way they are going to vote on this amendment. If they do that, then they will be supporting the amendment along with the opposition.

Mr BEATTIE: We will not be supporting the amendment, and we will not be doing it for very good reasons. To begin with, there is a code of conduct that applies to all public servants and that code of conduct requires that they behave appropriately and honestly and not be involved in misrepresentations. If they are—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Hang on. I listened to the member in silence. If he wants to hear an answer, I am happy to give it to him.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: He had better do it intelligently.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Well, I am really sorry about that. It is about time the member grew up. The reality is that there is a—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The member is a real classic. He was whingeing before when people were not giving him an answer. Stephen and I are giving him an answer and now he does not want to listen to it. I have indicated to him—and Stephen and I are of one mind on this matter—that the reality is that we do not support the amendment for a very good reason, and that is there is a code of conduct that requires appropriate behaviour by public servants. If they are involved in anything misleading, they can be disciplined even to the stage of being dismissed. If it gets to the stage of official misconduct, it can be the basis of a complaint to the CMC. In other words, this amendment is not required. What the member is seeking to do here—and let us be very clear about it—at every opportunity is to undermine this legislation which cracks down on illegal clearing. But we are not going to have a bar of it.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order.

Mr BEATTIE: Oh, squeals he does. He squeals he does. I think he does squeal too much.

Mr SEENEY: I find the Premier's comments offensive. Had he taken the time to listen to this debate up until now he would have heard me make it very clear that we do not support illegal tree clearing. I find the Premier's comments offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr BEATTIE: As I was indicating, what is going on here by the opposition—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I will withdraw. Let me make it really clear, even though under the standing orders I am not required to. Let me simply make the point: the opposition is seeking to undermine our crack down on illegal clearing, and let there be no doubt in anybody's mind about it.

On the last amendment we had, what were those opposite doing? They were taking away the protection that applies to an officer through workplace health and safety requirements. They were trying to expose officers to grave danger. That is what those opposite were trying to do.

Mr Seeney: Rubbish.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, they were. They should not come in here and do the old spin trick. It is not going to work with me. On the last amendment, those opposite were trying to expose officers. They sought to remove their protection under workplace health and safety. Now they want to ignore the code of behaviour.

We are not going to be conned by this attempt by those opposite to undermine this legislation. Eight thousand hectares of endangered vegetation was illegally cleared. The opposition supports that illegal clearing. We will not.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: We have already released these statistics. It has come through the mapping process. It has been well established. Here is another illustration that they are making excuses for illegal clearing. The opposition does not care about the 8,000 hectares. It will not accept any process. This is about watering down.

Where is the Liberal Party in all of this? The Leader of the Liberal Party said that he has committed his party to effective land clearing regulation. On the last five amendments he has voted for the bulldozers! The Leader of the Liberal Party has talked tough about tree clearing to try to woo the conservationists, yet he is in here voting for the bulldozers at every opportunity. Here is the test. Our legislation is going to crack down on illegal clearers and impose penalties that really bite, such as forfeiture of leases for repeat offences. Let us see how the Liberal Party fares in the litmus test of their green credentials.

Let us look at what the Liberals have done so far. They have voted on every division to water down our legislation to crack down on illegal clearing. They have gone weak at the knees over forfeiture of leases—a big test—and remediation. What is wrong with saying that people have to undertake remediation if they wreck? Liberal members went weak at the knees. They go out there and talk about tree clearing. What a load of rubbish! They want illegal clearing cowboys to get off lightly. The green tinge is already turning brown.

This clause talks about false or misleading statements. We have seen two classics. The Liberal Party has been at the forefront, as have the opposition. You are out there supporting illegal clearing, every one of you. Do not come down here trying to talk nonsense. You are supporting the wrecking of the Queensland environment.

Mr SEENEY: Madam Temporary Chairman, I rise to a point of order. This is cheap, desperate politics. I find the Premier's comment offensive.

Mr BEATTIE: I made no comment in relation to you.

Mr SEENEY: The Premier pointed straight at me and said 'you'. It could not have been plainer. The Premier comes in here playing cheap political games because the minister is in trouble. He should have been here for the whole debate.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! Member for Callide, resume your seat. He did not refer to you personally. It does not have to be withdrawn. There is no point of order.

Mr BEATTIE: Let us get back to this legislation.

Mr Horan: He pointed at him and said 'you'.

Mr BEATTIE: Every time we try to put a case, you interject. You want to wreck the parliament.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The Premier will direct his comments through the chair.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Are you going to give me an opportunity to discuss this or are you going to keep interjecting?

Mr SEENEY: If you are prepared to discuss—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: The member for Callide will resume his seat. Order! I will not have people yelling abuse across the chamber and I will not have members on either side ignoring my rulings.

Mr BEATTIE: As I was saying, this clause is about false or misleading statements. It is important to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to protect our environment, to protect land for future farming generations and to ensure that we can clamp down on illegal clearing. The reality of all of this is very clear. It is not just the 8,000 hectares of endangered vegetation that was cleared against the law—illegally. We are making sure—

Mr Seeney: You do not know that.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, we do know. We are not going to have your excuses in here.

Mr Hobbs: You have not even groundtruthed it. You don't know.

Mr BEATTIE: There are some people who still believe that the world is flat, and they are on the other side of the chamber. We will not accept the sort of disruptive, dishonest nonsense which is undermining our attempts to protect the environment and vegetation for future generations. I will make it absolutely clear. You can have all the pious nonsense you want, but we will ensure that the mechanisms are in existence to protect the land for future generations. No honest farmer—the overwhelming majority of farmers are honest—supports illegal clearers. The only people who are supporting illegal clearers are members of the opposition.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, you are.

Mr SEENEY: I find that offensive and I insist that it be withdrawn.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr SEENEY: This is cheap, base politics at its worst.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Do not debate the point with me.

Mr SEENEY: I find the Premier's remarks offensive. Had he been here to listen to even a quarter—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: The member for Callide will resume his seat.

Mr SEENEY: I seek that it be withdrawn.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: He did not name you directly, so he does not have to withdraw the point.

Mr SEENEY: He pointed directly across the chamber at me and said that I support illegal clearing.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: The member for Callide! Would you please resume your seat!

Mr SEENEY: I find that offensive.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: I call the Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: I just want to make two final points in conclusion. The first is that this legislation is in the best interests of Queensland. It has been thought through very carefully.

Mr Hobbs: It hasn't been needed for 150 years and you are bringing it in now.

Mr BEATTIE: The National Party is simply trying to hail down any contribution we make in this debate. This legislation came about because, through the two tests that were applied, there was a significant amount of illegal clearing. My government will not allow that to continue. I am determined, and so is my government, to make sure that illegal clearing is ended.

The second thing is that we are determined that the mechanisms will be put in place to protect our land. I talk to farmers extensively. The overwhelming majority of farmers support the government because they are decent people. They do not support people clearing 8,000 hectares of endangered vegetation. They are good people and they do not support illegal clearing, and nor do we.

Mr SEENEY: What we have seen in the chamber in the last 10 minutes is the sad reality of why the vegetation management legislation has been such an absolute failure in Queensland in achieving what we all want to see, that is, the sensible regulation of vegetation clearing in Queensland. That is what we all want to see. What we have seen from the Premier is exactly the reason the Beattie government's Vegetation Management Act has caused much more land clearing than it has prevented.

Three hundred thousand-odd hectares have been cleared simply because of the Beattie government's vegetation management legislation. The reason is the cheap, base political approach that the Premier has taken to this amendment in the last 10 minutes. Cheap, base politics is all that the Premier is interested in—cheap clown acts, using this parliament as a theatre rather than coming in here and participating sensibly in a debate that has been going on for quite some time.

Because the minister is clearly so far out of his depth, the Premier comes in here. Rather than address the issues that have been encompassed in this debate up until now, we see a classic, cheap political stunt—from a political coward who cannot debate the issue. The political coward comes in here and puts on his clown hat.

Mr Robertson: You are a disgrace.

Mr SEENEY: I didn't mention you, either. The same rule applies to me.

Mr BEATTIE: The opposition spokesman did make reference to me individually.

Mr Seeney: I did not. I said 'you', just as you did.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, you did. Let me make it clear: I am not seeking for it to be withdrawn because he has no credibility and no-one would believe him anyway.

Mr SEENEY: The political coward comes in here and engages in cheap political stunts rather than—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for Callide! Please return to the amendment.

Mr SEENEY: Madam Temporary Chairman, with the greatest of respect, I am prepared to be as relevant to the amendment as the Premier was. What we saw was no attempt to address the amendment, no attempt to address the tree clearing issue. We saw a continuation of a strategy to hype up the issue, to sensationalise the issue. If the Premier had been in here for even a portion of the debate—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I have asked the member for Callide to address the amendment.

Mr SEENEY: I am certainly addressing the amendment, Madam Temporary Chairman. I am responding to the contribution of the Premier, which I take it was about the amendment. The Premier sought to hype up the issue rather than address the specifics of the issue. Had he been here for even a portion of the earlier debate, he would understand how absurd his comments were about the National Party somehow supporting illegal tree clearing. We have made it clear over and over and over again that that is not the case.

This debate has been more about basic fundamental legal rights and civil liberties. That is what this debate has been about, because we all agree that illegal tree clearing has to be curtailed. We certainly explored earlier in this debate the alleged 61,000 hectares that the Premier and the minister—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for Callide should resume his seat.

Mr SEENEY: Why? I have a minute to go.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! Because I am trying to make a ruling and you are ignoring me. I have asked you to return to the amendment. The amendment is about the officers, not about land clearing statistics. I have asked you to return to the amendment. Would you kindly do so?

Mr SEENEY: The amendment is about misleading statements, and I was talking about misleading statements that were made by the Premier and the minister in regard to the alleged illegal clearing which is the basis of this legislation.

Time expired.

Mr HOBBS: The Premier mentioned a while ago the code of conduct that solves this particular issue. There are a number of cases where his code of conduct is not working. As the member for Callide mentioned in relation to the court case at St George, there are departmental staff who basically used misinformation. Those staff are still there. They have not been reprimanded or changed. I will cite another example.

These are cases at present that are under way. This letter from a land-holder says—

There are unfortunately a number of agency officers who are prepared to fabricate the facts and give deliberately false information in an attempt to have prosecutions launched and succeeded against land-holders.

Mr ROBERTSON: Madam Temporary Chairman, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member, to my recollection, has already read this letter into *Hansard* in a debate on a previous clause where we exhaustively discussed issues to do with the code of conduct and the role of the CMC in investigating official misconduct. I would ask you to rule on the question of tedious repetition in terms of the contribution by the member opposite.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: If that is the same letter as the member has read before, I would ask him to stop reading it.

Mr HOBBS: We are talking about false and misleading statements. This is exactly what I was talking about before in relation to these particular statements. At the present moment in Queensland some cases are going on in which officers of this government have given deliberately

false information, and these matters are now being dealt with in the courts. They will come out in due course. The minister knows about these cases. They are quite high profile cases.

This case is not sub judice because it is not before any jury, so we can talk about it. Quite frankly, those officers have not been reprimanded by this minister at all. There has been deliberate misinformation involving a number of officers. I am deadly serious about this. Nothing has been done at this stage.

A government member interjected.

Mr HOBBS: It has nothing to do with the CMC. There is a case going on at the present moment.

A government member: What is the case?

Mr HOBBS: The Ashley McKay case. He has been to court six times and it has cost—

Mr ROBERTSON: Madam Temporary Chairman, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member has just named the individual. That matter, I must inform the honourable member, is still before the courts.

Mr HOBBS: It is not sub judice. It is Magistrates Court.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! Would you resume your seats, please.

Mr Beattie: The Magistrates Court is still a court.

Mr HOBBS: It is not sub judice at all. It is a matter of public record, Madam Temporary Chairman.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: I am asking for advice. Would you all resume your seats. I have been advised that it is a criminal case so it is sub judice and you cannot refer to the case, particularly during this debate. I call the honourable member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you, Madam Temporary Chairman.

Mr Reeves: Are you going to apologise now?

Mr HOBBS: Well, I do not believe that is right. That is a ruling by the chair and we will accept it, but it is certainly not right. It is public evidence. Anyway, we are talking about false and misleading statements. Can the government table the code of conduct for its officers? The government is saying to land-holders that they will incur 50 penalty points for making false and misleading statements.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am happy to assist the honourable member to try to truncate this debate. Go to the web site. It is a public document.

Mr HOBBS: Why does he not bring it into the debate? We do not have a computer here. If he gets his staff to bring it in, we will debate it tonight.

Honourable members interjected.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Members will cease interjecting. I cannot hear the member for Warrego.

Mr WELLINGTON: I note that in the Premier's contribution to the debate on this amendment and the clause he advised the House that he was of the view that the amendment would undermine the code of conduct and the crackdown on legal clearing. I ask the Premier—how does this amendment undermine the code of conduct when I thought this amendment would doubly entrench the importance of the code of conduct and the duties and powers of officers?

Mr ROBERTSON: With respect to the member for Nicklin, earlier in this debate yesterday afternoon, if I recall correctly, we debated this provision at some length. I outlined a number of circumstances. Firstly, where an officer has acted in an illegal way we have the ability to take the matter to the CMC for an individual investigation. Where the officer has provided such misleading information to a court, clearly that officer has perjured himself or herself and therefore that matter gets dealt with by the court or ultimately by the Attorney-General. Where a lesser misleading has occurred, the code of conduct under the Public Service Act applies where, again, an independent body determines the guilt or innocence of that officer to the particular charge, and the appropriate punishment is meted out anywhere from dismissal to, if I recall correctly, a monetary fine at the lesser end.

Mr Beattie: Or demoted.

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes. There is a range of punishments in relation to the Public Service Act. What the Premier was saying—and what I said yesterday—was that the amendment sought by

the opposition is not necessary, because there are already sufficient provisions in this act and in others to deal with officers who according to the seriousness of the particular action act inappropriately. That is why we believe it is unnecessary and why we are not supporting the amendment.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: In speaking to the amendment to clause 26, the Premier made a number of statements and allegations about those of us who may be or have supported the amendments moved by the member for Callide. The fact that some members opposed extensive and intrusive powers to inspectors and enforcement officers does not mean we, as the Premier alleged, support the bulldozers. A check of *Hansard* will show that we have supported officers doing their work, but doing it appropriately. Officers, for example stock inspectors, who are concerned with potentially volatile situations can request police attendance with them at a property to assist that officer completing his or her duties. The same applies to our concerns in relation to the false and misleading statements clauses. We have asked that individual privacy not be unnecessarily compromised by, for example, the new criminal history checks. We wish as much as the next person to see the environment protected, but we also wish to see protected the individual rights and responsibilities of residents in our community who overwhelmingly are honest, responsible citizens.

Mr QUINN: I reiterate the words of the member for Gladstone. Contrary to the Premier's assertion, we are not here to undermine the legislation. We have supported the second reading and the vast majority of the clauses. We have actually examined a number of clauses in detail. To draw the conclusion out of all that that we are against the legislation is really stretching the imagination too far. It does the Premier no credit, frankly, when he knows that we will support the second reading speech, the vast majority of clauses and the third reading. We are entitled to ask explanations of the minister about the meaning of the clauses, how they will apply and if we are of the opinion that they need to be enhanced or improvements made. Anyone on this side, as well as the minister of course, is able to move amendments, debate them and divide on the clauses. That is the process we go through. That is what we are doing now. To simply infer that because we oppose a number of clauses on a range of different bases is just plain ridiculous. It does the Premier no credibility whatever.

The amendment does have some attraction to me, I must admit, because no-one likes to go to a court of law and have a person in authority present evidence found to be wanting and in some cases deliberately concocted to produce a particular result. I am also persuaded by the Premier's and the minister's statements that there are adequate protections in relevant pieces of legislation.

I am convinced that the CMC, the code of conduct and the way in which officers approach their work in general within the Public Service is of a high standard. Whilst there may be occasions where officers deliberately misrepresent something in the court of law, it is not an every day occurrence. Where this deliberate misrepresentation does occur, it ought to be punished to the full extent of the law. I am satisfied under the current codes and the current legal provisions that that is covered. On a regular basis officers are called to give evidence in various legal proceedings, whether they be under the Child Protection Act or whatever. In such situations officers are uncomfortable, but they try as much as possible to represent the truth when they take the oath and stand in a court of law.

By and large, we ought to be proud and pleased that we have a Public Service of such high integrity. I am not dissuaded on the balance of the arguments tonight that this amendment is needed. I consider that what is in the acts at present will cover the circumstances to which people on this side are alluding. If false evidence has been given in the court of law and is found to be false, the person making those allegations in the court deserves to have the book thrown at them. I would expect the government to take all measures to do so, because that undermines the integrity and the independence of the Public Service and strikes at the very heart of what this parliament, the Public Service and the government in general is all about. I ask the minister to give an undertaking that, if such an occurrence does happen in his department, he will in fact ensure that the book is thrown at the person involved, because this is too important an issue to try and put in place some measures which in fact might undermine or might go overboard when the current regime is perfectly adequate for what is needed.

We have an obligation to make those current regimes work properly, and that will enhance the independence and the integrity of the Public Service by our showing our support for them under the current regime and not trying to be too punitive in trying to second guess what they may or may not do in a court of law. With those few words, the Liberal Party supports the

legislation. We have made it quite clear in the public arena and here tonight why we do so. I take offence at the suggestion that because we have opposed or have tried to modify a couple of clauses we oppose the whole legislation. That is patently untrue. But we will be supporting this clause for the reasons I have outlined.

Mr ROBERTSON: I shall briefly respond to the leader of the Liberal Party in relation to the assurance he sought. I place on the record—and quite correctly so—that as minister I have an expectation that my director-general as chief executive of my department has the responsibility and would exercise the responsibility—

Opposition members interjected

Mr ROBERTSON: I am sorry you suffered that interruption, Bob. I have an expectation that my director general as chief executive of the department will do exactly what you seek and has outlined quite responsibly to the House.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: I rise on a point of order. I find the remarks of the member for Warrego most offensive. They are absolutely offensive. On behalf of my department, I find the remarks absolutely offensive. The member will not accuse public servants who are not here to defend themselves of lying before courts.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr ROBERTSON: I already pointed out to your dishonest mate on your left—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The minister will resume his seat.

Mr ROBERTSON: It is a point of order. I have asked him to withdraw.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: I am trying to ask him to withdraw, if the minister will resume his seat. The minister has asked for a withdrawal. Does the member withdraw?

Mr Hobbs: I didn't name him.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I have been advised by the Clerk that the member referred directly to him. I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr HOBBS:—a little bit of debate.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for Warrego will resume his seat.

Mr HOBBS: I will withdraw it.

Mr COPELAND: I rise to support the amendment moved by the shadow minister and Deputy Leader of the Opposition. This is a very simple concept. We are talking about two-way honesty. We are talking about legislating to make sure that property holders do not make false or misleading statements. Similarly, the amendment means that authorised officers, acting on behalf of the government, also do not make false or misleading statements. That is a very simple concept. It is an absolutely simple concept.

Tonight both the minister and the Premier have said that the officers are covered by a code of conduct and by the reference to the CMC. However, that is very different to being covered by legislation, which is what is happening to land-holders under this legislation.

The minister and the Premier say that the public servants are doing the right thing, and I am sure that on the majority of occasions the public servants are doing the right thing. I have no argument with that. However, I do not think that it is a wholehearted thing that happens 100 per cent of the time.

Examples have been quoted during the debate tonight and there are other examples of departmental officers perhaps not doing exactly as they should have done. This amendment is simply trying to put the same obligations on land-holders and on departmental officers. That is a very simple thing.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr COPELAND: Absolutely. It is a fundamental concept calling for honesty on behalf of the land-holder and honesty on behalf of the department. What is difficult about that?

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr COPELAND: I take the interjection from the member for Gregory. Two sets of rules are being enshrined in legislation should the amendment not be supported by the House. The amendment simply says that land-holders should not make false or misleading statements and,

similarly, departmental officers should not make false or misleading statements. It may be that that is covered by a code of conduct. That is debateable and we could debate it for quite some time. It could be referred to the CMC and again that could be debated. However, if we are to legislate that land-holders have to abide by this bill, we should make it absolutely clear that departmental officers also have to abide by a similar requirement not to make misleading or false statements.

I do not see that as being a very difficult concept. I do not see it being in conflict with the code of conduct. I do not see it being in conflict with the potential to report to the CMC. It simply enshrines in legislation certain requirements of departmental officers, which are exactly the same as what is required of land-holders under the legislation.

Under various clauses of this legislation we have debated the requirements of land-holders. I find it particularly offensive—and I back up the points of view of the member for Gladstone, the member for Robina, the member for Callide and numerous other members—the suggestion that we are supporting illegal tree clearing and illegal vegetation clearing. We are trying to make sure that what is being put in legislation is fair to everyone, that the requirements on everyone are absolutely clear and that the land-holders are not being unfairly targeted at the expense of the department. The requirements that are put on the department must be at least as equal to the requirements being put on the land-holders. At this stage in the debate, that is quite clearly not the case.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr COPELAND: That is exactly right. The requirements being put on the land-holders far outweigh the requirements that are being put on the department. We have seen inconsistencies with the mapping. We have seen inconsistencies with the permits. We have seen inconsistencies with the advice that is given by the department. We have to make sure that those inconsistencies are not taken as a rule of law, that the requirements that are put on the department and the departmental officers are just as onerous, just as difficult and just as stringent as those being put on the land-holders.

It is simply not acceptable to say that the land-holders have to carry the burden and the government is the all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing authority when we know that it is not. It has been proven that it is not in court. It has been proven that it is not on the ground. It has been proven that the information that it is interpreting is simply wrong.

We have to ensure that the things that they are interpreting on the ground are accurate. The maps must have groundtruthing, which simply has not happened yet but that is by the by. That relates to a different clause. We have to ensure that the interpretations, the statements that they are making and the supposed facts that they are giving are not false and misleading.

This amendment, which I strongly support, simply says that authorised officers—and isn't that a delightful term—of the government and the department are bound by the same legislative requirements, not simply a code of conduct, and are not simply acting under threat of being reported to the CMC. There must be legislative requirements that are exactly the same as those faced by land-holders.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Before calling the Leader of the Opposition, I would say that I have been listening to this debate upstairs. We are talking about a person not being able to make a false or misleading statement. The argument is that an executive official should not do that either. How many ways can that be said over an hour and a half? I let the last speaker go for six minutes—

Mr Seeney: Did you hear the Premier speaking?

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I will not allow that again from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I have been as tolerant as I can be. The arguments that the last member made have been put in the same way by members opposite for the last hour. If I feel that that continues, I will sit people down. I am not trying to do that. I do not want to be dictatorial. Members have to make a point and the point has been made. To remake it ad nauseam is a bit much. I will call the Leader of the Opposition and I will listen to him carefully. I have been listening to the debate upstairs and I wonder if he will say something different. Members cannot make the same arguments that other members have made.

Mr Seeney: Everybody is entitled to speak once.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Not at all. Everybody is not allowed to speak once. I will listen to the debate. Members cannot make the same arguments in the committee stages, one after another.

It is very clear that if a member persists in irrelevance or tedious repetition, either of his own arguments or the arguments used by other members in the debate, a member can be sat down for it. Members do not have a right in this chamber to get up and say the same thing. That is the point.

Mr SPRINGBORG: At the outset, I would like to make the point that at no stage have I encouraged disregard for the Queensland Vegetation Management Act. I also found offensive what the Premier said earlier on.

A number of issues concern me and I do not believe that the minister in his contribution has adequately answered them. The minister says that the current provisions that exist to discourage and to punish those public servants who seek to gather information and dishonestly represent that information are adequate. Nothing that the minister has said has led me to believe that those provisions that exist under the CMC legislation or in the codes of practice are working in any way.

I would like to hear from the minister what he has done with regard to the Anchorage case. Where is his code of practice? Where has the action been taken against that particular departmental employee who, quite clearly, provided evidence in that court case that was wrong. The minister said that it was a strategic withdrawal. He withdrew from that court case because it was crumbling around him. No action has been taken.

What the minister is saying is theoretical. In effect, the capacity of the CMC to take action against these people and the code of practice does not work. This amendment is simply about equalising and evening the ledger to make sure that the same obligations exist. The honourable member for Cunningham, I think very eloquently, put that point to the parliament and I am not going to go over it. One thing that creates disregard and disdain for the law is when the people of Queensland, who are subject to an act of parliament, are finding that what is expected of them is not expected of others. That is what the minister has not been able to enunciate properly in this parliament.

I will give the members an example of how the CMC's involvement does not work. Only recently, the Premier's office released information in a sexual offences case that it should not have done. It was in contravention of an act of parliament. That action went to the CMC. The CMC said that it was not really deliberate. But if anyone else had done it, they would have been before a court of law.

That is the extent of the investigation that we see from the CMC from time to time. With regard to codes of practice, has the minister ever tried to actually have some of these internal investigative processes and complaints against the public servants brought to proper fruition? We have a process that goes from here, to here, to here, to here, and it comes back to them—

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: No, it comes back. The whole process closes around itself.

Mr Robertson interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I am listening to the member for Southern Downs. I ask the minister to stop interjecting.

Mr Robertson: I was provoked.

The CHAIRMAN: I am getting provoked.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Similarly, the minister says that he believes in natural justice and he says that he believes in civil liberties. Yet, by the provisions of this legislation, he is undermining those tenets that he says that he believes in. In a practical sense, a code of practice is a problem. It is very, very difficult to ensure enforcement. The minister has something that is an aspirational set of guidelines that does not necessarily have the enforcement provisions or enough teeth to discourage people from doing the wrong thing.

All that we are simply saying is that, notwithstanding what the minister is putting forward and prophesying about the CMC's capacity to fix this up and the situation with regard to the code of practice, there needs to be a penalty provision in this legislation that puts equal responsibility on those who are doing the investigation as on those who are being investigated. What is wrong with that? I can give the minister a number of examples of what I have tried to do with numerous departments over the years when I have referred complaints. The whole process under codes of practice and the usual things that work in government just do not work because the process closes in on itself and it leads to an outcome where people become even more disgruntled.

This amendment is simply a deterrent. It is simply something that says that the same obligations exist on the land-holder as exists on the person doing the investigation. If it is not such a problem, then what is wrong in supporting the amendment moved by the honourable member? We support the majority of what is in the minister's bill. We have not argued against the extended penalty provisions in any of our contributions. We have in no way said that we support illegal tree clearing. Any suggestion by the minister or the Premier that we are doing that is completely wrong, it is erroneous and deserves to be treated with contempt. We support the majority of the clauses in this bill. We will continue to do so.

Previously, the Premier said that the test of whether or not we support something is when we support certain clauses. If we support the principle of the bill, support the second reading, and then support the third reading, there is no obligation on us to support all the clauses. Just because we support the principle we can also believe that there are some effective mechanics of the bill that need improving. That is all we are dealing with. The suggestion that in some way that denotes our support for rampant tree clearing is completely and absolutely wrong and needs to be treated with contempt. It is simply a matter of making better, more workable and fairer a piece of legislation that by and large we support.

Mr ROBERTSON: What an extraordinary contribution by the alternative Premier of this state. Tonight, the Leader of the Opposition has just initiated—and I take this as a core promise—that under a National Party government they will undertake to rewrite the whole Public Service Act so that every public servant in this state will now come under the most draconian provisions that we can ever think of. According to the Leader of the Opposition's contribution tonight, a National Party government will turn over decades of public sector law and administrative procedure. That is the tenet of what the Leader of the Opposition said. That was the most grossly irresponsible and, quite frankly, stupid contribution that I have heard in this place in many a year. I refer to the Anchorage case. The Leader of the Opposition—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: Mr Chairman, can I have some protection?

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The minister wants to be heard.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am actually trying to answer those opposite to try to put some truth back into the debate. In relation to the Anchorage case, I am assuming that the member is talking about the evidence provided to the court by a hydrologist. He did not lie to the court.

Mr Hobbs: He gave misleading information—totally misleading information. You know that.

Mr ROBERTSON: He did not lie to the court. He provided evidence based on—

Mr Johnson: He fabricated the facts.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for Gregory!

Mr Hobbs interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: I now warn the member for Warrego under standing order 123. So you can go to bed very, very soon.

Mr ROBERTSON: That was a disgraceful slur on that individual by the member for Gregory.

Mr Johnson interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: I warn the member for Gregory under standing order 123. You can go to bed early, too, if you wish. I am going to have some order in this debate.

Mr ROBERTSON: The person concerned did not provide dishonest information. He did not perjure himself. He did not lie before the court. He provided the outcomes of research that he undertook, which was challenged, like any other piece of research that any of the members may undertake or any other professional or any other scientist undertakes. According to the member's theory, we would not have moved on from the flat earth theory, because science is somehow unchallengeable. It must be definite. So if someone says before a court that the earth is flat—

An opposition member: You'll fall in.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am sorry, I am just waiting for the giggling to die down.

According to the warped point of view of the world of those opposite, the fact that someone presents his research to a court and is challenged represents a lie, represents misleading conduct, represents perjury—that is absolute arrant nonsense. But if the member for Southern

Downs wants to continue to pursue that, just as he wants to pursue rewriting the whole Public Service Act, to go down this ridiculous path—I thank him for his erudite contribution. I would love to see a similar provision put in the Police Service Act, because once it is put in there I might consider putting it in the other acts. Think about that, genius! But the reality is that it is a nonsense from the word go. He knows it. All he is doing is wasting the time of this parliament with his continuing nonsense. Frankly, Leader of the Opposition—the holder of the notion of positive politics—you did yourself a huge disservice tonight.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I listened with interest to the minister's response that he has just delivered where he described the imposition of clause 1(A) on officers of departments as draconian and yet it is reciprocating an obligation on departmental officers that is being imposed by the primary bill on landowners. I find that definition of interest, to say the least. I listened to the member for Robina and his reasons for not supporting the amendments. However, one of the benefits in my mind is that—and I may be dismissed by the minister as a simpleton—having this clause in the legislation which landowners will have to read to understand their new obligations clearly enunciates that the obligation on the landowner to be honest in their dealings with authorised officers applies equally to authorised persons. They do not have to know that there is a code of conduct for the Public Service. They do not have to go to another document; it is there in the legislation that it will be a reciprocal obligation. Both sides—

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Gladstone, that is actually putting what this debate is all about in a nutshell. How many ways do we need to say that? Two and a half hours or three and a half hours? I have been tolerant, but that is the point that has been made by all of you.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I note that there is a higher penalty attached to proposed clause 1(A) applying to the authorised persons. However, I believe that that doubling of the penalty is reasonable as it indicates the disproportionate power attached to the official duties of the officer in his or her capacity as opposed to the disempowered position that most landowners would feel in a situation of challenge. I support the amendments moved by the member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: I conclude my contribution to this debate on these amendments by pointing out that these amendments are about restoring trust. These amendments are about restoring the trust that has been destroyed, the trust that once existed between land-holders and the government—between land-holders and the government officers with whom they have to work. That is what this amendment is about. It is about restoring that trust that has been destroyed by the politicisation of the Vegetation Management Act from the time it was first introduced. It has been destroyed by the type of politicisation that we saw in the Premier's contribution to the debate on this clause. No better example exists than the way that the Premier approached the debate on this clause tonight. That type of politicisation has destroyed whatever trust has existed. This is about restoring that trust. The minister described the provisions contained in the amendments as being a draconian imposition on public servants.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr SEENEY: That is what the minister said. I am entitled to respond and rebut what he said. No-one should even begin to deny that I have the right to do that. The minister described my amendment as a draconian imposition on his authorised officers, yet it is exactly the same provision that his legislation is imposing upon land-holders—exactly the same. How much more of a double standard could he possibly conceive? It is exactly the same.

The CHAIRMAN: As a reasonable person, does the member for Callide not accept that he has now just made exactly the same point that has been made by every other spokesman? He is making exactly the same point. I am trying to be reasonable. Very shortly I am going to start to sit people down and put the amendments. I am going to do that very shortly, because the member is just repeating himself. The member is justifying something the minister said, but his arguments are the same. How many ways does the member want to make the same argument?

Mr SEENEY: Mr Chairman, I do not think anyone could possibly argue that I as the mover of the amendments do not have the right to rebut the arguments that have been put against those amendments in the final contribution. I do not think—

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I will not accept that. The member does not have the right to be repetitious. He does not have the right to be repetitious.

Mr SEENEY: I have only said it once, Mr Chairman. Anyway, I will conclude. I urge every member in this House to look at the amendments I have moved and conduct the reasonableness test that is so often repeated in this legislation with regard to those amendments. I urge members to consider the trust that has been destroyed between land-holders and government officers and

see this amendment as a step towards restoring that trust. These amendments have to be seen against the background of the Vegetation Management Act and what has occurred in the last three years. It cannot be seen in isolation and we cannot make a valid comparison between the situation that exists in that lack of trust that has developed in that situation and the rest of the Public Service. This is a unique situation that has come about because of that politicisation and this is a small step towards redressing that, and I urge the House to support the amendments.

Question—That Mr Seeney's amendments be agreed to—put; and the committee divided—

AYES, 17—Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Springborg, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Hopper

NOES, 58—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Foley, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Quinn, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, C. Scott, D. Scott, Sheldon, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Reeves

Resolved in the **negative**.

Clause 26, as read, agreed to.

Progress reported.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (11.54 p.m.): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Great Trophy Round-up

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (11.55 p.m.): I rise to inform the House about a project initiated by Channel 7 Sunshine Coast sports reporter and presenter Justin Veivers which is guaranteed to put smiles on the faces of many and cost the sporting community little.

Over recent years I have personally attended several events staged by our local Palmwoods Riding for the Disabled group. I have had the opportunity to sponsor awards and have seen first-hand the benefits young disabled riders get out of riding a horse and receiving an award for their efforts. I am therefore calling on all of my parliamentary colleagues and all Queenslanders to get behind Justin's Great Trophy Round-up. While Justin's round-up is still in the development stage, his project is aimed at encouraging trophy-holders to donate unwanted trophies to Riding for the Disabled for their young achievers.

A great supporter of Riding for the Disabled, Justin is in the process of planning the Great Trophy Round-up, starting with requests for trophy donations from pony clubs across the state. He will be encouraging riding enthusiasts to pack up their old unwanted trophies and donate them to their closest Riding for the Disabled organisation. As Justin will tell members, the Great Trophy Round-up will invite trophy-holders to make a small effort. The result is immeasurable.

The Riding for the Disabled organisation provides assisted riding opportunities for children and adults with severe disabilities as well as kids in need of a helping hand. Both Justin and I have seen the smiles on the faces of the young riders when they are presented with a trophy for their efforts, and we both understand the great benefits to these children and their families. Some of the parents of severely disabled children have been told that their child will have very little mobility, will never respond to them, will never smile. Justin will tell members that when the dedicated volunteers from the Riding for the Disabled groups organise special support and saddles for these children so that they can ride, miracles do happen.

The volunteers who make horse riding possible for these children just keep coming up with dedicated ongoing support—providing special riding blankets so that severely disabled children can be safely placed on a horse, with assistance, and experience movement on a horse. Suddenly these children are communicating—maybe not in words but certainly through their responses and their smiles.

While the achievement of riding on a horse is a great one, receiving a trophy for their efforts puts an added smile on the face of these children. Sporting trophies, whether they have been

presented to individuals for a horse riding event or even if they are non-specific trophies presented for other sporting activities, often sit on the shelves of sporting families simply gathering dust. Justin has come up with the idea of recycling these trophies for the benefit of disabled riders, who will see them as a milestone or a great achievement in their lives and will be reminded of their riding experiences. Winning a trophy is a great accomplishment for these young people. It revives the significance of these old trophies. It is about making a little effort for a great result.

I congratulate Justin on his great effort to assist this worthy organisation and I encourage all state government members to consider assisting with the cause by donating unwanted trophies and encouraging sporting friends to donate old trophies or perhaps by serving as a donation centre in areas where there is no Riding for the Disabled organisation nearby.

I have spoken with the Premier about this project and am pleased to inform members that, although he has already donated his trophies to the John Oxley Library, he will find something to donate to the Great Trophy Round-up and will assist in promoting this great cause. I thank the Premier for his leadership and support in this great endeavour.

Caloundra Hinterland Community Development Association

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (11.58 p.m.): I rise to speak about the caring community workers, both paid and voluntary, who are working in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland. Originally these people worked in their own communities, be it Maleny, Landsborough or another hinterland town. As we all know, social issues and problems do not have such structured boundaries.

Back in 1997 the neighbourhood centres of Maleny, Landsborough and Glasshouse, along with the Beerwah and District Youth Activities Centre, or BADYAC as we all lovingly call it, decided that the best way of getting much-needed services to the area was to work collaboratively. They encouraged the Caloundra City Council and the Department of Families to join with them to form a subregional body which could work together to provide a united, cohesive advocacy service. The Caloundra Hinterland Community Development Association was formed.

I first met CHCDA members in 1999 as the new Labor candidate for Glass House. Having been involved with government and community groups for many years, I was amazed to see a collective working together instead of competition.

After a community cabinet meeting with the then Minister for Families, Anna Bligh, the state government recognised the many benefits to both the community and the government of this type of collaborative approach to sharing resources. In 2001 the minister gave triennial funding for Glasshouse, Landsborough and Maleny neighbourhood centres. The CHCDA have many service delivery success stories, such as the Hinterland families liaison workers program, combined centres volunteer training and agreements with many coast service providers for outreach work.

This group has been meeting for seven years, and I am proud to announce that on Saturday, 15 March, I chaired their inaugural meeting as the newly incorporated Hinterland of Caloundra Community Development Association. They are working together to build communities in Beerburrum, Beerwah, Conondale, Glasshouse Mountains, Landsborough, Maleny, Mooloolah and Peachester. Their mission is to have people working together to build strong, sustainable communities that will enhance people's ownership and sense of belonging.

Their aims are to form partnerships to build and strengthen the Hinterland community, provide information and networking, encourage participation of people in community decision making around planning and addressing needs, and to support Hinterland communities to identify and recognise needs and to develop appropriate sustainable responses. The incoming executive team is made up of Bea Rogan, president; Ken Husband, vice president; Howard Buckley, secretary; Greg Kesby, treasurer; and committee members Tina Lathouras, Roger Westcott and Anna Grosskreutz.

As I look through the objects of the new group, it is obvious that cooperation amongst community groups and all levels of government will be the key to the success of this group. There are plans already to map the service need in the area, and I know that the HCCDA is keen to get as many local community organisations on board as it possibly can.

I am sure that, with the commitment, energy and drive that has always been displayed by the many individuals involved in this area, the Hinterland of Caloundra Community Development Association will go from strength to strength and make a real difference to the lives of Glasshouse residents.

Literacy Skills

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (12.01 a.m.): One of the great challenges that faces us and one of the challenges that has been the subject of many studies in recent times is that of improving literacy skills, in boys particularly. Literacy skills are one of those things that we try to address in our education system, but literacy skills in boys provides a particular challenge to us.

I was particularly pleased to receive a letter from the Cecil Plains State P-10 School, which is in my electorate, inviting me to participate in a program which it is introducing into its schools to proactively address some of the problems facing boys and reading, and that is the male role model reading program—which is quite difficult to say, especially at this time of night. It is something that I was particularly pleased to participate in. For as long as I can remember I have had a love of reading. It is probably not something that is seen as a particularly masculine thing to do.

Mr Bredhauer: You have read two books.

Mr COPELAND: No, I have read more than two books. I know that the minister, being a former schoolteacher, has. And I know that he will know the relevance of this particular program. I was particularly pleased to be invited by Cecil Plains State School P-10 to participate in this program with grade 6 and 7 students to be a role model reader. The program involved not just the male students but also the entire class, and it entailed discussing a book which we were reading by Paul Gennings called *The Gismo*, which took about three-quarters of an hour to read. So it was quite a long book to read out loud.

Mr BREDHAUER: My 12-year-old daughter read it in 30 minutes.

Mr COPELAND: When not reading it out loud, I am sure the minister probably could have, and I know that I could have as well. The questions that were raised by the students in the class were very good. We talked about the role of reading in my job, the way that we read, the things that we read, the books that we read, favourite authors, the importance of reading but, most importantly, how I love reading and that reading is a lifelong passion to pursue.

I pay tribute to Janelle Moore, the learning support teacher at Cecil Plains, Tanya Looker, who was the class teacher, and Louise Ross, who is the principal of Cecil Plains, for implementing this program. Paul Antonio, the mayor of the Millmerran shire, was the first participant in this program. He took part the week before I did, but following me there were a large number of males within the company, the school community and the broader community, who are participating in this program.

I hope that it is a success. I know I really enjoyed the time I spent at Cecil Plains. I know that Paul also enjoyed the time that he spent with the class. I hope it is a success with promoting reading, especially with the males in that school.

Ms K. Denman

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (12.04 a.m.): Last Friday, 21 March, I, in company with the member for Cleveland and the member for Capalaba, had the pleasure of attending the graduation ceremony at the Moreton Institute of TAFE. At the conclusion of the night, there was a vote of thanks moved by one of the students. The student that had been selected was Kerry Denman. I was most impressed by her speech. She was a most eloquent speaker and did a really good job. Later on after the ceremony I did not get the opportunity to speak personally to Kerry, but I spoke to one of her instructors, a Lyn Briers, who is in charge of the child studies team at the Moreton Institute of TAFE.

I complimented Lyn on Kerry's performance, and Lyn provided me with some information about Kerry which only served to increase my admiration for her. Kerry had been nominated for Adult Learner of the Year in 2002. Kerry lives on Coochiemudlo Island and has to travel by both boat and car to study at the Moreton Institute of TAFE. She is married with three children—Ali, aged 14, Kiah, aged 12, and Luka, aged 6. Not only has Kerry successfully combined family and study; her work is of an outstanding quality.

I am advised that combining full-time studies with family life is a feat in itself, but as well Kerry has completed a certificate III in Health Science (Emergency Care and Transport) with the Queensland Ambulance Service to qualify as an honorary ambulance officer. This extra course of three months of part-time study involves three nights a week with four whole weekends as well as

take-home packages. She volunteers as a third officer with ambulance crews to complete the practical component of this course.

Having a qualified ambulance officer on call on Coochiemudlo Island is a significant contribution to the community in which Kerry lives. Kerry has been nominated by the entire child care studies team at the Moreton Institute of TAFE as a student of excellence. Kerry's commitment to learning can be seen by her consistent attendance in class, the thoughtful, insightful contributions she makes to group discussions, the excellent standard of her work that she submits for assessment as well as the high quality of her practice on the job. She is respectful of the needs of her fellow students and staff and is always willing to be of assistance.

Kerry began her studies in child care at Moreton Institute of TAFE but requested to return to Cherbourg preschool as her first industry placement. Kerry's studies in child care have contributed significantly to the lives of others. She utilised her skills and knowledge gained in her studies by coordinating a play group on Coochiemudlo Island; thereby enhancing the lives of the children and families in this community. This was all done as a volunteer.

Kerry has also called on her knowledge and skills acquired in the child studies course when home schooling her daughter Kiah during grades four and five. During this time, she was also studying part time. Kerry's personal manner is gentle, calm and nurturing and she will be a wonderful asset to the child care profession and a wonderful representative for the Moreton Institute of TAFE.

Fuel Prices

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (12.07 a.m.): Once again we have seen the price of fuel in Australia increase dramatically since the outbreak of war in Iraq. Fuel consumers across Australia through their exposure to the world market for oil are exploited time and time again. Undoubtedly, the oil companies have some questions to answer in relation to the movement of fuel prices in Australia. However, the fact remains that while reserves in Australian oil are running down, and if further oil resources are not found shortly and found fast, we will be more exposed to the world market, and that includes Middle East crudes.

At the end of the day whether we get our oil locally or from the Middle East, the issue is of supply and price, and unfortunately they both go hand in hand. The only way we can get out of this nexus is to produce and supplement our own fuel supply with locally produced product from resources other than oil, and that is obviously ethanol. Currently in Mackay at the laboratories of SRI under the management of Graeme Bullock, research is being undertaken to investigate a new process for the production of ethanol. With funding of more than $700,000, scientists are endeavouring to prove up a new process for converting cane sugar to ethanol by microbial fermentation rather than by yeast fermentation, which is currently used.

The new process, if proven, will produce up to 50 per cent more ethanol than is available through the current technology and does not produce CO2, a greenhouse gas as a byproduct. Zeachem is a trade name for this new process, and SRI will be reporting progress by the end of April this year. If successful, the process will deliver ethanol at a price that is equivalent to petroleum fuel, i.e. it will go head to head with petrol.

More importantly, the environmental benefits of ethanol are enormous. Contrary to the spin that the oil companies have recently put on the ethanol debate, all manufacturers of vehicles throughout the world warrant their vehicles for a 10 per cent blend of ethanol—and that is a fact. For example, cars in Brazil run on a blend of 22 per cent to 26 per cent without any major modifications at all. This debate has been run in the USA and has been proven to be a corrupt and untruthful spin by the fuel and oil companies throughout the western world. It is all about retaining market share and putting the ethanol industry in Australia back 10 years.

Ethanol will become a fuel for the future because of its environmental credentials. For example, a 10 per cent blend reduces emissions by 30 per cent. It is renewable and has import replacement value. Indeed, the sugar industry on its own can meet the federal government's requirement for all electrical energy produced by 2010 to have a two per cent component supplied by renewables. Ethanol, co-generation and gasification can go a long way to meeting this target. The sugar industry can well and truly meet these levels on its own. Of course, the issue of carbon credits is also something that the sugar industry needs to investigate proactively with a view to providing another income source for struggling cane farmers.

Use of Pocket PCs in Schools

Ms KEECH (Albert—ALP) (12.11 a.m.): Members know the great value that the Beattie government places on education as the key to progress and innovation in the Smart State. I am therefore happy to rise to speak about an exciting new IT trial that has begun in three schools in my electorate. Windaroo and Cedar Creek State Schools and the new Upper Coomera State College join a number of state schools across Queensland which have been chosen to take part in the trial of cutting-edge, hand-held minicomputers that can access the Internet. These pocket PCs, as they are called, are being trialled to discover the best way they can support teachers' work both in and out of the classroom. As a registered teacher myself, I know how important it is to provide our teachers and students with the most up-to-date resources in order to create the best possible learning environment.

The PCs are compact, take seconds to boot and easily fit into a teacher's pocket. Teachers can take them anywhere and plan, evaluate and report where and when they want either in the classroom, the playground or at home. With these pocket PCs, teachers will be able to mark the roll and have it go straight into a central data base, enter the students' records without having to transfer data from paper to computer, and download learning resources. Teachers in the Smart State know there is much to be gained by embracing the exciting and innovative technology available to us in the 21st century. I congratulate the Hon. Anna Bligh, Minister for Education, for her ongoing efforts to make the Smart State vision a reality for every Queensland student.

Last week, I visited Windaroo State School to see the pocket PC in action myself. Year 6 teacher John Waller said he is excited about the pocket PC and its potential. Backed up by a hard working and dedicated P&C, I am proud to say that Windaroo State School continues to go from strength to strength in its quest to fulfil its motto of 'caring and learning together'. I have many reasons to be proud of all the 20 state and non-state schools in Albert. However, our family has a special attachment to Windaroo State School since two of our three children received their excellent primary education at this fine school. As well, I had the privilege of being its relief teacher in the early years. I thank the departing principal, Terry McCarthy, and warmly welcome the acting principal, Greg Dickman, to this Smart State school, a school which the local community and I are extremely proud of.

Ambulance Levy

Mr FLYNN (Lockyer—ONP) (12.15 a.m.): There are power games being played around the issue of the ambulance levy. I have spoken on the issue in the House before. In a question without notice on 25 February this year, I asked the Premier if instead of attempting to collect the levy—with which I hasten to agree—by means of Energex bills, that he request the cooperation of the federal government to collect it under the auspices of Medicare, it would capture almost all Queenslanders far more equitably than any proposals considered thus far. Polling within my electorate revealed that this option was totally acceptable. Indeed, following regional publication I received some considerable support for this plan from many people outside Lockyer. I supported members of the opposition tonight in their motion, but at the same time I was aware that there appeared to be a lack of alternatives offered to the government's power bill plan. One Nation has offered alternatives, the first of which, as I described, required the cooperation of the federal government.

In his reply to my question the Premier agreed that he would very much like the levy to be collected in Queensland on behalf of Medicare, implying, in my opinion, that he agreed that this method was a better alternative. The Premier undertook to convey this suggestion to the federal government; indeed, following his letter addressed to the Prime Minister and my communication to the office of the federal Minister for Health I received a reply from the minister's parliamentary secretary. In brief, the minister's reply was that, no, they would not permit the levy collection via Medicare as when it was set up it had not been intended for use in the manner I proposed.

I table a copy of the Premier's letter to the Prime Minister and a copy of the Health Minister's reply. It demonstrates to me a clear indication of a lack of cooperation between the states and the Commonwealth, something which I fear will always be the case. I also table media releases dated 17 December 2002 entitled, 'Cheaper national ambulance cover through Medicare as tax system'; 19 December 2002, 'Prime Minister asked to bring ambulance cover under Medicare'; 25 February this year, 'Collect ambulance levy through Medicare'; and 17 March, 'Governments play political games over the Medicare levy.'

I note that in the Premier's letter to the Prime Minister, dated 27 February, he referred to his original correspondence on this issue dated 17 February, two months following my original suggestion. Following my reply from the federal government, we went back to the drawing board after consultation with various bodies. We concluded that perhaps it was a matter of cost to the federal government and that that prompted it to refuse any assistance. Our suggestion now is that the Queensland state government pay a premium, to be determined by the federal government, for access to the Medicare databank, allowing our state to directly bill Queenslanders. This option is the only one which equitably charges Queensland residents to properly fund our ambulance service, so badly in need of support.

I repeat to government—what about people not on the grid like myself on a stand-alone power system? What about multiple families living under one roof? What about the much mentioned small businesses unfairly charged several times because this government cannot get its plan right? We all support the levy, or if we do not we should. It is just the absolute inequity of the current proposal. I would recommend the Premier revisit the Medicare proposal under its changed perspective.

Furfural

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (12.17 a.m.): There has been much debate of late in both government and industry circles around the need for diversification and value-adding in the sugar industry. While many have been content to focus on the reasons why it is not possible, others have risen to the challenge of finding a way forward and have taken decisive steps to achieve that goal. The Board of the Proserpine Cooperative Sugar Milling Association provides an excellent example of a group with the can-do attitude that is so badly needed in this besieged industry.

The board, under the chairmanship of Mr Dick Dray, has seized on a project that has the potential to enhance profits and reduce the cooperative's exposure to low world sugar prices. They have begun a full feasibility study into the development of a furfural plant at the Proserpine Mill. Furfural is a speciality chemical made from agricultural waste products including bagasse, the fibrous component of the cane plant remaining after cane juice has been extracted. Present uses for furfural include: as a solvent in the manufacture of lubricating oil, as a non-toxic nematicide and as a feedstock for furfuryl alcohol and many other chemicals used in paints, golf balls, lycra, skateboard wheels, flavourings, pharmaceuticals, et cetera. The really exciting dimension to the development of a furfural plant is that it will not detract from the mill's current focus, the production of sugar, molasses and electricity. The production of furfural will complement these activities and, most importantly, has the potential to provide jobs on a year-round basis rather than the much shorter season associated with sugar production alone.

The Proserpine sugar mill is the mainstay of the town's economy, so this type of investment in local jobs would be welcomed by the whole community. While I am keen to heap praise on the vision and enterprise demonstrated by the mill's board, I also want to say how proud I am that the government, through the Department of State Development, has taken an active and supportive role in this project to date. The DSD approved a dollar-for-dollar Regional Business Development Scheme grant of $46,750, which enabled the board to undertake a pre-feasibility study. The results of the pre-feasibility study have given the board the confidence to go ahead with the next stage, which will involve the construction of a pilot plant reactor and a period of trialling taking place in South Africa.

This project epitomises the sort of smart thinking and development that this government is championing in its Smart State vision. I am really excited by the potential benefits that furfural production could bring to Proserpine. If the reality meets the expectation, it will be a win for local canegrowers and millers, a win for the environment and a win for the local community.

Country Racing

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (12.19 a.m.): I rise tonight to speak about a group of people who took part in Clip for Cancer on Saturday, 15 March in my local town of Bell. It was a very humbling experience to have to line up and have my head shaved for such a wonderful cause. A number of local people had their heads shaved, and a number of women had their hair coloured, with each and every one of them raising a good amount of money for such a wonderful cause. The total amount of money raised for the night was in excess of $12,600.

I would personally like to thank the members who supported me with sponsorship. I will not recognise them tonight. However, I will be personally contacting them all in the near future.

It just goes to show the spirit that exists in our small country towns such as Bell, Warra and Jandowae. It saddens me tonight to say that that spirit has been massively crushed with what our Racing Minister has failed to address. Our country race clubs are being totally disregarded, ignored, pushed aside and destroyed—yes, destroyed!

The town of Bell has well over 50 volunteers who run our race days. I must say that not one of them gets paid for the work that they do. The member for Keppel spoke about the beauty of his race course, and I can say that the town of Bell takes a fair bit of matching. I am a member of that club and I also act as Clerk of the Course.

Each and every year the Race Club puts on a theatre restaurant in which my family sometimes participates. It is put together by locals who participate in dance and drama, and it really is a magnificent display of what country people are all about. This theatre restaurant makes a few thousand dollars every year for our club.

Bell has been cut from four meetings a year to two. Well done, Minister! She really has no idea about and no feeling towards our country clubs. This government just could not care less about our rural people. Can members imagine the spirit of the people involved in our theatre restaurant this year? It will be crushed. I congratulate this government for its callous disregard of bush racing and country people in general.

Warra has been cut from two meetings a year to one. That is all Warra has each year. This is the only event that takes place in Warra. This government should hang its head in shame! What about Jandowae? It has gone from three meetings a year to one.

What about Dalby? Dalby has lost its TAB race meetings. Dalby is a massive club for a country town, and this could well be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Well done, Minister!

Two records were broken at the last race meeting at Dalby. One was an Australian record and the other was a track record. Over 1,000 people attended the race meeting. The minister is taking this away from us. The only thing that she can do is stand down and let someone take her place—someone who understands the racing industry.

Noosa

Ms MOLLOY (Noosa—ALP) (12.22 a.m.): I rise to inform the house of more good news on the environmental front in my electorate of Noosa, which clearly demonstrates the Labor government's commitment to preserving Queensland's valuable natural assets. In February, the Premier and Minister Wells were in Coolum to announce that some 303 hectares of habitat for the threatened ground parrot had been acquired by the state government to add to Noosa National Park, lovingly known to locals as D-Bird Land. This state land at Coolum, west of the existing national park, had been transferred from Department of State Development control and would be added to the park in the near future. The land contains magnificent wallum heath and will help the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to further protect the threatened ground parrot.

This followed the announcement in January that the state government had purchased two blocks totalling 400 hectares on the Sunshine Coast, with the help of the Maroochy Shire Council, to protect sensitive coastal land from future development. These additions will help to link 600 hectares added to Noosa, Mount Coolum and Triunia national parks in 2001, and will provide a green corridor that stretches from the Maroochy River through to Noosa.

The news has been welcomed by local environmental groups with Noosa Parks Association President, Michael Gloster, describing the protection of such environmentally sensitive land so close to urban areas as "unique to south east Queensland." I take this opportunity to thank the Sunshine Coast Environment Council, particularly Lindsay Holt and Darryl Fry, along with John Fuller and Coolum Parks Association for their commitment to this glorious environment and for their support and advice in my endeavours to ensure the fruition of this project. The additions take the Sunshine Coast Cooloola allocations of national park to more than 75,000 hectares. This is all part of the Labor government's vision for the future use of state-owned land between the Maroochy and Noosa rivers, and will help preserve the Sunshine Coast's natural values.

The House should also be aware that the state's national parks are not only good news for environmentalists, but they also make good economic sense and that means jobs. Queensland's parks and forests cover about 11.5 million hectares of the state, and bring in more than 13 million

visitors a year and much-needed income to local communities. When the Premier was in Coolum he also said that 140 new park rangers would help to provide the necessary management for the state's national parks network. This can be added to the potential for further employment in the tourism sector. Tourism is a key economic driver in my electorate of Noosa and, given its extraordinary environmental values and biodiversity, there is certainly scope to develop niche markets in eco-tourism.

The national parks hold the potential to deliver new visitor experiences in a variety of geographical locations and habitats and offer new opportunities for soft adventure. I would like to congratulate this government, not only on its commitment to preserving our natural heritage but also on its foresight in providing assets that will help drive ecologically sustainable economies. I would also like to thank the member for Kawana, Chris Cummins, and the member for Glass House, Carolyn Male, for joining me in my electorate for the final announcement of this land parcel to national parks.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 12.25 a.m. (Thursday)