



WEEKLY HANSARD

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51ST PARLIAMENT

Subject

CONTENTS

Page

Wednesday, 16 June 2004

NATIONAL COMPETITION POLICY	1425
AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT	1425
PETITIONS	1425
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1425
Wally Lewis; Honorary Ambassador for Queensland	1425
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1426
Trade and Investment Mission: Chile, Brazil and the United States	1426
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1427
World Meat Congress 2006	1427
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1428
Toowoomba Show Grounds	1428
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1429
Queensland Economy	1429
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1430
Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood	1430
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1431
Small Business	1431
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1431
Tactical Crime Squads	1431
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1432
Federal Election, Electoral Rolls	1432
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1432
AusLink	1432
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1434
Fishing Laws	1434
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1434
Tree Clearing	1434
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1435
National Parks, Tourism	1435
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT	1435
Indigenous Achievement	1435

Table of Contents — Wednesday, 16 June 2004

SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION COMMITTEE	1436
Report	1436
NOTICE OF MOTION	1436
Commercial and Recreational Fishing	1436
PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	1436
Ethanol	1436
Magnus Johansson	1436
Broadbeach Bowls Club	1437
WorldSkills	1437
Imports, Assessment Panels	1438
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	1438
Inbound Tour Operators	1438
Emergency Services, Call-out Fees	1439
Aviation Industry	1439
Royal Brisbane Hospital, Plumbing Malfunctions	1440
Indigenous Art	1440
Royal Brisbane Hospital, Plumbing Malfunctions	1441
Safety in Schools	1441
Specific Purpose Grants	1442
Lawasia Headquarters	1443
Marine Effluent	1443
Innovation, High-Tech Industry	1444
Redcliffe Rail Link	1445
Island Councils, Auditor-General's Report	1445
State-Controlled Roads, Traffic Congestion	1446
Water Police, Thursday Island Search and Rescue Boat	1446
Tree-Clearing Permits	1447
Fight Fire Fascination Program	1448
State Schools, Insurance Cover	1449
Red-Eared Slider Turtle	1449
DUTIES AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)	1449
First Reading	1449
Second Reading	1449
CHILD SAFETY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL	1450
Second Reading	1450
Committee	1488
Third Reading	1491
NATURE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL	1491
Second Reading	1491
Committee	1493
Third Reading	1493
COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL FISHING	1493
ADJOURNMENT	1503
Vietnam Veterans Subcommittee, Toowoomba RSL Sub-Branch	1503
Legal Aid Commission	1503
Hockey, Maryborough	1504
Poly Optics Australia, DuPont Award Win	1505
Schools, Charters Towers	1505
Road Safety, Kallangur Electorate	1506
Racing Industry, Gold Coast	1506
Whitsunday Festivals	1507
Central Queensland University	1508
Rugby League Television Coverage	1508

WEDNESDAY, 16 JUNE 2004

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

NATIONAL COMPETITION POLICY

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise that on 28 May 2004 I received a letter from the Prime Minister in response to a resolution passed by this House on 21 April 2004 in relation to the impact of competition policy.

I lay upon the table of the House a letter for the information of members.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I report that today I received from the Auditor-General a report entitled *Audit Report No. 10 2003-04—Results of audits performed for island councils*.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Vehicle Access, Three Rivers Beach, Byfield

Mr Hoolihan from 713 petitioners requesting the House to ensure vehicle access is continued to Three Rivers Beach at Byfield for tourists, recreational fishers, surf groups, commercial fishers and licensed beach worm gatherers.

Tax Relief, Pensioners

Mr Hoolihan from 543 petitioners requesting the House to give relief to pensioners in the form of a rebate on added taxes.

Recreational Activities, Nine Mile Beach

Mr Hoolihan from 774 petitioners requesting the House to allow citizens to continue using Nine Mile Beach, from Stockyard Point on the north to the boundary of beach area on the national park on the south, for camping and recreational activities all year.

Ms C. Wong

Ms Lee Long from 1 petitioner requesting the House to reinstate Christina Wong as a Queensland doctor; institute an independent inquiry into the revelations of the Ombudsman; order a written public apology; arrange just and fair redress, rehabilitation programs and an appropriate doctor's position and assistance with a legal appeal against Christina Wong's deregistration.

Foreshore Erosion, Clifton Beach

Mr O'Brien from 41 petitioners requesting the House to generate support for preventing the loss of Clifton Beach due to foreshore erosion.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Wally Lewis; Honorary Ambassador for Queensland

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.33 a.m.): Twelve months ago I made a promise and today I am going to honour that promise; today we are going to make Wally Lewis an honorary ambassador for Queensland. I know I speak on behalf of all members when I welcome Wally to the gallery today. It is great to have him here. I notice that he has got the right coloured tie on—maroon! It is right that today I make Wally Lewis an honorary ambassador for this state. He is, after all, one of Queensland's greatest players, one of our greatest sons.

Queensland's first State of Origin coach, John McDonald AM, is known for his ability to detect rugby league talent. John said of Wally when picking that first Origin team, 'He'll be the best player we've had.' He turned out to be spot on. Now two great components of Rugby League's modern era, the State of Origin and the Brisbane Broncos, are directly linked to Wally's presence. What better time to present an honorary ambassadorship to Wally than State of Origin week in Queensland for the second State of Origin match.

Let us have a look at a bit of history here: in April 1978 Wally made his first grade debut, arguably for the greatest club of all, and that is Valleys. I have to admit to being a Valleys supporter. I have some supporters here, Wally; but the Deputy Premier, of course, is an Easts supporter, which I will overlook.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The Deputy Premier says that the Broncos are borrowing Easts' captain for Saturday so I do not argue with that.

In 1978, Wally the young diehard made his Maroons debut against New South Wales when chosen as a replacement in the final interstate game. He was first selected in their starting side in 1980 at half-back, but the King's best was yet to come. With a State of Origin debut alongside the great master Arthur Beetson in that unforgettable first game in 1980 began the most memorable part of Wally's stellar career. Wally was to then dominate State of Origin with eight man of the match performances in 11 years—not a bad achievement. Every time the Emperor took the field in a maroon jumper, especially at his beloved Lang Park, everyone knew, be they at the ground or watching on television, that every Queensland hope was with Wally. His very presence engendered passion. He was revered in this state and he was despised by the Blues and their supporters, the depth of which has probably never been seen since. Explosive speed, a freakish passing game, adroit kicking and bone-jarring defence, Wally had it all.

Who can forget Origin II in 1989? Scores were locked at 12-all, but Queensland only had 12 men standing. From 40 metres out Wally angled toward the New South Wales corner and he just kept going and going. He beat off the tackles of Chris Mortimer and Laurie Daley before carrying test fullback Garry Jack over the line.

Mr Horan: As the song went, like a Stradbroke Island shark.

Mr BEATTIE: That is exactly right. I take that interjection. In one moment we hit the front. The Sydney crowd was struck dumb, which is their best position, and the home state went hoarse roaring with pride. It was a magic moment.

Wally played 42 times for Queensland, including 31 Origin games. He also made 53 appearances for Australia, including 33 tests, 1 World Cup game and 19 tour matches.

I have to simply say: Wally, well done! It is a great honour to have you here today. I will be presenting Wally with his honorary ambassadorship in front of parliament very shortly. I know I have the support of all members of this House when I say thankyou to Wally for what he has done for the sport. We look forward to the Queensland State of Origin team winning tonight. Wally, thank you very much.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Trade and Investment Mission: Chile, Brazil and the United States

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.38 a.m.): On Thursday I returned from a very successful trade and investment mission to Chile, Brazil and the United States. I will table a highly detailed report on that mission at a later date, probably in August, but I want to provide members with a summary today. In doing that one of the things that Tony McGrady, Minister for State Development and Innovation, and I released in San Francisco was the new 175-page directory designed to showcase the Smart State's strengths in scientific research and development to the world. I table two copies of that document for the information of the House. I also seek leave to incorporate the rest of my ministerial statement in *Hansard* as part of my formal report on my overseas trip.

Leave granted.

The biggest achievement of the mission was securing the agreement of Brazilian President Luis Inacio da Silva to co-operate on the possibility of developing an ethanol export industry.

Many people have seen Brazil as an enemy of our sugar industry.

In fact, Queensland can win a future for our sugar industry with Brazil as a friend.

My meetings with President da Silva and Vice-President Jose Alencar were the first by an Australian leader and I invited them to visit Queensland.

Brazil has much expertise in manufacturing not just ethanol but also ethanol plants.

We need to use their expertise in manufacturing ethanol plants and then join with them in exporting ethanol to Japan.

The Brazilian Government agreed to help organise an ethanol roadshow in Queensland later this year to inform people about ethanol issues.

I also announced the Queensland Government would organise a major international conference in 2005 on the future of ethanol.

Since then, Caneharvesters executive officer John Powell has joined me in calling on the Federal Government to mandate for a 10 per cent ethanol blend in fuel.

Caneharvesters have issued a media release headlined: 'The Federal Government must mandate ethanol'.

And Alan Jones has also said it's time to back my call for a mandate.

When I was with the Brazilian Prime Minister we also talked positively about collaborations on biotechnology.

At BIO 2004 in San Francisco I announced the Smart State Research Facilities Fund will provide a total of \$34 million in the third round of funding for seven projects.

The \$34 million comprises:

- \$8.1M to the University of Queensland to establish a Queensland Preclinical Drug Development Facility in Brisbane;
- \$3.5M to the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to establish Queensland Crop Development Facilities at Ormiston and QUT's Gardens Point campus in Brisbane;
- \$9.5M to the University of Queensland to establish a Centre for Advanced Animal Science at Gatton;
- \$3.0M to the Mater Medical Research Institute in Brisbane to support cancer and other disease research;
- \$5M to the Queensland University of Technology to establish a Medical Engineering Research Facility;
- \$2.2 million to the University of Queensland to expand the Queensland Hypersonic Testing Facility Centre in Brisbane and Toowoomba; and
- \$2.52 million to the Queensland Institute of Medical Research to establish a Queensland Viral Testing and Product Characterisation Centre in Brisbane.

I also announced other funding, including:

- \$5 million towards the development of a Queensland Clinical Trials Network which will be a one-stop shop for overseas or interstate companies which want to conduct drug trials in Queensland;
- \$4.7 million for a Smart State Health and Medical Research Fund to support and encourage Queensland's health and medical researchers;
- \$3 million towards the establishment of a Centre for New Foods.

While at BIO 2004 I also announced:

- The 2004 recipients of the Smart State Fellowship Fund which was created to attract and retain world-class scientists;
- Biotech company Panbio will move most of its American manufacturing operations to Queensland, creating more than 50 new high-tech jobs;
- A simultaneous ICT mission to Canada;
- The creation of a network for expatriates working in high tech industries so that the Queensland-based Australian Institute for Commercialisation could use their expertise and contacts to create mentoring and investment opportunities;
- The release of a report Queensland Bioindustries 1999-2004 which forecasts that if the Government continues to give biotechnology a high priority, the industry will employ 2,500 people by 2010 and 10,000 by 2025;
- The release of a new, 175-page directory designed to showcase the Smart State's strengths in scientific research and development to the world (and I table a copy of the directory);
- The holding of—
 - the 2004 World Congress on Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics in Brisbane, attracting about 1,500 delegates;
 - the 2004 Ausbiotech National Conference in Brisbane, attracting about 1,500 delegates;
 - the 2004 International Strawberry Symposium on the Sunshine Coast, attracting about 300 delegates;
 - the marketing in California of two Queensland-developed strawberry varieties;
 - Griffith University researchers were promoting their work on developing a skin cancer vaccine technology;
 - the way in which the Queensland delegation to BIO 2002 had led to the commercial development of VitroGro, a QUT product to accelerate the healing of wounds;
 - the awarding by the US Food and Drug Authority of Orphan Drug status to Progen Industries' PI-88 drug for the treatment of malignant melanoma and other cancers.

I also signed the Australia-New Zealand Biotech Alliance to market Australian biotechnology to the world—a concept I had been working on since 2002.

In Chile I announced that Queensland company Electrometals Technologies had won a contract to build a plant in Chile and that a major Chilean supermarket chain would stock Queensland products.

I met the Chilean Minister of Economy and Energy and the acting Minister of Mines, and I opened the new regional headquarters of Mincom, the Queensland-based software company which has recently won two major contracts in South America.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

World Meat Congress 2006

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.39 a.m.): This morning I am delighted to announce that Brisbane has won the right to host the prestigious World Meat Congress in 2006. Winning such a major international congress is a vote of confidence in the Queensland meat industry, in Brisbane and in the Smart State. It is a real coup and I want to thank State Development Minister, Tony McGrady, and his department for making this happen.

Hosting this event reaffirms Queensland's position as Australia's premier state for meat processing and also the destination for international events. Queensland exports meat and meat products worth more than \$2.5 billion to more than 100 countries—this accounts for 61 per cent of Australia's total meat exports and firmly puts the Smart State at No. 1. The three-day congress, to be held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, will bring together between 600 and 800 industry representatives from around the world. It will be held from 26 April to 29 April 2006 to discuss current industry challenges and showcase Queensland's meat industry. In an excellent Smart State

dovetailing, it is an ideal lead in to the 2006 Australian National Beef Expo in Rockhampton from 1 May to 7 May.

Already this morning I have asked the Minister for Public Works who is also the member for Rockhampton, Robert Schwarten, to advise Beef Expo 2006 Chairman, Geoff Murphy, of this news, so that every interlinking opportunity possible between the congress and the expo is taken up. I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my ministerial statement in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The draft program for Rockhampton's Beef Expo has an international conference listed for the first day—I suspect with today's news they will have little trouble attracting world beef leaders to attend.

Queensland's Congress win was officially announced overnight by the Managing Director of Meat & Livestock Australia, Mr Mark Spurr at 2004 World Meat Congress in Winnipeg—Canada.

Mr Spurr is chair of the 2006 World Meat Congress organizing committee and we wish him and his committee well.

The World Meat Congress is held every two years and attracts meat industry professionals from throughout the world to discuss the industry and to analyse trends and issues.

Recent Congresses have been held in Sydney (1993), Denver (1995), Beijing (1997), Dublin (1999), Belo Horizonte (2000) and Berlin (2002).

This year Queensland will host major events including the Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics Congress, AusBiotech Conference 2004 and the World Congress of the International Society for Heart Research.

The State Government is making a concerted effort to attract international conferences and events to Queensland, especially those that are closely aligned to our priority industries.

As the State's largest primary industry and an employer of 14,000 Queenslanders, the meat industry certainly falls in that category.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Toowoomba Show Grounds

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.40 a.m.): Immediately after question time I am off to Toowoomba to unveil a successful rescue package. Today, I am returning to the Toowoomba show grounds to detail a \$271,000 total funding package that shores up its future. Early last year, Kerry Shine, the member for Toowoomba North, and I met privately with the Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland's Chairman—RASQ—John McDonald AM, his CEO, Damon Phillips, and members of the RASQ's committee and we promised to help. We gave them a commitment we would do what we could. It looked grim, but it needed our help.

Today, I can say that with \$150,000 from the state government, \$75,000 from the Toowoomba City Council, \$10,000 from Jondaryan Shire Council and a matching restructure from the society's bank, the future up there looks far brighter indeed. The show grounds are magnificent. The member for Toowoomba South, Mike Horan, and the member for Cunningham, Stuart Copeland, were both former managers, as was Peter Johnstone, Robert Schwarten's senior policy advisor. They all deserve recognition.

But despite their efforts it was battling debt. After hearing of its plight on that coolish February night last year—while I was there opening the new \$850,000 State Equestrian Centre—I knew we had to do something. Today, courtesy of Kerry's persistence and the cooperation of the local councils, the Show Society and its bank, we have delivered.

Also today, I can detail that 'Treasurer AAA', Terry Mackenroth, has approved an extra grant of \$121,000 to further improve the Equestrian Centre. Enclosure of the centre's western wall provides weather protection for participants and spectators. This improves the centre's use and capacity to attract and host major events all year round. As I said last year, the centre adds another nation leading facility to sit perfectly along side Toowoomba's cherished reputations in manufacturing, gardening, education and tourism—that is smart. The centre will be used next June for the world sheep shearing and handling titles. This international event has been made possible by my government's Queensland Events Corporation securing those titles. Queensland Events Corporation is in my portfolio. Those world titles will be staged from 8 June to 12 June and are expected to draw teams of shearers from 26 nations bringing international exposure, employment and tourism dollars to the region. It is hoped that with good management the RASQ will continue to be one of the great Downs institutions.

While on Toowoomba issues, Saturday night's wine show attracted about 300 wine entries from around Australia, with about half being from Queensland. The government sponsored a new category, the 'Best wine from the Darling Downs'. As I said before, I thank Kerry Shine for his persistence. I know that he, along with the member for Toowoomba South, will be delighted by these announcements today. I am pleased we could sort something out.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Economy

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.43 a.m.): This morning's *Financial Review* says it all—Queensland is economically beautiful one day and perfect the next. I could not have thought of a better phrase myself. Alan Mitchell from the *Financial Review* sums up Queensland's positive position of growing at four per cent which is above the nation's growth rate of 3.75 per cent. He says that this is—

Despite SARS and the Iraq war, which hit world tourism, at the start of 2003, despite the drought and despite the strength of the Australian dollars which threatened profits of exporters.

Queensland's trend unemployment is the lowest in 22 years. The rate for May was six per cent and stands in contrast to the peak rate of nine and a half per cent unemployment delivered by the Borbidge government. The ABS statistics reveal that 265,300 jobs have been created in the Smart State since June 1998. Over the past year, full-time employment growth has been especially strong with 70,900 extra Queenslanders in full-time jobs. This represents almost four out of 10 full-time jobs created nationally and is twice our share of population. I promised jobs, jobs, jobs in 1998 and we have delivered, delivered, delivered.

This is the type of performance that would be anticipated from Australia's engine of economic growth. In trend terms, the Westpac-Melbourne Institute Consumer Sentiment Index for Queensland rose 0.7 per cent in the June quarter 2004, to reach its highest level, 120 points, in around 10 years. Consumer confidence in Queensland was 5.5 per cent higher than a year ago. Queensland recorded the highest trend level of consumer confidence out of the major states surveyed in the quarter.

This is a good sign for continued solid growth in consumption. One risk to consumers is of course the attitude of the Reserve Bank to interest rate rises—each small rise in interest rates takes hundreds of dollars out of the pockets of every Queensland family with a mortgage or a small business loan. This is something we will need to watch closely in the coming months.

The ABS March quarter national accounts indicates that Queensland recorded 8.8 per cent annual growth in state final demand. This was the highest rate of growth of any state and a rate more than twice the growth rate for New South Wales and almost twice the growth rate for Victoria. In terms of projections, Queensland's rate of economic growth is expected to be four and a quarter per cent in 2004-05, a slight pick up on the four per cent anticipated in 2003-04. This is once again well up on the national growth estimate of three and a half per cent.

Our unemployment rate is expected to continue to be at more than two decade lows with employment growth leading the nation. In terms of the composition of growth, domestic factors such as household consumption and dwelling investment are expected to make less of a contribution to growth than they have in the past. This will be offset by a strengthening export sector and growth in business investment and public investment as a result of infrastructure spending. That is one of the reasons I have made 2004 export year. I will be leading an additional trade delegation to get jobs for Queensland.

Business investment is critical to making our economy more competitive. It allows workers to become more productive and helps to win export markets. The annual rate of business investment growth has been very strong for a number of years now. In 2001-02 business investment was up by 13.8 per cent, in 2002-03 it was up by 30.6 per cent and it is expected that it will record solid growth in each of the next two years as well. This, along with key investments in public infrastructure, will help to secure the economic future of Queensland through enhancing productivity and winning export markets. The Smart State has certainly come a very long way since the days when the unemployment rate was nine and a half per cent.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. At the outset of the Premier's ministerial statement he significantly mentioned the budget. I ask for a ruling on that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No, he did not. He did not detail it.

Mr SPRINGBORG: He was talking about the budget and its positive effects. If that is okay, can the opposition ask questions about the budget, Mr Speaker?

Mr SPEAKER: No.

Mr SPRINGBORG: So it is all right to make reflections and talk about positive commentary on the budget but not to ask questions?

Mr SPEAKER: No. The Leader of the Opposition has got it slightly wrong. I was listening intently to the Premier also. He was not talking about the bill; he was talking about media comments on the overall budget. That is not talking about the bill. He did not detail anything that is in that bill.

Mr SPRINGBORG: So we can refer to media comment on the budget when we are asking questions in here.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I will take that point of order on notice.

Mr BEATTIE: Can I draw to the attention of the House that my ministerial statement was very carefully worded. It made absolutely no reference to the budget.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have been advised by the Clerk that he has read the statement while I was listening to it. The litmus test in the case of a bill is whether it will be the subject of debate later on. There were no isolated figures in that statement. The Premier said it was a good budget. The Leader of the Opposition can say it is a bad budget. I will not stop him saying it is a bad budget if he wishes. Members are not to refer to the detail of the budget. That is fair enough. That is the test of the debate.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I rise to another point of order.

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No, he is entitled to his point of order.

Mr SPRINGBORG: No, it is an important point, because we need to know these things, Mr Speaker. You indicated that in your view the Premier was referring to favourable media comment, and that was fair enough. If we wanted to refer to unfavourable media comment on the budget—

Mr SPEAKER: Fine. As an overall test, you can say that the Adelaide *Observer* said that the budget was a terrible budget. Yes, there are no problems with that.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Or an interest group or whatever the case may be.

Mr SPEAKER: But you cannot go into the details of the budget debate. I think that is pretty plain. You cannot go and talk about whether there is going to be a rail line to Redcliffe, for instance. There is not, I know, but I am just saying that you cannot do it.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I could help you, Mr Speaker: there will not be under this government. There will not be under this government.

Mr Beattie: Mr Speaker, if there was, I'm sure you'd allow it.

Mr SPEAKER: Of course.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood

Hon. A.M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education and the Arts) (9.50 a.m.): Last week more than 60,000 children and adults converged on the Queensland Performing Arts Centre for the Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood. This festival is the only one of its kind in the world, and I am pleased to report that it was a great hit with its intended audience of three- to eight-year-olds. The Queensland Performing Arts Centre was a hive of activity over the six days of the festival with more than 20 different performances, workshops and exhibitions staged daily. Anyone who visited the festival during the week—and I hope that some members took the opportunity—would have seen young and old alike immersed in indigenous culture through Aboriginal storytelling and dance, theatre productions made just for children, circus performers, walls covered in artwork by children, and Brisbane's future drummers, puppeteers and performers expressing their creativity in all its forms on the lawns, forecourt and theatres of the Queensland Performing Arts Centre.

The Queensland government is very proud to be the major supporter of such an innovative initiative. The Out of the Box Festival has gone from strength to strength since its inception in 1992. It not only provides rich learning opportunities for young children but also stamps our state as an international leader in the delivery of creative activities for children. This year the Out of the Box Festival creative team, under the leadership of Artistic Director, Susan Richer, put together a high calibre program of innovative and insightful works. The headline performance which I was delighted to attend was *The Red Tree*—a large-scale theatrical performance which was an adaptation of the acclaimed children's book by West Australian author Shaun Tan. A well-respected Australian creative team, including a number of Queenslanders, developed the show with the assistance of Shaun Tan and workshops with children. *The Red Tree* was an insightful and thought-provoking work which, I am pleased to say, has already generated interest from interstate and overseas. I hope to see this Queensland work on stage in another state or another country in the very near future.

Out of the Box is not only nurturing the creative talents of Queensland children; it is also nurturing the artists of the future. Another festival performance, *Scribble*, which also won high praise for its originality, is the brainchild of a Brisbane based creative team called Brown Room. This group is carving out its own reputation in the arts community for its innovative work. Out of the Box is a world-class festival of which this state should be very proud. I want to congratulate the team behind Out of the Box on putting together another great festival in 2004. It is teams like this that are putting Queensland on the international cultural map.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Small Business

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for State Development and Innovation) (9.52 a.m.): Small business is firmly on this government's agenda, and we want to see small business thrive. We recognise that small businesses are the key to economic growth, particularly in regional Queensland. That is why we have gone to great lengths to establish and grow small businesses right across the state. More than 96 per cent of Queensland businesses are small businesses, and they employ more than half of all Queenslanders working in private enterprise. That is why we have implemented a range of programs and initiatives to make sure that these businesses have the best possible chance at success. Programs such as the Small Business Accelerator Program, which kicked off in January this year, are designed to do exactly that. This program involves intensive case management, seminars and access to up to three grants up to \$5,000 each to assist individual firms to grow.

Indeed, the accelerator program is just one of many initiatives targeting small business. We have also successfully implemented the Smart Small Business web site. It is the most comprehensive small business web site throughout the whole of the country and is designed to be a one-stop shop for our small business services. On top of that, we have also established the Women's Business Coaching Program and Smart State, Smart Women's Workshop series. Both of these programs ensure that business women in the regions have the same access to assistance as those in the south-east corner.

We have the proof that these programs are already creating results. A recent Sensis business index survey showed that small businesses throughout the state are recording excellent results in sales, profits, employment, capital expenditure and indeed business confidence. In fact, business confidence was rated at 73 per cent, which is 12 per cent higher than the national average. However, it was businesses in regional Queensland that recorded the biggest jump in confidence at 67 per cent, which is up 10 per cent on the previous survey. This confidence is creating more jobs for Queenslanders and, as a result, employment in small business is up four per cent. By comparison, there was a four per cent national decline.

Additionally, when rated against the national average, small business sales are up 10 per cent and profits are up 14 per cent. These are figures that this government and indeed every member in this House can be proud of. They provide cold, hard evidence that the Beattie government's commitment to small business is paying off. This is about making sure Queensland's great diversity of small businesses not only survive but also thrive.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Tactical Crime Squads

Hon. J.C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.55 a.m.): In only a short time, tactical crime squads have become an integral part of policing in Queensland. They assist and complement the hard work of local police and take a proactive approach to crime fighting. The squads respond to any surges in crime, particularly serious crime such as drug offences, researching crime problems in the local area, identifying particular issues, and creating specific policing strategies to address them. Sixteen tactical crime squads have been established across Queensland in a staged roll out, with the latest beginning operation in Maryborough last Saturday. Other squads are based in the districts of Logan, Oxley, South Brisbane, Brisbane Central, North Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Mackay, Mount Isa, Rockhampton, Townsville, Redcliffe, and the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast. These squads have an approved strength of 14 officers, while Mount Isa has a seven-member squad. The Cairns based squad, which also responds to serious crimes in the cape and Torres Strait, has 21 members.

The tactical crime squads have proven very successful, laying more than 16,000 charges between 1 December 2002 and 1 December last year for offences such as break and enter, stealing, drug offences, weapons offences, unlawful wounding and prostitution. Since July last year, property recovered by the squads includes motor vehicles, jewellery, money, electrical appliances, furniture and other goods worth more than \$2.5 million. The Mackay Tactical Crime Squad alone has recovered stolen property worth more than \$111,000. Also during the past 12 months the Brisbane Central Tactical Crime Squad alone has laid 2,301 charges—the highest number of any squad—with Toowoomba recording 1,782 and Mackay 1,591 charges.

Of all the charges laid since July 2003, 52 per cent relate to drug offences and 24 per cent to property offences. Successful operations by tactical crime squads across the state include Operation Kendall in targeting assaults in the Ipswich CBD, Operation Suez in policing the alcohol restrictions at Woorabinda, and Operation Haricot which was conducted around Toowoomba with the assistance of

the State Flying Squad and Toowoomba detectives to target drug and property offences. As a result of this operation, a total of 48 people were charged with 128 offences. Tactical crime squads are just one part of the Beattie government's tough on crime strategy, with Queensland police making our communities safer. I look forward to following the progress of our newest squad in Maryborough in the near future.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Election, Electoral Rolls

Hon. R.J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (9.58 a.m.): I want to alert members of the House to the Howard government's plan to thumb its nose at the most important democratic right of all Australians—the right to vote. This year a federal election is soon to be held. The Howard government is looking to use every connivance—every possible ploy—to hang on to power.

Their latest trick to squeeze every advantage is a plan to close the electoral rolls on the day on which the Prime Minister calls the election. This will mean that, unlike in every other election previously held, there will be no time for those who have just turned 18 to register to vote. It means that there will be no time for people not on the roll or who need to change their details to do so. It means that people who are motivated to update their details by an opportunity to vote for a change of government cannot express their democratic right. It means that something like 100,000 Australians may not be able to vote at all and the details of another 300,000 people may be out of date.

Unlike many countries throughout the world, we have a democratic process for electing our governments. It is a process we must protect at all costs. This plan by the Howard government reeks of desperation and petty political motivation. For the interest of members, let me provide some information about how the changes to the rolls have an impact. The recent Queensland election was called on 13 January. In the six days that elapsed from the time the election was called to the closing of the rolls, the Queensland Electoral Commission processed 45,357 enrolments. Of these, 4,326 were 18-year-olds. At the last federal election called on 8 October 2001, in the week that elapsed from the time the election was called until the closing of the rolls there were in Queensland alone 66,256 enrolments or changes processed. Of this number, 7,715 were 18-year-olds.

The Queensland Electoral Commission is geared up to process changes to the rolls. In fact, in the 12 months leading up to the recent state election, it processed 660,000 changes to the roll, most of these being people who have moved home. But what the Howard government is trying to do is clear for everyone to see. Once again it is targeting our young people and disfranchising everyone else who wants to get on the roll once the election is called.

As if it is not good enough that John Howard is putting a university education out of the reach of many young people, now he does not even want to allow them to vote. It is not surprising that, with the appeal of Labor leader Mark Latham and the recent coming on board of Peter Garrett to the Labor Party, John Howard and the federal government are becoming ever more desperate at trying to deny 18-year-olds a vote. This is a blatant attempt to disfranchise our young people. We can only hope that sanity will prevail and that the Senate will reject this latest Howard government attempt to hijack Australian democracy.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

AusLink

Hon. P.T. LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.02 a.m.) I wish to inform the House of how Queensland's National Highway system has been duded as a result of the federal government's announcement. AusLink will provide Queensland with just \$22 million extra to upgrade our national highways—the same roads that John Anderson has admitted in the past are the worst in Australia. In December last year, the Queensland government provided the Commonwealth government with its *National Highway System Forward Strategy Report*. This document contained funding requests for our national highways at a level of \$3.2 billion over the next five years. However, under AusLink, Queensland will get just \$1.46 billion over five years and, what is worse, most of that funding will not be available until 2008-09. In fact, all we get in additional federal funding next year is a paltry \$22 million, with \$50 million less the year after that. That is not enough, and what money we get is too far down the track. It is a case of too little, too late.

A number of critical projects have not been properly addressed under AusLink, such as the six-laning of the Ipswich Motorway and \$200 million worth of improvements to the Brisbane urban corridor to make it liveable for residents. Instead, we have a \$400 million unfunded half northern bypass foisted on us, which no-one wants—not me, not this government, not the people of Ipswich, not the state

opposition, not the federal opposition and not the RACQ. There is the need for floodproofing and upgrading of the Bruce Highway, particularly in north and far-north Queensland. In fact, the federal government will spend just \$10 million on the 1,650 kilometres of the Bruce Highway north of Caboolture. There will be \$10 million next year and the year after that it is \$5 million. That is what the people of regional Queensland get from the federal government. What did the Queensland government ask for? What were our priorities? Seven hundred and twenty million dollars over the next five years. They have given us \$15 million.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr LUCAS: Yes, the member for Gregory is correct. Eighteen per cent of the fuel tax comes back to the states in road funding. The member for Gregory is quite right to be concerned about the terrible rip-off that the federal government is making to the people of Queensland. That is right. The member is dead right. It is about time that the federal government returned more of the fuel excise when it returns only 18 per cent to the people of Queensland. The Gateway Motorway upgrade—

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. I find what the Minister for Transport said about me and fuel funding totally untrue and I ask him to withdraw it, because I made no mention of it.

Mr SPEAKER: The member has asked the minister to withdraw.

Mr LUCAS: I will withdraw that. Certainly, the whole lot of them are concerned about trying to defend the federal government. I just warn that I do not mind who is in federal government. I do not mind whether it is John Howard or Mark Latham. I will defend the interests of this state, and it is about time that people on the other side of the House did as well.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We will continue with the statement.

Mr LUCAS: There is the need for an upgrade to the Gateway Motorway—the six-laning of the Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road and the airport extension on the north side. There is also the need for stage 1 of the Townsville port access road—the Stuart bypass. We put up the \$8 million—

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Gregory! Order!

Mr LUCAS: Mark Latham has guaranteed the \$8 million if he is elected and we need funding for stage 2 detailed planning design and corridor acquisition. Apparently there is no money whatsoever for the interstate rail line in Queensland despite the Acacia Ridge rail crossing, despite the Queensland government putting up half the amount needed—\$25 million—for it. Under AusLink, \$450 million was put up in rail funding. How much do we get? I think about \$7 million for some telecommunications work on the track. We have the best rail system in Australia. We get ripped off.

Last Friday I heard the Opposition Leader on ABC Radio say that he had been caught up in congestion that morning on the Ipswich Motorway. I wonder if he took the time to ring John Anderson. Of course, the last time that he was in Canberra, John Anderson wanted him to hurry up and leave. I should remind the member that the Ipswich Motorway is a National Highway, which means that the federal government is responsible for its funding. Neither the federal budget nor AusLink—

Mr Springborg: How much did they put in for your Tugun bypass, which is a state road?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is a ministerial statement. If you want to ask a question, you can ask that question later.

Mr LUCAS: It is a road of national importance, in case the Leader of the Opposition does not know what it is.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is not a debate.

Mr LUCAS: Neither the federal budget nor AusLink have provided the money to six-lane the Ipswich Motorway, which is the preferred choice of the state government, the member for Moggill, the federal opposition and the RACQ. Is the Leader of the Opposition saying that the Queensland government should go—

An honourable member: This is all budget stuff.

Mr LUCAS: It is certainly not the budget. I am talking about the federal budget and AusLink. Is the Leader of the Opposition saying that the Queensland government should go easy on the federal government for not funding this roadway or indeed others because he wants to protect his federal mates? Regardless of whether it is John Howard or Mark Latham, Peter Garrett or Bronwyn Bishop, I will lobby just as hard for the motorists of Queensland no matter who is in power, and so should the Leader of the Opposition. It makes the choice very clear. It is very simple: if people want the Ipswich Motorway six-laned with the service roads, they should vote for Mark Latham's candidates in the federal election. If people want a promise of a half-funded, half northern bypass, then they should vote for Cameron Thompson, the Howard-Costello candidate in the federal election.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Fishing Laws

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (10.09 a.m.): In recent weeks community concerns have been raised about the compliance of seafood retailers and fishmongers with Queensland's fishing laws. In particular, a number of allegations have been raised about the sale of undersized fish and crabs. Indeed, a group of concerned recreational anglers has offered to donate money to charity for people who have purchased an undersized fish, provided they present that to the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

The Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol has responsibility for enforcing our fishing laws and ensuring all Queenslanders abide by the law. I can report to the House that the patrol has inspected 216 retail outlets in 16 centres in Queensland to check compliance with fishing regulations. I can advise that as part of the survey patrol officers estimated they inspected approximately 28,000 fish and crabs on display in the shops visited. Of this product, 31 were found to be undersize. This represents a compliance rate of almost 99.9 per cent.

The patrol has issued 10 cautions for undersized fish, and three breach reports are to be submitted for undersized fish. There has been one breach report for no buyers' licence and four cautions for dockets offences. Areas where the survey found non-compliance to be higher will be targeted in future operations.

I believe the findings of the fish shop survey show the majority of retailers are law abiding. The laws are in place to ensure our fish are sustainable for commercial fishers, recreational anglers and the wider community to enjoy. However, we must remain vigilant.

The government's 24-hour toll-free Fishwatch hotline, 1800 017 116, has been used by many to report suspicious fishing activity. I can also announce today that the Fishwatch hotline service has been upgraded to enable the patrol to respond more readily to illegal fishing reports. Previously, when callers rang through to the Fishwatch hotline after hours they spoke to the officer on call, who could be stationed anywhere throughout the state. Now callers will be transferred to the relevant officer in their area, which will mean a much quicker response time. This local officer will also have a much better idea of where the activity is taking place and other local information that could assist in the investigation.

People who catch and keep undersized fish and crabs and those people who sell them are not only breaking the law but also showing scant regard for the future of our fish stocks.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Tree Clearing

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy) (10.11 a.m.): Honourable members will recall that the government has established a transitional cap of 500,000 hectares to allow limited clearing before broadscale tree clearing ends on 31 December 2006. We are currently assessing existing applications for broadscale clearing lodged prior to 16 May 2003, when the government announced the halt on all new clearing applications. Those applications which meet rigorous assessment codes and are approved will be subtracted from the 500,000 hectare cap. The balance remaining will then be available for allocation to land-holders through a ballot to be held on 17 September 2004.

I am announcing today the rules for the ballot. Land-holders will have until 31 August 2004 to apply for clearing approvals through the ballot process. Applications will be assessed in order drawn from the ballot until the total available allocation has been reached. Applications will be assessed against regional vegetation management codes developed from the draft regional vegetation management plans. The ballot will be divided across Queensland's bioregional boundaries, and the total area of land available in each region under the ballot will be announced shortly.

All applications for broadscale clearing must meet specific criteria, which are: an application must relate to one region only; the total area available to be cleared per application is restricted to the area limit set for that region—I will detail these areas shortly; an application may cover either one land title or a number of titles; and the area applied for in each application must not exceed the limit specified for particular regions.

For an application in the central Queensland coast and Wet Tropics bioregions, the New England Tableland and south-east Queensland bioregions, the area of land must not exceed 250 hectares per application. In all other bioregions the area of land must not exceed 2,500 hectares per application. This will ensure that one land-holder cannot obtain more than a fair share of the available clearing and disadvantage others in the same region.

The new tree clearing laws are crucial for the sustainable management of vegetation in Queensland and to ensure a viable future for land-holders, their properties and communities. We have been careful, however, to design a ballot process that ensures all land-holders have equal access to the final broadscale clearing approvals that will be allowed in Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Parks, Tourism

Hon. R.J. MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for the Environment) (10.14 a.m.): Our national parks are a natural asset which underpins the tourism industry and supports jobs for more than 6,000 people. The Queensland government wants to encourage ecotourism and create more job opportunities, particularly in tourism areas. The Tourism Minister and I recently unveiled a strategy to achieve that by delivering certainty to tourism operators who rely on our national parks for their livelihood.

The Tourism in Protected Areas program is a joint initiative between the Environmental Protection Agency, Tourism Queensland and the tourism industry. For the first time, it places tourism operations in national parks on a business footing. Instead of having to renew a permit every three years, tourism operators will enter into a commercial agreement with the EPA through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service for up to 10 years. What this means is that businesses will find it easier to plan for future growth and secure loans.

The agreements will set clear guidelines in terms of visitor numbers and activities in protected areas. In return, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will use the revenue to improve visitor facilities and for maintenance in parks in the local area wherever possible. It also means money can be directed to other parks for spending on facilities and maintenance. It will give tourism operators and visitors an improved appreciation of the conservation values of our parks. It makes sense. We are adding value to our natural assets which underpin our tourism industry. And we are planning for sustainable management of the parks and the ecotourism industry.

As each agreement is negotiated, indigenous groups will be consulted and opportunities for indigenous involvement will be promoted. The agreements will apply to about 250 of the 500 tourism operators who rely on national parks for their livelihood. The agreements will start to take effect later this year. This is a win for the tourism industry and a win for the environment. I wish to thank Tourism Queensland and the tourism industry for working with the EPA to put this strategy in place.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Indigenous Achievement

Hon. E.A. CLARK (Clayfield—ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (10.16 a.m.): Today is the all-important date of the second State of Origin game, and it is a fitting day to pay tribute to the considerable recent achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. Just last week we heard the news that another talented Aboriginal player, Willie Tonga, had been added to the Queensland side. Go Cherbourg! The news is all good.

Not only has Willie Tonga, whom I am sure Cherbourg is pleased to call one of its own, been catapulted into the spotlight; this happened in the same week that the principal of Cherbourg State School, the wonderful Chris Sarra, was named Queenslander of the Year. Cherbourg is showing its Queensland colours through both its sporting talents and Chris Sarra's work as an educational leader who is helping keep Cherbourg 'strong and smart'.

Willie Tonga is, of course, not the first or the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander to pull on the boots in Queensland. And then there is AFL. Congratulations to the Brisbane Lions' Darryl White, who has become the fourth Aboriginal player to chalk up 250 games. I will not burst into song, but it is worthy of celebration.

It is not just sporting champions who are following the example of high achievement set by this year's Senior Australian of the Year, Pearl Duncan, and Queenslanders named in this week's Queen's Birthday Honours List. Like Pearl, who has had a lifetime dedication to boosting Aboriginal participation in education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and groups are making a difference.

Just in the last few months we have seen the appeal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park in Cairns was named as Australia's best tourism attraction by the Australian Export Council last month. In the arts, Lafe Charlton won the indigenous facilitator's prize at the prestigious 20th Sidney Myer awards in April. Then there are the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are making their mark in the academic world, such as St George Hospital

indigenous health worker Darcy Washington. Darcy recently graduated with a Bachelor of Health Science from the University of Sydney.

Organisations such as the Wu Chopperen Health Service are gaining national attention for their work. Wu Chopperen, in Cairns, was one of only four community services in Australia to be recognised as a national centre of excellence at the Australasian Drug Strategy Conference in Alice Springs last month. The Kowanyama Justice Group also recently won a domestic and family violence prevention award for mediating in the community.

We all know Queensland is a state of high achievers, and they are high achievers in all fields. We celebrated Queensland Day last week, and today's State of Origin is just another chance to show what Queensland can do.

SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Report

Hon. K.W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (10.19 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's *Alert Digest No. 3 of 2004*.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Commercial and Recreational Fishing

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (10.19 a.m.): I give notice that today I will move—

That this parliament condemns the Beattie government for its overzealous attack on the commercial and recreational fishing industries in Queensland and calls for:

- (a) a structural adjustment package to commercial fishermen adversely affected by the coral reef fin fishery management plan and other recently introduced fishing restrictions; and
- (b) all decisions relating to commercial and recreational fisheries management, including complementary zoning of State waters adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the proposed Great Sandy Strait Marine Park be based on accurate science, honesty and true consultation with the commercial and recreational fishing sectors.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Ethanol

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.20 a.m.): The Premier has had a conversion on the road to Rio to the ethanol industry in Queensland and Australia. Some two years ago we introduced a private member's bill in this parliament for there to be a mandate for ethanol to be sold in fuel in Queensland. The Labor Party and Mr Beattie used their enormous majority in this parliament to oppose that. We have seen the Premier come back from Brazil and all of a sudden become converted to an ethanol mandate but say that it needs to be done at a national level. I say that the Premier is squibbing his responsibility. He is squibbing his responsibility to this industry in Queensland and Australia.

My challenge to the Premier is this: go to Mark Latham, go to their star recruit, Peter Garrett, and ask them what they think about an ethanol mandate in Australia, particularly in light of their disgraceful attack on Dick Honan and the Manildra group last year. Is it any wonder there is reticence at a federal level even to look at a national mandate? As soon as it got into the House of Representatives, the Labor Party would oppose it. As soon as it got into the Senate, the Labor Party would oppose it because the Labor Party conspired with the motor vehicle manufacturers, the fuel companies in Australia and those who opposed ethanol to torpedo it in the most scurrilous attack on Dick Honan and the Manildra group that we have ever seen. So I say to the Premier: get on the phone to Mark Latham and convince him that it is a good idea, because until he can do that he knows that it will not happen. The simple reality is that he should accept his responsibility and introduce a mandate here in Queensland. Show some ticker because when that works other Australian states and territories will follow suit.

Time expired.

Magnus Johansson

Mr POOLE (Gaven—ALP) (10.22 a.m.): It was no so long ago that we were saying that every family will some day be affected by either knowing someone or knowing a family who has had a member of their community develop the AIDS virus or who has been involved with drugs. Fortunately, this did not reach the level that was anticipated. Today I think we can include terrorism in this category. Since Bali

and other places have witnessed such cowardly acts, it has been brought home to us that it can be closer to us than we really like.

I can tell this House that I, too, have been touched by terrorism. A very close friend of mine was killed recently in Saudi Arabia. I think most members would be aware of the senseless killing of Magnus Johansson. Magnus was an executive chef working in Saudi Arabia when he was gunned down in a terrorist attack for no apparent reason other than he appeared not to be a Muslim. I have known Magnus and his wife, Sheree, for nearly 15 years. They were Gold Coast residents but due to Magnus's popularity were often poached to foreign lands to work. I stayed with them in Saigon many times before entering this House where Magnus was food and beverage director for the new Amara Hotel. Magnus, Sheree and I spent many an evening enjoying great food and beverages in different restaurants, especially on the garden rooftop restaurant of the Saigon Rex Hotel overlooking the beautiful Ho Chi Minh City.

Magnus Johansson was a beautiful person, a very large man and full of love with never a bad word to say about anyone. He was born in Sweden and migrated to Australia in the early eighties where he worked in the Gold Coast ANA Hotel as executive chef before being poached by Singapore interests and then on to Vietnam.

May I tell this House that members should make contact with friends. Do not put off sending that message to someone that you have not spoken to for a while. Keep in touch because I did not with Magnus Johansson and now it is too late. Sheree's loss is everybody's loss. Those who had ever come in contact with Magnus all lost someone special. What a waste!

Broadbeach Bowls Club

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (10.24 a.m.): I rise today on a matter raised by my colleague the member for Currumbin with regard to rates for that outstanding Australian institution—the local bowls club. The club I would like to focus on is Broadbeach Bowls Club. The club is east of the Gold Coast Highway between Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach.

I have been approached by the chairman, Don Bayliss, who has expressed concern to me about the rising cost of rates and the damage that does to the future outlook of that club. This club pays the highest amount of rates of any bowls club on the Gold Coast. In 2000 its rates bill was \$17,385. In 2004 the rates bill is \$43,000. When the club—which cannot afford the massive rates on the property—approached this state government seeking special consideration, the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy outlined a possible solution which, in summary, said that by using the concessional rental system, and based on a valuation of \$2.9 million, the approximate rent would be \$72,500. That is \$29,000 more than they are paying on the current rates system.

For a local bowls club, this is unacceptable. The remedy sought by the club is clear. As Mr Bayliss states, for the continuation and viability of these valuable community based non-profit organisations, we seek that the government allow the various local government councils to administer these leases which would attract a much more affordable annual rental plus a different way of calculating the unimproved capital value for non-profit organisations which would result in more affordable council rates.

The point he makes is very valid. The bowls club is an Australian institution that has been sadly forgotten by this government. It is a place where people have come to congregate for years. The bowls club is a place of recreation where members of the community come to interact with their neighbours. It would also make sense for the government to create a lease for the land and have that lease administered by the local government. This would create a fairer situation for the bowls club and a more efficient method of administration. I certainly hope Mr Bayliss's concerns do not fall on deaf ears.

WorldSkills

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (10.26 a.m.): As this government works towards moving Queensland towards the Smart State, we see the government working on a range of agendas towards improving that. We see the Premier speaking about biotechnology and the advances being made in the upper end. It is important to understand, however, that trades play an important role in advancing the Smart State agenda. I would like to follow up a ministerial statement made yesterday by the Hon. Tom Barton, the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, and talk about the important work done in the WorldSkills program.

Trades are important and we have a shortage of skilled tradesmen, and I encourage people to apply for apprentices and look towards a trade as providing a valuable contribution to society. In the WorldSkills contest the community was the real winner, by allowing a range of apprentices and tradespeople to put their skills on show and to show the great advances being made in this area.

I would like to congratulate all competitors in the WorldSkills challenge. As that great saying goes, all politics is local. Therefore, I would like to congratulate a local lady—Kristy McSkimming—in coming second in the floristry section. She actually won five of the eight categories. However, her results overall

meant that she came second. Kristy is employed by Fleurz Florist at Victoria Point. These are the florists that I personally use for all my floristry needs. I would like to congratulate Kristy and the other employees of this florist and praise them on the great work that they do.

Imports, Assessment Panels

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (10.28 a.m.): Yesterday the ignorance and incompetence of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries was fully revealed in this House. Asked a question about one of the most important subjects that exist at the moment, about the assessment panels for the importation of bananas, apples and pork, he did not have a clue. He had to rush outside and ring up his senior media adviser to get the answer and come back and slip it in a dorothy dixer later on. His department has had a budget cut. Only an incompetent minister like that on this most important issue of Queenslanders being on assessment panels for the importation of bananas, apples and pork would oversee and admit the fact that they had only one Queenslanders on one of those panels.

We need to have scientists on these panels with regards the importation of apples who know about Stanthorpe, who know about the pathways through the horticultural industry of Queensland and who understand the unique problems of our apple industry in Queensland, but there is not one single Queenslanders on that panel because the minister is disinterested, does not know and could not care. Exactly the same thing applies to the pork industry throughout the Darling Downs, the Burnett and north Queensland. Once again, the minister makes soothing, patronising noises all the time about the federal government and blames everybody else, but incompetence and disinterest reside with him.

Primary industries and fishing in Queensland deserves someone with a bit of ability and a bit of talent, not someone who is so low on the pecking order of the cabinet that he even gets his budget cut in a year when there is a massive budget surplus.

Time expired.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Inbound Tour Operators

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.30 a.m.): In the absence of the Minister for Tourism I direct my question to the Premier. The Tourism Services Act came into effect on 1 December 2003, outlawing illegal kickbacks being demanded from traders by sections of the inbound tourism industry. In answer to an opposition question on notice, the minister has admitted that since the law was introduced there has not been one infringement notice issued, no warning notices and no court action. This is despite traders openly admitting in the local press that they are paying these kickbacks. Will the Premier inform the House of what his government has actually done to crack down on shonky tour operators?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Let me start by saying that Margaret Keech is participating in the launch of the first direct Qantas flight for many years between Brisbane and Los Angeles. She is—with my blessing, and I think all members of this House would support her—representing the state as part of that launch because, frankly, one of the things that has really irked me in more ways than one is the fact that we had not had direct flights between Brisbane and Los Angeles. As of today we do. That is part of the Qantas strategy—one that we have encouraged and supported. That is the reason the minister is not here.

Secondly, in terms of these vertical integration questions, which is what the Leader of the Opposition is referring to, we share his concern about these matters. I am not aware as to whether there have been any formal complaints. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition can assist me. As he knows—and this is my recollection of the legislation—it is initiated on the basis of complaints. If there are no complaints, then clearly the department could not have taken action beyond what we have stated in the legislation itself.

But I will say this to the Leader of the Opposition: I will follow this matter up. I will ensure that he is appropriately briefed, either by officers from my department or officers from the minister's department, because we do not want to see these vertical integrations. If that happens it means that Queenslanders do not get jobs and do not get opportunities. That is why we take this issue very, very, very seriously. You cannot end up with an inbound tourism operator simply flying people in and then making sure that they are the ones who get all access to the tourists who come with them, which means that there is not enough money going into the goods and services produced in this state.

Let me indicate to the Leader of the Opposition that within two weeks I will ensure that he is personally briefed, either by the minister's department or by mine, and there will obviously be someone from my office or from the minister's office present. The response off the top of my head is that I suspect there have not been formal complaints here. If there have not been, I would urge members of the industry who have legitimate concerns to ensure that the complaints are drawn to the attention of the department. If there are legitimate complaints then the government, through the agency, will take

appropriate action. Let us deal with this issue. It is a serious one; I acknowledge that. Let us move to resolve it in a way that is sensible. I will ensure that the Leader of the Opposition is briefed.

Emergency Services, Call-out Fees

Mr SPRINGBORG: My question without notice is to the Minister for Emergency Services. In a question on notice, No. 351, the minister was asked: 'What was the amount charged for persons who had to pay call-out fees for the Fire and Rescue Service? He said: 'The answer is in the annual report.' I have just provided the minister with a copy of the annual report. Will he indicate to the House where this information is in the annual report?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Regarding call-out fees to emergency services, especially the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the policy on attendance at a motor vehicle accident, or MVA, to rescue, extract or treat an entrapped person is that there is no charge.

One of the primary functions of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in attending accidents is to effect a clean-up and manage any pollution such as hazardous materials, chemicals and flammable materials to make sure that the accident area is safe. As members would understand, if there is a motor vehicle accident and there is a chemical spill—

Mr Johnson: Where is it in the report?

Mr CUMMINS:—or petroleum, et cetera, the task can take many hours, and in some cases it is most appropriate for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service to charge for these services. There have been instances where this policy has not been applied consistently. The department is reviewing the existing policy. I have directed—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister will be allowed to answer the question.

Mr CUMMINS: The department is reviewing the existing policy, and I have directed the director-general to conduct the review as fast as he can and report back to me as soon as possible.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: Normally it is red which is what opposition members look like after they have drunk far too much rum. I take offence at members opposite coming into this place and denigrating my family name.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister will resume his answer.

Mr CUMMINS: As I say, the intent of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service policy on attendance at a motor vehicle accident, when they go to rescue or extract or treat an entrapped person, is that there is no charge.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Point of order. The question was not about the policy; it was about where it is in the report. What is the amount that is actually being charged to these people for call-outs?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. Before calling the member for Barron River, could I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from Forest Lake State School in the electorate of Algeester. Welcome.

Aviation Industry

Dr LESLEY CLARK: My question is to the Premier and Minister for Trade. Can the Premier advise the House of how the government's work to attract major aviation businesses to Queensland is injecting new jobs, business opportunities and optimism into far-north Queensland?

Mr BEATTIE: I am very happy to do that. Before I answer the honourable member for Barron River's question, in relation to a question asked by the Leader of the Opposition I should have mentioned that he knows from the response to the question on notice he has that there are two complaints that are being investigated. I cannot comment any further while they are being investigated, but he already has that information. I did not want to be misunderstood in regard to what I said earlier about complaints.

Let me move on. This is a great day for Queensland today, 16 June, because it really is significant for our tourism industry to have that direct flight from Brisbane to Los Angeles. Previously we had to go through Auckland or go through Sydney. It just makes us more attractive in terms of investment and in terms of the tourism dollar, so it is a really great day for the tourism industry.

But as the member for Barron River would know, the government's business attraction drive is continuing to drive results for regional Queensland as well. From the far north comes the excellent news that Australian Airlines' decision to base its aviation hub in Cairns is predicted to pump \$800 million into the Queensland economy this financial year compared to the \$500 million annual injection forecast

when the airline began its Cairns operation in October 2002. That represents a 60 per cent increase. A large percentage of that benefit is in far-north Queensland, hence the member's question.

Approximately 290 people are currently employed at the Cairns operational base. The Department of State Development and Innovation's Office of Small Business and the Cairns State Development and Innovation Centre have worked closely with local firms to assist them to prepare bids for Australian Airlines contracts. The presence of Australian Airlines has put a new spring into the step of the Cairns region and the incentives offered to attract the operational hub to Cairns, comprising payroll tax refunds, training assistance and joint funding of marketing activities with Tourism Queensland, have been returned many, many times over.

Where are the critics now? Where are the whingers now? Let me simply say that these strategies being pursued by the government of small incentives to get major returns are delivering. They returned many, many times over for Virgin Blue and they are doing it again for Australian Airlines.

Since beginning on 27 October 2002 with flights to Nagoya and Osaka, Australia has expanded services to take in six other Asian locations—Fukuoka, Singapore, Taipei, Hong Kong, Bali and Sabah. More good news is in the pipeline as Australian Airlines plans to increase its fleet of five aircraft to six, boosting capacity and allowing for the opening of new routes. I understand that India is on the list of potential new destinations, together with Shanghai and Malaysia. It shows what can be achieved when a motivated community makes the most of the government's commitment to building exports, jobs and business opportunities for regional Queensland.

We are doing the same with sugar. I should mention to the Leader of the Opposition that I had a long discussion with Dick Honan on Saturday night—a long discussion.

Mr Springborg: That's good.

Mr BEATTIE: We will do what we can to advance sugar. I am delighted to see you suggest that we should do that. Well, we did.

Royal Brisbane Hospital, Plumbing Malfunctions

Mr COPELAND: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, there have been significant plumbing malfunctions in the Ned Hanlon building at Royal Brisbane Hospital which has caused that building, as well as the east block, to be completely without water today and has placed RBH on code yellow. This has necessitated the cancellation of surgery schedules and has meant that patients are without fundamental plumbing facilities, including toilets and washrooms.

Can the minister confirm that some patients have been returned to regional and rural areas as a result of this problem?

Will the minister advise what action he is taking to urgently rectify this structural defect and to ensure the welfare and well-being of patients and staff; and what arrangements will be established to ensure that patients who have had surgery cancelled today or have been sent home will be attended to as a matter of urgency?

Mr NUTTALL: Contrary to some reports, there was a single water pipe burst at the Royal Brisbane Hospital this morning. A maintenance team was on site immediately and a diversionary system has now been installed to service the two blocks of the hospital which were temporarily cut from the water supply.

We expect to have the pipe repaired by early this afternoon. As a precautionary measure and as a standard practice some elective surgery was postponed where we could not guarantee the water supply immediately. Those patients will be rescheduled as a matter of priority for their surgery. I am not aware of any patients who have been returned to regional Queensland or anywhere else, but I will check that for the honourable member. Can I just say that the matter is in hand.

Indigenous Art

Mr REEVES: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier update the House on how the government is supporting indigenous Queenslanders to master the art of exports, boosting jobs and business opportunities in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. The answer is: you bet! It is a pleasure to update the House on the progress of Out of Country, the indigenous art exhibition touring the United States, which is an initiative of the government's Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing Export Agency and my department.

The Minister for Education and the Arts, Anna Bligh, raised the curtain on the exhibition on 1 May at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC and the show ran at the embassy until 27 May. On 12 May I informed the House that 26 of 56 works had been sold. As of last week, two thirds of the works had been sold—37 out of 56—and 7,030 people have visited the show. A further work has been reserved for

purchase. These sale figures are remarkable, well above expectations, and augur well for the remainder of the tour.

This is money well invested by the government to encourage indigenous artists to take their art to the world. While we talk about indigenous issues and social problems, this is one way to empower indigenous people in a real way. The government is right behind this strategy. The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and I inspected the Art Gang at Lockhart River recently, as everyone would know, and I have got to say: what a great contribution. The member for Cook would know this. This is fantastic quality art. You do not sell this art in the United States unless it is world class. This is Queensland indigenous artists going to the world. Everyone in this House should be very proud of them, because I certainly am.

As I said, these sales figures are remarkable and well above expectations. The exhibition has now moved to Kluge Ruhu Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. It opened there on 11 June and will be officially opened on 19 June to run until 14 August.

Out of Country is fulfilling its aim of introducing Americans to Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art by showcasing paintings, prints, sculptures and fabrics. Queensland art is distinct from the desert paintings that are more familiar to the American art market.

I sincerely thank the Australian Embassy staff for their support; they have been fantastic. I am advised that the embassy promoted the exhibition by using it as a backdrop for a number of functions, including an Austrade business visit to the World Bank. I thank Jennifer Herd, artist and head of the Indigenous Visual Art Unit at Griffith University, and Vic McGrath, Torres Strait Islander artist, elder and member of the Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing Export Agency, who gave fully subscribed lectures to accompany the exhibition, and Anna Bligh, of course, whose promotional efforts were reportedly well received.

By no means least my thanks go to the 29 artists represented in Out of Country. Three of them, Fiona Foley who is currently based in New York, Craig Koomeeta and Ken Thaiday Senior attended the exhibition and played a central role in educating the new audience about their art. This is the sort of thing that we need to do more of, because this is about empowering indigenous people in a real way to change their lives for the better.

Royal Brisbane Hospital, Plumbing Malfunctions

Mr SEENEY: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the answer that the minister provided to my colleague the shadow minister for health a moment ago in regard to the situation at the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

Can the minister indicate to the House to what extent programmed surgery has been cancelled and, if the matter is as inconsequential as you indicated in your answer, why has the media been excluded from the hospital and the situation today?

Mr NUTTALL: In my response I certainly did not indicate that it was inconsequential. I certainly did not indicate that. I will clarify it a little further.

Mr Horan: A single water pipe burst.

Mr NUTTALL: I will explain it to you if you give me the opportunity. There was a 210 millimetre pipe made of welding high density polyurethane and it has a fracture. The water was shut off. The water was shut off at the Ned Hanlon Building and the Dr James Building at 6 a.m. this morning after it was identified by engineers that there was a leak there this morning at around 5 o'clock. The contractors who installed and built the pipe, Fairfield Engineering, are at the site examining the damage as we speak. As I said, at this stage water will be off until at least lunchtime and we hope to have it on early this afternoon as long as all goes well.

What I did indicate about the surgery was that patients would be rescheduled as a matter of priority and the reason we have cancelled the surgery is, as you can appreciate, that we have a diversionary system in there. We cannot guarantee that the water supply would be in the operating theatre. It is best from a safe practice point of view to cancel the surgery until we get that fixed. Those patients will be rescheduled as a matter of priority.

Mr Horan: Why has the media been excluded?

Mr NUTTALL: Obviously you would not be allowing the media to run around where the water pipe is being repaired at the moment.

Safety in Schools

Mr ENGLISH: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts. Violent or aggressive intruders have no place on school grounds. Laws were passed in this House recently to give principals new powers to ban these intruders. When do these laws take effect?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question and for his concern for safety in our schools. I am pleased to advise that on 24 June, a little over a week away, the new laws that provide new powers to principals in state and non-state schools will commence. That means they will be up and running in time for the beginning of term 3.

We have seen a comprehensive training program for principals over the first semester of this year.

These are new and unprecedented powers that send a very clear message—that is, that violent and threatening behaviour will not be tolerated in our schools. While all parents and members of the community are welcome they need to make sure that their behaviour is appropriate for the school environment to ensure our children and staff are safe at all times.

The new powers put in amendments to the Education Act essentially give principals the power to direct individuals to cease certain behaviour or to restrict their movement to certain parts of the school. It gives principals the power to ban disruptive and threatening people from school environments for up to 24 hours. In very serious circumstances, there are new powers for the director-general or governing bodies of non-state schools to ban these individuals for up to 60 days and in very extreme cases to ban them from all Queensland schools for up to 12 months.

I was very pleased to note when these amendments came before the House last year that they received the unanimous support of all members on all sides of the parliament. Imagine my surprise when in the January election campaign the opposition put out a policy saying that it would introduce a bill to ensure that principals had these powers. It seems to have totally forgotten that it debated this issue late last year, it supported the bill and it voted for it. The opposition indicated in January that it would go through the process of redrafting, reconsulting, reintroducing the bill and, presumably, redebating and repassing it.

If the National Party were on this side of the House I believe that we would be at the cabinet submission stage of these powers now. It might get them through to the cabinet room. We would not necessarily see these powers enacted on 24 June. We might, if we were lucky, see them introduced back into the chamber where we could spend another couple of hours debating them again.

I could not see a better example of an opposition asleep on the job. It has forgotten that it has already voted for this and said in the election campaign that it would promise to reintroduce the exact bill that it has already made law. Members would wonder what is going on in the opposition's tactics room.

That was not the only part of the opposition's behaviour management policy. It also said that it promised to introduce a requirement for all schools to develop a behaviour management code. That has been practised and required in Queensland schools for more than a decade. Since the early 1990s, every Queensland school has been required to have it. Every Queensland school does have one. Every Queensland school regularly updates it with their parents and school community. Wake up.

Specific Purpose Grants

Mr QUINN: My question is directed to the Premier. I refer the Premier to my question on 12 May that highlighted the enormous growth in GST revenue to Queensland to which he expressed his concern for the level of specific purpose payments to Queensland. Can the Premier confirm that, since the introduction of the GST, the total amount of specific purpose payments to Queensland has increased by 20 per cent which more than maintains their real value? In other words, has Queensland benefited by both large increases in the GST and specific purpose payments?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. One of the issues that we need to face up to is the GST revenue. We get the GST revenue. I am delighted that we do and, frankly, so we should. Queenslanders pay it. This is not rocket science. We did not have a GST before.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: So we should get it. I believe we should get every single last cent of it. I do not make any apologies for that. Queenslanders pay the GST. They did not pay this tax before. Why should we not get that revenue. Too right we should get it. We should get the specific purpose payments.

One of things that the Leader of the Liberal Party did not mention is that a lot of the specific purpose payments are going to private schools and a lot are going to local government.

Mr Mackenroth: Private schools and local government.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. It goes to private schools and local government. It does not come to us. I believe very strongly that we need to maintain real value for these payments. There is no guarantee of that happening. The Leader of the Liberal Party has to remember that I sat there as part of the negotiating team on GST. While those opposite jump up and down about it we actually got a better deal. One of the things about the GST that those opposite seem to forget is that the Prime Minister and I actually had a discussion at the Lodge. It was just the Prime Minister and I. I have to say that it was a very rewarding discussion. Queensland ended up with tens of millions of dollars more. It was the most

productive financial discussion I have had in my life. The federal government wanted us to sign up and this government was not going to sign up until we got more. Did we get more? Yes, we did get more. I make no apology for saying we would not sign until we got it. Of course we got more GST money but we only got what we deserve.

In terms of the specific purpose payments, we are going to watch the federal government like a hawk because there is no guarantee that they are going to maintain real value. There is no guarantee at all.

Mr Mackenroth: Big rises through the state but not to the state.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. The Treasurer is spot on. With local government payments the money comes through us to local government. We do not keep it; we do not get it. Let us be really clear about what we are doing here.

The second issue I want to raise relates to the Grants Commission. I hear my very close colleagues and friends in New South Wales and Victoria, intimate mates of mine, make comments from time to time about Grants Commission allocations. There are two things there. The Grants Commission money is allocated on the basis of need. After Tassie we are the most decentralised state in Australia. We are entitled to the money under the Grants Commission and we do not support any changes to that formula. It is based not just on expenditure but on revenue. If we look at the revenue base on both criteria we are entitled to the amounts that we get.

As I said at a business breakfast this morning, one can drive around Victoria in an afternoon. Try to do that in Queensland. I say to John Brumby and our mate in New South Wales, whose team is going to get thrashed tonight, try to drive around Queensland in an afternoon. We are entitled to the money and we are spending it wisely.

Lawasia Headquarters

Mrs REILLY: My question is directed to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. I refer the minister to the decision by Lawasia to relocate its headquarters to Brisbane. What benefits is this likely to have for Queensland?

Mr WELFORD: I thank the honourable member for her question. Lawasia, whose membership is drawn from 53 countries worldwide, exerts an influence surpassed by few other international legal bodies. It is the international representative body for 23 Asia-Pacific countries, including Australia.

Lawasia provides an important forum in which law societies and bar associations can discuss issues of common interest. As the honourable member noted, late last year Lawasia decided to relocate its headquarters to Brisbane with considerable encouragement from the Queensland Law Society. I congratulate the Law Society on its initiative in pursuing that goal. This move will lead to a range of benefits for our state's legal services industry by enhancing the profile of Queensland lawyers in the region and by providing increased marketing opportunities.

Recently, Lawasia announced it would hold its biennial conference at the new Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre in March 2005. This will be an important boost for the local economy and is further evidence of the Gold Coast's growth as one of the most popular business events destinations in Queensland. The Lawasia conference will be held in conjunction with Australian Legal Convention, the Queensland Law Society symposium and the 11th Conference of the Chief Justices of the South Pacific. More than 1,000 delegates are likely to attend. In addition, I have arranged for my fellow Australian Attorneys-General to have our first national meeting in 2005 at the Gold Coast in conjunction with these other conferences. It will be just prior to the Lawasia conference.

The decision by Lawasia to relocate to Brisbane and to hold its biennial conference on the Gold Coast next year are further indications of Queensland's growing reputation as a strategic location for business and legal services. The Lawasia organisation has made a significant contribution to regional debate on issues such as the independence of the judiciary, terrorism, East Timor, child prosecution in Cambodia and the protection of refugees. Our government looks forward to supporting the Lawasia conference in 2005 and to working in partnership with Lawasia to engage with the growth economies of the Asia-Pacific region to see an expansion of the export of legal services from Queensland.

Marine Effluent

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. The boaties in the Maryborough electorate are up in arms over the new rules regarding marine sewage. Under the new laws any boaties staying out overnight must have an on board sewage holding tank that can only be emptied outside restricted areas offshore or into effluent dumps based on the shore. Local councils will not accept marine sewage as it contains salt water and it is a 20-hour return trip to empty the sewage offshore. My constituents are terrified of the prospect of the 'Poo Police' being able to board their boats without a warrant, which is technically a vehicle but is actually their home, and fine them up

to \$63,000 for breaching a law that is impossible to comply with. How can my constituents comply with this law?

Mr LUCAS: I will resist all the puns that immediately spring to mind in relation to the subject, because it is a very serious one, and I thank the honourable member for his question. The first thing I indicate is that the government makes no apology in relation to laws to protect our environment. For those of us who venture out on the water occasionally—rivers, bays, et cetera—nothing is more important than wetting the line and catching a fish. But, to be quite honest, that is all we want to catch. When one realises that most boaties are keen anglers, they also have a very keen interest in the state of the environment. As our population increases in south-east Queensland or indeed on the Fraser Coast where the honourable member is situated, more and more people will put more and more pressure on the nature of that environment. So it is very important that we take very serious steps about the issue.

I assure the honourable member that it is not necessarily the case that boat owners have to have holding tanks. There are other alternatives in relation to portable systems and on-board treatment systems. This should also be remembered: the vast majority of recreational vessels are vessels that are out for three to 10 hours—that is, 84 per cent of recreational trips—and nine per cent of recreational vessels carry six people or less. So we are talking about much larger vessels generally that are affected by this, but it is still a very serious question.

There is a pump-out facility in the honourable member's area, but I have received a number of reports about local authorities that are of course very supportive of the government taking steps to improve the quality of our waterways—and they do a lot of that themselves—but then complaining about salt water effluent in boat discharge. There are about 40,000 people in the Maryborough area. It is not hard to think of the proportion that a three-litre discharge from a boat would be in relation to salt water and fresh water. I understand that the local authorities do sell the waste water to cane farmers, but local authorities need to have a sense of reality in this as well.

Let us take Brisbane, for example. How many boat discharges would there be into sewerage treatment facilities in Brisbane, and let us compare that to perhaps the sewage generated from one office block or a street in greater Brisbane? So we do need to engage local authorities better so that they have an understanding of the implications of this. They want us to work towards improving water quality. Boaties do as well, and we do as well. Most boaties are not covered by this because most boaties do not go out for lengthy periods of time or are in vessels such as tinnies that do not normally have that sort of requirement. I am happy to work with the honourable member and other members in coastal electorates who have raised this as an issue. But we will not compromise on water quality, because it is important not only for the environment but also for those who like to eat what they catch.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Indooroopilly, I welcome a second group of students from Forest Lake State School in the electorate of Algeester. Welcome.

Innovation, High-Tech Industry

Mr LEE: My question is to the Minister for State Development and Innovation. Can the minister please inform the House of a government initiative designed to foster innovation and create more high-tech jobs in Queensland?

Mr McGRADY: Of course I can. I first of all thank the member for Indooroopilly for his interest in this subject. I think all of us on this side of the House know that he is certainly very involved in this industry. But nobody can doubt this government's commitment to fostering innovation right across this state. From our \$2 billion investment in R&D and infrastructure to our assistance for high-technology companies, we have a proven track record for fostering innovation. One example of this commitment is our multimillion-dollar investment in the i.lab technology incubator at Toowong, which, as we all know, is right in the heart of the member for Indooroopilly's electorate. The innovative businesses which are flourishing under i.lab's roof are to benefit from an additional \$3 million investment by this government. Since 2000, i.lab has been assisting the growth of our high-tech industries by fostering entrepreneurs and bringing them together with investors.

i.lab can certainly be proud of its track record. To date, it has provided support to 24 high-tech tenants, has generated 167 jobs and has helped to raise about \$8 million in capital—all this in just over three years. i.lab has accomplished this by providing start-up ICT companies with cost-effective business space, expert legal, financial and marketing advice, as well as providing access to the world's best venture capital. i.lab has proven so successful that we are developing plans to use it as a model for our statewide technology incubator strategy. This strategy will enable i.lab to continue to provide incubation services in Brisbane and expand a network of regional technology incubators or nodes throughout Queensland. We have allocated \$2.4 million to establish these nodes in regional Queensland, and that is on top of the \$600,000 recently announced to support an incubator in Cairns. i.lab is clearly helping Queensland's ICT companies grow, and they in turn are creating new business, new jobs and certainly boosting our economy. This is certainly another smart investment in the Smart State's future.

Redcliffe Rail Link

Miss SIMPSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. Minister, I refer to the Petrie to Kippa-Ring corridor impact assessment statement that cost taxpayers almost \$600,000 which recommended that construction of the Redcliffe rail line be commenced. Isn't it a fact that this recommendation has been overruled by a five-page Queensland Transport study questioning the results on the basis that commercial-in-confidence data available to the department had been withheld from the consultant? Minister, why did the department commission a study costing \$600,000 knowing that it would not make the relevant data available, and was this just a costly stunt designed to con the people of Redcliffe in the lead-up to the last election so that they believed a rail connection would be built?

Mr LUCAS: The honourable member was with me in this parliament during the last term, and she would be well aware that the Premier and the then Minister for Transport indicated in July 2003 that the preliminary results from the examination indicated that it would be very difficult to justify having a rail link to Kippa-Ring at that point in time. But what the Premier and the then minister did announce were significant commitments to rolling out bus services in that area.

The honourable member has asked a question on a false premise, because to suggest that the study was about costs alone is simply not correct. As the honourable member knows, when one is going to study the acquisition or the development of a public transport corridor, one looks at not only the costings of it but also the environmental issues, and there are significant environmental issues in that part of the world. We look at station locations and town planning issues. The actual costings part of it is an important part but only one part of it. I make no apology for the fact that we studied through our consultants very vigorously the issue of the Kippa-Ring rail link because it is important to the local community.

But one thing that I will not allow to happen and this government will not allow to happen is what happened during the years of the National Party in the 1960s when rail lines were closed. Sometimes they are closed, and in certain circumstances I do not have a difficulty with that. But right of ways were sold when there was a clear use for them in the future. The government has not indicated that we will not have a rail link on the Redcliffe Peninsula ultimately. What the government has indicated is that we will protect that corridor so that an alternative does become viable. I remind the honourable member that rail recovers about 30 per cent of its operating costs. That is not a problem for us. We spend about \$350 million a year, I think, off the top of my head in relation to the subsidy.

Miss Simpson: Why wasn't the data made available to the consultants?

Mr LUCAS: If the honourable member waits, I will get to that. What had happened at the time was that consideration was being given to undertaking that project as a public-private partnership—in other words, in the private sector. How would it have looked then if Queensland Rail, potentially a competitor and a bidder in relation to an open tender process, had been involved in supplying the figures on which that was based? That would have either put it at a commercial advantage or a commercial disadvantage.

Having said that, I think that we can probably do things better. One of the things that I will do is work with my department to see how we might better refine those costings. The simple fact of the matter is that, ultimately, we probably will see rail in the Redcliffe-Kippa Ring peninsula area. We have \$7 million in the Smart State building fund for public transport service improvements, including bus priority measures along Anzac Avenue, improved bus stops between Petrie and Kippa Ring and improved bus running times. I am happy to talk more about that in the future.

Island Councils, Auditor-General's Report

Ms NOLAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. I understand that the Auditor-General's report into island councils was tabled today. What were the results of those audits?

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I thank the honourable member for Ipswich for her question.

Mr Johnson: Don't let me intimidate you.

A government member: That's not likely.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Not likely at all, really. The Auditor-General's report into the 17 Island councils was tabled today for the period between 1 May 2003 to 30 April 2004. I would like to congratulate the nine councils that received unqualified audits. They were the Hammond, Iama, Kubin, Mabuig, Poruma, Seisa, St Pauls, Warraber and Ugar island councils. Three of these island councils, Hammond, Mabuig and Ugar, showed a significant improvement on previous years while five of the other six had received unqualified audits for the last six years. Unfortunately, two qualified audit opinions and six council audits remain unfinalised.

The issues highlighted in this report are of concern and they are among the reasons that a review of the Torres Strait legislation under the Community Services Act will start later this year. We are

confident that Aboriginal councils becoming part of the Department of Local Government and Planning will bring about greater accountability and a better understanding of financial processes. This change will be supported by measures to give councillors a greater capacity to take effective charge of their councils.

State-Controlled Roads, Traffic Congestion

Dr FLEGG: My question is to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. In light of last week's release of the RACQ survey of peak hour travel times in Brisbane that showed that Moggill Road crawls inbound at an average speed of 18 kilometres an hour and that the Centenary-Western Freeway crawls at about one-third of its speed limit, instead of hiding behind continually blaming the federal government over roads, when will the minister face up to his responsibility of funding these chronically congested state-controlled roads and do something for the long-suffering residents of Mount Ommaney, Moggill and Indooroopilly?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for his question. The honourable member usually comes to me when he has road issues, including road issues with the federal government because it does not seem to listen to him very much. The federal government wants to put a highway that nobody wants through his electorate. I could talk about what is happening in the budget, but that would not be appropriate so I will not do that. Instead I will speak about traditionally what we have done in relation to roads in Queensland.

In the past, when it comes to capital and maintenance expenditure Queensland's roads budget has been approximately \$1.3 billion. That is a significant amount of money. We get 20 per cent of our funding from the Commonwealth government. When it comes to the Commonwealth government, we are going backwards. One thing that everybody agrees on, with the exception of Cameron Thompson—

Dr Flegg: They're not going anywhere in Moggill.

Mr LUCAS: I will be going through Moggill if Cameron Thompson gets his way. There will not be a problem with that. If Cameron Thompson gets his way, the member will not have to worry about any of these issues. They will pale into insignificance compared to what will happen to the member's electorate. In fact, I have had people from the member's electorate who I would not class as core or traditional Labor voters who are very keen on the election of Mark Latham and, indeed, offering to campaign in Blair for—

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mr LUCAS: That is right—for the Labor Party. Having said that, one of the disappointments with AusLink is how poorly Queensland did under AusLink compared with the other states. Under the first eight years of the Howard government, Queensland got 24 per cent of the National Highway funding cake. That is more than our population share, because we have 27 per cent of the National Highway journeys. We are a very decentralised state. A lot of people live outside the capital city.

Under AusLink, what are we offered? Down to 19 per cent! I am a student of politics, like most members here. We saw in the *Courier-Mail* that there was talk about studying the feasibility of western bypasses, taking the tolls off the Logan Motorway, 'We might do a half northern bypass and fix the Ipswich Motorway at the same time'—all of that stuff.

Dr Flegg: They're state roads.

Mr LUCAS: When the honourable member and his party do such a good job, he will have the opportunity to become the Transport Minister and then he can answer questions in this chamber. In the meantime, I will stick to answering questions and he can stick to asking them.

In relation to AusLink, we asked for \$3.2 billion over five years, which included things that would make a major improvement to traffic in the member's electorate, not to mention the fact that during the Brisbane City Council election campaign the federal government made noises about assisting Lord Mayor Newman to fund some of his tunnel proposals. None of that is in AusLink—not in five years of AusLink. That must be on the never-never.

Dr Flegg: Let's talk about Moggill Road and the Western Freeway.

Mr LUCAS: I know the honourable member is frustrated because we want to actually improve the Ipswich Motorway. We want to take away the temptation for people to drive through the member's electorate. As I said before, there is a very clear choice. If the member wants people in his electorate to live on a half northern bypass, then they should vote for the Liberal Party. If they do not, then they should support us.

Water Police, Thursday Island Search and Rescue Boat

Mr O'BRIEN: My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Last week on Thursday Island the minister commissioned the Water Police search and rescue vessel, the

Carolus Isua. Can the minister tell the House a bit about this vessel and the role of the Water Police in modern day policing?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for Cook for the question. I was very pleased to be on Thursday Island at this time last week to commission the *Carolus Isua*, which is the newest vessel for the Thursday Island Water Police. Mr Isua was a Torres Strait man who was a community police officer for many, many years and a greatly respected elder of the Torres Strait. In fact, he was made an honorary superintendent by the Queensland Police Service. I am told that in his lifetime he did so much to bring the Queensland Police Service and the Torres Strait people very close together. So it was very appropriate that we named a vessel after him. It is a great mark of respect for him and the work that he did. Last week, I was also very pleased to meet his family and many Torres Strait Islander people who came along to the ceremony.

This vessel is important for the Torres Strait. It is one of five constructed by a Queensland based company, Dee Vee, for the police. This particular vessel cost \$246,000. It is equipped with the latest electronic communications and navigational aids. I know that the member for Cook will appreciate that there is a great need for a vessel such as this one for search and rescue operations and also for transporting police from one island to another. In fact, while I was visiting the police on Wednesday at Thursday Island they had four search and rescue operations just on that day alone. So I think that reminds us all how important the vessels and the Water Police are to our community generally.

I have had the pleasure of visiting Water Police on the Gold Coast, at Yeppoon, and recently at Lytton with the local member. I have found those Water Police officers to be very professional. Those of us who do not live near the water do not stop and think about the terrific work that the Water Police do on a daily basis. A lot of their work is search and rescue work and, obviously, their vessels are very important for that. A lot of their vessels are high-speed response vessels. They are also very involved with the Australian Customs Service. I am told that they will participate in extensive training with customs on security and shipping in Queensland's ports during the coming year. So I want to take this opportunity today to pay tribute to the fine work undertaken by our Water Police throughout the state.

Tree-Clearing Permits

Mrs PRATT: My question is to the Premier. Queensland has been in drought for some years and, in some places, for as long as 14 years or more. Normally land-holders would not clear under such conditions, but the Premier's government stampeded land-holders into panic clearing with the announcement of the total ban on clearing remnant vegetation by 2006. The ballot clearing permits must be used by the due date, which will force land-holders to clear land while it is distressed. Selectively clearing the same amount of land in optimum conditions over 10 years would preserve the land, while adversely enforcing the clearing time frame in drought conditions will be detrimental. This government is determined to preserve the land. Therefore, I ask the Premier: will he review the time frame for using the permits because it would be in the best interest of the land or will he assist in the destruction of the very land that he wants to preserve by enforcing the proposed time frame? I ask the Premier this question as a last resort. Will commonsense prevail?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Premier, you realise that it is not really within your portfolio?

Mr BEATTIE: You know me, Mr Speaker. I am always happy to have a view on things.

This matter has been to cabinet. We have considered it at some length. We have been working with the various groups on the land—AgForce and others. I know that they do not support aspects of this legislation, but we have been working with them to come up with sensible outcomes. As the member knows, there is in some areas clearing for fodder purposes for drought—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I understand that, but there are opportunities for the provisions during drought. The reality is: there needs to be a mechanism to introduce this legislation. What we have tried to do is be fair. We have put up a package of \$150 million, which is one of the most significant packages put towards protecting the environment the state has ever seen, and we have tried to do it in a sensible way in terms of timing.

I do not accept the member's view about panic clearing. Some people may have sought to go out and do that, but we have tried to inform the community as well as we possibly could. I think in the past there has been some panic clearing, but I think generally, bearing in mind the moratorium that we brought in as part of this, we have managed this as sensibly as we possibly can.

The problem with the proposition the member is putting is: how many times do we keep extending this? How many times do we keep going back and changing the scenario? The reality is—

Mr Hobbs: It is the same permit, though.

Mr BEATTIE: With all due respect, this is not the member's question. I am trying to—

Mr Hobbs: I am trying to be helpful.

Mr BEATTIE: That is the last thing the member would be, but I thank him for the thought, misplaced and ill-informed as it was.

I suggest that the honourable member have a discussion with Stephen Robertson, the minister, to talk through what is happening in her particular area. I know that Stephen has met with a number of people on the land who are involved in these changes. He would be happy to meet with people from her area, as he always is. He is such a warm, considerate person. The point here is: we have tried to be fair. We believe that what is coming in is sensible. If there are particular matters, then I suggest that the member meet with the minister.

Mrs Pratt: Doing this is not a genuine commitment to the environment. You are destroying it.

Mr BEATTIE: It is a commitment to the environment. To not do it would see the environment destroyed. The facts of life are that what we have tried to do is inform—

Mrs Pratt: The same amount of hectares over 10 years will not hurt it like this two-year period.

Mr BEATTIE: This is part of the problem. The difficulty the member has—let us be blunt—is that her area is one of the most highly cleared areas in the state. That is her difficulty. That is the difficulty she is confronted with.

Mrs Pratt interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The question has been asked.

Mr BEATTIE: I suggest that the member meet with the minister. Let me be really clear. We have a mandate to do this. We are going to do it with as much care and consideration as we can, but do it we will.

Fight Fire Fascination Program

Mr FRASER: My question is addressed to the Minister for Emergency Services. Last Thursday I represented the minister at a meeting of firefighters who devote their time to educating young people who have been in trouble with lighting fires. Could the minister tell the House about the Fight Fire Fascination program run by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service?

Mr CUMMINS: May I start by saying that, after having more time to again peruse the Department of Emergency Services annual report 2002-03, I advise the Leader of the Opposition and indeed the House that page 11, total revenue user charges, page 92, revenues from ordinary activities, and page 95, revenues from ordinary activities, set out income from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service charges.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: It is a 145-page document.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. That is general user charges. It does not answer the specific question we asked.

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for Mount Coot-tha for the question. The Fight Fire Fascination program is another brilliant initiative of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. Juvenile fire setters are the third largest cause of structural fires and one of the major causes of bushfires across Queensland. The property and environmental damage they cause is enormous, as is the physical cost of painful, disfiguring and sometimes fatal burns and injuries.

I congratulate and thank everyone in the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service involved with this very worthwhile community based initiative. It is a free service provided by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service throughout Queensland. The program is available to children aged three to 17 years with an unhealthy interest in fire. Firefighters go through an accredited one-week course to become program practitioners. They go to the family home for visits to educate kids about fires and the consequences of those actions. Over an average period of six months, the firefighter develops trust and understanding with the child and explains the consequences as well as the benefits of fire, showing that fire is a tool, not a toy, and must be respected.

By incorporating a series of goals, objectives and rewards into the Triple F program, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is able to turn a negative into a positive and stop childhood fire fascination at an early age. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service receives referrals from concerned parents or guardians, the Queensland Police Service, the Juvenile Aid Bureau, the Department of Justice and the Department of Child Safety. I thank the ministers of those departments for their positive cooperation.

The fire service currently has 56 practitioners of the program throughout Queensland, with plans to expand it to 70 practitioners. Since July 2000 approximately 1,300 kids and their families were put through the program. The Fight Fire Fascination scheme recently received \$120,000 in funding for regional delivery expenses.

State Schools, Insurance Cover

Mr MESSENGER: My question is addressed to the Minister for Education. Is there a legal requirement for all Queensland state schools to have appropriate insurance cover for injuries sustained in school sanctioned contact sports? If not, will the minister give an undertaking that her department will cover the costs of any children injured in school sanctioned sport?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I have to say it is a little confusing, but what I can say to the member is that Education Queensland is covered by the Queensland Government Insurance Fund. Any claims that are made against the department are covered by that fund. Claims would have to be assessed for their veracity and merit. If the member has any particular claim that he is aware of that he believes may need some assessment, I am very happy to talk to him about it. It would depend on the circumstances in which the claim was made. I mean, it could be an accident in the playground or it could be in other circumstances. It would be assessed as any other claim against the department was assessed, and any costs that arose would be covered by the Queensland Government Insurance Fund.

Red-Eared Slider Turtle

Ms BARRY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy. Can the minister advise the House about the actions being taken by the government to eradicate the red-eared slider turtle from the Pine Rivers shire and other waterways in south-east Queensland?

Mr ROBERTSON: In January my Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy became aware of a population of red-eared slider turtles in the Pine Rivers shire in south-east Queensland. Considered as one of the top 100 world's worst invaders, the red-eared slider turtle is very aggressive and will outcompete native species for food and space in our waterways and lake systems.

That is why the government acted quickly to establish a specialist task force comprising the Pine Rivers Shire Council, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, the Queensland Museum and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. This task force immediately commenced an eradication program in Pine Rivers shire. To date, approximately 100 turtles have been captured from a confined area in this shire. Field staff are continuing to survey streams and dams to determine the extent of the incursion and to determine the most suitable eradication techniques.

The task force has also undertaken a community engagement program and has subsequently received considerable support from the community. A turtle hotline was set up for the public to report suspected sightings of red-eared slider turtles. All suspected sightings have so far proven negative.

Four red-eared slider turtles have been voluntarily surrendered in south-east Queensland under the national exotic reptile amnesty, which is administered by officers of the EPA. Three of the surrendered turtles were being kept as pets. The other turtle was said to have been found on a suburban street in the Broadbeach area of the Gold Coast. This is the first record of red-eared slider turtles occurring outside Pine Rivers shire. Initial reports from the area indicate the environment in which the turtle was found is unsuitable for red-eared slider turtles to maintain a viable population, but further investigation and surveying of the area will be undertaken to determine whether a population exists in the wild in this area.

We are taking the threat to biodiversity presented by this turtle very seriously, and that is why a new project plan and budget for the eradication of red-eared slider turtles and associated surveillance and community engagement activities are currently being prepared by my department.

DUTIES AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (11.31 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That leave be granted to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Duties Act 2001.

Motion agreed to.

First Reading

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

Second Reading

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (11.32 a.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Duties Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2004 delivers additional duty savings to Queenslanders as announced in the state's 2004-05 budget. These initiatives will assist all home buyers, reduce the cost of general insurance policies and benefit both credit card providers and credit card holders. Currently, all Queensland home buyers may claim a concessional transfer duty rate of one per cent for the first \$250,000 of the value of a home that is used as their principal place of residence while general rates of duty apply to the excess price over \$250,000. A further rebate is provided for buyers purchasing their first home valued at up to \$500,000.

This rebate for first home buyers was extended on 1 May this year at a cost of \$101.6 million over four years to deliver on one of this government's election commitments. In the 2004-05 state budget, I announced further transfer duty savings for all home buyers. In short, the ceiling for the concessional transfer duty rate of one per cent is to be increased from \$250,000 to \$300,000, with effect from 1 August 2004. This is the earliest date that these measures can commence to enable sufficient time for system and process changes to support the new amendments. This initiative will provide home buyers with substantial transfer duty savings on the purchase of a home valued at \$250,000 or more. For example, a person buying their home for \$350,000 would pay \$6,000 at present compared to \$4,750 from 1 August—a saving of \$1,250.

As the extended home transfer duty concession will not apply until 1 August 2004, this bill will include an antiavoidance provision to address any schemes designed to defer transactions to a date after 31 July 2004. The provision will operate so that the extended home transfer duty concession will not apply to certain home transactions made on or after 1 August 2004, where a prior transaction or arrangement is made before that date. Examples of a prior transaction or arrangement include a pre-existing transfer or agreement which is replaced by another transfer or agreement for the same home after 1 August 2004 or an option to purchase a home granted before 1 August 2004. In these circumstances, the parties will be able to claim the home transfer duty concession as it applies at present.

As announced in the budget, credit card duty will also be abolished from 1 August 2004. Credit card duty is currently imposed on credit card transactions at the rate of 10c for each transaction in a billing period less 10c for the billing period. Credit card duty is payable by credit card providers but generally passed on to credit card holders. The abolition of credit card duty will result in Queenslanders paying approximately \$19 million less in state taxes each year or \$76 million over four years.

I now turn to the final duty initiative announced in the budget—insurance duty. Currently, insurance duty is imposed on insurance policies relating to Queensland, with different duty rates applying for different insurance policies. For example, a flat rate of 10c is imposed on CTP motor vehicle policies, a rate of five per cent of the net premium applies for WorkCover insurance and various rates apply to life insurance policies. Duty is imposed at the rate of five per cent of the premium for class 2 general insurance, which is insurance for professional indemnity, comprehensive motor vehicle cover, a home mortgage that is a first mortgage and travel personal accident cover. All other policies, such as business insurance and domestic and commercial building and contents cover, constitute class 1 general insurance and attract duty at the rate of 8.5 per cent of the premium.

The duty rate for class 1 general insurance is to be reduced from 8.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent. This is the second lowest rate in Australia. This change is also to take effect on 1 August 2004 for insurance premiums paid on or after that date. This initiative is expected to provide Queenslanders with in excess of \$76 million in insurance duty savings over the next four years. This change will apply to all class 1 general insurance policies and will therefore benefit home owners, investors, businesses and sporting, non-profit and community organisations.

These changes continue to ensure that Queensland maintains its highly competitive tax environment. To ensure that we are able to introduce these changes as quickly as possible, I will be asking the parliament to pass this bill on Friday following the second reading debate on the budget. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Seeney, adjourned.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fraser): Order! Before calling the Leader of the Opposition, I welcome staff and students from Forest Lake State School in the state electorate of Algeester.

CHILD SAFETY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 20 May (see p. 1326).

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.37 a.m.): I rise to deliver the opposition's reply to the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. I believe this is one of the most important pieces of legislation that will be debated in this House over the course of this term. It marks the first of a three-stage legislative reform process to implement many of the 110

recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report *Protecting children: an inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*, which was delivered in 2004.

The Nationals' opposition offers its 100 per cent support to the reforms that are required to ensure an integrated and holistic approach to protecting our children and providing them with the best possible care. Being supportive of the reforms and legislation does not mean that we will not criticise the government when and where we believe that improvement is necessary. However, the minister is aware that we have chosen to bring most matters to his attention in the first instance rather than bring them to the public's attention. That is our commitment to bipartisanship.

I think it is also important to be frank about why we are debating these reforms. These reforms have come about following what I have previously described as systemic failures in the culture of administration over a considerable period of time within the Department of Families.

I am very much of the belief that these problems are as a result of systemic, not individual, failures. A very sad indictment on the way this department has operated from the top down was in a memo from a departmental officer some 12 months ago where they said that they only had the resources to deal primarily with children who were at risk of physical abuse rather than sexual abuse in the first instance because they were the children who were going to be killed or injured. Children who were at risk of sexual abuse or being sexually abused were not necessarily killed.

Cases relating to the Department of Families' handling of matters requiring protective intervention of children which were first revealed in the media and which went on to form the basis of Operation Zellow were effectively denied by the government, and the people who were found to have made inquiries about the case were disciplined.

Any suggestion that the government was keen to have these matters investigated and initiated the CMC inquiry is completely incorrect and would be a rewrite of the processes that led to the decision to establish an inquiry. When the opposition leaked material that substantiated the claims, and community groups like Bravehearts and the media were also able to substantiate these claims, the government moved to conduct an internal audit and establish a hotline. Further revelations about the repeated denial of problems associated with cases was then enough pressure to finally force this government to take some action, but not until after considerable kicking and screaming.

Even when the parameters of the CMC inquiry were announced, the Premier and the then minister for families chose to cast doubt on the evidence that was being put forward. I found it curious, to say the least, that the Premier and the minister were challenging the veracity of the process which they claim to have implemented.

The Nationals' position has always been for a broadly based examination of all the issues and processes through a royal commission, and in particular to encourage witnesses to come forward by being offered indemnity. The failure to extend the terms of reference, I believe, was one of the greatest acts of social negligence we could perpetrate on the children in the community which relied on the Department of Families to protect them from abuse. By way of explanation, in the time since this CMC inquiry, in which I believe the commissioners did their very best, I have had a range of people raise others issues with regard to the abuse of people in other areas of care, particularly disability care.

The inquiry confirmed that the management processes of the department had failed totally in its administration of its child protection functions. It was unthinkable that anybody could accept that other functions of the department would be exempt from the same systemic failures, given that they emanated from such fundamental failures, including the lack of appropriate record systems, reporting systems and accountability.

It is incredible to think that a department can knowingly be in breach of its own legislation for three years without this basic failure being reported to government. It was inconceivable that a minister of the Crown did not know about this failure. If that really was the case, how was it possible for a minister to fail to identify such a basic failure?

When the opposition raised these matters in parliament, the minister consistently and deliberately refused to provide the basic information that would have permitted increased accountability in the operation of the department. For example, the minister consistently refused to provide information to the parliament about how many family services officers were allocated to child protection responsibilities, yet the director-general, at the same time of the hearing, was able to provide that figure. During the hearings the minister advised that section 88 of the Child Protection Act was not necessarily being complied with, yet on the floor of the parliament she had previously denied any such failure.

Another concerning aspect of the running of the department was the failure of data and information management. It was unacceptable that the children of Queensland would have to wait five to seven years for the department to acquire an information system that has such a long delivery path.

Child protection task force chairman Peter Forster's report identified a lack of suitable information systems and that there was no funding for the necessary information technology architecture, for the upgrade of the IT infrastructure for the necessary data warehouse or for the record keeping

improvement project. The report confirmed that the existing network infrastructure is obsolete and slower than most home computers using modems, that there is no statewide access to client files and that there is no computerised system regarding foster-carers.

I note that the target given in the blueprint for implementing the 110 recommendations from the CMC for the completion of the upgrade of information systems begun by the Department of Families is June 2006. This is a crucial part of the reform process and has to be in place by the target time frame to ensure that the new Department of Child Safety has a functioning record keeping process which will allow for the best possible internal operations and coordination between the eight different departments that will play a part in the new processes. These systems are only as good as the data they contain and, frankly, at present the data is either trash or does not exist.

For this reason I still have some concerns over how effectively the backlog of child abuse notifications is being addressed. Other important components of an effective child protection system that the opposition has argued strongly for is on the recruitment and retention of family services officers. As I understand it, some 28 per cent of staff in the Department of Families at the time of the inquiry had only a year or less experience. There was a turnover rate of 15 per cent and there were many concerns about the juniorisation of staff compounding some of the problems.

In any workplace, but in particular one that can quite stressfully play on those employed at times and requiring good judgment, unless these people are valued and encouraged, it will make it more difficult to be able to keep them and to be able to build a base of corporate knowledge and experience which is so crucial for addressing these issues in the future.

I do not think any excuses should be made, and I am not seeking to justify any examples where individuals may have failed their duty to children in care, but it has always been concerning to the opposition that the government sought to place much of the blame on the front-line staff who were working under enormous pressures and circumstances.

The opposition did receive, during the period prior to the CMC hearings, a number of personal accounts from families and staff who felt they were being left to cop all of the blame and demonised by the administration when they were the ones who were actually doing all of the work in dealing with these difficult areas. They said that they were working under policies and processes which were put in place by the government and the department which does not properly recognise them, resource them or provide them with the powers of intervention which they need to be able to protect children not only in these abusive foster care relationships but also with general child protection needs. That is exactly where the system has fallen down over a number of years. A sad indictment of the Department of Families is that these front-line workers did not feel that the system would provide them with the support and encouragement to voice these concerns.

One of the first tasks that has been embarked on following the release of Peter Forster's blueprint is the recruitment of 518 service delivery staff. That is a lot of staff. There is no argument that we have to get more people working in the new department, and people who have experience to provide a stabilising influence.

It is positive to see the Minister for Child Safety saying that he is confident that the new structure of child safety service centres, together with mentoring and professional development opportunities, will ensure it has the staff with the support it needs to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people.

These are important steps to ensure the new systems will have a transparent and open culture. As the first part of a three stage legislative reform process, this bill seeks to do the following in broad terms: establish a new Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, extend the community visitor program, extend the children services tribunal jurisdiction, establish the child death case review functions, enable responses to an unborn child notification, annual public reporting for departments, provision to support the child safety directors and new principles for the Child Protection Act of 1999.

I will talk to these reforms more specifically in the committee stage of the debate depending upon the response from the minister, but I do wish, in my second reading reply, to touch on some of the concerns the opposition has at this early stage with the reforms proposed in stage one. This bill extends the statutory Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People to become the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. With the additional role of Child Guardian, the commissioner will be responsible for an extended range of monitoring, auditing and reviewing functions in relation to children who come to the attention of the Department of Child Safety.

Given the total and absolute failure of the Department of Families to protect our children it would be a pretty good assumption that this litany of failure is also testament to the corresponding failure by the position of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. As I have said before, I believe that this is a case of the process of this position not living up to its expectations.

The opposition has not sought to blame any one individual over what has been a failure of existing legislation and implementation. An example is when the government acted to repeal the

Children's Commissioner and Children Services Appeals Tribunal. Its particular responsibilities in relation to the investigation of paedophilia were removed. The standing reference to the investigation of paedophilia that existed with the Crime Commission was also deleted when it was combined with the CJC to create the CMC.

I made it clear, as did the previous Leader of the Opposition, that we were very concerned about the removal of this particular reference at the time of the formation of the CMC. With regards to the extended range of monitoring, auditing and reviewing functions provided to the commissioner in her capacity as Child Guardian, the opposition believes very strongly that the appropriate reporting and performance mechanisms need to exist and be followed accordingly. I acknowledge that I have raised this point with the minister and the minister has provided significant encouragement on that point and has said that he will be making sure that that is the case.

As I understand from my reading of the legislation and the briefing that was provided to me, the commissioner does have a number of specific reporting requirements to the minister who will obviously bring them to the attention of the parliament. If we legislate for certain reporting requirements it is imperative that they are consistent across the entire role performed by this office or that other government agencies also have a role to annually report on departmental operations relevant to child protection.

I am concerned that in this legislation the reporting requirement has not been applied as stringently as it should be. For example, in the section of the bill that looks at child deaths and the responsibility of the commissioner to prepare a report each year on the matters that are required, there is then a further clause which states that the commissioner may—and I repeat may—also prepare and give to the minister other reports arising from the performance of the commission with reference to how previous recommendations have been implemented. Again I put emphasis on the word 'may'. I believe that it should be stronger than 'may', that it should be 'must'. This means that the commissioner is not legally bound to report on previous recommendations which she—and I say she in this case—sought to implement with regards to child deaths. If we are going to talk about this new system being absolutely open and transparent then I believe these reporting requirements have to be mandatory. They must apply, they have to be mandatory; not simply providing the respective office with a choice which they may or may not decide to take.

The minister has to know about these things and following on from that there must also be an avenue where ultimately the parliament must know about these things. That has been the failure of the system in the past: the failure of the information to get from the department to the minister. In some cases I think the previous minister may have had it but did not necessarily act on it, or it may have been hived away somewhere in the office. But the information has to properly go through.

The oversight provisions that the commissioner has to ensure things are happening also have to be transparent. The minister has to know about it; not only that, the parliament has to know about it. There has to be an avenue where the public has an opportunity to be able to scrutinise the performance, because when the information is not out there that is when there is a problem. When the information is reluctantly given or not given, that is when the cover ups and the incompetence continues. That is when, as we say in modern parlance, the clients of the department, the children in this case, really miss out. We need to be able to properly scrutinise the performance of the department, the performance of those officers and the performance of the Child Guardian in this case. We know that the reluctance to provide that information in the past led to a lethargic response and probably the response coming much later than it would have otherwise come. We know the experience that we had. Basically it was like trying to pull teeth to get the information here in parliament. The minister indicated that she was having some difficulty and things were being found lying around the place. If there was a reluctance to give information and that information was conflicting, if it was different in here to what it was in the CMC inquiry, then we really have to question what was going on.

Any reporting provisions have to be absolutely mandatory because that is the only way that we will be able to ensure that children are going to be properly protected by this new legislation. We will keep a watching brief on it through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to the minister. We would encourage you to keep an eye on that because we think it is very, very important. We do not feel that it is necessary to be opposing legislation based on that, but we would encourage the inclusion of mandatory provisions at some future time. Certainly, whilst it may not necessarily be in the legislation, we would encourage by way of practice or convention the mandatory exposure of these particular oversight provisions.

A common approach to monitoring, auditing or reviewing the performance of a function within a government department or agency is by setting key performance indicators, otherwise referred to as KPIs. We see these in the ministerial portfolio statements and annual reports year after year and amazingly, despite what the feeling is on the ground, the target or benchmark is always met or is very, very close. One of my concerns is that when you are benchmarking yourself, what sort of independent process is going to be in place to ensure that these benchmarks actually provide some concrete feedback to the client group you are dealing with? If there is a benchmark that says 80 per cent of this has been achieved, does this reflect the real feeling out there on the ground? Whatever benchmarks or

KPIs are put in place to test the effectiveness and efficiency of these reforms, they need to be reported openly and accurately and appear in each year's ministerial program statements or annual report.

Last year we saw a number of these scrapped within the Department of Families, such as the workload management lists, which was an unfortunate example of how the department had failed to benchmark its activities so that it could be open and accountable. As I understand it, the next stage of the legislative reform process will extend the monitoring scheme to cover other government agencies which provide services to these children in care, including the Departments of Health, Education, Housing and Police.

In his second reading speech the Premier addressed the issue of information exchange. It cannot be emphasised enough the importance of ministers and staff from other departments assisting the Children's Commission wherever possible prior to the enactment of the second stage of reforms.

This leads on to the Children's Commissioner's existing monitoring functions being expanded to include the monitoring, auditing and reviewing of the handling of cases of children in the child safety system by service providers and the monitoring, auditing and reviewing of systems, policies and practices of service providers in relation to these children. As I said before, there was a clear failure by the department to be open and accountable with its workload management lists. I know that it is the minister's intention—and I hope that these new processes are truly adhered to—to require information sharing about case loads. This will hopefully lead to a more transparent and open culture within the Department of Child Safety.

The bill re-orders the child protection principles in the Child Protection Act 1999 so that the act is to be administered according to an overarching principle that the welfare and best interests of the child are paramount. This includes reinforcing the existing requirements that children's rights, interests and welfare should take precedence over the rights and interests of adults where there is a conflict.

The bill also seeks to ensure that the child be kept informed of matters affecting him or her in a way that is appropriate, having regard to his or her age and ability to understand. The opposition is supportive of this particular revision of principles guiding the Child Protection Act. However, I would appreciate the Premier or minister's clarification of where families are involved in the decision making process. Do these reforms intend to erode the involvement of the family in the decision making process—I note the minister is shaking his head and is saying that that is not the intention; I would appreciate his clarification on the record later—or do they simply seek to reinforce the child's rights.

I cannot actually recall seeing this in the bill or in the explanatory notes. This is an issue that I have expressed some concern about given the evidence brought forward which clearly points to a failure in this area of the process. I believe the power given to the Child Safety Department to respond to notifications made before a child is born where the child may be in need of protection after he or she is born is a crucial part of the legislation.

We would all remember the recent recommendations of the Ombudsman in the 'Baby Kate' report. In this particular instance, and previously with the Brooke Brennan case, the Ombudsman established maladministration. It is sad that it has taken these tragic circumstances to ensure that the system will more carefully monitor children who are in these most vulnerable situations.

The new processes and reforms that will guide the Department of Child Safety in its coordination with other departments and agencies are set out to provide for a proactive approach to children in care. This is instead of a failed system that simply did not have the capacity, by virtue of the way it was being administered and the culture that had developed, to detect and intervene in the most severe cases but also care for all children who had come to the attention of the Department of Families.

I think that the strengthening of the Children's Commissioner's ability to investigate complaints with regard to all children who are brought to the attention of the department, not just those under a formal order or subject to statutory intervention as is currently the case, should provide some real teeth to this position and an investigative role that simply has not existed. Reactive procedures or processes are not there to compensate for a lack of proactive approach and I would hope that they do not have to be used at all.

However, given the previous record of the Department of Families under the stewardship of this government in the past six years, which has seen 94 children known to the department die, there is a need to have a more stringent and transparent process in place which will ensure that these mistakes are not repeated. This process will occur through a legislative requirement for the Department of Child Safety to conduct a child death case review in circumstances where a child may have come to the department's attention and died within three years after that contact.

As the Premier stated in introducing this legislation, the review of a child death will determine whether the department and its associated agencies acted appropriately in relation to a child. A child death case review committee will act as an accountability measure to monitor the reviews undertaken by the Department of Child Safety. The causes and circumstances of a child's death will be reviewed through the establishment of a register and child death research function which will fall under the responsibility of the Children's Commissioner.

These processes will have to be put in place, but I stress again that they are there because mistakes have been made in the past. We will have failed our children in care if in another five or six years we look back and an unacceptably high number known to the department have died. If mistakes are made, they have to be properly scrutinised and the department's processes improved. We should not accept a standard lower than this.

I have been a strong advocate for improving the legislation we have in place and also ensuring its proper implementation, resourcing and enforcement. We can have good laws in place, such as section 88 of the Child Protection Act with regards to six-monthly reviews of children in care. Nobody would argue against this. However, it has not been implemented in its three years of existence. It is good to have fantastic laws but unless they are complied with and unless they are being overseen and monitored in some way then they fail this parliament and they fail the people that they were put in place to support.

Section 88 of the Child Protection Act, which deals with six-monthly reviews of children in care, failed to protect those people it was put in place to support and protect. It failed the kids. I hope that we have a situation where the mechanisms, which are to be put in place by this bill, are adhered to, are overseen by appropriate compliance mechanisms and are appropriately resourced.

When a government legislates it gives the impression that it is fixing the problem. If properly implemented and administered it should work and do just that. If the implementation, resourcing and administration fall down then it is doomed. That has been a concern of the opposition and a concern of other people. From what I have seen to date, I believe these legislative reforms provide us with the platform to establish a more open and accountable system and culture for ensuring the wellbeing of our children in care. Over the next two years these reforms, as well as the stage two and three legislative reforms, have to be supported with the necessary funding, resources and commitment to implementation otherwise these will be nothing more than aspirational documents. Whilst I cannot talk about the budget, I am encouraged by what appears to be the government's funding commitment to this new department and its implementation.

Our children should be the first priority of any government. There needs to be no justification for this. The Premier called the election in order to secure a mandate from the people of Queensland to implement the CMC's 110 recommendations. That was despite the opposition offering complete bipartisan support and the fact that the Labor Party held the largest parliamentary majority its ever held—it was huge. In proportional terms, it is probably as large as the Bjelke-Petersen majority in 1974. Why the government needed a mandate to do this I do not know. The opposition said it would provide absolute bipartisan support for this measure. The Beattie government ignored all the warnings in the 1999 Forde inquiry recommendations as well as several other inquiries into child abuse over its first two terms in office.

The Premier again has a large parliamentary majority, and the opposition is going to provide support to these reforms to keep the government accountable on child protection when and wherever it is required. We all expect real change, and the children of Queensland cannot afford anything else.

Before concluding, I again say that I appreciate the briefings and the openness of the minister and his departmental officers to date in briefing myself and the shadow minister and member for Burdekin, who will be following through on these issues during her contribution to this debate. I also commend the shadow minister, who has shown a very tenacious and very dedicated approach to this issue since she became the shadow minister. It is not an easy portfolio to take first up.

I also want to personally acknowledge what I believe is a genuine commitment from the minister. I think the minister has a genuine commitment to this issue—a personal, genuine commitment. However, the opposition will of course continue to monitor the issue. As I said, we will give praise where praise is due—as I have done here today—for the minister's commitment in what he has done to date, because he is starting off with a new brush. If there are areas where we do have some concerns, it is our role to raise them, and we will raise them. To date, we have raised some issues pretty responsibly. But we do have to provide a watching brief on this new legislation, because quite frankly, honourable members, we have a situation where a brand new world is being embarked upon, so to speak, in that we are designing and constructing a new department from the ground up. We all support that.

There is some degree of dissection from the former Department of Families. There is the creation of the Department of Communities, the Child Safety Department and all of the complementary functions of other government departments here. We need to ensure some sort of seamless exchange of information, data gathering and compliance of this process. I suspect that that is going to be a major challenge, particularly when designing a new department. There are functions which the Child Safety Department has to deal with as being the first responder in order to protect kids. However, there is also an ongoing role for the Department of Communities. There have been traditional things in the past such as patch protection and sometimes there are departmental jealousies. That happens under all governments and has happened under all governments.

I remind the minister that years ago we spoke about the need for more interaction, more involvement and more coordination between TAFE and Education. It was just absolutely unbelievable.

There should be seamless interaction, and we are starting to see that happen now to the benefit of everyone. Frankly, the sky did not fall down then, and the sky will not fall down now. However, I acknowledge that the minister has an enormous task ahead of him. His department has an enormous task. The other real challenge is to ensure that the culture which was part of the problem and the maladministration which was a significant part of the problem in the past do not in some way manifest themselves again, and that is going to require a lot of diligence on the minister's part. Sometimes these things are very big and just happen. Many things are happening on the ground level in order to run many different things in a department. In any event, some little thing may start and move its way through to become a huge issue. That is going to require a lot of diligence and a lot of oversight.

There is also an enormous amount of community responsibility with regard to the issue of child protection. It concerns me greatly that some people who have children do not want to assume their responsibilities. They believe that children are a commodity—an item that can be virtually cast aside. I am a parent of four children. My wife does an extraordinarily brilliant job of bringing up our children on her own, and that is not without a lot of challenges. People say to me, 'When I have kids I'll be able to go about the life I had before. We'll have the same social life. We'll do this, we'll do that.' It is amazing the number of my contemporaries whom I have spoken to who have said, 'We didn't have a clue that somebody so small could be so demanding and change our life. The bushwalking that we used to do on the weekend, the going out on Friday nights and meeting with friends. It's easier sometimes just to stay at home!' That is a responsibility of parenthood, and it can be very stressful. There is no doubt about it.

The majority of people in Queensland who have children are extremely responsible parents. We probably all get stressed from time to time and feel like losing our cool, but the simple reality is that children are an enormous responsibility. I am concerned that some people do not want to assume their responsibilities and want to cast their children off to somebody else. There is also the issue of dysfunctional families. However, when one looks at the number of children that the minister's department looks after, it is a small proportion of the children in Queensland—a minuscule number of children in Queensland of a couple of per cent or thereabouts. Yet we have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars protecting those kids. It is an appalling indictment on our society when one thinks about it. We probably spend more on looking after those few children than we spend on assisting parents who are doing the right thing. That is not a reflection on the government; that is just the reality.

We are spending hundreds of millions of dollars dealing with the health and welfare of a few thousand children. We have to do that, but it is an appalling indictment on the way that people look at raising children, the dysfunctionality in families and the failure to make a commitment to each other when it comes to children. I know that things happen in relationships, and I understand that. I really do understand that. But raising children requires an enormous commitment, not only a commitment to the children but a commitment to supporting each other. That is not always possible. We have to keep advocating what we believe are the right value systems. That does not mean a political value system, but there are some things that are right that need to be taught—respect, commitment, understanding and a whole range of those things. It is not a political partisan thing; it is about the right values in bringing up children and understanding responsibility.

Sometimes we step away from being judgmental. When it comes to dealing with children in these situations, we cannot afford not to be judgmental. Many parents who are doing the right thing say the same thing. I know that is probably a sticky issue for the minister, but unless we get this under control the minister is going to be going into the CBRC process—the Cabinet Budget Review Committee process—each year asking for funding for another 50 staff or an extra few million dollars. He is going to do that. That may be the case; I hope that it is not. But that is where we are heading unless we can bring this under control. It has been a problem for a long time. Sometimes we do need to look at values and we need to unashamedly say what we think is right and what we think is wrong. The opposition is very pleased to support the bill before the House. We commend the minister for his work in this area. We will of course be keeping a watching brief on this issue and will be very keen to see tranches 2 and 3 come before this parliament and be implemented as well.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! Before calling the next speaker, I welcome to the gallery students and teachers from Petrie State School in the electorate of Kurwongbah.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (12.17 p.m.): I am pleased to rise in this House today to speak to the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. I want to commend the Opposition Leader, Mr Springborg, for many of the comments he made in his speech on the second reading debate, particularly his last comments on the rights and responsibilities of everybody in this community to ensure that we protect our most vulnerable section of the community, and that is our children. I was also pleased to hear Mr Springborg speak at length about the systemic failures of the previous Department of Families. However, we must realise that it was not just in the last year or two that this has happened. This has happened over many years from previous governments. I am very pleased that he did not stand here today and point the finger at one particular person, because the problem has been around for such a length of time. He is right when he says that we can legislate all we like, but that does not necessarily mean to say that that is going to fix all of the problems. We must be ever vigilant. When we

do legislate, we have to carry through with that legislation to ensure we do everything in our power to help protect the children.

This bill implements stage 1 of the legislative reform recommendations by the CMC in its report entitled *Protecting children: an inquiry into abuse of children in foster care* and as set out in the blueprint prepared by Peter Forster and his team. The bill amends a range of legislation aimed at improving support and accountability arrangements for children who are most at risk. In particular, the bill amends the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2003 to expand the role of the commissioner to act as a new Child Guardian and to provide monitoring functions for the Child Guardian to monitor the delivery of services to children by the Department of Child Safety and associated licensed care services.

The bill extends the community visitor program to cover all children in alternative care. The commissioner, in her role as Child Guardian, will be able to maintain constant vigilance over the services provided to children, including those in foster care. The bill also amends the principles in the Child Protection Act 1999 to ensure that the overarching principle in the act is that the welfare and the interests of children are paramount. The act will also be amended to require all government agencies with a role in the delivery of services to children in care to report annually to parliament on the delivery of these services.

The bill also establishes a new child death case review committee—or CDCRC—to review the cases of children who have died whilst in care. The CDCRC will be chaired by the commissioner and will include as members a range of experts in the child protection area. The commissioner will also be given a new function to keep a register of all child deaths in Queensland and to conduct research and identify trends and patterns regarding the causes of child death. Legislation has also been amended to facilitate access by the commissioner to the information that she needs to perform this important function. The Children's Services Tribunal Act 2000 will also be amended to extend the jurisdiction of the Children's Services Tribunal to allow the commissioner to apply to the tribunal to review a range of decisions of the DCS regarding children in care.

The abuse of anybody is intolerable and I applaud the introduction of this bill to help our children at risk. This is a fresh approach and will go a long way to reforming the child protection system, which is a major priority of this government. The 110 recommendations of the Peter Forster inquiry will be implemented and are fully costed in the budget. I have been invited to join the new child safety ministerial legislation committee, headed by the minister, the Hon. Mike Reynolds, and I am keen to regularly update the parliament on the work of the committee. I look forward to working closely with those individuals in child protection. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (12.21 p.m.): I rise to participate in the debate on the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill. In common with my leader, Lawrence Springborg, I, too, believe that this is one of the most important pieces of legislation that will be debated in this House. I have seen an alarming number of distressing child safety cases brought to my attention at my office, and I am sure that every other member in this House has also. Considering that we are made aware of only a very small percentage of the total cases going through the department, it is frightening to theorise on the impacts that this reality will have on the future lives of our children. The former Department of Families' own statistics indicate that in 2002-03 there were over 31,000 notified cases of child abuse and neglect, with just over 4,000 children subject to some form of protective response with the majority under orders for granting custody and/or guardianship. That a child was previously removed from an abusive situation, placed in an apparent environment of trust and then faced the indignity of further abuse is abhorrent and something that we must never forget.

The Child Protection Act 1999 states as a fundamental principle that every child has the right to protection from harm. These children are the parents of tomorrow and they are looking to us now to formulate a legislative framework that not only responds to the abject failures of the old system that let them down but also further recognises the problems that might arise in the future. In this task we must be bold, we must be ambitious, but, most of all, we must be forward thinking by ensuring that the system that is implemented recognises the full ramifications of the problem and is not a rushed attempt to save face.

With this in mind, as the shadow minister for child safety I affirm the Nationals' commitment that we offer our 100 per cent support to the reform process outlined by the Forster/CMC report. However, in recognition of the significance of this issue, we think that the processes for the introduction of this legislation should be properly reviewed and some further suggestions perhaps considered. During this review, I think that it is important to acknowledge big picture thinking, that is to say, instead of treating the problem, we must address the cause. Most psychologists will tell us that the root foundation of an individual's behaviour is his or her learned memory, meaning that people behave according to their experiences. In order to stamp out the cause of parent behaviour problems, one must first consider the child's upbringing. Therefore, more consideration needs to be made to early intervention and education where the rules of life and the values of the family unit, in whatever shape it may be, are instilled in children for the next generation.

I noticed with interest that whilst the blueprint for the implementation of the child safety reforms addressed the education of applicants for officer positions and addressed the training of current officers successful in obtaining positions within the new department, nowhere could I find a recognition of the level of parenting education or training undertaken by parents and their children. I believe that it is time for the child safety implementation processes to be restructured to address the inclusion of parenting programs into the Queensland education system curriculum to enlarge and enlighten a real focus on what parenting is and what it entails, the responsibility that it evokes and the just rewards that it can provide. A systematic education approach is the answer to systemic child abuse. Otherwise, how else are we going to be able to reach these children who are the adults of tomorrow?

I truly believe in the premise of this idea. Recently I have had contact with senior executives within the Lifeline organisation who have indicated to me that they are now dealing with clients who are third-generation sufferers of child abuse. I am sure that something as chilling as that should make every one of us in this House realise the graveness of the reality with which we are confronted. Unfortunately, this issue of child abuse that we are dealing with is multifaceted, this issue that all of Queensland wants fixed is systemic and this issue that we are all trying to solve is intergenerational. As stated in the child safety departmental overview under the heading 'Strategic Issues' there is national and international research seeking solutions to decrease the incidence of child abuse, which has identified the importance of governments supporting and valuing the role of families, focusing on managing risk at crucial points in children's lives. With that in mind, we need something to break the cycle, acknowledge the role of parenting, the duty of care and properly evaluate the power of influence a parent or carer has in a child's life. Proper parenting programs could be the answer.

Being supportive of the reforms and the legislation does not mean that the opposition will not criticise the government or the legislation when and where it believes that improvement is necessary, particularly in the committee stage of the passing of this legislation. However, at this stage I take the opportunity to point out some of my thoughts on the legislation as it stands. With this in mind, I acknowledge the establishment of the child death case review committee, the child death register and child research functions as a welcome addition to the legislation. However, with reference to part 2 of the legislation, which relates to the amendment of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003, clause 4 states that the registrar must give notice of the registration of a child's death to the commissioner and the chief executive. The registrar has a very detailed amount of information to report, including very concise accounts of the child's name and details. However, at no stage is there any mention of the child's mother's name. I question this omission. I request that this House considers the inclusion of this information as I believe that it is an important detail to add to the reporting system. As subsequent children of the one biological mother may have different surnames and different home addresses, it would make sense to include the mother's name. In the very unlikely and hopefully unprecedented event of the death of one or more siblings, under the current reporting system, this may not be able to be determined. Therefore, I request that consideration be given to the act being amended so that this report process includes the biological mother's maiden name, forming the only possible linking factor should this abhorrence occur.

Early intervention is another area where I believe inroads can be made by the establishment of this new legislation. In my personal opinion, this is the most important aspect of child safety, and I am very pleased to see that the minister has put particular emphasis on this area within the bill and the budget. For once, with the establishment of this reform the children of Queensland have a right to feel confident that abuse will be detected and that their protectors will be protectors. The enlargement of the community visitor program to include an extended range of children in out-of-home care is also a welcome addition and a credible component of this bill.

At this stage I believe it is important that, as a member of Queensland's parliament, I acknowledge our deep appreciation of the sacrifices, love and commitment made by our Queensland parents, foster-parents and carers and further extend our confidence and support to the family service officers throughout Queensland. Many of these people have been unreasonably maligned over an incredible amount of time due to the abject failure of a government department that failed to serve the needs of its sector.

It is unbelievable also that a department dealing with such an important issue as child abuse had no appropriate record systems, reporting systems or accountability. In fact, the department was knowingly in breach of its own legislation for three years without this basic failure being reported to government. We do not want this to happen again. It is very much to the credit of the Minister for Child Safety that he has been so open in his confidence that the new structure of child safety service centres will not only provide mentoring and professional development opportunities but also ensure staff have the supports they need to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. I sincerely hope that the minister's confidence in this establishment is fully justified. These are important steps to ensuring the new system will have a transparent and open culture. For too long this subject of child protection has been a closed book, with hushed tones and lead walls surrounding it. Finally we may be able to see a new world.

As mentioned in the speech of the honourable the Premier, this bill extends the statutory office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People to become the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. With the additional role of Child Guardian, the commissioner will have new functions and stronger powers to monitor, audit and review agencies providing a range of services to these children in the system. I have concerns that, given the failure of the previous Department of Families in protecting our children, it could be asserted that failure is also possible due to a corresponding failure by the position of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Whilst I am certainly not blaming any individual over what has been a failure of existing legislation and implementation and I acknowledge that the person currently in this position, Dr Robin Sullivan, is doing an excellent job, I personally believe that this position is not structured well enough in the legislation to consistently maintain the openness and transparency that I know the minister and his department are seeking.

With regard to the extended range of monitoring, auditing and reviewing functions provided to the commissioner in her capacity as Child Guardian, we in opposition believe strongly that the appropriate recording and performance mechanisms need to exist and be followed accordingly. But from reading the legislation, the commissioner does have a number of specific reporting requirements to the minister, who will obviously bring them to the attention of the parliament. As noted by the Leader of the Opposition in his speech, the legislation as it is currently written means that the commissioner is not legally bound to report on previous recommendations which she sought to implement with regard to child deaths. So if we are going to build a system that is absolutely open and transparent I believe these reporting requirements have to be mandatory, not simply providing the respective office with a choice which it may or may not decide to make. There should be no choice, remembering that a defenceless child who is encountering abuse does not have that option.

I think the strengthening of the Children's Commissioner's ability to investigate complaints with regard to all children who are brought to the attention of the department, not just those under formal order or subject to statutory intervention, as is currently the case, should provide some real power into this position and provide an investigative role that has never existed. I do believe in these legislative reforms, and I do believe that a platform for the establishment of a more open and accountable system has been created. I do believe that the Department of Child Safety will do everything in its power to ensure the wellbeing of our children in care. I also sincerely hope—I know it is the minister's hope as well—that this new Department of Child Safety will have a new culture and systems in place that will attract those very capable and qualified people in the community that it needs to staff it.

As much as I feel privileged to be the member for Burdekin and the shadow minister for child safety, my No. 1 priority is my family and my children. This is a feeling that I am sure I share with many other members in this House. Children should always be our first priority. Unfortunately, governments and government departments that deal in statistics and numbers can sometimes forget this. In a time when children are pawns, the moral fabric of society is breaking down and the family unit consists of many unique shapes, we cannot afford to forget or ignore our children.

The people of Queensland went to an election expecting change, expecting action. It is certainly now time for the Beattie government to create a system deserving of children's respect. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.37 p.m.): I rise to support this groundbreaking legislation promoting and enhancing the rights and the safety of all children in Queensland. The objective of this bill is to implement the first stage of legislative reforms resulting from the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. The bill seeks to establish a new Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian and extends the statutory office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People to become the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

With the additional role of Child Guardian, the commissioner will be responsible for an extended range of monitoring, auditing and reviewing functions in relation to children who come to the attention of the Department of Child Safety. This legislation will expand the existing monitoring functions of the commissioner to include monitoring, auditing and reviewing the handling of cases of children in the child safety system by service providers and the systems, policies and practices of service providers in relation to these children. It will enlarge the commissioner's existing powers for the monitoring function and extend her powers to the Department of Child Safety and non-government services that operate under a licence to provide care for children in the chief executive's custody or guardianship under the Child Protection Act 1999.

This legislation to reform the child protection system is a key priority for this government. It is most important that we have laws to reinforce Queensland children's protection from neglect, abuse and exploitation. In January 2004 the Crime and Misconduct Commission released its report *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. The Premier acted quickly to commit the government to implementing all of the 110 CMC recommendations. The Child Protection

Implementation Unit was established and consulted widely and advised the government of the best way to implement the CMC recommendations.

The Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill represents stage 1 of the legislative reform package. It is a significant step that implements 11 recommendations of the CMC report. This legislation ensures that the welfare and the best interests of the child are paramount, and it also adds a new principle that children should be kept informed of matters affecting them. It strongly focuses on the child and the circumstances of their environment.

The bill is about improving departmental responses in an effort to inform best practice in the protection of vulnerable children in the future. Importantly, this bill creates a monitoring system giving the Commissioner for Children and Young People a lot more influence in her new additional role of Child Guardian. Due to her considerable experience, Dr Robin Sullivan is an appropriate, respected choice to continue as Commissioner for Children and Young People for the next three years. We place our trust in her to get the results that we want, together with the sincere commitment to making this work from the Premier and his ministers, in particular Mike Reynolds, the Minister for Child Safety.

It must be clear to everyone what exactly the role and responsibilities of the commissioner and the minister are. The children's commissioner will focus her monitoring activity on those agencies that provide services to those children most at risk, including the Department of Child Safety, the Department of Communities and its statutory child protection role, and the licensed care services that provide placement and support services to children in out of home care. This will include children in foster care. Later this year the government will legislatively extend the monitoring scheme to cover other government agencies which provide services to these children such as the departments of Health, Education, Housing and Police.

The children's commissioner's ability to investigate complaints about children in need of protection will be expanded to all children who come to the attention of the Department of Child Safety not only those under formal order or subject to statutory intervention, as is currently the case. That means that every child about whom a notification has been made to the department will now be covered and the heavy workload will be fully resourced.

Community visitors currently visit children in residential facilities, detention centres and mental health facilities. Their role is to build a strong, trusting relationship with the vulnerable children and keep an eye on how they are treated and advocate for their needs. If the child discloses a problem, the community visitor can provide immediate assistance and can report back to the children's commissioner, who may decide further investigation and action are needed.

The bill extends the community visitor program to enable visits to children in the care of an approved foster-carer or other carer, whether the child is in custody or guardianship of the Department of Child Safety or placed in out of home care under a voluntary agreement. These community visitors are vital and key players in monitoring and reporting on the care of children. They need to be listened to and taken absolutely seriously. The government has brought in new laws and new practices to put children first, and our prime responsibility will be to put children and their welfare above all things.

The abuse of children is simply not in any way acceptable at any time. It is senseless and very distressing to those who care about the welfare and wellbeing of our most vulnerable. The whole community has a moral responsibility to report suspected child abuse to the police. Recently an unprecedented number of members of the community have come forward with information to the department since the topic of child protection has been recently widely debated. They know that the government is serious about doing something to ensure protection of all our vulnerable children. Members of the public need to know that if they bring a matter forward to the government something will indeed be done about it. This legislation is the first step to ensuring that mechanisms are in place to deal appropriately, properly and swiftly with reported cases of child abuse. I commend the bill to the House.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.43 p.m.): In rising to support the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill, I welcome the provisions within the bill and acknowledge this is a bill which has bipartisan support in the parliament. How the vulnerable and the marginalised are treated is the litmus test of a society's true morality. Society and government as well as individuals are responsible for striving to break the intergenerational cycle of child abuse.

The role of government should involve preventative as well as interventionary strategies where child abuse has already been identified. However, it is the state government's legislative response to protect children which has been under the spotlight as this most fundamental of safety nets has failed. I remember about two years ago the opposition asked questions of the government as to why about 5,000 children whose cases were notified to the department were on waiting lists to be assessed. The Beattie government's response was not to fix the problem but to remove the performance indicator so that delays of this sort could not be measured.

It was after persistent lobbying, particularly from child welfare groups, that the issue refused to go away and demanded a response. Tragically, the people who spoke so publicly had witnessed and experienced themselves or knew from the pain of their own families what child abuse had meant and the

damage and destruction that goes on throughout the life of that person unless they are able to find a pathway through that pain. The issue refused to go away and what we saw finally was an acknowledgment after a CMC report from the government that changes had to occur. This is what is embodied within this legislation.

The elements of this bill are providing for some fairly important changes to the Child Protection Act. The objectives of the bill, as I have outlined, are to address what have been some of the fundamental failures. The then families department and now Department of Child Safety is trying to address the fact that children are experiencing child abuse. Proper intervention and monitoring needs to be employed, but unfortunately this was where the most fundamental failures of administration was resulting in children who had been notified not getting appropriate follow-up; children who needed ongoing care or assessment who were not finding that ongoing care and assessment. I acknowledge that there is no perfect system of administration or legislation, but I think it is widely accepted that far more could have been done than had been done and that the system had to change.

This legislation will expand the existing monitoring functions of the children's commissioner. The children's commissioner will be known as the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. This is envisaged because one of the criticisms had been that there were ambiguities as to the power of the commission. Others said the powers were there to act in a more direct way, but this legislation is to clearly stamp a need for this commission to act and to outline in a more prescriptive way what their powers will be. That is certainly something that will be supported.

There will also be an extension to the community visitor program—a recognition that part of the implementation of legislation has to have some accountability with people who are external to some of the institutions or settings where children are in some form of care. Community visitors currently visit children and residential facilities, detention centres and authorised mental health services. This bill extends the program to also include children in the custody or guardianship of the chief executive under the Child Protection Act 1999 who are placed in the care of an approved foster-carer or other appropriate person. It will also extend the visitors program to children who are not subject to an order under the Child Protection Act 1999 but who are placed with a carer under an agreement between the chief executive and the child's parent guardian.

This legislation will also expand the commissioner's powers to seek the Children Services Tribunal's review of decisions. Another important amendment to our legislation is the ability for a review of child deaths. There has been a public call for this for some time and it exists in a number of other states. This legislation will finally provide a framework for reviews by the Department of Child Safety of cases where children have died within three years of coming to the attention of the department. It also establishes an independent child death case review committee to monitor the reviews undertaken by the Department of Child Safety.

Alongside this is the establishment of the Child Death Register and child death research function. This is extremely important. It is only recently that we have also had the State Coroner role come into existence. I remember there was some discussion around the issue of inquests and the need for greater consistency and a higher level of scientific scrutiny of some of the inquests because there was concern that some of the coroners' cases, particularly in more remote parts of the state, did not have consistency with regard to recognition of possible child abuse. I think that with the advent of the State Coroner's position and now with some of these additional measures this is very important. Obviously, this is after some traumatic events have already taken place, but it is recognition that there are areas that have not had the scrutiny and the understanding from a higher level of scientific input to look at where there may have been child abuse which has been missed in the first instance, to look at where there has to be action taken in respect of those tragic deaths.

This legislation also provides for revision and re-ordering of the principles of the Child Protection Act. These are well outlined. One new power is to respond to notification made before birth about suspected risk to a child after birth. I know there have been examples where there has been a known and very real risk with some individuals. The provision to have that notification prior to a child being born unfortunately is one of the elements that is all too necessary, perhaps only in a limited number of cases but still this is closing one of those loopholes and seeking to provide earlier steps of intervention.

As I said at the outset, it is the government and the whole of society which has a responsibility as to how we care for children, children particularly being the most vulnerable in a community. I think perhaps the full impact of what child abuse has done to people in this generation and in the past has not really been fully understood. For those who have never experienced it, it is such an eye opener when you listen to those who have been through the tragedy and the brokenness. Those who have walked through that and through their pain have been able to bring others through with a victory of purpose to see these terrible abuses cut short, to see the intergenerational abuse stopped. They have been able to find purpose in helping stand up and stand against what has been many times a silent scourge in our community.

The implementation of this bill will be its proof. The principles are definitely supported. However, there was legislation on the books before which was not being administered, was not being enacted, in

a way that was providing what should have been a basic level of care and protection for children. It is only right that there be strong scrutiny. There is bipartisan support of the principles, but there must be the ability to continue to scrutinise this and, if necessary, criticise the administration if it is failing children.

The bigger issue of how we respond as a society to protecting children, ensuring that their childhood is one of memories that they cherish and is a nurturing environment which gives them hope for the future, is a significant one. Children are not commodities. They are people of value, whatever their age, whatever their circumstance or personal ability.

There is an issue here of how we build a society which is more protective of a child's basic needs and understanding. A roof and food is basic to the needs of a child, but so is love and care. We must never delegate our responsibility as a society to the love and care of children to those who are only paid institutional workers. I recognise there are some wonderful people who are standing in the breach and doing those jobs, but I am mindful that if we are really to address this issue it is not only through legislation. It is by looking at our values as a society and saying, 'How do we take this responsibility together', by scrutinising the actions of government and also by taking a more involved role in providing a protective society which values children. The real values of a society are demonstrated not by what we say but what we do, and that ultimately is going to be the test of what we see come forth in the next few years and subsequent generations.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (12.54 p.m.): I am pleased to acknowledge the opposition's support for the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill. Listening to the member for Southern Downs and his contribution, what he said really struck me. I think other speakers, including the minister, have also made the point that it really is an appalling indictment on our community that we need to spend literally hundreds of millions of dollars nationally on child protection systems. It is a really frightening and sobering statistic which reminds us that we need to be ever vigilant in taking account of child protection issues in our local communities.

As the Premier pointed out in his second reading speech, this bill is only part of a raft of proposed legislation dealing with child safety and child protection issues in Queensland. The reform process is vital on a number of levels. Most importantly, it will overhaul a system which has clearly failed to protect our children over a long period of time. This bill takes a significant step in fixing the problems that have been highlighted and reinforces a major objective of governments, that is, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its citizens.

The reform process will also address underresourcing and cultural problems that have existed in the child safety system for some time. It was not until the Beattie government called in the Crime and Misconduct Commission to investigate and report on these problems that Queenslanders got a true picture, an accurate picture, of the failures of our system. It would be very easy for me to go back over the history of other governments in this area and highlight how the system has failed and, indeed, how little the system changed for many, many years. Instead, however, I want to concentrate on the advances that have been made and also the positive proposals outlined in this bill.

The CMC report was a watershed in Queensland child protection history but importantly the report, as does occur from time to time, was not allowed to gather dust on a shelf. On the day the report was handed down the government was already well advanced in implementing measures to address the problems that have been identified and also immediately appointed a very well respected consultant, Peter Forster, to oversee the implementation of its proposals. I must say that it was very impressive to see how quickly Mr Forster and his team absorbed the complex issues of the report and set about completely rebuilding the Queensland child protection system.

A major factor which assisted Mr Forster in undertaking his work was the government's commitment to support him every step of the way. One of the problems identified by both the CMC and Mr Forster was the lack of checks and balances under the old child protection system. It is a well-known fact that when any system fails often it can be found that one of the main contributing factors is a lack of oversight and adequate communication between the various elements of that system.

There were many cases highlighted through the CMC investigation where shortcuts were taken, processes were not followed, priorities were overlooked and important pieces of information were not shared between appropriate agencies and within appropriate sections of the department. I am not seeking to blame staff for these breakdowns, because they work under tremendous pressures and are under tremendous stress. But processes are put in place for a reason and if they are not followed problems can occur, and these problems will get worse over time.

This bill will go a long way to addressing the problems that were identified by putting in place a new series of checks and balances. These include a new Child Death Review Committee, expanded powers of the coroner, a new register of child deaths and a child death research function, improved powers for the Commissioner for Children and Young People, expanding the community visitor program and an increased role for the Children Services Tribunal. The issues that the staff of the Department of Child Safety and the former Department of Families have to deal with are complex and volatile, and no-one can promise that nothing will ever go wrong in the future with regard to a child's safety.

Child safety officers are in the unenviable position of making very difficult decisions when an accusation of child abuse is made. If they act to remove a child because they believe it would be in the best interests of that child, the child's family normally obviously object, accusing the officers of being too heavy-handed. Separations can be very traumatic for families and particularly for the children involved. If the officers do not remove the child and something does occur which is detrimental to the child, then they are accused of failing in their duty of care, so they are in a very difficult predicament. We feel for them and we want to give them all the support we can in the difficult tasks they undertake.

The steps taken in this bill will help child safety officers in those decisions because there will be an increased level of supervision and feedback from various agencies or within the department. In this way there will be more consistency and accountability in the child protection system in Queensland.

I am confident that the improvements made in this bill will help create a safer Queensland for children in need. They also fulfil the Beattie government's election commitment to fix the child safety system in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House and wish the minister and his department well in their endeavours to take good care of children in need in our state.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (2.00 p.m.): I rise to support this Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill as a member of this 51st Queensland Parliament. However, I am also a mother, a community activist, an ex-paediatric nurse and a deeply concerned citizen.

The Liberal Party fully supports the recommendations of the report of the Crime and Misconduct Commission, *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. As a nurse at the Adelaide Children's Hospital and still in my teens, I came face to face with the horrors of child abuse and neglect. Child abuse patients were given a label like all other illnesses; they were called Silverman's Syndrome, and I will never forget them as long as I live. Toddlers' beautiful little bodies covered with cigarette burn marks, huddled and rocking in the corner of their cots, wide eyes filled with fear and mistrust. Babies used as footballs, placed in microwaves and worse. Child abuse in any form is abhorrent and we all have a responsibility to do whatever we can to reduce the high incidence of this scourge on society.

In 2003 the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People delivered a paper to the 9th Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect which, amongst other things, profiled the victims and those at risk of child abuse. It was reported in the period 2001-02 Queensland had the highest reported rate at 8.3 substantiated claims per 1,000 children. This had increased by 14 per cent from the previous year. In the year 2001-02 the Department of Families reported 19,575 children and young people who had suffered harm. This is an increase of 19 per cent on the previous year. I shall state that figure again: an increase of 19 per cent on the previous year.

These statistics come from within the Beattie Labor government's own department yet they still refuse to act. Latest figures state the Queensland government expect to be notified of 34,000 calls of child abuse and neglect in the 2003-04 period. This is an appallingly high figure.

The legislation is mute on the matter of the qualification of potential foster-carers, which was the prime concern of the inquiry. While it may not be necessary to provide for this legislatively, it should have been more fully addressed in the second reading speech.

Is there, in fact, an established protocol that details what the selection process is? What is the compensation package for the foster-carer? What positive support will a foster-carer receive from the department and other involved government agencies? Do the qualities sought vary from location to location? Do different standards impact on the quality of care? What protocols exist in other departments that have responsibilities for children for dealing with abused children that permit the Department of Child Safety to carry out its responsibilities to children? If such arrangements do exist they should be spelt out by the minister to give meaning to this legislation.

Turning to the amendments of this legislation, I support the provisions which enable the department to respond to notification before a child is born. Members are all probably familiar with the Ombudsman's report in October 2003 which investigated the death of baby Kate who died at the age of 10 weeks. It was alleged that baby Kate should not have been released into her mother's care and that the actions or lack of action of the Department of Families and Queensland Health contributed to her death.

When Lisa became pregnant, concerns were expressed with the Department of Families about her ability to care for her child when it was born. Lisa had certain intellectual and physical impairments and was known to the Department of Families because she had been brought up in foster care. Baby Kate was born at a regional Queensland hospital. Three days after her birth she and her mother were transferred to a smaller hospital closer to Lisa's then place of residence. The smaller hospital was advised of Lisa's condition and the documents that accompanied her transfer stated that Lisa needed a lot of support and encouragement with her parenting skills.

A few days later nursing staff observed Lisa to shake baby Kate and swear at her. Lisa acknowledged she needed help caring for baby Kate, especially with night feeding, but she indicated that her partner, John, would help her. The next day the family support officers returned to the hospital and spoke to both Lisa and John. They explained the Department of Families' concerns about the safety and well-being of baby Kate and informed Lisa and John that baby Kate would not be able to go home unless the Department of Families was satisfied she had a parent who was willing and able to care for her.

These officers asked John to stay at the hospital to enable nursing staff to assess his ability to care for baby Kate and support Lisa. Baby Kate was discharged from hospital into Lisa and John's care that afternoon. Some four days later the Department of Families became aware that the relationship between Lisa and John had ended and that Lisa intended to move to Brisbane with baby Kate.

The Department of Families referred Lisa and baby Kate to a local group home near the smaller hospital where they remained for about a week before travelling to Brisbane to stay with Lisa's former foster family. The Department of Families then decided to refer Lisa and baby Kate to a residential facility operated by a non-government organisation in Brisbane. That facility provides emergency accommodation for women and their children but does not provide specialist parenting services. Lisa and baby Kate resided at this facility for approximately four weeks until baby Kate's death.

A worrying concern is how will a government ensure that children are not being placed back into a harmful situation? There have been many accounts recently where this has happened. A few weeks ago a baby was attacked on Brisbane's north side after being monitored by the department just a few days before. The three-year-old suffered six broken ribs, two broken legs, a broken arm, a broken collarbone and a dislocated shoulder. The assault was committed by the mother's de facto husband. Fourteen other children who had contact with the Department of Families died in the first four months of this year. Nine were suicides or accidents, three were deliberate and two remain unexplained. So far in this financial year the number of deaths of children known to the department stands at 29.

Our first priority must be in the earliest possible intervention to ensure the maximum benefit to the child and the highest effectiveness of the department. The appointment of a child safety director within relevant government agencies to coordinate and report on their child protection activities should be unnecessary. Surely public servants in such agencies have an existing responsibility in this area. If there is evidence that some do not, then the appropriate action is to replace such individuals with people of commonsense and commitment.

An unfortunate counterpoint to this part of the legislation is that it does not cover the effective exchange of information between agencies; that apparently is to be covered by later legislation. However, we already have had two reports produced by the Queensland Ombudsman that indicate that the lack of communication between agencies is a major factor when reviewing child deaths. These reports include the abovementioned report on baby Kate in October 2003 and an earlier report on the late Brooke Brennan, aged 3, in May 2002.

A more recent example of where communication between agencies and a proactive, not reactive, attitude may have saved lives was reported in the *Sunday Mail* last weekend. On Anzac Day this year a father suffocated his two children: Jessie, 19 months, and Patrick, just 12 weeks of age. The court had granted the father custody six weeks earlier while the mother was in hospital after a nervous breakdown caused by years of physical and verbal abuse. The court order had been granted even though the police had placed previous domestic violence orders against him because of his violent abuse against his wife. When the court revoked his custody and gave it back to the mother he decided to perform an act of revenge that sickens me to the core. This is when he took the lives of his two children and then his own.

So we have new positions of child safety directors within agencies dealing with children but no legislation covering the effective interchange of information dealing with child abuse. I would recommend that the government drop the legislation dealing with the appointment of child safety directors at least until later legislation is introduced to address the exchange of information.

While the focus on early intervention is of utmost importance, dealing with the auditing of performance as provided for with the introduction of the Child Death Case Review Committee, wider powers for the coroner and the specific widening of the powers with the new Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian are important checks on the effectiveness of the efforts to reduce the incidence of child abuse.

The legislation does not need to touch upon the specifics of the review function, but I would feel more confident about the effectiveness of it if the minister were to advise the House if it would embrace the collection and organisation of data that would throw light on the pattern of abuse as defined by location, family or carer, access to other government services, family employment and any other such pattern characteristics as those experienced in the field might suggest.

I commend the expansion of the community visitor program as being an important service directly to children and a positive influence on the quality of care that children in whatever care should receive. I

support the amendments to the legislation. As I have already commented, my confidence in its impact would be greater if the minister were to flesh out the operation of the legislation in practice.

In the briefing paper provided by the department we were advised that it would be recruiting 318 new staff to commence work in 2004-05. Of these, 118 were to be allocated as professional and administrative support staff. The budget for 2004-05 identifies an increase in staff in the divisions of Early Intervention Services by 73 and Immediate Response Services 93, which is a total of 166. This is substantially less than the 200 proposed field people as mentioned in the Premier's second reading speech. This is particularly so as hiring had commenced in May 2003.

The division of Continuing Support Services has had staff increases from 565 to 651—that is, 86 more staff. This is a division where staff represent 45 per cent of the department's total. Most of this division's responsibilities relate to analysis, research and policy development. The front-line work of contact and communication is carried out in the divisions of Early Intervention Services and Immediate Response Services. These two divisions will employ 818 staff on a full-time equivalent basis.

Since no detail is given on the split of resources between field contact staff and administrative support I can only estimate that little more than 60 per cent of this staff is in fact involved in field work—that is, only 500 out of the 818. So it seems that of the 1,409 full-time employed staff in the department about 500—or, in any case, well less than 50 per cent—are in direct contact with their clients.

The average cost of employment of public servants in the Department of Child Safety is \$62,000 per annum. The principal components of the field staff are child safety officers. PO2 salary ranges are \$1,457 to \$1,864 per fortnight. Say, on average, it is \$1,700 plus 15 per cent oncosts. On a cost of employment basis it is \$2,000 per fortnight or \$52,000 per annum. PO3 officers receive on an equivalent basis \$60,000 per annum. Child safety support officers receive salaries ranging from \$1,098 to \$1,896 per fortnight, say, on average, \$1,500. On a cost of employment basis this is \$1,750 per fortnight or \$46,000 per annum.

I suggest that many of these staff in 2004-05 will be employed in the more junior classifications and on a weighted basis. This would indicate that the employment costs to the department should be on average close to \$40,000 to \$45,000 per annum. With an average cost of employment in the department of \$60,000, resources will be allocated to staff or administrative functions, as will a high proportion of personnel and, at best, 30 per cent will be field workers in contact with clients. The least qualified, lesser experienced and lowest paid people will have the front-line contact responsibilities and burdens. Is this not a recipe for low morale and high turnover?

While the Liberal Party supports the legislation because it provides the necessary legal framework to the operations of the department, I will remind the House that the proof of the pudding is in the eating and not the recipe. In this case, the Liberal Party supports the recipe but we believe that the government is failing in the implementation of the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission because of a misallocation of resources within the department. I believe that too much is spent on administration and other headquarter functions. In that regard, I would appreciate it if the minister would make available to me an organisational chart of the Department of Child Safety showing the position, location within the department and grade and salary of each position. This would allow parliament to fully understand how the department is structured and whether it will give the most effective implementation of policies designed to protect our children.

In any case, the minister should, without delay, seek a review by independent, outside experts of the suitability and effectiveness of this new Department of Child Safety. If we do not get it right then thousands upon thousands more children will suffer abuse and neglect and be unable to live a full and rewarding life. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (2.14 p.m.): It is my pleasure to speak in support of the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill. There can be no better rationale and justification for the state as an institution of government, as an instrument of the will of the majority over all in a democratic society than the protection of children. It is the indispensable role of government to do this. This must be at the heart, in my view, of the legitimacy of any government. The legitimacy of any government must be assessed in terms of how that government looks after the disabled, the homeless, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the vulnerable elderly, the weak, the defenceless, the mentally ill, the poor and the low paid. These are people in our community who look to the government and the institutions of the state for protection and well being.

The Constitution Act of Queensland provides that the peace, welfare and good government of Queensland is the purpose for the institution of the state of Queensland. The Crime and Misconduct Commission report into the abuse of children in foster care is the principal instrument that forms a basis for this reforming legislation in the House today. This is a classic example of how a proactive executive arm of government can be used to investigate, detect and identify the shortcomings in the administration of government for the purpose of fundamental reforms. That has certainly been the outcome in this particular case.

There are a range of features of this legislation that have received the commending comments of members of this House. Regretfully some criticisms have come from the other side. There are two key changes that I want to focus on. The first is that the bill makes amendments to the Child Protection Act 1999 to ensure that the welfare and best interests of the child are paramount. The second change instituted through this reform legislation is that there will be established at administrative level positions of child safety directors in all of the departments and agencies of the state that have administrative responsibility for child safety. Their responsibility will be to coordinate reports on those departments and those agencies involved in child protection activities.

I turn to the first feature, which is the paramount interests of the child. The amending legislation provides for the relocation of one of the principles set out in section 5 of the principal act, the deletion of another and the addition of a new principle altogether. The result is that we have 10 principles that are said to apply to the administration of the act. Previously there were nine.

There was no distinction drawn between any one of those nine principles that were provided to govern the way in which the act was administered. They were treated as having equal merit. As a result of these amendments one of those nine is lifted and made paramount or primary in the way in which this legislation is administered. That is the principle that the welfare and best interests of the child are paramount. Then the legislation proceeds to nominate nine other principles, all of which are now provided to be subordinate to this first principle that the welfare and best interests of the child are paramount.

That is to ensure that the confusion that has existed since 1999 to this time about the relative importance of that principle—the best interests of the child are to be paramount—measured in combination with or against the other eight is cleared up, and that is an important move. There is an established body of law from which this concept of the best interests of the child is to be drawn, and that is legislation passed in 1975 by Senator Lionel Murphy, the federal Attorney-General, in the Whitlam Labor government—that is, the Family Law Act, which embodied the principle that the welfare and the best interests of the child would be paramount within the family law context. More recently, there was the development of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which established universally the primacy of this consideration.

The Family Law Reform Act was then passed in 1995 which picked up this expression as used in the UN convention. Other state legislation like the New South Wales child protection legislation also picked up on this principle, as did Queensland, as I said, in 1999. But we have now in this amending legislation elevated it to the superior position that it needs to take. Just to illustrate, what that in fact means in practical terms is that established law in the courts in recent years has identified a range of issues complementary to the other principles in section 5 of the act that are to be taken into account in determining what are the paramount interests of the child, and these are as follows: the child's wishes and factors which are relevant to the weight to be accorded to these, for example maturity and level of understanding; the child's relationship with each parent or other people; the effect of change on the child, including separation from parents or other people; the practical difficulty of the child having contact with a parent; the child's personal characteristics, namely its maturity, gender, background and culture, et cetera; the need to protect the child from harm; and the possibility of the existence of family violence or family violence orders. Those are the issues that the courts have established over the years are the considerations that are to be taken into account in determining the welfare and best interests of the child. Having established that, those interests are to be paramount over all other principles as laid down in this legislation.

In the short time available to me, I want to conclude by making further comment about the second main point that I wanted to draw attention to in this legislation, and that is establishing the child protection directors. That is an important step to be taken administratively. Whilst functionally the nature of government is that we must unavoidably separate activity into various departments, it is so important to work against the silo effect. There is such a need to have a whole-of-government approach to any major priority such as child protection. The value of a child protection director in each agency is to ensure that ultimately it continues to remain a whole-of-government approach to the delivery of the outcomes intended by this legislation. I look forward to the effective working of that administrative arrangement. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (2.23 p.m.): I am delighted to rise and support the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill, and might I compliment members of the House on the debate. It has been very insightful and I have learnt a lot. I particularly want to congratulate the member for Burdekin and also the member for Currumbin on their insightful and detailed views of the subject.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: What about my speech?

Mr MESSENGER: I said all members of the House. Like all members of the House, I have been horrified and sickened when I have encountered stories of child abuse. I have to confess my naivety. I thought that child abuse would not be a common happening in my community. I have since been educated by a couple of very dedicated sexual assault workers who also support the reforms of this 102-clause document. Denise Williams and Cathy Prentice are part of a very dedicated and

professional team at the Bundaberg Area Sexual Assault Service, the BASAS, which provides help for children at risk and children who have been assaulted. These children and their families of course live in both the Bundaberg and Burnett electorates.

I firstly must congratulate the Minister for Child Safety on the diligent manner in which he so far has applied himself to the job. I am told that a delegation from Bundaberg met with him recently and were given a very generous hearing. Apparently they were only meant to meet for 20 minutes, and that was soon extended to half an hour. I am told that Minister Reynolds went out of his way to hear what these dedicated and talented women had to say, and I thank him for that kindness and that courtesy. Undoubtedly they would have told him about their therapeutic preschool for children who are at risk of or are victims of domestic violence or sexual assaults.

One of the most depressing facts that Denise and Cathy would have told the minister is that unfortunately there is a waiting list to enrol in this exemplar or unique service. Denise told me that yesterday she enrolled another seven students in the course. These students are referred to the therapeutic preschool by Department of Communities officers. The maximum number of children in the class is about eight students. As the name implies, they are all preschool-aged children—that is, they are under six years of age. Some of these innocents are only three years old. That is a sobering and heart-wrenching thought which would remind members of this House why we should always find new ways of protecting and nurturing these kids, who have had a horrific and probably the worst start to their lives. I am led to believe that there is no other service like this available anywhere in Queensland and indeed Australia. It is truly unique and, according to Denise Williams and Cathy Prentice, it is very successful.

Young preschool-aged children who exhibit signs of distress because of their experience are placed in a preschool class for two days a week under the control of both a counsellor and a teacher. The therapeutic preschool is run in conjunction with a state school and has the goal of integrating these children with the mainstream student population. I am assured by the staff of the BASAS that this goal is almost always achieved. In supporting the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill, I invite the government to confirm and commit extra funding to the Bundaberg Area Sexual Assault Service, which employs seven workers. Of those seven workers, three are full time and four are part time. One of these workers is an indigenous person who has been employed for the last year, and during that time she has found that her referrals, just like the non-indigenous referrals, have steadily increased.

These workers are struggling to meet the demand placed on their resources, and they of course deserve more state government assistance in servicing an area which stretches from Childers in the south, Theodore in the west and Agnes Water and the township of Seventeen Seventy in the north—an area which would encompass more than 20,000 square kilometres and, by a quick calculation, more than 150,000 people.

I note that the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill was introduced into this parliament on 20 May of this year, more than a month after the opening of parliament on 17 March this year. This is a matter which disturbs me given the fact that the Premier called an early Queensland election because of the crisis in the family services and child safety areas. So it disappoints me that this legislation was not introduced to the parliament a lot sooner. The sooner this legislation is enacted the sooner our children are protected. I could be very cynical and say that introducing the Vegetation Management Bill into this parliament before the child safety legislation shows that this government cares more about the environmental vote than the safety of our children. But I will give the government the benefit of the doubt and wish the minister strength and courage for his journey. It is important that he and the government are successful. I will be watching. The community will be watching. But, most importantly, the children and parents of Queensland will be watching. I commend the legislation wholeheartedly to the House.

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): The minister, Mike Reynolds, and his staff must be feeling both a great sense of pride and a sense of responsibility in delivering this new child safety legislation into the parliament. Pride because this blueprint for action enshrined in this legislation is a bold and unprecedented leap forward—a leap forward in making sure that children suffering harm within their families will get the best possible care from the government and community; and responsibility because this is one of the single most important areas of government action. There is nothing more core to the government and our community than making sure that children are cared for and protected from harm. I congratulate the Premier, the minister, Peter Forster, the CMC and the departmental staff. In fact, there is probably a cast of hundreds who have had a role in the development of this new legislation. I also congratulate those from the non-government sector who have had input.

The very important feature of the blueprint is that it is child focused. As the previous legislation did, this legislation builds on that child focus. It acknowledges clearly the concerns voiced by children. In fact, the report documented some of the comments from children. I remember reading comments such as the children saying that they wanted to be treated as normal children in conventional families, they wanted to understand and be involved in the decisions made about their lives, and they wanted to be listened to. It is encouraging to see that the blueprint for action and the implementation of this legislation will respond in a much better way to those express needs of children.

The blueprint, and I know the minister, have also very clearly acknowledged and valued the work of the staff within the department. That is key to this reform. As many members in the House today have acknowledged, the staff play a very complex role. If the staff are not valued and given the support that they need, then we will have great difficulty in implementing these reforms. But I know from the feedback that I have received from staff in the various parts of the state that I have travelled to that they are very, very encouraged by the minister's commitment to them and the way in which he values them. I just wanted to provide that feedback to the minister and commend him for it.

I am also very pleased that the minister is responsive to the needs of families from diverse cultural backgrounds. In fact, he is quite a man of action. I know that I am seeming to be a bit of a fan—

A government member interjected.

Ms STRUTHERS: In fact, the minister is a man of action, because in my new role as the parliamentary secretary to the Premier on multicultural affairs I raised with the minister the need in both the recruitment strategy and throughout the department for better ways of responding to the needs of families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Within a few days the minister had organised a meeting with senior departmental officers and his own staff to address these issues and he suggested that there be work done on a cultural diversity strategy. So the minister acted very quickly and again I commend him for that.

It is very important that child safety officers understand different cultures and can respond to those cultures. It is very important that the department continues to actively recruit people from different cultural backgrounds—people who can speak the language of the families they are dealing with. It is important, for example, that the child safety officers understand what it is like for people to pack up their belongings from a refugee camp in Sudan and bring their family out to Australia and that they understand the torture, trauma, persecution and other experiences of those families. I have not heard any direct evidence, but I have heard anecdotal evidence that those families who have come through those experiences are at risk of violence within their own relationships when they arrive in countries that are new and foreign to them. So we need to have staff who can understand and deal with those issues. I know in my discussions with the minister that he has been very aware of that issue and supportive of that need. I commend the minister's efforts in that regard.

I also just want to say—and I guess that this is a bit of a plug—that there is a good training opportunity coming up next week at the Multicultural Families—Investing in the Nation's Future conference at the Sunshine Coast University. That is a great initiative. It is a national multicultural families conference that aims to share information on family support issues that are faced by culturally diverse families. If the minister has the opportunity to get a few of his staff to that conference, I would really encourage him to do that.

Mr Reynolds: I am actually giving a talk at that conference next Thursday.

Ms STRUTHERS: The minister is going himself. That is even better. The minister is a man of action.

Finally, like a cracked record, I want to reiterate my interest in ensuring that the child protection system and the domestic violence system in this state are well integrated. As we all well know, children may not be directly abused by their parents or care providers, but may witness abuse in their home and suffer accordingly. We also know that many women who are victims of abuse at the hands of their partners may as a result have great difficulty in protecting and caring for their own children. There are a lot of issues that need to be understood together. The support systems and the legal systems all need to continue to work in well together.

I am very, very encouraged by the fact that we have a dedicated minister and a dedicated Department of Child Safety. In that regard the only concern that I have is that it separates the two areas—the Communities Department and the Child Safety Department. Again, I know that the minister is well aware of these issues, but I think that it is very important and even more imperative that efforts are made to make sure that those areas work in well together. I am very pleased that we are acting so promptly to institute this blueprint for action and I commend the minister for his efforts.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (2.35 p.m.): I am really pleased to be able to rise to speak in this parliament on the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill, which is such an important bill to our state. This bill is partly as a result of the Crime and Misconduct Commission inquiry into abuse of children in foster care and the implementation of the recommendations contained in that report. It is also in response to the decades of neglect and problems associated with the Department of Families. Over the past five years, the Beattie government has set an agenda of internal and wide-ranging legislative reforms to change the system of child protection in this state. This bill is part of that reform agenda.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of the previous minister, Judy Spence, who was committed to seeing a long-term plan to rebuild the child protection system in this state. It has been the Beattie government that has increased funding to child protection in record amounts. It is the Beattie government that took on the challenges. It is the Beattie government that is

implementing the recommendations contained in the CMC report just as it did with the Forde inquiry recommendations.

We have all heard about some of the negative cases that front-line workers have unfortunately had to deal with. We never seem to hear the positive stories—the hundreds, probably even thousands of children and families where the department has intervened and made a positive difference to their lives. I thank the front-line workers for their hard work because I do not know if I could do their job. I heard the member for Currumbin speak about those horrific injuries to the toddlers and children that she saw while working in a hospital. All I can say is that I think it would be very easy to run in and grab a child from a parent who had done that. But I wonder how easy it is to go in and grab a child from a parent who you think may be abusing them, that you have suspicion of, but you do not really know. How hard would that be? So I cannot thank those front-line workers enough, because I know that I certainly could not do their job. It is such a stressful thing that they have to do. Those front-line workers do a marvellous job and I congratulate them.

We never seem to hear the great stories of the wonderful work done by people in this state such as foster-parents. I know some wonderful foster-parents in my electorate who are making a positive difference to the children and families who touch their lives. Often those foster-parents do it tough financially and emotionally, so I am pleased that foster-parents will be receiving an increase in their allowance. However, in our society there will continue to be families who do not cope. There will be foster-parents who will not have the best interests of the child as a high priority. No government can say that that will not happen. Although governments may not always be able to ensure that all children are protected at all times because of a whole range of complex reasons, that does not mean that we should not always strive to take whatever action we can to meet the needs of children, no matter where they are from. I particularly welcome the expansion of the provisions that empower the Department of Child Safety to respond to notifications made before a child is born that the child may be at risk of harm after birth.

Child protection is not a government issue. It is an issue in which the community needs to play a role. Bravehearts' office is located near my office at Springwood. That organisation is not only assisting victims of child sexual abuse; it is also raising the awareness in the community of this very important issue. More resources, more funding and more front-line workers are not the only solutions to ensuring the safety of children. Although I agree that they are a necessary part of getting a better system, I am sure that in the future we will still be reviewing ways in which to strengthen the system.

Child protection is not just about a department to protect those at risk; it is about the rights of all people to access a good education and the accessibility of affordable health care. Having a home and having a job will make a difference in tackling the challenges of protecting children. This is the way to start, the way to look forward to having a better child protection system in this state. I know that the new minister will also be committed to doing as much as possible to continue to improve the system. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (2.39 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill and to thank the minister and his advisers for their open-handed briefings in the period leading up to this bill being tabled. It certainly is a quantum shift in terms of the resourcing that will be required to fulfil the aims and objectives of the child safety amendment legislation.

None of us here would ever be able to fully estimate the value of children. None of us can ever fully estimate the damage done to a child as a result of abuse, whether that is intentional abuse—that is, by a person who sets out to hurt a child physically, sexually or emotionally—or abuse caused by parents who are not coping, who unintentionally injure their children or upset their children emotionally or psychologically. Those parents need a great deal of support.

This legislation is correctly clearly focused on the children. The bill extends the statutory office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People so that it becomes the Commissioner for Children, Young People and Child Guardian. It is welcome, even in the beginning stages, to see that the resourcing of that office has been addressed with the creation of the assistant commissioner's position.

The Children's Commissioner will be empowered to monitor, audit and review service providers who provide services to children who have come to the attention of the Department of Child Safety. I think we would all have in our electorates men and women working in what was previously the Department of Families who have worked tirelessly to endeavour to provide a safe environment for the children for whom they have been made responsible. Indeed, we have to have dealings with them over just a short period of time to sense their frustration when, because of resourcing in the past, because of insufficient powers contained in their legislation or just because of the process of dealing with humanity, they have been restricted or unable to attend to what they have assessed as the needs of children in care.

The previous speaker said that the media deals with the very extreme cases, and they do. In some ways, tragically, it is as well that they do because it keeps us focused in terms of the direction that child protection is going in and the needs of child protection. We have those very sad cases such as of baby Kate, which was one of the catalysts for the review. Our hearts go out to those children who are

damaged because of a lack of resourcing or those children who suffer because they have been placed in an environment that is less than ideal, albeit with the purpose being to provide them with greater protection.

The Children's Commission will be able to investigate complaints about children in need of protection. It will be expanded to all children who come to the attention of the Department of Child Safety. I welcome, too, the extension of this legislation to allow for protection orders to be considered for unborn children. In those circumstances, often tragically the parents have shown an inability to cope with young children—perhaps because of other siblings they have come to the attention of the department—and have behaviours that at the point in time prior to the birth of another child are not attended to and have not been modified. The department may have been clearly concerned that the new baby would be at risk but has had limited ability to intervene. This legislation will give it the ability to make decisions.

I welcome the extension of the community visitor program. The community visitor program, when it was introduced quite a number of years ago, was intended to give an independent and objective visit to a child in placement. Visitors could assess, without the providers of care being in attendance, not only the quality of the care but also how the children were going—how they were managing and how they were reacting to the care that was being provided. The extension of that visitor program to include foster care, an extended range of out-of-home care, residential care facilities, which they currently visit, detention centres and authorised mental health centres, which they currently visit, I believe will be very worth while.

The Children Services Tribunal is to be extended to enable the tribunal to review certain decisions made by the Department of Child Safety about a child within its jurisdiction. The bill also introduces a broader ability for the Children's Commissioner to go to the tribunal.

History has shown, unfortunately, the need for the establishment of the Child Death Case Review Committee, the child death register and the child death research functions of the Children's Commission. The minister, in the briefing that we got in May this year, indicated very clearly the purpose of those registers. While I hope that the registers are very small—almost non-existent—they will provide valuable information in the future to be able to modify or change the actions and the activities of the Child Safety Department.

The investigations will include investigations into the death of a child within three years of departmental contact. As I said, I trust that the review committee, the register and the child death research area will not be too active at all, but the ability to review decisions made within that three-year period—the activities of the child and the activities of the family, if the child was domiciled in the family or in foster care—will, I believe, provide important information to make better future child safety decisions.

The child protection principles in the Child Protection Act will be reordered to clarify that the overarching principle is the welfare and best interests of the child. This new legislation puts the child first. I think in all of the previous child protection legislation the minister who sponsored that legislation, irrespective of their political persuasion, would have believed that that was the intention of the legislation. This refocuses our attention on the fact that the best interests of the child have to be paramount.

There was an incident in my electorate just recently. I intend to talk to the minister about it when I have all of the details. It again refers to a decision making process in the department that I find rather unfortunate. It relates to a small child who has been looked after by her grandparents. The mother has happily let the grandparents take care of this three-year-old. There is no court involvement. There is no Department of Families involvement. It has been an internal family decision, if you like. The mother of the small child is now in a de facto relationship and that relationship is violent. The mother of the child does not seem to be able to exclude herself from that relationship, but the male in the relationship is determined to have the small child stay with them now; that is, with the natural mother and the de facto partner.

When the grandparents phoned the Department of Families in June, they were told that something drastic would have to happen before the department could intervene. I would hope that this legislation will allow for that intervention prior to something drastic happening.

We have seen in the past that departmental officers have felt their hands were tied in terms of intervention prior to an incident occurring. It is that sort of response from the department that I would hope this legislation in great measure will forestall—that the department will have the power to have a look at how damaging the family situation is, at evidence of police—there is evidence of police in this circumstance—and at historical information in terms of primary caregivers to the children, and that the department will be able to intervene to protect the child because the child's best interests are paramount. I believe that is at the heart of the minister's legislation. I believe that is at the heart of the minister's intentions. I look forward to that occurring, not only in my electorate obviously but also right across the state where patterns of destructive behaviours are evident but in the past the department has been unable to really take any action.

We all believe very strongly in the importance of our children. We work very hard in providing safe, secure environments for them, often modest. Some of the best parents that you can meet live in very modest circumstances. The children might not have the best bike or the best clothes but they have a great deal of affection, and that is what we as parents look forward to providing our children. This legislation, however, is necessary for those children who do not enjoy that sense of protection from their custodial guardian, whether it is the natural parents, de facto parents or guardians. It is an unfortunate sign of the times that it is necessary. I again commend the minister for the aims and objectives of this legislation, Peter Forster for the blueprint that was drawn up and the government for implementing that blueprint. More importantly, I look forward to this legislation granting health, safety and protection to the children of Queensland into the future to ensure that we have young men and women who are sound of mind and body.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (2.50 p.m.): I am very proud to be a member of this Labor government and to take part in this debate today. The Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill, which is the first of three parts, will see greater safeguards for children, more checks and balances, and will bring in a new way of operation for our workers who are at the front line to ensure the protection of our most vulnerable children.

Children all want to be loved. They deserve to be nurtured and protected, and given every encouragement and opportunity to develop and reach their true potential. There are times when we may observe behaviour between an adult and a child that gives us reason to suspect abuse. It is now everyone's duty to look out for children and to report suspected abuse to authorities for investigation. We should all be in the job of keeping children safe.

Unfortunately, over the years we have all witnessed in the media horrific crimes against young children that reduce even the most hardened person to tears. We now face instances where children are born to parents who may have had no positive role model of parenting in their own lives, who may have trouble forming satisfactory relationships, who may suffer financial and/or emotional stress and who may, in many cases, have drug related issues. Babies who are born into such homes may be very vulnerable. This legislation makes provision for the identification of concerns before a child is born and mandates the monitoring of such situations.

Over the years we have witnessed a huge increase in the breakdown of relationships, an increase in domestic violence and drug use, and we recognise a section of our community which requires a great deal of help. These issues may flow right across the economic and social strata of society. While parents may need intensive support, this legislation deals primarily with the protection of children and they must always be our first priority. It has been evident for some time that front-line staff within the former families department were carrying a huge workload and were often not receiving adequate training and support. We had reached a crisis point with the public focus on sad issues within foster care. It was at this time that the Crime and Misconduct Commission was given the task of conducting a wide-ranging investigation into the abuse of foster-children. Its report was handed down in January 2004 and contained 110 recommendations. This report has formed the basis for the legislation which we now see in this House, and the government has made a commitment to implement all 110 of the recommendations. Mr Peter Forster was selected and charged with overseeing the implementation. He delivered his blueprint for reform in March and has received support from all sectors.

I was present at the Logan Entertainment Centre when the minister, the Hon. Mike Reynolds, held an information session for child care officers within the department as well as workers from the non-government sector involved in caring for children. I can only say that I was tremendously impressed by plans to increase the number of child protection officers, to ensure their workloads are manageable and to offer training and support and a total change of culture within the department. The recommendation which gave me great hope for improved outcomes was that the department would work collaboratively with other departments such as Education, Health, Police and Housing. While being mindful of privacy issues, there must be cooperation with all sectors to ensure the best outcomes.

When there is a tragic accident involving the death of a child, it is important that a proper investigation take place. It is essential for the future management of cases that all relevant matters be thoroughly investigated. The recommendation is that a Child Death Case Review Committee be formed independent of the department to monitor the investigation of incidents and suggest changes in work practice and policy if deemed necessary. The committee will be chaired by the Commissioner for Children and Young People whose powers have been widened to incorporate the role of Child Guardian.

I welcome the news that the present commissioner, Dr Robin Sullivan, will continue in that role for another three years. She has brought great experience to her role and is an active and effective advocate for children and young people. All departments dealing with children as well as non-government agencies and foster-carers will be subject to scrutiny by the commissioner. She will also be empowered to investigate any child who is the subject of a notification to the department. The role of community visitor will also be expanded, allowing for a watchful eye to be kept on children in residential care, foster homes, detention centres and mental health services. The Children Services Tribunal will

also have an enhanced role of review. At the grassroots level, child safety directors will have responsibility for service delivery and reporting back to the minister.

In our budget this week, we have seen substantial funding of \$269.4 million for this new department, which is solely established to protect children. Some of the difficulties with past cases have been the inadequacies of recording and tracking information. The department will now receive \$35.1 million in capital funding to develop new information systems and 46 child safety centres around the state. An extra 318 staff will be employed and trained in 2004-05 at a cost of \$11.7 million. Some 134 new alternative care places will be established at a cost of \$13.2 million, reaching a total of 680 within three years and a cost of \$58.4 million. Twenty-three new and expanded Aboriginal and Islander services will be established costing \$4.7 million in 2004-05 and reaching \$26.5 million over three years. Foster-carers will also receive additional funding.

These measures to protect children are substantial. They are costly and they are urgently needed. This government is serious about child protection. The minister and the Premier have both made a solemn undertaking to do all within their power to protect these vulnerable children and young people, but child protection is a whole-of-community issue. We need our teachers, our health workers, our police officers, our volunteers and non-government workers as well as each and every neighbour to look out for our children.

Families are often disconnected. The extended family which once operated and gave a network of support is not as prevalent in our society as it once was. We need to offer help where we can, but if abuse is suspected it is a case for the professionals and we cannot delay. Too many tragedies have occurred.

I look forward to the next phase of this legislation and to a new way of working alongside this department so that the vulnerable families within the electorate of Woodridge are given the support they require and deserve. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (2.59 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill is the first legislative step towards implementing changes called for following the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*.

We have all heard the horror stories of what has happened to children in such care. We have seen the minister in recent media admit that the then Department of Families was dysfunctional. We know that there are cultural changes under way and that there is a great hope that the new Department of Child Safety will be a new organisation all together with a fresh approach to helping children in need. However, I am concerned that the underlying philosophy has not changed and therefore Queensland families and Queensland children may still be dealt with unfairly.

The focus on the rights of the child is appropriate. The problem is that it has resulted in, and continues to result in, a knee-jerk reaction from the government. I have been advised that the department's first priority after protecting the child is to see that the child remains with their family. It is a position with which I am in agreement. I am a firm believer that the best possible place for a child is with its natural parents in a network of support provided by the extended family.

Of course there are those unfortunate circumstances where the child is, in fact, better off in care, but I think we should be concentrating heavily on ensuring that families are able to properly care for their children, not taking the children away as a first option. In that light I believe that the department would be keen to help families deal with their issues, that the department would be eager to hear from parents under stress and that the department would encourage them to reach out for a helping hand rather than parents continuing under stress until the child suffers. If mum and dad are struggling surely the best, most responsible thing they can do is to ask for help, yet I have had too many cases where constituents have reached out to the department for help only to see their children seized.

I accept the circumstances these parents have described to me. I am not speaking about people who have abused their children. I am speaking about parents who have been able to recognise that they are under stress and have wisely decided to seek help. All that has happened is that the department has jumped on them, seized their children and caused enormous traumatic upset.

I will outline two examples. In one case a single mother with a full-time job called the department about discipline issues with her daughter. She had never even delivered a single slap, but in discussion with the department and after the department told her they would not help, this mother said, in exasperation, words to the effect, 'Do I have to flog her to get her to do anything?' The department's response was to advise her to spend more time gardening or reading.

The mother then decided that perhaps she and her daughter needed some respite from each other and made private arrangements for the girl to stay with another person. However, in the meantime the department had gone to the girl's school and taken her out. They then went ahead and placed her with a carer. Within a day or so she was shifted to another carer. Then the police turned up at the mother's place with a temporary restraining order. This happened after the mother went to the department for help.

During this time the girl's grandmother had visited the department to see if she could mind the girl but was refused. It seemed that the department was determined to keep the girl in care. During all this the matter had been listed for a court appearance—something the department had not got around to letting the mother know about. She did find out accidentally and was able to arrange legal representation. Only after this did the mother learn that her daughter, seized after she had asked the department for help, had been involved in an incident at the carers where she had been grabbed by another older child who also threatened to kill her.

Finally the mother and daughter were reunited, but now the mother has to undergo counselling at departmental direction, with the department allowed to ask the counsellor what she says. She has also been told that she will be subject to the department checking up on her. This is a woman who went to the department for help, who had never used physical discipline, who had acted responsibly and what happened? She lost her daughter, she has to pay a large lawyer's bill, she must attend counselling without any privacy, and she is subject to departmental check-ups. So why would anyone trust this government? As she said in a letter to me—

I asked for help, but now I am too scared to do that again. It seems that in needing help, I have become a bad mother. I am not. I want to have the best relationship with my daughter that I can have.

Sadly, this is not an isolated case. Another constituent family has contacted me because they too had come to the attention of the department. In this case it was a new mum with a tot. The allegations were made maliciously, were unfounded and were not substantiated. A large part of her anger is that she and her husband have no recourse against whoever made the unfounded allegations, coupled with the fact that the allegation will remain on their record even though unproven. In a letter to me she said—

Every dealing I have with the child health nurses et cetera is now tainted with the fact that we have this permanent record (although unsubstantiated) that we will be judged on. I am ashamed that we have ANY association with Family Services and I am sick of having to explain to people (doctors et cetera) what happened.

She went on to say—

There definitely needs to be a better system that preserves the integrity of families and protects their privacy, whilst still ensuring that children are ultimately protected.

These are just some of the people raising similar issues with me, but most are by telephone as there is a great fear that anything in writing might ultimately be twisted and be used against them.

In this bill there is nothing to give me encouragement that the integrity of families will be considered. I believe that is a massive failing, as the family is the natural place where children belong. Of course children in need deserve the protection of the state, but the state must recognise that in reforming its approach to child safety it also needs to look at addressing the root causes.

I have spoken here in the past about another family in my electorate against whom allegations of vile acts were made. The acts, if performed, would have physically damaged their children. A medical examination, uncovered through the FOI process, showed no such damage, yet the children were seized and years later continue to be separated from the parents. At this stage they will remain separated until the children reach 18. This is in the face of hard, factual evidence about what did not happen. That, I believe, raises serious doubts about the reasonable suspicion provisions. How reasonable is a suspicion when there is medical evidence that alleged acts never took place?

As I have said, I believe we need to look more at the root causes. I believe that includes addressing families in need, not just children in need. This government can do a much better job of that than it is at present, where its jackboot approach is making good people fearful of having anything to do with it. This bill does nothing to change that climate of fear. In that respect, I believe that there is still a need for better support for the maintenance of the family unit.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (3.08 p.m.): Most parents love their children and care for them in the best way that they know possible. Most parents want the best for their kids and want them to grow up happy, healthy and safe. But, as we know through our governmental responsibilities, there are some parents who do not provide a safe environment for their children. There may be a variety of reasons, and it is important that we understand them so that we can provide assistance, guidance and direction to those who fail. Parenting classes, anger management courses and early intervention strategies with families can all assist to break the cycle. The TRACC Strengthening Families Program in Caboolture is a good example of funding being utilised to support parents who are struggling with their parenting responsibilities by providing intensive assistance over an extended period of time.

I would encourage the government to continue funding these programs, with special concentration on models of early intervention and support so we can break the cycles of abuse and teach families about appropriate behaviour. We also need mechanisms to ensure that vulnerable children are identified, handled appropriately and adequately case managed. Reforming the child protection system in Queensland is a key commitment this government has made to the community. We promise to implement all of the 110 recommendations from the CMC's report *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. The government appointed Peter Forster to lead the Child Protection Implementation Unit and we are following through on his recommended reforms.

The first stage of these reforms is delivered through this Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 which we are debating here today. It amends seven acts with the result being to improve support and accountability arrangements for children who are most at risk.

The role of Child Guardian is added to the responsibilities of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. The commissioner will be responsible for an extended range of monitoring, auditing and reviewing functions in relation to children who come to the attention of the Department of Child Safety. The bill also expands the current functions of the commissioner so that she can review the handling of cases of children in the child safety system and review the systems, policies and practices of service providers in relation to these children. The commissioner's powers will extend to the Department of Child Safety and non-government services that operate under a licence to provide care for children in the chief executive's custody or guardianship under the Child Protection Act 1999.

The commissioner will be empowered to require these agencies to provide regular and ongoing information about their systems, policies and practices in order that the commissioner may maintain constant vigilance over the quality of services that agencies are providing to children in the child safety system. In addition, the Children's Commissioner's ability to investigate complaints about children in need of protection will be expanded to all children who come to the attention of the Department of Child Safety, not only those under formal order or subject to statutory intervention as is currently the case. That means every child about whom a notification has been made to the department will now be covered.

I am pleased to see the extension of the community visitor program to include visits to children in the custody or guardianship of the chief executive under the Child Protection Act 1999 who are placed in the care of an approved foster-carer or other appropriate person and children who are not subject to an order but are placed with a carer under an agreement with the guardians of the child.

The bill reorders the child protection principles in the Child Protection Act 1999 so that the act is to be administered according to an overarching principle that the welfare and best interests of a child are paramount. The amendment seeks to reinforce the existing requirement that children's rights, interests and welfare should take precedence over the rights and interests of adults where there is a conflict. A new principle that the child should be kept informed of matters affecting him or her in a way that is appropriate having regard to their age and ability to understand is also included.

This Child Safety Amendment Bill 2004 is child-focused legislation that is the first stage in delivering a system of protection for children in Queensland. I am confident that the checks and balances will now be in place. I, along with many members of the community, welcome the many changes to the child protection system that have already been announced by this government and look forward to seeing a well-resourced department which will ensure that our children are protected.

I commend the minister for taking on this responsibility and acting so quickly to address the issues raised. I would also like to thank him for coming to Caboolture to speak to departmental staff, non-government agencies and also foster-parents and other interested community members very early in the piece so that they would know how the child safety department is going to be formed and the steps that this government is taking to protect children.

On that note I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (3.12 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. Can I say at the outset that I will be supporting this bill. More importantly, I commend the previous minister and the new minister in the government for their commitment to trying to improve the lot for children in Queensland.

It certainly takes a lot of courage to be able to say that a department is dysfunctional. It certainly takes a lot of courage to say we can do better and we must do better. It certainly takes a lot of courage to say that from the perspective of a minister or a government. So often we see when we look to history how ministers and governments have said there is not a problem and they use any trick in the book to hide it. I believe this is a forward step and I am looking forward to seeing a review of how the new model works.

There is no doubt it is difficult to change a whole model and to create a new department, but when I look at what we have here today I think the easiest work is done. I believe the hardest challenge and the hardest task facing the minister and the government is to ensure that the department is able to encourage, headhunt—call it what you like—but simply get the right people for the right jobs to carry out the important role that they have to fulfil.

My experience with the previous department was there were many, many staff who were stressed. I know I certainly could not have done the job that they were called on to do. I am genuinely concerned that there may be a trend to fill the vacancies as quickly as possible. I am aware on the Sunshine Coast of a number of very genuine complaints which have been raised with me—can I say unofficially at this stage—in relation to one person in a department, and their ability to deal with foster-parents and genuinely taking on board their concerns and their complaints.

I am not one to come into this House and flippantly name a person. I certainly do not intend to do that at this stage but I simply wish to indicate that I do have a genuine concern that in the rush to get the system operating we do not really make sure that we have the best people in those important key positions dealing at the coalface with foster-parents, parents who are agitated and stressed and very concerned, to ensure that we do not have more abuses or simply more neglect in the future.

Often we talk a lot about the rights of the child. I have come across some children and, by crikey, they seem to know more about their rights than adults do. Quite frankly, I think we sometimes might go overboard when we talk about the rights of the child in today's age. I think we need to also talk about the rights of the parents. What about the rights of the grandparents? A number of constituents have come to see me about their genuine concerns. They are not proud about having to come to see me, but they are genuinely concerned about the skills of some of their children and their ability to raise their grandchildren. The alarm bells are ringing. The grandparents are wanting to take on the role of looking after their grandchildren but, alas, we do not seem to have the level of support and commitment from the government.

I am yet to see after I read the fine print in the budget which was brought down yesterday if this Treasurer was prepared to support our grandparents in Queensland and their commitment to look after their grandchildren, and to see if this government is also prepared to support them, not so much in a token way but something a little bit more substantial.

On the issue of rights of the children I say yes, we need to protect the rights of the children but we need to have it in balance and we need to make sure that a commonsense approach is applied. We need them to also acknowledge that our staff have the skills and the ability to genuinely deal with people in stress and crisis and not just simply read the policy manual and deal with them as another number on a list. One of the problems I believe we have in Queensland, especially south-east Queensland and the Sunshine Coast, is we are growing so rapidly we do not have the links and networks in place between the extended family to support the parent who is in crisis and stress. Sometimes those parents do not acknowledge or see that they are in crisis or stress, they see it as the normal process.

Because the government and our local councils are promoting Queensland so much we have people travelling to Queensland. Only last week I had a call from a 34-year-old father complaining about the lack of services available to him in Queensland. He was comparing it with Victoria. He said Victoria had so many more free services available to him as a father of his children. I said, 'What does your wife do?' He said, 'She is an animal technician.' I said, 'I am sorry, I do not know what an animal technician is.' He said, 'She works with zoos.' I said, 'We don't have many zoos on the Sunshine Coast.' He said she was a volunteer. I said, 'If you can't find employment for your wife perhaps your wife could take on the role of looking after the children at home and I might be able to assist you in finding some employment.' But alas, he saw that as a sexist comment because he wanted to continue to be the person at home looking after the children.

He was complaining that Queensland did not have the same level of free services as Victoria. As far as I am concerned, if you want to come to Queensland and freeload, you should go back to where you came from. If you want to come to Queensland and work and be part of our community, I am more than happy to have you pop into my office and I will do whatever I can to assist you, but I am certainly not interested in freeloaders on the Sunshine Coast because we have so many problems at the moment where people are genuinely trying to get ahead, genuinely trying to improve the lot for their children. I certainly see them as the people on whom we need to prioritise our efforts.

Other speakers in this debate have spoken about the issue of the extended family. Unfortunately, with our state government and local councils promoting Queensland so much I see so many people come to Queensland and leave their extended family behind. They then expect government services to be available to pick up the pieces when things do not go right.

That is certainly one of the challenges we face with the Smart State of Queensland initiative, and we promote our state so well. My challenge to the minister is to ensure that the Treasurer and the Premier are able to keep pace with the infrastructure demands that we have on the Sunshine Coast, which is where these young families are moving to. Quite frankly, we simply do not have the infrastructure in place to provide the support that is so critical to ensure that the rights of children are protected. I commend the bill to the House. I certainly look forward to listening to the debate at the committee stage.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (3.20 p.m.): The longest journey begins with the first step. The Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill is an admirable first step. I commend the minister and the cabinet on this initiative. We have seen that cultural change can occur within large organisations and within large government departments. We saw a significant turnaround in the Queensland Police Service following the Fitzgerald inquiry. What we have before us is a watershed in the history of the former Department of Family Services.

Some isolated problems existed within the Queensland Police Service but the entire department was tarred with the one brush. Some isolated problems existed within the Department of Family Services. These were identified through the CMC inquiry. This resulted in a huge watershed. The

government has undertaken to endorse all 110 CMC recommendations. This bill is the first step in that regard.

It is important when we consider child protection legislation—and particularly in light of the rambling diatribe of the member for Tablelands—that we get the balance right. The member for Tablelands seems to want it both ways. She seems to want the department to leave a child with a family when things go well. Of course she will be in here criticising us when the department decides to leave a child with a family and subsequently that child is injured.

It is a very difficult job. I have worked in the child abuse unit. It is very difficult to get that balance right. Honestly, I do not think the media really help either. When the department leaves a child with a family and that child is subsequently injured people will rant and rave and say that the department made an appalling choice. If people think it is unjustified that the department took a child into protection people will rant and rave about the department being too savage. Everyone that I have ever worked and spoken to in the child protection area always and only wants what is best for children. Nobody knowingly makes a poor decision. Hindsight may prove a decision to be poor. Social workers do not have the benefit of hindsight. They are presented with facts and they make the best assessment they can at that time. I am always nervous about the Monday morning coaches, particularly standing up in this place, who tell us how, with the benefit of hindsight, they would have done it. They were not there at the time.

I believe this bill strikes a balance between the protection of the child and the protection of parents. I am sure it is not a pleasant situation to be in. Having conducted these investigations myself I know it is not pleasant for families when social workers or police officers knock at the front door, come in and start asking detailed, intimate questions about their family life. I know as a parent, I would not like that intrusion.

However, it is important to understand that they are there to try to protect the child. They are not there to embarrass the parents. Without providing too many details—because I would hate to breach the Police Service Administration Act—on one occasion a complaint was made to us and staff from the child abuse unit and the Department of Family Services went out to a house. The general information we got was that there was a lot of screaming and a child was seen to have blood on its face. We went out there. It turned out that there was a completely innocent explanation for what occurred in that house. I know the family was not happy to have the police and social workers turn up on their doorstep. But I encourage them to see the positive side of it. Someone out there in society had actually given a damn about the child and picked up the phone and made that phone call. They did not do it maliciously or to embarrass that family. They made that call out of genuine concern for the welfare of the child.

I do not want to harp on, but I want to try to educate members in this House about the difficult decision that has to be made at that time. The officers making these decisions do not have the benefit of hindsight. I believe the information contained in this bill strikes a balance between protecting all parties involved.

It is important to make sure that the bill just does not have a reactive component—that is, that it reacts to complaints after they are made. This bill acknowledges that if we get out there and prevent these things from occurring in the first place that is always better than cure. In addition to historical reforms of the child protection system being debated, the bill addresses the fundamental need to invest in early intervention and prevention services as an attempt to reduce the number of children entering the child protection system.

As recommended by the CMC, the government is maintaining its commitment to primary and secondary child abuse prevention programs. Spending on prevention and early intervention will be further enhanced by the allocation of an additional \$10 million under the Future Directions initiative in the 2004-05 financial year. These funds will help vulnerable families and children at risk.

Peter Forster's blueprint recommended that the Department of Communities should transition successful Future Directions pilots into routine practice. I know that work is under way in the department to develop a policy framework for prevention and early intervention in relation to vulnerable families and children at risk.

This policy framework will be informed by what is learnt from the successful Future Directions pilots. The additional \$10 million available will expand on the Future Directions prevention and early intervention program. A working group of senior departmental officers has been established to prepare a whole of government overarching planning and policy framework to guide its involvement in prevention and early intervention for child safety. Child safety directors are being established in key departments, including the Department of Communities, to ensure that child safety issues are integrated into the core work of various departments.

The Child Safety Director in the Department of Communities, which has the lead agency responsibility for prevention and early intervention across government, will ensure a child safety focus is maintained. I am sure that is really what all members of this House are about—that is, having a child centre, child focused safety and protection regime. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (3.28 p.m.): I am delighted to be taking part in my first debate on the Child Protection Legislation Amendment Bill. I spent a substantial part of life in this House as shadow spokesman for families. The safety of children and child protection is an issue that is very close to my heart. I have always felt saddened that the history of child safety in Queensland has been a saga of neglect and indifference.

I note that some members who have spoken previously in this debate have said how sad it is that we are in a situation where hundreds of millions of dollars has to be put aside to protect the safety of children in order to intervene on their behalf. All children have the right to a safe, caring and nurturing environment. For some children, their parents are unable or unwilling to care for them. In that case, state governments have a statutory responsibility to intervene and protect them. When I talk about the saga of neglect and indifference, legislation in this area passed by this House dated back to 1965 before it was finally amended in 1999. That really underlines the indifference with which the child protection issue was treated in this parliament.

In 1999 Minister Anna Bligh gave us legislation which brought distinct developments to the area of child protection. For example, there was a change from a reactive system to the use of more preventative policies and family support services to help families to protect a child which ensured that any action that was taken was in the child's best interests. This legislation before the House today takes this issue much further. What has happened in Australia historically is that all states have been unable to meet their statutory obligations to protect children from exploitation, neglect and abuse. Until the Beattie government and this budget in particular, Queensland has consistently grossly underspent compared to the Australian average. As I said in an article in the *Courier-Mail*, the underresourcing of child protection in Queensland has been scandalous and we must own up to that in order to move on.

In the interests of putting this on the record, in 1984 Graham Zerk, the Director-General of the Department of Children's Services, then reported to the Queensland parliament a doubling of confirmed child abuse notifications and almost a trebling in the numbers relating to sexual abuse. At that time, Mr Zerk said—

Departmental child care officers are finding it increasingly difficult to adequately meet the department's statutory responsibilities.

Difficult indeed. For his trouble, Mr Zerk decided to have another go the year after, again highlighting the fact that there had been a 33 per cent increase in notifications. A 1985 Children's Services report stated—

... it is no longer possible to provide the full range of statutory services for which the department is responsible.

It could not police the laws with the powers that it had to do so. What was the response at that stage? Apart from Graham Zerk being sacked, the minister of the day, Minister Muntz, stated—

The answer to this serious problem does not necessarily lie in an increase in staff. It requires extensive public education and a greater acceptance of the responsibility of parenthood. Funding of additional staff will never replace the discipline and supervision of responsible parents. Those who chose to be parents must accept that role. The taxpayer cannot be asked to bear the increasing cost of parent neglect ...

This is a classic example of blaming the victims. If parents accepted their responsibilities, in a perfect world we would not need the state to intervene. However, the needs of the child are so paramount in nature that we cannot allow children to be put in a situation where the risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation is very high. Minister Muntz, the National Party minister of the day, went on at that time to say that we had much higher priorities as a society. He said that we had to find nurses, policemen and teachers and that the need of these areas of human service delivery was of much higher priority. What a terrible indictment on the values we displayed as a society back then.

When I was involved in the inquiry into homeless children as a senior consultant, we received a submission from the state government in 1988—that was the Burdekin inquiry, for the record—and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. The submission from the state government indicated that more than half of the children who were out on the street as homeless had at some stage been wards of the state. What an indictment on us as a society. It appears that what we did in that situation was give a 15-year-old kid a bag or a suitcase and put him out on the streets. That is how we met our responsibilities. Having intervened to take that child away from their family, we then totally destroyed any future that that child had. In the eighties I was involved with a group called Friends of Children in Care which was set up specifically to look after the interests of these children. So the community had to respond to try to catch up with some of the gaps in the government's responsibilities.

I am not going to say in this House that Labor governments in the early days did much in terms of this issue. The Goss government did nothing to further the cause of child protection. If I remember rightly, Jacki Byrne, a former Director-General of Family Services, said in an interview on *Four Corners* that there was gross underresourcing of the Department of Families by the Goss government whilst she was director-general. I am just saying that that has happened all along. The Goss government then lost power and Minister Lingard came onto the scene. I will quote him. In responding to a series of *Courier-Mail* articles which expressed serious concern at the plight of the safety of children, Minister Lingard said—

I do not believe that there has been one case of either paedophilia or child abuse which the department has not investigated or does not know about.

In an article in the *Courier-Mail* around the time of the CMC inquiry, I said that there were shades of Russell Hinze walking around the valley with a white cane saying that there were no prostitutes there. That is how ludicrous it was.

It is interesting that we had what I described earlier as an appalling saga of neglect and indifference. At the time of the CMC inquiry, I wrote in an article in the *Courier-Mail* that we have left Queensland with a shameful legacy. I give credit to Anna Bligh as the first Minister for Families who actually tried to do something positive about this horrendous situation. Anna Bligh insisted on highlighting the plight of children in institutions by holding the Forde inquiry. It put that issue on the agenda and shamed all of us. As I said earlier, she finally brought before the House the first progressive child protection legislation, and today we are doing something to improve that. At that time, the money allocated for child protection was just about doubled but was still well below the Australian average.

What I said then that we needed to do—and I think we will do it—was to make sure that we have child protection workers who are supported. That is so fundamentally important. In a job like that, they need to be able to share their successes, their failures, their tears, their laughter and their joy. We need an environment which nurtures child protection workers, which says that they are valued. Prior to what we are doing now, their caseloads were unacceptably high. We have always needed more resources for training and staff development, and I know that the current minister understands that so well. That is something that we need to ensure happens, and I think that is the first thing that he said we needed to do in order to help the professionalism of these workers in their very difficult task. It has always been understood that early intervention and family support were fundamental—that is, not having the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff but having a railing at the top of the cliff so that people do not fall over the side. It is just so important.

So I think that this legislation is the first stage of what is going to be the response to the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report into the protection of children. That report contained a number of recommendations. I think that this legislation meets the first 11 of those recommendations. This legislation is about improving support and accountability arrangements for children who are most at risk. I think it is important that we do that. This is a very significant, first step down a long, hard road.

Can I tell the House that, as a member of the minister's committee, I have been impressed that the committee members have turned up with enthusiasm to the committee meetings to be part of this new approach to safeguarding the wellbeing of our children. I have been impressed by their attendance. I have been a member of this chamber for a very, very long time and I have never seen such hope and enthusiasm to undertake a task.

I know that members have spoken about the rights of parents. Even the 1999 legislation indicated quite clearly that, if it came to the crunch, when people were deciding whether to intervene or not to intervene—which is a very difficult decision and nobody is always going to get it right; this is not a perfect world—we had to come down on the right of the child to be protected. This legislation is about making the child safety system more child focused.

The minister stated in his second reading speech—

The bill reorders the principles in the Child Protection Act 1999 to ensure that welfare and the best interests of the child are paramount. It also adds a new principle that children should be kept informed of matters affecting them.

As I said before, this legislation is all about making the child safety system more child focused.

Another element of this bill is the new Child Death Case Review Committee, which will provide critical external accountability mechanisms. It will oversight the child death case reviews undertaken by the Department of Child Safety. So we will have somebody looking over the shoulder of the department and helping it to look back at why these horrendous events happened—and they will happen again. That is the reality. Also, the role of the Children's Commissioner in all of this is very, very important.

I would like to conclude—because I am passionate about this issue—by saying that prior to the last election the *Courier-Mail* published many editorials and a large number of articles about the horror of the abuse of children in foster care. I have not seen the same enthusiasm from the *Courier-Mail* about children in detention. The Human Rights Commission has indicated that, under our international commitments on the rights of the child, we should not be keeping children in detention, with the savaging that happens to them and their sad plight. If those children were actually part of a family who lived in West End or somewhere, the state would not be doing the right thing if it did not intervene and take those children away from that abusive environment, from an environment in which those children would pay an unbelievable price down the road in terms of their mental anguish. I know that I had nightmares after seeing some German soldiers take my dad away at gunpoint when I was lying on a mattress on the floor. That is one event in my life. There have been a couple of other events in my life as well and I know how difficult living with those images becomes. Yet we had a report that demanded that these children be released by a date that has now passed.

The *Courier-Mail* has not published any editorials on that matter. It has not championed the plight of these sad children whom we have decided to put in detention. Why have we done that? We have been told by Senator Vanstone and our Prime Minister that it is a deterrence—so that we can deter refugees from coming to this country. Again, the idea is to blame the parents. Way back in 1985 in this House Geoff Muntz said, 'Do nothing about it, but blame the parents.' Again, we have this blaming of the parents. When Ruddock as Immigration Minister was told about children self-harming in detention centres, making suicide attempts and all of that, he said that they were just attention seeking. Imagine, as a state government, we had a policy that declined to take note of a plea from the heart from a young person—a young person who was attempting suicide because of his or her plight.

Can I just say to this House today that the reform of child protection is going to be a very long and difficult road. But for once we have the proper legislative processes—the proper checks and balances and the proper values system. Of course, we are going to resource that. So it is a great day for children at risk in this state. In terms of comparisons with other states, Queensland's child protection system is going to go from being at the bottom of the tree to being at the top of the tree.

I am just so proud to be part of a Labor government that is showing Labor values. Thousands of years ago the Greeks said that the true test of a democracy is the extent to which that society minimises social disadvantage. The more it does, the more democratic it is. I think that this legislation is a test of Labor values and Labor principles. It is a true test of real democracy. I am proud to be a member of a Labor government that has brought this legislation before this House.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (3.46 p.m.): I rise this afternoon to speak in support of the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. Over the past few years, the requirement for such a bill and the amendments to the child protection system have become more and more necessary. The implementation of the reforms as set out in this bill are an indication that the previous processes and procedures in regard to children and their welfare were grossly inadequate. The only pity is that these reforms did not occur earlier when some children could have been spared the pain and suffering that they were subjected to prior to the CMC inquiry being sought.

However, the inquiry came up with recommendations and this legislation is aimed at improving the lot of Queensland's most vulnerable children. In his second reading speech the Premier spoke of the fact that this new commitment to child protection and safety will mean an increased workload for the department responsible for children at risk. Under the previous child care system, many caseworkers were overloaded with cases and obviously were unable to provide the appropriate amount of time to each individual case, very often to the detriment of the children whose situation and individual circumstances were at the very least precarious. The enormity of the task of vetting appropriate foster families must be extremely taxing for departmental workers and the level of responsibility for such a task would be difficult under any circumstances, but even more so if those staff members are not provided with the necessary support mechanisms or resources in order to carry out their role to the best of their ability.

The formative years of a child are so important when it comes to the emotional stability and sense of security for their later lives. The responsibility that a government has for children within its care is even more vital to these children than any other, because they have already suffered greatly simply due to the fact that they no longer reside with their biological parents, which is considered the norm in everyday society. One of the problems that I found in my dealings with the previous department was the difficulty for people such as grandparents, for example, who had concerns regarding their grandchildren and the environment in which they may be living. The ability of these people in regard to having their concerns addressed, let alone investigated, was frustrating as there was always the possibility that the claims were untrue or vexatious. But the very small possibility that it may be true meant that in my mind each allegation must be looked into, just in case the allegations were true.

I realise that it is an enormous burden for governments of all persuasions, but it is one we have to be responsible for because, sadly, a government and its staff are the only people some children have to look out for them. As we all know, a child does not choose its biological parents or its circumstances. This is why such trust is put into the hands of our child care services.

During my last term, my independent parliamentary colleagues and I met with Department of Families' staff and we articulated our concerns with the system and spoke of the need to increase staffing numbers and to review the use of university undergraduates and their ability to adequately investigate cases of abuse.

Unfortunately, not everyone knows how to be 'a good parent'. There are no lessons in how to be a good mother or father. Some people have enough trouble getting themselves through life let alone understanding or appreciating the needs and wants of their offspring. Also, parents are becoming younger and younger, particularly in my electorate where there are many young teenage parents who are not more than children themselves. One cannot really expect that they will have all the answers, and most of their parenting skills will develop from a process of trial and error.

I believe there should be a more accessible facility for parents of all ages to visit or contact if they are experiencing problems or have doubts. I know from personal experience as a local member how

difficult it is for some parents to find help without being labelled a bad parent. I also know that there are parents who feel that they are at a stage that if someone does not intervene they could harm their child.

Inflexibility and the sense that everything is black and white is something parents and I experienced with the previous Department of Families, particularly in relation to shared care agreements. I have witnessed first-hand the level of intimidation and guilt that is placed upon parents and the public humiliation by some departmental staff of some parents. There seemed to be a lack of communication and I have seen a lack of consultation regarding the provision of medication, education and issues of grave importance and relevance to a child's welfare. I have had people in my office in tears over situations such as these. When it comes to the life of a child, mistakes cannot afford to be made.

Another area of concern is the process of nonintervention, which has been responsible for some tragic circumstances over the years. This must not be repeated. The reality is that leaving a child with a parent may not always be the most suitable option. There really is so much that needs addressing with regard to children and welfare. I could rehash every negative story I have heard, and we have all read the *Courier-Mail*. Without the media this inquiry may not have even occurred. We all have our own personal views of the media, but in this case I guess we should be grateful. We are all aware that the crisis was endemic prior to this recent inquiry. As I said, I am not going to mention each appalling instance of abuse, because I am sure the circumstances of the majority of the sad cases are etched indelibly in all of our minds.

Whilst I am yet to be a parent and I cannot speak from personal experience in that regard, I see mothers, fathers, grandparents and carers on a daily basis, and I can see how strong the bond of parental love can be. In a perfect world every child would experience this kind of love, but we do not live in a perfect world. I sincerely hope that with this new legislation we may be able to provide as many disadvantaged children as possible with the next best thing. It is hoped that this legislation will mean a new and improved era in child welfare and one that we can all be proud of. Our future society depends upon its success. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (3.53 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. In fact, it is one of the debates that I am very proud to be part of. In fact, listening to the depth of experience and the humanity that has been part of the contributions by the members of this House to today's debate is both heartening and empowering. I am pleased to have been here to hear the contributions by MPs.

Protection of children from neglect, abuse and exploitation is at the centre of our government's child safety policies and actions. I recently heard a retired Childrens Court magistrate say that, indeed, children are our future but, quite frankly, they need our help here and now. I cannot do anything other than agree with her. The bill before the House, of course, is the first stage in legislative reform that arises out of the CMC's January 2004 report *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. Of course, we know that all recommendations arising from that report will be implemented by the Beattie government.

This bill provides the legislative base for the implementation of a new child safety culture that puts children first. To borrow from Minister Reynolds's own words, the key characteristics of the culture that will be developed by the Department of Child Safety include: the department as a whole will address the needs of children at risk as its No. 1 priority; there will be a consistent view of desired outcomes for children and young people; staff will strive to maintain positive, supporting and effective working relationships with children and young people; reconciling the endeavours of workers and management so that service delivery staff have clear and unambiguous responsibilities; adhering to best practice standards of therapeutic interventions and specialised services; accepting clinical accountability at every level; continually strive for effective working relationships with all external agencies; acknowledging the necessity for documentation of all clinical decisions; encouraging the identification of and subsequent attention to practice failures; and encouraging the pursuit of excellence in all activities. I cannot help but commend the minister for the culture that he, the Premier and this legislation are seeking to implement.

I would like to talk about young people as opposed to children. I think many adults have an ill-conceived view about the capacity of understanding of children. I am the mother of four teenage children, and I am constantly being educated by them on their capacity to understand, analyse and articulate on matters that affect them personally—their community and indeed their role in it. Young people indeed deserve to be treated as partners in discussions and decisions about their lives—important things such as health, education and their social and work circumstances. I do not profess to be an expert on children, even though I have got four. In fact, my kids will attest to the fact that I am no expert.

Mr Neil Roberts: You've got a degree in children.

Ms BARRY: I have a degree in mothering! I understand, however, that for many children, in particular foster-children, increasing their partnership and their participation in the discussions and decisions about their lives will provide them with some protection in terms of their preparedness to

speak up about things that concern them. It gives them some sense of confidence to know who they are and how valuable they are so that they do not spiral down into a life where they consider that they are destined to despair and loss.

Reaching those teenage years is a very difficult challenge for all children. I am told by many foster-parents that in particular it is difficult for foster-children. There is an overwhelming desire for them to know who they are, no matter what environment they have been brought up in. They are often angry about perceived and real rejections that they have suffered. They are often angry about their treatment by the system, and there is this temptation to reject even the most caring foster-parents. That is very, very real. So the emphasis by the new child safety culture on sharing information is critical to guiding young people down this rocky road. It is so important to give them an opportunity to build self-respect, to let them know that they are okay.

Orana Youth Shelter in my electorate cares for children between 13 and 17 who are homeless. It is staggering to realise that some people say to their 13-year-old children, 'I am done with you. You are out the door.' Orana has been part of my life for the last three years. They have taught me an awful lot about the importance of building self-respect for young people as a way of providing them with the skills to lead safe and fulfilling lives.

The bill provides for notifications of concerns prior to a child's birth. I have sought some clarification on this and I am assured that the notification for that particular aspect is that a notification can be made about a child before it is born for protection after it is born. I am pleased to raise that.

The bill provides for a whole range of changes in relation to the review of child deaths. It give the coroner greater examination powers. It provides the Children's Commissioner with access to children by expanding the community visitor program. One of the most important aspects is that the Children Services Tribunal can review decisions that have been made by the department.

These are the changes to legislation that build on real progress for children here and now. But, in particular, it says to Queensland as a community that child safety is everybody's business. It is like domestic violence: it is not something that happens to somebody else and one should just be grateful that one's own life is okay. Child safety is everybody's business.

My husband and I recently applied for a blue card. I am pleased to advise the House that we were both successful in that. It was a bit of a nervous moment there. It was a requirement for us to be home stay parents for overseas students that are coming out in the next few weeks. The requirement for a blue card is most appropriate because it is appropriate that we provide protection for all children, even if they are children from overseas who are only with us for a few weeks. It is quite an onerous task to apply for a blue card and something I am pleased is one of the foundations of our provision for child safety measures in this state.

What our continuing changes to child safety say to me is that all children deserve to be protected; that it is simply not ethical to compartmentalise which children do and do not need protection. I expected, and am delighted, that the member for Ashgrove would raise the issue of children in detention. I hope the federal government follows the lead of the Queensland state government in applying the same sense of ethics and accepts that its responsibility to child safety applies even to children of refugees. It gives me real pride to be part of a government that is prepared to accept that it must and can do better for all children.

The ongoing and critical need for child protection is not new. It is a difficult subject. In fact, it is really hard to imagine that people can harm children. I have been very pleased to hear people's experiences. I do not think I will ever forget my first experience at viewing child abuse. I was a student nurse whose job it was at the Royal Children's Hospital to sit beside the bed of a toddler who had suffered a lifetime and life-threatening injury over his entire body. In fact, he was left permanently brain damaged. My job for the shift was to sit by the side of the child's bed and look out for the child's father.

I could not believe it was possible but the father was a regular visitor to the Royal Children's Hospital. He had only one purpose in mind while he was there and that was seeking to cause further harm to the child. In some way he thought if the child was not there—in other words, if the child was dead—it somehow would protect him. I will not forget standing hanging on to this man's arm yelling out to the nurses to get the security guards because he had arrived in this unit to cause harm to a two-year-old. It was staggering. I can still see the child's face.

I spent some time in the accident and emergency department of the Royal Children's Hospital, and I notice that stage 2 of our reforms will require registered nurse mandatory reporting. That is a truly confronting thing for nurses, but I commend the government on its courage and I look forward to being part of that debate. I have to commend those workers previously with the Department of Families and now with the Department of Child Safety for their courage and their skills to do this work on an everyday basis. They absolutely deserve our support. They absolutely deserve our commitment to fund and support their efforts in child protection.

I know that ours is a government that is committed to addressing the deficits of the past and continuing to make every effort to match the efforts of our workers in this important area. I understand

the minister and the Premier's passion. I have heard them in their unguarded moments talk passionately about their desire to make things better. I look forward to the continued implementation of these important legislative reforms, and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (4.03 p.m.): I wish to speak very briefly to the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill. I have just returned from Toowoomba, but I thought it was important to make a short contribution bearing in mind the great importance of the subject matter of the legislation. I am very pleased to see that the Premier has the carriage of this bill, showing the government's thoughts and resolve with respect to the importance of what is trying to be achieved through this legislation.

The department has been created following on the CMC's recommendations in *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. This followed on the increasing and voluminous number of notifications with respect to child abuse over a period of time. That is not just restricted to Queensland; it is an Australia-wide phenomenon, unfortunately.

The CMC recommendations have been discussed and are the subject matter of this bill, and I will not go through them, but I want to commend the work of Peter Forster and the work done by the minister, the Hon. Mike Reynolds, with respect to following the blueprint set out by Mr Forster in his report. The focus of the department will be to fully implement the recommendations of the Forster report and indeed the CMC report. This new department will have an opportunity to build a new child centred system from the ground up which will be, I know, looked forward to greatly not only by the children of Queensland but also by those who work in that field, including the nurses, as mentioned by the honourable member for Aspley.

The changes will be significant and again they are set out in detail in the legislation. More particularly, I suppose, the government's resolve is demonstrated by the money that will be committed to this project. An additional \$60 million is to be provided to implement the CMC recommendations in the financial year 2004-05, rising to \$153 million in 2006-07. The government has shown its seriousness. It is not just rhetoric supporting this legislation; it is hard cash and resources in terms of staffing. For example, 46 child safety service centres across the state will be staffed by specialist child safety officers. New child safety officers will serve a 12-month probation period and will undergo performance assessment and they will have experience in community based organisations. The list goes on in terms of what is proposed with respect to the training of the people who will work in this area.

The only other area I want to touch on in the brief time I have available to me is that of the future developments which the minister has in mind. I was pleased to see a finalisation of the partnership agreement between Education Queensland and his department, which will contribute to improved educational outcomes for children. It is important that these kids are able to get back on track and to make something of their lives. The importance in social justice terms of education to this government is well known, and it is great that provision has been made with that partnership to ensure as much as possible that the best opportunity available is given.

Finally, I note with satisfaction that there will be and is to be a growing, increasing association and transparency of association with the non-government sector, and systems and service agreements have been put in place to increase the accountability of those organisations.

I commend the legislation, which is quite lengthy, to the House. I was pleased to be able to make a short contribution, bearing in mind the importance of the legislation and the fact that I have the honour, with others, of serving on the minister's backbench committee.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (4.08 p.m.): I rise to support the legislation before the House. It is terrible that any child would be abused or neglected in any society anywhere in the world. I support the comments by the Premier and comments made by members of this House on both sides who have highlighted the need for child protection. I wish, though, to raise some caution in this whole area. We have to realise that most abuse does not occur in institutions; it does not occur within churches, orphanages, the scouts or other organised groups. Most abuse occurs within suburban homes in apparently normal, heterosexual relationships.

It is unfortunate that the media highlights issues which give a different stand. I am holding in my hand the front page of the *Courier-Mail* of 21 August. Everyone would recognise a certain church leader who was publicised for a charge against him that was later withdrawn. The crux comes in the right-hand column of this same front page where it talks about a 10-year-old girl in a Queensland regional town who had been kidnapped, raped and tortured and rescued by the police that very day. But for the media an alleged incident 30 years ago, which was later withdrawn, was the key news item, not a 10-year-old girl in 2002 who had been kidnapped, raped and tortured. We have to stop looking to people out there, people in some particular group who are the abusers. The abusers live in normal suburban homes.

Not 100 metres from my home in the last month we have been working with police, mental health and family services on a family where we are certain abuse has occurred. It has been extremely difficult for the family services officers to deal with that family where abuse is evident. For 15-year-old girls to be going in flash cars at 10 o'clock at night and being brought back at 4 a.m., and from the comments they

make to neighbours, the indications are that they are on the game, and shows that there is abuse occurring right now in our suburban homes.

I hope that in the discussion of child abuse and neglect we do not look for some extraordinary group, we look for groups who appear to be normal but whose behaviour is quite extraordinarily abhorrent.

We also need to be aware of what will happen when we get it wrong. Firstly, we can get it wrong in two ways. We can get it wrong when we do not pick up the abuse. I congratulate the government and members from both sides who are supporting this legislation because we are trying to put in place circumstances that will pick up as much as possible, as much as can be done by any government agency, the abuse that occurs. But we can also get it wrong in another way, and that occurs when there are false or vexatious claims.

I have worked with two people against whom claims were made and which were dismissed by the court. One person, whose life has been turned around, was facing legal proceedings for the better part of 12 months. The magistrate said in concluding the case—

The charges are dismissed, the defendant is discharged, but I feel that I must comment that the evidence of the complainant X, in my experience ranks amongst the most heinous, scurrilous and malicious accusations made by one person against another, which were completely unfounded and inherently untrue.

So we are in a situation where we are giving the police and other groups the power to investigate. They must investigate, but if the investigation goes wrong, if the claims made are scurrilous or heinous, as was the situation in the case that I quoted, then another person's life is destroyed.

There is another case to which I have alluded in this chamber before and which, if the person decides to give me permission, I will speak about in detail. The two people I referred to came in contact with the Argos group. One person found them to be a professional and thoughtful group. The other person had a very different experience with the officers in Argos. But I guess, as with every group, we are going to find people who work in a better or worse way.

I fully support the legislation before the House. I support the work that Robin Sullivan and Anthony Benedetti do in the children's commission. I believe they are highly dedicated and professional people.

I think one issue the government has been working on in recent years and which deserves greater attention is the sharing of information. Often the people who are being abused have contact with mental health, the Department of Housing, the Queensland police, the court system, education, and sometimes their local MP. Because of constraints of privacy, information is not shared and different people have lots of different bits of information about the person. I see the minister nodding that he understands the concern. We have a situation where, for the good of the people involved in that case I related to earlier less than 100 metres from my house where those young girls were on the game, it was difficult for the different agencies to fully share their information because of what they perceived were barriers with the privacy legislation.

I support the legislation before the House. We must stamp out child abuse and neglect, but we also must put in place procedures that will ensure we have a fair and proper system of investigation.

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (4.14 p.m.): I want to say today that I find it a great privilege to be a member parliament but an even greater privilege to be a member of the Beattie Labor government which is introducing this first tranche of legislative change that is being introduced in the child protection reforms that have come out of, first of all, the CMC inquiry last year, the blueprint that was written by Peter Forster and delivered to the government on 23 March and, of course, the legislation that is before us today. To be Minister for Child Safety is a great privilege in regard to the reforms that we are making.

First of all, I want to put on the record my thanks for the commitment and the work which has been done by two of my predecessors. First of all, I refer of course to Minister Anna Bligh as minister for families in the first term of the Beattie government. In 1999 she introduced the Child Protection Act and the very important reforms that were brought in by Minister Bligh at that particular time.

I also commend the work that Minister Judy Spence did in the second term of the Beattie government. Certainly the future directions trials that were brought in in 2002 in regard to the examination of prevention, early intervention and therapy will go a long way, not only in this year but in coming years, towards the changes that are required from a holistic perspective of looking at child protection. As I indicated, the legislation before us today is the first tranche of legislation. There will be further legislation introduced in September and also, of course, in May next year.

The blueprint in taking up the CMC's 110 recommendations has as its centrepiece the very fact that the paramountcy must be the interest of the child—the interest of the child will be absolutely paramount on every occasion. That means that where we see a number of stakeholders we do not ignore them, but it does mean that on every occasion I as minister and the staff members of the Department of Child Safety must put the interests of the child in a very paramount way.

It does not mean that we do not take into account the needs of the biological or natural parents. It does not mean that we do not take into account the needs of the extended family, the needs of foster-carers or any other individual or group that is important to the child. However, as is indicated in the amendments that are before us today, it does mean that the legislation needs to be child focused. It will be child focused. Myself, as the minister, and the government make no apology in that regard.

Can I say today that in terms of the legislation before us it is really about ensuring that the Department of Child Safety and the system of child safety and child protection that we have in Queensland needs to be as open, as transparent and as accountable as we possibly can make it. That is very much in the interests of the child. As I have indicated to members and publicly as well, it is my intent as Minister for Child Safety to have a very high standard of accountability, transparency and openness.

The changes which are inherent in the legislation changed today in regard to the Commission for Children and Young People, the new position of Child Guardian, the children service tribunal and the area of the unborn child provisions that are coming in means that as a system we need to ensure that the systemic failure of the old Department of Families, the dysfunctionalities that were with that department and in many ways part of the culture and ethos of the department do not remain as part of the culture in the years to come.

No-one, let alone me, underestimates the task that is at hand here. This is the first stage of the legislation. I am delighted with the bipartisan support given by both the Opposition Leader and my shadow minister, who I believe are working in a bipartisan way to ensure that this legislation is passed by the House today on the basis that we are putting children first. This should not just be discarded into a political waste bin of debate.

I am a bit disappointed that the member for Currumbin and the member for Tablelands have wanted to go into areas that have nothing to do with this legislation. I believe that in many ways those members do not understand the legislation, that they have not in fact read the CMC report or have not read the blueprint in any tangible way so that as members of parliament representing their individual parties or representing their electorates they can get up and make a meaningful speech as other members of parliament have done today.

I indicate that inherent again in this legislation is the fact that this is an integrated service delivery focus. That was very much touched on by the member for Stafford in his comments in regard to the nature of data, the nature of confidentiality and the sharing that is often required, not only between state government departments but also between non-government organisations and state government departments as well. If we are about the interests of the child, we are about case planning, and case planning can only work if we are going to have transparent and accountable partnerships and collaboration and cooperation with all the stakeholders that are involved in the child protection system. That is very much the centrepiece of this legislation.

I was a bit disappointed that the member for Currumbin said that we were not putting in all of these provisions at once. My department is still going through the problems on a day-to-day basis that they have had before; they are problems that they are having because this is going to take some time. We are doing this in a very considered way. We are ensuring that the transition of staff from the old Department of Families and the Department of Communities into the Department of Child Safety is done in a way which ensures that our staff are going to be willing to move into a new culture, into a new ethos and are indeed going to be competent to be able to work in that way in the future system.

Nothing will come easy, but I can assure members, as I have previously indicated, that the staff of the Department of Child Safety need to be valued. They need to be valued because, by and large, these departmental staff members take on a job that many other people would not take on. The fact of the matter is that 60 per cent of the staff of the old Department of Families only stayed there for a period of up to three years. They have walked on and they have voted with their feet in moving on to other jobs. What we have seen is an ignorance in child protection research, not only in Queensland but indeed across Australia. An Institute of Criminology research paper put out in February actually indicated that there had been no research on this matter in Australia in the past.

With the legislative change, with the additions that we are making to the commission and the professional nature of these changes, we need to be able to recognise that many of our staff who are still with us, even though there has been an enormous attrition rate, have got on with the job; they have been willing to do a very difficult job. In many ways some of those who are still there have been burnt out, may well have become depersonalised, may well have in many ways not had the same level of competency that they may have had when they first started the job. We need to support those staff; we need to give them the professional support, the mentoring support, the supervision. We need to do that in the way that is focused very much in this legislation today.

Can I finish where I started today and say that I find it a great privilege to be a member of parliament, and I find it an even greater privilege to be the Minister for Child Safety under the Beattie Labor government. These are progressive reforms. They are reforms that are needed. We do not shirk away from our responsibilities. What the CMC said in its 110 recommendations last year meant that

there had to be change. There will be change, and this first tranche of the three tranches of legislation that will go ahead in September and May will make this Department of Child Safety the lead agency in regard to the work that we are doing across about eight government departments and also working in partnership with a non-government organisation.

I once again thank the opposition for the bipartisanship that they have shown in this regard and I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (4.25 p.m.), in reply: I thank all members for their participation in this debate. I also acknowledge and thank the opposition for its bipartisan support in these important legislative reforms and hope that that bipartisanship continues from today because we have not always had it. This is an important area of reform and there is no room for politics in it. Let us hope that that continues from today.

I will start with the issues raised by the member for Southern Downs, the Leader of the Opposition. While supporting the bill he recognised the need for seamless data gathering, reporting, exchange of information and monitoring. In particular, he commented on the responsibility of the Child Death Case Review Committee to report when its recommendations are not complied with by the Department of Child Safety. The response to that is very simple: the Child Death Case Review Committee is an independent committee. It will be chaired by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and will be comprised of experts from fields such as child health, paediatrics, forensic pathology, mental health investigations and child protection. It must also include appropriate indigenous representatives because we all know the high incidences of indigenous children involved in foster care who have been the subject of abuse. They are disproportionately highly represented in this area and that is why this committee needs to include appropriate indigenous representatives.

In performing its functions the Child Death Case Review Committee must act independently and is not under the control or direction of any other entity, including the minister and the commissioner, in relation to the way in which it performs its functions. The committee will be required to report annually on its functions. This should include a report on its recommendations and how they were or were not implemented. The committee will also be empowered to prepare reports about particular instances where the committee has made recommendations to the Department of Child Safety that may not have been complied with to the satisfaction of the committee. These reports are to be provided to both the Minister for Child Safety and also to me as the minister responsible for the Commissioner for Children and Young People. You do not get a more open process than that.

It is the independence and expertise of this committee which will ensure that, where reports need to be given to the minister, that will be done. I certainly expect this will occur in circumstances where recommendations are not followed through by the Department of Child Safety. I know the Leader of the Opposition is not listening, but I hope he will read the answer to this because it is important he understands that we have taken appropriate action to ensure that this works. We do not want any cynical politics played by the Leader of the Opposition on another occasion on this issue, as we have seen in the past.

The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Nicklin also asked whether the re-ordering of the child protection principles erodes the rights of families and decision making. The response to that is clear: the amendment re-ordering the principles of the act clarifies the requirement that children's rights, interests and welfare should be paramount. It is very clear. The amendment is not intended to require decision makers to give children and young people whatever they want, nor is it about ignoring the views and wishes of parents or grandparents. It is about the best interests of the child. The concept of best interests incorporates not only considerations of the child's wishes but also consideration of views expressed by parents and family members and professional assessments in relation to the welfare and needs of the child.

Anyone considering it would know that that is a sensible, pragmatic and reasonable way to go. The application of this best interest principle can be complex and difficult as it involves considering a range of matters relating to the child's needs, both in the short term and long term, and determining the weight to be given to those matters in order to decide what action would best promote the child's wellbeing and interests.

This process inherently requires consideration of the child's interest in relation to other persons who are significant to the child. Examples of different decisions where the application of this principle is particularly meaningful are decisions about the frequency and type of contact that should occur between children and their parents and other family members while they are in care, decisions about the unification of children with their parents and decisions about whether to remove a child from the care of a carer.

This area is an absolute nightmare. The truth of the matter is that there are some cases where, unfortunately, there is abuse. Recently we had a tragic case in my electorate which, as a parent, made me shake my head. I find it very difficult to understand the tragic circumstances that occurred there. Anyone with any heart or compassion would have to feel for the mother concerned. I cannot say any more because this matter is being investigated at the moment.

Frankly, we need to understand that it is too easy for people, whether they are in the media or in politics, to point the finger and say that, at the end of the day, the department should wear all of the responsibility and it should have intervened at this point or the next. While in hindsight some of that may be true, the reality is that in family crises rationale and logic go out the window. While people are trying to consider the basic rights—that is, the rights of the child and the right of parents to have access to the child—take into account allegations of abuse and juggle the different interests, it becomes almost an entangled nightmare and very difficult for decisions to be made. No-one should be under any illusions here. The best possible professional course will be followed, people will be trained appropriately and there will be extra staff.

Where one is dealing with the very close line between love and hate in family relationships—that is, there once was love but that has turned into hate—it becomes very difficult for professionals to make a decision which in every single case will be perfect. If anyone thinks people can do that then they are wrong. The last person who was perfect we managed to crucify. We have not had one since. People in this department will not get it right 100 per cent of the time. They will do their best to get it right 100 per cent of the time but that is simply impossible. If anyone thinks otherwise then they do not live in the real world and they are simply playing base politics or being unreasonable in their judgments.

In addition, the CMC made specific recommendations that children and families participation in decision making be strengthened. This recommendation is also being addressed through the development of departmental practice guides and tools. The Leader of the Opposition also pointed out that good legislation needs to be backed up by resources. We are doing that. I can assure the honourable member that adequate resources will be provided for the implementation of the CMC recommendations and specifically these reforms. That was provided for in yesterday's budget. Because the matter is before the House I do not intend to discuss the details, although I would be only too willing to deal with them at some length. I will do that.

I highlight the fact that in terms of Queensland governments we have been the most responsive in the history of this state in dealing with child protection and funding it appropriately. While other governments have been only too willing to cover it up or pretend it did not exist, we have not. We sent this matter to the CMC. We have had a number of assessments. We have implemented all of the recommendations. We had Peter Forster come along with his reputation and integrity to ensure that the recommendations were properly implemented. We have copped the extra costs on the chin. As a government we have funded it.

There was a suggestion of a new department. We are establishing one. There was a recommendation for the massive injection of funds into a range of areas. We are doing that. I do not think there is any room for anyone to be churlish about the funding. We have implemented all of the recommendations or are in the process of doing so. They will be appropriately funded. That was in yesterday's budget. As I said, I will not go through the detail because the budget is before the House. All anyone has to do is go and read it and they will understand that we are serious about this.

I acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition's comments in relation to the necessity to collect and exchange appropriate data. This is an issue that the government is keenly aware of. Significant effort is being focused on ensuring that this occurs. I have a clear commitment from my ministers to all steps necessary to ensure the effective provision and exchange of information about children at risk. I also have their commitment to assist, as far as legislatively possible, with the effective operation of the new monitoring and oversight system.

In stage 2 of the reform process we will introduce any legislation that is necessary to facilitate more effective exchange of information between and among departments and agencies. Mike Reynolds, the minister, suggested to me that we should convene a meeting of relevant ministers. We did that. After cabinet, the relevant ministers sat around the table and discussed the appropriate exchange of this information. It has been agreed to and they have given me a commitment to do it. I have absolute faith that this will be done. We have not shirked any of these issues and nor will we.

The member for Burdekin commented on the need for more emphasis on early intervention and prevention and particularly the benefits of parenting training and programs within the Queensland education curriculum. The curriculum for secondary education allows many opportunities for young people to acquire essential skills and knowledge on parenting. This is achieved through the Enhancing Personal Development component of the Health and Physical Education syllabus as well as the Human Relationships Education Program. Both programs enable students to learn about personal and social relationships, including parenting. Other opportunities are provided within the key learning areas of the study of society and the environment, English and home economics.

In addition, the government has a clear commitment to early intervention and prevention of child abuse. Under Future Directions, the then Department of Families committed to increase its investment in prevention and early intervention from 13 per cent to 25 per cent of annual expenditure over the five years from 2002 to 2007. As recommended by the CMC, the government is maintaining its commitment to primary and secondary child abuse prevention programs. Funds will be provided to respond to children at risk in the future.

The blueprint recommended that the Department of Communities should transition successful Future Directions pilots into routine practice. Currently, work is under way to develop a policy framework for prevention and early intervention for the Department of Communities in relation to vulnerable families and children at risk. This policy framework will be informed by learning from successful Future Directions pilots. A working group of senior departmental officers has been established to prepare a whole-of-government overarching planning and policy framework to guide its involvement in prevention and early intervention for child safety. These prevention and early intervention initiatives, combined with the overarching principle in the Child Protection Act that the best interests of the child are paramount, should ensure a balanced response to child protection.

I have to say to the member for Burdekin that it is about time we as a community all accepted responsibility here. I get a bit sick and tired of the fact that there are some in the community who say that the government should do this and the government should do that. When are people actually going to start accepting responsibility for their own actions? I am sick and tired of suggestions that child abuse is someone else's problem. Child abuse and domestic violence at any time under any circumstances are totally unacceptable. Let us stop buck-passing on this. Yes, the government will do its bit and the department will do its bit, but it is about time everyone accepted the responsibility of making sure they do their bit as well. I think that we have to stop this blame game and actually make sure that people accept what is appropriate and what is not.

Bashing a child under any circumstances is not on. I do not believe that we should make excuses for people anymore. Those who get involved in this activity should be pursued. If they are acting irresponsibly in relation to children and committing criminal offences then they should feel the full force of the law.

The member for Burdekin also suggested that information provided by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages to the Commissioner for Children and Young People should include the mother's maiden name. The response to that is simple. This provision is aimed at providing the Commissioner for Children and Young People with the information she needs in order to carry out her child death research functions of keeping a register of and researching all child deaths in Queensland. These functions are aimed at preventing child deaths and do not require an ability to link children by parentage. Therefore, provision of the maiden name is simply not relevant for the commissioner's purposes, so it is irrelevant.

The member for Currumbin asked why the process for the selection of foster-carers is not in this legislation. That is because processes for selection of foster-carers are already in the Child Protection Act 1999. The member for Currumbin also commented that child safety directors should not be legislated for until legislation is introduced for the exchange of information. The establishment of child safety directors is not being done legislatively. These provisions have been established administratively, and the practical knowledge of the child safety directors will be of assistance in the development of any measures necessary to facilitate information exchange between agencies.

The member for Nicklin raised the issue of cultural change within the Department of Child Safety. This is a really important issue, and I commend the member for Nicklin for having the foresight of recognising the importance of this issue. It is a matter that the Minister for Child Safety and I have spent a lot of time discussing and we are putting a lot of resources into it. This is one of the things that Peter Forster is continuing to do with his extended contract—that is, he has helped in facilitating workshops to help in the cultural change. The Child Safety Implementation Unit has implemented a considered transition process for staff. Transition workshops are being rolled out across the state currently. We are asking staff to work in a new culture with a new ethos with practical standards. Staff who are willing to do this will be most welcome in the Department of Child Safety.

Again, I want to make the point here that this is an area of enormous difficulty. One does not change a culture in 30 seconds. One only has to look at how long it has taken us to change the police culture. Look at how long it has taken us to change the political culture in this state. Frankly, there are some who still have not caught up. In terms of the cultural changes since Fitzgerald—we are going back now 16 or 17 years—that process is still under way. It is nearly completed. That took a long time. I am hoping that this change will be a lot quicker than that, but there does need to be an understanding that that cultural change does take time. We have fast-tracked it. Hopefully we can move it within a very short period of time, but cultures take time to change. That is why this upheaval which the government has been supportive of and partly engineered will contribute to that change taking place quicker than otherwise would have been the case.

Finally, I would like to thank all members for their contributions to this important debate this afternoon. The task of reforming the child protection system is indeed a challenge not only for the government but also for the community as a whole. I look forward to the continued cooperation and commitment of all those involved in progressing this vital work. I also want to thank the public servants from a number of departments who have coordinated well together and worked very long hours to enable this extremely important piece of legislation to be progressed. I want to emphasise that. We have actually had a whole-of-government approach from the Premier's Department through to Mike

Reynolds's department through to Warren Pitt's department—this has been across government—through Education, Health, Police and the list goes on. They have all done a magnificent job.

There is another group of people that I think we need to quietly applaud. Notwithstanding what I have said about cultural change, we need to understand that there have been a lot of people in the old Department of Families and new Department of Child Safety who have actually had to put up with this public debate and the angst that has gone on while these reforms have been put in place. I know we have made mistakes. I know there is no perfect system and some will say, 'So they should put up with it.' We should be mindful enough and sensitive enough to understand that most of the people—the overwhelming majority of people—in these departments have really put their best effort in to protecting children.

While the system has needed radical reform, which we are now delivering, that does not mean that we have had a lot of bad people working in this department; quite the contrary. We have had a lot of very dedicated, committed people who have done their best under difficult circumstances and who have been doing their best under difficult circumstance for probably 20, 30 or 40 years. It has only been this government that has finally had the courage and the moral commitment to actually do something about it. I am not going to let this debate go without actually saying thankyou to those people. Thankyou for coming with us, but the journey has only just started—the journey to reform. It has a long way to go, and we need them on side to make this journey as quick as possible, bearing in mind that the most important thing for us is the paramount interests of the child. I thank Mike Reynolds. Because of other commitments, I will be asking the Minister for Child Safety to carry this bill through most of the committee stage. I will be here in a supportive role. I want to thank him for his support during the preparation of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) in charge of the bill.

Clause 1, as read, agreed to.

Clause 2—

Mr REYNOLDS (4.45 p.m.): I move amendment No. 1—

1 Clause 2—

At page 12, line 7—

omit, insert—

'(1) This Act, other than part 7A,¹ commences on a day to be fixed by proclamation.

'(2) Part 7A commences on 1 July 2004.'

¹ Part 7A (Amendment of *Legal Profession Act 2004*)

I want to speak to both of these amendments at this time. It is proposed to make amendments in this bill to the Legal Profession Act 2004. The amendments will ensure a smooth transition to the new regulatory regime commencing on 1 July 2004 and will avoid the need for later retrospective legislation. The amendments are for the following purposes: firstly, to clarify the wording of a provision which restricts investment related claims on the fidelity fund to moneys and property received and invested in the ordinary course of legal practice; secondly, to ensure that the complaints and disciplinary regime applies to former law practice employees; thirdly, to allow approved forms to the disciplinary tribunal to be approved by its chairperson; fourthly, to ensure that fees received by the admissions board can be retained by it and applied to reimburse the Queensland Law Society of the cost of its services to the board; and, fifthly, to correct a reference from 'part' to 'chapter'.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I have some concerns about what the government is doing here. We are going to oppose the next amendment, but in general terms this one does relate to the substantive amendment which will be moved in a moment. This one basically facilitates the enactment or when the substantive amendment is going to take effect. We basically indicated to the government the other day that we did have some significant and substantial concerns about the incorporation of these amendments in the child safety bill, because these amendments relate to the Legal Profession Bill which had passed through the parliament only a day or so before the Attorney-General first mooted these amendments a couple of weeks ago. At that stage it was to go in I think the geothermal bill. We indicated at that stage that we felt that that was inconsistent with that bill. The Attorney indicated at that stage that he would not be including it in that bill but would be doing something at a subsequent time.

We now have a situation where the Attorney has drafted these amendments to the Legal Profession Act. They are now being moved by the minister here today. Quite frankly, I believe that they are inconsistent with good drafting principles. Whilst one may argue and Parliamentary Counsel may say that there is sufficient scope for their incorporation in this bill, they are to do with the Legal

Profession Act which is a totally different matter. So these amendments are going to be substantive matters that will be attached and annotated to this child protection legislation that we are debating here today. Therefore, we are unable to support the substantive aspect of it, which I will talk more about in the next amendment.

I would have thought that it would have been far tidier and far neater for the Attorney to have drafted a short amending bill which could have been brought into this parliament. We would have been very happy to support its passage. He knew our concerns three weeks ago, and we could have passed that amending bill in a short period of time. We just do not believe that this is the right thing to do. We think it is sloppy. We think it is inconsistent. This is not even a miscellaneous bill. It is not even a child protection and miscellaneous amendment bill; it is a specific bill. I just think that it is sloppy drafting. Quite frankly, it should have had its own bill which was brought into this parliament. That would have allowed us to vote in a neat and tidy way and we would not have to go through this.

Mr REYNOLDS: I table the explanatory notes for the amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 99, as read, agreed to.

Insertion of new clause—

Mr REYNOLDS (4.50 p.m.): I move amendment No. 2—

2 Insertion of new pt 7A—

At page 82, after line 18—

insert—

'PART 7A—AMENDMENT OF LEGAL PROFESSION ACT 2004

'99A Act amended in pt 7A

'This part amends the *Legal Profession Act 2004*.

'99B Amendment of s 161 (Defaults relating to financial services or investments)

'Section 161(2), from 'However' to 'placed'—

omit, insert—

'Without limiting subsection (1), this part does not apply to a default of a law practice if the default happens in relation to money or property that was placed'.

'99C Amendment of s 252 (Chapter also applies to law practice employees)

'Section 252—

insert—

'(2) Also, this chapter applies to former law practice employees in relation to conduct happening while they were law practice employees in the same way as it applies to persons who are law practice employees, and so applies with necessary changes.

'(3) In this section—

"**former law practice employee**" includes a person who was a law practice employee in this jurisdiction before the commencement of this definition but is not a law practice employee on the commencement.'

'99D Amendment of s 316 (Application of ch 4)

'Section 316(2), 'this part'—

omit, insert—

'this chapter'.

'99E Amendment of s 491 (Functions and powers of board)

'(1) Section 491, heading, after 'board'—

insert—

'etc.'.

'(2) Section 491—

insert—

'(3) Fees payable to the board under section 42² are not moneys payable to the Supreme Court Library Committee under the *Supreme Court Library Act 1968*, section 11.³

'(4) The board is a statutory body for the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977* and the *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982*'.

'99F Amendment of s 492 (Administrative support of the board)

'Section 492—

insert—

'(2) Under an agreement with the law society, the board must pay the law society for the administrative support from fees received by the board.'

'99G Amendment of s 594 (Approved forms)

'Section 594(2) (b), 'the body'—

omit, insert—

'the chairperson of the tribunal for the tribunal, and the committee for the committee'.'.

² Section 42 (Fees payable)

³ *Supreme Court Library Act 1968*, section 11 (Fees received from Barristers' Board and Solicitors' Board)

Mr SPRINGBORG: I would like to table correspondence between the Attorney-General and me in which I have expressed my issues and concerns about this amendment and also the Attorney-General's response. I acknowledge that in my last letter to the Attorney-General there is an issue where the opposition understood that the government wished to conclude the budget debate by tomorrow evening. The Leader of the House assures me that that is not the case and that it will go for as long as necessary. We were led to believe this morning that maybe we would sit late and conclude it tomorrow night. We are probably going to sit late, but we will not necessarily conclude the debate. So I acknowledge the assurance of the Leader of the House with regard to that.

That correspondence outlines our concerns. It outlines the issues and the justifications from the Attorney-General. I suppose there is little point in debating those issues at length, because our issues are quite clear. We just think it is sloppy attention to detail on the part of the government. These amendments should have been contained in their own legal profession act amendment bill that, quite frankly, we probably would have been able to pass through this chamber in 10 minutes flat.

I will go through the details of what is proposed by these amendments. Section 161(1) provides that the part dealing with fidelity fund cover for solicitors does not apply to defaults where money or property has been entrusted with a law practice in connection with the provision of a financial service by a holder of a financial service licence, a managed investment scheme, mortgage financing or other investment purpose. Section 162(2), as passed by parliament previously, allows a claim under the part relating to fidelity fund cover in respect of a default where the investment takes place as part of the provision of ordinary legal services as part of legal practice in relation to a matter and for the ancillary purpose of maintaining or enhancing the value of money or property pending completion of a matter or payment, et cetera, at the direction of a client.

The proposed amendment of section 161(2) would ensure that, notwithstanding the provision of section 161(1), the part does not apply to a default in the circumstances that I have outlined. Therefore, the amendment reverses what was passed by parliament as part of the original bill. No doubt the Law Society supports the proposed amendment for it will limit its obligations through the fidelity fund to provide protection for clients who give it money or property to invest as part of ordinary legal practice. However, it would arguably reduce a right that clients would have gained on the passage of the original bill. Whatever might be the policy desirability of what is now proposed, the explanation for this variation in clients' rights should be placed on the public record.

Chapter 3 deals with complaints investigation and the discipline of legal practitioners. Part 252 provides that the chapter applies whether the conduct being investigated, et cetera, occurs partly in Queensland or elsewhere or before or after the commencement of the act. The proposed amendment to section 252 would extend the chapter to apply to persons who may have been previously employed by a legal practice in Queensland. Therefore, the amendment extends the ambit of operation to the Legal Profession Act to cover the actions of a class of persons not covered by the act as it was passed. Whether they should have been covered is a question of policy that should have been addressed at the time of the passage of the original bill. Their omission to be covered is not a failure of drafting; rather, it is a failure of policy implementation in introducing the original bill.

Section 316 deals with the application of chapter 4, which deals with external intervention into a legal practice. Part 6 of the chapter in which section 316 appears deals with general matters concerning the application of the chapter. By use of the term 'part' in section 316(2) as passed, the impact of section 316(2), which allows for a regulation to provide for how much the part applies to an interstate legal practitioner, is rendered nugatory in substance. An amendment that would ensure the whole chapter could be applied to an interstate legal practitioner by regulation makes more sense. This is an obvious drafting error that was not picked up, notwithstanding the months that the bill was under preparation—or even potentially years for some aspects of it.

Section 419 deals with the functions and powers of the Legal Practitioners Admissions Board. The proposed amendment will provide that fees paid to the board are not moneys required to be paid to the Supreme Court Library Committee as is currently the requirement applicable to fees for admission as a barrister or solicitor under the Supreme Court Library Act 1968. This is an issue of policy, not one of drafting. It raises issues about the future funding of the operations of the Supreme Court Library. The proposed amendment also provides that the Legal Practitioners Admissions Board should be subject to the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977 and the Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982. Again, these are issues of policy that should have been addressed in the original bill.

Section 492 deals with administrative support to the Legal Practitioners Admissions Board. The section as passed requires the Law Society to provide administrative support for the board. Presumably this would be at the expense of the Law Society—a not uncommon practice in other areas, for example the support provided by the Public Trustee to the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal and the Adult Guardian. The proposed amendment would require the board to enter into an agreement with the Law Society to pay it for the administrative support provided. Again, this amendment deals with an issue of policy, not legal drafting. It transfers a cost burden from the Law Society to the board, that is, those persons who are seeking admission as a legal practitioner. No wonder the Law Society is supporting the amendment.

Section 594 deals with the approval of forms under the act. The proposed amendment would vary the use of this power to approve forms in relation to a disciplinary body from the disciplinary body itself to the chair of the tribunal in the case of the disciplinary tribunal and the committee in the case of the disciplinary committee. No doubt this amendment reflects a sensitivity of the Supreme Court judges whose existing inherent powers in relation to the discipline of legal practitioners are being modified by the creation of a staged disciplinary process involving either the Legal Practice Committee and the Legal Services Commission for minor matters of discipline or the disciplinary tribunal for more serious matters. Where a Supreme Court judge sits as a member of a disciplinary tribunal, the judge will be the person to approve the forms without the necessity to consult any lay or legal practitioner member of the tribunal. It is a stretch to suggest that the amendment is essentially correcting a drafting error. Again, in my view it reflects what I believe to be at least a minor issue of policy.

I will say again that, although some aspects of what the Attorney-General has proposed through the amendments that he has put forward for the Minister for Child Safety to incorporate in this bill we think are commonsense, we have concerns about other aspects—those that could arguably reduce the rights of clients or legal practitioners. Because of all of the reasons outlined and the way in which these amendments have been presented to the parliament to be included in the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill that we are debating today, we will not be supporting the amendments.

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

AYES, 57—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Beattie, Bligh, Briskey, Choi, E.Clark, L.Clark, Croft, J.Cunningham, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Hayward, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Lucas, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nuttall, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Reilly, Reynolds, N.Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, C.Sullivan, Wallace, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T.Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 25—Copeland, E.Cunningham, Flegg, Foley, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Menkens, Messenger, Pratt, Quinn, Rickuss, E.Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stuckey. Tellers: Hopper, Malone

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clauses 100 to 102, as read, agreed to.

Schedules 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments.

Third Reading

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

NATURE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 15 June (see p. 1415).

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (5.08 p.m.): This bill categorises the various animals that require categorisation. The member for Moggill could easily be categorised, because the other day the federal member for Ryan put out a press release to the effect that he supported the road through the electorates of south-western Brisbane, particularly the electorate of Moggill. I know that the member for Moggill is strongly against this particular road. I seek the support of the member for Moggill for the widening of the Ipswich to Brisbane road. Otherwise he will end up like some of these animals—on the endangered list.

Dr FLEGG: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. That is not relevant.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jarratt): There is no point of order.

Hon. R.J. MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for the Environment) (5.10 p.m.), in reply: I thank all honourable members who have taken part in this debate. The wildlife categories in the Nature Conservation Act 1992 were developed in the early 1990s to assist the management of Queensland's wildlife. These categories are outdated and inconsistent with the current classification systems which exist at a national and international level. That is why we have introduced this bill—to bring Queensland

into line with the Commonwealth and the widely accepted and respected classification system used by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. This amendment honours a 1998 election commitment by the Beattie government and introduces additional categories for protected wildlife consistent with those recognised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

This was desirable given that the IUCN classifies wildlife according to their risk of extinction based on set criteria. By adopting the appropriate IUCN categories, the NCA categories will now form part of a logical set of wildlife classes that are based on level of threat or extinction risk. Under the new regime, the 'presumed extinct' category will be renamed 'extinct in the wild' and the 'common' category will be renamed 'least concern'. In addition, the new 'near threatened' wildlife category will enable us to be more proactive about conservation by identifying species which are in decline earlier. This will allow us to act before the wildlife is at risk of extinction.

Although the 'rare' category in the Nature Conservation Act is inconsistent with the IUCN categories, it will remain for the time being. This is because it will take time to reassess the 843 species currently listed in this category to one of the other wildlife categories. It is likely that, when species in the 'rare' category are reviewed, many of the species will be reclassified into the 'near threatened' category. This will highlight species that could be under threat in the future.

In addition to the renaming of two wildlife categories and the addition of a new category, the criteria for all wildlife categories have also been revised. In this regard, sections 76 to 80 of the Nature Conservation Act have been revised to incorporate the three broad factors on which the IUCN base their conservation categories, which are population size, area of distribution and rate of decline.

The amendments to the Nature Conservation Act will improve wildlife management in Queensland by providing a consistent, explicit and objective framework for the classification of species according to their extinction risk. They will improve the alignment of Queensland's wildlife categories with those in the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The bill also complements other legislation recently passed by this House which seeks to protect wildlife through the protection of habitat, and I am referring to our vegetation management laws which will preserve Queensland's unique biodiversity.

I would like to address some of the specific issues raised during this debate by honourable members. The honourable member for Lockyer asked why there had not been consultation with local government. There had been consultation with the Queensland Conservation Council, the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, AgForce and my scientific advisory committee which was consulted about the proposed changes. We did not deem it necessary to carry out broad consultation as the amendments are about better aligning the framework for categorising wildlife in Queensland with the internationally recognised IUCN model.

No species will change its conservation status directly because of the bill. The future placement of any species into the new 'near threatened' category will occur through the separate existing statutory processes set out in the Nature Conservation Act. This will provide an opportunity for any further consultation that might be considered necessary. I also note that, despite those concerns—and I appreciate the fact that the honourable member has indicated his opposition—the National Party will be supporting the bill.

The honourable member for Moggill asked why the IUCN 'critically endangered' category was not included for species such as the northern hairy nosed wombat. The 'critically endangered' category was considered in the development of the revised framework. However, the existing statutory management intent for endangered wildlife as prescribed by the nature conservation wildlife regulation addresses all the protection and management requirements of a critically endangered species under the IUCN category.

Could I at this stage place on record my congratulations to the expert in the agency—Dr Alan Horsup—on winning a prestigious award for his work on studying the northern hairy nosed wombat. He was presented with the Australian Geographic Society's 2004 Conservation Award in Melbourne last week. He has devoted more than a decade to saving one of the world's rarest mammals, and I know the member for Moggill would join with me in congratulating him on that effort.

The honourable member for Charters Towers mentioned flying foxes in Charters Towers and asked what status they will have. I have previously answered the member for Charters Towers regarding flying foxes, and I repeat: we will continue to facilitate work with the local council in helping to move them on by issuing damage mitigation permits. We will continue to work with the community to minimise inconvenience associated with flying foxes in their town. I repeat: because habitat has been irresponsibly cleared, there is a need to provide an alternative for them to have a long-term solution.

As I mentioned earlier, there will be no immediate changes to existing categories of wildlife—I think that is what the honourable member asked—as a result of the passage of this legislation. Changes that may occur do so as part of a process that includes consideration of a species' conservation status and the threat to that status as determined by an independent scientific advisory committee. These

recommendations then come to me as minister for approval and then go to Governor in Council. So there is a set, orderly and scientifically rigorous process, and I intend to stick to that.

The member for Charters Towers indicated prior to the election in some newspaper articles that he wanted to come up with a workable solution to the problem. That workable solution he indicated in the media was to cull them, but I am not sure how one would go about that in a built-up area like Charters Towers. How would he do that? It seems to me that what is needed is a commonsense solution. What I would invite the honourable gentleman to do is to work with his community. He has a community reference group. What is needed in Charters Towers by the honourable member is leadership. He needs to work with the community to establish that habitat on the edge of town. If he wants to know how he could do that and seek funding for it, then he could approach his federal member, the Hon. Bob Katter, to assess the Natural Heritage Trust funds to get some financial support so that the Charters Towers community can work on developing a habitat at the edge of town. Let me say that the bat problem in Charters Towers is not new. It is a historical problem. Let us not make it a hysterical problem. I welcome the member's support for the bill, nevertheless.

The member for Nanango also supports the bill. She raised concerns about the Vegetation Management Act. I note her commitment to wildlife care in her area and the biodiversity in her backyard. I also acknowledge and agree with her observation that people, nevertheless, often create some problems by interfering with wildlife.

The member for Nicklin also supports the bill. He raised issues in relation to fire management. I want to place on record the fact that we are committed to hazard reduction burns, and I support him on that. I think my department has a good track record in this regard. We are currently conducting planned burns in the Noosa and Rockhampton areas. We are building on that management program with extensive fire-breaking and maintenance and hazard reduction burns throughout Queensland. At the last election we had a commitment to increase the funding and, according to media reports today, I am told that that is exactly what happened in an event that occurred yesterday.

The honourable member for Burleigh, a very active member for our side of the House, also mentioned Fleay. I acknowledge the member for Burleigh's commitment to the Fleay centre. She will no doubt be aware of the extraordinary contribution that that centre is making both in educational opportunities and also a commitment to endangered species.

I want to acknowledge the support of all members who supported the bill. The member for Greenslopes said he had grappled with a carpet python in his backyard. I think all of us join in commending him on his bravery on attacking a snake in his backyard. Also, the fact that some reptiles survive shows how resilient some wildlife can be.

I want to thank all members who participated in this debate. It is pleasing to see that members of all political persuasions support improvements to the protection and management of our unique wildlife. On those few happy words, I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Clauses 1 to 13, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

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

COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL FISHING

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (5.23 p.m.): I move—

That this parliament condemns the Beattie government for its overzealous attack on the commercial and recreational fishing industries in Queensland and calls for:

- (a) a structural adjustment package to commercial fishermen adversely affected by the coral reef fin fishery management plan and other recently introduced fishing restrictions; and
- (b) all decisions relating to commercial and recreational fisheries management, including complementary zoning of State waters adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the proposed Great Sandy Strait Marine Park be based on accurate science, honesty and true consultation with the commercial and recreational fishing sectors.

The fishing industry in Queensland has taken an absolute hammering from the Beattie Labor government. Let me go through some of the issues and problems where this government has trampled over the fishing industry without proper consultation, without truth, without science and, worst of all, without one jot of attention or desire to provide any compensation for these hard-working fishing families who have had great chunks of their living simply torn and taken away from them.

In the Coral Reef fin fishery management plan the Queensland government has reduced the total catch level in this fishery from 4,830 tonnes to 3,061 tonnes, not to mention a whole range of new size limits, bag limits, spawning closures and increases to the no-take species list that affects both commercial and recreational fishermen. The Queensland Seafood Industry Association estimates that the changes will mean a loss of \$20 million in the commercial industry, which equates to about 500 jobs directly. Imagine all the jobs in the indirectly associated processing and post-harvest industries. There is also a massive impact on the recreational fishing sector and the boating industry, particularly the small boating industry which has to comply with a whole stack of new regulations.

In contrast to the federal government's announcement of an initial starting point of \$10 million in structural adjustment assistance to help adversely affected fishermen with more to come, the state government has done nothing. The state government says there is no legal obligation and refuses to acknowledge its moral obligations. I note that in the state budget there is \$950,000 to enforce the Coral Reef plan, but there is no funding for compensation. If the Beattie government wants to persist in taking away the rights of the individual for what it claims is to benefit the whole community, then it should be prepared to pay on behalf of the whole community.

Then there is the recent backflip on the Coral Reef fin fishery changes. While there has been some acknowledgment of the impact of this plan on long-term fishermen, the Primary Industries Minister's recent backflip is merely a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. The government is taking quota off other fishermen who have already paid for their allocation and for their quotas to help these long-term operators. The CRC reef centre, which Environment Minister John Mickel has cried crocodile tears over in recent weeks, put out a paper earlier this year which suggested such a large reduction in coral trout catch levels is not biologically necessary. The minister could easily increase the levels in this fishery and the fishery would still be sustainable, but after six years of working to introduce this plan the Labor government still cannot get it right.

Finally, there is the issue of complementary zoning. The Queensland government has undertaken to zone state waters adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in what might be called a complementary fashion to the recent Commonwealth representative areas program. That is the program to which I alluded. It has a \$10.2 million starting point for compensation for claims in that area for loss of income by fishers in that area.

The complementary zoning has the potential to devastate hundreds of in-shore fishing operations. These operations cater for about 80 per cent of the mud crabs and the barramundi that is caught—the iconic catch of Queensland which is so much a part of our tourism and our seafood industry.

This is going to have a massive impact on recreational fishermen as well who fish in the local rivers and creeks that will be caught up in this complementary zoning, which is an area that covers out to the low water mark. There was a meeting in Cairns recently. It was one of the 13 meetings held at 13 different ports on the coast. At those meetings the fishermen expressed their disgust with the state government. More than 50 fishermen walked out of the Cairns meeting in disgust with the plans for these complementary no-go zones.

The Queensland government voluntarily undertook to adopt these complementary zonings. The government did it on its own. The Environment Minister and the Primary Industries Minister will try to mislead people in Queensland and mislead their backbench members that it was something that it had to do. It was not. In the submission that it took to the Commonwealth government it voluntarily said that it would put, of its own volition, these complementary zones in to complement the RAP zones in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. That is the problem. There is no need for the vast majority of these complementary zones. They will not do anything for the sustainability because they simply cover the low water mark. As I said, they cover 80 per cent of the catch of barramundi and mud crabs in Queensland.

The Queensland government's position on complementary zoning should be seen for what it is. It is the government's idea and it is the one which should have made the decision on this way, way back. When it does finally make a decision, and if it does it on our basis of having proper and truthful consultation with the fishing industry, then there should also be compensation for taking away the legitimate wages and income of these hardworking people.

The Great Sandy marine park which is proposed in the area basically from Bundaberg to the Noosa River is planned to create a marine park and it has been under consideration for some two years. It was supposed to go public last year but two Labor members in the area had it slowed down and stopped because they know the damage it will do to employment in their area, particularly Hervey Bay. I notice the member for Hervey Bay is not speaking in this debate. I am pleased the member for Cook is speaking in the debate because he knows the problems that the hardworking people in Cooktown will have. They will lose so much of their income from the mud crab and barramundi and fishing areas under the complementary zoning arrangement that the Beattie Labor government proposes.

I return now to the matter of the Great Sandy Strait Marine Park. The member for Hervey Bay, and the ex member for Burnett, knew the difficulties this would bring about when there is so much unemployment in Hervey Bay. It has one of the highest youth unemployment figures in Australia, and

certainly in Queensland. Hundreds of jobs and flow-on jobs will be lost if this is done incorrectly, untruthfully and without consultation with the fishing industry. Through the Queensland government closures, the potential closures of the complementary zones and the GBRMPA closures by that authority, recreational fishing has suffered enormous blows, as have the associated bait and boating industries.

I turn now to grey nurse shark protection. Thousands of recreational fishers lost out in December last year when the Beattie government refused to adopt a commonsense approach to protecting grey nurse sharks—an approach that would protect fishing and associated industry jobs. The government did not need to shut down fishing in four key areas around Moreton Bay, Stradbroke Island and Double Island Point to ensure protection of grey nurse sharks. They are bottom dwellers. The people who lost their income over this fiasco were trolling around the top of these areas. I spoke to one fisherman who has been trolling this area for over 30 years and he has never seen a grey nurse shark, let alone caught one. The sharks are down in the sandy area at the bottom of the rocks. Fishermen are so many fathoms up the top, nowhere near the sharks. The government has closed a one-and-a-half kilometre radius around this particular rock and, as a result, two fishing families have lost one-third of their income with no compensation whatsoever. That is how the Beattie government treats the hardworking fishing families of Queensland—with no commonsense, just obscene haste, chasing the Green vote; no truth, accuracy, science or the practical knowledge that resides with the fishing families.

Some matters discussed in this debate are just the tip of the iceberg of what the Beattie government has done to the commercial and recreational fishing sector. Bear in mind that some 40,000 small-boat recreational fishermen visit some of those fishing spots that I have mentioned. The charter boat operators have taken something like 10,000 people a year to those particular places. I have spoken to fishing families and fishing industry people and they are absolutely committed to sustainable industry that ensures a future for all Queenslanders, their industry, their family and the environment. What we need is what we have in the motion moved by the opposition. There needs to be true consultation. There needs to be truth and accurate science. There needs to be a structural adjustment package because if you take away the living and income of people, it is just not right, it is just not fair. If it is being done for the environment and the common good, then everybody should pay. That is only fair. That is the moral way to address these particular issues.

I call on the government to heed our motion tonight. It is about truth, honesty and science. Stop the obscene and untruthful chase for Green votes. Do something right by hardworking fishing families, decent Queenslanders, and bring in a structural package and listen to the fishing industry, the recreational fishing industry, and the boating industry.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (5.33 pm) I rise to support and second the motion moved by the member for Toowoomba South. A serious situation is developing as far as the fisheries in Queensland are concerned. The government is closing these fisheries one by one and telling people to just go somewhere else and do their fishing because, quite clearly, they are creating a problem here. What is actually happening—and we saw it with the east coast trawl plan—is that people who had other endorsements went and used them within other fisheries. Of course, that compounded problems within many of these fisheries even more.

The commercial seafood industry in Queensland is worth something like \$800 million. If we keep going down this track and do not supply enough fish for our own requirements, imports will come in—cheap, terrible fish that comes in from other countries. I ask the minister why there is not country-of-origin labelling of this imported fish. It is absolutely obscene that Queensland could be taking more fish on a sustainable basis than we are at the present time. We are seeing decentralisation because of the fishing industry—some 7,000 jobs and 10,000 in the processing industry—yet we are losing these jobs and opportunities for Queenslanders. We do need sustainability; there is no question about that. We can endorse that. However, we must also be mindful of the fact that, while we are ensuring sustainability of the fishery, we can also put it to a better use than we are at the present time—and certainly more than this government has proposed.

In the electorate of Hinchinbrook and the Ingham and Innisfail districts, commercial fishing represents about 470 jobs and \$16 million and about 170 jobs in businesses. There are probably thousands of recreational fishers altogether. Of course, the tourist trade is particularly big, and the caravan parks have people in them who depend very much on recreational fishing.

Members heard a little about the coral reef fin fishery and the investment warning in 1997. Six years later—six years later—in 2003 there was a blow-out to 4,830 tonnes. Then we got cut back to 3,061 tonnes—the 1992 level. This should have been 3,400 tonnes. There were something like 1,700 licences to start off with and at the end of the day there were 400. What happened to the rest of them? There was no compensation whatsoever for those people who lost out on the coral reef fin fishery. The minister is not saying anything, because there was no compensation.

The Minister for the Environment discussed complementary zoning. Of course, one issue that I have a serious concern about is the Hinchinbrook Channel. We have mud crabs and barramundi, and people are going up and down our channel tagging fish. It is a great area for tourists. Of course, the likes

of those commercial and recreational fishermen will possibly suffer if the Minister for the Environment goes ahead with some crazy complementary zoning mechanism. I would like to know what agreement was reached with the federal government on the RAP scheme. I have heard just recently that it will be upgraded from \$10.2 million to \$27 million. If that is a fact, I think that is more than a fair thing, but some more topping up may be necessary.

As far as sovereign waters are concerned, there is no talk about any compensation. Of course, the DPI did not appear before the Senate inquiry into the banana industry, but it came up with some crazy submission about socioeconomic problems. It was not really crazy; I say that because of the fact that all the things we were worried about—the dairy industry and the sugar—were all loaded into this submission. They did not give a hang about them before when this legislation was brought in, and I guess the same thing will happen as regards the complementary zoning. I have a deep concern about the future for many people in my part of the world who depend on the fishing industry, whether it is for commercial purposes or whether it is for recreational purposes; whether it is caravan parks which have people coming in to them—

Time expired.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the minister, could I welcome to the public gallery the P&C association of the Woolloowin State School in the electorate of Clayfield. I call the honourable Minister for Primary Industries.

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (5.39 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

That all words after 'parliament' are omitted and the following words inserted:

"congratulates the Beattie government for its achievements in fisheries management over the last six years and endorses the existing approach of basing fisheries management decisions on commonsense, science, honesty, and consultation.

The fact is that the Queensland government has introduced wide-ranging fisheries management reforms over the past six years. It is also a fact that at the last election the opposition did not promise to revoke or alter any of the fisheries management reforms we have introduced. Over the last six years there has been a strong commitment from all people interested in Queensland's fisheries and marine environment to ensure that fish stocks are sustainable. If Queensland was to remain an angler's paradise and a world renowned producer of quality seafood, we needed to implement reforms and address the increasing pressure on fish stocks.

We have had to tackle some difficult issues, but we have done all this in consultation with the community. We have issued relevant regulatory impact statements and we have conscientiously considered the public responses on a full range of issues. The easiest option would have been to do nothing, like others in our state's history have done. The do-nothing option is the National Party's option. To do nothing would have caused the most damage, and some of our fish stocks may have been left in an irretrievable position.

I take this opportunity to outline more of what we have done in the fisheries area since 1998. These include VMSs, bycatch reduction devices and TEDs. In 1998 we were able to introduce on-the-spot fines.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I accept that when the honourable member was minister he introduced the VMSs. In 1999 we introduced management plans for spanner crabs and the Gulf of Carpentaria and freshwater fisheries. We implemented major changes for the trawl sector including seasonal changes and we also delivered on our commitment to close Trinity Inlet to net fishing. We also introduced a limit on recreational prawn catches in Moreton Bay in 1999. We also arranged for the amalgamation of the Queensland Fisheries Management Authority and DPI Fisheries to form QFS. We also introduced the east coast trawl management plan. The results from the implementation of this management plan are already apparent. I will not go through them.

Following the 2001 election we established the FIDC, chaired very capably by the member for Kurwongbah, to give a forum for all in the fishing sector and other stakeholders. Immediately the government moved to address the issue of tailor with the commercial and recreational fishers embroiled in a tit-for-tat dispute. We introduced new reforms and FIDC played a very constructive role in this area.

In 2002 the government formulated changes to freshwater and marine fishery management and finalised the draft coral reef fin fishery management plan. Prior to Christmas 2002 we announced a raft of reforms from the freshwater and marine regulatory impact statements, including a ban on netting spotted mackerel. Last year we implemented a further marine RIS, including closures on Fraser Island, North Stradbroke Island, Baffle Creek and Fitzroy River and new measurements for blue swimmer crabs. We also improved the coral reef fin fishery management plan with provision for spawn enclosures, capped and reduced the commercial fishing effort to be allocated by quota, allowed for the protection of icon species and introduced protection areas for the endangered grey nurse sharks.

The member for Toowoomba South makes reference to the coral reef fin fishery management plan in his motion, yet his party did not propose to change the plan when it went to the state election this year. What hypocrites! The fact is that when the coral reef fin fishery management plan was announced last year the President of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association supported it.

During the election campaign this year I committed our government to progressing consideration of widening the scope of the Rural Adjustment Authority Act 1994 to include fisheries. Cabinet has given me the authority now to prepare the amendments, which we are in the process of doing. Following the 2004 state election we issued a further RIS for the coral reef fin fish plan to ameliorate the impacts on long-term operators in the fishery. Submissions to the RIS closed at the end of May and the responses are being closely considered.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: The member is a rude man. I would like to acknowledge all government members who have supported me in introducing all these plans, especially the members for Mackay and Whitsunday, who are participating in this debate tonight. I thank them for their representations to me in order to assist the fishers in their areas.

Time expired.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (5.44 p.m.): I support the amendment moved by the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries to the motion before us. We know how committed the National Party is to fisheries management and coral reef fin fish management. Last year the National Party moved a disallowance motion of the coral reef fin fish management plan, but the motion was left on the table. Those opposite would not debate it. The disallowance motion lapsed. The silence of the National Party on these issues has been deafening. It has no genuine interest in fisheries management.

This was clear during its time in office. The National Party did not progress the management reforms needed. The National Party's ignorance of fishery issues was further highlighted by its promises at the recent state election. It promised to do nothing. It was not prepared to revoke any of the decisions made by this government.

Fisheries management is not an easy job, but it is an essential job. If we do not ensure our fisheries are sustainable then we are doing our environment and our future generations a grave disservice. Reform is essential to ensure our fisheries are sustainable. Fishery reform is essential to the ability of the seafood sector to trade overseas.

The federal government also requires that each export fishery be assessed against the Commonwealth's guidelines for ecologically sustainable management of fisheries. One fishery is now being assessed by Environment Australia under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The spanner crab fishery was one of Australia's first fisheries to be exempt from the export control provisions. One of the measures introduced by the government is the standardisation of commercial fishing equipment that minimised the risk to turtles from trawling. The standardisation of the turtle excluder device removed the existing provisions that allowed the use of other devices to prevent the capture of turtles.

In 1996 the US stopped prawn imports from fisheries that were not using effective TEDs. This measure effectively banned Queensland prawn exports to the lucrative US market. The US developed a series of protocols for prawn imports which specified that only aquaculture prawns or prawns caught by TED-equipped trawlers that met US specifications would be permitted.

The US has overtaken Japan as the world's largest importer of prawns. The United States imports more than 470,000 tonnes of prawns, or shrimp as they are known there, worth more than \$US4 billion a year. In 2002-03 the value of Queensland's prawn production was about \$180 million—half the value of Australia's prawn production. Queensland exports approximately 20 per cent of its seafood and re-entry into the US market is an important boost. There is a preference in the US market for headless prawns, which provides great value-adding opportunities in Queensland. I was pleased the east coast trawl fishery and the Torres Strait fishery have been certified by US officials to again supply the US market. Although Japan will continue to be Australia's largest export market for prawns, the US will again provide an attractive market.

If our fisheries are not sustainable then our seafood industry suffers. The east coast trawl fishery is an important case. The government implemented the east coast trawl management plan in 1999, ensuring fisheries were sustainable. Fishing effort was capped, effort was removed through a licensed buy-out, seasonal closures were implemented and species permitted for catch were restricted. As the minister has indicated, the available and active effort has been reduced significantly.

If the National Party does not respect our fisheries and their future sustainability then it should at least respect the position of the commercial fishing sector. If the National Party criticises the fisheries management decisions of this government it doubts the future of the commercial seafood sector in Queensland. We believe fishing in Queensland does have a future and we are committed to securing that future.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (5.49 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Toowoomba South. I will start by quoting a prominent fisher person from my region who said, 'Let's get real, people. The commercial and recreational fishing industries are in crisis.' This crisis is a government-made crisis. Both federal and state governments have caused this fishing crisis. Those governments have got it wrong to varying degrees and both have mismanaged our fishing industries. Only those governments can fix this crisis. If we do not get it right very soon, hundreds of commercial fishers will go bankrupt causing massive social upheaval, and thousands of recreational fishers will be denied the freedom they have always enjoyed—that is, to fish responsibly in their own patch of the Pacific.

GBRMMPA stinks like a three-day-old fish. The state government's attitude to fishers would give Pepe Le Pew a run for his money. GBRMPA has miserably failed all fishers, both commercial and recreational, and it is for that reason I am calling on the federal Environment Minister, Dr Kemp, to sack all the bureaucrats and start again. When they start again he should make sure that all the fishers get a decent hearing and become a part of the decision making process and the conservation process.

GBRMMPA is a federally funded, state administered body. It has drawn up plans to close down around 30 per cent of the fishing grounds in the reef. The state government, under Environment Minister Mickel, intends to further add to fishers' woes by establishing another marine park which covers an area of sea and coastline from the Baffle Creek mouth just north of Bundaberg to the Noosa River.

All fishers are asking: how much more government interference can we take? All interference and no compensation is one way of describing the state government's policy. In defence of my federal colleagues, at least they have offered as a starting figure \$10 million as compensation, with the promise of more to come. Mr Beattie has come up with a big fat zero! I have been at meetings of commercial fishers where the tone and mood of individuals has ranged from quite black desperation to talk of armed revolution. Members of this House need to understand just how much emotion is being generated by these fishing closures.

At a meeting of the North Burnett Local Government Association I was part of an audience of mayors and councillors who heard from Don Robinson, a prominent figure in a recreational fishing organisation, who painted a very grim picture for both recos—that is, recreational fishers—and professional fishers all over this state and specifically in the Wide Bay and Burnett. He showed this eminent group of community leaders maps containing green zones which effectively banned all Burnett fishers from accessing at least 90 per cent of their fishing grounds. I have just finished talking with John Olsen, the President of the QSIA, who says that for the last 10 years the focus has been solely on environmental outcomes. The emphasis needs to be not only on the environmental outcomes, which are important—John Olsen and his colleagues are probably the biggest greenies I have ever met—but also on social, economic and cultural focuses.

John Olsen also gives this House this warning: pro fishers are the best environmentalists, and they can only take this kind of flogging for so long. I urge both federal and state governments to listen very carefully to these cries for help. Mr Olsen is also seeking an urgent meeting with both Minister Mickel and Minister Kemp, and I trust that Mr Olsen's simple request is granted. In my own backyard, a \$37 million pro fishing industry is at risk. A recreational fishing industry worth millions—hundreds of millions—is also at risk. Multiply those figures by a factor of more than 20 and members will work out what is at stake for Queensland. It is time for everyone to listen to the fishers and get real.

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (5.52 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment moved by the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. I have to say at the outset that I always seem to be following the member for Burnett on the speakers' list. I quite enjoy the experience. Though his comments are generally petulant and irrational, they are always entertaining.

I want to start by acknowledging that the fishing industry has been subject to great change in its practices in recent years with the introduction of turtle exclusion devices, bycatch reduction measures and effort reduction. Governments at all levels and of all persuasions have supported changes to the industry's practices because they realise that the industry must be made sustainable. Much of this change has been supported by the industry itself. I want to reject the assertion by those opposite that there has been an overzealous attack on the commercial and recreational fishing industry in Queensland. In fact, I want to acknowledge what this government has done to benefit indigenous, recreational and commercial fishing in my electorate.

A major concern of indigenous and commercial fishers in northern Australia has been an increasing incidence of illegal foreign fishing. In the last two years there have been record apprehensions of Indonesian-flagged vessels allegedly fishing in Australian waters. Earlier this year concern was raised about the federal government's policy of apprehending illegal fishing vessels. The concerns revolved around the use of administrative seizures, which involved removing fishing equipment and catches from the vessel. The concern being strongly held is that using administrative seizures instead of apprehensions would send the wrong message to fishers in Indonesia and elsewhere. While the federal government has responsibility for enforcement in these matters, the Queensland government has been able to provide assistance. I understand that the Queensland

Boating and Fisheries Patrol was involved in apprehending more than 50 vessels on behalf of the federal government.

I also welcome the recent signing of the memorandum of understanding between Papua New Guinea and Queensland Fisheries. The aim of the MOU is to encourage further cooperation and understanding between the two agencies. Under the MOU, Queensland and PNG looked forward to working more closely together on such issues as research and development, market access, biosecurity and sustainable natural resource use. The MOU will be particularly useful when dealing with fishery issues related to the Torres Strait protected zone. The protected zone includes sovereign waters belonging to PNG and Australia, with Queensland jointly managing fishery resources in the Australian area with the federal government.

Like the member for Mackay, I was pleased to hear the news late last week that the United States has given permission for wild-caught prawns harvested on Queensland's east coast and in the Torres Strait to once again be sold in the US. The ban on our prawns originated in 1996 because our fisheries did not comply with the turtle protection devices. As a government we have introduced turtle exclusion devices into our fisheries. The government and industry have been working very hard to get permission from US officials to reopen its market to our prawns. In February officials from the US National Marine Fisheries Service inspected the state managed east coast trawl fishery and the joint Commonwealth-state managed Torres Strait fishery. The introduction of the turtle exclusion devices has been of major benefit to the environment, as well evidenced by the reopening of the US market which will be of major benefit to Torres Strait fisheries.

I heard the member for Hinchinbrook say that he has heard a rumour that the federal government is talking about increasing its compensation package to fisheries as a result of its recent changes. I have not heard that rumour. I do not know whether the minister has heard that rumour.

Mr Palaszczuk: No.

Mr O'BRIEN: The minister has not heard that rumour. That is perhaps one exclusively for the member for Hinchinbrook. But certainly the challenge for the Howard government is to fully fund its compensation package. It has not stepped up to the mark with other compensation packages for people who have been affected, and I certainly agree that the Howard government should fully fund its compensation package. Those opposite talk about using correct science. We looked at the science related to the land clearing legislation. The world scientific opinion was—

Time expired.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (5.57 p.m.): I rise to support the opposition's motion. This morning a review of my emails and faxes provided the clearest indication so far that the ramifications of the state government's proposed coral reef line plan and RAP complementary closures were going to bite and bite hard on the Burdekin electorate. The story headlined 'Seafood industry faces firing squad' detailed the proposed closure of the Burdekin community's only two seafood shops due to the proposed plans to cut back commercial fishing levels. Due to the Burdekin's location—being so near to the coast and a number of abundant fishing grounds—the Ayr and Home Hill communities have become used to serving fresh fish as a meal option. All of this is soon to change with the frozen fillets of major department chains due to be the only seafood options for Burdekin residents. Unfortunately, as detailed in the article, one seafood retailer has sold his house, is planning to close his shop and move out of the industry given that he will be unable to supply the niche Sydney and Melbourne markets that supplement his retail income. This story is telling.

The effects of the government's policy on the seafood industry have led to the establishment of a lobby group called Save Our Seafood in the Burdekin area. This consists of over 100 committed commercial and recreational fishermen who have decided to take up the fight to save their industry. This group is being organised by representatives from Sunfish in north Queensland and the QSIA, and it is a most historic union given that so often in the past commercial and recreational fishermen have been adversaries. Yet as polar opposites they have managed to gain common ground in their opposition to these ridiculous proposals.

One would think that this fact would speak volumes to the government. The reason for their formation is as clear as their message: 'Ignore the catchcry of "I fish and I vote" at your peril. If you continue with your detrimental policies and you are not able to buy Queensland barramundi or mud crabs at your local restaurant, then there is no majority big enough to escape the winds of discontent.' This opposition is further fuelled by the fact that the Burdekin region will have real pain forced upon it by a government that is showing that it simply does not care about primary industries and, in particular, an industry that provides over \$800 million in retail value in Queensland.

The statistics supplied by the Queensland seafood industry paint their own picture. The coastal communities of Bowen, Cungulla, Alva, Guthalungra and Cape Upstart, which are part of the Burdekin electorate, are expected to feel the full effects of the government's proposal with the coral reef line plan cutting fishing quotas between 60 per cent and 70 per cent. In the Bowen area alone this will account for losses of between 90 and 105 jobs within the fishing industry. It does not even take into account the

proposed losses in the Bowen retail industry, which are estimated to affect at least 30 people. It is surely an indictment on the government that these numbers do not seem to concern it in the slightest.

The coral reef line plan alone will cut the value of the Queensland seafood industry by \$20 million to \$30 million annually in wharf price alone, with total industry job losses to reach at least 500. Along with the job losses, more than 1,600 tonnes will be lost to the Queensland consumer annually, all to satisfy the green lobby, which is not able to use science to justify its stance. In fact, new research shows that, biologically, reduction is not required, with the current available fishing grounds able to sustain an increase in harvesting of over 400 tonnes. That this government is ignoring the research at the expense of people's livelihoods must surely be the biggest indication of the arrogance that comes with such a large majority.

Unfortunately for the fishing industry, trying to fight on many fronts, the government blitz in the form of complementary closures has the potential to devastate hundreds of inshore fishing operations. It seems ridiculous that, without even undertaking a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of complementary zoning, the state government has voluntarily gone down to Canberra and said that it will close off fishing grounds in association with reef area protection. The state government is keen to promote the fact that complementary closures in state waters comprise only 2.5 per cent of the GBRMPA area. It is not telling the general public that these areas contain upwards of 80 per cent of the important fishing habitats in Queensland. Considering this information alone, it is akin to a hangman's noose dangling over the heads of every commercial and recreational fisherman. The Queensland public appeals to the Beattie Labor government and the Minister for Primary—

Time expired.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (6.02 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the amendment to the motion moved by the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. The motion moved earlier this evening by the National Party is not only based on a false premise but also is mischievous and misleading in the extreme. There is no overzealous attack on the commercial and recreational fishing industries in Queensland. Only last week I was reassured by a highly respected and very successful fisher from my electorate that there is actually a great deal of support for the government's actions within the local industry.

In addition to being based on a false premise, this motion is actually quite disrespectful. The reference within the opposition's motion to commercial fishermen ignores the important role that women are playing in the fishing industry. As the member for Whitsunday, I have had a number of representations and delegations from women working in the commercial fishing industry. The sad part is that I believe that the National Party's reference to commercial fishermen was not a mistake; it actually reflects its mistaken belief that primary industries are the domain of men only. The fact is that women play an important role in primary industries in this state. This fact is recognised at both state and Commonwealth levels through the establishment of and support of industry groups for women. One such program, supported by the Queensland government, is the Enterprising Women in Rural Industries Program. The following statement appears on the program's web site—

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries' Enterprising Women in Rural Industries Program recognises the increasing significance of entrepreneurship to the future development of Queensland's rural industries and the important role that women play in that development. The program's ultimate goal is to ensure that we have more women working in rural industries developing and expanding profitable and sustainable businesses.

Women in rural industries (i.e. Agriculture, fisheries and forestry) today are making significant contributions to Queensland's economy.

I am very pleased with the effort that this government has made under the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries to encourage more women to take on decision making roles in primary industries. That is in stark contrast to the implications contained in the motion moved tonight by the National Party. The fact that the member for Toowoomba South and the National Party do not acknowledge the role of women is a very poor reflection upon them.

I have referred to the number of representations and delegations that I have received on fisheries matters. Following the release of the coral reef fin fish management plan last year, I had many meetings with affected fishers and I relayed their concerns to the minister. The coral reef fin fish management plan winds back and caps the commercial catch of coral reef fish, such as coral trout and red emperor, to pre-1997 levels. In 1997 an investment and effort warning was issued to the commercial sector not to increase investment or effort in the fisheries. Many operators ignored this warning and indeed some new operators joined the fishery, particularly to take advantage of the higher prices driven by the live fish export market in South-East Asia.

The total capped catch under the plan of 3,061 tonnes is allocated to eligible fishers who can demonstrate history in the fishery on an individual quota basis. By allocating quotas, these eligible fishers have something that they have never had before, that is, a tangible financial stake in the fishery that can be bought and sold. The allocation of quota was strongly argued by the Queensland Seafood Industry Association, which welcomed the release of the plan last year. Indeed, the level and quality of consultation that occurred subsequent to the release of the plan are reflected in a fundamental change

from a proposal to cap effort by allocating fishing days to a quota based on catch. That proposal was argued by the industry and accepted by the minister. More recently, I was pleased that the minister reopened discussion about some of these issues in the plan by issuing a further regulatory impact statement in May.

I want to turn very quickly to the matter of the Representative Areas Program. I remind members that the responsibility for the establishment and planning of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park has always been with the Commonwealth. This responsibility was established in a formal agreement between the Commonwealth and the state governments, known as the Emerald agreement and detailed in the basis of the agreement. These agreements go back to the 1970s and the early 1980s. I am astounded that the Queensland National Party remained silent on the issue of RAP until now. Where were they when my constituents were desperate to get their views across? Nowhere to be seen or heard!

Time expired.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.07 p.m.): It is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Toowoomba South, the opposition spokesman for primary industries. Before I speak in depth in this debate, I would just like to pick up on an issue that was raised by the member for Mackay, Tim Mulherin, who in his contribution said that the National Party did nothing about the fisheries, particularly during the last election campaign. At the last election the National Party was committed to getting access to a structural adjustment package—something that Labor has completely refused. Both the minister and the member for Mackay were too embarrassed to even mention that. They have no defence. The Nationals also promised in the election campaign that we would give commercial fishermen access to primary industry productivity enhancement scheme concessional loans. I am pleased that the minister is currently adopting this policy. In that regard, we look forward to the amending legislation and wonder why it has taken the minister so long for him to bring this amendment into the House.

The minister referred to a statement by the President of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association, Mr John Olsen, to support his argument. Mr Olsen's media release dated 16 January 2004 states—

The approach of the Queensland Government to date has been to say it has no legal responsibility to pay compensation and isn't interested in moral responsibility. That is a very disappointing position for the Queensland Government to adopt and, frankly, I believe it is a morally bankrupt position.

With those few words, we completely debunk the argument that has been put forward so far tonight. However, I have to agree that the issues surrounding the complementary zoning are complex and require full and comprehensive analysis, including the full analysis of social and economic costs, including the costs to the taxpayer in adjustment assistance funding, and the potential conservation benefits of each of the potential fishing closures.

It is certainly not the case that complementary zoning adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is a simple extension of the Commonwealth's RAP closures. Despite the area representing only about 2.5 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the intertidal zone may represent up to 80 per cent of some of the most important iconic seafood. Indeed, it is an area in which a great deal of effort by both recreational and commercial fishermen takes place. It could be said that most of the seafood that is supplied on the coast of Queensland, right across Australia and even overseas basically comes from that area. In many cases, more damage will be done by closures to the state waters than to the GBRMPA closures currently taking place.

It is clear that the state wants to progress the issue of complementary zoning at its earliest opportunity. As I indicated earlier, the intertidal zone is under state jurisdiction and, as I understand, there is another zone that extends three nautical miles to sea from the mean low water mark. That is a significant area, particularly in the area that I represent on the central coast of Queensland.

As members of the House would know, there are extreme tidal movements in that area, particularly in the Shoalwater Bay region where a huge amount of land is covered by the tidal zone. Obviously, out of that central Queensland area comes a very significant amount of seafood such as crabs, barramundi and so on. Certainly huge numbers of recreational fishermen and also professional fishermen rely on that area. To close significant areas of that zone will be a huge disincentive and it will have a huge impact on the fishing industry in my electorate.

All inshore fishers, particularly the net fishermen, are already restricted in the areas they can fish. As previous speakers have said, further closures would lead to unnecessary loss of jobs, create a very high level of conflict between the commercial fishers and the state government and also, I believe, between the commercial fishers and the recreational fishers. It could easily expose taxpayers to millions of dollars of compensation.

As I have said before, many areas inshore of the new GBRMPA closures are critical commercial fishing grounds, such as Hinchinbrook Island, as mentioned by the member for Hinchinbrook, Cape

Bowling Green and so on, all the way up the coast. Economists at the University of Queensland estimate that complementary closures will result in an annual loss of \$2 million —

Time expired.

Hon. R.J. MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for the Environment) (6.13 p.m.): The motion moved by the opposition deserves to be rejected. When one listens to some of the shadow spokesmen it is plainly obvious that they have no idea what this is all about. I listened to the honourable member for Hinchinbrook who said, 'We do not want the Hinchinbrook Channel affected.' It will not be. It is entirely within an existing marine park, entirely in state waters and not affected by any proposed changes by the Commonwealth. It is only in his electorate, the poor thing, and he could not even understand that! This is all about the intertidal zone. The poor thing has not even worked out that it is a marine park that is there already, it is in state waters, et cetera. He is up there trying to advise fishermen. It is no wonder they are scared. Why wouldn't they be with advice like that being trumpeted out? He also said that we should not have any of this sort of stuff, but what do they expect us to do? We have had a joint planning system in place for 30 years where we have had to deliver certainty to reef users, the businesses and the coastal communities that rely on the reef for their livelihoods.

We heard from the member for Burnett, who waltzed out of the ABC studio in Bundaberg and tried to say that all public servants should be sacked. Why? Because they follow his example as a Commonwealth public servant? He then enjoins me to meet with Mr Olsen. I have met with Mr Olsen on two occasions, one occasion on this, and I have met with his representatives three times.

Indeed, my staff were pestering me one day about consultation and they said, 'The honourable member for Toowoomba South has this media release for you.' I said, 'Go away.' They said, 'No, it is essential.' I said, 'What does it say?' They said, 'They want you to meet with the fishermen.' I said, 'Who do you think I am meeting with?' They were right there in my office. The honourable gentleman from Toowoomba South put out a media release saying I should meet with the people I was meeting with. That is what I am doing. That is what we have done.

The paucity of argument by the National Party is unbelievable. We have had the member for Burdekin crying crocodile tears about fishermen. Have members ever heard her get up in this place and argue for aquaculture? Not once! It is a significant industry in her electorate, one that produces a great number of jobs and has she ever been up there supporting it? I have not once heard it! I enjoin her to go and visit her electorate properly and meet with the people engaged in aquaculture. She will find out about another aspect of the fishing industry.

The other thing that tonight's motion deals with is science, as if somehow the National Party has discovered science. The only thing they have ever employed in all of this is political science. Did members ever hear them argue science sensibly when debating vegetation management or the RFA? A few weeks ago the honourable gentleman from Warrego came up with some claptrap science to show that the crown-of-thorns starfish posed no threat to the Great Barrier Reef. For goodness sake, where do they get off with this science argument?

When I say political science, the whole process on zoning was interfered with in a massively political way by the member for Dawson. Did we hear the National Party say that was unfair? Members should ask the mayor of Whitsunday what he thinks about the involvement of the member for Dawson in this process. They are heartbroken that the draft plans that came out were interfered with in a most political way by De-Anne Kelly, yet we are supposed to accept the National Party argument tonight that all of this is based on some great science. It is based on political science and they know it.

In every marginal seat that the coalition holds we will find political science and political interference in this process. How they could stand in this place, with a straight face, and argue what they have tonight speaks wonders for their acting ability, because they would not know what the National Party has been up to and that is why, when they are appealing to a scientific process, it is one that has massively escaped them so far. I remind the honourable members opposite that this whole debate tonight is an attempt to try to squeak away from the Howard government's responsibility for owning up to compensation for those fishermen affected by their zoning decisions.

Time expired.

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

AYES, 51—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Bligh, Briskey, Choi, E.Clark, L.Clark, Croft, J.Cunningham, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fouras, Fraser, Hayward, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Lavarch, Lawlor, Livingstone, Lucas, Male, McGrady, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nuttall, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Reilly, Reynolds, N.Roberts, Robertson, Scott, Shine, Smith, Stone, Struthers, C.Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T.Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 26—Copeland, E.Cunningham, Flegg, Foley, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Menkens, Messenger, Pratt, Quinn, Rickuss, E.Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Hopper, Malone

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Any future divisions on this motion will be of two minutes duration.

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

AYES, 51—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Bligh, Briskey, Choi, E.Clark, L.Clark, Croft, J.Cunningham, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fouras, Fraser, Hayward, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Lavarch, Lawlor, Livingstone, Lucas, Male, McGrady, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nuttall, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Reilly, Reynolds, N.Roberts, Robertson, Scott, Shine, Smith, Stone, Struthers, C.Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T.Sullivan, Reeves

NOES, 26—Copeland, E.Cunningham, Flegg, Foley, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Menkens, Messenger, Pratt, Quinn, Rickuss, E.Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Hopper, Malone

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. A.M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (6.28 p.m.): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Vietnam Veterans Subcommittee, Toowoomba RSL Sub-Branch

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.28 p.m.): Tonight I want to speak about a wonderful effort and move in Toowoomba by the Vietnam Veterans Subcommittee of the Toowoomba RSL sub-branch to put in place a Vietnam War memorial in the beautiful Mothers Memorial Gardens located on the banks of East Creek in Toowoomba. They have already applied for a grant from the Department of Veterans' Affairs under the auspices of the program Their Service, Our Heritage. They are looking forward and hoping to get under the terms of the funding an amount of \$4,000.

I am speaking in parliament tonight to ask the Queensland government and the Premier to provide an equivalent amount of \$4,000 to the Vietnam Veterans Subcommittee to enable them to realise their dream of putting in place a monument. Do you think you could keep them quiet, Mr Speaker? This is pretty important.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Terry Sullivan: Why don't you get some of your own members here to listen? They all run away.

Mr HORAN: Pull your head in! This is a very important matter about a Vietnam memorial and it deserves respect. I thought the member opposite would be decent but I do not think he knows much about decency.

During the past eight months the Vietnam veterans have had a process of consultation with a community based committee made up of veterans, veterans widows, youth and other interested parties. They have created a design for the memorial using the talents of local sculptors and artists, and they have raised about \$20,000 already towards the estimated cost of \$60,000—all by their own efforts. The site has been provided free of cost by the Toowoomba City Council and the commitment of the Toowoomba City Council has been secured for the ongoing upkeep of the memorial. They have been provided with sizeable personal donations from many members of our local community.

They have also conducted group presentations to local area commanders of the Australian Defence Force bases and the Singaporean air force detachment and have received support of a practical and a moral nature from both. They have also been granted the wonderful honour of having the memorial, when constructed, dedicated by Mr Keith Payne VC, who was guest of honour during Anzac Day in Toowoomba this year at the dawn services at the Drayton service and at the Mothers Memorial service.

Local contractors will be utilised in the construction work wherever possible. The design is going to be quite exceptional, with navy stele to the left and army stele to the front and air force stele to the right. There will be a circular pond in front, with water feeding to the top of each stele and then returning to the pond via channels. Around the ponds in what will be a first for Australia will be an acknowledgment of the service provided by various civilian groups in Vietnam—approximately 1,400 served of whom six were killed.

This will be a wonderful memorial to those men and women who served in Vietnam, to those who have sacrificed their lives to provide peace in south-east Asia and peace for our Australian nation. I am asking the Premier if he would give every consideration to this very modest amount of \$4,000 to enable this memorial to be put in place.

Legal Aid Commission

Hon. D.M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (6.31 p.m.): Accountability in Queensland has reached the upper echelons of government in a way that it has not before. Ministers have been referred routinely to the CMC or its predecessor, always to emerge with honour in tact, while the travelling roadshow of community cabinet entitles constituents from all parts of Queensland who have, or believe they have, an

issue that could profitably be considered by a minister to sit opposite them in a hall on a Sunday afternoon with or without appointment and draw their concerns to the minister's attention.

But while the upper echelons of government face greater scrutiny than ever before, others in public administration are using modern technology and 1990s management theory to avoid such scrutiny. Increasingly it is difficult for constituents or their elected representatives to gain access to decision makers to provide them with information to assist them with their decisions.

The other day I had to contact the Legal Aid Commission. I was not able, as I would have been in former days, to contact the local office of the Legal Aid Commission which was handling my constituent's case. I had to contact a 1300 call centre and was politely told that if I provided the call centre with further information that would help in referring the call on to someone else who might most directly be able to help me. I gave the constituent's details and indicated that all she needed to know before the close of business was whether she was going to be given legal aid or not. Her hearing was on the very next day. I was then told that the constituent's file could not be opened, not even to tell me whether the constituent was going to be legally represented the next day.

How could the constituent then find out whether she was to be represented, I wondered aloud. I was told that if the constituent rang the appropriate officer in the regional office that information could be provided. The original problem, however, was that the constituent was unable to get past the call centre. This was the problem she had come to a member of parliament to fix, but the possibility of fixing it was completely removed by the device of invoking an entirely spurious privacy principle.

The Legal Aid Commission is a federal/state commission. I speak generally about government agencies, though the problem is particularly acute with federal government agencies. Too many individuals in too many agencies of government too far down the food chain are now able to lie recumbent on a feather bed of spurious confidentiality, protected by a praetorian guard of computerised answering machines and call centres, while the life-changing decisions they make about our constituents are shielded from the scrutiny of the elected representatives of the people.

In this instance I actually counted myself fortunate since at least I was speaking to a human being, a very pleasant one at that but one whose job description was specifically to fob me off. The unfortunate thing is that there is little that the responsible minister, the Attorney-General, can do in this case. We are talking about a federal/state independent commission. Once you set up an independent commission you might as well put them in a hot-air balloon and set them adrift in the sky for all the control that the people or their elected representatives subsequently have over them.

I have received reports from constituents, again largely in respect of the Commonwealth agencies, who have spent literally hours on the phone battling through a morass of computerised cul-de-sacs masquerading as communications technologies in order to get to the one public servant who is familiar with the constituent's case.

Time expired.

Hockey, Maryborough

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (6.34 p.m.): I would like to place on the record of the House my thanks to Terry Mackenroth for his generosity in recognising the fact that Maryborough is indeed the hockey capital of Queensland. The recent grant that Maryborough received for the water based playing surface has made a huge difference to hockey in Maryborough.

A little bit of history is that hockey has been a sport in Maryborough since 1911. The Maryborough District Hockey Association was formed in 1934. Currently we have around 1,116 registered players, which is not a bad effort when you consider the population of around 26,000. Maryborough has a development officer whose job is to foster hockey in Maryborough.

The impressive track record of Maryborough in hockey continues to roll on. In fact, we have had six Olympic hockey champions, four of whom have captained Australia—John McBryde, Don McWatters, Mark Hager and the very well-known Jenny Morris. In the 2003 season we have had 20 state players and five Australian players—Rosely Giddey, Kathy Rogers, Greg Collins, Anthony Kirk and Travis Sutton.

The Maryborough District Hockey Association is a wonderful organisation with 14 acres of freehold title on their fields and is the ultimate in recycling as it is built on an old dump and timber yard. Of course they are zoned sporting and rec within the Maryborough City Council plan.

The economic benefits to both Maryborough and Hervey Bay for this new service are manifold. Currently when we hold championships in Maryborough, because there are not a lot of motels a lot of the visiting teams go to Hervey Bay and therefore Hervey Bay can gain a lot from having our state championships in terms of accommodation and general economic benefits to the area. We are now going to be able to hold even more high profile games. We know from championships that have been held in Maryborough in the past how much money is generated in the city when people shop locally wherever possible.

Again on behalf of the community of Maryborough, we place our thanks on the record to Terry Mackenroth for this very generous grant.

Poly Optics Australia, DuPont Award Win

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (6.37 p.m.): Tonight I would like to speak about a business in my electorate and how it is taking Australian innovation to the world. Poly Optics Australia designs fibre-optic cable and accessories. It has literally dozens of its own creations lighting up the unusual and inventive all over the world—all created in Burleigh Heads, in the heart of my electorate.

Last month this outstanding company was awarded the prestigious DuPont Innovation Award. The award was judged by a panel of 23 people drawn from industry, government and university and was awarded at a gala ceremony in Melbourne. There were more than 90 applicants in four categories. Poly Optics was successful in the construction and architecture division for their flexible optic light system.

The DuPont Innovation Awards program is an Australian and New Zealand independently judged competition. The awards are the first of their kind and are designed to recognise innovation and advances in industry, science and agriculture.

DuPont, founded in 1802, is committed to using science to solve problems and making people's lives easier and safer. The DuPont award recognises the introduction of something new, either an idea, technology, an application, a product or a service that improves Australia's competitiveness, illustrates innovative spirit and demonstrates tenacity.

The flexible optic light system is a flexible light transfer material designed to use various light sources including low wattage light-emitting diodes and sunlight to distribute light along a length of optic fibre. This technology can be used as an alternative lighting system offering reduced energy consumption which is both cost effective and environmentally friendly.

The LED and fibre optic system was first commercialised in 1992. Technological advancement has helped develop this system to include the ability to use sunlight as a viable light source. No other system has achieved a cost-effective way of delivering sunlight for performable usage. This technology has also been developed further as a low-cost super sidelight coupling to LEDs.

Poly Optics has won a string of awards including the Queensland Premier's emerging exporter award for completing the world's largest fibre optic project, lighting up a 70-storey building in Hong Kong. They have developed a range of wonderful accessories, including small lights for key rings and necklace style lights which are very popular in nightclubs and at concerts. In addition, they have used this new technology to put a new spin on traditional lighting, such as chandeliers, and museum and showcase lighting.

Mr Eddy Joseph is the company founder, head of operations and chief scientist. He and his wife Sue are to be commended for their dedication to excellence. Their imagination and innovation is truly an inspiration. They are supported by incredibly talented and professional staff. I congratulate Eddy and Sue on their achievement and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Time expired.

Schools, Charters Towers

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.40 p.m.): I would like to bring to the attention of members the plight of schools in the western part of the Charters Towers electorate, with particular mention of the Richmond, Muttaborra and Hughenden schools. Seventeen years ago evaporative air cooling was installed in Richmond State School to make learning more conducive in an environment where temperatures often hit the high forties. After 17 years the evaporative coolers are well and truly at the end of their serviceable life. They are costly to run and maintain and their design makes them ineffective in properly cooling school classrooms to anywhere near the comfortable temperatures that we enjoy in this parliament.

The school needs to be fitted with a new refrigerative air-cooling system. Herein lies the problem for the children and teachers: schools west of Charters Towers are excluded from the state government's Cooler School zones. I fail to understand why. Surely they deserve the same treatment under the Cooler Schools initiative? Towns such as Richmond, Hughenden and Muttaborra can be the hottest places in Queensland in the middle of summer. Countless studies have shown that stress is exacerbated in hot environments. Students have difficulty with concentration and their ability to memorise and learn is affected. Working in a hot environment interferes with the learning process and behaviour is compromised. In hot climates, the best environment for both students and teachers is when airconditioning is functional and effective.

When the Cool Schools initiative was implemented in the 1980s, western schools were the first to benefit and deservedly so. However, now these evaporative coolers are old and costly to maintain and run. It is time the state government incorporated these schools into round four or subsequent rounds of

the Cool Schools program so that the western schools such as Richmond, Hughenden and Muttaborra can benefit from this program.

At the beginning of this year an electrical upgrade was completed at Richmond State School, so the groundwork necessary for an airconditioning upgrade is complete. The P&C has worked hard to raise funds and is prepared to work with the government to ensure that facilities are improved. I do not understand why the policy and guidelines for the Cool Schools program state that schools with existing airconditioning or evaporative cooling systems installed at full state cost are ineligible for replacement or upgraded systems by way of subsidy applications under this program. Why do schools west of the Great Divide fall outside the eligibility zone under this program? Surely it is the government's responsibility to ensure that the program continues to improve facilities provided to all students and teachers, regardless of their geographical location, especially those in remote schools in western Queensland.

The Richmond school has recently had electrical maintenance and upgrading work done and the P&C is willing to work with the government. The P&C committee has approached the minister to request that the Richmond State School be included in the Cool Schools program.

Time expired.

Road Safety, Kallangur Electorate

Hon. K.W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (6.43 p.m.): I wish to speak about the matter of road safety and, in particular, the efforts of the Pine Rivers Shire Council to reduce speeding. The Pine Rivers Shire Council has developed a staged speed management strategy and has chosen the location of Marsden Road, a subarterial road located in my electorate of Kallangur. The road goes through a residential area and past the Dakabin State High School and various sporting fields. Traffic calming was considered but, as the function of Marsden Road is as a collector road and bus route, such a measure was not practical. Speeding motor vehicles are a major concern in my electorate and I am certain that applies to most other electorates. I am not saying anything particularly profound.

The focus of this trial is people who speed unintentionally. The trial is a response to residents' concerns that a series of traffic surveys showed drivers often exceeding the speed limit. The first stage of the trial has recently been installed. It involves an innovative road line marking consisting of a painted centre line and edge lines with short transverse bars. The visual impact to a driver is of a narrow road, presenting a well-defined driving lane and changing the driver's view of an open, wide expanse of bitumen. This perceptual treatment targets those drivers who unintentionally speed and is clearly not for those drivers who intend to speed.

The council will be monitoring speeds over a 12-month trial period. It is hoped that the trial will show that this type of line marking provides a low-cost treatment that may be used in other hot spot areas where speeding drivers are an issue. This speed management trial will have another stage involving installation of physical devices in the road, the purpose of which is to restrict vehicle speed to 60 kilometres whilst allowing buses and service vehicles to negotiate those devices without the difficulty occurring in negotiating a low-speed traffic calming device. Importantly, the design of the devices will make extremely high speed impossible. The other stages will proceed only after consultation with local residents, as on-street parking will be affected by the device locations.

Why is this initiative so important? Road safety is a vital concern for our community. I have been provided with information extracted from the road crash database in the Parliamentary Library. The information provided concerns crashes over the last 12 months. The results are very sobering. In 2002, 18,383 crashes were recorded in Queensland. In 2003, 17,855 crashes were recorded. Those crashes have resulted in 1,069 fatalities, 12,934 hospitalisations, 14,369 injuries requiring medical treatment and 7,866 minor injuries. What these figures do not show is the terrible, debilitating effect on people's lives—not only those directly affected but also their family and friends.

Time expired.

Racing Industry, Gold Coast

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (6.46 p.m.): I am very proud to rise in this House tonight to congratulate the Gold Coast Turf Club on the success of Prime Minister's Cup day on 15 May. Once again, the Gold Coast put on all its glitz and glamour for one of the Coast's two premier race days of the year. A record crowd of over seven and a half thousand were on hand to cheer on the cup field. I congratulate the connections of the winner of the 2004 Prime Minister's Cup, Vanquished, and the winner of the AD Hollandale Cup, This Manshood.

A government member: What about the board?

Mr LANGBROEK: I am coming to the board. Gold Coast Turf Club chairman, Bill Millican, was all smiles on the day and in the weeks afterwards, as membership of the club looks set to rise above 3,000. He was proud that the Gold Coast Turf Club is leading the way in shrugging off the image of racing as being the bastion of old stiff-shirted men and is now attracting race-goers of both sexes and all ages. Bill

Millican's predecessor, the late great Peter Gallagher, would have been happy to see the success of the day. The Gold Coast Turf Club has come along in leaps and bounds in recent years, although attending the races still has many of the elements it has always had.

My assistant electorate officer and I, being know-it-all punters, managed to pick only a single winner for the day. That aside, it was great to see the people of the Gold Coast in the Surfers Paradise electorate having fun on a glorious autumn day, including my friend and colleague the member for Currumbin. I congratulate the turf club chairman, Bill Millican, and chief executive, Scott Whitman, and all of the committee on their efforts. I note that the committee includes my esteemed colleague, the member for Southport, and my friend and new member of the board, fellow dental surgeon Brian O'Hara.

On-course betting also had a massive day out, with the combined on-course tote and bookmakers turning over in excess of \$3.2 million. Local bookies said that many of the punters were small-time punters who appeared to be enjoying the races for the first time. This is great news for the racing industry. The new corporate image and marketing of many clubs and the upbeat race days have attracted this new and more vibrant crowd.

This was also seen on the Gold coast's biggest race day, the Magic Millions. On that day, fourteen and a half thousand people entered the course and the rooms were bursting at the seams. On that day, on-course betting turned over a whopping \$6.7 million. However, the Magic Millions is not just the Saturday afternoon of racing. There are two other days of racing in the very successful Magic Millions. The 2004 Magic Millions sales were the most successful sales in the history of the Magic Millions. This year, the turnover at the four days of sales was up over 20 per cent from \$53 million to \$64 million in 2004. Very few of the horses were passed in and the sale attracted yearlings from many of the great sires, including the late Danehill, as well as home grown talent like General Nediym.

The next big race day is Wednesday, 18 August for the Carlton Draught Gold Market Handicap. I urge all punters on the Gold Coast and surrounds to go to the turf club. Whilst I would like to join them, and no doubt the member for Southport would, we will be in this place. I am sure they will have another great race day.

Whitsunday Festivals

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (6.50 p.m.): As the chill of winter sets in across southern Queensland and people stay indoors to avoid the cold, we in north Queensland are just beginning to come alive and revel in the passing of the sticky heat of summer. The winter months in my electorate herald a plethora of community events and festivals.

Just last weekend, locals were able to choose to participate in one or all of three great local events. A great family event was held at Dingo Beach. This day is known as Whitfunday. It is an annual event that attracts visitors and locals who come to enjoy a fun-filled weekend at one of our little known but more beautiful beaches.

Airlie Beach came alive to the sights and sounds of the Oceanic Boat Show. This annual boat show is the brainchild of the local Rotary Club of Airlie Beach. I want to sincerely congratulate the club members and organisers on the enormous amount of effort that they put into ensuring that the Whitsundays are well and truly on the boating map. The boat show is supported by the local boating industry and the community. There were great displays, cooking demonstrations and information of a nautical kind. We are not yet rivalling Sanctuary Cove with our boat show, but we are quite confident that we will get there one day.

Another event last weekend was the Great Barrier Feast held on Hamilton Island. This was a weekend of celebration and food and wine. It attracts people from as far away as Hong Kong, Melbourne and Sydney, some of whom have returned for a third year in a row. The Great Barrier Feast weekend is a fantastic weekend. Master classes in wine appreciation and cooking are held. Some of the great wine makers from across Australia were present in the Whitsundays, including the legendary guru Len Evans. Amongst the chefs were Gilbert Lau and Anthony Lui from Flower Drum restaurant in Melbourne, Paul Wade from Aspen, Colorado, and Wolfgang Strauss from Austria. I congratulate Hamilton Island CEO, Wayne Kirkpatrick, and his very capable team who do so much to promote tourism in the Whitsundays.

What a weekend, but there is a lot more to come. In September there will be the Airlie Beach triathlon run around our shores. This year it is being supported by regional Queensland events. I am truly looking forward to that. I am looking forward to the annual Hog's Breath Race Week and Hamilton Island Race Week—two boating events that are a lot of fun to be a part of, even if it is just from the sidelines. Then we have our annual Bowen Fishing Classic, which is a must attend event in my area.

On a sad note, I indicate the recent resignation of Glenn Ormsby, the manager of Tourism Whitsunday, who is leaving for personal reasons. I welcome Matthew Williams on board as the new manager.

Central Queensland University

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.53 p.m.): I rise tonight to speak about a graduation ceremony for the Central Queensland University, Mackay campus, which I attended. This year there was a record number of 223 graduates presented to the chancellor, which is magic. The university's Mackay campus is a marvellous place. It has grown substantially over the last few years.

The campus in Mackay commenced in 1987 with 32 students as part of the outreach centre for the university. This year the numbers at the Mackay campus will exceed 1,200. The Conservatorium of Music started in 1989 with 10 students. Numbers have risen to over 200 this year. The Central Queensland Conservatorium of Music became part of CQU in 1996 and moved to the Plainlands campus in 2001.

The numbers of enrolments at the Mackay campus have doubled over the last five years. It continues to grow. It is a beautiful place to visit. It now offers programs of study for all university faculties. Initially, only a few undergraduate programs were available. These now number 38, most of which are available for the three full years.

There is a strong number of postgraduate research students who are working with CQU and the Mackay staff. There is a highly qualified academic staff who undertake regionally relevant research. They are contributing substantially to the research work that is being conducted in central Queensland.

The university campus at Mackay is at an exciting stage. It is currently investigating the establishment of a science and technology precinct and a mining engineering centre. Both of these are in response to the development of local industry. I should explain that the cutting edge technology that is being produced in the Mackay district to service the mining industry in the hinterland is unbelievable. Quite frankly, the technology is at the cutting edge according to world standards. Companies in Mackay are exporting that technology all over the world. I am extremely proud to be part of and have that university campus in my electorate.

I pay tribute to a member of the campus board, John Tate. After 25 years he is finally hanging up his boots. I have to say that John has been a tremendous support person, a tremendous instigator of the development of the university. I wish him well in his retirement from that role. I am sure that he has many years of enjoyable retirement to look forward to.

Time expired.

Rugby League Television Coverage

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (6.56 p.m.): I rise to speak tonight about a matter that is high in the minds of many members of parliament and many people right across the eastern seaboard—that is, Rugby League. As people go off to the game—and some members are lucky enough to have tickets to the game this evening—I want them to spare a thought for people in living in the Torres Strait and on Cape York Peninsula who are being denied access to the coverage of Rugby League on Friday nights.

I do not want panic to break out tonight, but thankfully people in Cape York and in the Torres Strait will be able to watch the State of Origin tonight. A massive campaign is being launched in the Torres Strait and Thursday Island to ensure that they get adequate television coverage of Rugby League.

Let me explain the situation. People in Cape York Peninsula and in the Torres Strait do not receive their television broadcasting via the normal networks that we get in regional Queensland and in capital cities. They get Imparja and Seven Central. Imparja is broadcast out of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. It is a hybrid of both Channel Nine and Channel 10 which, as many members would be aware, have the broadcasting rights to both the AFL and the Rugby League.

I do not want to get into a debate about which is the better code—AFL or Rugby League. Most sensible members would have the answer to that. What I am asking is that Imparja give equal coverage to both the AFL and Rugby League. Currently what is happening in Cape York and in the Torres Strait is that Imparja broadcasts four live games of AFL a week and broadcasts only two games of Rugby League, both of which are delayed telecasts. It is quite a shocking situation.

Mr Scott Whybird is a noted referee in the Torres Strait. He is pulling together a campaign to make sure that we get a game of Rugby League broadcast on Friday night at 8.30 for the convenience of people in the Torres Strait. It still leaves room for three live broadcasts of AFL for those few supporters of AFL in the region and gives fair coverage to both AFL and Rugby League. Rugby League is very well supported in my electorate. There are some fantastic competitions.

Time expired.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.58 p.m.