



WEEKLY HANSARD

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51ST PARLIAMENT

Subject

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TUESDAY, 31 AUGUST 2004

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

ASSENT TO BILLS

Appropriation (Parliament) Bill Appropriation Bill

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have to report that on Tuesday, 24 August 2004 I presented to Her Excellency the Governor the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill and the Appropriation Bill for royal assent and that Her Excellency was pleased, in my presence, to subscribe her assent thereto in the name and on behalf of Her Majesty.

ASSENT TO BILLS

24 August 2004

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

Dear Mr Speaker

I am pleased to inform the Legislative Assembly that the following Bills, having been passed by the Legislative Assembly and having been presented for the Royal Assent, were assented to in the name of Her Majesty The Queen on 24 August 2004:

"A Bill for an Act authorising the Treasurer to pay amounts from the consolidated fund for the Legislative Assembly and parliamentary service for the financial years starting 1 July 2004 and 1 July 2005"

"A Bill for an Act authorising the Treasurer to pay amounts from the consolidated fund for departments for the financial years starting 1 July 2004 and 1 July 2005"

"A Bill for an Act to amend certain revenue legislation"

"A Bill for an Act about taking and using State native biological resources for biodiscovery, and for other purposes".

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

Yours sincerely

(Sgd)

Governor

STANDING ORDERS

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I remind you that the new standing orders adopted on 18 June 2004 are in effect from today.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Container Deposit Legislation

Mrs E Cunningham from 50 petitioners requesting the House to introduce container deposit legislation using the guidelines of that of South Australia and overseas examples and that a refundable deposit of ten cents be implemented, as recommended by the recent review of container deposit legislation in New South Wales.

Heiner Road Bridge

Mrs E Cunningham from 231 petitioners requesting the House to overturn the decision to partially entomb the Heritage listed sandstone abutments of the Heiner Road Bridge, Heiner Road, North Ipswich and allow the abutments to remain, be protected and valued as a significant piece of Australia's heritage.

Goondi Railway Crossing, Innisfail

Mr Pitt from 1,440 petitioners requesting the House to take the necessary steps to rectify the condition of the approaches to the Goondi Railway Crossing at Innisfail.

PAPERS

PAPERS TABLED DURING THE RECESS

The Clerk informed the House that the following papers, received during the recess, were tabled on the dates indicated—

20 August 2004—

- Letter, dated 17 August 2004, from the Premier and Minister for Trade (Mr Beattie) to the Clerk of the Parliament enclosing a copy of a letter from the Commonwealth Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Treaties listing proposed international treaty actions tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament on 22 June 2004 and the National Interest Analyses for each of the proposed treaty actions listed

24 August 2004—

- Letter, dated 20 August 2004, from the Premier and Minister for Trade (Mr Beattie) to the Clerk of the Parliament enclosing a copy of a letter from the Commonwealth Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Treaties listing proposed international treaty actions tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament on 4 August 2004 and the National Interest Analyses for each of the proposed treaty actions listed
- Response from the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (Mr Lucas) to a paper petition presented by Ms Lee Long from 474 petitioners regarding the rail branch line, Millaa Millaa to Tolga, under consideration as part of a Rails to Trails project

27 August 2004—

- Response from the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines (Mr Robertson) to a paper petition presented by Mr McArdle from 1020 petitioners regarding a request to freehold the property known as Tripcony/Hibiscus Caravan Park at Caloundra
- Response from the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (Mr Lucas) to a paper petition presented by Ms Stuckey from 611 petitioners regarding a request for a no standing zone along the north side of Currumbin Creek Road

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

The following statutory instruments were tabled by the Clerk—

Industrial Relations Act 1999—

- Industrial Relations Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004, No. 160

Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990—

- Trading (Allowable Hours) Regulation 2004, No. 161

Transplantation and Anatomy Act 1979—

- Transplantation and Anatomy Regulation 2004, No. 162

Prostitution Act 1999—

- Prostitution Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004, No. 163

City of Brisbane Act 1924—

- City of Brisbane Regulation 2004, No. 164

South Bank Corporation Act 1989—

- South Bank Corporation By-law 2004, No. 165

Government Owned Corporations Act 1993, Rural Adjustment Authority Act 1994, Water Act 2000—

- Government Owned Corporations Regulation 2004, No. 166

Criminal Law Amendment Act 1945—

- Criminal Law Regulation 2004, No. 167

Justices Act 1886—

- Justices Regulation 2004, No. 168

Rural Adjustment Authority Act 1994—

- Rural Adjustment Authority Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004, No. 169

Statutory Instruments Act 1992—

- Statutory Instruments Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 2004, No. 170

Revenue Legislation Amendment Act 2004—

- Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 171

Gladstone Power Station Agreement Act 1993—

- Gladstone Power Station Agreement Regulation 2004, No. 172

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sun Aqua Fish Farm

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.34 a.m.): I want to inform the House that I have been advised that the Coordinator-General has completed his evaluation of the Sun Aqua sea cage project. Accordingly, I advise the House that the Sun Aqua sea cage project has been rejected.

This has been a highly complex application to deal with. The project was declared to be a significant project under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971. This project promised the development of a new industry and the creation of new jobs. However, it is the responsibility of government to establish development approval frameworks that allow the correct balance between development and protection of the environment. Experience in other parts of the world has shown the folly of allowing major developments which can have an adverse impact on the environment.

More than 1,000 submissions were made in relation to the environmental impact statement. The main issues raised were the impact of increased nutrients on the water quality of Moreton Bay, the potential for impacts on wild fish stocks and other fauna, and the restriction of access to the site for users of the bay.

Evaluation of a project in this environment is necessarily time consuming, but it is important to the proponent and to the community that there should be a rigorous decision-making process in place for these important decisions. It was crucial for the state government to ensure that a full, appropriate process was undertaken so that a properly considered verdict could be arrived at. All relevant considerations were taken into account.

Consideration of the Coordinator-General's report will show that the Moreton Bay environment is highly complex, as are the planning and management arrangements for the bay. Moreton Bay is an important recreational and environmental resource for south-east Queensland, and its importance will grow as our population increases. It is also an important economic resource, and we need to continually improve our management practices as further information about the bay and the increasing demands we place upon it is clarified.

This House can be assured that my government has the future of Moreton Bay as a key priority and takes its stewardship role very seriously indeed. For the information of honourable members, I will table the Coordinator-General's report. The Coordinator-General's report concludes—

Accordingly, I am not satisfied that the environmental effects of the project, in particular, the discharge of nutrients, can be adequately addressed to the strict standard required and applied to other facilities which discharge into eastern Moreton Bay.

In accordance with the provisions of sections 35 and 39 of the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act, I recommend that any application for a development approval for an Environmental Authority for Environmentally Relevant Activity 1 (Aquaculture) for this project must be refused.

We agree with the Coordinator-General. I table the Coordinator-General's report for the information of the House. Because of its importance to members, I have asked for copies to be prepared and distributed to all members. For the information of members, I seek leave to have a letter written to me by the Coordinator-General incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Queensland Government
State Development and Innovation

31 AUG 2004

The Honourable Peter Beattie MP
Premier and Minister for Trade
PO Box 185
BRISBANE ALBERT STREET QLD 4002

Dear Premier

The Sun Aqua Sea Cage Aquaculture Project in Moreton Bay was declared to be a significant project for which an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required under section 26 of the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 ("the Act"), on 31 October 2001.

I have now completed my evaluation of the EIS in accordance with the provisions of sections 35 and 39 of the SDPWO Act. I am not satisfied that the environmental effects of the project, in particular, the discharge of nutrients, can be adequately addressed to the strict standard required and applied to other facilities which discharge into eastern Moreton Bay.

Therefore, I have recommended that any application for a development approval for an Environmental Authority for an Environmentally Relevant Activity 1 (Aquaculture) for this project must be refused. I have advised the proponent of this decision today, and in accordance with the requirements of section 35(5) (b) of the Act, will publicly notify my decision by placing my report on the website of the Department of State Development and Innovation.

I have attached a copy of my report and my letter of advice to the proponent for your information.

Yours sincerely

(Sgd)

Paul Fennelly
Coordinator-General

Mr BEATTIE: I table the report, together with a letter that has been written to the proponent by the Coordinator-General. The Minister for State Development will have more to say about that in a moment.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Changes in Ministry

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 a.m.): I wish to inform the House that on 25 August, in accordance with the Constitution of Queensland 2001, Her Excellency the Governor appointed Stephen Robertson to be Minister for Natural Resources and Mines of Queensland, Reginald John Mickel to be Minister for Energy of Queensland, and Desley Carole Boyle to be Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women of Queensland. I also inform the House that on 25 August 2004, in accordance with the Constitution of Queensland 2001, Her Excellency the Governor, acting by and with the advice of the Executive Council, approved Administrative Arrangements Amendment Order No. 6 of 2004. I lay upon the table of the House copies of the relevant notifications from the *Extraordinary Queensland Government Gazette* of 25 August 2004.

I have reshuffled my cabinet to create a stand-alone Minister for Energy to concentrate on implementing the action plan for improving Queensland's electricity distribution system. I have appointed the member for Logan to spend all his time focusing on Queensland's power needs and ensuring the 44 recommendations of the independent review panel are implemented as quickly and efficiently as possible.

I want to thank the member for Stretton for doing a first-class job in arranging the independent review of our distribution system and in responding quickly and efficiently to that review. I also thank the Treasurer for his support in organising that review. The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines also has major responsibilities in dealing with tree clearing and water resources—two of the biggest challenges facing Queensland at the moment. When I told him that I wanted someone to concentrate solely on power, the member for Stretton pointed out that he had developed a detailed understanding of the issues involved in tree clearing and water resources and felt it was important that he should continue to deliver results in these areas. So he will continue as the Minister for Natural Resources.

The member for Logan has proven himself to be a vigorous and proactive minister since his appointment as Environment Minister in February after the election, and I am confident that he is the ideal person for this very crucial role. The Minister for Local Government, Planning and Women will also be the Minister for Environment. All three ministers were sworn in at 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 25 August 2004.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Supply, Briefing of MPs

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.40 a.m.): Today the Minister for Energy and I will be available to brief all non-government members on the independent panel's review of Queensland's electricity distribution system and the actions being taken to deal with the panel's recommendation. I have written personally to all non-government members to invite them to the briefing, which will be held in the main conference room on level 5. The CEOs of Energex and Ergon will attend, along with the panel's chair, Darryl Somerville. Members will be free to ask questions on whatever they like. I table a letter that I have written today to the Leader of the Opposition in response to a request on matters that he raised with me about the hearing.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Supply, Implementation Plan

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.40 a.m.): State cabinet has approved a plan by Energex and Ergon Energy to spend \$2.7 billion between now and 30 June 2006 to improve services to customers. The facts are: there is a massive increase on spending in comparison with previous years. This plan by cabinet is designed to resolve the issues. I table a copy for the information of the House. I have asked for copies to be provided to every member.

I seek leave to have the details of this plan incorporated in *Hansard* for the information of all members.

Leave granted.

The spending of \$2.7 billion over two years is about a billion dollars more than for the past two years and compares with an average of \$880 million a year over the past three years.

In terms of new money, both corporations had anticipated a significant increase in capital expenditure when the State Budget was brought down in June.

While Ergon was further down the path in improving its network, Energex now plans to lift its capital works over the next two years by an additional \$187 million on top of the Budget figure—an increase of 23 per cent on 2003-04.

The increased spending of more than \$100 million a month shows the Government's determination to act as quickly as possible to improve the system.

Both corporations will increase spending on capital expenditure to about \$500 million a year—an increase of 76% on average yearly spending over the past three years for Energex and an increase of about 62% by Ergon Energy on the same basis.

ENERGEX will increase operating and maintenance spending by about 36% to an average of \$173 million a year and Ergon by about 20% to \$190 million a year.

The corporations will be able to fund this spending from income and a prudent level of debt which will enable them to retain investment grade credit ratings. The plans also need to be approved by the Queensland Competition Authority.

The spending plans are part of a detailed Implementation Plan, approved by Cabinet, which delivers on every one of the 44 recommendations of the Independent Review Panel which examined Queensland's electricity distribution system.

I table a copy of that plan.

The detailed Implementation Plan outlines what the Queensland Government, ENERGEX, Ergon Energy and Queensland Competition Authority are doing to implement the 44 recommendations.

The Implementation Plan deals with improvements to reliability, introducing minimum service standards and rebates, improving network capacity, better information for customers, a bigger workforce and more efficient monitoring and reporting of the corporations' performance.

Improvements to reliability mean customers will have:

- Fewer interruptions to their supply
- Fewer hiccups in their supply
- Any blackouts will be shorter.

Improved network capacity means:

- More stable voltage levels
- Less chance of power cuts on hot days or if equipment fails
- No problems with the ability to connect new appliances
- Ability to deal with forecast growth levels.

Improved communications mean:

- A phone system capable of dealing with up to 100,000 phone calls an hour
- Better information on blackouts and their expected length
- More ways of finding out about what is happening.

The Government will investigate how the Single Wire Earth Return system in western Queensland can be improved.

ENERGEX and Ergon Energy will:

- Increase their operating and maintenance programs
- Be required to prepare plans identifying where capital investment and target maintenance is required in their networks.
- Adopt more conservative planning assumptions so that if assets fail, they will have sufficient back-up capacity to ensure customers don't lose supply.
- Implement capital expenditure programs to reduce asset utilisation of their bulk supply and zone substations to 60-65% and 50-55% respectively to increase network security and reduce risks of loss of supply to customers.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Supply, Staff

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.41 a.m.): Our comprehensive plan to fix the electricity distribution system includes a plan for Energex and Ergon Energy to increase their staff by more than 10 per cent over the next two years. I seek leave to have the details of that plan incorporated in *Hansard* for the information of members

Leave granted.

We are making sure the money is available to fix problems identified by the independent panel—but a major problem the companies face is finding the extra people needed to do the work.

ENERGEX plans to increase its workforce from 2,530 at June 30 this year to 2,815 by June 2006, with field officers and apprentices rising from 1,369 to 1,599 and office workers from 1,161 to 1,216.

Ergon plans to increase its workforce from 4,841 to 5,300 in the same period, with field officers and apprentices rising from 2,384 to 2,850 and office workers decreasing from 2,457 to 2,450.

In addition, about 200 field contractors will be working on new lines from Goondiwindi—to Bulli Creek, near Millmerran, and from Rolleston to near Blackwater.

Because there is a worldwide shortage of fully-trained electrical workers, we have approved three new strategies to help provide the extra tradespeople ENERGEX and Ergon need.

The companies have major intakes planned for new apprentices in 2005, with up to 160 positions available throughout the State.

In addition to these intakes, the companies are targeting electrical apprentices who have cancelled their training contracts over the last two years or who have uncertain jobs prospects.

These apprentices would complete their trade qualification with ENERGEX or Ergon.

The companies are also targeting qualified electrical workers from other industries to join an established 12-month training pathway to achieve dual certification and licensing as linespersons/cable jointers.

The third strategy is to develop an up-front intensive training program to provide foundation skills for new apprentices in the first six months of employment.

It will emphasise safety issues and will enable them to be more productive, giving them the work experience they need and providing extra hands where they are needed.

This intensive training program is modelled on the very successful program that has been developed for apprentices at Aviation Australia.

The Electrical Trades Union will be consulted on these measures.

Both corporations are starting significant advertising campaigns this month and next to invite young Queenslanders to join the future workforce of this critical industry.

Apprentices in the electricity industry have the capacity to earn between \$15,000 and \$19,000 in the first year while undertaking industry training, plus the potential to earn overtime during the peak periods faced by the industry.

On completion of a four-year apprenticeship, the base rate for a linesperson is \$40,000 a year, with many of them earning between \$60,000 and \$80,000 a year with overtime and allowances.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Supply, Rebates

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.41 a.m.): One of the major changes the government is making in the power industry is to greatly expand electricity rebates for customers adversely affected by the electricity distribution companies.

I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The changes will mean customers will be entitled to get a rebate on their electricity bill if ENERGEX or Ergon Energy do not give them an adequate level of service.

This will extend ENERGEX and Ergon Energy's current voluntary arrangements and put a greater onus on them to deliver appropriate levels of customer service.

Under the existing voluntary rebate schemes, each of the distributors has been paying up to \$15,000 a year in rebates that have been claimed by customers.

There are set payments such as Energex pays \$20 for failing to restore power within four hours when a power failure is reported prior to 1 p.m. and Energex allows \$100 for wrongful disconnections.

The existing schemes are not well-publicised and they rely on customers putting in a claim.

The new rebates will relate to two types of services.

The first relates to the number of times people lose power.

If, over the course of a year, a consumer loses power for longer than the maximum level set by the Government, the consumer will be entitled to a rebate on the bill.

We are in the process of investigating the appropriate rebate levels and will announce them when they are set.

In other States, the rebates are typically around \$80.

The second rebate relates to the customer services that ENERGEX and Ergon Energy provide to customers.

For example, if they make an appointment and don't keep it, the consumer will receive a rebate.

If they promise to connect someone and don't do it on time, there will be a rebate.

If they wrongly disconnect someone, there will be a rebate.

ENERGEX and Ergon Energy will automatically give the rebate if they fail to meet the required levels of service.

However, customers will need to apply for a rebate if their supply is interrupted.

The Government will be amending the Electricity Act 1994 and putting new conditions into ENERGEX and Ergon Energy's licences to implement the scheme.

Voluntary Guaranteed Service Level rebates will become mandatory in October.

A new Guaranteed Service Level with increased penalties for issues such as punctual appointments, connection times and responding to supply interruptions, will start on January 1, 2005.

A full scheme covering the length and duration of outages and non-reliability measures will start on July 1, 2005.

From January 1, 2005, ENERGEX and Ergon Energy will be required to comply with minimum service standards for the duration and frequency of outages.

The Government will set targets for Ergon Energy to improve the reliability of its long rural feeders over the next five years so that rural customers receive a better service.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Supply, National Electricity Market

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.42 a.m.): The government does not believe the national electricity market is perfect but recognises that we would be worse off without it. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

On the other hand the Opposition Leader would walk away from the market to the detriment of all Queenslanders.

As the Liberal leader has correctly said, that would be a ridiculous policy.

Last Friday, August 13 some of Queensland's load was shed by the national grid operator to address the massive loss of generation in the NSW Hunter Valley.

Some 30% of NSW generation was lost and load shedding began in all States who are part of the national grid—QLD, NSW, VIC and SA.

Full power was restored to QLD customers in 2 hours. Yes this was caused by NSW. Yes, QLD shared some of the pain but what is the alternative?

If you follow the logic of the Opposition Leader it would be better if Queensland did not have an interconnector and instead lost power for 3 or 4 days rather than 2 hours.

That is how ridiculous his energy policy is. Mr Quinn was dead right.

As Greg Roberts commented in *The Australian* last Friday: "That's an ill-considered policy that would cost Queensland big-time in national competition payments."

Some Members will recall the 4 days of darkness that Energy Minister Tom Gilmore had to explain to the House in March 1998.

Four Queensland power stations had equipment failures in late February 1998 and for four days Queenslanders woke up each morning wondering if they could boil the kettle.

Each day either 500 megawatts or 300 megawatts of demand had to be taken out of the Queensland system.

The system at the time could not import power from NSW because there was no interconnector.

As Tom Gilmore said at the time, "interconnection between Queensland's power system and the electricity network serving Australia's southern States will provide Queensland with an additional 500 megawatts of capacity."

In other words, there would not have been blackouts at that time if the interconnector was there.

The Borbidge Cabinet dithered on construction of the interconnector. Perhaps they were driven by muddle-heading thinking by some Ministers like Mr Springborg.

Well the Beattie Government built that interconnector and fix the problem. That is what the Beattie Government is all about—recognising problems and fixing them.

It is also about providing for the future not living in some fantasy world of the past.

The problems experienced by the Borbidge Government also related to its lack of reserve generation capacity. As Tom Gilmore noted, Queensland had a reserve margin of 18%, below the industry standard of 20%.

I would remind the House the reserve margin is currently around 28%.

The response of the Borbidge Government was to enter into a series of agreements with private power providers at places such as Oakey, and Yabulu and Mt Stuart in Townsville.

These Power Purchase Agreements or PPAs have cost the State of Queensland tens of millions of dollars.

Today we are paying these companies a small fortune for the Borbidge Government's folly. If you were looking for the worst possible solution to a generation problem you could not have come up with a better set of agreements.

The Beattie Government's record is to have facilitated the largest increase in base load generation of any State since the national market started in 1998.

Millmerran, Callide C, Swanbank E, and in the future the Townsville base-load station and Kogan Creek Power Project will ensure we don't return to the dark old days that Mr Springborg thinks were so good for Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ministerial Expenses, Report

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.42 a.m.): I table the public report of ministerial expenses for the period 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004. I am continuing to demonstrate that I have the same resolve to be open and accountable with the public of Queensland as I had when I became Premier in 1998. The public report contains details of the expenses of ministers, parliamentary secretaries and their offices. It shows how my government has continued to maintain expenses at reasonable levels. The expenditure compared to last year shows substantial savings in motor vehicle running costs and a reduction in overseas travel for ministerial offices, with only moderate increases in salaries. These are due to enterprise bargaining pay rises for all staff and incremental pay increases for some staff. My government has continued to be responsive to community needs and the portfolio structure I have put in place will ensure Smart State initiatives are progressed and ministerial

offices continue to listen to the community while remaining cost effective. The public report clearly shows that expenditure is being maintained at a reasonable level.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Trade Mission, Japan and India

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.43 a.m.): Next week I will lead my last trade and investment mission for 2004. This mission speaks volumes about where Queensland is in the world and where we are heading. I will visit the crucial markets of Japan and India to create more jobs for Queenslanders by enhancing exports.

Japan is like an old friend in trade and investment terms. It is our biggest international partner—merchandise exports alone totalled \$5.3 billion in 2003-04—and we have many enduring business and cultural relationships with Japan. But we take none of this for granted. We continue working to strengthen existing relationships—this will be my sixth visit to Japan—and to forge new ties with the Japanese.

While Japan is bouncing back from a 10-year economic slump, India is emerging as an economic powerhouse. India, like China, is an emerging economic superpower. It is where the jobs of the future will come from. India's economic growth hit a high of eight per cent in the mid-nineties and has since averaged between five per cent and seven per cent per annum. Registered GDP growth was 8.2 per cent last year and is forecast to exceed six per cent this year. India is the world's biggest democracy, with a fast-growing population of more than one billion people and the world's biggest middle class.

Queensland is already on India's radar, with almost half of all exports from Australia to India being sourced from the Smart State. Preliminary figures show Queensland's merchandise exports to India in 2003-04 were worth \$1.039 billion, having grown by 40.7 per cent over five years. The Queensland government and a growing number of businesses and institutions are aggressively pursuing opportunities in India so that jobs for Queenslanders will flow from India's remarkable growth.

I first visited India while in opposition in 1996 based on reports that it was shaping as an economic colossus of the 21st century. I led a trade and investment mission there in February 2003 and signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of one of India's boom states, Karnataka. The two-year agreement focuses on cooperation in tourism infrastructure, agribusiness, mining, urban development, road and transport infrastructure, and fiscal reform. I also entered a higher education cooperation agreement with the Karnataka government, and I expect to see fruit borne by this agreement when I return to Karnataka in a fortnight.

My work will include opening a new Queensland Government Trade and Investment Office in the city of Bangalore, and addressing the Karnataka-Queensland Trade Forum. I will also visit the city of Mumbai and surrounds. Throughout my India mission, I will hold high-level meetings with representatives of government and business, including powerful corporations that have made it onto lists such as Forbes 500. The main aim will be breaking new ground for Queensland in areas including urban and tourism development, education and training, mining, aviation, biotechnology, information technology, film, car manufacturing and telecommunications.

In Japan I will spend time in Tokyo, Saitama, Hamamatsu, Nagoya, Aichi and Osaka. I will join business leaders in making a significant tourism announcement and be involved in a Queensland beef promotion by a leading Japanese supermarket chain. Our reputation as a producer of clean and green meat is absolutely priceless in Japan, especially amid bans on imports of North American beef because of mad cow disease. So that the full details of what I propose are available to members, I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

So I will be delighted to reassure Japanese consumers and retailers that we will be part of the National Livestock Identification System to ensure Queensland beef can be tracked from the paddock to the plate.

In Japan I will also meet government officials and corporate leaders, such as the Governor of Saitama—with which Queensland has had a sister state relationship for 20 years.

I will hold talks with the Governor of Osaka, Her Excellency Ms Fusae Ohta, and reinforce my written invitation for her to visit AusBiotech 2004 in Queensland in November.

I will visit the site of World Expo 2005 in Aichi, and meet senior representatives of the Expo authority.

Everywhere, I will encourage exports of Queensland food and wine, and promote our capabilities in industries that represent the new generation of exports to Japan.

These areas include: Innovative nursery products; carbon sequestration; bioplastics made from sugar; other biotechnology products; and nanotechnology.

As always, I will be accompanied by impressive business people who will use the trade and investment mission to improve their own trade profiles.

I seek leave to have lists of their names and organisations incorporated, and I also a table a pack of information that will be distributed during this trade mission.

Business Delegation—Japan

Mr Fergus Lee, General Manager—Sales and Marketing, NanoChem
Ms Barbara McGeoch, Director, Birkdale Nursery
Mr Chris Moyle, Director—Sales and Marketing, Jimbour Wines
Mr David Noble, Managing Director, NanoChem
Mr David Russell RFD QC, President, National Federation of Australia Japan Societies
Mr Bradley Teys, Chief Executive, Teys Brothers
Mr Eric Van Ras, Sales and Marketing Manager, Teys Brothers

Business Delegation—India

Mr Guy Chester, Director, EcoSustainAbility
Mr Gautam Chiniwala, Superior Jetties rep in India
Mr Andrew Craig, Director, Australian Industry Group
Mr Manoj Deekshit, Con-Serv Corporation Australia rep in India
Mrs Judy Freeman, Director of Sales & Marketing, TJAPUKAI Aboriginal Cultural Park
Mr John Hogan, Managing Director, Superior Jetties
Mr Robin James, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Film & Television Commission
Associate Professor Brian C. Lovell, Research Director IRIS, School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering University of Queensland
Mr Chayan Sarkar, Producer, Bollywood Dreams
Mr Anupam Sharma, Indian Film Industry Advisor/Producer/Director, Films and Casting Temple
Professor Arun Sharma, Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Commercialisation, Queensland University of Technology
Mr Scott Sheppard, Executive Director, QUT International
Mr Craig Sherrin, Institute Director, Southbank Institute of TAFE
Mr Maha Sinnathamby, Chairman, Springfield Land Corp
Mr John Thomson, National Commercial Sales Manager, Con-Serv Corp Australia Pty Ltd

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Supply

Hon. R.J. MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy) (9.46 a.m.): Mr Speaker—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I intend to hear the minister.

Mr MICKEL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am committed to delivering a first-class electricity system to Queenslanders. I want a customer driven focus by Energex and Ergon Energy. As part of that customer driven focus, I want a fairer deal for Queensland.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I suggest you read the new standing order 253 because I will be using it soon.

Mr MICKEL: As part of that customer driven focus, I want a fairer deal for Queensland when it comes to issues such as automatic load shedding and national emergency situations. It is clear that Queensland customers carried a bigger burden than those interstate on the night of 13 August this year. The other states did not wear their fair share of the pain. As honourable members may recall, an explosion in a transformer in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales triggered load shedding across the national electricity network. The load that was disconnected in Queensland was about 500 to 550 megawatts. In New South Wales, where the problem occurred, it was 480 megawatts. In Victoria it was 488 megawatts.

Mr Malone: Talk to your Labor mates about that.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gregory! The member for Mirani!

Mr MICKEL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will take—

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition! I am going to hear this ministerial statement. Everybody else in this House is entitled to hear this statement. I now call the Minister for Energy, and the opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr MICKEL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In view of the urgency of this, I will take the confidence of the House again with these figures.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warrego, I have just given you a warning. Order!

Mr MICKEL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The load that was disconnected in Queensland was about 500 to 550 megawatts. In New South Wales it was 480 megawatts. In Victoria it was 488 megawatts, and in South Australia it was 25 megawatts. Queensland's share of the burden was disproportionate.

The fact that the pain was not shared was acknowledged at last week's energy minister's meeting which I attended in Adelaide. The meeting agreed that there should be a national review of the automatic load shedding scheme operated by the National Electricity Management Market Company, or NEMMCO. The meeting also called for greater equity and transparency in the system.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Gregory under standing order 253.

Mr MICKEL: I will take that again, Mr Speaker. The meeting also called for greater equity and transparency in the system. I want a fairer deal for Queensland out of all of this. I am simply not leaving this issue to NEMMCO to deal with. I am taking this review a step further by directing Energex and Ergon to review their load shedding protocols. I want to see what can be done to ensure that domestic consumers are treated fairly under the automatic load sharing scheme. I raised this issue in a meeting with Ergon and Energex executives yesterday.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Cunningham, I warn you under standing order 253.

Mr MICKEL: I say it again, Mr Speaker. I raised this issue in a meeting with Ergon and Energex executives yesterday. I have also written to the chairman of the Ergon and Energex boards requesting such a review. I am advised that domestic customers lose power first under the current Ergon and Energex emergency load shedding protocols. I am not satisfied with these arrangements, and I have made this clear to Ergon and Energex. I have directed them to immediately review the prioritised list and develop a new list which gives domestic customers a better deal. My priority as Queensland's new Energy Minister is to drive the changes which are needed to improve the level of service which Ergon Energy and Energex provide to all their customers in Queensland. I want a customer driven focus. I expect that to be reflected in the way Ergon Energy and Energex respond to the independent report into distribution and service delivery in Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Olympic Games

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (9.51 a.m.): The Olympic Games have ended with Australia's best ever gold performance. As a proud nation, we really did see the full spectrum of Olympic glory across an array of sports. Each and every member of this House will no doubt agree that to rank fourth on the overall medal tally was a remarkable effort from a relatively small nation.

But I think there is another performance slightly more remarkable than Australia's—that of Queensland. Every Queenslanders who competed in Athens deserves our full praise. On a medal scale, Queensland produced 19 gold, 18 silver and five bronze medallists—that is counting team events such as hockey, softball and swimming relays. Individually, or as members of a team, Queensland was involved in 19 of Australia's 49 Olympic medals. Medals involving Queenslanders, individually or otherwise, represent 38.7 per cent of Australia's total medal tally and is double our share of the country's population. On a per capita basis, Australia ranks third on a gold medal count behind the Bahamas and Norway. However, looking at Queensland in isolation, we actually come in second behind the Bahamas. If members work it out, we won a gold medal per 542,857 people. We won an Olympic medal—gold, silver or bronze—for every 200,000 people. Both per capita figures are twice as good as Australia's overall performance.

Another huge success story to come out of the Games was the Queensland Academy of Sport. Of the 19 Olympic medals this state won, Queensland Academy of Sport athletes were involved in 17 of them. On final count, Queensland sent 86 athletes to Athens. Sixty-seven of them were QAS athletes who took home a total of 35 medals.

Let me talk briefly about the QAS itself, because it clearly has been the backbone of our phenomenal success this year. I want to thank the executive director, Alex Baumann, and all of his staff for their expertise, their guidance and their unwavering support for our elite athletes. As this House heard a couple of weeks ago, we have come a long way. The academy's evolution has been quite remarkable. When it started in 1991, the QAS had 33 athletes across 11 sports. Now it helps more than 650 athletes across 25 sports. It has become the best state based academy of sport in the country in terms of international success and the world-class facilities, equipment and assistance it offers our athletes.

We employ dedicated and highly qualified coaches who run elite training programs to help take athletes to the pinnacle of their sport. There are head coaches, assistant coaches, regional coaches and network coaches who all contribute to an athlete's journey to the top. They work out techniques, training regimes, strategies, mental toughness and many other facets designed to get the best out of their talent. Our strength and conditioning department forms one of the cornerstone support services alongside coaching. Its staff lend their expertise to improve speed, agility, endurance, strength, flexibility and injury prevention and management.

Sports medicine and sports science are also vital pieces in the puzzle. With the demands that elite sport places on the bodies of athletes, illness and injury prevention, treatment and rehabilitation are of great importance. The sports medicine experts take a wide-ranging approach to athlete health and welfare, with services including specialised sports medicine, physiotherapy, nutrition, psychology and massage. Our leading sports scientists provide cutting-edge support to help athletes gain a competitive advantage. They work closely with the coaches to design testing and training strategies that integrate into the overall performance plans for squads. The QAS has also taken steps to lift Australian sports science to a new level, with a centre of excellence for applied sports science research. We have invested \$2.5 million over four years in the first state-sponsored centre of its kind. We also have successful initiatives such as the talent search program, which identifies potential elite athletes at a young age, and the regionalisation program which targets top talent outside Brisbane. Put all that together and there is a proven recipe for international success, and that is exactly what we have seen over the last few weeks.

With our government's support for sport at all levels stronger than ever, I expect our excellence to continue through to Beijing in 2008. In the meantime, preparations are in full swing for this Friday's street parade and reception for our Olympic heroes. The state government and the Brisbane City Council will co-host the festivities, which will begin at the Edward Street entrance of the Queen Street Mall at 12.30 p.m. The parade will go through the mall and then along George Street to arrive at Parliament House for a state reception at 1.30 p.m. Road closures will apply. I encourage as many Queenslanders as possible to get out there and join in the huge welcome home.

Finally, I seek leave to have incorporated in *Hansard* the full list of Queensland Olympic medallists so that we can acknowledge each one of them individually.

Leave granted.

List of Queensland's 2004 Olympic Games medallists

Archery

Tim Cuddihy—bronze medal in the individual competition

Baseball

Paul Gonzalez, Wayne Ough, Phillip Stockman, David Nilsson, Brett Roneberg, Andrew Utting—silver medal

Canoeing

Clint Robinson—silver medal in the k2 500 metres

Cycling

Sara Carrigan—gold medal in the road race

Anna Meares—gold medal in the 500 metre time trial (world record), bronze medal in the sprint

Hockey

Michael Brennan, Dean Butler, Liam De Young, Jamie Dwyer, Nathan Eglington, Troy Elder, Robert Hammond, Mark Knowles—gold medal

Rowing

Michael Toon—bronze medal in the men's eight (coxswain)

Softball

Sandra Allen, Marissa Carpadios, Amanda Doman, Tanya Harding, Natalie Hodgskin, Brooke Wilkins—silver medal

Swimming

Alice Mills—gold medal in the 4x100 metre freestyle relay (world record), gold medal in the 4x100 metre medley relay (heat swimmer)

Lisbeth Lenton—gold medal in the 4x100 metre freestyle relay (world record), bronze medal in the 50 metre freestyle

Jodie Henry—gold medal in the 4x100 metre freestyle relay (world record), gold medal in the 4x100 metre medley relay (world record), gold medal in the 100 metre freestyle (world record)

Leisel Jones—gold medal in the 4x100 metre medley relay (world record), silver medal in the 200 metre breaststroke and bronze medal in the 100 metre breaststroke

Jessicah Schipper—gold medal in the 4x100 metre medley relay (heat swimmer)

Grant Hackett—gold medal in the 1500 metre freestyle, silver medal in the 400 metre freestyle and silver medal in the 4x200 metre freestyle relay

Nicholas Sprenger—silver medal in the 4x200 metre freestyle relay

Triathlon

Loretta Harrop—silver medal.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

School Technology Infrastructure

Hon. A.M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education and the Arts) (9.57 a.m.): Keeping pace with advancements in technology is a challenge for all organisations, particularly one like Education Queensland, which is responsible for almost 1,300 state schools. However, our government has responded by investing tens of millions of dollars in school technology infrastructure and hardware. All state schools are now connected to the Internet, with 70 per cent of all classrooms now cabled—up from 61 per cent in 2002. We are continuing our investment in this important area, with \$63.4 million allocated this financial year to further integrate information and communication technologies into the curriculum and into classroom practice.

With this infrastructure now in place, we are ready to take the next step. That is, to equip state schools with a modern schools administration and learning management system. The capability of the current schools information management system falls short of what is required to support our teachers and administrators in this era of rapid technological change. Currently, Queensland's 1,292 state schools each operate their own stand-alone school management system. This means that the data keyed into these systems can only be accessed by each individual school. The information is not readily shared across schools and across the system. For example, when students move between state schools their achievements and personal history cannot automatically be accessed by staff at the new school.

The technology to create an integrated school information management system linking Queensland's 1,292 state schools is now available. Today I am pleased to announce that the government has approved the call for tenders from the information technology sector to design, implement and operate a world-class school administration and learning management system in partnership with the Department of Education and the Arts. The request for tender will be released today and will be available on the Queensland government marketplace website.

This is a multimillion-dollar project which is expected to attract a strong and competitive field of tenderers. The proposed system is expected to ease the administrative burden on state schools by giving them the tools to better manage information about students and their achievements. Once implemented, teachers and school administrators will have online access to comprehensive achievement and administrative information on each student, including those who have transferred between schools. This will greatly assist classroom teachers in the development of learning programs and intervention strategies geared to the needs of individual students. The new system will improve the reporting of student achievement to parents, allow more effective timetabling of classes and efficient use of resources and will streamline the processes for the management of school finances. The system will feature inbuilt controls to ensure that students or other unauthorised persons cannot access sensitive information contained within the system.

Following successful contract negotiations and design of the system, implementation of the new system is expected to commence in schools by the second half of 2006 and be operating in all state schools by the end of 2007. I look forward to announcing the successful tender in 2005.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

TAFE, International Students

Hon. T.A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.01 a.m.): The Beattie government is committed to increasing export revenue from education and training. Our efforts are paying off. Last financial year TAFE Queensland institutes enrolled 3,798 international students from 90 countries—an increase of 14.5 per cent on the previous 12 months. This growth has been achieved despite the higher Australian dollar, SARS and the threat of terrorism. By comparison, New South Wales and Victoria have recorded negative international student growth in their vocational programs recently.

Our success means that TAFE Queensland achieved export revenue of nearly \$17 million for 2003-04. When you include these students' personal spending of around \$15 million a year while here, this is a significant boost to Queensland's economy.

TAFE Queensland has a long-term strategy to double exports of education and training between 2001 and 2006. It is currently on track to achieve this. Overseas education and training organisations have recognised the quality and expertise of TAFE Queensland teachers. Approaches are frequently made from offshore colleges to partner our institutes to deliver vocational courses in their own countries. There can be no better example of this than Shanghai Second Polytechnic University. Five years ago, TAFE Queensland signed a memorandum of understanding with the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission to implement a vocational education and training system in Shanghai. Underpinning this memorandum is an agreement for TAFE Queensland to deliver courses in Shanghai. In November 2000 the Hon. Tom Burns formally opened the Queensland College at Shanghai Second Polytechnic University offering two diploma programs. Now the range of these programs is being extended from the original international business and information technology to engineering, tourism and hospitality. Eight TAFE Queensland teachers will travel to Shanghai in a few weeks to facilitate these courses. Revenue from this contract is expected to near \$1 million this financial year. This initiative is project managed by the Open Learning Institute of TAFE and supported by Southbank, Brisbane North, Central Queensland and Tropical North Institutes of TAFE. Let's hope we can clinch more good business like this which creates valuable international links as students return home to become influential professionals and decision makers.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sun Aqua Fish Farm

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for State Development and Innovation) (10.03 a.m.) There has been a high level of interest in the Sun Aqua project. The Premier has mentioned the complexity of the Moreton Bay environment and the planning and management arrangements that apply to it. Consequently, I would like to provide an outline for the parliament of the process that is followed in the preparation and assessment of environmental impact statements under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971.

The state development act sets out a process for impact assessment that includes the following steps: declaration of a project to be 'a significant project for which an EIS is required' if the project meets the criteria in section 27 of the act. In making this determination, the Coordinator-General considers matters such as potential environmental impacts, complexity of local, state and commonwealth requirements and the strategic significance of the project to the state; the preparation of a terms of reference setting out the matters that are to be addressed in the EIS. The draft terms of reference are advertised to obtain stakeholder input. The terms of reference for this project run to 26 pages. They cover an enormous range of issues including water quality, flora and fauna, Moreton Bay Marine Park, cultural heritage, amenity, construction methods, traffic and transportation, waste management, social and economic impacts, health and safety proposed safeguards, mitigation measures, environmental management and monitoring.

The proponent then prepares an environmental impact statement addressing these issues. This EIS is provided to key regulatory agencies for review and made available for public comment. It is usual for the proponent to provide a supplementary report addressing the issues raised in the review process. The process ends when the Coordinator-General considers all the relevant information generated throughout the assessment and determines the conditions that must attach to the development approval, that there are no conditions or requirements for the project or that the application for the development approval must be refused.

In this case, because of the serious issues relating to water quality that arose, the Coordinator-General took the unusual step of preparing an interim evaluation report with the agreement of the proponent. After considering the proponent's response to that report, the Coordinator-General reached the decision that has been provided to the proponent and tabled in this House today.

The Coordinator-General's report will be made publicly available on the website of the Department of State Development and Innovation.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Rail; National Competition Policy

Hon. P.T. LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.06 a.m.): The story of Queensland's social and economic development in the past 135 years is inextricably linked to the rich history of rail. The imposition of national competition policy and its excesses is something I would have

preferred not to have dealt with, but it is a fact, it is a reality and it is something that this government must deal with. Whilst national competition policy presents threats it also presents opportunities for Queensland Rail. With the backing of the Queensland government, Queensland Rail will take the fight right up to Pacific National and any other competitor. Neither myself nor the Leader of the Opposition can stop Pacific National using our rail network, just like we cannot stop interstate trucking companies driving on our roads. But unlike other states, such as New South Wales and Victoria, we will not take the easy way out and sell off our railways.

What we have now is one state owned integrated rail company in Australia—Queensland Rail—and one essential private sector monopoly. That is what national competition policy has got us.

Queensland Rail has set new records for patronage on its Citytrain network and coal tonnages and I am confident QR has a strong future. When Pacific National, which is jointly owned by Toll and Patrick Corporation, begins operation in early 2005, QR will lose half its containerised freight traffic on the North Coast Line between Brisbane and Cairns. It will rip \$32 million out of QR's revenue which means that fewer staff, trains and other assets will be required. For example, Pacific National will not even be using our overhead electric network; they will use diesels. Electrification was a Bjelke-Petersen initiative, I might add.

CEO Bob Scheuber last week personally briefed staff and union officials in Townsville, Rockhampton and Brisbane about the impact and the voluntary redundancy packages offered. Consultation is well under way. But let me make it clear: there will be no sackings and no forced relocations. QR's workforce has been steadily declining due to increased efficiencies, technological changes and competition. In 1966, it had 25,000 staff. Ten years ago it had 16,000 and now it employs 13,500. Under the Beattie government, the statewide reduction in average QR job numbers has been 1.15 per cent per annum. Compare this to the Borbidge government's rate of 2.3 per cent per annum. We continue to invest heavily in securing QR's future. This includes \$400 million in additional expenditure announced in October last year to provide extra Citytrain services; a further \$342.3 million for Citytrain in the Budget; \$104 million each year to fund the Traveltrain service, because people in regional and rural Queensland deserve a fair go; and \$17 million, I might add, in rural freight contracts to subsidise people in the electorate of the member opposite, which is very appropriate.

More than \$6.5 billion has been invested by the state in infrastructure and rolling stock in the past decade. Under successive conservative and Labor governments back to Bjelke-Petersen times, we have spent money on our rail network and other states have not. This record funding is in stark contrast to the recent Commonwealth funding announced under AusLink. Despite having one-fifth of the national rail network, Queensland's share is less than one per cent. We got \$7 million for signalling on the interstate line and \$443 million was spent in the rest of Australia. They wreck their infrastructure, we look after ours and they get the benefit from that funding.

QR is investing more than half a billion dollars in track infrastructure over four years including a new line to the Bauhinia coal mine. Servicing Queenslanders and industry remains QR's core business. Its future lies in its ability to be a national business and it has already secured more than 12 per cent of the coal freight market in the Hunter Valley. More needs to be done. QR's commercial success, driven by its skilled and committed staff, is the key to safeguarding its future.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Climate Outlook; Drought Assistance

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (10.10 a.m.): Earlier this year, many producers in large parts of the state heralded good rains as providing the best start in decades. That rainfall promoted pasture growth and replenished soil moisture after prolonged and severe drought. Based on these quite substantial falls, a number of local drought committees recommended the revocation of the drought declaration for a number of shires. These revocations triggered subsidies for the movement of stock returning from agistment and purchased for restocking for up to another two years.

Almost \$1.9 million in freight subsidies have been paid for restocking purposes in recent months. Of course, these subsidies are in addition to more than \$12 million in freight subsidies for the movement of water and fodder since 1 July last year. They are also in addition to the record levels of aid administered by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority over the same period.

Queensland's traditionally dry winter has been especially dry and, unfortunately, the rainfall probabilities for spring, to be released by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, are poor. The expectation is that for most of the state the chances of receiving above average rainfall in spring will be between 30 per cent and 50 per cent. These rainfall probabilities are based on the current near zero phase of the southern oscillation index. Another issue is that sea surface temperatures in the central Pacific Ocean are warmer than normal and research has shown this can reduce the possibility of rainfall in eastern Australia.

Producers in half of Queensland can continue to access freight subsidies for the movement of fodder and water for stock within 46 shires, eight part shires and 100 individual properties in another 11 shires on the drought declared list. I urge all producers outside those areas who believe they are again impacted by severe drought to contact the Department of Primary Industries for an application for an individually droughted property, IDP, declaration. Over the last month, there has been some interest in IDPs. I remind producers that IDPs provide the same level of freight subsidies for fodder and water as a shire or a part-shire declaration.

While access to Queensland drought assistance remains open, I am extremely concerned about the availability for the Commonwealth's exceptional circumstances assistance for producers on the Darling Downs. EC welfare support for producers in Cambooya, Chinchilla, Clifton, Dalby, Jondaryan, Millmerran, Pittsworth, Toowoomba, Wambo and Warwick, as well as the part shires of Murilla, Rosalie and Tara, expired five weeks ago—23 July—and interest subsidies are due to end on 14 September.

Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss promised an automatic rollover of these declarations. He has failed to deliver. Warren Truss rolled over assistance for parts of NSW last week, but he has failed to do so for parts of his home state of Queensland. It is an indictment on Ian Macfarlane and Bruce Scott, who purport to be the federal representatives for these producers, that welfare assistance has expired without renewal.

I am also surprised by the silence of the Leader of the Opposition and his Darling Downs colleagues, including the spokesman for primary industries, on this matter. Late last week I wrote to Warren Truss urging him to make a decision immediately. Now an election has been called, I am writing to Labor spokesman for agriculture Gavan O'Connor outlining the Darling Downs case so he will be able to approve it if asked to do so during the caretaker period.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Water Resources

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines) (10.14 a.m.): Certainty of water supply to our communities, our farmers and our industries is the most fundamentally important challenge facing Queensland today. Queensland's future growth and economic prosperity depend heavily upon the sustainable management and use of our finite water resources. That is why the Beattie government is getting on with the job of meeting these challenges through our comprehensive water reform and resource planning process.

We are putting in place across Queensland strategies that will ensure security of water supply, improve water use efficiency and provide a framework for future water infrastructure development. We have water resource planning activity ongoing in 90 per cent of the state, and have already completed water resource plans for the Barron, Pioneer, Boyne, Fitzroy, Burnett, Condamine-Balonne, Border Rivers, Georgina-Diamantina, Moonie, Cooper Creek and Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine catchments. We are progressing plans for the Burdekin, Mitchell, Gulf, Calliope, Logan and Mary rivers catchments and doing preliminary scientific work for water resource planning for the greater Brisbane-Moreton region, the Gold Coast, Whitsunday and wet tropics catchments.

We are also working with regional councils to progress specific long-term water supply strategies—which include proposed new water infrastructure—for south-east Queensland, central Queensland and the far north. These will plan for meeting the growing needs of the regions for the next 15 to 50 years. We support appropriate water infrastructure like the Burnett River Dam that is based on solid scientific planning, is economically viable and environmentally sustainable.

However, the ongoing drought has taught us very clearly that we must all value every drop of water we use and be more efficient in our usage. The government's drought water task force, which I chair, is working with communities and rural industries to develop water management strategies to protect town water supplies during drought and provide farmers a fair share of available irrigation water.

Desalination is one option. Last year I commissioned a report, which has been distributed, to help councils utilise desalination technology, such as the new desalination plant now in operation at Dalby and another being considered for Miles. We also have drought management strategies in place for communities in the Wide Bay, Logan-Beaudesert, Mary-Gympie, and Upper Burnett areas while others are being finalised for the Pioneer area, including Mackay, the Dawson and Emerald areas.

Improved water use efficiency is a major focus for the government. We are working to encourage greater use of recycled water by domestic, rural and industrial water users and we support council rainwater tank programs to improve water use efficiency in the home.

We are also saving more than 100,000 megalitres of water a year through our bore capping program in the Great Artesian Basin and conducting trials on new dam covers to help reduce the 40 per cent of water lost from dams each year through evaporation. The government's rural water use efficiency initiative has proved an outstanding success and we are providing financial grants to

thousands of farmers to access the latest irrigation technology. To date, the program has surpassed its original target of boosting farm productivity by \$250 million a year and saving 180,000 megalitres of water each year.

The Beattie government is proud of its achievements to date in water reform and we will continue to work hard to ensure Queensland's future growth and prosperity are underpinned by the sustainable management and use of our precious water resources.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.18 a.m.): I am pleased to report that the reform work of the Department of Child Safety over the last quarter has delivered significant progress in the child safety performance measures. These performance measures are in the early stages of development and as Minister for Child Safety I am determined to lead Australia in this work as part of the Beattie government's commitment to be open, transparent and accountable. Progress in implementing the Peter Forster blueprint has been substantial. Already 16 of the 110 recommendations have been fully met, although the majority of the recommendations are not scheduled for finalisation until late 2004 or during 2005 and 2006.

The organisational structures for the Department of Child Safety and the Department of Communities have been announced and 248 change management and staff transition workshops completed, attended by more than 2,300 staff. Child safety directors have now been appointed to the 10 government agencies aligned with child protection. A nationwide recruitment campaign for 518 additional staff over three years—with 318 scheduled for 2003-04—resulted in 1,600 applications. Stage 1 of legislative reforms has been completed, and stage 2 reforms will be introduced to parliament in late September. A new \$13.2 million funding round for 134 additional alternative care places has been completed and attracted 108 submissions, with contracts to be awarded shortly.

Some key measures reflect workloads in the system and indicate the effectiveness of the interventions with children, their families and of course their carers. The statistics indicate that departmental interventions are working in a number of significant areas. The data compares 2002-03 with estimated actual results for 2003-04. It is provisional material and will be fully reported to cabinet in November 2004 in the 2003-04 *Child protection system baseline* report. For example, over the last two financial years the number of notifications increased by 3,555 from 31,068 in 2002-03 to 34,623 in 2003-04. Principally, this increase was due to the significant attention and scrutiny of the child protection system from government, media and the community, and so should it have been, and we see positively now a greater increase in the number of notifications. More than 170 temporary positions were created to specifically address the backlog of child protection notifications. I know that the member for Logan will be very pleased to hear this, as I have discussed it with him on many occasions—that is, I am pleased to note that the backlog of over 1,000 notifications awaiting initial assessment in the Logan area office in April is now running at less than 100.

The performance data also indicate that the number of deaths of children known to the child protection system rose from 19 in 2002-03 to 36 in 2003-04. However, as I said at the estimates committee, we need to take care when noting this increase. The quality of child deaths data has been historically poor and improvements to data collection have occurred over the past months and will continue to advance due to information exchange protocols with Births, Deaths and Marriages and stage 1 legislation amendments. Given these historical issues, the validity and comparability of the stated 19 child deaths in 2002-03 is highly questionable. A better approach is to compare the percentage of total child deaths in Queensland with the number of at-risk children who died. In the latest 2001 census year data, 562 children—or approximately 0.06 per cent of the population aged 17 years or under—died in Queensland. In 2003-04, 0.1 per cent of children known to the department died from a range of causes. Given the complexity of the issues faced by families of at-risk children, it is sad but not surprising that a slightly higher percentage of children at risk died. Seven of the 36 deaths in 2003-04 were of children or youngsters in the department's care at the time of their death. Six of those seven died of natural causes and the cause of the remaining death is yet to be determined.

Under new legislation, every child death known to my department will be thoroughly investigated. Our system will be responsive to review findings to ensure that our practices and case work are of the very highest standard. While most jurisdictions focus on deaths from abuse and neglect only, rigorous departmental reviews will be undertaken on all children known to the department within three years prior to their death, regardless of cause of death. We will continue to lead the way in this regard. My commitment to transparency and accountability is affirmed by the very easy accessibility of child deaths data on the department's information gateway and our use of independent external reviewers.

It is important that in Queensland we do not lose sight of the need for all parents to show diligent care in looking after their children. This is a matter, as all members of this House would be aware, of life

or death for our young people or our babies. It is also important that the media and the community do not pre-judge the circumstances surrounding a child's death. The death of any child is distressing—to the family, to my departmental staff and of course to the broader community. To automatically assume that the death of a child known to the department relates to abuse and neglect is unjust and unhelpful, both to the family and also to my departmental staff. In all fairness, we need to await the outcomes of the child death reviews before final judgments are made.

My department is currently reviewing data from a range of sources in relation to allegations of abuse by foster carers. In reviewing this data, the department has identified the need to consult with relevant organisations to improve current policies and practices relating to such notifications and their investigation. As the inaugural Minister for Child Safety, I am pleased to be able to present this information to the House today and reaffirm the Beattie government's commitment not only to accountability but also to providing the best possible support and care to the most vulnerable children and young people in the state of Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Care Independent Living Inc., Bribie Island

Hon. F.W. PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors) (10.25 a.m.): There is nothing more deplorable than the abuse of vulnerable people. It is a sad fact that abuse does occur, and government must continually improve mechanisms to prevent it. The Adult Guardian has produced a report detailing instances of abuse of people with a disability at Care Independent Living on Bribie Island. The Adult Guardian is an independent body and has chosen not to release the report publicly, so I cannot discuss its findings in detail. I am also conscious that police investigations are continuing and I do not want to jeopardise those investigations. But I will say this: the government will do everything in its power to prevent people becoming victims of abuse.

I have asked my director-general to meet with the Adult Guardian to discuss any outstanding issues in relation to Care Bribie. The Queensland government is very concerned about this situation. For this reason, I raised with the Premier the possibility of licensing or regulating supported accommodation providers. This is one option we are considering to increase government powers to intervene in situations where there are reports of abuse. DSQ stopped referring clients to Care Bribie and cut all direct funding to the organisation last year. There are, however, several clients who receive individual packages from DSQ who have chosen to remain living at the facility. This is a personal choice and DSQ has no right to forcibly remove these people. I can assure the House that DSQ is keeping a very close eye on Care Bribie and has been making weekly visits.

The department is already implementing various changes in light of the Adult Guardian report into Care Bribie. DSQ is currently implementing the quality assurance system. The system comprises a mix of external quality audits, continuous improvement plans, service user assessment and service provider self-assessment. Importantly, the system will involve significant input from people with a disability. As part of the quality assurance system, government this year introduced the Queensland disability service standards. These outline 10 clear standards aimed at improving the quality of services in the disability sector. The Adult Guardian report highlighted the need for DSQ to improve mechanisms for complaints against non-government organisations. I have asked the director-general to review these mechanisms as a matter of priority.

Also, during this term the Beattie government will amend the Queensland Disability Services Act. Nine issues papers for public consultation have already been released as part of that process. These papers focused on three main themes: coverage of the act, safety, and accountability and monitoring. One of the significant outcomes of the review will be an improved and accountable funding and regulatory framework for the delivery of specialist disability services in Queensland. As I said earlier, government must continually improve mechanisms for preventing abuse of any kind against anyone. If there can be any positives that come of this, it will be the reform of the disability sector. I give my commitment as Minister for Disability Services that the focus of this reform will remain sharply on protecting the rights and the interests of people with a disability.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Comments by Leader of the Opposition

Hon. N.I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (10.28 a.m.): Following the last sitting week in this parliament, a letter to the editor from the Leader of the Opposition was printed in the Bundaberg *News-Mail* headed 'Cunningham cops attack'. That letter read—

Obviously fairness and natural justice for private property owners does not rate with Labor's local Member Nita Cunningham who did not bother to turn up to vote on the Charter of Property Rights legislation in State Parliament on Wednesday.

It went on to say—

Without a word from Nita Cunningham on this important issue the bill was ultimately voted down by those Labor Party members who bothered to turn up.

The National Party has reached the bottom of the barrel with their leader Lawrence Springborg attacking me in such a way. Where is his sense of fairness and natural justice? I have openly stated that I recently had skin cancer surgery in Brisbane and will be having follow-up treatment for some weeks to come. For those reasons, I had leave from the parliament on that Wednesday after 11.30 a.m.

In all of my 16 and a half years in public life, both in local government and state parliament, I do not recall ever taking time off for ill health and I do not ever recall a more cowardly attack on an elected member. Unfortunately, it will be necessary for me to have more leave over the next six and a half weeks for ongoing treatment. However, during this time I will still be working every day. I will continue to sit in this parliament when possible and I will ensure that my Bundaberg office continues to be one of the busiest and most efficient electorate offices in Queensland.

The Opposition Leader should apologise. I suggest that in future the National Party check its facts before it launches into cowardly attacks in a vain attempt to win cheap political points.

PRIVILEGE

Private Members' Statements

Hon. K.R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (10.29 a.m.): Mr Speaker, I bring to your notice the fact that the government has deliberately stopped the Leader of the Opposition speaking in the first hour—a strategy which occurred last week when the government then changed the sessional orders to bring on a debate on electricity.

Mr Quinn: I want to table reports.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We cannot table them. They will have to wait until tomorrow.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Electricity Supply, Briefing of MPs

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.30 a.m.): My question is to the Minister for Energy, and I ask: what does it feel like for the minister to be rolled by the Premier on the fourth day of his new job when he tried to be accountable? Can the minister confirm that this means he is just another temporary Labor Party minister?

Mr MICKEL: I thank the Leader of the Opposition, my honourable friend, for his imagination. As I was preparing for the day, I noticed a quote from me which said, 'I won't do the briefing personally. I think that would be over the top.' Those are my words. How do I know? Because the Leader of the Opposition sent me this letter with my words in it.

What is happening today? The honourable the Premier and I will be arranging for a briefing. I will not be doing it personally. I am going to have the executive there. I invite the honourable gentleman to be there. Who will be there? None other than the other opposition, the Liberal Party. So when it comes to briefings, we have two oppositions and two different policies. Let me quote from the ABC this morning—one of my favourite programs that I listen to when I wake up.

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroochydhore. You are now warned under standing order 253.

Mr MICKEL: They do not like it. It is the most energy that they have shown in weeks.

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Darling Downs is warned under standing order 253.

Mr MICKEL: Leave him here, Mr Speaker. Every circus needs a clown.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is unparliamentary.

Mr MICKEL: Of course. I was distracted. This morning on 4QR at 6 o'clock the honourable member for Robina—the decent leader of the opposition, the one with a little bit of heart, a little bit of commonsense, a bit of intelligence—said, 'The fact that the Premier has put this briefing on indicates that he is prepared to spend his time and effort making an effort. We think that it would be pretty silly and immature not to attend.' The fact of the matter is that growing old is mandatory, but growing up is optional. I ask the honourable gentleman, my dear friend, to grow up.

Electricity Supply, Opposition Briefing

Mr SPRINGBORG: My question is to the Minister for Energy. I refer to his flip-flop position on the briefing, which was offered to the opposition by the Premier over a month ago, then reneged on and then committed to by his government—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We will have the question.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Then the minister was rolled by his leader. I also refer the minister to a memo sent to all non-government members yesterday in which he said that the CEOs of Energex and Ergon have been 'invited to attend' the briefing that he would be giving. By late last night it was, 'The CEOs of Energex and Ergon will attend.' I also refer the minister to his commitment last week where he said, 'I won't be briefing personally. I think that would be over the top.' I ask the minister: what information was provided to the minister by Energex and Ergon that caused him to change his mind on his original commitment? Does this backflip just prove that he is another temporary Labor Party puppet minister?

Mr MICKEL: Let me answer the question this way. It has always been my policy, whether in this position or in the previous one, to make sure that, on the big issues, the opposition is briefed. The Leader of the Opposition knows that as well as I do.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has asked the question.

Mr MICKEL: I like the cardboard cut-out of the member better than him at the moment. The Leader of the Opposition should come and see it in my office. It is better dressed than he is.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister will turn to the question.

Mr MICKEL: Mr Speaker, I am sorry. I was distracted. The point is that on all the big issues I brief the opposition. Let me tell members what happened with fishing. Before the estimates committee hearings, I released our proposal on fishing. I thought that in three hours, they could ask me a question about it. We have the laziest but best resourced opposition in Australia. In three hours, they did not ask me one question—not one—on the big issues. I invited them. I asked my office to say, 'We will make a briefing available to you.' What happened? The Leader of the Opposition said, 'Not everybody is here now.' So we said, 'We will give you two briefings. We will give you one for the leadership and one for when parliament is sitting.' They said no to the leadership one, but yes to the one when parliament was sitting. So I provided the public servants my office for a briefing on the single biggest issue. How many of those lazy jokers opposite showed up? Four of them—on the biggest issue around the place!

Last week on my way to Adelaide, what did they do? On the Thursday they said to me, 'We would like to see the call centre on Monday.' I received the message on the Friday when we were trying to pack up our office. I said, 'By all means, grant it.' That happened yesterday. I also indicated that I would make the Energex and Ergon executives available. What is happening? Today, that is exactly what is going on. Who is showing up? The Leader of the Opposition, in his childish pantomime, says that he is spitting the dummy, that he is not showing up, but the responsible opposition, the Liberal Party, is showing up.

The fact of the matter is that we have the laziest but best resourced opposition in Australia. When it comes to the big issues, when it comes to stepping up to the plate, they have a heart the size of a caraway seed. They walk away from responsibility. To them, responsibility is like Dracula with one of those wooden stakes.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Deputy Leader of the Opposition under standing order 253.

Mr MICKEL: I appeal today to the Leader of the Opposition to show some leadership and be there.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Hervey Bay, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers of Abercorn State School in the electorate of Callide.

Virgin Blue

Mr McNAMARA: My question is addressed to the Premier. The National and Liberal parties are constantly attacking the government's aggressive policy of attracting businesses to Queensland. Could the Premier tell the House about the results which have been achieved through Virgin Blue's decision to locate here?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for Hervey Bay for his question. When I first approached—

Mr Hobbs: How many times have you been on it?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warrego! I now warn you under standing order 253.

Mr BEATTIE: When I first approached Richard Branson on behalf of the government in November 1999 to urge him to consider the advantages of locating his new airline in Queensland instead of New South Wales or more likely Victoria, he was predicting 300 new jobs in the first year. We were successful in wooing Virgin, and today—31 August—marks the fourth anniversary of Virgin Blue's first flight from Brisbane to Sydney. Less than a year after that first flight, in May 2001, Virgin Blue was already talking of 700 staff and forecasting 1,000 jobs by Christmas 2001. Now, Virgin Blue has 2,240 staff in Queensland.

It is not just those jobs we have to thank Virgin for. Virgin Blue has introduced its cheaper fares to seven destinations in Queensland, in addition to its Brisbane headquarters, bringing thousands of tourists who otherwise would not have been able to afford to come here. It has meant new jobs in our tourism industry, our second biggest industry. Figures released today by the Deloitte and Touche HotelBenchmark survey show that Brisbane occupancy rate revenue for each hotel room increased by nearly 13 per cent in the first six months of last year compared to the same period the year before. The survey says that fare discounting by Virgin and Qantas contributed to the result. The story does not end there.

I want to congratulate the Hervey Bay City Council for deciding to spend \$11 million on improving the runway and terminal at Hervey Bay airport to enable larger passenger jets to land and take off, something strongly supported by the member for Hervey Bay. The council has negotiated with Virgin Blue and Jetstar to fly directly between Sydney and Hervey Bay in time for the 2005 whale watching season. This is expected to result in a major tourist boom in the area that has already resulted in Peppers Retreats and Resorts announcing that it will build a \$70 million resort in Hervey Bay. The airport upgrade will offer the travelling public and local business community access to cheaper airfares and improved operations. Virgin Blue will fly its 737-700 aircraft into the city, carrying up to 144 passengers on each flight. Jetstar will also fly Boeing 737 aircraft.

I say happy fourth birthday to Virgin Blue and thanks for all the jobs. I say to members in this House: this is what the government's incentives program is all about. This has produced jobs for Queensland. It has been the biggest shot in the arm for the tourism industry we have ever had, and I stand by that program.

Electricity Boards, Appointments

Mr SEENEY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Energy. When will the minister be reviewing the make-up of the boards of the energy GOCs? If the minister wants to appoint new board members, will he accept getting rolled again by the Premier and the Treasurer?

Mr MICKEL: Some mothers do 'ave 'em! All in good time and all will be revealed when I have a chance to meet the boards. Members would appreciate that I have not done that yet. I have had a very good meeting with the chairmen.

Mr Beattie: A very busy first week.

Mr MICKEL: I have had a busy first week. I must say, I thought we had a great day down there on Friday. We had a great win for Queensland—getting that review—

Mr Schwarten: They're not interested in that.

Mr MICKEL: They are not interested in that, but I am and I know that the people of Queensland are—in the whole issue of load shedding. In answer to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, those decisions are made by the cabinet. I actually want to meet the board first. I would like to be in the job a week and then I will make up my mind. I will do that in good time. I will tell honourable members this: I will spend every waking moment trying to make sure faith in Queensland's electricity system is restored.

There are two different policies on the other side. The Leader of the Opposition wants to nationalise the show and the member for Robina and the Liberals say they will not have a bar of it. We have got two different oppositions and two different policies. We have had a review into the electricity distribution system, we have an implementation plan and, by golly, that is exactly what I am going to be doing.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Stafford, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers of Carina State School in the electorate of Chatsworth.

Smithsonian Fellowships

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: My question is directed to the Premier. I believe that most Queenslanders welcomed the decision by the Beattie government to introduce the Smithsonian Fellowship Program in 2001. I ask: what has resulted from this program since its introduction?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. At midday today I will be launching a history of Queensland's involvement in world expos, written by 2001 Queensland Smithsonian fellow Dr Judith McKay. I will also be calling for nominations for the 2005 Smithsonian fellowships, which are

part of the Smart State strategy about enriching not just Queenslanders but also the future research that is being done in Queensland. The fellowships range from three to 12 months and enable Queenslanders to work at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington on research projects—building up our level of knowledge, building up our skills, building up the Smart State and building up our universities and research institutions.

Dr McKay, who is a curator at the Queensland Museum, was awarded one of the inaugural Queensland-Smithsonian fellowships in 2001 to research her book, *Showing off! Queensland at world expositions 1862 to 1988*. For anyone wondering what good our participation in world expositions does to promote Queensland, a great example is the guidebook that was published at the 1908 Franco-British exposition in London. The guidebook describes Queensland—some things never change—as—

... a land of eternal sunshine, where snow is unknown and where the course of production in some form or other goes on all year round—a land whose winter climate has no rival in the whole world.

The book gives many insights into life in Queensland over the past century. For example, it tells readers how three different Queensland exhibits bound for overseas expositions were lost in shipwrecks in the late 1800s. Ten pages are devoted to the hugely successful Expo 88 held here in Brisbane.

I would like to encourage people throughout the Smart State to put in applications for the three fellowships that are available. Applications for the 2005 fellowships close in December. Once again, my government is contributing \$90,000 to the program.

I have here the book I will be launching this afternoon. I would urge people to get a hold of it and have a read. I should mention that one of the things I will be doing is examining and announcing very shortly the Queensland government's position in relation to the expo that will be held in Japan next year. As I indicated earlier, I will be embarking on a trade mission next week. Part of that is designed to deal with our presence at that exposition. As members know, with the tourism market in Japan being so strong for us, it is very important that we have a visual presence there. Very shortly I will be announcing what our position will be, how much we will be spending and what sort of presence we will have.

These fellowships are very important. As I indicated earlier, they are about giving people an opportunity to learn and research. That is what we will continue to do.

Energex Board; Mr M. Bucknall

Mr COPELAND: My question is addressed to the Minister for Energy. I refer the minister to even more Labor Party cronies appointed to the board of Energex, and I particularly refer to Mr Mark Bucknall, who sits on the board of Energex Retail, and I ask: is it not a fact that this is the same Mark Bucknall who is a prominent member of the Labor lawyers association; is it not a fact that Mark Bucknall was appointed to the board in 1999; and is it not a fact that this is the same Mark Bucknall, from Mark Bucknall Solicitors, who donated \$27,600 to Labor's 2001 election campaign as part of a corrupt deal to ensure that this Labor crony was reappointed to the board if Labor won the election? Will the minister put a stop to Labor's cronyism and corruption?

Opposition members interjected.

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

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Leader of the Opposition under standing order 253. I call the Minister for Energy, and we are going to have order in this chamber from now on.

Mr MICKEL: Let me state that as long as I am the Energy Minister in this government nobody will ever buy their way on to any board, ever.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warrego! I have already warned you. Under standing order 253 you will now leave the chamber.

Interruption.

PRIVILEGE

Standing Order 251

Mr LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (10.50 a.m.): Mr Speaker, you have continually warned the opposition under 253 but now you have a minister who interjects. What about standing order 251?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There was not a minister on his feet; it was interjections after the question. I ask the member for Warrego to leave this chamber. I run this House, not the member for Beaudesert.

Whereupon the member for Warrego withdrew from the chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Energex Board; Mr M. Bucknall

Resumed from p. 2083.

Mr MICKEL, continuing: I repeat: as long as I am Energy Minister nobody but nobody will ever buy their way on to any board. Why would they ask this sort of shabby question? Because they know in all the corrupt years that they have presided over things you could buy your way into a knighthood.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Burnett!

Mr MICKEL: That is the shabby standard they judge others by. I pride myself on this: when I was the Minister for the Environment I used to say to people then, 'I don't care about your politics and I never have.'

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Toowoomba South!

Mr MICKEL: I know that there is a pause over there because they all know the Public Service hit list when careers were destroyed on suspicion. They know about that. All of us who have served in this House in whatever capacity know that. I always said that to the Public Service, and they can ring up any of my former directors and ask them. I challenge you to do so. The member for Lockyer would know this because he used to have a fair bit to do with them. I used to say this: 'I don't care about your politics but I do care about your professionalism. Give us your best advice on time every time,' and I prided myself the other day when they said farewell to me in praising me for that.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Toowoomba South! This is my final warning.

Mr MICKEL: It is a badge I wear with honour because I do not care about people's politics when it comes to getting this industry right. It does not bother me. What bothers me is professionalism. What bothers me is getting the right advice every time on time. I know they cannot take it because they judge everybody by their own miserable standards.

Ethanol Roadshow

Mr MULHERIN: My question is directed to the Minister for State Development and Innovation. The Leader of the Opposition issued a media statement calling on the ethanol roadshow to travel south instead of going to north Queensland. Is the minister aware of any alternative views by members opposite?

Mr McGRADY: First of all, I thank the member for Mackay and other members of this House who participated in and assisted with the ethanol roadshow to ensure it was the huge success which it was. The Treasurer this morning mentioned that the Olympic Games is finished, and what a huge success it was. The ethanol roadshow is finished and, whilst it did not have the same attendances as the Olympics, we certainly had hundreds of people—

A government member: It was very popular here.

Mr McGRADY: It was very popular here. It was very popular right up and down the coast. I think it is appropriate this morning that we look at what the National Party said about the roadshow. First of all, we have the Senate candidate Barnaby Joyce. Barnaby said that it was a charade, a dodgy publicity campaign and a waste of taxpayers' funds. If we look to what the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Springborg, said, he said that it should go south and he called it little more than a stunt. To sum up, the Nationals called it a stunt, dodgy, a charade and a waste of money.

You can imagine my surprise, Mr Speaker, as I glanced through the clips and saw Mr Marc Rowell visiting the promotional bus in Ingham on Saturday. Again, you can imagine my surprise when I saw the local member for Burdekin jumping on the bus.

An opposition member: She's prettier than you are.

Mr McGRADY: She is prettier than me; that is right. Ted Malone also paid the roadshow a visit in Mackay and he said it was a great idea. What I want to know today is whether these opposition members or Mr Springborg believe it was a charade, a stunt or a waste of money? Of course not, because the reality was they were tripping over themselves to try to get a photograph taken of them getting on the bus.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Burnett! This is my final warning.

Mr McGRADY: What did the member for Hinchinbrook say when he was interviewed by the local media? He said, 'I was glad it stopped at Ingham.' He said, 'It enabled residents of the district to gain an understanding of the Brazilian industry and would assist in their participation in the establishment of an Australian ethanol industry.' I thought it was a media release from my office. It was not; it came direct from him.

Minister for Energy

Mr QUINN: My question is directed to the Minister for Energy. I refer the minister to his claim last week that he was well qualified to handle the new Energy portfolio because he had 'personally experienced blackouts'. I ask: if all it takes to be 'Mr Energy' in Queensland is to personally experience blackouts, does that not qualify most Queenslanders for the job? Under the Beattie government, are they not becoming better qualified every day?

Mr MICKEL: You can see why I am glad he is coming to the briefing! That was part of a quote. The point is this: when I first became the member for Logan I inherited what was bequeathed to me from the National Party electricity system. We knew all about it in Marsden because the power used to go out all the time and we were very familiar with it. Over the three years when I was a backbencher I fought very hard for my constituency to make sure that would never happen again. The honourable member for Waterford and the honourable member for Woodridge know exactly what I am talking about.

The outer metropolitan areas have been neglected by the National Party. One of the tasks that I set myself was to make sure that the Browns Plains substation was enlarged and upgraded because the small business people in that area had complained for ages about outages and about brownouts. So what I did was make sure that we augmented that system. Simultaneously—and this was one left to me by the member for Beaudesert—the power link had an easement to put a line through there. Whilst everybody wants the electricity, nobody wants the powerlines. They are the most difficult issues that you can face, and face it I did. I was prepared because I wanted a system that was completely upgraded. The member for Robina knows all about this because that line helped upgrade and augment the system to the Gold Coast. So I come to it with that.

I also come with 20 years background. Twenty years takes you back. It takes you back to a few incidents. It takes me back to my own family who were employed in the electricity industry. They will tell you all about how great it was under Bjelke-Petersen getting sacked because you went on strike and losing all your benefits! They will tell you all about losing your superannuation.

I will also tell members one other thing. I was around this place when the Borbidge government came in. I was around when it ripped the dividends right out of the system. That is what my background allows me to have—20 years experience, 20 years of knowing you jokers and knowing where the bodies are buried because I know all about their rotten performance in the electricity industry. I know how the opposition tore the money out of those dividends. The opposition is behaving like Rip van Winkle at the moment. Their web site says that there were no outages under the National Party. What about the corporation under Gilmore? Did it forget that? This is sort of Rip van Winkle stuff. They were asleep the whole time the power was out. What a shame!

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order! Before calling the member for Kallangur, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers of Southern Cross College, Kippa-Ring in the electorate of Murrumbidgee.

Energy Efficiency

Mr HAYWARD: I direct my question to the Minister for Energy. Queensland is leading the way nationally in encouraging the smarter use of electricity. Would the minister detail how this will benefit electricity customers across Australia?

Mr MICKEL: I thank the honourable member for asking the most intelligent question on energy this morning. I want to pay tribute to the Queensland public servants who have been leading Australia. I might say that I did not ask them about their politics, either. It was a delight to be in Adelaide last Friday with my friend from Stretton who also put a lot of leg work into this, and I thank him for that.

I simply say this to the honourable member: I am proud that Queensland is taking the lead in implementing a national energy efficiency framework. As I said, at last Friday's ministerial council meeting we secured the backing of the federal government and the other states and territories to prepare a plan to be signed off by December of this year. It is a nine-point plan, but it is more important than that: it is a breakthrough for Australia. It is a breakthrough because it has the potential to save up to \$750 million a year in energy costs, or one-quarter of the identified cost-effective energy savings potential across the Australian economy. Up to 1,000 jobs could also be created through the adoption of this plan. It is a nine-point plan and it proposes, amongst other things, the introduction of benchmarking

of power bills. The bills will tell customers how much an average consumer uses and will allow them to compare their consumption with the community average.

We will also introduce energy efficient courses in our schools. This will build upon some of the successes we have already achieved in Queensland with programs such as Solar Schools. I alerted the House earlier this year to a project where I went out to Thargomindah—a small town but leading the world in the last century and participating now in the Solar Towns program. It is a fascinating and great project.

I also commend to the House the national energy efficiency rating for all new houses, units, apartments and major renovations. This will be the single biggest breakthrough, if we can adopt it, not just in this state but also Australia-wide. I also want to commend to the House the energy performance standards for commercial buildings. No state has this at present. I hope that Queensland will lead the way when it comes to this, because I have asked them to write a letter to my friend the Minister for Public Works and also to the honourable the Premier to make sure that Queensland is participating in this right across the board.

We are going to have uniform national training in energy efficient assessment for builders, architects, plumbers, electricians and engineers. We are also requiring governments to publish annual reports on the energy performance of their agencies. We are going to broaden the energy rating scheme to include more appliances in the commercial sector. We are going to require governments to give energy performance ratings for buildings they lease.

I would like to have more time. It was a great scheme. I commend the Queensland Public Service for giving us the lead in the nation on this very exciting program.

FarmBis

Ms LEE LONG: My question is to the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. We are all aware that the challenges to primary industries today are enormous and that farmers in particular are in desperate need of assistance to cope with these challenges. The FarmBis program has been of enormous benefit to them, yet this program has been cut and will not resume until January 2005. I ask: why has this program been slashed? Can the minister guarantee that it will resume in January 2005?

Mr PALASZCZUK: I would like to thank the honourable member for the question. I would like to put on the record of the Queensland parliament how successful FarmBis I and FarmBis II have been in assisting our primary producers. There is a problem with FarmBis III, and that problem rests with the federal government. FarmBis III, like FarmBis II and FarmBis I, is a joint Commonwealth-state funded scheme. We were not able to get agreement from the Commonwealth government when it was first announced in its budget in May. Unless there is agreement between the Commonwealth government and the states the scheme cannot go ahead.

But I have good news for the honourable member. We, as a government, are committed to FarmBis III. As a matter of fact, members opposite talk about cuts in funding: FarmBis II was funded to the tune of \$166 million by the Commonwealth and the states. This year the Commonwealth government has reduced its share of funding to just under \$66 million. We, as a government, again will have the lion's share of funding for FarmBis III for our primary producers. And yes, I can give the honourable member the assurance that FarmBis III will commence in 2005.

While I am on my feet, could I just say one thing: I took offence at the mouse pad that was shown to this House by the Minister for Energy which depicted a logo and a slogan from the communist regime. My parents escaped communism. My constituents—the Vietnamese people—escaped communism as well. For goodness sake, do not remind those people of those dreadful times and those dreadful places that they got away from. I would implore the honourable Leader of the Opposition to withdraw that mouse pad and think of the sensitivities of the Vietnamese people in my electorate and think of the sensitivities of the Taiwanese people. They have escaped the ravages of communism, and he is putting that out and reminding them of it once again.

When I speak to National Party members and I tell them about this mouse pad, do members know what they say to me? They do not believe that the National Party could ever come to something like that. I do not mind his other paraphernalia but, for goodness sake, let me ask the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of my constituents, to withdraw that stupid communist slogan mouse pad of his.

Mental Health Association, Gold Coast Branch

Mrs SMITH: My question is to the honourable Minister for Health. There has been much speculation regarding the future of the Gold Coast branch of the Mental Health Association of Queensland. Can the minister advise what the current situation is in relation to funding for this very important service?

Mr NUTTALL: I thank the honourable member for the question and thank her for her representations on behalf of that organisation, along with other honourable members on the Gold Coast.

I have been made aware that there have been a number of issues in relation to the tender outcomes for this organisation. Queensland Health has worked with both the Mental Health Association of Queensland and the Gold Coast branch of that association to try to find a satisfactory resolution to the concerns that have been raised. I have been advised by the director-general of my department that the Mental Health Association of Queensland will receive funding for the specific purpose of maintaining the operation of the Gold Coast office. Over the next nine months Queensland Health and the Mental Health Association will review the overall service delivery profile to ensure that they will maintain a physical presence on the Gold Coast.

Let me assure the honourable members of the House that this government recognises the vital role performed in particular by non-government organisations in complementing public sector mental health treatment services, supporting continuity of care and assisting consumers in their recovery process. It is important to remember that we have announced a record \$6.9 million funding package for community organisations for new and expanded mental health services throughout this state. This is an additional \$850,000 this year as part of funds to 55 NGOs to provide services for mental health consumers and carers. The government spent seven per cent of its mental health budget on services provided by non-government community groups, the second highest of all Australian states and well above the national average of 4.9 per cent.

We are very aware that mental health is an important health issue, particularly for honourable members on the Gold Coast. We have already spent \$100 million on a capital works program for extra mental health beds in new facilities around the state. It is the largest capital works program of its kind in this country. Last year we spent more than \$321 million on mental health services in Queensland and an additional \$13.4 million has been allocated in this year's state budget. In addition, the Beattie Labor government has employed an extra 600 mental health workers this financial year, and we will spend a further \$11.5 million to employ another 100 new community based mental health clinicians. I assure the honourable member and other honourable members on the Gold Coast that we are committed to maintaining that service on the Gold Coast.

Drugs in Schools

Mr MESSENGER: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I refer to the latest example of your department's soft on drugs policy that has overturned a recommendation from a school that students who were caught with illegal drugs at school be expelled. Minister, does this decision not indicate to teachers, students and parents that the use of drugs in schools is acceptable to your government?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. Just before answering it, can I correct something that was put on the record earlier regarding the business of the House when it was alleged that in the last sitting the government had in some way prohibited the Leader of the Opposition from speaking prior to question time. In fact, *Hansard* records that Mr Springborg spoke for the normal two minutes which left enough time for the member for Mudgeeraba to speak. I would suggest that the member for Beaudesert check his facts.

I am pleased that this question has been asked because it does give me an opportunity to put on the record the facts about how the behaviour management system in Queensland schools works. Firstly, schools in the state system are required to develop a behaviour management plan. That plan has to be negotiated with the school community: the teachers, the parents, students and others. That behaviour management plan will reflect the expected standards of that school. All behaviour management plans will have common elements but they are not identical. Under the Education Act principals have the power to make a recommendation to the executive director about exclusion of a student for something that is consistent with the behaviour management plan. The executive director of schools in the Queensland system is the decision maker, not the principal. The principal makes a recommendation and the executive director makes the decision. It would make a mockery of the system if every recommendation of a principal was simply rubber stamped by the executive director. Executive directors are expected to exercise a judgement and to take into account all of the circumstances of a case.

You would think from the way that the opposition bleats on about this system that it was invented by the Labor Party as some sort of Labor plot. Well, the facts are very different. When did we inherit this system? This system was put in place by a comprehensive set of amendments to the behaviour management program contained in legislation that was introduced by the current Leader of the Liberal Party when he was the minister for education in the coalition government that the current National Party was a part of.

Who ran the education system when this behaviour management system was put in place? The Queensland National Party in coalition with its Liberal Party colleagues. I suggest to the member for Burnett that this system has enjoyed bipartisan support for nearly six or seven years. These are very difficult decisions that are not black and white. They are complex; they have long-lasting effects on the lives of children and on the good order of our schools. I expect our executive directors—as was required when the Liberal Party Leader moved these amendments in the parliament six years ago—to make a

very, very careful judgment on every circumstance and to make a sound decision. They should have our support for those sorts of decisions, not that kind of cheap politics.

Core Skills Test

Mr POOLE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education, Anna Bligh. I understand year 12 students will be undertaking their core skills test today. Will the minister please advise members what the purpose of this test is?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Yes, the member is correct; the Queensland core skills test is being conducted across every state and non-state secondary school in Queensland today. Almost 30,000 students have begun to sit four test papers. Those test papers will be undertaken over two days and they will be made up of a range of different tasks, including multiple choice and short response answers as well as comprehensive writing tests.

The tests will examine 49 elements that are common to the Queensland senior curriculum, including recognition of letters, words and other symbols, comparing, contrasting and hypothesising. This test is accessible to all year 12 students. However, not all year 12 students will sit the test. The test is required if a student is seeking an OP score. All of our OP eligible students must sit for the test. However, those who are not seeking an OP score may choose not to sit the test although some of them do sit it.

The test examines those elements regardless of the individual differences in students' subject enrolments. The results are used to provide information to compile overall positions, or what has become known in the Queensland system as OP scores, and field positions. I would stress that the core skills test is only one component in the construction of an OP score. An OP score in itself is only one part of the whole picture of a student's achievement. These tests are an achievement test. They are not an IQ test, and they test students on, as the name indicates, the core skills that are required to satisfy a year 12 curriculum.

Today students will be sitting their writing tasks and tomorrow will move on to the short response tests. There will be a number of members of this House who will remember sitting the core skills test or its predecessor, the ASAT tests. Queensland senior students have been experiencing continuous school based assessment for just on 31 years now. I was one of the first students in Queensland when ROSBA was brought in—people here will remember ROSBA.

When you look back 30 years it seems remarkable that the National Party of the seventies, which enjoyed an international reputation for educational conservatism—

A government member: When Rona Joyner ran Education.

Ms BLIGH: Perhaps even backwardism when Rona Joyner ran the system—introduced a system of assessment for years 11 and 12 that is regarded as one of the most progressive in the world. I give it credit for that, although there have been suggestions it was not watching when it happened. The introduction of that system of assessment is often commented on internationally whenever I travel. Unlike some of the other parts of the system, I am pleased to say that it does enjoy bipartisan support. It has a reputation for being rigorous and progressive, but it does mean that these tests are the only external exam our kids sit and I wish them well.

Electricity Supply

Dr FLEGG: My question without notice is to the honourable the Minister for Energy. I refer the minister to his comments last week that the blackouts in the Indooroopilly and Taringa areas were caused by a car hitting a power point, and I ask: why did the minister mislead the people of the western suburbs on the cause of the blackouts or was the minister simply following the lead of former Energy Minister Paul Lucas, who blamed blackouts on everything from acts of God, bats out of hell, possums and rogue backhoes? This was another equipment failure.

Mr SPEAKER: I am not quite sure about the question. Could you clarify what the question actually is?

Dr FLEGG: Why did the minister mislead the people of the western suburbs on the cause of the blackouts?

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr MICKEL: At quarter past seven last Thursday morning, I was at the radio station 4BC on the *John and Ross* program. My recollection of the circumstances was this: they informed me that there had been a blackout at Indooroopilly caused by a car hitting a power pole. The burden of it to me was this: they had tried to ring the communications centre and there had been a problem there.

Dr Flegg: That's nothing new.

Mr MICKEL: That is why I invited the member to be at the briefing today. I am pleased to say that he is coming. I will tell him why. 4BC rang up the call centre. It indicates from where you ring. There was no blackout at 4BC. What you had to do was follow the next prompt. Not a lot of people do that.

I am pleased the member is coming along today because I want him to take the information back to his constituents. It was not 4BC's fault at all. I did not know and I operated on the assumption. I was not able to get a briefing and from there I went into the next meeting. It was a meeting of the CEOs of Ergon and Energex.

That is what those opposite would expect me to do. The Premier gave me a job to do and that is what I did. I did not have a chance to go back and check the veracity of what I had been told. I did not and do not ever seek to deliberately mislead anybody any time on any issue. That is why I have asked all members opposite to come to the briefing today. Why did I say last week that I would not do it personally? Because I knew that in this amount of time I could not get across the complex range of issues. That is why I appeal to those opposite today to come along to the briefing.

Time expired.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Yeerongpilly, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers of Farnborough State School in the electorate of Keppel. Included among the students of that school is one Isaac McBryde, the nephew of the member for Whitsunday.

Road Safety Strategy

Mr FINN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Yesterday we saw the release of the Queensland Road Safety Strategy. Can the minister explain what this strategy will mean for the Queensland Police Service?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for Yeerongpilly for the question. Queensland police have a key role to play in implementing many of the 84 actions in the Queensland Road Safety Strategy released by the Minister for Transport yesterday. In the next year, they will be providing at least 170,000 hours for random breath tests. The police currently breath test more than two and half million people each year, which I understand is the highest testing regime of any jurisdiction in Australia, with one in 107 drivers being charged. Next year we can expect at least 43,800 hours of speed camera operations and an additional 140,000 hours of other speed enforcement.

Our police are at the front line in the campaign to improve our road safety. Indeed, we have improved our road safety figures in recent years. For example, in Queensland in 1995 there were 456 fatalities on the road. Last year there were 310 fatalities. To put it in other terms, though, in 1995 there was one death for every 5,470 vehicles on the road and last year there was one death for every 10,254 vehicles on the road. So we are pushing down those fatalities. We are improving road safety.

The strategy released yesterday commits us to further reductions. We make no apologies for targeting speeding and drink-driving. It is all about saving lives. There are some myths out there that I would like to comment on. One myth that has been put to me as Police Minister is that police place speed cameras to optimise revenue raising. I am sure we have all heard that. This is not true. Speed cameras are determined by Queensland Transport's research on crashes. There are committees all over Queensland made up of community stakeholders and members of the RACQ who have to approve new speed camera sites before they are introduced.

Our speed camera sites and our program have been evaluated by Monash University and it has been established that they are well targeted against road traffic black spots. There has been a 45 per cent reduction in fatal crashes in areas within two kilometres of speed camera sites. So our speed cameras are working.

Finally, contrary to popular belief, the revenue that is gained from fines from speeding and drink-driving does not go into police coffers. I am sure the Treasurer would be happy to forgo this revenue if it meant no more human carnage on our roads.

Interruption.

PRIVILEGE

Energex Board; Mr M. Bucknall

Hon. R.J. MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy) (11.26 a.m.): I rise on a matter of privilege suddenly arising. In answer to a question from the honourable member for Cunningham, which was a disgraceful attempt to smear Mark Bucknall, I am now advised that the contribution by Mark Bucknall Solicitors was made from the trust account of that firm as part of the administration of the estate of Neil Lofgren. Mr Lofgren was a young Aboriginal man and a member of the stolen generation. He tragically died in 1998 and left a substantial amount of money in his estate. Under the terms of his will he made a donation to the Australian Labor Party. Mr Bucknall was the executor of his will. I have a copy here.

In this capacity, the donation to the Australian Labor Party was made from Mr Bucknall's trust account. The contribution was incorrectly listed, I am advised, as a donation from Mr Bucknall. When the matter was incorrectly reported in the *Courier-Mail*, Mr Bucknall contacted the Australian Electoral Commission and the Australian Labor Party to have the records corrected.

I am also advised that Mr Bucknall established and has continued to administer, on a voluntary, unpaid basis, the Neil Lofgren trust which raises funds to provide scholarships to young Aboriginal people wanting to study politics or law at university. I show the House a letter to that effect from Mark Bucknall Solicitors. It is a disgraceful smear and one that we have become used to in this House on anybody who dares stand up to the National Party for their political beliefs.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Resumed from p. 2089.

Power Outages, Compensation

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: My question is directed to the Premier. The Premier recently announced a capped compensation scheme effective in 12 months for power consumers disadvantaged by continuing outages. Is the Premier proposing to cap all claims for compensation or will shop owners and others who lose thousands of dollars of stock as a result of blackouts be able to claim for their full losses?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for Gladstone for her question. I tried to ring her yesterday to invite her to the briefing today. I hope that she will respond in a positive way to the written invitation that I sent to her. For some communication reason I did not get her call back. This is one of the things that I am happy to deal with today at this detailed briefing rather than within three minutes. In essence, I say to the member for Gladstone that there are a number of schemes. The first scheme is that up to \$20,000 compensation is already available. There is a scheme that needs to be followed, but compensation is already available.

In addition to that, I have signalled that there are two things that we are looking at. One relates to reliability. This is where the government will be setting certain standards that have to be met. If those standards are not met, then there will be an opportunity for people to pursue what is regarded as a rebate. It is a different program to compensation but it is a rebate program, and this is called guaranteed service level payments, or rebates.

There is a second element of that—that is, a scheme that is currently operated by Energex and Ergon which is a voluntary scheme. We are about to make that mandatory, and that deals with other services and non-reliability matters—for example, not turning up for appointments, delays, new connections and so on. So there are three schemes that will be operational. Compensation already exists. I think the non-reliability issue will be operational from early next year and the one in relation to rebates will be operational before or on 1 July next year. This morning I made a brief ministerial statement and incorporated some details in *Hansard*. I invite the member for Gladstone to read the *Hansard* record. If there are further matters, I invite her to attend the meeting at 1.30 p.m. where I am happy to provide her with more information.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! The time for questions has now concluded.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Electricity Supply, Briefing of MPs

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 a.m.): This morning in this place we have seen more flip-flopping from the government and more flip-flopping from the new Minister for Energy, particularly on the issue of briefings for non-government members in this place. Imagine our surprise when last Thursday the minister indicated at that stage that he would be happy to accede to the request from the opposition for a briefing—that is, he would be happy to accede to a request from the Nationals for a briefing where we had the chance to be briefed by the CEOs of Ergon and Energex and to ask questions of them. To his credit at that stage the minister, when asked if he would be doing the briefing, indicated, 'I won't do the briefing personally. I think that would be over the top.' What we have seen since that time is the Premier roll right over the top of the new Minister for Energy, because this whole saga of accountability, this whole saga of openness, this whole saga of disclosure from this government on the issue of who knew what and when they knew it and the status of the power industry in Queensland has been a very sorry saga.

It has been a saga of cover-up. It has been a saga of duplicity. It has been a saga of downright dishonesty and incomplete statements from those members opposite. That is what it has been. The government—I would use the term 'lied' but apparently we cannot say that in this place—has certainly

been terribly dishonest in its whole approach to this issue. The Nationals raised this issue prior to the state election. We said that there is a very serious problem with the power industry in this state which needs to be disclosed. What did the Premier say at that stage? He said that there was no problem whatsoever. He said that everything was right, everything was hunky-dory and everything was being fixed. That line was being parroted by government MPs—backbench and frontbench members—right throughout Queensland. Whenever they were asked a question, they stood up and said, 'We've been assured by the minister that there is no problem whatsoever.' We know that there is a problem—there are a lot of problems—and the people of Queensland are now experiencing discomfort because of the mismanagement of this government. The people of this state are the ones who are having their quality of life and their lifestyle impacted upon because of this government.

Let us go back to what the Premier said over a month ago when we raised some issues with regard to the electricity industry in Queensland. He promised us a briefing. He promised the Nationals a briefing. We pursued him on that. We asked him, 'When can we have the briefing? When can we have that briefing?' Then he started to walk away from it. He started to back-pedal from that, and he has been back-peddalling ever since! He reneged on the commitment which he gave to the Nationals for the briefing. He said that we needed to be informed, and that we needed to be properly informed. Sure he thought we needed to be informed. When he realised the extent of the problems in the power industry and the extent of the meltdown in the power industry, he did not want to inform us and he reneged.

Then we were very surprised indeed—in actual fact, we were heartened—when the brand-new Minister for Energy in Queensland came out of the blocks and looked like a cleanskin. Well, he soon ended up smelling just like all of the other ministers. He failed on his first outing. He agreed first of all that we could have a briefing, and then he agreed that it would be over the top for him to provide us with that particular briefing. Yesterday when people were calling his office to find out about this briefing for the Nationals, he turned around and said, 'There's not really going to be a briefing.' He himself was already back-peddalling. One could then imagine the surprise of everyone when the Premier was asked about the briefing and he said, 'There will be no briefing.' The media then reminded the Premier that Mr Mickel had promised a briefing, and the Premier stood there looking like a stunned mullet! Then he said, 'Well, okay. Maybe there'll be a briefing, but the minister is going to have to be there.' So we saw numerous positional changes yesterday afternoon by this government on this issue. The Premier then started to agree to the briefing as long as the minister was there. Then the Premier agreed to the CEOs being invited. So the briefing was going to be by the Premier and by the minister with the CEOs being invited—hardly what the Nationals had requested.

I table a copy of that memo from the Premier. I want to quote what it says. It states—

The Premier Peter Beattie and Energy Minister John Mickel extend an invitation to brief all non-Government MPs tomorrow ...

The energy briefing will be in the Conference Room ...

The CEOs of Energex and Ergon have been invited to attend.

Does that sound like a hastily put together briefing? It sounds like one to me from a government that did not know what it was doing. Yet last night this is what happened. Non-government members received a memo from the Premier stating—

Re: Confirming details for tomorrow's energy briefing.

Energy Minister John Mickel and I will brief all non-Government MPs tomorrow ... at State Parliament at 1.30 p.m.

The energy briefing will be in the Conference Room ...

The CEOs of Energex and Ergon will attend.

So they got them to attend the briefing which the Premier had organised, and I also table that memo for the information of all members of this place.

I also wish to table correspondence which I have had over the last week or two regarding this matter. First of all, I wrote to the minister on 26 August seeking his confirmation of the undertaking to brief us. In that letter I stated—

It would also be appreciated if you could organise for copies of submissions to the Independent Panel for Electrical Distribution from regional electricity councils to be made available to Shadow Cabinet along with those sections of minutes of meetings from Energex and Ergon pertaining to the payment of dividends and special dividends.

We will never get that until hell freezes over in this state, and that is why they are back-peddalling. I also table copies of letters that I sent yesterday afternoon following the Premier's confirmation of such a briefing to the CEOs of Energex and Ergon asking them to attend a briefing for the Nationals at the same time without the presence of the ministers. We called for a minister-free briefing so that there was an opportunity for us to really know what was going on. I also table my letter to the Premier of yesterday afternoon seeking details of this meeting and asking for an opportunity to be able to pursue this in a frank and fearless manner without those people being intimidated.

Make no mistake about it: this is intimidation. This is the use of standover tactics from Mr Beattie and his government. They have learnt from their past involvement in the union movement to use standover tactics and intimidation—that is, not letting people do anything in secret, not letting people do anything that is not being disclosed and not having secret ballots so they can sit there, intimidate and

use standover tactics. One would have to be absolutely naive to believe that a briefing today by the Premier and Mr Mickel with the CEOs being invited, attending and maybe even answering some questions will mean they get any full, frank and fearless contributions from those people. It is intimidation. These are standover tactics being used by the Premier and by the minister.

I just simply say that if the Premier and the minister want to give us information about what is happening in the electricity industry in Queensland then they can come into this place and answer questions and disclose that information. Goodness me, we have been waiting long enough for that. In the time that this parliament has been sitting in the past two weeks, we have had nothing but obfuscation from them, we have had nothing but cover-ups, we have had nothing but diversions from them.

So we are going to get more of that today at the briefing. Why does the Premier want to be there? Why does the minister want to be there? They want to be sitting there listening to what is being said and taking notes. It is not about those people being open and being able to contribute what we need to know. They are under a constant cloud of intimidation because the Premier and the minister will be there taking notes and they will be ticking off 'former CEO', 'former CEO'. There is no way on earth that those people will be able to pass on any useful information whatsoever, because their bosses will be sitting in the room and they will be hanging off every word that those people will contribute.

This is nothing but a stunt. It is another backflip from Mr Beattie—or a turnover, or a 180-degree turn, or whatever members want to call it. It is not about exchanging information; it is about sanitising information. It is about deception and it is about cover-ups.

Time expired.

Medical Students

Ms NELSON-CARR (11.40 a.m.): Currently, the James Cook University School of Medicine, which has a strong emphasis on general practice and rural medicine, has around 400 students across the five-year course. The school came into being in 2001 and it will hold its first graduation at the end of 2005. Townsville is justifiably proud to be home to a school of medicine—Australia's first new medical school in 25 years. The school serves the greater north Queensland community and I welcome the ongoing support for it from the Beattie government.

Therefore, it is with concern that I draw attention to the high cost of university degrees, in particular medical degrees. Those high costs are due to come into force next year. Under legislation passed by the federal parliament last year, for the first time universities will be able to charge full fees to Australian medical students. Full-fee places are expected to generate \$350 million for universities over the next four years. For example, according to a report that appeared in the *Australian* on 1 July, the University of Melbourne could charge domestic students up to \$210,000 to obtain a medical degree.

If that figure is accurate, then the situation is much worse than anticipated. A little over a year earlier on 29 May the *Age* carried a story forecasting that, under the federal government's deregulated system, there will be up-front fees of \$150,000 for a medical degree at the University of Melbourne. At the time, that amount of \$150,000 was denied. So, too, was an earlier suggestion of \$135,000, the reason being given that that figure was deemed too much. The *Age* report stated—

Last week Dr Nelson rejected suggestions that a medical degree would cost as much as \$135,000.

The reporter quoted Dr Nelson as stating—

It wouldn't be fair to make students pay \$135,000 for a university medical degree.

Are we looking at hyper-inflation? In May 2003 we had a denial of a \$135,000 fee on the grounds that it was unfair. Then 14 months later we had the revelation that the University of Melbourne was looking to charge \$210,000. If \$130,000 was regarded as unfair, what word best describes \$210,000? This group wants us to believe in it and to trust it. That is only one university. Once the cash registers start ticking over, how many others will follow suit? If James Cook University chooses to charge fees that even remotely approach the level of those mooted by the University of Melbourne, the chances of hundreds of young north Queenslanders seeking medical careers may well be dashed to their own loss and to the loss of the region as a whole.

Many students who miss out on HECS places and who are intent on becoming doctors or who are looking to other careers, which also come with a big price tag, will have to put themselves very heavily in debt to meet the up-front full fees. The alternative for those students is to just walk away from their dreams. Even capped government loans of \$50,000 would not come close to meeting the cost of a degree. The high cost of becoming a doctor would mean that gifted students could miss out through a lack of financial resources while others with perhaps lesser prospects but who are cashed up, would make the grade. I also make the point that under the federal coalition HECS fees are destined to increase by up to 25 per cent. That is another heavy impost on young people and their families, particularly when there are good savings to be made for those who can afford to pay off a HECS debt early.

The JCU School of Medicine vision statement is to pursue excellence and to provide leadership in medical education and research. In particular, programs will be responsive to the health needs of the communities of northern Australia and the school will be a leader in the focus areas of rural and remote health, indigenous health and tropical medicine for Australia and the wider Asia-Pacific region. That is a commendable vision and one that is being realised. However, the potential impost of exorbitant up-front fees may well mean that continuing to achieve the vision would become a whole lot harder, if not well nigh impossible, in the years ahead.

Children should be given every opportunity to reach their full potential in life, and that includes being able to attend the university course of their choice if they have the will and the ability, even if they do not have the cash. Up-front fees prevent many children from lower-income families from attending university to become a doctor, lawyer or whatever. It is not only unfair; it is un-Australian.

Federal Election

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): The federal election is in less than six weeks, but Australians have just until the end of this week to enrol to vote. For the longest election campaign since 1984, we have the shortest enrolment period. Why? Because I believe John Howard does not want people to vote, especially young people, new citizens and those who have moved in recent years to areas where they believe that they can build a better life for their families or stretch their retirement funds further, for example the Gold Coast. Young people who have turned 18 recently or who will be turning 18 before 9 October have just three days to enrol; otherwise they are disempowered for at least three more years. So I appeal to the nation's young people to enrol to vote, to make their vote count and their voice heard, and to vote for their local Labor candidate.

I appeal to all Australians to vote for change, not just for the sake of change, but for the sake of the nation. I appeal to all Australians to vote for Mark Latham and Labor, because we need a leader and a government that are progressive, compassionate and fair. A federal Labor government will help all Australians grow and succeed. It will be a federal Labor government that will provide opportunity for all and give hope for all our children to reach their full potential.

John Howard wants the Australian people to trust him, but trust has to be earned and this Prime Minister has lost the trust of Australian people through a series of deliberate falsehoods. On the weekend in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* there was an interesting juxtaposition of a feature article on cyclist Ryan Bailey, who has become a champion dual gold Olympian on a diet of junk food, and a quote of the week from Amanda Vanstone. She was quoted as saying, 'It's not the Hilton; it's a detention centre,' referring to the diet of asylum seekers in detention. Were they requesting fast food? No, they were requesting fresh food free of maggots. Vanstone's comments are typical of a federal government that has no compassion and no vision. The Howard government has made stretching the truth an art form. A coalition government that lacks heart and integrity does not deserve the trust of the Australian people, having ridden to power in 2001 on the back of a campaign of fear and ignorance.

But what is Howard going to do now that there is no further invented wave of mysterious foreigners with which to awaken those secret fears that exist inside otherwise compassionate Christian voters? Australians trusted Howard and he lied to them. They trusted him even though he had lied to them before. Remember the 'never, ever GST' man who changed his mind? Australians still wanted to trust him then. They believed him when he said that asylum seekers—men, women and children fleeing war, persecution, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and death and destitution—were scary, dodgy types with no papers. Australians believed John Howard when he said that there was a flood of them coming and that we did not know who they were and claimed that they could be terrorists when they were just poor, sad people crowded onto leaky vessels cradling their babies. Howard and Ruddock demonised innocent, destitute wretches and they tapped into that little kernel of fear buried at the back of all human hearts—the one that we suppress, the one that our Christian or Buddhist or other religious or even agnostic hearts and minds deny; the one that says that it is okay to hate, because they are not like us.

But now we have a federal election that gives us the opportunity to put things right, to put things straight. But Howard is still preying on fear. He is still playing with the truth. He is not being completely honest, because now he is using interest rates as a fear factor. The Reserve Bank has already indicated that it will more than likely lift interest rates next year. That is conveniently after the federal election and regardless of its outcome.

There was a time when my mother earned enough interest off her term deposit to pay bills and purchase luxury items such as clothing, whitegoods and furniture. But now, thanks to the GST, these things are out of her reach. Her savings have dwindled because she had to tap into them to buy these things. Her pension barely lasts the week, let alone the fortnight, and she has to pick and choose her doctor and her medications based on what she can afford, not what she needs.

I want to live in an Australia which has a national government of which I can be proud—a national government that defends human rights; a national government that cares about older people, young people and the future of all Australians; a national government that does not shame Australia on the

world stage; a national government that embraces the least well off and does what it can to help all people of all generations and of all abilities reach university, reach their goals, reach their targets, reach their full potential and be safe and protected for the rest of their lives. I want a Latham Labor government in Canberra to restore honesty, integrity and compassion in our national public life.

Agricultural Colleges

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (11.50 a.m.): In Queensland there are four agricultural colleges and 15 institutes of TAFE. The four agricultural colleges are at Dalby, Emerald, Burdekin and Longreach. In my electorate of Darling Downs, Dalby is the major centre. The Dalby ag college is one of the leading ag colleges in Australia.

This morning we heard the minister speak about the importance of TAFE. He mentioned overseas students. I think that is great, and we support the minister. Only a week or so ago we heard the minister speak about our ag colleges, and he happened to mention that up to 50 per cent of the students at one of these colleges were from New South Wales and he was not happy about this. The minister lays claim to overseas students and promotes the fact that we are educating them, yet we hear him trying to talk down our ag colleges by stating that he is not happy training New South Wales students. Why is he trying to talk our colleges down? I smell a rat.

I have heard it said that the status quo will not stand. These colleges are the backbone of our rural learning. I personally know a lot of teachers at our college, and they are being paid a minimal amount for the work they do. The overtime some of these dedicated people are doing is at no charge, and it is immense to say the least. The minister has released a review of Queensland ag colleges. In the introduction of that review he states—

It is apparent the colleges face increasing challenges and difficulties in independently, efficiently and effectively complying with vocational education and training legislation and public sector compliance requirements. Over recent years significant financial and service delivery performance issues have emerged. The issues raise significant viability questions and place the continued sustainability of colleges at considerable risk.

I table the document. I question the minister's motivation in conducting this review. The performance of these colleges is outstanding. We in Queensland should take pride in educating our young. Why do we have a state school system? It is simply because we have a duty of care to our young Queenslanders. The students who leave our ag colleges have a job placement rate of over 95 per cent—100 per cent within the first 12 months. This statistic speaks for itself.

Can members imagine the pressure this review is putting on the 70 staff at Dalby? Can they imagine the pressure it is putting on the parents of those who are thinking of enrolling—the future students? The way to bring something down is to make comments of instability, set some draft terms of reference and call for a review. I know that the Dalby ag college owns 5,500 acres of prime farming land on the blacksoil plain within five kilometres of Dalby. Members can imagine the value of this land.

I wonder exactly what is behind this review. What is behind the down-talking? Is the minister planning on putting all ag colleges under the TAFE system? I sense that this is the whole motivation behind the move by the minister. There are four ag colleges in Queensland, and there is a massive amount of assets involved with these colleges. The pressure TAFE will come under in the future from the government's learning or earning program will be large to say the least. TAFE will no doubt become a major educator in Queensland; however, this should not be used to put pressure on our ag colleges. I am not knocking our TAFE system; I am just extremely concerned if our ag colleges are put under this system.

Before the minister goes too far, I would like to personally invite him to have a look at the Dalby ag college and see for himself. I would love to give the minister a guided tour of this wonderful facility and let him see first-hand. He should meet some of the 70 staff and the 130-odd students. My boy wants to attend the Dalby ag college. If he wants to go, I will gladly support him. Some of his friends also want to attend this college. I have grave fears for the future of these wonderful rural educational facilities.

Senior Sergeant P. Irwin

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (11.54 a.m.): This time last year I rose in this place to bring the attention of the parliament to the untimely death of Senior Sergeant Perry Irwin, a well-respected and very popular policeman who tragically lost his life on 22 August 2003 while on duty at the Caboolture Police Station. Perry was promoted to sergeant and came from the Yarraman Police Station to Bribie Island Police Station in February 2002. He remained the sergeant at the Bribie Island Police Station for only 14 months before once again being given a promotion to senior sergeant in May 2004, taking up the position and duties of officer in charge at the Caboolture Police Station. Whilst the station is located just outside the electorate I represent, it does cover areas of Pumicestone with regard to policing responsibilities.

Ms Male: interjected.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Most of them are, yes. Perry lost his life doing the very thing he loved—serving and protecting his community—and his loss has been felt throughout all walks of life. In the past couple of weeks I have represented the state government and the community at several ceremonial observances in memory of Senior Sergeant Perry Irwin, and several community meetings have paused for a minute's silence. The plaque dedication at the Caboolture Police Station was particularly moving, and those who watched the Channel 10 news at 5 o'clock on the evening of Friday, 20 August would have had a glimpse of the ceremony, where a number of Perry's fellow officers and friends launched blue and white balloons to the background music of Powderfinger, Perry's favourite band.

The Queensland police department organised a special morning tea at the Bribie Island Police Station to present Melissa Irwin with two framed certificates—one for Melissa and one for Perry. Commissioner Bob Atkinson described the incredible personal and working relationship Perry and Melissa shared and asked Melissa to accept the certificates of appreciation for their contribution to safety and security in Queensland during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

As the local member of an electorate in which Perry worked, I was honoured and privileged to also make a presentation at that morning tea—to Melissa Irwin on behalf of a group called Community Supporting Police Inc. Its annual police quiet achiever award, which is judged on a policeman's efforts in the amount of work carried out in the community in their own time which is above and beyond the call of duty, had never before been given posthumously, and it was with great pride that I nominated the late Senior Sergeant Perry Irwin for this award. The presentation included a framed certificate and plaque honouring Perry's community dedication. Perry was also named the overall winner for 2004. That just shows the high esteem in which he was held.

The latest emergency accommodation home at Nundah was officially opened by the Minister for Police, the Hon. Judy Spence, and was named after Perry. Perry Irwin House is another valuable project by Community Supporting Police Inc., which has made life a little easier for members of the Queensland Police Service and their families.

Melissa Irwin has asked me to extend her personal thanks and gratitude to the police department, especially Yarraman and Bribie Island police and staff, and the community for their generosity and support. She has asked me to make special mention of Commissioner Bob Atkinson, Senior Constable Peter Thompson and Inspector Anne Macdonald for their assistance, understanding and encouragement during the past 12 months. She has been moved by their outstanding compassion and patience and will never forget everyone's kindness. However, the Irwin family is keen to see the commencement of the coronial inquiry, which they hope will resolve a number of unanswered questions for them.

Senior Sergeant Perry Irwin lives in the hearts and minds of those who had the pleasure of knowing him. His memory has not faded, and he will always be remembered by all of those whose lives he touched. The Premier, the Hon. Peter Beattie, telephoned Mrs Melissa Irwin this morning and passed on his very best wishes on behalf of the parliament and the state government. It has been a difficult time for the family, friends and colleagues of Perry Irwin. On behalf of the community I represent, I take this opportunity to once again express my sympathy to Melissa, Daniel, Jenna, Elizabeth and Patrick Irwin and wish them all the very best for the future. I hope that time will help heal the large void that the death of a much loved husband and father has left.

Prostate Cancer and Multiple Myeloma

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (11.59 a.m.): This House has heard recently about research under way in Brisbane into prostate cancer and multiple myeloma. When I first heard the name 'multiple myeloma' mentioned, my ears pricked as that is the same type of cancer from which my late husband suffered. It is an extremely painful bone cancer and is also known as leukaemia of the bone marrow. I can vouch for that pain as I witnessed first-hand the suffering of one unfortunate enough to have contracted bone cancer disease.

My late husband was a fit, active man before being struck down. The symptoms started some 12 months before diagnosis was made and that was not until a third GP saw Colin. It was and is a very serious disease with an average prognosis of about 18 months. What prompted me to speak out about this were recent current affair programs with Ray Martin highlighting the wonderful work that Dr John Holt of Perth has done and is still doing for cancer sufferers with an alternative treatment method using high-tech microwave therapy. He has been doing this for the past 30 years.

I would like to record my thanks, gratitude and great admiration for Dr Holt for the way in which he so greatly improved the quality of life for the time Colin had left when conventional doctors of the day could not help him. After being diagnosed, Colin was sent home from hospital in great pain with nothing but a promise that doctors would get back to him when they could decide what to do. Not long after this while we were still waiting for word on what the medical system could do for him, a woman called into our home. About 10 years earlier she was sent home from Brisbane after conventional cancer treatment

had failed with only weeks to live at that stage. But she went to see Dr Holt and is still alive today, some 30 years hence. Her advice, not surprisingly, was that we should go to Perth as soon as possible.

We took that advice and were in Perth under Dr Holt's care while the regular doctors were still procrastinating. Dr Holt's professionalism could not be faulted. He has a wonderful manner, does not promise the impossible and does the best he can. After a fortnight's treatment, my husband felt enormous relief from the pain he was suffering. If members can picture cancer cells floating around in the marrow inside your bones causing tumours to grow randomly everywhere from your skull to your legs, in your hips and ribs, and up and down your spine, they might just begin to imagine the pain these people endure. After Dr Holt's treatment, Colin could again walk unaided and get out of bed in the mornings without a pain-killing injection.

Some five months after the first treatment I found Colin in pain clutching his arm. X-rays showed a tumour had eaten a large C-section out of the upper part of his arm. The bone had been hanging on by a thread and it had finally given way. Our local GP advised having it pinned from the shoulder to the elbow. This sounded horrific considering the condition of Colin's bones. We were on the plane to Perth the next day and Dr Holt again treated Colin. Within a short time the bone had grown back and Colin was able to use his arm normally for the remainder of his life—no pin, no surgery, just a fortnight of simple treatment from Dr Holt with little or no side effects. Again, much of his overall pain was also taken away. Dr Holt did not cure him but there is no doubt he did give him a hugely better quality of life.

Twenty years ago Colin's sister also had treatment for lymphoma. Living in Newcastle, in New South Wales, she had already had the best of conventional treatment with chemotherapy and radium therapy. She underwent that for four years and it got rid of some of the tumours but not all. In the process the chemo itself made her put on a large amount of weight and lose her hair. After four years she had had enough and said she was going to give it up and take her chances. We told her about Dr Holt and she tried it. Two treatments later and the persistent tumour was cleared up, and she has remained healthy and active ever since. In fact, she has only just retired from the work force.

As stated on the Ray Martin program, many people have been cured after undergoing Dr Holt's treatments and many, many more have at least had a much better quality of life. I repeat: I cannot speak more highly of this dedicated, highly professional doctor who obviously has something very precious to offer the medical world. I believe it would be a smart move indeed if the medical profession in Queensland looked outside the square and embraced a concept such as this which obviously has had many positive outcomes.

Federal Election, Health System

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (12.04 p.m.): The forthcoming federal election is the most important in Australia for many generations. It is important in terms of health, education and the future of Australia. I would like to briefly talk about some health issues. John Howard's health plan will undoubtedly see Australia headed for an Americanised two-tiered health care system where your credit card is more important than your Medicare card. This is where your visa card, your MasterCard and your Bankcard are more important than your green Medicare card. If you do not have a credit card or if you do not have the cash up front, which happens a lot in my electorate, to see a GP you simply go home and you suffer, and in many instances you suffer in silence.

The truth is that the Howard government has not done anything significant in health reforms for the Australian public whatsoever. In fact, it has failed in its basic duty of care to the people of Australia and to the people of Queensland as far as health care goes. The national rate of bulk-billing doctors has been eroded dramatically under Howard's power. Bulk-billing has in fact decreased and everyone is paying more out-of-pocket costs for their needed health care and also for private cover.

All Australian families see that the Howard government's health system shows utter contempt in addressing the Medicare system. He has in fact crippled it and he has no priority whatsoever in bringing back the 80 per cent bulk-billing rates. John Howard is a joke! As Australians, we have a right—a basic right—to see a local doctor—

Mr Wallace: He's a bad joke.

Mrs MILLER: He is a bad joke. I take that interjection. As Australians, we have a basic right to see a doctor and a bulk-billing doctor when we are sick. Certainly in my electorate we are crying out for more doctors who will bulk-bill. Howard's deferral and procrastination to fund vaccinations such as pneumococcal, chicken pox and the new polio vaccines which both the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation and the National Health and Medical Research Council recommend for all Australian babies shows just how irresponsible this man is.

The Liberal Party is the party of doctors and dentists, the party of medical specialists, the party of the wealthy, the party of big business, of big banks and big insurance companies. It is certainly not a party of the people and it has no intention of looking after ordinary Australian people—people with health and dental needs. In my electorate you can tell how well people are getting on by the number of teeth in their head, and this is a disgrace to John Howard and to Tony Abbott. If ever we needed a Labor

government in power at the Commonwealth level, we need it now because only Labor governments deliver on health, just like we are delivering here in Queensland.

Last Thursday, as proof of a Labor government delivering, I had the pleasure of officially opening the BreastScreen Queensland Brisbane city service. Why are we doing this? It is a pilot BreastScreen Queensland screening service for three months to 30 October 2004. We would like to thank the Brisbane City Council for its support in making this service a reality and by offering the accommodation rent free during the pilot.

The reason why we are having this pilot service is that we are bringing BreastScreen Queensland to the city, where a lot of women work. Between 1971 and 2001 the Australian Bureau of Statistics's data shows that 68 per cent of women aged between 45 and 54 years and 34 per cent of women aged between 55 and 64 years were in fact working. Our target group, particularly for BreastScreen Queensland, is women aged between 50 and 69 years. So it is a very important service.

Can I report to the House that officers of Queensland Health told me that when they started building the BreastScreen city service clinic they had many people knocking on the doors even while they were building it to try to make appointments for women to go and have their breast screens done. We think that is absolutely fantastic. They are open of a morning from around 7 o'clock and they shut at 6 o'clock at night, which means you can have breast screens done before going to work or after finishing work. We believe it will be a great service for women in the city—public servants, students and others—who will find it more convenient than flexing off or having a day off and going out into the suburbs and having their breast screens done. We would also like to thank the Brisbane city assets branch and also the Public Works Department for their help.

Time expired.

Queensland Rail

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.09 p.m.): Just like with the shemozzle in the electricity industry, the Beattie government has also lied to Queenslanders about what it had planned for job losses in the railways. Now we find out that more rail jobs are to be lost so that Queensland Rail can repay \$400 million promised for new rolling stock in Brisbane in the run-up to the last election.

The National Party opposition obtained a government document during the estimates which clearly states that Queensland Rail has to hand back funding from the implementation of rail reforms. It says that the increase in the cost of train service contracts as a result of the investment in additional trains is to be funded from 'the implementation of reforms identified as part of the Queensland Rail strategic assessment'. Now the minister is claiming that the equity injection does not have to be repaid, but perhaps he should explain who was telling the truth with regard to this document. This document, which was tabled during the estimates, clearly says that it includes a return of equity.

This issue is about what this government knew before the election and what it is telling people now, and the fact that there are more jobs to go. The announcement of the loss of 700 rail jobs, mostly in regional Queensland, is the first instalment that Queensland Rail workers are going to have to pay. The \$400 million loan that QR has to repay was announced by the Premier as part of his Smart State Building Fund on the eve of the last election, but he did not tell people about the jobs that would be lost as part of this rail strategic assessment. This document clearly links those two issues together. Queenslanders have been misled by this government. Rail workers have been betrayed by this government. Regional Queensland has been let down because every job that goes from these regional centres has an impact not only upon those families directly, who lose the breadwinner in the family, but upon the wider economy as those jobs are permanently stripped away from that local network of jobs.

Mr Beattie knew that this promise was to be paid for by QR jobs, just as he knew about the shambles the power industry was in, but he deliberately withheld it from Queenslanders. He hid it from those who are now losing their jobs and those thousands of rail workers who will lose their jobs in the near future because this government has not clearly outlined the full extent of how many more jobs are to go. It is sheer hypocrisy for him to try to blame the introduction of competition to the Queensland Rail network, as Queensland Rail had gleefully welcomed the opportunity for QR to compete interstate.

On 2 May this year the group general manager for Queensland Rail issued a media release announcing it had launched a container service to Melbourne. He bragged that 'our new service will enable us to compete in the market and be a part of the predicted increase in the general freight traffic' and 'it will form a link from Cairns through Queensland to Melbourne'.

What we have seen from the government has been deceit over the electricity industry before the election when it said that everything was fine and to 'trust us'. Then immediately after the election the government launched the review and, surprise surprise, what the people have been saying was true: there was a shemozzle and a real breakdown of maintenance in that system. It also lied in regard to rail jobs, the state of the rail industry and the jobs that would be lost from these communities in order to pay for the upgrade within Brisbane. This document proves it. Let the minister explain why this document clearly says 'a return of equity'. This issue is really about jobs in the regions and how many more are to

go, the fact that rail workers are being used as an excuse, and that competition—which was signed off by the ALP in 1995—is being used as an excuse to strip away more jobs from Queensland Rail. No wonder it does not trust this government.

Ipswich Motorway; Mr C. Thompson MP

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.13 p.m.): Last Wednesday evening I had to be in Brisbane by 6 o'clock from Ipswich. At 20 to six I was sitting in traffic on the Ipswich Motorway, surrounded by thousands of other people, together going absolutely nowhere. Eventually I turned around, as did lots of other people around me. This is not a story just about me; this is a story about the fact that the Ipswich Motorway is frequently completely blocked—not just slow—for hours on end.

The next morning I went to an Ipswich Chamber of Commerce breakfast where Capral, a major Australian publicly listed company which has decided to move its manufacturing operations and headquarters to Ipswich, said that Ipswich appealed to it on many levels as a wonderful place to set up a manufacturing industry, but it made the point that locating in Ipswich was for it—and is for other businesses—a risky thing to do while the Ipswich Motorway is in the parlous state that it is.

The state of the Ipswich Motorway is appalling. The *Courier-Mail's* recent road solution report identified that on any given day in peak hour commuters have a 50-50 chance of getting held up due to an accident. Yet the federal government and the federal member for Blair, Cameron Thompson, are ducking and weaving and trying to say that the responsibility for the state of the Ipswich Motorway—despite the fact that it is a 100 per cent federal government responsibility—lies with someone else.

Over a period of two years now the member for Blair, Cameron Thompson, has run the most dishonest, deceitful campaign of lies I have ever seen in my political career. There are a number of aspects to Mr Thompson's campaign, and I want to deal with them one by one.

Mr Thompson has said, firstly, that the state government has done the wrong planning for the Ipswich Motorway; that the plan to upgrade the motorway to six lanes was, in fact, in his words, a corrupt exercise and certainly the wrong thing to do. In trying to run this line to the people of Ipswich, Mr Thompson fails to acknowledge that the state government has planned to upgrade the motorway to six lanes at the request of his own minister, the federal Transport Minister, John Anderson, and that the federal government funded the study and had members of its own bureaucracy sitting on the study committee. Mr Thompson argues that what we need is an alternative route that will cross the Brisbane River two or possibly four times. He argues that by the time the six-laning is done the road will be out of date, despite the fact that expert reports project that this road will have a life going beyond 2021. He completely ignores the fact that the plans to six-lane the Ipswich Motorway will indeed take 25 per cent of the existing traffic off the road by creating a network of service roads to keep the local traffic away from the main Ipswich Motorway.

Mr Thompson has ignored all of these undeniable facts. He has tried to argue that an alternative route from Ipswich to Gailes, which will put traffic on to the Logan Motorway, is somehow sufficient to get both freight and people from Ipswich to Brisbane. He has lied again by arguing that the state government is somehow negligent in putting up a plan to upgrade the motorway over eight years when again it was his own government, the federal government, that asked for an eight-year timetable to fit with their own funding responsibilities.

The final lie from Mr Thompson, which to me is perhaps the most shocking, was to read last Wednesday—when I turned around and got back to Ipswich—a line in the *Ipswich Advertiser* in which Mr Thompson claims—

The federal government announced in the AusLink statement on June 7 this year funding of \$627 million for the Brisbane urban corridor with the Ipswich Motorway and Goodna Bypass as the top priority.

This is an outrageous lie from Mr Thompson. While there is funding of \$627 million over a five-year period the federal government, in its own words, acknowledges that the Brisbane urban corridor will cost \$2.5 billion to upgrade, not \$627 million. This is a shocking campaign of deceit that we are seeing from the federal government. It is putting up a fraction of funding for a road that desperately needs to be fixed right now. What we have seen in recent weeks and in recent years is a federal government that will lie to people as quickly as look at them. The member for Blair's campaign on the Ipswich Motorway is the best local example of that.

Time expired.

Office of Leader of Liberal Party, Expenses; Electricity Supply

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (12.18 p.m.): First of all, let me table a document in the House. I table it now because this morning ministerial business ran the full hour, which was an absolute disgrace. There was no time left for personal explanations, tabling reports, notices of motion, private members' bills or private members' statements. All of that, of course, was just a stunt by the government to avoid extra

scrutiny. I seek leave to now table the Auditor-General's report of the office expenses for the Office of the Leader of the Liberal Party for the year ended 30 June 2004.

Leave granted.

Mr QUINN: As I said, that stunt this morning not only prevented members from making personal explanations and making essential tablings in the House, it also prevented the Liberal Party from bringing in its bill on fluoridating water in Queensland. That is a shame because there is quite a deal of public debate in the community at the moment and many members of the general public, as indeed is the government, are looking forward to the details of the bill. In two respects what they did this morning was a shameful exercise in power and having no regard for other members of the House.

The second issue I wish to speak about is the inconsistent and inconsiderate approach that the government is taking to the electricity crisis in Queensland at the present time. One could say that the government and blackouts have one thing in common right across the state and that one thing is that they are all over the place. There is not a considerate approach by the government in terms of its response.

You only have to look at what is going on in the House today to understand why there is not a considerate approach. In the first instance you have a minister saying he will brief non-members of parliament by providing officials from Ergon and Energex without a minister being present. A couple of days later we have the minister being overridden by the Premier saying that the briefing will now occur with the Premier and the minister in the House—hardly a consistent and considerate approach from the government; two conflicting statements in a matter of days.

That is the latest example. You can go right back to 29 July when the Somerville report was first brought down. A matter of days after the release of that report the then Energy Minister, Stephen Robertson, was saying at a press conference that the government ought not be blamed for the condition of the electricity network in Queensland. Five minutes later, at 10.25 a.m., the Premier interrupted his own minister's press conference, saying, 'Blame me.' If that is not a change of direction all of a sudden—within five minutes—I do not know what is. Again another inconsistent approach.

That is not the last of it, of course. We saw in the previous parliamentary week the member for Nicklin asking the Premier whether he would consider a stand-alone Minister for Energy and the Premier gave the categorical statement that there would be no such position created. Four days later, what do we see? A stand-alone minister for energy being announced in this state.

People in Queensland are wondering what is going on. We have got a government that flip-flops from one position to another. What people really want is a consistent, considerate approach to what they think is the worst crisis in the electricity network that Queensland has seen. What we have is a government on a day-to-day basis making the story up as it goes along. You wonder why people are confused, Madam Deputy Speaker.

That is not the last of it, of course. The Minister for Energy himself was a bit confused. This morning he gave an answer in relation to why he was saying that there was a blackout in parts of Brisbane due mainly to a car hitting a power point. Then later on it was revealed that it was an equipment failure. He gave the excuse that he could not possibly have had time to find the correct answer. For heaven's sake! He is a minister; he has staff. The moment that issue arose in terms of a blackout, which is the No. 1 issue in Queensland at the moment, one would have thought a responsible minister would have turned to his staff and said, 'Find out what is going on.' Instead he takes the story, puts it in the public arena and again causes confusion in terms of the reliability of information he is providing to the general public.

All in all, as I have said, the things that this government and the blackouts have in common is that they are all over the place. It is about time the Premier and his minister sat down, worked out a strategy and stuck to it in the public arena so that the people of Queensland at least know what is going on in terms of this critical issue.

Opera Queensland

Mr FENLON (12.23 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in this debate. I wish to speak today about a group of extraordinary people. Imagine the lung capacity and stamina of a marathon runner, with the sense of timing of an Olympic gymnast, with poise, presence and talent in measure. I am not talking here about the sporting field athletes or those people coming back from the Olympics; I am talking about another very different group of people: a group of people who do not receive the sort of publicity that the sporting stars receive, but perhaps one might suggest that they do not receive the groin injuries or the dislocated elbows. Perhaps if they did they might receive more publicity.

I am talking here about the stars of Opera Queensland. It was a great pleasure recently to represent the Minister for Education at a reception with the sponsors of Opera Queensland. I jumped at the opportunity, as a season subscriber, to meet the cast of *Don Pasquale*. It was a pleasure to meet those people. They included Mr Andrew Collis, Ms Helen Donaldson, Mr Jason Barry-Smith, Mr Henry

Choo and the conductor, Graham Abbott. They are an extraordinarily talented group of people and I enjoyed the performance of *Don Pasquale*. It was, indeed, a magnificent performance. It had a great feel to it and was magnificently produced. The cast was young and obviously chosen with care. It should also be pointed out that Helen Donaldson was, indeed, a local talent who was brought back from New York for this occasion.

Opera Queensland's successes are many and varied. Its success and presence in the marketplace at the moment is also attributable to the way that it reaches out to the community. It is not seen as just an elitist group that sits down in Brisbane; it gets out into the field, into schools, into the regional towns and is received extraordinarily well on those tours. Opera Queensland is the second largest opera company in Australia and it presents three major productions each year in Brisbane and many more smaller concerts and tours throughout Queensland, as I said. Choice Voices entertains corporate, hospitality and convention areas, et cetera; young and developing artist programs assist outstanding young performers to refine their professional skills through coaching and performance opportunities.

Opera Queensland was founded in 1981 with funding from the Queensland government and has gone from strength to strength. It moved to the Lyric Theatre in 1985 where it continues to present two of its three main stage opera seasons each year. It indeed provides a varied annual program of works drawn from opera, concert productions and musical theatre. It presents works in new and exciting ways for contemporary audiences and it is actively involved in commissioning and presenting new productions and supporting Queensland artists as part of the Opera Conference; for example, *Seeking True South*, which was produced here.

There have been sell-out seasons of *Madame Butterfly* and *Così fan tutte* in previous years and audiences are continuing to grow with 53 per cent of revenue derived from the box office, sponsorship and other earned income in the past year. Opera Queensland has provided employment for 590 artists and arts workers in 2003. There certainly has been some discussion, as there always is about these fine institutions, about the content. I am very pleased with the content and I agree with director Chris Mangin's reported statement that it puts on productions that have the potential to attract a range of people, given the public nature of much of the sector's funding. As an annual subscriber I join many people in my electorate in suggesting that people should go along to the opera to see many of the old favourites, and I would hate to see us move away from that.

I call on corporate Queensland and the media to get behind Opera Queensland and support this fine institution in their work, to give them more publicity, to support them more in the community. We are on the right track in taking opera out into the wider community and schools and I hope that this can continue.

SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Report

Hon. K.W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (12.28 p.m.): I seek leave to table the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's *Alert Digest No. 5 of 2004*.

Leave granted.

GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 18 May (see p. 1106)

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.30 p.m.): I rise to lead the contributions by the opposition in the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. We will not oppose this bill in this parliament. It makes some minor changes to the gambling industry in Queensland. The bill seeks to put in place a number of exclusion regimes for people experiencing problems controlling their gambling behaviour. The bill improves the consistency and clarity of gambling regulation in the state. It strengthens the power of the regulator to deal with the issue of private sector involvement in clubs.

The bill amends seven bills in taking a uniform approach across the range of legislation that controls gambling in Queensland. One of its principal aims is to ensure that there is a consistent approach in relation to the exclusion of problem gamblers. While the gambling industry has become increasingly important to the state's revenue and has grown to a very great extent within the Queensland community, and gambling has become an important part of the recreational opportunities that are available to many Queenslanders both directly and in terms of other financial benefits that the industry has provided, it cannot be avoided that there are a number of people within our community who

have problems controlling their gambling. There needs to be a consistent regime across the gambling industry and the statutes that control it to ensure that those problems can be managed.

This bill tackles the issues from both ends. It ensures that the problem gambler has the rights and opportunities to ensure that their problem is controlled. But it also tackles the issues from the gambling venue side. It allows a gambler to seek an exclusion order and creates a duty on the gambling providers to exclude the gambler once that person has realised that they have a problem and sought an exclusion order.

The bill also creates a power for gambling venues to initiate exclusions against problem gamblers with the appropriate avenue for appeal for a gambler wishing to have an exclusion direction removed. The minister went through that in some detail in his second reading speech. I do not really think there is anything to be gained by me repeating the detail. It seems a fair approach. We are only too happy to lend some support to what seems a reasonable solution to a very real problem out in the community.

The bill also puts in place penalties for gambling providers, employees and customers who do not comply with the legislation. That is a normal part of any legislation that is introduced into this House. Once again, I do not think there is any point in me going through those penalties that have been put in place. They, too, were covered pretty well in the minister's second reading speech.

The bill puts in place exclusion orders and exclusion directions that may be revoked within one year. They will remain in place for five years unless they are revoked. The bill also makes amendments in relation to the operation of private clubs by putting in place measures designed to boost accountability in this sector. Under the terms of this bill, licensed clubs will be required to provide the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation with their management agreements in order for the office to assess whether the terms and conditions of these agreements comply with the provisions of the act.

Once again, the licensed club industry is a very important part of many communities throughout Queensland. The opportunities that they provide to a great many Queenslanders for recreational opportunities cannot be underestimated. This bill certainly seeks to increase accountability in that area. That is something that we are only too pleased to lend support to. The bill also places a requirement on clubs to report annually to the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation the details of benefits paid to people under a lease or a management agreement within the club, as well as payments made to members of the clubs' management committees or boards. That is part of the increased accountability that this bill seeks to achieve.

There is nothing in this bill which the opposition seeks to oppose. We appreciate the importance of the gambling industry to Queensland. The benefits that the gambling industry and the club industry provide for a great many Queenslanders for recreational opportunities cannot be forgotten. As well there are the benefits that are available to a great many Queenslanders from the money that flows from the gambling industry.

An increasing part of the state's revenue base stems from the gambling industry. For us as local members, one of the best parts is the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund and the Jupiters fund that return small amounts out of the total pool to community organisations within our electorates. Every member in this House knows the great impact that those relatively small amounts of money have for those community groups. It has been one of the great benefits that has flowed from the growth in the gambling industry in Queensland.

I know that in the range of small communities that I represent that money has provided opportunities for community groups that otherwise would have had no chance of putting together the facilities or whatever it is that the particular community group needs to offer the services they do to their community. They are a very important part of the community. They are a very important part of the fabric that makes living in those communities possible and enjoyable. It is gratifying to see that money come from the gambling industry back to community groups to allow them to provide those services to people all over the state and in all the electorates that we represent. The opposition will not be opposing this bill.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (12.36 p.m.): In my contribution to the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill I want to make a few comments about the measures that the government is putting in place to counter the adverse impacts of gambling which affect a small percentage but a significant number of Queensland individuals and their families. Like many members in this House, I do not mind an occasional bet or putting a few dollars through a poker machine. Like others, I regularly make a contribution to the benevolent bookies' fund and to the dividends received by TAB shareholders. Whereas that is not directly related to this issue, the issue of gambling is a problem for some individuals and it is something that can become an all-consuming passion. As a government we have a responsibility to put in place measures to try to address this issue. As I have indicated, unfortunately these problems do not just affect the individual who might have a gambling problem. These problems also directly affect their families and, as a consequence, the wider community.

I want to put on record a number of statistics about the gambling issue. According to the Queensland Household Gambling Survey 2001, about 0.83 per cent of the state's population

experienced some level of problem with their gambling behaviour. By 'some level', we are talking about obviously the extreme where people have a major problem which affects theirs and their family's lifestyle to those who might just have a minor problem with gambling.

That figure statistically may not sound a lot but it does translate to about 22,000 individuals in Queensland, which means about 22,000 families are directly affected in some way or other by gambling problems. Of this group, the majority are male and in the age group between 18 and 34. Of more direct concern is the fact that of that group only around 19 per cent actively seek help to resolve their gambling problems.

Much of the blame for the difficulties being experienced in the gambling sector is often directly attributed to poker machines. For instance, in the *Cairns Post* on 26 July a front-page story was devoted to statistics about pokie addicts and the fact that around four and half million dollars had been put through the region's poker machines in that month.

However, the reality is that the link between gambling problems and the number of available poker machines may not be as high as one would think. According to an analysis of the Queensland and Australian gambling statistics carried out last year by the Research and Community Engagement Division of the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation, the connection between the level of expenditure and the number of gaming machines in Queensland is quite tenuous. The division's report indicates that gaming machines are the most significant contributor to the large increasing gambling expenditure in all jurisdictions across Australia. However, with respect to the experience in Queensland, it says this—

Although out of the eight jurisdictions Queensland has the second highest number of gaming machines, it does not have a proportionate expenditure on gaming machines.

It further states—

Queensland ranks fourth in Household Disposable Income spent on gambling in Australia; fifth in Real Per Capita Expenditure on gambling in Australia; and third in share of expenditure in Australia.

So the question might be asked as to why is Queensland different from the experience in other states. The report goes on to indicate that some of the factors may be the demographic characteristics and geographic dispersion of the Queensland population and, significantly, the Queensland government's gaming regulatory policy which does not permit the easy movement of gaming machines between venues and regions. This bill strengthens this current regulatory regime by making some sensible and balanced amendments to enhance Queensland's improved performance in managing gambling problems, as indicated and recognised in that report.

The Deputy Premier and Treasurer pointed out in his second reading speech that these provisions are unique to Queensland and, more importantly, have been developed in consultation with a tripartite working group called the Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee which involves community, industry and government representatives. The amendments in the bill are twofold. They firstly provide for a self-imposed exclusion for problem gamblers and also for club imposed exclusions. Most gamblers soon realise that they have a problem when it moves to a position where it is taking over almost every aspect of their lives. However, as I indicated earlier, the concern that we have is that only 19 per cent of those gamblers actively seek help. These provisions allow those gamblers who wish to seek help to do so by providing notice to clubs to exclude themselves and in fact give gamblers some control over the rehabilitation process in their lives.

However, for those gamblers who are hell-bent on wrecking their lives and do not seek help—which unfortunately seems to be the greater number of those who have problems with gambling—the bill does allow clubs to initiate the action to have them excluded for up to a period of one year. The bill has some protections for excluded persons, and they can challenge or appeal such decisions by clubs through the Magistrates Court. Another feature of the bill is the ability for substantial fines to be applied to gambling providers for an employee who knowingly permits an excluded person to enter or remain in a gaming area or licensed premises, as the case may be. The model that has been outlined in this bill will be consistent across five of the seven existing gaming acts. It does not include the Charitable and Non-Profit Gaming Act and the Lotteries Act because the venues at which those products are sold do not lend themselves to the types of problems that are experienced in licensed premises—for instance, products sold in newsagents, shopping centres, et cetera. Overall, the bill presents a balanced approach to managing the problems experienced by a small minority of people who are unable to manage the opportunities for gambling in our state. Accordingly, I commend the bill to the House.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (12.43 p.m.): I rise to participate briefly in the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. This bill amends seven gaming acts. Some of the amendments will enhance the consistency of regulation across the various acts. In particular, this bill will provide for a consistent model across five gaming acts for the exclusion of problem gamblers from gaming venues. Currently, the legislative provisions to exclude problem gamblers from gambling venues differ across each of the gaming acts, and the Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee was determined to strengthen the legislation and address a number of uncertainties and shortfalls through creating greater uniformity across the gaming acts.

This bill will see the creation for gambling providers to exclude the gambler when the gambler seeks an exclusion order. Penalties will be in place for gambling providers, employees and customers not complying with the legislation. Referrals to counselling services are to be offered to all third parties and customers identified to be at risk of problem gambling. Exclusion orders may not be revoked within 12 months and the exclusion orders will remain in place for five years unless a written application is made to the venue and the gambling provider agrees to lift the order.

I want to take this opportunity to speak about the Liquor Industry Action Group in the Logan corridor. This is a group that meets monthly to discuss issues and obtain information regarding the industry. It is made up of clubs and hotel management, security providers, police, Liquor Licensing officers and often Desley Scott and myself attend meetings. It invites guest speakers from the industry to provide information and assist in any issues members may have, and the venue changes each month so that we all get to see the different clubs and pubs' facilities. Once again, this year it will be attending schoolie talks in the local high schools, and I, too, look forward to assisting it in these lectures. It is a very proactive group and does a lot for our local community in ensuring that the residents of Logan have safe and responsible gambling and liquor outlets. Members communicate with each other regarding problem customers to make sure that the problem is just not moved on to other premises in the area. It cares for the industry and ensures that the community has somewhere to relax, enjoy a drink or a meal or even try their luck on the pokies. It is made up of responsible licensees, and I know that this group will be very keen to promote responsible gambling in the same proactive way it has promoted responsible drinking.

I now want to speak briefly about online Lotto. I never could get into the habit of going to newsagents to place Lotto bets, so I am looking forward to online Lotto. As a person who is very used to Internet banking, paying my bills on the Internet and shopping on the Internet, I now hope that I will get into the habit of doing my Internet Lotto betting. This will be done responsibly, as with any other gambling activity I enjoy.

Mrs Miller: I hope you win.

Ms STONE: I hope I win, too. I am pleased that newsagents will receive a percentage due to registering as an online player, and I will be going to my local newsagent at the Chatswood Hills Shopping Centre to register. That is right; hopefully I am going to win once in a while. Responsible gambling is up to the individual. While I accept that there are quite a number of opportunities that present themselves to those who may have a weakness to gambling, I believe that this bill also provides strength and consistency for assisting problem gamblers. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (12.46 p.m.): I rise to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 which increases the efficiency of the administration of the seven principal gaming acts. I acknowledge the unique place that gambling has in our Australian culture and the thousands of jobs which are created for Queenslanders from the racing, lottery and gaming industries. I am not a wowser. I have to say that I enjoy a bet on the horses, especially the Mount Perry picnic races which have been killed off under the Peter Beattie smart socialist state. I have also enjoyed the occasional flutter at the casino. However, I am well aware of the social dangers and family misery created by problem gambling.

In my electorate of Burnett there is a growing list of people and families who have fallen victim to problem gambling, especially problem gambling associated with poker machines. The majority of problem gamblers who have contacted my electorate office have been people who are attracted to poker machines. Research by my electorate office has shown that approximately \$34 million was put through the poker machines of the Burnett and Bundaberg regions from January 2003 to February 2004. Some of that money is coming from people like Casey, and I will only use Casey's first name. She has written a letter to me called 'Dear poker machine'. Casey writes—

Why am I addicted to you? Why do I give you all my money? Why do I allow you to make me feel so bad? Why do I think you are the answer to my problem? What is the answer?

Casey continues—

To me there is no definitive answer—no definitive why. Oh yes, it would be so easy to say I gamble because my parents did; or because they were alcoholics or because I had an abusive childhood; or because of any excuse I can possibly think of; but none are valid except when I am with you. You are a metal trap that eats money and you do it so well. But it is not just money you eat—no—you eat a part of me. You take away my self-esteem; you cause arguments in my household; you prevent me from having the little things in life that I used to cherish so much. But is it you that is doing this ... It's me. I have allowed you to do all these things to me and more. I have given control over to you—a piece of metal, void of all feelings. Doesn't that tell me I have a problem?

Casey continues—

Well, Pokie, I'm going to beat you and not in the way you think. I've taken the first step and admitted I have a problem and now I'm taking counselling at Lifeline.

No it wasn't easy making that call and it wasn't easy walking through the door for my first visit, but now I'm so glad I did it.

Each week I join a group of pokie fighters who make me feel so much better than you did.

They aren't judgmental; they accept me for who I am and they listen and truly care about what I have to say and best of all Pokie, they don't want my money—they just want to help me.

...

I know there are more people out there like me—I've seen you at the club pushing that reserve button and rushing to the ATM just like I did.

Casey continues to write—

I'd love to talk to you at our group session, please join me and the other soldiers by making that call—

And it is a local call for the Burnett and Bundaberg region; 4153 2000. It is a Lifeline centre. Casey finishes her letter to me by writing—

I need your help and support.

Casey will be just one of the many people from the Burnett and Bundaberg regions who support the strengthening of the exclusion provisions detailed in the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. We are not going to stop gambling, but we need to deal with problem gambling more compassionately and more effectively. Earlier this year Mr Rodney Nembark of the Wide Bay Lifeline Community Centre's gambling health service said—

Anyone can develop a gambling problem. It is very addictive. Don't think that it can't happen to yourself, your friends or your loved ones.

Dianne Newman, a counsellor at the Lifeline Community Centre in the Burnett, has confirmed my fears by saying that 95 per cent of the calls to her centre are related to the addiction of poker machines and problem gambling. Dianne points out that problem gambling diminishes people's quality of life, that problem gamblers go through large amounts of money in an extremely short period and that sometimes they resort to desperate means by taking money that is not theirs. Miss Newman also makes the comment that problem gambling can also make people feel suicidal, ashamed and suffer from depression. It is just as bad as other addictions, because people experience cravings, urges, physical changes in their bodies and also in their digestive system.

The Treasurer and Peter Beattie's state Labor government will take approximately \$404 million plus in taxes on poker machines. I believe that, through the Community Benefit Gaming Fund, the community really gets back only peanuts. My research shows that, since the scheme started in 1994 until April of this year, the total amount allocated from the Community Benefit Gaming Fund to Bundaberg was approximately \$1.7 million. That is an average of around \$180,000 a year for the past nine years. I would like to take this opportunity to call on the Treasurer to allocate more funds from the Community Benefit Gaming Fund to assist those organisations that, as all members here know, do a wonderful job. Finally, before I close and commend this bill to the House, I urge anyone with a gambling problem to telephone the Gambling Help Line. It is an easy number to remember: 1800 222 050.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (12.53 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. This bill amends all seven principal gaming acts for the purposes of strengthening a number of existing provisions and to further enhance the consistency of regulation. The key features of the proposed amendments in relation to problem gamblers are necessary to implement because there is a deal of inconsistency across the various acts.

As we all know, gambling can be a bit of fun—with Lotto, keno, gaming machines or horse racing—but for some people it can be more than that. It can be an obsession that is so great that they waste all of their time and money on gambling to the detriment of themselves and their families. This government has the Queensland responsible gambling strategy, which has at its focus strategies that include problem gambling prevention initiatives, community education, an industry code of practice, early intervention approaches, expanded treatment and support services, and a comprehensive research agenda. In many areas, substantial progress has already been made while in others new measures are required.

Currently, the legislative provisions to exclude problem gamblers from gambling venues vary in their effectiveness and form across the gaming acts. The Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee decided that these provisions needed to be strengthened. The proposed amendments to this bill will enhance the current procedures for self-exclusions to standardise the self-exclusion provisions and create a duty for gambling providers to exclude the customer at the customer's request. When a gambling provider receives a self-exclusion notice from a customer, it must ensure that it is effected. It must also provide the name and contact details of at least one entity that provides counselling services to problem gamblers.

There is a new service in Caboolture to assist problem gamblers called Interlock Gambling Help. It is a division of the Alcohol and Drug Foundation of Queensland. The Caboolture office has been operating successfully for two years and can be contacted on 5428 6244. That organisation services the Caboolture, Redcliffe, Strathpine and Kilcoy areas. Interlock Gambling Help services offers a range of professional support and counselling services to assist people with gambling problems and their families—from individual counselling for gamblers and their partners, relationship counselling for couples and families, financial counselling, support groups, information and referral to a range of other support services if required. These types of services are vital for the wellbeing of a community.

Gambling venues must also take responsibility for assisting the community. Under this bill, gambling providers ensure that the self-exclusion notice and the new venue initiated exclusion direction notices are implemented and monitored. It is vital that problem gamblers are supported in their own desire to be excluded from gambling and it is vital that there are services that will help them kick their addiction.

The bill also addresses the involvement of private interests and licensed clubs by providing that before clubs enter into management agreements, they must advise the chief executive of the details of the agreements. This will enable an assessment of the club's compliance with the legislation to be undertaken and for concerns to be raised. This bill strengthens the current regulatory regime by making sensible and balanced amendments that will enhance Queensland's gambling services. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr LESLEY CLARK (12.56 p.m.): I rise with pleasure to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 because problem gambling is a significant issue in Cairns and it is something about which I am personally very concerned. I welcome any measures such as those contained in this bill to address the issue.

The member for Nudgee referred to a *Cairns Post* article that appeared in July this year and which referred to some \$4.5 million going into poker machines in just one month in the Cairns region. I think that is a very sobering statistic, because it translates into so much pain and distress for so many Cairns families.

Generally speaking, I understand the standards of statistics that are used whereby for every 100,000 people in the population there are considered to be some 1,000 problem gamblers. For Cairns, that statistic translates into some 2,800 problem gamblers, or people at risk of problem gambling. Of course, it is not just those individuals, either, who are affected; it is estimated that for every problem gambler or person with some at-risk behaviour, some five to 10 other people are also affected. So again, translating that into the situation in the Cairns area, we are looking at some 28,000 people who could be affected. I think by anyone's estimation that is a very significant problem.

In Cairns we have a gambling help service that is provided through Lifeline. I commend the work that that service does. It provides workshops on demand and three courses a year called Busting Bad Habits. Lifeline receives something like 120 new clients every year. But as has been pointed out, that is just a very small number of the people who are actually experiencing problem gambling. That is again a feature of this whole issue—that only a very small percentage of the people affected ever come for any support or assistance to address their problem.

I think that until the taboo and the stigma is lifted from this particular addiction we are not going to get large numbers of people coming forward. It has to almost get to the stage at which problem gambling is considered equivalent to the way in which society considers drink-driving and the amount of resources that we put into trying to address that issue. We need to embrace the issue of problem gambling on a similar scale so that it is talked about, so that people are able to recognise the problem in themselves and go for help without feeling that it is a stigma. Often, it is a hidden thing in the community.

As we know, problem gambling can lead to all sorts of problems. Every member would have examples in their own electorate of families who have been torn apart because of problem gambling—people who have stolen from their employers and gone to jail because their problems have not been addressed at the appropriate times.

This legislation, which allows for people to self-exclude when they know they have a problem and allows for the provider of the gambling service to exclude people, is a major step forward. I look forward to seeing these amendments come into force to address a very significant issue. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (2.00 p.m.): The Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill is an important bill, particularly in the way it provides increased protection for those who have gambling problems and in the way it deals with certain changes to the administrative management of clubs, in particular private contractors who contract to conduct the management operations or organisations leasing the club facilities. First I will make some general comments. Since the introduction of poker machines in the early 1990s we have seen a lot of social change occur in the cities and towns in which we live. Certainly we have seen a major change in terms of the difficulty so many organisations have in raising funds. Poker machines and convenient gambling methods such as scratch-its have been like vacuum cleaners, sucking large amounts of money out of communities. That has had an effect upon not only the fundraising activities of many organisation but also—this happened particularly in the early stages while there was some sort of adjustment in communities—small business operators and commerce in many of our towns and districts.

Organisations such as the Endeavour Foundation and other service club organisations used to rely quite heavily on bingo. They found that it was very difficult for bingo to compete with poker machines. Whereas those organisations were able to raise money through bingo and the vast bulk of it

stayed in our town or district, with poker machines a certain amount of revenue goes to the government. It is a matter of conjecture whether a district gets back as much as what goes out. Particularly in rural and regional Queensland there is probably a feeling that, because of the big demands in the capital city—cross-river bridges, stadiums, art galleries and all the things that go into a capital city and as a result of the highways and growth that occurs around the capital city in the south-east corner—more money goes out of rural electorates and to the south-east corner than comes back to the areas. In the whole mix of money that is going out and coming back, it is very difficult to determine whether there is a negative drain on the economies of the rural and regional areas of Queensland. We tend to believe that that is what is happening.

I think a lot of clubs and organisations saw the advent of poker machines as a potential pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It certainly has not been that. In most towns or cities of Queensland you find that one or two poker machine venues or licensed clubs have become highly successful and have become big or huge. Then there are a number of smaller clubs that are able to make something out of the poker machine revenue by being very careful and running a system of poker machines of small denominations and not overspending or overborrowing in order to go big.

I think there was a period when we saw some very unfortunate happenings to organisations—big sporting clubs in the regional cities of Queensland that perhaps overborrowed because they thought there would be a bonanza from the poker machines but it did not turn out that way. They were eventually taken over by other organisations or liquidated in some form or other. It was a shame to see that happening to some of our major sporting clubs along the coastline and in some of our major cities. With that, some of the major licensed clubs from New South Wales, who operate in a very big way, have moved into regional Queensland and taken over these organisations.

I ask the minister, in his reply to the second reading debate, to comment on the part of this legislation that refers to leases and to contract management and the oversight of that by the Office of Gaming Regulation. Is that all to do with the takeover of some of our sporting clubs by, for example, the major leagues clubs of New South Wales who come in in certain circumstances? I know that one has come into our city to take over a club. That sports club, which we had all hoped was going to be for the total benefit of our city of Toowoomba, has been taken over by a New South Wales leagues club. No doubt some of the profits are going back over the border to New South Wales.

Mr Mackenroth: They can't take a percentage of the revenue out of the gaming.

Mr HORAN: But they are not buying it to run at a loss. They are buying it to make a profit.

Mr Mackenroth: And this legislation is to try and make sure that private operators are not able to get in there and make too large a profit.

Mr HORAN: That is the point I ask the minister to comment on in his reply. The aim of clubs putting in poker machines was to help the club ownership and the club members—that it remain a community benefit, if you like. There could be communal owners or members of a club, that club would have some poker machines, there would be improved facilities—meals or whatever—and people could enjoy their club, and at the same time the profits from the club would go towards running the particular activity the club was associated with. It could be an RSL club that wants to maintain good facilities and maintain the sacred memory of the returned servicemen in particular parts of their building and then distribute money to Legacy or other organisations in the town, or it could be a sports club that wants to use the surplus money for the betterment of the sports involved in the club. It could be a leagues club, a Rugby club, an Aussie Rules club, a netball club, or whatever. They want to use the funds generated to promote and develop their sport, rather than have to do it by the methods that have always been used in the past, such as chook raffles, meat trays and so forth. Of course, many of those activities still happen. On any Friday night in any pub around the town there are always the little raffles going for the various clubs in our town.

I think it has been a bit disturbing to see some of these major clubs that did not make it being taken over by clubs such as Penrith and the Canberra Raiders. Obviously there will be a surplus—that is why they are trying to run it—and that surplus will go back over the border. It is not like the clubs being run by our own people. They are being run by people over the border and some of the proceeds and profits are going back there, so a little bit more is being siphoned out of our regional area.

A couple of funds have been developed in parallel with the introduction of gambling machines and with the casinos: the Jupiters Casino Community Benefit Fund—I will not touch on that because it relates to casinos—and the Gambling Community Benefit Fund, where the amount people can apply for has been increased to about \$30,000. We get a lot of applications—I think it happens throughout all electorates—and perhaps almost all of them are very worthy of receiving those grants. When they do get them they greatly appreciate them, but one does wonder what is going out of the town compared to what is coming back into the town in the form of the grants that those who receive them are lucky enough to obtain.

I have mentioned the problems of fundraising. Everyone who is involved in fundraising now is finding it more and more difficult. There is no doubt that poker machines have soaked up a certain amount of money from our community.

One of the other interesting developments has been with hotels. In the history of hotels we have had various stages of fluctuations both up and down, but the arrangements with poker machines has enabled some hotels to be able to update and improve the facilities that they have. So there has been a regeneration or renewal of many hotels that would not have been possible had the poker machines not been there. I guess part of the reason why it would not have been possible—it is a bit of a catch-22 situation—is that the introduction of poker machines to clubs meant that clubs took a lot of the business that the hotels had previously had.

I want to make a few comments about the good job that Lifeline does. Lifeline in Toowoomba sees a regular—not a massive—number of people coming to it who have self-excluded or who have seen they have a problem and want to deal with it through Lifeline. The demand for counselling has been increasing over the past 12 months. If we look at the national statistics, we see that about 2.1 per cent of the Australian adult population is classified as problem gamblers. That is a sizeable chunk of our population. In Queensland that particular survey showed close on one per cent were problem gamblers but there was another percentage of people who were at high risk of becoming problem gamblers, so that brings it up close to that 2.1 per cent national average.

I think what we have to watch as a parliament is the staggering increase in the amount of money that is going through poker machines. I believe in the last 12 months there has been about a \$200 million increase in the gross amount put through gambling machines, through poker machines. That is a large amount of money and the bulk of it does not come back. Once it is in, it is gone unless you are lucky enough to pull the jackpot.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr HORAN: If it were that good we would all be going there all of the time. The real attraction of clubs for many people—and I think we would all like to see this with responsible gambling—is that people see it as their club. Whether it is a little bowls club or a big club that has 170 poker machines, people see it as a facility to go to with family and friends, have a nice meal maybe on a Friday night, spend some time with their family or friends, maybe have a little flutter for entertainment or maybe not go near them at all. In that way, we could all be assured that these poker machines were not creating the problems that we had all hoped they would not create.

This particular bill deals with the issue of exclusion, be it voluntary or self-exclusion, by those people who have come to the realisation that they are in trouble and they have a problem with their gambling addiction. There is a uniform standard process across the five acts which addresses how self-exclusion occurs. A cooling-off period and the self-exclusion remains in effect for five years but there is an opportunity for that to be revoked and brought back to one year. The bill also deals with venue initiated exclusions, which are exclusions which are basically forced upon people by the operators of the venue. Again, this bill which we are supporting provides for a uniform system and various rules for that to happen.

As I said, this bill looks at a licensed club being required to advise the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulations of any management agreement and of any subsequent change before an agreement is entered into by the licensee or before the changes are made. I would be interested in the minister talking about how this all happens. In some cases New South Wales leagues clubs have come in to take over a club. In most cases they were fairly desperate circumstances for our own clubs that were in difficult financial circumstances. We could say that at least they were bailed out or saved or rescued. What is the disadvantage to us as Queenslanders in having our club system run and managed by major New South Wales Rugby League clubs? How does this bill, in particular, ensure that those takeovers are occurring to the benefit of our population and our centres? If it can happen when they are in financial difficulty, then no doubt it can also happen at any other particular time. They may come forward with ideas or concepts of capital injection to build or expand a particular venue.

I would also like an explanation of the references in this legislation to contract management. Does that mean clubs are now no longer training and running their enterprises with their own staff? Are they bringing in private enterprise contractors who come in and do the management?

Mr Mackenroth: A lot of the smaller clubs employ the larger clubs to do the contract management. Wynnum Manly Leagues Club do it for the Wynnum Workers Club and the Wynnum Bowls Club. Those clubs have their own identity but the management comes from—

Mr HORAN: I gathered that. Perhaps the Treasurer could explain that in detail in his summing up.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr HORAN: I think they were the two major queries that I had. I also have a query about the leasing of clubs. I would like the minister in his summing up to explain the references here to the leasing or management agreement of a club where the clubs are able to be leased.

I have noticed some small clubs in my electorate which have done well. Because they have been sensibly and well run, they have realised their limitations. One club in particular—a bowls club—has kept its poker machine denominations to a small amount. It had a healthy balance before poker machines were introduced. It has maintained that. It has not gone into grandiose expansions but has lived within its means. I have seen the great success of the Toowoomba City Golf Club, which has always been a well-run club. Even before poker machines were introduced, it had the second highest liquor licence in Toowoomba after the Wilsonton Hotel for many years because it was well run by a good committee.

The Toowoomba Hockey Club, which is on the western side of the city, I think has done an exceptional job in an area where there are not many houses. It is mainly an industrial area but they have been able to attract people to the club's facilities. Importantly, I think they have really worked to the principles of a licensed club. The Toowoomba Hockey Club has been able to improve dramatically its fields and facilities so that there are water based fields, sand based fields and grass fields—a whole range of fields. All of the clubs in town use that facility for playing and training. I think it is well known the enormous contribution by Toowoomba hockey to the Australian Olympics, to both the women's team and the men's team over a number of Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games and world series.

That is a good example of how that club has had a core business—an understanding of what it was about and that it had to provide good customer service to attract people to it—but that club is ultimately about hockey. I think it has really kept its eye on what it was all about. As a result it has been a very successful club and has received good support.

We are supporting this bill, but we do have concern, of course, about the gambling problem. In supporting this bill we are pleased to see that there are systems to deal with those particular gambling problems.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (2.19 p.m.): The government has provided a framework for building the most comprehensive, responsible gambling program in Australia. Queensland's aim is to create a new gambling culture where gambling providers recognise their key role in assisting gamblers experiencing problems, where the gambling help services work actively with the industry to assist problem gamblers and where the whole community recognises its role by gambling responsibly.

The aim of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 is to amend all seven principal gaming acts and to achieve greater consistency in the administration of these acts. The bill will also make clearer some of the existing provisions of these acts. It looks at a model for a new exclusion regime for people experiencing problems controlling their gambling behaviour. The Gambling Advisory Committee constituting members of the community, industry and government was set up and developed this regime, which is one of its kind in Australia. Under this regime it is proposed that uniform exclusion provisions from gambling venues are put in place for people with gambling problems across five of the seven gaming acts. It will enhance the current processes for self-exclusion and puts an emphasis on gambling organisations to exclude the gambler at their request. The gambling provider is also required to give the excluded gambler details of someone who provides counselling services for problem gambling.

The patron has the right to notify the provider that they want the self-exclusion order to be removed. In regard to machine gaming, there is the option of limiting self-exclusions to gaming machine areas or including the whole of the premises. Should the patron not use the cooling-off period, the self-exclusion will remain in place for five years. However, there is the opportunity for patrons to give notice in writing to the gambling provider after one year to revoke the order. These exclusions may occur when a gambling provider becomes concerned about factors indicating a gambling problem exists through an approach by a third party, observation by the customer liaison officer or staff, or an admission by the patron themselves.

One of my local clubs, the Sherwood RSL, always carefully monitors their gaming area to ensure that gambling problems are identified. I commend the club manager, Peter Ward, for his own care and attention in these matters. Also, gambling providers would be required to document breaches of self-exclusion orders or exclusion directions and report the breach to the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation.

Community awareness programs have included the government distribution of problem gambling awareness signs to every gambling venue in the state. As part of the early intervention programs, in 2003 the fourth curriculum module for use in schools was released; a new teachers resource kit was made available; the government is also considering player information screens and responsible gambling messages displayed on gaming machines; and the state's gambling help services, which are funded from the Community Investment Fund, are also engaged in substantial community based early intervention work such as the first Responsible Gambling Week held in May this year. People who have gambling related problems have a right to appropriate free of charge support and treatment services.

Members of this House are all well aware of the issues facing people in Queensland who love to gamble. For those with a good income and comfortable standard of living, losing money in this way may

not adversely affect their lives. Some of us see how a small percentage of gamblers, who cannot set limits for themselves, have problems which not only cause suffering for themselves but affect the wellbeing of their families. In some cases the family unit breaks down and further social support is required to help pick up the pieces. This year, over \$3.3 million will be provided as part of the government's ongoing commitment to reliable, flexible and accessible gambling support services. This will provide 13 regional gambling help services, a 24-hour seven-day-a-week free call service and a residential treatment capability in Brisbane.

This bill goes a long way towards ensuring consistency and clarity of gambling regulation in Queensland. I congratulate the Treasurer for maintaining the highest standards of probity, integrity and community benefit in the conduct of gaming in this state. Lifestyles in Queensland can only be enhanced with the introduction of this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (2.24 p.m.): It is my great pleasure to stand and speak in support of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill that is before the House. I commend the Treasurer for the introduction of this legislation. This legislation will be highly welcome by community organisations, gaming venues and gambling venues within my electorate. I am particularly thinking of places such as the Ferry Grove Bowls Club, the Arana Leagues Club and the Ferry Grove Tavern. From the discussions that I have had with them from time to time, I know that the issue of gambling in the community is one that they wish to treat in a responsible and balanced way by not only encouraging that recreational activity in their establishment for the enjoyment of their members and the general public but also wishing to take a responsible attitude and approach to the issues to do with problem gambling.

There are a number of clear points about the current public attitude about gambling. There are three main points to which I want to draw attention and then address the issue of problem gambling and how we are dealing with it. Firstly, many people in the community do have mixed feelings about gambling, and gaming machines in particular. Secondly, many people in the community are concerned about the spread of gaming machines through local communities. Thirdly, people are very concerned about the adverse effects of gambling on what are called problem gamblers and on their families. This legislation addresses a deficiency in the regulation of gambling identified by the 1999 Productivity Commission report, namely, avenues for the exclusion of problem gamblers from gambling venues.

As I said, most Australians are ambivalent towards gambling industries despite their widespread involvement in them. A 1999 study by the Productivity Commission reported that around 70 per cent of people surveyed believed that gambling did more harm than good. Ninety-two per cent did not want to see further expansion of gaming machines. However, their research also showed that gambling provided enjoyment to most Australians, over 80 per cent of whom gambled in the year of the survey, spending about \$11 billion, with 40 per cent gambling regularly.

Gambling is a big and rapidly growing industry in Australia, with the industry currently accounting for an estimated 1.5 per cent of GDP and employing over 100,000 people in more than 7,000 businesses throughout the country. The main benefit of the liberalisation of gambling has been to provide consumers with access to a service that gives people enjoyment. Governments—and this government included—regulate gambling industries to promote consumer protection, to minimise the potential for criminal and unethical activity, and to reduce the risks and costs of problem gambling.

The prevalence of problem gambling relates to the degree of accessibility of gambling, particularly gaming machines. That is a particular finding of the commission. The costs that it has identified include financial and emotional impacts on gamblers and others with, on average, at least five other people affected to varying degrees. For example, one in 10 in the survey conducted by the commission said that they had contemplated suicide due to gambling, and nearly half of those in counselling reported losing time from work or study in the past year due to gambling. This legislation addresses, in a most responsible way, concerns that have been identified about problem gamblers. The new initiatives in the bill have been developed, as has been said by others, by a tripartite working group involving community, industry and government members of the responsible Gambling Advisory Committee. The provisions apply to all gambling location venues other than outlets involving charitable and nonprofit activities and lotteries.

The legislation falls basically into two parts so far as dealing with problem gamblers, that is, a vehicle for self-exclusion and an avenue by which venue initiated exclusion can take place. In relation to self-exclusion, a duty is created on gambling providers to exclude the customer at the customer's request. The gambling provider must provide information about counselling services that are available from other entities for the benefit of problem gamblers. Further, the exclusion in relation to machine gaming at clubs and hotels may be limited to the gaming machine area or to the whole of the licensed premises. There is a cooling-off period of 24 hours before which a patron may change their mind. Beyond that cooling-off period, self-exclusions remain effective for five years. That is a brief summary of the key parts of the self-exclusion machinery.

The other avenue is the venue initiated exclusion. There is a head of power but not a duty—I underline that: not a duty—on gambling providers to initiate the exclusion of patrons from the provider's

venue. There are various indicators, of course, for the benefit of the venue provider that can help identify problem gamblers: obviously there is an approach by a third party that is possible; the customer liaison officer or staff of the venue provider may observe over a period of time that there is a particular problem gambler and, of course, there may be an approach or an admission by a patron. The venue initiated exclusions cannot be revoked by the gambling provider until one year has elapsed. The patron has a right of appeal to a magistrates court within 28 days of the exclusion notice having been given to them. Importantly, uniform penalties apply to all gambling providers, their employers and patrons.

A key part of the new legislation, of course, is identifying who are problem gamblers. The bill defines a problem gambler as a person whose behaviour indicates a compulsion to gamble, an addiction to gambling or an inability or disinclination to make rational judgments about gambling. This area has been under concerted and intense study by a range of government agencies over the last five to 10 years.

In the ACT a select committee on gambling in 1999 took the view that problem gambling may be characterised as a loss of control over gambling, especially over the scope and frequency of gambling, the level of wagering, the amount of leisure time devoted to gambling and the negative consequences deriving from this loss of control. In a submission to the Productivity Commission in 1999 the Mental Health Association of Australia submitted that problem gambling is gambling behaviour over which the person does not have control or which the person finds very hard to control and which contributes to personal, economic and social problems for the individual.

Problem gambling is defined by a consultant, Market Solutions, which also made submissions to the commission, as a situation when a person's gambling gives rise to harm to that individual and/or to his or her family and may extend to the community. The commission itself took the view that problem gambling is a continuum. It is not only about people with severe problems or those needing counselling or help. It is very important to see problem gambling as a continuum, with some people having moderate problems and others more severe ones. The commission goes on to say that public policy is appropriately directed at those who need help to resolve their problems, those whose lives are adversely affected without needing clinical or counselling intervention and those who are at risk of developing problems.

It can be seen from that research work and that hard evidence based approach that this bill fits fairly and squarely on the well-identified and defined problem of problem gamblers. Who are the problem gamblers? The commission reported that approximately 15 per cent of regular non-lottery gamblers, who account for about \$3.5 billion in expenditure annually, constitute the problem gamblers—about one third of the gambling industry market—and that they lose on average about \$12,000 each per year compared to just under \$650 per annum for other gamblers.

There are an estimated 130,000 people with severe problems with gambling, or about one per cent of the adult population, to which is added an estimated 160,000 people who are said to have moderate problems requiring treatment or policy concern. All up about 300,000 people, or about 2.1 per cent of adults, are estimated to be experiencing significant problems with their gambling.

On the basis of self-assessment questions that the commission undertook in its research work, there are an estimated 250,000 adults, or 1.8 per cent of the adult population, who have experienced significant harm as a result of gambling in the past. There are other mechanisms of trying to identify the extent of the problem of problem gambling and, through other research work undertaken, self-assessment survey work has indicated figures of something like 6.3 per cent of adults as having experienced some problems with gambling in their life, although some of those problems may have been only minor.

More recently, a 2003 Victorian Longitudinal Community Attitudes survey conducted by the Gambling Research Panel in Victoria released in April 2004 tried to identify some of the key characteristics of problem gamblers. Its brief summary is that mostly they are male, if only because males are more strongly represented amongst the regular gamblers; the age bracket is between 35 to 49 and 50 to 64; they have relatively low levels of education, particularly below tertiary level; mostly problem gamblers derive their main income from social security payments other than the age pension; they live with others who could be affected on a daily basis; they mostly live in metropolitan areas; they have a family history of gambling; they have a high consumption of alcohol and drugs and also correlate with states of depression.

There are some other indicators of the extent of difficulties arising from problem gamblers that may be indicated by the sort of clients who access self-access gambling help services such as Gamblers Anonymous. However, that does not give us a complete picture because it has to be accepted that educated, middle class people, as is said by the Productivity Commission report, are more likely to contact help services than working class people.

Furthermore, in relation to the characteristics of problem gamblers, it has been said that often it is found that there is a predominant number of single and young people being overrepresented in the problem gambling category measured against their profile within the normal demographics of the population. Another observation about problem gambling is that, as indicated earlier, while males

typically account for a greater share of problem gamblers, there is a growing feminisation of the problem of problem gambling if only because of the accessibility and availability of gaming machines.

A key message that comes out of the Productivity Commission work is that, despite those characteristics that I have indicated, there is the exception that young people aged 18 to 25 years are disproportionately represented among problem gamblers. I conclude by addressing that aspect of the research work. In the Victorian government report on the impacts of gambling on adolescents and children in 1999 there is some interesting survey work.

It certainly is appropriate that we take responsible action to assist people experiencing difficulties with problem gambling, no matter what age, but we can take some comfort from the research work in relation to young people when measured against the incidence of problem gambling amongst young people in other countries. In a Victorian study in 1999, through the results of the Gatehouse survey conducted in 1997, 41 per cent of the 2,788 year 8 students in Victoria who completed the survey reported that they had gambled in the previous year compared to over 80 per cent in some studies from the United Kingdom and the USA.

Secondly, adolescents with the greatest breadth of experience in gambling—that is, involved in three or more different types of gambling—had distinct patterns of involvement in other potentially harmful behaviour. It is estimated that this group represented about eight per cent of the 2,788 students who completed the survey. Young people in Victoria between the ages of 12 and 24 were surveyed in addition to the year 8 age group. The research shows that this group who engaged in three or more types of gambling is more likely to also engage in cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use, self-harm behaviours and to experience low levels of enjoyment of and connection to school and are therefore different from adolescents who gambled in less than three ways.

I reiterate my observation that this legislation is extremely timely. It is very well directed towards the legitimate concern that we as a government have to make sure that we remain modern and contemporary in our efforts to assist and encourage people who become addicted to gambling or experience problems with gambling in any of the ways that I have described. It needs to be done as an integral part of managing the entire gambling industry in Queensland.

It is clear that problem gambling will also continue to demand close attention by all governments. I am pleased that we are doing that. We will continue to do that through agencies such as the Queensland's Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee. I am very pleased to commend the committee for the fine work it has done on this bill.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (2.41 p.m.): I rise today to make a short contribution to the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill amends seven acts. One of principal aims is to assist people with gambling problems. I think that is something that we should all be aware of. It is not that long ago that Queensland introduced poker machines. I am yet to be convinced that we are better off with them. They are something that we live with now and something that the community certainly has embraced.

The member for Toowoomba South mentioned a long list of clubs and organisations in the Toowoomba and Darling Downs area that have put in gaming machines. They are something that a lot of people enjoy. I cannot see the attraction of playing poker machines. It does nothing for me. I have an occasional flutter on other forms of gambling but certainly not poker machines. There are a lot of people who enjoy it. Having said that there are a lot of people who experience problems with them. We should do all we can to assist those people to manage their problem. I know that there are organisations out there that do it on a daily basis. Organisations such as Lifeline do a fantastic job.

There is a concern in the community that the government has become over-reliant on the revenue that is raised through gambling. I think that is a fair concern. When a government does become so reliant on one form of revenue then it makes it difficult to look at the issue in isolation. There is always one eye on the money that is raised and another eye on how any restrictions on gaming machines, for example, may affect the revenue stream.

We should look at the amount of money that the government takes from poker machine gaming. I got the 2002-03 gambling report from the library. In 1998-99 the revenue was \$234.9 million and in 2002-03 it was \$362 million. That is a fairly significant amount of money coming from gaming machines. If we look at the table included in that report we find that machine gaming expenditure per adult in 2002-03 was just over \$448. That is an enormous amount of money being taken out of the pockets of a lot of Queenslanders. We really need to make sure that we keep an eye on gaming machines and the effect that they are having on our community.

The one good thing that has come from gaming machines is the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. I know the shadow minister, the member for Callide, referred to this in his speech. All members of parliament would go to the opening of facilities—playgrounds, upgrades, all sorts of things—that have been facilitated by funds from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund and the Jupiters fund. Both put significant amounts of money into small organisation that would never be able to raise the money by selling raffle tickets, doing chook raffles or other forms of fundraising. It is a good thing that the money

that goes back into the community does enable a lot of organisations to do things that they would not otherwise be able to. Given the money that is being taken out of our communities through gambling we need to make sure that money is being fed back to small organisations.

I have one concern. I do not want to criticise the benefit fund because it is such a good thing for our communities and our organisations to get that money. We do see from time to time—and I think it is fair to say increasingly—that some things that we would expect the state government to fund as part of its role of government are funded by these organisations making applications to the benefit fund. That is something that we need to look at as well.

It is good that the organisations are able to get extra money, but we also need to make sure that it is not just a matter of going to wherever we can get the money. The government should actually be fulfilling its role and providing the facilities or upgrades to buildings or installing airconditioning or whatever. If that is a principal part of what government should do then it should be doing it and not shifting the responsibility across to the community benefit funds.

The other thing I will touch on regards the ability of a lot of our charities to raise funds for the work that they do. I spoke in parliament in the last sitting week about the problems that the Endeavour Foundation is encountering and the fact that it has had to close down both the Endeavour nursery and the Endeavour farm, which are located in my electorate. It has had to close a number of facilities around the state because of the difficult financial future that it faces. It is something that it has had to come to grips with. A lot of its ability to raise funds in the community has been diminished because of the advent of gaming machines, for example, and the increase in the number of gaming machines.

The proceeds from its lotteries and art unions, which were major fundraisers, have decreased significantly since the advent of gaming machines. That is a by-product that we also have to be cognisant of. If it is not able to raise funds the way it used to then we need to make sure that it is still funded to be able to do the work that it does in our communities.

I know that the state government could not step in to fulfil the role that the Endeavour Foundation in Toowoomba, and right around the state, plays in providing services for people with disabilities. It would cost it far more to do so if it did. Gaming machines have really affected the way that it is able to raise money and deliver services. That is something that we have to be cognisant of.

As the shadow minister said, the opposition will support this bill. We should support anything that will assist people who are experiencing problems with gambling and gambling behaviour. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MOLLOY (Noosa—ALP) (2.48 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to stand in the House representing my community, the electorate of Noosa. Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport, the Hon. Terence Mackenroth, for bringing this legislation forward and to all the other parties who participated in the consultation process. Let me identify some of them.

The government consulted with the following departments: Premier and Cabinet; Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development; State Development and Innovation; Employment and Training; Housing's racing directorate; Local Government and Planning; Primary Industries and Fisheries; Justice and Attorney-General; Communities; and Child Safety. The Police Service was consulted in relation to consequential amendments to the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2002 arising from the enactment of the Racing Act 2002.

Consultations were also conducted with other pertinent stakeholders. These stakeholders included the casinos, Clubs Queensland, Queensland Clubs Alliance, the Club Managers Association, UNITAB Ltd, the Golden Casket Lottery Corporation Ltd, Jupiter's Gaming and the Queensland Gaming Advisory Commission. Additionally, the Responsible Gaming Advisory Committee was consulted with regard to the exclusion of problem gamblers.

This level of consultation and the production of this document is testimony that this government takes its role seriously and with great care. The bill will amend the main gambling acts, of which there are seven. The bill proposes some principal changes, including the strengthening of the power of the regulator regarding private sector involvement in clubs under the Gaming Machine Act 1991 and amendments to provide for a consistent model across five gaming acts for the exclusion of problem gamblers from gaming venues. Since 1996 many amendments have been made to all of the gaming acts. This bill will give greater streamlining to the regulation and greater consistency across the gaming acts. It will give strength and greater perspicuity to a number of matters within the acts to make sure that the ongoing probity and integrity of the gambling industry is ensured.

On the societal front, the bill is intended to lessen the harm arising from or potential harm that results from problem gambling. For people such as myself who hear on a regular basis of individuals in the community who experience serious harmful impacts from their gambling behaviours, this aspect of the legislation translates into really constructive help for those people with a gambling problem. I want to focus on this key feature of the proposed amendments. A duty will be created for gambling providers to exclude the gambler when the gambler seeks an exclusion order. The amendments create a head of

power in each act but not a duty for venues to initiate exclusions, known as exclusion directions. Penalties would be provided for gambling providers, employees and customers not complying with the legislation. Exclusion orders or exclusion directions may not be revoked within one year. When the venue imposes an exclusion direction or refuses an application for revocation of an exclusion direction, the individual may appeal to the Magistrates Court. I might add that all of these processes are put in place to actually help and support people who have already identified that they themselves have a problem with their gambling.

This bill is fairly lengthy and detailed but a comprehensive document. Some communities neither agree with nor approve of gambling, but it does exist. It is a fun pastime for those who know their limitations and can afford it. On the other hand, gambling benefits to the community are manyfold, and the Noosa electorate is a grateful and appreciative recipient of those monies—monies which have gone to putting in place infrastructure into our kindergartens and schools such as Sunshine Beach Primary for renovations to the tuckshop and the Good Shepherd Lutheran School for new playground equipment. The Noosa Croquet Club, the Tewantin community, the Coolool community and the Kin Kin community have all benefited from these funds. Ozcare in Noosa now sports a great new TV with a wide screen, a small comfort for the very elderly but one that is really appreciated.

It was only this last weekend that I attended the Veriadale Tennis Club to help celebrate the contribution of life members and open the new fences. The funding for the fences came from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. The tennis club boasts some 80 members, many of whom have been with the club when tea was made in a billy and locals rode their horses to enjoy a game. The Veriadale Tennis Club put on a sumptuous afternoon tea and celebrated its new facilities and sent its best wishes to the government with a very big thankyou. While gambling is a double-edged sword—we do need to acknowledge the suffering of families who have a problem gambler—we also acknowledge the role this government is taking to ensure accountability and integrity to this industry. Furthermore, we acknowledge the benefits to the community from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (2.53 p.m.): I rise to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. Members in this House would know very clearly my views on gambling. I see gambling as a blight in our society. In particular, I am enthusiastic about this bill because it gets right to the heart of the matter—that is, to address the problem of problem gambling. There is no doubt that Australia is a nation of gamblers. The latest research shows that around 90 per cent of Australians gamble at some time during the year, whether it is a flutter on the Melbourne Cup or a go on the lottery or some coins in a pokie machine. When one walks into the RSL club in Maryborough, the sound of many pokie machines with their playful tunes and coins and the odd payout almost seems to hypnotise people. I agree with the member for Cunningham in that I cannot understand what it is about poker machines that makes people want to sit there and just mindlessly feed money into them all day.

Problem gambling accounts for around 2.1 per cent of the Australian community. That is about 290,000 adults or roughly the total population of Canberra. But there is a much bigger impact than just on those 290,000 people, because as the blight of problem gambling spreads its ugly tentacles throughout our community it has a flow-on effect to family, friends and businesses and the overall social impact is absolutely dreadful. The figures are probably a little bit old, but I believe there are something like 36,000 pokie machines in Queensland with the majority in clubs such as RSLs and big sporting clubs. Even though the gaming tax has brought in some good revenue for scouts and other organisations to use, I am really not convinced that the end justifies the means. I certainly have not seen much of the increased profits of these organisations actually going back into community matters other than via the tax.

A lot of Australians feel in their bones that gambling may be doing more harm than good. I was speaking recently with some people from Relationships Australia, which runs the Break Even counselling service for gamblers. Our local Uniting Church has a counselling service as well which is run by a former Lutheran minister, and that Uniting Church service is doing a brilliant job with problem gamblers in the Wide Bay area. What we need in Queensland is some really well carried out social impact research which can quantify the impact of gambling on Queensland families, businesses and the community as a whole.

Looking at the specifics of this particular bill, I note that the minister's second reading speech said that the Charitable and Non-Profit Gaming Act 1999 and the Lotteries Act are not included because there is in some respects a low incidence of problem gambling in those particular areas. It is also my contention that many hardworking average Aussies spend a ridiculous amount of money buying Lotto tickets honestly believing that one day their fortunes will turn around. The ads for Gold Lotto are brilliant ads, but unfortunately they fill people with the idea that if they just spend \$20 a week on Gold Lotto tickets they will be living in a mansion in a few weeks time.

One area in this bill that interests me is that when a gambling provider issues a self-exclusion order following receipt of a self-exclusion notice from a patron, the gambling provider must also provide the excluded person with details, including the name and address of at least one entity that provides

counselling services for problem gamblers. Perhaps this is a little hard to do, but I would like to see that go a bit further and actually have the venue make an appointment for them with the gambling service, because so often it just becomes a piece of paper that ends up staying in a pocket and going through the washing machine. One issue that really alarms me with regard to this bill—and it appears in the second reading speech—is that patrons may give notice in writing to the gambling provider after one year to revoke the self-exclusion order. To me that is like saying to an alcoholic, 'Stay dry for a year and then you can start drinking again.' For a person with a gambling problem, as we have already heard from many speakers in the House today, a lot of these things come from an addictive personality—that is, people will have problems with alcohol as well as gambling and other addictive behaviours.

This has already been said by one of my other parliamentary colleagues, but a normal gambler might lose around \$650 a year. However, for a problem gambler, the loss is \$12,000 a year on average. When one considers that much of that income that they are gambling comes from pensions and Centrelink benefits, that is a financial disaster for the family and all of those people surrounding that person. It is well known that people who are problem gamblers borrow and beg money and do anything they can to be able to continue their gambling. I note also that the bill contains a provision in that an exclusion may occur when a gambling provider becomes aware of indicators that suggest a cause for concern about a particular patron's problems through an approach by a third party. I would ask the minister to clarify how the bill would seek to deal with vexatious or perhaps anonymous people who are just trying to besmirch someone's reputation if they do not actually have a real problem.

Venue initiated exclusions cannot be revoked by the gambling provider until a minimum period of one year has elapsed. Again, on that point I would voice my concern. If we were to ask any of the counselling providers whether it would be good to revoke that order after a year so that a person who has a serious gambling problem can go back to gambling, I am sure that anyone in this House with half a brain would know what the answer to that question would be.

I notice that there is a provision for a court to postpone imposing a penalty on the patron on the condition that the patron attends counselling. I would also like the minister to clarify for how long that person would have to attend counselling and the frequency. In other words, if that person went for a couple of sessions and then missed some sessions, could the court then impose that penalty?

I am supportive of this legislation. I think that it is a fantastic idea to crack down on problem gambling. I think that far too little has been done in this area up until now. I commend the Treasurer for taking this matter seriously. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (3.00 p.m.): I am privileged to speak to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. I begin by commending the government for tightening up provisions and taking the first steps to really address the problems associated with gambling in Australia. I have some reservations that the bill does not go far enough in the provisions that help those who are afflicted with gambling problems to help themselves.

Firstly, though, I would like to outline briefly the beast that we are dealing with. In any given year 80 per cent of Australians gamble and of that half, or 40 per cent of the population, are regular gamblers. Of regular gamblers outside of lotteries, 15 per cent, or 2.1 per cent of the population, are problem gamblers. It is this 2.1 per cent of the population who contribute to one-third of the gambling industry's market. There are 290,000 Australians in this group and they are contributing on average \$12,000 each year to the gambling pool. This group does not necessarily contain high rollers; it contains people who fall into the categories of severe problem gambler or moderate problem gambler. The former category contains those gamblers who are at a point at which their gambling habits need treatment; the latter category are gamblers who have not reached such a point. However, they are a group whose gambling habits require policy consideration. This means that the average \$12,000 does not contain skewing results of high rollers who can afford to drop \$1,000 a year. It is made up of middle- and, indeed, low-income earners who are losing high proportions of their incomes.

That leads me to the next issue. If Australians on middle and low incomes are losing high proportions of their incomes, there is a less proportion of their income and, indeed, less money going to essentials. There is less money going to food, food for children, rent, and clothes. These are all essentials.

Gambling is a real social problem. In doing something I never thought that I would do in this place, I would like to quote Homer Simpson who, when speaking to his children of his wife's poker machine addiction, said—

The god of gambling has taken your mother. I call him Gambler and it is time to save her from his neon claws.

It is time that we all became really serious about saving Australians from the neon claws of gambling. Although I see this legislation and the whole idea of self-help as a good way of doing it, there have been a number of studies to say that self-help is not the most effective method of balancing all of the considerations associated with problem gambling.

On 8 July 2003, the ABC reported on a South Australian Centre of Economic Studies report that stated that self-help in the area of gambling fails when it comes to achieving its objectives. The study

outlined many reasons for that. However, the main theme was the ease with which people can circumvent the provisions. It is very difficult for gambling establishments to, by photo recognition, help problem gamblers help themselves. It is also very easy for problem gamblers, when the problem is intense, to be mischievous enough to find a way around any set of reasonable measures that are designed to try to help them. In the case of the Gold Coast, it is also the case that problem gamblers can simply move into another jurisdiction—New South Wales—to gamble.

The report suggests a card for gamblers and other measures that I express reservations about due to their nature being very invasive on a person's own responsibility. I am very conscious that self-help should be a measure that is truly an individual's way of helping himself or herself. As soon as we start bringing in smart cards or the like, the wonderful individuality of self-help is perhaps lost and we have more of a non-wanted gamblers register and the stigmas that could be attached to such a register.

I express these concerns to the Treasurer. However, at the same time I commend him for a program that is designed to help problem gamblers. I encourage the Treasurer to continue work on research into the field of problem gambling. This research could take on many different fronts as the gambling addiction is in many ways a multifaceted problem. Perhaps such research could include the portfolios of the Minister for Health and the Minister for Communities in looking in an all-round way to solving the physiological, social and economic impacts that gambling has on Queensland and Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (3.04 p.m.): I rise also to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill and, like a number of other members in this House, I will focus on the introduction of the new regime to address problem gambling. It is remarkable the number of members who have spoken in this debate about problem gambling. Clearly, there is quite a lot of will in this chamber to address the issue. So, hopefully, we can go further than these steps that we have taken already to address this problem.

The importance of the new regime as contained in the legislation cannot be underestimated when we consider the social and financial impacts of problem gambling. Research into this condition shows the connections between problem gambling and family breakdown, poverty, crime and homelessness. The Australian Productivity Commission report referred to by my colleague the member for Ferny Grove, which came out in 1999, estimates that there were 309,000 people with significant gambling problems and 140,000 people with severe problems. Given the growth in gambling turnover since 1999 and the ever-increasing opportunities to gamble, that figure will be much higher today.

Of those 390,000 Australians, it is most likely that they are people who are the least able to afford to lose money. University of Melbourne research in 1997 showed that 48 per cent of problem gamblers had income under \$20,000 a year and a further 30 per cent had incomes between 20,000 and \$40,000 a year. That is almost 80 per cent of people with gambling problems earning less than \$40,000 a year.

The cost of problem gambling to individuals, communities and society cannot simply be measured by the amount lost directly through gambling activities. However, these costs are significant. In 1997-98, losses from gambling were estimated at \$819 per year for every adult Australian. Six years on, that figure is not likely to have reduced. Surveys of people reporting as problem gamblers show the health and social cost to individuals, communities and families. The Productivity Commission research shows that 90 per cent of problem gamblers considered themselves to be suffering from depression, 37 per cent had at some stage considered taking their own lives and 11 per cent had actually attempted suicide. That is over one-third of people with problem gambling behaviours at some point considering suicide as a solution to their problems. In addition, 42 per cent of problem gamblers reported having gone without food as a result of their gambling habit and one in four had suffered relationship separation or divorce. The cost to families and the associated cost to the health system need to be considered in the balance of benefits of gambling revenue.

The connection between problem gambling and crime paints a frightening picture of the desperation that comes with people's need to feed their habit or to solve difficulties arising from their problem. Usually law-abiding people find themselves in legal difficulties simply because they cannot manage their gambling. A 1997 study by Jackson and others into problem gambling in Victoria reported that 30 per cent of people with a problem admitted to committing an illegal act to finance their gambling. Queensland's statistics gathered from people presenting for counselling to the Break Even centre on the Gold Coast indicated that 53 per cent reported committing illegal acts to finance their gambling. A New South Wales survey of 300 problem gamblers receiving hospital treatment or attending Gamblers Anonymous found that only 35 per cent reported not having committed an offence. Fifty-nine per cent reported at least one gambling related offence, and that is a crime for the purpose of financing their habit; 18 per cent reported a non-gambling related offence, a crime for the purpose of solving other financial problems.

One of the saddest impacts of gambling related problems is the connection between crime and work and family breakdown. A St Vincent de Paul study into the nature of the crimes committed by problem gamblers found a prevalence of crime such as taking funds from families, friends and employers using debit and credit card fraud and stealing items from family, friends and employers to

hock at places like Cash Converters. Sadly, a crime commonly reported by problem gamblers is the forging of a spouse's signature on cheques or joint account withdrawals.

No member of parliament will be surprised by these reports. We have all heard stories in the community and indeed have helped many people who have lost their savings to gambling. I recall a story of a constituent who took a voluntary redundancy, having calculated an ability to survive in comfortable retirement. Within a very short period of time he had lost all of that money to gambling and was struggling to survive on benefits while looking for opportunities to return to work.

It is critical that governments undertake all possible measures to reduce the incidence of problem gambling. Responsible governments must accept that, as revenue gatherers through gaming, they must implement measures to help afflicted people receive counselling and do all they can to assist those seeking help to succeed. Almost 70 per cent of problem gamblers report unsuccessful attempts to address their problem. This bill implements measures to help people succeed and to encourage people into counselling.

Self-exclusion from gambling venues is an important mechanism in allowing people who recognise their problem to seek not to be able to access gambling venues. This legislation provides for a regime across gaming acts, creating a duty on gambling providers to exclude a gambler seeking self-exclusion and providing for penalties for non-compliance. In addition, gambling providers are required to ensure that a patron who initiates a self-exclusion order is provided with contact details for a counselling service. For those problem gamblers who unfortunately end up in the justice system, this bill, by extending the provisions of section 99 of the casino act, enables the court to postpone imposing a penalty on the condition that the person undertake counselling to address their problem.

Eighty-two per cent of Australians gamble, whether it is on Lotto, on the Melbourne Cup or a few dollars on the Lions winning the premiership.

Mr Wilson: Hear, hear!

Mr FINN: I take that interjection from the member for Ferny Grove, who is no doubt having a few lazy dollars on the Lions winning the premiership for the fourth time this year.

I, too, love an occasional punt. In fact, I am very much looking forward to Saturday, 16 October and the Pot of Gold Day at my local Rocklea trotting track. Many members will have read of the Rocklea trotting track in recent days. It has announced a very big and successful carnival coming up over the next six weeks, and I will be there on 16 October.

Whilst it is a great Australian tradition to enjoy a flutter, unfortunately some people lose their ability to control their gambling behaviour. The importance of this legislation is that it extends government measures to minimise the potential for harm from gambling activities in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (3.12 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill and congratulate the Treasurer on its introduction. I spent two years working in the club industry and with poker machines. I saw some of the sad cases. I well remember an elderly widow who managed to put her entire home through a poker machine—first by mortgaging it and then by selling it and losing the remaining equity. Over many years of medical practice, often in lower socioeconomic areas, again I saw the impact of problem gambling.

People will gamble. The approach of attempting to ban or restrict gambling has not proved to be a terribly successful one and probably just encourages illegal gambling. It is imperative that we bring in measures that will help to protect people from their own problem behaviour. Addictive behaviour, whether it be to gambling or to substances, is very difficult for people to control.

I like the self-exclusion provisions very much. Many problem gamblers realise that they do not have the ability to control their behaviour and, particularly at times when family crises have been precipitated by their behaviour, they are frequently remorseful and will seek to alter their behaviour. This provision will give them the ability to do that without relapsing into their problem behaviour.

In terms of establishments excluding problem gamblers, there are some comments to make. I think the provisions are well drafted, but it should be noted that the provision states that establishments 'may' exclude problem gamblers. Under the Liquor Act, in the case of someone who is drunk and causing a problem the establishment is required to exclude them. It should be noted that under this provision there is no requirement to exclude problem gamblers.

In terms of casinos, one thing I think we should watch is that the provisions are used truly for problem gamblers and that casinos are not tempted to use them to exclude people who win or people they wish to exclude for some other reason, such as behaviour and so forth. The provisions should be used purely for problem gamblers. In saying that, of course we do not have any worries at all about excluding people who win on poker machines because I do not think there are any. I am probably more with the members for Yeerongpilly and Ferny Grove in that I do not mind having a bit of a flutter, but we have to accept the responsibility of protecting people who have compulsive behaviour.

Finally, I challenge the government to extend its good work in this bill. A ban on smoking in licensed premises while people are gambling, with gaming machines or in casinos, would help people who have compulsive behaviour. Substance use—of alcohol or tobacco—is frequently associated with people who have poor impulse control and who are more prone to this sort of behaviour. Problem gambling might also be benefited by a ban on smoking in licensed premises and casinos. I congratulate the government on the legislation and support the bill. I am very pleased to see some action being taken on this problem.

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (3.16 p.m.): As we have heard, most Queenslanders like to have a punt of some kind. There is nothing inherently wrong with gambling for a bit of fun, but, as we know, sadly too many people have trouble knowing when to stop dipping into their pockets and gamble well beyond their means. Sadly, these are often the people who can least afford to be pumping money into machines or other activities. I am very pleased to support this bill as it strengthens the responsible gambling regimes that successive Labor governments have established in Queensland. In particular, this bill provides greater capacity for venues to better manage and support people who have a gambling problem.

The average Australian punter loses about \$625 a year. Problem gamblers lose an average of \$12,000 a year. Research also indicates that problem gambling lasts, on average, about nine years for individuals. So we are talking about nine years by \$12,000, which is a hell of a lot of money for people who can least afford it.

No one person, no one venue and no one government can ever really totally deal with the behaviour of others—people are ultimately responsible for themselves—but a strong, effective, responsible gambling regime is a critical component of our state gambling system. This bill provides a new exclusion regime for people experiencing problems controlling their gambling behaviour, including new procedures for self-exclusion. The bill also provides for a new mechanism of venue initiated exclusion, called exclusion directions. These are critical measures that have to be implemented. As members have acknowledged here today, there will be difficulty implementing these sorts of regimes, but it is very important that we continue to be vigilant.

In my new role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier on Multicultural Affairs I have taken a particular interest in whether gambling is more prevalent amongst particular ethnic communities. A number of reports have been commissioned, one of them by the University of Queensland, that have had a good look at this issue. Overall, the studies seem to show that there is no evidence to suggest that the prevalence of problem gambling is higher in particular communities than in the general Queensland community, but what all researchers on this issue have said is that the strategies to deal with problem gambling have to be culturally inclusive and appropriate. I think we have taken some steps in that direction in Queensland. For instance, Nick Xynias is playing a very useful role working on our state based committee, but we certainly have to make sure that there are educational materials and publicity in various languages around venues and that we actively work with the Vietnamese, the Chinese and other communities to make sure we are supporting their families.

The other very important issue this bill addresses is in amending the Gaming Machine Act 1992 to strengthen the power of the regulator to deal with private sector involvement in clubs. Community based clubs in Queensland have provided jobs, entertainment and support for lots of people. It is a great industry, and there are many great things about the club and hotel industries in Queensland. One risk, though, that the exponential growth in pokies has posed is that some of the bigger clubs seem to have lost sight of their original community based objectives. Some clubs seem to grow and develop as mini casinos and really have lost sight of those fundamental community based activities and philosophies from which they grew.

I had the opportunity with the gaming review that I conducted under the direction of the former Treasurer, David Hamill, to visit clubs and hotels and meet with a lot of club people and hotel people. It concerned me that some of them were using the US-inspired tricks and teasers to keep people mesmerised in gaming areas in clubs and pubs. The managers introduced dim lighting and kept those rooms as an area where people did not leave. They got locked into this culture like a trance and they just kept playing. That sort of behaviour is totally irresponsible, and I urge club and hotel industry people around the state to take a good look at that sort of behaviour and ask for what purpose are they there. Are they there to serve the community? Are they there to in some way cause harm? The answer definitely is that it has to be service to the community that is the priority.

The trend generally around the state has been that clubs have really come of age and have made quite significant profits. I want to commend a club in my local area, the Algeria Sports Club, formerly the Algeria Bowls Club. It was one of the bowls clubs in Queensland that was really struggling when pokies were first introduced. It was having difficulty competing with the bigger clubs. With some new management approaches, a lot of hard work and pledges by members of the club to keep the club going, it has really powered ahead now and is doing extremely well.

Again, pokies have been both good and bad for clubs like that. It is only where there has been good management that people have really handled the new culture and the new regime well. The bill

also takes important steps to limit the capacity for private entities and individuals to derive any gain from the community based clubs. There is a number of measures in the bill which will assist that, and I fully support those initiatives that seek to achieve that aim. The bill seeks to shift the balance in the gaming industry so that the benefits of gambling far outweigh the costs, and any activity designed to achieve that goal has my full support.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (3.22 p.m.): I rise to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 because it is essential that we as legislators do everything in our power to assist the individuals and their families who are caught up in the never-ending trap that surrounds them at every turn but are unable to extricate themselves. I would much prefer we were passing a bill which would outlaw gambling altogether, but that is impossible and impractical because it is there in every aspect of our lives in one form or another. It is under our noses every day and tempts the unwary or the addicted. There is no greater threat to the livelihoods of families who contain a wage earner who is addicted to gambling. Sir Joh was proven right when he predicted the damage that poker machines would have on family life.

I can speak from experience here because a family member late in life and after her husband had died sought company at the local RSL club. She was lured in with the bells and whistles; they were so attractive. She would come home skiting, 'I won \$40 or \$100 on the clubs,' but never told how much she lost. The truth is that many clubs encourage people to gamble, and for most people it is harmless fun, as many have stated. My husband is a member of the local RSL club and every year he receives gift vouchers from the club on his birthday which includes a voucher for the pokies. It is not very much money, but it is enough to make you want to put it through the machines. Thankfully, neither of us have that problem. We find the pokies pretty boring, and I do not think we have used one of those vouchers in the last eight to 10 years.

I know with this family member of ours that her mother's inheritance money and the money left to her from her husband was whittled away within seven years to absolutely nothing—even to the point where her house was in jeopardy and she came to live with my parents. It was a terrible situation to witness and perhaps that is why I personally hate pokies so much because I have seen the damage they do.

I have also seen the damage done to families when one of the parents goes into the clubs, spends all the money and the kids have gone without food. It is a terrible thing to witness and it is a terrible affliction on society. I fully support any enhancement to the current exclusion procedures for those wishing to have themselves excluded from gambling premises, though I disagree with the one-year clause where a person can simply say in writing that they want the exclusion lifted.

I also support the obligation of the gambling provider to supply at least one entity that provides counselling services for problem gamblers. I am trusting that that is a recognised entity and not just one that puts themselves forward. I trust that they have been checked out and their bona fides are correct. To a degree, I believe this is like closing the gate after the horse has bolted, but it is better than nothing so I support it wholeheartedly. I know that many of the community welfare organisations in our area—and I guess in every electorate—see the human face behind gambling and do absolutely everything to relieve the suffering of those families, and I have the greatest admiration for them.

I do have one question. Where a person signs up for an exclusion order in an RSL club, let us say, and it is activated, will that automatically take effect in other clubs? The Treasurer has indicated that it will not. They would have to do an exclusion order for every single club. I have a problem with that because it is really transferring the problem from one to another. The person may have had a moment of conscience where he or she signed up to be excluded from one premises but could then go on to others. Perhaps it is being a bit like Big Brother, but if a person took that step to exclude themselves would it not be appropriate—like Alcoholics Anonymous—to have some way of conveying to others that they have a concern? I would ask that consideration be given to that.

Mr Mackenroth: You wouldn't be able to police it.

Mrs PRATT: True, but maybe it would make them a little more responsible in their future actions knowing that there is some communication between the gambling premises. If a person has excluded themselves from a certain premises, that could be passed to others in the town or area. That might throw some extra weight behind the responsibility to themselves and family. I must admit I did question how it would be done and I guess that is for greater minds than mine, but if I do not ask the question the government will not even think about it. So please think about it.

I also recognise the provision made by a third party which could be a family member to be able to mount a case for the exclusion of the offending problem gambler if, I am assuming, it can be proven by that family that they have hardships. That in itself raises concerns with regards to someone being a bit vexatious and naming someone who has picked them in the club—someone who may have given them a hard time or stolen their poker machine. I have actually seen people fight over a poker machine. That really astounded me at the time, but it happens.

Mr Terry Sullivan: I have seen a fight over women, but you are not going to ban all women, are you?

Mrs PRATT: I would not ban them but I would ban the fights and any woman who provoked it or allowed it to happen. Most people can control their gambling habits and no doubt most people think it is a bit of fun. Whether it be just a couple of dollars on the scratchies or as little as 20c on a raffle, they are all forms of gambling. But I doubt there are very few people alive who have never participated in gambling of one form or another.

It is a sad reflection of our times that many clubs and pubs would not have survived if they had not been able to install poker machines. I remember in the little town of Wandoan, when pokies were first brought into the golf club, the pubs thought they would go under. With a very limited population the pubs really felt the effect of having this one venue with just three poker machines at the time.

Now they are everywhere. The pubs in my area have them. They are quite prolific, and they are all doing extremely well. Unfortunately, their doing well has impacted on a lot of families in the process. Many community organisations and groups have benefited from the gambling fund grants and now it is an accepted avenue of obtaining funds. Often it is the first point of call. It is good to see that the money is actually going back into the communities. But the question is: what is the cost to the individuals and their families? For some it is huge.

I commend the minister for the attempt at addressing a situation which is very painful to many people. I hope he will continue to pursue it so that not one single child is negatively affected by gambling.

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (3.30 p.m.): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. Gaming acts have been in place in this state for many, many years. It is a very important aspect of government that needs to have very clear and secure laws. This legislation will make a number of significant but relatively minor amendments to achieve greater consistency in the administration of all gaming acts. It will also clarify and strengthen a number of existing provisions. One hears the words 'technical changes' and think they are unimportant. That is wrong. They are necessary and they are important. With any system that is up and running, wrinkles appear along the way. Sometimes they are good wrinkles—unexpected but welcome—and sometimes they are bad wrinkles, with people taking advantage and abusing the laws.

This legislation is necessary. These changes are necessary and they are important. The amendments will strengthen the power of the regulator to deal with issues of private sector involvement in clubs. I think that is something that a lot of us had concerns about years ago, but a lot of the things that have happened in that regard recently have been positive and we need to take that into account.

Next there are amendments to provide for a consistent model across five gaming acts for the exclusion of problem gamblers from gaming venues. We have heard people talk at length about problem gamblers. People will do with their money what they will. When I was about 14 I saw a bloke burn £400 on the floor because, as far as he was concerned, it was his money and nobody else was going to get it. Because of problems he had with a marriage, he burnt it. He got rid of it. He could have gambled it at a racetrack or whatever, but he got rid of it. If people want to get rid of money, they are going to get rid of it.

Amendments to the Casino Control Act 1982 provide for situations where an overpayment to patrons is made at a casino. That really speaks for itself. I think people make mistakes from time to time and that needs to be sorted. Amendments to the Charitable and Non-Profit Gaming Act 1999 prohibit minors collecting prizes that contain liquor or another gaming product. I think that is self-explanatory. We do not want to encourage people to break the law, and that is what that does. This will sort that out. There are amendments to clarify that criminal history checks, including fingerprint checks, are required for candidates for appointment as commissioners to the Queensland Gaming Commission. We want on that commission people who are above reproach and whom we can trust implicitly—people who will not be able to be coerced by anybody within the industry. As we know, when there is money involved—and sometimes large amounts of money—people can be put under a lot of pressure.

There are amendments to strengthen the internal control systems required for gambling providers across all gaming acts, especially the lottery licensee, following the investigation of the Instant Scratch-It system validation matter. We need to make sure that checks and balances are there to ensure that we do not make mistakes and that we do not pay out more than we take in, I suppose, although we would all like to get a bit of that from time to time.

There are amendments to provide a consistent process for show cause action to cancel or suspend a licence. I think they are commonsense provisions. There are amendments to provide for consistency with respect to confidentiality and secrecy provisions. The Golden Casket Lottery Corporation Ltd will be able to offer online Internet registration to players of Lotto products. This is happening with the written agreement of the casket agents association. I and other members have lobbied the Treasurer in regard to this. I think it is good that there will be a written agreement in regard to it. It will affect a lot of people, but I think it is progress and we need to be able to take care of that and make provision for it.

Various amendments to the Wagering Act 1998 address matters arising out of the enactment of the Racing Act 2002 which came into force on 1 December 2003. If members think they are unimportant, then they were not listening. We need to look after the welfare of patrons who access gambling in our state. We also need to look after our gambling institutions. These changes will do both. These changes are fair. These changes are necessary. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (3.34 p.m.): This is a positive bill in that it achieves three matters. Firstly, it draws together a series of seven acts to adopt a generally consistent approach to a range of issues. It deals with problem gamblers by putting in place mechanisms to assist in protecting them and their families; it reins in those individuals who have in the past refused to return unwarranted profits; and it puts in place a regime across the legislation to deal with regulation of the industry, including breaches of the various acts. As such, it is a pleasure to support it. Consistency in similar legislation, as far as possible, is naturally a positive. In most cases it will provide a greater degree of certainty thereto lacking. These amendments go a long way to achieving that goal and are to be commended. In addition, it provides those involved in the gaming industry with a stable base from which to operate.

Gambling is, for the vast majority of people, a pastime or a relaxant which has no negative impact. There are those we call professional gamblers for whom gambling is an occupation and for whom it is a way of life. It has, generally speaking, limited impact upon those around them. However, there is a small group of gamblers who combine it as an occupation with a compulsion and become addicted to gambling. It is a social and community issue which has beset our state and indeed Australia for many years.

Without doubt, pokies and other forms of gambling provide income to the operators, employment directly and indirectly in the industry, winnings for players, revenue for the government and grants for the community. It is an industry that has grown over the past 20 years or so, yet with that growth has come an equally growing concern for those whom the bill refers to as problem gamblers. Problem gamblers suffer an illness. This has to be recognised and not merely considered a problem. The bill, of course, cannot rectify this, but what it does do is attempt to provide a mechanism to protect some of those who suffer from, or as a consequence of, the illness. As regards any addiction, there needs to be a desire by the individual to change, which of course can come only from inside that person. In some cases this can and has been assisted by legal penalties or legal sanctions, but these are generally secondary. A desire to change is both the start of the answer and a problem in itself.

Yet with all addictions, this act places the onus on the problem gambler, at least at this stage. The problem gambler is required to take the steps to deal with their problem themselves by seeking a self-exclusion document. This bill provides two further additional benefits. The gambling provider, upon being given the self-exclusion document, must provide details of counselling services to the problem gambler. There is a cooling-off period of 24 hours to withdraw the self-exclusion document. Exclusion periods run for five years.

The second group within the bill who can exclude problem gamblers by way of their own application for an exclusion direction is the venue in which the gambling occurs, but I note that this is not compulsory. In my opinion, this is unfortunate, but in many ways understandable. Often those who work in the industry have a greater knowledge of those at risk and see a greater volume of damage caused by gambling on a daily basis. This is a gap in the legislation, particularly if the aim of the bill is based on the good of society and our community as a whole.

We all have rights as citizens, whether as individuals or as a corporation, but those rights are equally tempered with obligations. One is to provide assistance to those less fortunate, to offer a helping hand. Sometimes that helping hand needs to be particularly harsh and at other times gentle. I suggest the time will come when the real issue will be the obligation of the industry itself. I acknowledge, however, the enormous task in making the industry responsible for this and, of course, I can see a real risk of litigation, more of which we do not need.

Previously I used the phrase 'those less fortunate', and it is important to understand who they are. Naturally it is the individual gambler, but, as we know, the impact has many tentacles and can shake families, businesses and, in fact, a society to the core, if not destroy them. It is not unusual to hear people from Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul and others tell of the increase in family destruction, loss of business and criminal activity flowing from problem gambling. All these impact on the innocent, including children who lose their home or a parent, employees who lose their employment, and families who lose their livelihood. This bill provides benefits to all concerned and, additionally, provides greater control on those operating gaming clubs. It is indeed a very good start and is to be commended.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.40 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill and acknowledge, as others have in the debate to date, that gaming has added significantly to government income and government has come to rely on that income.

Australians have been great gamblers over the years, from horseracing and dog racing through to the caskets and the Lotto and more recently scratchies. But overwhelmingly a huge amount of money is generated in the gaming industry from our major casinos. When casinos were first legalised there was a

great deal of comment within the community as to where the additional community revenue was going to come from to be able to feed this particular area of entertainment. As time has passed, it has transpired that the money has often come from a family's daily budget—the groceries and those sorts of things. In great measure our community has been the loser from this form of entertainment and often the families most affected are those that can least afford to be affected.

This legislation provides a new mechanism for venues to initiate exclusions of patrons that they view as perhaps having problems. There are three opportunities for these exclusions to come about. One of the opportunities is an approach by a third party. The question has already been put to the minister in relation to how that will be monitored to ensure that malicious exclusions or malicious reporting does not occur and what investigations are obligatory on the venue or the person to whom the third party reports the problem to ensure that the approach by the third party is a bona fide approach rather than perhaps maliciously based. Another opportunity for exclusion is an observation by the customer liaison officer or a member of staff of the gambling provider or an admission by the patron resulting in self-exclusion.

I agree with the inclusion of these provisions. I believe that self-exclusion, whilst it would not occur very often, would be the healthiest exclusion. It would be the exclusion where the person recognises that they have a problem and wants to do something about it. The biggest statement they could make is to say, 'Please do not let me in here to feed my habit'.

I find it difficult to believe that there will be too many venues who will initiate exclusions. One only has to read some of the reports in the media over the last couple of years where people are charged with fraud because they have embezzled or in other ways withheld funds from either their employer or somebody for whom they are responsible, and they have gambled away \$30,000, \$100,000 or more. It would be difficult for me to accept—unless they were going to many, many different gambling venues—that the operators of those venues would not be able to in some way investigate whether the proportion of money that they are gambling is equivalent to that person's employment or lifestyle.

I would like to believe that venues would initiate those exclusions, but I guess time will tell as to whether there is any motivation on behalf of those gambling enterprises to actually exclude patrons who are adding quite copious amounts to their income. The legislation creates a head of power but not a duty, so there is not an obligation on the venue. Until there is, perhaps there will not be too many venue initiated exclusions.

The legislation also amends the Charitable and Non-Profit Gaming Act 1999. The only point that I wish to raise in relation to that is that since the relaxation of obligations on operations to gain permits many not-for-profit groups are now struggling to be able to raise the funds that they used to raise through bingo or other similar activities.

In my local electorate I have heard a number of stories where small sporting organisations have struggled because the big gaming venues actually use bingo and the like to draw the community in. They have got the capacity to offer very cheap meals and a great range of prizes for the bingo, but the real reason for the gaming venues tapping into the bingo market is to be able to get them to stay and use the poker machines later on. Small charitable organisations are struggling to be able to raise any funds through bingo and the like.

I commend the sporting groups in my electorate that have made a conscious decision not to introduce gaming machines in its venues. Meteors is one such establishment which has actively resisted the temptation to put in gaming machines. Gaming machines are a new revenue stream in a lot of the clubs. Meteors has resisted and in some ways it has struggled to continue growing its area of sporting enterprise. The community has responded. Meteors has aggregated a number of sporting disciplines using its fields and it has, over time, gradually been able to improve its facilities. I commend Meteors for resisting that.

Another such establishment is the Palms sporting area. There are a couple of others in my electorate who have actively said, 'No, we wish to remain family focused and we are not going to get into the gaming machine scene.' I commend them. I bring to the minister's attention the fact that a lot of the charitable and not-for-profit organisations are struggling to make any gains in a financial sense because the bigger sites that already have poker machines are using bingo and the like to attract patrons.

I believe any activities taken on board by the minister in relation to the protection of people at risk of being problem gamblers is beneficial and welcome, and I certainly support that legislation on those grounds.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (3.47 p.m.): I rise to support the legislation before the House. It is legislation that provides practical, sensible measures to help gaming become an even more responsible activity. It has been developed with the expertise and experience of the community, the industry and government members of the Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee.

As with most human activities—sport, science, politics or eating—there are positive and negative aspects; there are responsible and less responsible ways of approaching activities. There are positive

aspects to gaming and I want to highlight some of those. The revenue has allowed clubs to provide employment, entertainment and excellent community facilities to a wide range of communities across Queensland.

I stood beside Treasurer Keith De Lacey when he dropped the first coin into the first legal poker machine in Queensland at the Kedron Wavell Services Club at Chermside. The Goss government's introduction of gambling legislation ensured that a couple of strategies were implemented that were extremely beneficial to the community. These were the establishment of the Gambling Community Benefit Fund and ensuring that a certain proportion of revenue was dedicated to assisting people who were having a problem with gaming. There are very few other activities where specific money is allocated from the general revenue of that activity to assist those who may not benefit from it.

I want to pay tribute to the Kedron Wavell Services Club for its contribution to the development of the community in Brisbane's inner northern suburbs. Throughout the state there are many communities benefiting from the activity that this legislation impinges upon. Kedron Wavell has won many Clubs Queensland awards. In 2002, when it won the inaugural responsible gambling award, the long-term president, Fraser Allom, said, 'That was our proudest moment.' I know that Fraser Allom and Ken Mogg, who work so closely with the industry and the patrons, were extremely proud that that was what their club was recognised for in 2002, because that is their approach to the community.

The Kedron Wavell facilities provide affordable meals and entertainment particularly to an elderly population in our area. The facilities it provides are pro-family, pro-children and pro-building of the community. Its meeting facilities—whether it be the community hall where large gatherings or business expositions can be held or a smaller room like the Long Tan Room or the magnificent Blue Pacific Room where 600 people can gather for a community function such as the Lilley Australia Day awards—are all community facilities which have been provided through revenue generated through gaming machines.

Working with the Brisbane City Council, particularly then Lord Mayor Jim Soorley and former councillor Terry Hampson and current councillor Faith Hopkins, the club built a multimillion-dollar sports complex. The hockey facilities are world class. It has gone from the Shawspartz facility, which faced financial difficulty on two occasions when my children were involved in sport there, to a multisports complex which is financially viable and providing healthy recreation to literally thousands of people each month.

The club is currently working to set in place and formalise the Zillmere Community Sports Club. My colleague Neil Roberts will know about the challenges faced over past years at the North Star complex. Kedron Wavell is using its expertise and some of the income generated through the poker machines to give back to the community.

It has been able to provide housing for seniors, particularly in the complex at the rear of the club in Ballantine Street. It has helped some of the older residents stay in the area in accommodation that is more suitable to them. It has worked with the Kedron Wavell RSL sub-branch, particularly on Anzac Day but also on other commemorative services throughout the year, to provide a magnificent venue and facilities to the local community.

I turn now to the people on the Kedron Wavell executive. Fraser Allom, for more than 27 years, has been the president and the guiding hand. People like Paul O'Brien, the senior vice-president, is very involved with Clubs Queensland, Aspley Little Athletics and Athletics Queensland. He is a real community builder. These are people who, with the responsible money management of people like John Draper, have really helped the community bind together. They do not see the club as a money-making machine; they simply see the club as a way of gaining revenue to provide services to the community. People like Jim Maloney gets involved in the local ambulance committee and other groups within the local suburbs to make sure that the community is benefiting from gaming activity.

I thank the Treasurer for this legislation. Unlike some speakers beforehand, what I see is, on balance, the benefits that have come to the northside community out of gaming and the way that it has been responsibly managed have outweighed the negatives. While we must always be conscious of and give support to those who are not benefiting from any activity, the residents, the families from the north side of Brisbane have benefited from these facilities. I thank the Kedron Wavell Services Club and the hundreds of other clubs across Queensland that have provided and are continuing to provide recreation, entertainment and community building for the people of Queensland. I support the legislation.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (3.53 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. It is great to hear the comments from members from both sides of the House in relation to the intent of this bill and the hope that it may better respond to people in our community and the great state of Queensland who unfortunately do have a gambling problem.

There is no doubt that we all know of examples of individuals and families who have suffered and how our community is really, in many instances, paying a very real and high price for people with a gambling addiction. Addiction to gambling is, in my mind, no different from an addiction to alcohol, an addiction to drugs or many of the other of addictions that are available to us if we avail ourselves of those opportunities. I really believe that the challenge is not just to introduce legislation with the intent of

the bill which the Treasurer has before us today and which we are debating but to really look at trying to focus the government's resources on teaching responsibility to our children and everyone in the communities through the length and breadth of Queensland that it is okay to say no. I repeat: it is okay to say no. I believe that it is time to focus government resources—state, local and federal—on the need to teach responsibility. If we do not teach responsibility, our communities throughout Queensland will have to pay tenfold in responding to the rehabilitation of people and the problems that members of our communities will face.

I know many other speakers have spoken about the benefits that flow from the gambling dollars in our communities. That no doubt is a challenge with which we all have to come to grips: do we think the benefits outweigh the disadvantages? In responding to that question I believe we really need to focus our energies and any resources that are available to us on teaching awareness, responsibility and how our actions impact on other people's lives.

On the news it is disappointing to see problem gamblers appearing before the courts because they have misused someone else's funds, denying that they have had a problem or trying to justify their actions by blaming someone else. It seems to me that we seem to be developing a mentality that we blame someone else for the problems we have and that we do not take responsibility for our own actions. Often we focus our energies and our efforts on compensation. When people go to court they have the best explanations as to why it was not their fault or why someone else was responsible for their bad actions. But again I say that people should take responsibility for their own actions. I certainly will be supporting this bill and do not intend to repeat the comments that many other speakers have made. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (3.56 p.m.), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. There has been one common theme through everyone's speech and that is that they all support the legislation. I thank them for it.

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in Detail

Clause 1, as read, agreed to.

Clause 2—

Mr MACKENROTH (3.57 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

1 Clause 2—

Page 16, at line 7, after 'Act'—

insert—

‘, other than sections 4A, 4B, 5A and 18(4) to (7),’.

I table the explanatory notes relating to the four amendments that I have to move and which have been circulated to members

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 3 and 4, as read, agreed to.

Insertion of new clauses—

Mr MACKENROTH (3.58 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

2 After clause 4—

At page 17, after line 26—

insert—

‘4A Insertion of new s 29A

After section 29—

insert—

‘29A Notice of particular change under casino management agreement

‘(1) This section applies if, under a casino management agreement, a person who is, or may be, the casino operator under the agreement may, from time to time—

- (a) stop being the casino operator; or
- (b) become the casino operator.

‘(2) At least 60 days before the person is to stop being or is to become the casino operator, the relevant person for the casino management agreement must give written notice of the proposed change to the chief executive.

Maximum penalty—40 penalty units.

‘(3) In this section—

“relevant person” means—

- (a) for a casino management agreement entered into by a casino licensee, or a casino licensee and a lessee under a casino lease—the casino licensee; or
- (b) for another casino management agreement—the lessee under a casino lease who entered into the agreement.’.

‘4B Amendment of s 31 (Cancellation or suspension of casino licences and letters of censure)

Section 31(1), from ‘who has entered’ to ‘lease’—

omit, insert—

‘under the agreement’.’.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 5, as read, agreed to.

Insertion of new clause—

Mr MACKENROTH (3.59 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

3 After clause 5—

At page 24, after line 4—

insert—

‘5A Amendment of s 57 (Liability for fees, taxes and levies)

(1) Section 57(2), ‘Where’—

omit, insert—

‘If’.

(2) Section 57(3)—

omit, insert—

‘(3) If—

- (a) the casino operator is not the casino licensee or a lessee under a casino lease and there is no casino lease, the casino operator and the casino licensee; or
- (b) the casino operator is not the casino licensee or a lessee under a casino lease and there is a casino lease, the casino operator, casino licensee and lessee under the lease;

are jointly and severally liable for all fees, taxes and levies payable in accordance with this part.’.

Amendment agreed to.

Clauses 6 to 17, as read, agreed to.

Clause 18—

Mr MACKENROTH (3.59 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

4 Clause 18—

At page 39, after line 31—

insert—

‘(4) Schedule, definition “casino management agreement”, ‘the other’—

omit, insert—

‘another’.

(5) Schedule, definition “casino operator”, paragraphs (a) and (b), ‘where’—

omit, insert—

‘if’.

(6) Schedule, definition “casino operator”, paragraph (c)—

omit, insert—

‘(c) if there is a casino management agreement—

- (i) for any period in which a person is, for the time being under the agreement, responsible for the management of the casino—that person; or
- (ii) for another period—
 - (A) if there is no casino lease, or there is a casino lease and the lessee under the lease has not entered into the agreement—the casino licensee who entered into the agreement; or
 - (B) if there is a casino lease and the lessee under the lease has entered into the agreement—the lessee;’.

(7) Schedule, definition “casino operator”, paragraph (f), after ‘licensee’, second mention—

insert—

‘, but does not include the person during any period after the grant of the licence in which the person is not responsible for the management of the casino’.’.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 18, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 19 to 123, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Bill, as amended, read a third time.

COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1) 2004

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (4.02 p.m.): I move—

That the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004 (Subordinate Legislation No. 52 of 2004) tabled in this parliament on 14 June 2004 be disallowed.

I have moved this motion after some considerable degree of consideration. As everyone knows, the Nationals have had some serious concerns about the way that the state government has gone about the implementation of its ambulance levy scheme. We have never had a problem with having a properly funded Ambulance Service. However, it has always been the issue of how we achieve that goal. Unfortunately, the government has taken away a lot of the community confidence and a lot of the support which used to exist for the Queensland Ambulance Service broadly. Back in the days when there was a subscription scheme, people felt a degree of ownership over the Ambulance Service in Queensland. That was indicated and underwritten by the fact that in areas around the state in excess of 90 per cent of people chose to voluntarily be part of that subscription scheme. Nobody had a problem with it. They were generally extremely supportive of it. Over and above that, there were many people who would be more than happy to continue to contribute by way of donation on a regular basis to the Ambulance Service in Queensland. Throughout my part of the world, that used to happen by way of direct cash donations from businesspeople and in many cases, at least in times past, would involve the donation of a bale of wool or the last bullock of the last pen sold on the day at the sales.

Those things have now gone by, and they have gone by for a number of reasons. One of those, of course, is the gradual dismantling of the way that the Ambulance Service in Queensland used to operate and used to be funded. When this government came to power in 1998, it made a very strong commitment—and we accepted that it had a mandate to do this because it actually campaigned on it—to provide free ambulance cover and transport services to pensioners in this state. We had no problems with that because it was the government's policy and we accepted that. We always said from the first day, however, that that was not a properly costed policy. What we have seen subsequent to that time is proof of it. It was costed at around about \$20 million per annum. The cost blew out to just under \$120 million. So the government had to find a way of funding that, and that is where the idea of this community ambulance cover came about.

It is also interesting to note that prior to the 2001 state election the government was saying that it had no intentions for new taxes and charges in Queensland and that it was not considering such an ambulance levy. Straight after the state election it broke that promise and did it. What an absolute shambles that created, because first of all the government was looking to put the levy on rates in Queensland. There was a revolt from the Local Government Association and local governments right across this state individually. That is where the idea of putting it on the electricity accounts of certain Queenslanders came about.

Therein lies a fundamental inequity, an inequity that concerned us greatly from day one. It concerned us greatly, because there are quite a few Queenslanders who are paying on more than one occasion. These are not just well-heeled Queenslanders; these are Queenslanders who have worked all of their lives who may have a little investment home or a couple of shops as well as their own home. In some cases, depending upon the nature of an agricultural property, there are a number of power accounts which could not be exempted and therefore they have to pay on a number of occasions. So that is where the \$88 ambulance levy came from. The regulation which we are seeking to disallow in this parliament is the one that takes that levy to \$90.20. Some people might say, 'That's only a small amount of money. It's only an extra \$2.20. It's only a CPI increase and the government has a commitment and a policy position of increasing things in line with CPI.' Not everything it does is increased in line with CPI.

If we look at the history of this issue, when was it brought in? It was basically introduced into this place on the day that the state budget was brought down. So there is no doubt that it was used as a cover. It was brought in on the day that the state budget was brought down when everyone was diverted with all of the hullabaloo and all of the hoi polloi over the state budget so that it would not get any attention. It was only in the subsequent day or two that the attention and the focus moved to this issue. This is not just a simple matter of standing up, as honourable members will do later on, and saying that it is a CPI increase so it is a just cause and we can all afford it. If we actually could be convinced that it was delivering us a better Ambulance Service in Queensland, if we could be convinced that it was all going into the Ambulance Service in this state, that there was actually a net benefit to the Ambulance Service and that it was not used in some way to shift other revenue or other budgetary commitments from the government, then we may have a different view with regard to it.

Let us look at the state budget of 2003-04. The estimated actual return for that year was \$92 million for the levy. In the 2004-05 budget the estimated actual return for the levy was \$104 million. So it went from \$92 million to \$104 million or a 13 per cent increase in levy revenue. Let us then go to the Queensland Ambulance Service budget for the outputs—that is, the amount that was actually expended of the overall total budget. This of course includes the levy and the amount that the government makes up out of consolidated revenue and also fee for service. The 2003-04 estimated actual output was \$225.353 million. The 2004-05 estimated output revenue was \$246,189,000 or a budget increase of 9.2 per cent. So it is worth noting that what we have seen is a 13 per cent increase of collections—that is, under this levy—but the increase in expenditure of the Queensland Ambulance Service budget is 9.2 per cent.

So is the money really going where it should be going to ensure that we have a better Ambulance Service in Queensland? I doubt that. A lot can be done with smoke and mirrors. Let us look at some of the other pronouncements from the state budget. The Treasurer said that \$9.9 million would be spent on new ambulances in this current financial year. However, if we compare that to 2001-02, it shows that the state government had spent \$10.5 million on new ambulances. That was three years ago—three years ago. So in actual fact, with a brand-new ambulance levy in Queensland—a brand-new ambulance tax in Queensland—and three years down the track and an estimated increase of 80,000 new Queenslanders each year or a quarter of a million in that time, we have a government spending less, a government spending \$0.6 million less.

So the government spent \$10.5 million three years ago when the population was a quarter of a million fewer. That in itself shows what a shallow policy decision this was. This was all about giving the impression to Queenslanders that they needed a well funded, properly run, professional, First World, high-class Ambulance Service. Nobody argues against that. It is very easy to go out there and con people into thinking that this is a great idea based on that argument. But I ask: how can the government justify spending \$0.6 million less in this budget on new and replacement ambulance vehicles than it spent three years ago when the population of this state was 250,000 fewer?

I turn to the response times for the Ambulance Service. Basically, one would have thought that in the first full year of this ambulance tax in Queensland, things would have been getting better. In actual fact, they have not got better; they have got worse. I have the figures that go back just a few months. They show that 65.9 per cent of emergencies were responded to in less than 10 minutes. That compared to 70.6 per cent four years ago. Surely that is an appalling indictment on the administration of the Ambulance Service in Queensland by this government. I ask members to also keep in mind that that better response time outcome occurred when the Ambulance Service relied on a subscription scheme—a greater degree of community input and support. So one would think that, to overcome that, the government should be spending more on the Ambulance Service in new and replacement ambulance vehicles rather than less.

We need to be convinced that the government is actually spending what it is currently collecting, and using that funding as part of a net significant overall increase, rather than just using it as a chance to sideline or divert the revenue into other areas. That is a very, very real concern of ours. As I indicated, there has been a 13 per cent increase in revenue collections under the ambulance tax and only a nine per cent increase in actual expenditure. The government cannot hide behind the veil of commitment and promises that it is actually using all of this extra revenue to enhance the Ambulance Service and the services it provides to people in this state.

We also need to look at some of the Premier's pronouncements on this matter. In a media release on 18 February 2003, the Premier said that 412,000 families who had previously paid \$98 per year under the subscription scheme will save significantly under the new ambulance levy. On the surface, that probably sounds right. With this latest increase in the levy, there is now a difference of only \$7.80 between the two fees. The other important point to note is that there will be many families across Queensland who are paying more than once. Many of those people are actually already far more significantly impacted on than they were under the subscription scheme.

I turn now to single subscribers. Under the old scheme, those 230,127 single subscribers paid an estimated \$76 a year. They are significantly worse off. Many of those people are paying more than once, depending upon their own individual circumstances.

So we have a situation in which a number of Queenslanders are paying very, very significantly and very dearly for this government's mismanagement and failure to properly cost a promise that it made in the 1998 state election. Quite frankly, Queenslanders should not be responsible for footing the bill more and more for this government's economic and administrative mismanagement in this state. As well, we have seen this government being embarrassed into providing more and more exemptions under the scheme. We support many of those exemptions because, quite frankly, they had to be made. There was a basic lack of justice and proper foresight into this scheme. That is why the government has to provide many of those exemptions—because it had not thought about those things in the first place.

Basically, we have a hotchpotch policy that has not been put together properly. We will oppose this increase, because we do not trust the government's modus operandi. We are not convinced that the

government is using the collections that it is already making in the best interests of providing a better Ambulance Service for the people of Queensland. The government's expenditure on essential equipment such as motor vehicles for the Ambulance Service and also reducing ambulance response times indicates that the concerns that we have are justified. We will continue to monitor any further increase that the government proposes for the ambulance levy in this state, because it deserves to be monitored. We need to make absolutely sure that the amount that the government is collecting is going to ensure a net increase to the Ambulance Service of the equivalent amount, not a proportional decrease.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (4.15 p.m.): I rise to second the disallowance motion that has been moved by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Southern Downs. This disallowance motion seeks to disallow the increase in the government's infamous ambulance tax. It is right and proper that we refer to it as the government's ambulance tax, because that is what it is. This new tax was introduced by the government, despite a string of promises that had been made that it would not introduce a new tax. This tax was introduced because of the greatest budgetary ill discipline we have ever seen. The Treasurer budgeted for an amount of some \$20 million to implement the government's promise to introduce free ambulance transport for pensioners in Queensland. That eventually cost something like \$120 million.

That was a good example of the budget discipline of the Treasurer. It was a good example of the economic credentials and the financial management ability of the Treasurer. It led directly to the need to introduce a massive new tax to cover up a hole that had been created simply because the Treasurer did not have a clue how much that promise was going to cost. The figures that he had used were so far out that basically the government had its back to the wall and it had to do something. It is so characteristic of this government that it is only when it has its back to the wall, it is only when there are no other options available, it is only when the government is jammed into a corner that it acts on a whole range of issues. The ambulance tax is a classic example of that behaviour. It was a panicked reaction to address a chronic underfunding of a government promise. It was a way to introduce a new tax and get around the commitment that the government had given and the obligation that it had not to introduce new taxes. It was a new tax that was introduced at the time and there can be no reasonable justification for an increase in that tax today.

The introduction of the ambulance tax has caused a huge amount of resentment and a huge amount of anger right across the community and especially among those people who have unjustly and unfairly been required to pay it a number of times. It is a lingering injustice that speaks volumes about this government's commitment to fairness and fair play. It consistently refuses to address the injustice that is being perpetrated on those people who pay more than one electricity account.

I know that there are people in my electorate who are continuing to refuse to pay the ambulance tax. They are continuing to deduct it from their electricity accounts. Before the Treasurer tells me, I know that his clever little trick in the legislation means that they are essentially withholding the cost of their electricity. But those people are taking the only action that is available to them to continue to protest the unfairness and the injustice of the imposition of this ambulance tax on them simply because they pay a number of electricity accounts. It certainly does the government no credit that it has consistently refused to acknowledge the unfairness of that.

The government was forced into some exemptions, simply because of the weight of public pressure and public opinion, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to get those exemptions.

Mr Mackenroth: That bill is before the House.

Mr SEENEY: I have dealt with a number of constituents who consistently tell me that it is a lot more difficult to get an exemption. I am not going to talk about the exemptions that are part of the bill. I have no doubt that the Treasurer does not want to talk about that injustice and unfairness, because that will be his legacy—the unfairness and the injustice of the way this ambulance tax was inflicted upon the people of Queensland, especially those people who pay a number of times simply because they pay a number of electricity accounts.

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I know that the member for Toowoomba North is somewhat embarrassed by the whole debacle of the ambulance tax. Perhaps he can get on the speakers list. I note that not many Labor members are prepared to stand up in this House and justify and defend the increase in this tax. There are about four Labor members on the speakers list, and I do not see the member for Toowoomba North's name. His embarrassment is such that he is not prepared to stand up and try to defend an increase in this new tax so soon after its introduction. I can understand that, because it is something of an indefensible position.

The other thing that makes this increase in this new tax so indefensible is the fact that the ambulance service available to Queenslanders since the introduction of this new tax has not been any better. We have not seen an increase in the service that is available to people—that essential service that we would like to think most Queenslanders could rely on. Not only were people asked to pay an \$88

tax on each and every electricity account; now, in the short time that has elapsed since its introduction, people are being asked to pay another \$2.20 by way of increase.

The fair question to ask is: what has been the increase in the service, both since the tax was introduced and now that this increase is being inflicted upon people? The answer is that the service has not increased. The reliability of the service has not improved. The expenditure the government has been able to allocate to the Ambulance Service in its current budget gives the lie to any suggestion that the Ambulance Service is better off because of the imposition of this new tax on Queenslanders. For government members to come in here and suggest that this will be the first of many automatic increases completely ignores the situation that exists in terms of service delivery to Queenslanders.

This tax has disconnected the Ambulance Service from the close relationship it had with the community. So many people in the communities I represent were prepared to support the Ambulance Service in their own communities in a whole range of ways, some of which the member for Southern Downs talked about. There were a whole range of ways in which people were prepared to support the Ambulance Service and the people involved in providing that ambulance service in their communities, because there was that close relationship between the community and the Ambulance Service. There was almost an ownership of that service by those communities, and they were prepared to support it.

Government members cannot expect that same level of support to exist in a situation where the government introduces an unfair and an unjust tax on electricity consumers to fill in the hole that it created in the budgetary process and then such a short time later seeks to increase the level of that tax. Of course the people in those communities are going to take a very different view of the Ambulance Service than they did when there was that close relationship. Of course this increase in this inequitable tax will add to the resentment and anger that already exists in the community because of the way this tax was put in place.

This motion seeks to deny the government the right to increase the ambulance tax. It is only a small increase; however, its symbolism is very great. This parliament should deny the government the right to increase this tax. It should disallow the regulation and it should support the motion moved by the member for Southern Downs. I urge every member in the House to do that today.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (4.25 p.m.): I rise to oppose the disallowance motion. Before speaking to the motion, I want to make a few comments about the extraordinary attack on Mark Bucknall that took place in this parliament this morning. I have known Mark Bucknall personally for about 15 years, and I know Mark to be a man of utmost integrity and decency. The opposition this morning engaged in an outrageous and disgraceful attack—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! Member for Nudgee, this is not relevant to the disallowance motion. I ask you to proceed with your contribution.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: It is not relevant, and I respect that. If the opposition wanted to do the decent thing, it would publicly apologise to him for that disgraceful attack.

The community ambulance cover scheme was introduced on 1 July to provide a secure funding source for ambulance services in Queensland. Under the scheme the community ambulance cover levy applies to most electricity accounts in Queensland and, as is well known, is collected through the electricity retailers. There are many accounts which are exempt. Since the implementation of the scheme the government has provided exemptions to around 500,000 accounts across Queensland.

Under the scheme, all Queensland residents have been automatically covered for ambulance services not just within Queensland but also across Australia. That is a significant benefit for all Queenslanders which did not previously exist. Of course, the benefits applied only to those people who subscribed to the previous scheme. That is not something which is widely acknowledged as a significant benefit that has arisen out of this particular scheme.

As I understand it, the National Party opposition has said that it will abolish the community ambulance cover scheme, but it has not said how it would fund the services in the ambulance sector and make up for the \$100 million-plus shortfall in ambulance funding. I recall very clearly the Staib report of 1996 which suggested that an additional \$32 million was required to properly fund the Ambulance Service. In the two and a half years the opposition was in power it did not provide that necessary funding. It took our government coming to power to provide a scheme which adequately funds this service, something the National Party was not able to do when it was in government.

Under the Community Ambulance Cover Act the levy applies to a range of different electricity accounts. The levy was imposed at a rate of \$88 per annum for the 2003-04 year. The levy is applied on a daily basis, and the rate for 2003-04 was 24.044c per day. To ensure that the Community Ambulance Cover Act continues to achieve its objective of funding ambulance services in Queensland, the act does make provision for the annual and daily levy to be increased each financial year. This increase is consistent with government policy whereby most levies and charges are adjusted in line with the CPI each year.

The Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Regulation (No. 1) of 2004 increased the annual levy to \$90.20 and the daily levy to 24.712c per day. The annual levy increased by the percentage increase in the CPI over the 12 months to March 2004, which was 2.5 per cent, and the daily levy is worked out from the annual levy.

The increase in the daily levy is actually 2.78 per cent, which is slightly higher than the CPI for the 12 months. This is because the daily levy is worked out by dividing the annual levy by the number of days in the year. As 2003 was a leap year, the daily levy for the 2003-04 financial year was consequently a little lower. Importantly, however, the annual levy for 2004-05 has increased only by the CPI increase over the past 12 months. For the 2004-05 financial year, the levy is estimated to raise around \$104 million, and this amount will be used along with additional contributions from consolidated revenue funding to fully fund the enhanced ambulance services delivered by the government under the community ambulance scheme. I oppose the opposition's motion.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (4.30 p.m.): The Liberal Party will be supporting this motion tonight. We do so on a matter of principle. We believe the ambulance levy scheme to be an unfair scheme. It hits some Queenslanders harder than others. Even if the government did have a mandate to introduce the scheme, it also had a responsibility to make sure that the scheme was fair and equitable. By any judgment, this scheme is not fair and equitable. As I said, we will be opposing it. The fact that there have been exemptions granted to certain categories of people in the past and there is now a bill before the House to extend the exemptions indicates that the Treasurer is struggling to try to make it fair. We appreciate that. But he had an obligation when he first brought it in to make sure that it was fair in the first instance—not to put an unfair scheme in and then try through a range of exemptions over a long period of time to eliminate some of the unfairness of it. That is the point to which we object. It should have been done properly the first time, not on a piecemeal by piecemeal basis over a longer period of time. It simply indicates that not enough thought was given to it in the first place. It is on that matter of principle that we support the disallowance motion tonight.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.31 p.m.): I am speaking in support of the disallowance motion that has been moved by the Opposition Leader. At the outset, when this ambulance tax was introduced, we felt it was unfair. It was introduced by the government to save its skin because it got itself into a mess. How many messes have we seen? We have seen the power mess, we have seen the mess with children who are in need of care and protection, and we saw the ambulance mess when the government made a promise during the election campaign that it would provide free ambulance services for people over the age of 60. It had not properly researched it, it was not able to fund it and it got itself into a major financial hole. As a result, it then had to go out and introduce this new tax simply because it made a promise at an election time when there was supposed to be an amount of trust around. We could not trust the Labor government. It had not properly researched it, it did not know the full cost implications, it was a wild promise and then it had to bring in this new tax because the costs of implementing the scheme were way above any estimates it had made, if in fact it had even made an estimate.

On that basis, we have always opposed the unfairness of the ambulance tax, particularly the unfairness faced by all those people who have had to pay it many times over. There are a lot of people in our community who have always subscribed to the ambulance and, in addition, provided all sorts of donations to the Ambulance Service. Many of those people now have to pay the levy a number of times. They object to it and they object to the basic unfairness of it. I heard the member for Nudgee say that the National Party said that we would get rid of it. We said at the election that we would review it, but our promise was that no-one would pay it more than once, to get rid of the basic unfairness of the system.

One of the reasons we are moving this disallowance motion tonight, in addition to the unfairness of the scheme from the outset, is that we noticed there was an increase of 9.2 per cent in the QAS budget but there was a 13 per cent increase in levy revenue. We only have to look at the number of houses going up in the south-east of the state and the number of people coming into the state to see the extra money that will come from these levies which are based on each person's electricity account. On that subject, that was another diversion for the retail power authorities. Instead of concentrating on getting the power right, they have been running around on behalf of the government collecting the ambulance tax. They have been collecting the levy instead of ensuring a proper and decent power supply and preventing the blackouts that have occurred.

Since the introduction of a compulsory ambulance tax people have expected that they would be able to get an ambulance service. I would like to thank Mr Marc Rowell, the member for Hinchinbrook, for the work he has put in on behalf of a constituent of mine who was very concerned about an old lady who was a friend of hers and who had been like a mother to her. This old lady I think was 78 years of age. She was in the final stages of cancer, was unable to work, had tumours throughout her body, was having continual radiation therapy and was in a lot of pain. This lady went down from Toowoomba to help this old lady on a day when she had to be transferred from the Mater Hospital to the PA Hospital for particular tests and brought back to the Mater Hospital.

The whole process commenced at 10 a.m. The lady from Toowoomba had to return to Toowoomba at 2 p.m. after sitting with this old lady at the PA Hospital where she was waiting for transfer back to the Mater Hospital. That transfer back to the Mater Hospital did not occur until 11 o'clock that night. So she spent all afternoon and half the night waiting for a transfer back to the Mater Hospital. She was told all the time when the people sitting with her asked for a transfer back that the ambulance officers were not authorised to take her back to the hospital. Finally, late in the night, a lovely ambulance officer gave her the help and support she needed and I think used a bit of force to get a service to take this poor old lady back to the Mater Hospital.

That should not occur. The minister has responded to our shadow minister and has expressed regret for any discomfort experienced by this lady, but people expect when they pay a compulsory levy that there will be a reasonable modicum of service provided. I think it is a good example of a Labor government that has simply got itself into a financial mess, whacked a compulsory tax onto people but has not brought about any improvement in the service. There is no extra money for the Ambulance Service out of this. All that happened is that this money was used to soak up a black hole of deficit and debit that had been incurred by a government that had wantonly gone out and put forward a promise at election time that financially it could not sustain. For those reasons, I will be joining my colleagues in voting for the disallowance of this regulation.

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (4.37 p.m.): It absolutely amazes me that we are here in this parliament debating a disallowance motion on the basis that we are paying \$88 per year or 24.04c per day. Now we are going to be paying \$90.20 per year or 24.71c per day for ambulance cover. It is still the cost of a chocolate frog every day and the increase of \$2.20 per year is the cost, roughly, of a Cadbury chocolate block per year. I cannot believe that the opposition is so pathetic and is wasting the time of this parliament.

The record \$300.8 million allocated to the Queensland Ambulance Service in the 2004-05 budget is tangible proof that the community ambulance cover is working for all Queenslanders. The record budget will be used to boost paramedic numbers, to provide new and redeveloped stations and new ambulance vehicles. The budget created history as the first state budget to allocate more than \$300 million to the Queensland Ambulance Service. It should be remembered that the last coalition government's ambulance budget in 1997-98 was just \$158 million. What a shameful effort from the National-Liberal party government!

This financial year's latest funding increase means funding for the Ambulance Service in Queensland has risen by a massive amount, which is well ahead of the level of inflation. The Beattie government will also spend \$100 million over the next three years on a raft of initiatives to further improve ambulance response times. The package will include at least 240 extra paramedics, 22 new or refurbished ambulance stations—one of which is the Redbank Ambulance Station in my electorate, which I will come to soon—and 200 new or refurbished ambulance vehicles. The \$100 million commitment will provide the most strategic and far-reaching package of initiatives to further improve ambulance response times ever delivered by a Queensland government. The package was only made possible by the July 2003 introduction of the community ambulance cover, which is providing a solid and predictable funding base for the Queensland Ambulance Service for the first time in its 112-year history.

I remember all too well how the ambos once struggled to raise funds through chook raffles, chocolate wheels and similar fundraising drives in the dark days of the coalition government. I can remember my father and all of his mates, the coalminers, voluntarily contributing week after week, year after year, decade after decade to the Ipswich and Redbank ambulance services until the mines started to shut down in the 1980s and beyond. Why did the mines shut down? Because of the coalition government. It is an absolute disgrace! The ambos themselves and their local ambulance committees were forced to do a huge amount of tireless fundraising back then, and we cannot thank them enough for their efforts. That is why our ambos are so well loved in our communities.

Where does the community ambulance cover money go? It goes on facilities like the Redbank Ambulance Station. The new ambulance station in my electorate was officially opened by the Emergency Services Minister, Chris Cummins, on 20 July 2004. I was there, and not one person in my electorate complained about the community ambulance cover. God knows what the opposition is talking about.

Ms Molloy: They don't know either.

Mrs MILLER: The opposition does not know what is going on either. The new station is a state-of-the-art facility which will provide continuing high standards of emergency response to the local community. God help us, we do need a decent ambulance service in our electorate because of the Ipswich Motorway. It is called out nearly every day to an accident.

The old Redbank station was opened in 1970. It was refurbished in 1981 and 1998. The new station has become necessary due to the increases in resources at the station. We have extra paramedics and extra vehicles. It also provides our local area with modern ambulance facilities to serve our growing population. In my area Collingwood Park, Redbank Plains, Brookwater, Springfield and Springfield Lakes are all new communities, and the new ambulance station provides ambulance cover

for these facilities. The Redbank local ambulance committee has also made a very positive contribution to the opening of the new facility. Apart from their fundraising activities, the LACs provide a vital role in community liaison and in promoting community awareness of the Ambulance Service. May I say that it is capably led by young Aaron Broad, a dedicated man in our community. He will be a good leader in our community in the future.

The new station at Redbank is evidence of the government's commitment to delivering state-of-the-art resources for our Queensland Ambulance Service. Our paramedics were recently declared the most trusted profession in Australia because they play a vital role in the community. It is absolutely essential that they have the best equipment, the best facilities and the best training possible.

The Redbank local ambulance committee is, in fact, meeting tonight. I am going to make sure that in my local area they have copies of the opposition members' speeches so that they know how mean and miserly those opposite really are. I want to say that Redbank Ambulance Station is led by David Eales, Peter Dennis and by Gavin Leader. Gavin Leader, who is our officer in charge at Redbank, is actually in Africa now on a humanitarian mission. But other people who serve at Redbank and who have served there locally are John Bain, Carl Wallace, Clifton Proud, Russell Pavay, Joanne Armstrong, Joanne Gosper, Barry Gerhardt, Doug Sinclair, Noel Elliott, Matt Jobst, John Borowski, Dee Taylor-Dutton—who is the acting officer in charge of Redbank at the moment—Greg Conroy and Jessica McNab. All of these officers have contributed wonderfully to the Ipswich Ambulance Service and, in particular, to the Redbank Ambulance Station.

Again, I reiterate my opposition to this disallowance motion. I cannot believe how mean the opposition is.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (4.44 p.m.): The community ambulance tax is a major, major public issue. This government knows that, and the manner of collecting the tax got rolled by the local government when the government tried to lumber it with the collection. This government also knows how unpopular the tax is. It knows that by attaching it to the electricity accounts of Queenslanders it brings in a smoke and mirrors effect. This tax means that some Queenslanders pay many times and others do not pay at all. Of course, the government hopes that those forced to pay—whether once or multiple times—will simply forget that the first part of their power bill actually has nothing to do with their electricity consumption.

The Premier stated in November last year that the previous method was not fair. On 13 November he said that what went wrong with the old subscriber scheme was that 'a large number of people were not paying their fair share'. He went on to say that that meant those who were paying were paying for those who were not making a contribution. Yet here he has done exactly the same thing. He is making some Queenslanders pay more and more to cover for those who are paying nothing. But what is he trying to do today? He is trying to defend a tax that is, by his own definition, inequitable and unfair. No wonder it is also unpopular.

With the new tax hardly a year old, the Premier is now jacking up the amount by a whopping two per cent. He has tried to sneak it through as a regulation. That is how the Beattie government makes itself accountable to Queenslanders. It jacks up an unpopular tax and tries to sneak it through the back door. Every sitting day in this place we listen to minister after minister stand up and tell us how wonderful everything is; how the Beattie government is doing this or that for the benefit of all of us; and how caring they are, how honest and open they are. But do not mind the ordinary people—the government just sticks its hands in their pockets and rummages about for a bit of extra cash! If you are one of those Queenslanders who are already paying more than your fair share, then look out because the increased bill will be multiplied across every electricity account you have!

The tax as introduced is so unpopular that communities across my electorate are refusing to pay. They get their power bills, they pay the levy once and they pay the electricity component on any further accounts—but they are refusing to pay more than their share. I commend them for their courage. They have received warnings and they know their power supply is at risk, even though they believe they have paid for it. I believe it is so dishonest for this government to say that the first part of someone's electricity account is their ambulance tax. These ordinary Queenslanders have now dug in.

I have visited some of these businesses and they have their generators ready. They are calling this government's bluff, not because they are ratbags but because they believe in a fair deal and they know they are not getting it. What they are getting is a raw deal. I want to be clear that I am speaking entirely about the unfairness of this tax and the creeping-about-in-the-dead-of-night way that this government has tried to go about increasing it. I am fully in favour of a properly funded Ambulance Service, Fire and Rescue Service, police, SES, our lifesavers and so on. I believe that the emergency services are a core government business and should be fully funded from consolidated revenue.

We do not have a police tax on our power bills; not yet, anyway. It seems that we can find the money for fancy football stadiums and flash pedestrian bridges in Brisbane but not for our Ambulance Service. Where is the Suncorp Stadium levy on those people who are close enough to make regular use of it? We do not see that. Of course not, that would be discriminatory, yet here we have an ambulance tax that discriminates against those Queenslanders with more than one electricity account. Small

businesses in particular are being treated unfairly by a Labor government which members might have thought was sympathetic to ordinary working folk. It is well and good for members opposite to puff their chests out and parade about like pigeons, saying they are determined to properly fund the Ambulance Service, but their actions prove otherwise.

Those opposite do not take it on as a core government service. They do not reach into their own coffers to pay the bills. They stick their grubby paws into the pockets of an unlucky minority and force them to pay on threat of losing their electricity. When it comes back to take an even bigger bite they do not even have the common courtesy to tell us. Instead, they are taking the money with threats and that, in my book, is plain thuggery. Thuggery is something that the people of Queensland will not stand for. That is why they are protesting. That is why they have organised generators and other standby provisions. That is why they are standing firm. This government is acting like a bully and the people of Queensland know it.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.50 p.m.): I rise to support the disallowance motion predominantly because the ambulance levy or the ambulance tax—whatever one would like to call it—is a fee that has been imposed on the community that, in principle, people in my electorate, and I am sure in most electorates, support. They support the principle of paying a levy. In fact, a lot of people in my electorate were ambulance subscribers. They reminded my office and anyone else who would listen at the time that the ambulance levy was put in place that they would happily pay the levy once. I can only think of one person who indicated an unwillingness to pay the levy. Overwhelmingly, people said that they were happy to pay the levy. But it was the imposition of two, three or more payments on an individual that they objected to.

The government stated at the time that all of the money from the levy would go to the Queensland Ambulance Service. Currently, I have a question on notice to the Treasurer because at estimates time I endeavoured to find out: how much money was actually gained by Treasury from the levy; what amounts were taken out by the electricity industry for administration; what moneys were taken out by Treasury for administration; and how much money actually went to the Department of Emergency Services for expenditure in the ambulance area. Whilst the Treasurer is still within time to answer that question—I am not saying that he is out of time—I am still waiting to get that information. People are yet to be convinced that all of the money that they put into this ambulance levy is being realised and is being apportioned to the Queensland Ambulance Service.

Mr Mackenroth: All of that is on board.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: The Treasurer interjects that they are getting that and more. I am sure that the community will be encouraged to find that out empirically. To raise the levy after 12 months, albeit by CPI, is a move that I believe the community objects to strenuously. Anyone I have talked to about the CPI increase has been angry about an increase this early in the piece. The Treasurer will defend the increase by saying that it is increasing by CPI. Until people see a flow through in benefits from the actual levy at home, at work or anywhere else, then they will not accept it.

Mr Cummins: What about the Boyne Island Ambulance Station?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: The Boyne Island Ambulance Station is welcomed. It has been on the books for construction for about four years. Whilst it is welcomed that it is finally there, it is not because of this levy that it is there; it is there because of other funding.

The ambulance service in my electorate covers a very diverse area. Geographically, they cover over six and half thousand square kilometres. We still have a number of single officer ambulance stations. Mount Larcom has an officer plus one on call. Calliope is still a single officer station. That is very concerning because it covers quite a significant geographical area back into the Boyne Valley and it covers highway accidents.

Of more concern at the moment is the Gladstone Ambulance Station. Staff rosters have been reduced. I acknowledge on the record that the minister is investigating these concerns. I thank the minister for that. We do not have any answers back, but I thank the minister for taking on board some issues raised, I think, during the last parliamentary sitting. His office has been in contact with my office and I have had a number of discussions about that. I acknowledge that.

The issue that is being investigated currently is that the night shift has been reduced to two people. In the week encompassing 20 August there were two people on night shift. One was sent to Rockhampton to cover that station. I am yet to be convinced why Gladstone ambulance officers were sent up to the Rockhampton Ambulance Station when they have closer ambulance stations and a significantly higher staffing allocation than Gladstone has. The other officer was sent to Miriam Vale, so there was no-one on night shift in Gladstone. The day staff, who had already worked 10 hours, were put on call. Those staff attended four callouts through the night.

When we have the ambulance service in situ facing situations like this, the community at large will find an increase in the levy this early in the piece very unpalatable and unacceptable. It is on that basis that I will support the disallowance motion.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (4.55 p.m.): I rise to support the disallowance motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. I do not think anyone disputes paying the ambulance levy but they certainly dispute paying it 10, 20 or 30 times. I heard the member for Bundamba speak in the House a while back. I have great respect for the member for Bundamba, but I say to her that it is not fair that people have to pay the ambulance levy so many times.

Fair is fair, but this is not fair. I do think anyone disputes the fact that we have to pay an ambulance levy. We can go back a few years and not everybody was paying the ambulance levy. I know the government found itself in a quandary because of the situation that arose at the time. When we talk about essential services there is probably no more important an essential service than the Ambulance Service.

The situation, as I currently see it, is that even though the fee is going up only \$2.20, that \$2.20 will certainly push it to \$90.20. There is one businessman in Cairns who, I understand, is paying it something like 60 times. Where is the fairness in that?

I say to the Treasurer and the government that if it is going to be fair and if we are going to do this properly, why do we not revisit the policy and the formula to see if we cannot get it absolutely right so that it is fair to all Queenslanders. The Premier said in this House and in the media on numerous occasions, which I support, that every Queenslanders is going to be covered by the Ambulance Service. So they should be covered! We can talk about our pensioners and the others who do not pay. At the end of day, that is good because those people have paid their dues in the past and they have passed this state on to us in the way it is today. We have to look very closely at how we manage this concept.

The Premier stated in his media release on 18 February 2003 that the 412,000 families who previously paid \$98 a year under the subscription scheme will save significantly under the ambulance levy. I can assure members that there are a lot of those families who will be paying the levy four, five, six or more times. With this latest increase to the levy there is only a difference, the Treasurer says, of \$7.80 between the two fees, with many families paying more than once. The promise that this scheme is more affordable for families is now looking very weak, I have to say.

Former single subscribers are now paying significantly more. The 230,000 single subscribers under the old scheme previously paid an estimated \$76 a year. I have said on numerous occasions that I know people who do not pay the levy at all. I know a lot of people who work in industries where they live in subsidised housing, earn big dollars and do not pay a bent razoo. So where is the fairness in that? I say to the Treasurer that that is something that has to be revisited. It has to be put into perspective.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: They are definitely not paying it. In a lot of those cases they are not paying it. I can show the minister evidence of that.

One area in my constituency takes in my old home town of Quilpie, and at the moment those people find themselves in a quandary. The ambulance service in that area is run through the local hospital. It is a funded arrangement in that the Queensland Ambulance Service provides the vehicles and the Quilpie Hospital provides the staff and drivers. Often the hospital is limited in its availability to supply qualified staff for this purpose—that is, nursing and driving staff. As such, the community is concerned about the very real repercussions in that staff are not readily available for the ambulance service and at the same time the limited staff not being available to the hospital. The Quilpie community and the council are desirous of the Queensland Ambulance Service staffing the ambulance service in Quilpie, and I am pleased to see that the minister is in the chamber this evening.

This is another inequity in this operation. When former Minister Mike Reynolds had responsibility for this issue, I made representations to him on numerous occasions about addressing the same situation which existed in Barcaldine, and he duly did. While there is this policy in place where everybody is covered, these people should be covered, too. The Quilpie shire is some 68,000 square kilometres. Quilpie is the main town, Toompine is 50 miles to the south, Eromanga is 68 miles to the west, Cheepie is about 45 miles to the east and Adavale is another 60 miles to the north. I have to say that these people are entitled to have that coverage of service too, and I remind the House that many of those people pay that levy more than once.

Whilst we will be defeated by the sheer weight of numbers of this government in debating this disallowance motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, I say to the Deputy Premier and to the government: please revisit some of these issues. They are very valid points, and I believe that these people are entitled to fairness and equity. If that is done, this issue can be addressed. Nobody minds paying the levy. I certainly do not mind paying the levy, and I know a lot of other people out there who do not mind paying the levy. However, at the same time they want to make absolutely certain that they have a service that covers their area and that they are not paying this levy for somebody who should be paying it but is not paying it. That is where it is totally wrong. That is why we will not support the government with this increase as such.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (5.02 p.m.): In rising to speak on this disallowance motion, I have to acknowledge what the Ambulance Service does because I have had a bit to do with it over a long period of time. Throughout the rural areas of Queensland, the ambulance certainly plays a significant role as far as ensuring people's good health and wellbeing are in place. Over a period of time there has been a range of schemes in putting together funding for the ambulance. I can recall a time when canegrowers used to pay a levy to benefit the ambulance and, because of that, the communities had some ownership of the Ambulance Service. However, time has progressed and other people thought that fees should be raised in another way. As a consequence, we are now in a position where the decision has been made to collect the fee through electricity accounts.

There are great variations as to how electricity accounts are put together, because in many instances some people have a range of accounts. There have been some concessions made over a period of time if there are pumps on a property, houses and that sort of thing. However, at the end of the day, very often they are on different lots. Many businesses have a range of premises that do not attract the exemptions that were given to others who could reduce the cost imposed on them by having the levy apply to one property. There is quite a variation and, as a result, there are some inequities. I know people who pay some two, three and four times and perhaps even more. In fact, the other day I was speaking to somebody at Saunders Beach, which is in the southern end of the electorate, and they raised this issue. They had a business in Townsville and were very concerned about the fact that they were paying more than once.

Returning to the community aspect of the Ambulance Service, as I said, canegrowers used to pay a levy to raise money for the needs of the ambulance. We used to put something like a quarter of a cent a tonne in and as a result built new premises at Ingham. Some communities were very good at doing this sort of thing and others were not. When there was a necessity for a new four-wheel drive, there was no dispute. Nobody said that they would not support the ambulance. Of course, within a very short period of time both the harvester operations and farmers put in quite a bit of money. They were only small amounts but they were very beneficial amounts in acquiring the things that were necessary in these districts, particularly in the Ingham district because that is the one that I am very familiar with. There were no concerns about assisting and supporting the ambulance.

The issue before us is that there is a CPI increase which means that the levy will go from \$88 to \$90.20. That might be regarded as a small amount, but where businesses are paying on numerous occasions it adds up to quite a bit. Of course, those businesses employ others. They have to not only carry the burden of the increase but also satisfy the needs of their employees as far as wages and workplace health and safety. This is just another compounding issue that they have to deal with. When one looks at the estimates from 2003-04, the estimated actual was \$92 million and the 2004-05 budget shows something like \$104 million. There has been some increase, and I believe that is woven into the actual amount that is going to be collected with this new tax. There has been a 13 per cent increase in the levy receipts but only a nine per cent increase in the QAS budget. It is quite evident that the figures are moving around a fair bit in terms of the way the Ambulance Service is being funded.

I also want to raise the issue of a number of people who live in a single residence. They may share a small amount of the actual fee such as \$10, \$15 or \$20, but they get full cover. However, somebody else who is paying three and four times certainly does not get any better benefit in terms of ambulance cover. In fact, they are probably employing people at the same time and are making more than their fair contribution to the economy but are paying an increased amount in terms of the ambulance levy. I am very much aware that the electricity authorities are getting something like \$5.7 million for the way they go about collecting the fee. That seems like quite a bit of money to me for the sake of a computer entry which is ongoing and that is then automatically sent across to Treasury for the collection of the levy. It is quite evident that there is a fair amount of money involved in this process. When one divides that \$5.7 million by the \$88 or now the \$90.20, there are quite a few contributions that are going towards the fee being charged by the electricity authorities. I am not getting away from the point that there was always an issue as far as collecting money. I believe that the method being used now is certainly very efficient as a method of collection. I am not necessarily supporting the way that it is collected, but it is an efficient method of collecting funds for the ambulance—that is, the funds go to Treasury and it then gives that money to the Ambulance Service itself.

I am pleased that the minister is present in the House, because I want to raise an issue. I believe that the system is becoming impersonal. Once if a person had a particular need, an ambulance officer was available. If a person had something in their eye, or in their foot or something of that nature, the ambulance was a very good source of providing some very minor dressings and a very minor service to that person. Of course, if the ambulance officer believed that he did not have the capacity to provide that service, he would refer that person to a doctor. That was a given. The ambulance officers did not go beyond their capacity. There is little question that nowadays ambulance officers are more highly trained and highly skilled and act as paramedics to assist people.

I want to raise an issue that I wrote to the minister about which concerns a 78-year-old lady who has advanced cancer. She was taken from the Mater Hospital to the Princess Alexandra Hospital for

treatment and waited at least five hours after receiving that treatment. I was told that she waited longer, but I am not disputing what the minister has said.

The computer-aided dispatch system allocates ambulances. This system positions ambulances throughout the state and it allows the Ambulance Service to know exactly where the ambulances are located. I have been to the call centre in the minister's part of the world. There is little question that it is a very efficient operation. We can use all of these whiz gadgets and so on, but it was quite evident that this lady had a major problem in getting back to the Mater Hospital. Unfortunately, she was left to her own devices.

The story that the minister told me is slightly different from the one that I heard. I heard that had it not been for an older ambulance officer who recognised that lady's need, she would have been left there even longer. There is little question that her plight was extreme. But after a period she managed to get back to the Mater Hospital. I want to recognise that the minister said that this probably was not good enough. I am just making the point that the system is becoming a little bit impersonal. If there is the ability for somebody to recognise a person's plight, I think that is absolutely necessary.

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (5.12 p.m.): I speak against this disallowance motion and it gives me great pleasure to do so. We have a community ambulance cover in Queensland which, incidentally, for the information of the members opposite, was taken into account by the people of Queensland when this government was returned in February. There was a levy of \$88. What parsimony do we hear from the members opposite who argue about an amount of less than 5c per week—\$2.20—which is the CPI increase.

We hear all about the people who pay the community ambulance cover 60 and 70 times, but a number of people come to my electorate office—pensioners who do not pay it—and ask to voluntarily make some payment in relation to the ambulance because they appreciate the quality of the Ambulance Service that is being provided and will continue to be provided with this levy. The community ambulance cover at \$90.20, taking into account the increases in the CPI, has to deal with things like rising fuel costs and wages. It is a nonsense to say that the amount of the community ambulance cover would remain the same for all time. Charges go up for everything. Charges have gone up radically for fuel. We now have fuel that is almost \$1 a litre.

We need a properly funded Ambulance Service. This community ambulance cover gives it to us and it gives it to us on a daily basis. Since it was introduced, there have been 110 extra paramedics appointed and another 240 will be appointed over the next three years. In my own electorate, two new paramedics have been stationed at Yeppoon and one permanent paramedic has been stationed at Emu Park. There is a new ambulance station to be built at Emu Park at a cost of \$750,000. Where do people believe this money comes from? Does it come out of thin air? No! It comes from the contribution by the community to a properly funded Ambulance Service.

The member for Gregory mentioned the size of his electorate. It was brought home to me only in the last week that the aerial ambulance that used to operate is now operated by the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is also being funded by the state government from the contribution to the Ambulance Service.

Nothing comes free. I think that even a Liberal politician said that there is no such thing as a free lunch. But the increase in the community ambulance cover at \$2.20 is in line with the increase in the CPI index. I believe that the people of Queensland are prepared to accept that the community ambulance cover should increase only in line with rises in the CPI index and that the community ambulance cover should continue.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (5.16 p.m.): I support the disallowance motion moved by the member for Southern Downs that the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004, Subordinate Legislation No. 52 of 2004, tabled in this parliament on 15 June 2004 be disallowed, and I do so purely on principle. People were not necessarily happy when the ambulance tax was introduced, but they were prepared to accept it and pay the \$88 per annum. But members should not kid themselves for one moment that those same people do not resent being asked to pay a little bit more. The people are prepared to pay one levy, but they are not prepared to pay more than one levy and they resent the increase.

A lot of people do not pay any ambulance tax at all. There are many people who live on five-acre blocks who use solar power or who use generators, or who share accommodation with six or eight other people. One young gentleman came to my office and asked me whether he was covered by the ambulance tax. He was going interstate. I asked, 'Where do you live?' He said, 'With my grandmother.' I said, 'You are covered.' He said, 'But I don't actually pay anything.' I said, 'But you are still covered no matter where you go.' He did not think that was fair, but then again did he not offer to pay, either.

All business persons and other people with multiple meters pay the levy twice or more to cover those who pay nothing or very little at all. The Treasurer was very clever—and I think most people give him credit for that—in insisting that people will only be failing to pay the electricity component of the bill if they take off the second, third or more amounts of ambulance tax, because the ambulance tax is the

first \$22 of each and every electricity bill. In my area, there are a lot of older buildings. Any business only has to expand to the adjoining shop in an old building to end up paying the levy maybe twice more as there may be two or more meters in the next shop. People are being penalised for living in older buildings. Those people will continue to be penalised, because there is no way that they can object to this tax by non-payment without eventually denying themselves power.

It offends me and those people that the electricity companies agree to the skulduggery of this government's actions, but when we consider that they are GOCs, we can understand that they did not really have much choice. People in rural and regional areas often had multiple meters because, as a friend of mine who has been an electrician for over 50 years stated, every time there was an addition to a house, whether that be a laundry, a shed, or a veranda with outside lights, it was easier for the electrician of the day to add another meter.

It is true that there have been a lot of exemptions, but there are still a lot of people who have been and will continue to be taxed unfairly. People now have to pay more for a service that they believe was foisted upon them, because they believe that it was their right not to subscribe to the Ambulance Service, and they also believe that the service has not been proven to have improved in their areas. Many areas now have the perception that their services have in fact been reduced, because they have first responders—volunteers who continually pick up the services which they believe were once others' responsibility. These first responders do a terrific job, and they display the same zeal for their community today as they would have and did for the Ambulance Service in the past. The tax rise may be only a minuscule amount to some in this House—it may only be equivalent to the CPI—but the principle of the matter is the reason for the ongoing angst expressed in the community.

People once gave a lot of time to supporting the ambulance. They bought lucky envelopes, and no-one minded if they did not win because they knew they would get the benefit in the long run. In every area I have lived, from when I was a child to recent times, ambulances have been well supported by the community. Some areas actually had two ambulances which were very well equipped. Rural areas knew really well that they needed these ambulances—they were a lifeline for them—and they looked after them very well. In the last area I was in the best ambulance was actually taken away and given to the coastal regions, which upset the people in the area no end. I do not think the resentment from those days has actually been resolved.

This tax was born simply because of the election promises of this government. Free ambulance for the elderly was the promise which could not be funded, as costs were underestimated. To keep that promise this tax had to be initiated. Many of the people who benefited from that promise have actually offered to make some contribution towards the ambulance tax. They have been used to paying and they are still prepared to pay. As was stated, it is very easy for them to contribute if they wish to, and they do. It is something I would encourage of everyone.

This debate tonight is over a matter of principle. The government says that it had a mandate but, as the member for Robina said, it also had a requirement to ensure the system was fair. It has not proven to be fair. Right outside a property at Kingaroy is a fuel bowser which actually pays its own ambulance levy. As the person who owns it said to me, 'When it breaks down, do I call the ambulance?' Although I acknowledge that the ambulance needed funding, I am still receiving almost daily complaints from people who have to pay more than once. I support the motion.

Hon. C.P. CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (5.22 p.m.): Like the member for Nanango, I have had people approach me and say that they are exempt from the ambulance levy and would like to pay. I say to them that they are more than welcome to make out a cheque for \$90.20 to their local ambulance committee. I would encourage all Queenslanders to consider that. Coming from the Sunshine Coast I do have a bit of bias, but I also say that they could look at making a contribution to the Energex rescue helicopter. These are two great services. Time and time again I have found that people who are exempt but who do want to pay are more than willing to take those suggestions on board.

I will not be supporting the community ambulance cover disallowance motion. The Queensland Ambulance Service now has a solid and predictable funding base for the first time in its 112-year history. Every cent the QAS receives from the CAC is spent on ambulance services. This financial year's record budget for the QAS of \$300.8 million is tangible proof that the CAC is working for all Queenslanders. This record budget allocation will ensure that the Queensland Ambulance Service can and will boost paramedic numbers, provide new and redeveloped stations and provide new and refurbished vehicles.

The latest funding increase means that since 1998 under the Beattie Labor government funding for ambulance services in Queensland has risen by about \$138 million—obviously well ahead of inflation. Such a solid budget enables the Queensland Ambulance Service to continue to deliver world-class patient care to all Queenslanders. Funding of \$5.6 million in 2004-05, which is part of the \$35.9 million commitment over three years, is provided for an additional 240 paramedics over the next three years, with 100 paramedics commencing already, up until the end of the financial year just concluded. This is on top of the 110 paramedics employed by the QAS during the 2003-04 financial year. One hundred new paramedics will be commencing this year, 2004-05. This is the largest boost to

paramedic numbers in the history of the QAS and is aimed squarely at addressing the growing demand for ambulance services caused by Queensland's growing and ageing population.

This budget also provides a boost in funding for new vehicles and upgraded equipment and infrastructure. The increased funding has enabled a boost to the QAS capital investments budget with a total of \$31.1 million. This includes funding to provide nine replacement or redeveloped ambulance stations, two new stations and one field officer residence at Cooktown, to be completed in this financial year. \$9.9 million has been provided for new and replacement ambulance vehicles across the state.

In July I announced that the QAS recorded an increase of 8,631 code 1 emergency cases in the past 12 months. This is a 10.17 per cent increase on the same period last year. It means that our hardworking paramedics have got to 8,631 more patients than last year to administer life-saving treatment. That really is an achievement. It also exposes the myth that some members of the opposition have been perpetuating about response times. Not only have we slightly improved our response times; we have reached more than 10 per cent more patients under 10 minutes.

With such growth in demand each year, it is obvious that the CAC is a necessity. Some members opposite have made comments to the effect that we should have gone back to the old days of the QATB system, with separate boards and separate funding. I remember all too well how the ambos once struggled to raise funds through chook raffles, chocolate wheels and similar fundraising drives.

The local ambulance committees also did a huge amount of tireless fundraising during those dark days, and we cannot thank them enough for their efforts. The Beattie government values its hardworking paramedics. They are the most trusted professionals out there, closely followed by our fires. They deserve our sincere thanks. The paramedics deserve to be properly funded.

The Beattie Labor government, along with the entire ambulance community, is aware of the role LACs play in the organisation and acknowledge their dedication to raising awareness and funds for the service. It is to be noted that all of the funds raised by the LACs are over and above the budget allocation to buy additional equipment in their community. Members will remember that these LACs did a huge amount of tireless fundraising during the dark days of years gone by, and we can still not thank them enough for their continued efforts. Members may be interested to know that there are now 178 local ambulance committees throughout Queensland, with a new station at Howard coming on line, and membership is at approximately 1,400 people.

With the introduction of community ambulance cover the QAS has a secure funding base for the first time in its 112-year history. Importantly, all Queenslanders, their spouses and dependants travelling anywhere in Australia now have ambulance coverage. This means that LACs will no longer need to concentrate on recruiting subscribers. LACs are concentrating on promoting community awareness of ambulance services; promoting community preparedness in an emergency; providing advice to the QAS commissioner and the assistant commissioner of each region through reports, meetings and conferences; fundraising to directly benefit their local ambulance stations; and purchasing equipment from community funds.

The LACs, who were instrumental in ensuring all Queenslanders now have ambulance cover, are concentrating on future challenges in their communities. Now that funding issues have been resolved, our volunteers are working at the front end. It is great to know that our hardworking ambos are always there, but these programs aim to educate various sections of the community so that Queenslanders hopefully do not have to use them.

Local ambulance committees are just as vital to the people of Queensland and the Department of Emergency Services today as they were when the first group formed at the turn of the last century. I again thank the LACs for their support and urge them to continue their fantastic work in the community.

I would just like to touch on an issue that the member for Gregory raised regarding the Jericho ambulance station. The Bush Nursing Association ceased operations in Queensland in July 2004, including its operation in Jericho. St Luke's Nursing Service has taken over the Jericho health centre as of July 2004. The area director and assistant commissioner of the central region of the QAS has met with representatives of St Luke's Nursing Service to discuss the ambulance component of the Jericho operation.

At this stage, agreement has been reached for the provision of ambulance services by St Luke's Nursing Service from Monday to Friday including out of hours call-outs. If the St Luke's Nursing Service resources are not available to respond to a call-out, a response is provided by the nearby Alpha Hospital, which is located approximately 50 kilometres east of Jericho. The current workload of approximately one case per month does not warrant the establishment of a full-time ambulance service at Jericho. Alternative methods of service delivery including first responders are currently being investigated. The first responders group will be coordinated by the newly created position of Group Coordinator Barcaldine. This position was recently advertised in the departmental gazette and interviews were conducted during the week commencing 23 August 2004.

It is envisaged that once a first responder group is established it will complement the current arrangements provided by St Luke's Nursing Service and provide a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week

response. In addition to the provision and maintenance of an ambulance vehicle, the QAS currently provides training for clinical staff, prehospital patient care supplies and technical radio support for the Jericho health centre.

In closing, the member for Gladstone raised some issues with regard to her electorate. I can assure the House that shift coverage at the Gladstone station has been effectively maintained at all times. There are instances where the Rockhampton Ambulance Station assists filling shifts due to student paramedics attending courses and officers taking annual leave.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (5.32 p.m.): I rise to support the disallowance motion moved by Mr Springborg, and in doing so I would like first of all to refer to a description provided by Brendan Pearson in today's *Financial Review* when he determined that Mark Latham's proposed levy on company and small business payrolls was actually a tax. He said, 'You can paint lipstick and mascara on a pig, add earrings to it and call it Peggy Sue, but it is still a pig.'

Accordingly, we must be under no misapprehension here. We are talking about a tax, not a levy, and it is a tax that is proposed to be increased. This tax arose as a consequence of this government's lack of capacity to protect our free ambulance system. Its first attempt was to provide, at a cost of \$110 million per year in 1999, free memberships for pensioners. The issue was not properly dealt with and, as a result of no planning being put in place, no plan existed for the consequences that may flow. In fact, the actual cost blew out significantly, leaving this government to impose a tax. This tax was initially fixed at \$88 per year and imposed inequitably across the community. We now have before this House an amendment to increase that tax to \$90.20 per annum—again inequitably across the community. Is it any wonder that people are looking at this government and saying, 'They are not protecting us, they are not planning for us, they are not investing in our future'?

Despite the overwhelming funds received by way of GST and significant tax windfalls, there is seen to be the need to impose upon a section of our community an increased tax burden. This government continues to tax only certain people irrespective of the consequences, and in many cases it taxes people many times over. It will now increase that tax with impacts on small business owners and others. This increase will have an impact on business cash flow and will have an impact upon the family standard of living.

This is an issue that people here in Queensland feel very strongly about. This is a tax brought upon this government by its own ineptitude and its lack of ability to plan. The increase in this tax is one more erosion of the purse from which mums and dads and children have to meet their day-to-day expenses. The government has failed to provide a rational explanation for the increase in this tax and this increase is not justifiably based upon this government's inaction in years gone by. No-one proposes a fair system—a system that as far as possible treats us all equally. With regret, this equity or sense of equity has not been obtained. Why should this inequity be compounded? Why should there be multiple payments, as there are from many people across the Sunshine Coast, including Caloundra and Kawana?

Again, this government fails to think and fails to act until it is made to wake up to its financial mismanagement. We have an obligation to make this government accountable as it will not do it itself. Principles do not go away, though they may be hidden, and this tax hides the principle of equity—so much a principle of our form of government.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (5.35 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition to disallow the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004. I receive many complaints from constituents regarding the ambulance levy, and I have grave concerns with what many people perceive to be a grossly unfair tax and an unfair system of gathering revenue. For example, people who have a fishing hut which is used once a year have to pay two full ambulance taxes. People who have power to the shed in their backyard on separate meters have to pay two levies. Miners who work away from home have to live in rented accommodation whilst they are on shift and then drive home for their days off. They pay two ambulance levies. People I know who own their own business and homes in Charters Towers have recently purchased a home on the coast so they can retire. They currently pay three ambulance levies. There are people in our small regional towns who do not have full-time ambulance officers in attendance. For example, the township of Greenvale, which is 200 kilometres from the nearest medical service, has an ambulance but no ambulance officer, nor does it have a driver.

Another disappointing factor is that these people pay an ambulance levy in the township and are unable to drive that ambulance during emergencies as there are no public servants, and laws prohibit locals who are not public servants or ambulance staff from driving the vehicle. I believe legislation should be changed so that members of these rural communities can do defensive driving courses and then have access to ambulances during emergencies. If the government wants to charge top dollar for services, it needs to be very sure that each and every person receives a fair go and equal access to these services.

The Premier stated in a media release on 18 February 2003 that 412,000 families who previously paid \$98 per year under the subscription scheme will save significantly under the ambulance levy. With

this latest increase to the levy, there is now only a difference of \$7.80 between the two fees. What the Premier did not say is that many families are paying the ambulance levy more than once and many rural communities are not receiving the appropriate services as they do in metropolitan areas.

As the minister stated before, in the township of Jericho the residents have St Luke's Nursing Service—a bush nurse based ambulance service—four days a week. This means one staff member is required to provide an ambulance service as well as other health related work. For the remainder of the week the Jericho residents have to rely on the service from Alpha—also a hospital based service.

Mr Cummins: They have one job a month. Do you think one job a month justifies a full-time paramedic?

Mr KNUTH: I am happy the minister said that. He can tell them that. The service from Alpha covers an area in excess of 20,000 kilometres. Residents in Jericho shire pay an ambulance levy and some pay three or four times over. I would like to bring the minister's attention to the fact that these residents should be entitled to a full-time ambulance service. On the days when there is no-one on call to man the Jericho ambulance, it sits there, because the government is too miserable to provide the town with full-time ambulance staff.

Mr Cummins: Because there are no jobs.

Mr KNUTH: There are plenty of jobs there. The use of hospital staff to provide an ambulance service is a huge burden on that staff. Unless the government can ensure smaller towns in rural and remote Queensland have access to a 24-hour ambulance service, it has no right to charge people three to four times over, nor does it have the right to inflict an increase on those people. I support the disallowance motion.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Croft): Order! I call the member for Burdekin. Under sessional orders, I give the member one minute.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (5.40 p.m.): I rise to speak in favour of the disallowance motion. The Queensland Ambulance Service and its band of hardworking, committed staff is one of the most excellent services available in Queensland today and they deserve our support.

The introduction of a levy scheme by the government to replace the subscription scheme is an attempt to assist towards this necessary funding. However, people have been disadvantaged by this, particularly with the latest increase to the levy. The difference in the fees will now only be \$7.80, making it a very expensive fee. Single people have also been totally disadvantaged by this levy scheme. However, perhaps one could argue that there is fairness in the levy scheme if families only paid the levy once.

I made contact with a number of local businesspeople recently and I was most appalled by their answers. They are businesspeople from the country towns of Home Hill and Ayr. Those towns are struggling with the current economic downturn in the sugar industry. Those people run small family businesses and, in most cases, their businesses have diminished considerably over the years.

Time expired.

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (5.42 p.m.): I think we need to put this debate into perspective. Last year when we introduced the community ambulance cover levy, we stated quite clearly that the levy would go up by inflation each year, which is what it is doing. The increase of 2.5 per cent follows the inflation rate from March to March, which is the measure that the government uses to increase its charges. That was clearly stated at that time.

A number of opposition members have, I think wrongly, tried to say, 'Well, now you are actually increasing it by \$2.20 and it gets closer to what it was at \$98.' They fail to recognise that, under any sort of policy, the \$98 would have gone up as well. In fact, we are now 30c further back than we would have been so we are saving ourselves some money, if we use that analogy.

To put into perspective what we have been talking about for the last two hours, this levy is going to increase by 0.668c per day or 4.6c per week. The increase per week is not even as big as the smallest currency that we have in Australia, that is, it is not even as much as 5c. That is what we are talking about.

Each year the increase occurs in line with inflation because the costs of running the Ambulance Service go up, as do wages for the ambulance officers and the costs of running the vehicles and the rest of the service, and we need to keep pace with inflation. The government will continue to do that.

At the last election in February the opposition campaigned on this levy and said that it would abolish it. At that time, the people of Queensland had the opportunity to decide whether or not they wanted the levy. Quite clearly they voted for our government, for the levy that we had introduced and for us to continue with it. Therefore, I think the disallowance motion that has been moved tonight is folly. It is just ridiculous. I do not quite understand the point that the opposition is trying to make.

Question—That that the motion be agreed to —put; and the House divided—

AYES, 23—Copeland, E.Cunningham, Flegg, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Menkens, Pratt, Quinn, Rickuss, E.Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Springborg, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Hopper, Messenger

NOES, 56—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Beattie, Bligh, Choi, E.Clark, L.Clark, Croft, Cummins, N.Cunningham, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fouras, Fraser, Hayward, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Mackenroth, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Poole, Purcell, Reilly, Reynolds, N.Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Spence, Stone, Struthers, C.Sullivan, Wallace, Welford, Wells. Tellers: T.Sullivan, Reeves

Resolved in the **negative**.

PLANT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 17 August (see p. 1840)

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (5.52 p.m.): The National Party opposition will be supporting the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2004. We believe it is a very important bill. This bill has been introduced into this parliament to rectify some problems identified in the Plant Protection Act 1989 during the recent citrus canker outbreak detected at the Evergreen farm in Emerald. If ever there has been an example of why we need to have first class or better than first class biosecurity in Australia, it is these events in Emerald at the Evergreen farm.

At the outset, I want to say how important I believe biosecurity is to Australia. When we see the potential for the ruination of people's lives and the ruination of entire districts and their economies it makes us realise how essential it is that the quarantine laws that are in place for the good of our nation and for the good of our produce are absolutely adhered to by each and every person. We need to have in place systems whereby if there is confirmed detection of a serious disease then the staff within the department have the legislation, regulations and guidelines that enable them to go in and act swiftly to prevent any further outbreaks and contain and get rid of the existing outbreak.

Citrus canker is a serious exotic disease. It affects all types of citrus crops including oranges, grapefruits, tangerines, lemons and limes. The disease is caused by a highly contagious bacterium. Infected trees continuously decline in health and fruit production until no fruit is produced at all. Citrus canker can be spread by wind borne rain, lawnmowers, landscaping equipment—slashers, for example—animals, birds, people carrying the infection on their hands, clothing or equipment, or moving infected or exposed plants or plant parts.

Citrus canker is common in many tropical and subtropical citrus growing areas of the world, including Japan, south and central Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific islands and some areas of South America. It has had a devastating impact on the citrus industry in Florida, USA. In fact, if some of these regulations that we are bringing in tonight had been in place in America it would have had every chance to contain and eradicate the disease. The US would have been able to move swiftly and not been held up by various court initiated actions that prevented it from acting immediately and, as such, allowed the citrus canker to get out of control.

There have been several outbreaks of the disease in Australia, most notably in the Northern Territory in 1912, 1991 and 1993. All were successfully eradicated by removing and destroying host plants in the wider vicinity of infected areas. The gross value of production of citrus in Australia is \$420 million and approximately 700,000 tonnes are produced per annum—75 per cent being oranges, 20 per cent mandarins and five per cent lemons, limes or grapefruit.

Citrus is the largest fresh fruit exporting industry in Australia and generates more than \$200 million per annum in earnings. The major markets for Australian citrus produce are Hong Kong, Malaysia, the USA, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan, Canada and Korea. Queensland produces 96,258 tonnes of citrus annually, about 15 per cent of Australia's production. Emerald produced 6,700 tonnes of citrus in 2000-01, about nine per cent of Queensland's citrus production. The main citrus producing area in Queensland is the Gayndah-Mundubbera region with annual production of about 22,000 tonnes.

The citrus canker outbreak on the Evergreen farm in Emerald first came to the attention of the DPI on Monday, 28 June this year when samples from this farm at Emerald were submitted by a private consultant to a DPI officer for identification. The affected 1,200 hectare property was subsequently placed in quarantine and on 6 July an eradication and surveillance program was agreed to by what is called the national management group of federal and state agricultural chief executives. Destruction of trees on the property finally commenced on 11 July 2004. Protocols and inspection procedures have been put in place to establish area freedom accreditation so that market access restrictions can be lifted.

If one looks at those dates we find that it goes from detection on Monday, 28 June to the destruction of trees commencing on 11 July. That is virtually two weeks. Any delays in that time, such as different climatic conditions which could have spread the bacterium, could have been absolutely critical to the final result.

I say all that because we support this bill. There are various measures being brought in in this bill that will bring the time down to the absolute minimum. I understand that a national surveillance program will run for the next two years to restore Queensland's status as a pest free area for citrus canker. This program is expected to cost \$7 million. I understand it will be funded in a similar way to the fire ant eradication program.

The fire ant eradication program is more than 90 per cent funded by the federal government and other states, with the Queensland government contributing around nine per cent of the cost. I do not know that the costs or percentages have been finally determined for the eradication of citrus canker.

I want to speak about the AQIS investigation that occurred in 2001. There have been concerns raised previously about the property on which citrus canker was found this year—in particular, the possibility of illegal imports.

I understand that the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, or AQIS, has confirmed that no import permits for plant material have ever been issued to the firm that owns the Emerald property. AQIS quarantined that property in 2001 and conducted an investigation with Queensland authorities after allegations that there was exotic plant material on the property. AQIS became involved following allegations of illegal imports of citrus planting material. Despite some mischievous and misleading claims made by the Queensland Primary Industries Minister when this citrus canker outbreak was first discovered earlier this year, I have been advised that AQIS did notify and did consult with the Queensland authorities in the 2001 investigation and in fact had a legal obligation to do so.

In a letter to the *Courier-Mail* on 19 July, the Executive Director of AQIS, Meryl Stanton, stated—

... a 2001 agreement between the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and Pacific Century Productions in no way impeded surveying of that company's Emerald farm for exotic pests and diseases.

Ms Stanton went on to state—

... the agreement did not affect other authorities' ability to undertake surveys on the PCP property or on other properties in the area.

All citrus on the property was inspected and samples taken for testing for diseases such as citrus canker. No evidence of citrus canker was found and there was insufficient evidence of illegal activity to support a prosecution. Surveillance continued for 18 months, during which time regular sampling took place, but no evidence of citrus canker was found. Surveillance finished in March 2003 because two production seasons had passed without any signs of disease being evident. Surveillance since March 2003 was the responsibility of the Queensland government. AQIS became involved initially because of allegations of a barrier breach, but normal biosecurity is the responsibility of the states and territories.

There are a number of key amendments in the Plant Protection Amendment Bill. These include the fact that the bill removes the ability of owners of diseased properties to seek injunctions to prevent eradication. The state of Queensland has found itself defending an injunction that could have prevented DPIF from eradicating canker infested host plants which is in the public interest. I was certainly concerned when the DPI was being taken to court and being stymied in its efforts to control the citrus canker outbreak, and I welcome this amendment. Whilst that injunction was there and due to public feeling on this issue and the public comments that had been made, I understand that that injunction process was lifted after a brief period. But in the meantime it did cause something in the order of two or three days delay, and that certainly could have been crucial had the weather conditions changed.

In 2002 parliament set a precedent with regard to this provision by approving the inclusion of a similar provision in the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act 1981. This will only apply to 21 exotic pests and diseases that are specified in this bill and considered to have a severe impact on the environment and cause major socioeconomic consequences. This provision does not affect the rights of a person to initiate legal proceedings for any loss or damage caused by the negligence of the DPI, if in fact there is any negligence by the DPI.

The amendments will also enable clear powers of surveillance to determine the presence or absence of a notifiable pest or disease when a pest quarantine area is declared or a direction into quarantine is given. Currently, the act is deficient in that it does not provide the capacity for surveillance programs. Surveillance programs will allow an inspector or authorised person to monitor, inspect, test, take samples for testing and to photograph anything and to lay baits and set traps for the pest. Safeguards are also put in place to prevent surveillance being used as a backdoor power of entry.

This power of surveillance is a very important part of this bill tonight, and the minister might want to comment on this particular matter. After the previous investigation by AQIS and then having gone through more than two seasons of surveillance, inspections and so forth, the difficulties that then arose for Queensland in many cases were issues to do with surveillance. But of course to have the surveillance there does need to be this provision of proving this precedent of setting it as a serious pest.

The bill also provides that inspection and production of records be carried out to enable trace forward and trace back of records during a quarantine that relate to the movement of plants from or to an infected premises. Businesses involved in the movement and sale of host plants and persons in possession of a relevant business movement document must be required to keep the relevant

document for seven years and produce these if requested by an inspector. Record keeping should be happening anyway in any normal well-run business in terms of accountancy and taxation records.

Consumers will be exempted from the record keeping and production requirements unless they are moving plants in a business—in other words, referring to people who buy plants from nurseries and so forth. I still think that that is an area of risk—that is, if there is ever a problem in backyards and so forth, how do we know where it has come from? Has it come from a flea market? Has it come from a registered nursery? When did they get it? How long did they have it and so forth? It is one niche of the whole process where, whilst we are getting improved surveillance and improved control and inspection methods relating to those people who are involved in full-time commercial business, there are other plants around the place that may possibly be a source of some disease at some particular time in the future.

The amendments also provide the capacity for inspectors to destroy infested host plants so as to manage the legal liability of the state by ensuring effective destruction in preventing the spread of the pest. Again, time is of the essence. It could well be, as I have said before, there could be environmental changes or the wind and the rainfall conditions could change. Therefore, it is important that they are able to put the plants in wind rows and are able to have a system of burning and destroying them as quickly as possible.

The amendments also prevent people seeking administrative review of decisions and actions that have been taken for notifiable pests in a pest quarantine area. A 28-day delay in carrying out a decision to act or meet the objectives of a quarantine notice or regulation while a review is heard is considered not acceptable and definitely not in the public interest of quarantining the affected area and the need to move quickly, and we agree with that. Another month would just be disastrous in some of these cases of notifiable pests, but certainly it does mean that the department needs to be in a position to accurately and swiftly identify these pests.

This bill also creates a new concept of a 'serious pest'. These serious pests are those plant pests which, if not eradicated, would cause significant public loss of environment, severe economic impacts on regions and the state economy, trade loss and serious effects on quality of life. A serious pest may be declared by regulation or notice, and the serious pests are actually listed in this bill.

The bill increases certain penalties for breaches of the act to reflect the gravity of the implications of non-compliance with control and eradication measures corresponding with those for equivalent quarantine offences relating to animal diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease. These maximum penalties under the act would now be 2,000 penalty units—that is, \$150,000—for serious offences in contravention of the act. These amendments also make it clear that there is a responsibility for executive officers to ensure that their corporations comply with the act.

I want to say some words about the lack of biosecurity funding in the recent budget, because this whole outbreak of citrus canker has demonstrated the importance of biosecurity to our state and to our nation and the importance of swift action. The Department of Primary Industries was able to undertake very swift action, and I think credit should be given. In the latter part of my speech, I will provide that particular credit. Staff had to be pulled out of various important duties right around the state. There simply were not any surplus staff at all because of the staff cutbacks that have occurred over the years.

Staff from all parts the state did a marvellous job. When the call came, they all went. It was a very difficult job—working in difficult conditions in suits and all the various quarantine cover over their bodies and so forth that they had to have, the processes that they had to go through to decontaminate themselves and simply the process looking at virtually tens, if not hundreds of thousands, of trees and trying to inspect all the various leaves and fruit and so forth in looking for this bacterium. It was a very difficult job for DPI staff and it shows the need to have adequate staff numbers in the DPI so that numbers of staff can be shifted at a moment's notice to various parts of the state if there are minor or medium problems that occur without disrupting other biosecurity services that of necessity have to continue 24 hours a day such as stock inspections, tick line checks and the issuing of various permits and weigh bills that are so important to preventing the spread of disease.

So while the changes being made in this bill are welcome and necessary, the Queensland government must back up these sorts of legislative changes with more funding for biosecurity. The Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers, or Growcom as they are now known, was particularly critical of the Queensland government's inadequate biosecurity funding when the state budget was handed down in June. I would like to read from a media release of QFVG, or Growcom, that was issued on 16 June this year. It states—

Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers fears the horticulture industry may be placed more at risk of pest and disease outbreak following a lack of new plant industry biosecurity initiatives.

QFVG Chief Executive Officer Jan Davis said the industry had been regularly informed by the government before, during and since this year's election that it would increase biosecurity funding commitments in the budget.

We have been constantly assured by the government that it would show a strong commitment towards protecting our industry from pests and diseases but that is not the case.

Two years ago the government introduced new certification fees and promised improved biosecurity arrangements. We were assured more resources would be provided to plant biosecurity but this has not occurred.

Ms Davis went on to state—

According to the budget papers, the number of jobs in the biosecurity section of the Department of Primary Industries & Forestry is forecast to fall from 1050 to 932 next financial year, a loss of more than 10 per cent.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I rise to a point of order. We have spoken to Jan Davis in relation to this matter and she realises herself—and I will let her speak for herself—that there is no reduction in the staff of DPI. The 100 staff reduction is in the fire ant area. So the member should tell the truth.

Mr HORAN: The minister will get a chance to make his comments in his reply. So he should listen to what we have to say. Ms Davis continued to state—

Maintaining the 'clean and green' status is essential to the continued development of our industry, both domestically and internationally.

Biosecurity is an especially important priority for the horticulture industry in Queensland because we are often at the forefront of any new pest or disease outbreak, simply because of our geographic location and proximity to other island neighbours.

Ms Davis finished her press release by stating—

Horticulture is Queensland's second largest primary industry worth more than \$1.5 billion to the economy and employing 25,000 people but the importation of exotic pests and diseases can lead to crop damage as well as a loss of market access that would devastate our industry.

Those were the words of Jan Davis, the CEO of Growcom. They are not the words of the Nationals, although I certainly support what Ms Davis had to say. The reduction in DPI biosecurity staff and the industry's concerns about whether there are sufficient staff to deal with pest and disease outbreaks is something that the government can no longer ignore. The minister has stated that at one stage about 300 people were deployed in the citrus canker response with 120 additional inspectors having to be employed and many staff having to be brought in from interstate. The DPI staff do a great job, despite the fact that under the Beattie government and this particular minister they are constantly and have been constantly confronted by budget and staff cuts.

The Nationals have been particularly concerned about the continued withdrawal of DPI stock inspectors from rural and regional areas. DPI stock inspectors are at the forefront of the battle of biosecurity. It is DPI stock inspectors who not only see that there is compliance with all the travelling arrangements and regulations that are in place but also it is DPI stock inspectors who very often are the ones who can provide advice around a district and who are looked up to by people in the district as a source of information. People can go to many parts of Queensland now and would be flat out finding a stock inspector. As a result, people just do not have the information that they used to have, they do not have the first-hand knowledge and advice that they used to have and we simply do not have the strong, up-front protection that has been provided traditionally, particularly when it comes to livestock, by the provision of stock inspectors.

The removal of stock inspectors from many areas and the Beattie government's failure to fill positions that have been vacant, often for many months, has left a dangerous lack of disease monitoring in those areas which, in some cases, can be thousands of square kilometres in size. Recently I asked the minister a question on notice. As at 13 May 2004, as a result of asking that question, we have found out that there are were five vacant inspector positions at Alpha, Charleville, Cloncurry, Quilpie and Yeerongpilly—all very important centres when it comes to disease control and disease prevention. Further, the minister reaffirmed his commitment to using third-party providers for cattle tick inspections rather than professional stock inspectors. His claim that this will enable the freeing up of inspectors' time so that existing inspectors can be utilised more effectively on higher priority biosecurity activities does not ring true with us, because we know that all he is trying to do is to manage with an ever-decreasing budget because, with the Labor Party, primary industries just gets the crumbs off the table.

Earlier I mentioned the issue of the original quarantine inspections that took place on Evergreen following the allegations that had occurred about the importation of material. At the time, we were all concerned, but I know that I did not enter into the debate overly because I felt that the important thing was to allow the DPI to get on and get stuck into this particular project and to give support to all of those people who left their various posts to go to central Queensland and the department leaders, because that was the important thing to be done. But I want to reiterate that the executive director of Australian Quarantine Inspection Service said that officers from AQIS and QDPI were involved in the initial quarantine order—that is back in 2001. Information was also provided on the results of surveys on the property to Queensland authorities and industry in November 2001 through a national plant health consultative committee. It is good to see that joint Commonwealth and state cooperation continues in relation to the recent detection of disease on this property and that is how it should be. I certainly hope that what is brought forward in this bill will be of assistance in making sure that any of these future disease outbreaks can be controlled.

I said at the outset of my speech that it is essential that we have the very best biosecurity arrangements. In recent times there has been a lot of concern about the disease risks involved in the importation of bananas from the Philippines and the risk of fire blight from the importation of apples from New Zealand. I wrote to the federal minister about these particular concerns, and I wrote to the minister about the concerns people had about Biosecurity Australia—the organisation that is charged with the responsibility of scientifically examining whether or not a particular product can be brought in. In particular I stated in my letter that the scientists engaged in the various panels in Biosecurity Australia stated that something is an acceptable risk.

What may be an acceptable risk to somebody on a panel may not be an acceptable risk to someone who has a huge mortgage, who has a family to care for and who has lease payments to make. Their whole life—everything they have done and worked for in their life—depends upon their product being able to be sold, whether it is sold domestically or exported.

Biosecurity Australia was set up to take the politics out of these particular decisions, to assist Australia in developing an increasing trade. Australia has had the most amazing increase in export and trade over recent years, particularly since the Howard government came to power. We are an export driven nation. Whether it is the federal government or state governments that send delegations to increase exports, it is important to a nation of only 20 million people on a large continent to have a major and massive export industry. Exports give us our standard of living and our lifestyle, so it is important that exports are protected with a system of biosecurity that is absolutely watertight.

The minister is aware that DPI staff are involved in biosecurity panels on various issues. There are many panels for which people are selected to represent the various states and the different sectors of industry. It is mostly the growing industry, but it may also be the packing industry or other aspects of the industry. That system is used in order to provide us with the highest possible protection.

I turn to the issue of bananas. We in the National Party have been very concerned that Biosecurity Australia brought out a draft report that looked at the acceptability of bringing in bananas from the Philippines. Once a draft report is issued there is an opportunity for industry and industry sectors to criticise and examine that report. I congratulate the banana industry for providing such a good response to that. It pointed out the computer errors that occurred in setting out the risk analysis and brought about another review. I stress the importance of the scientific panels understanding what acceptable risk is.

Bananas from the Philippines have to be inspected in the field. They may have to be dipped in particular chemicals or may have to be held in cold storage for a particular time. In the case of fire blight they have to be held in cold storage for periods of time, be dipped and so forth. I do not think the consumers of Australia want to buy product that has had to be dipped in particular chemicals in case there is some disease present such as fire blight, black sigatoka or moko. I also think that is not an acceptable risk. It is very important that the scientists on the biosecurity panel have a practical understanding—it is important that they are selected for having a practical understanding—of the absolute importance of a foolproof, watertight biosecurity system that protects our export markets from devastation.

If anything has demonstrated how devastating that can be it is the citrus canker outbreak in Emerald. Members can only imagine the devastation of fire blight to Stanthorpe or the implications for Tully of disease coming in with Philippines bananas. In this case one property was affected. Almost 100 per cent of the trees had to be destroyed. I understand that some 1,000 acres—approximately 400 hectares—of trees were destroyed. That is massive. One report I read said that it was somewhere in the order of \$2.6 million worth of trees. They lost about \$1 million or more in production. It will be an absolute minimum of two years before they will be able to replant any of those trees, if clearance is provided. Over that period of time the lost income for that particular organisation could amount to many millions of dollars. One organisation was affected by that particular outbreak, but honourable members can imagine if we had an outbreak in a whole district or if a whole area of Queensland was quarantined.

The important thing for Biosecurity Australia to realise in relation to things such as fire blight is that it is not just carried in the apple plant itself; it is also carried in other plants that are related to the apple species. We in Toowoomba have even heard that there are a number of plants in the gardens of Toowoomba that could be a vector. Just think of all the tourists who go to Stanthorpe and have a packed lunch on the bus. The odd person might throw an apple core out into the bush or whatever. The fire blight, if it is there, is in the core. Members can see how easily these things can be spread. I make those general statements about biosecurity and the importance of Biosecurity Australia in ensuring that our systems are absolutely watertight. I am pleased that the minister has made some changes to personnel and to the direction of Biosecurity Australia to see that our producers are protected at all costs.

I agree with what the minister said in his second reading speech, that it is critical to have the necessary legislative capacity to control and eradicate these devastating diseases when they do strike. The opposition will support the bill because we want the department and the staff of the department to

have the tools and the wherewithal to take whatever action they need to take to stop the devastation of this disease and to protect the other producers in the area and in the state.

I take this opportunity to call on the Beattie government to ensure that there are sufficient staff in the DPI to combat pest and disease outbreaks when they occur. The fact that they were able to combat this outbreak so successfully this time does not address the issue of staffing shortfalls, because staff had to be pulled from other important places across the state.

We would all like to know—I am absolutely certain that DPI staff would like to know—how, where and why this disease outbreak occurred. It is very important to know that. No stone should be left unturned in finding out how this happened. The minister would certainly have the support of the Queensland Nationals in endeavouring to find that out. There are three ways this disease could have come in: by illegal importation, accidentally with some importation—that is highly unlikely—or otherwise accidentally. It did come into the Northern Territory twice in the 1990s. It might be worth looking at how it occurred in those cases. We need to know so that we can stop it in the future. If any individual was responsible for this, they need to have the book thrown at them.

I congratulate DPI Plant Health General Manager Chris Adriaansen and all of the DPI staff who have been involved in battling the citrus canker crisis. Their efforts under very trying circumstances have certainly been appreciated by everybody in Queensland, particularly the people involved in the citrus and horticulture industries.

Sitting suspended from 6.29 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (7.30 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2004. At the outset, I would like to place on the record my appreciation to the minister for the briefing that he afforded the Independents and the One Nation representative recently. It was certainly wonderful access to his staff and they gave an excellent amount of time to answer quite a number of questions, so I thank the minister and his staff very much.

There is only a small number of issues that I wish to speak on, and I guess many of those come from the briefing notes that the minister's staff provided. This legislation will bring in a new category of authorised persons to the employment list of the DPI. Currently, the act provides only for the appointment of inspectors. These inspectors obviously demonstrate experience, expertise and training in the fields necessary for them to carry out their positions. However, the department found with the canker emergency that not only were those very specific skills essential but also there was a role for authorised persons who did not have quite the same level of competencies an inspector might require. It was found that what was needed was a greater work force or a greater force of people to be able to investigate offences, prosecute offenders and exercise other powers of an inspector under the act. The authorised persons will do surveillance to determine the presence, extent or absence of a pest in a particular area of the state.

I remember a pilot program was used extensively with the fire ant situation. In this pilot a significant number of people, certainly not at an inspectorate level, were schooled sufficiently to be able to identify fire ants. That has been, I believe, a great reason for the success of the fire ant eradication program in Queensland. Whilst there is still work to be done, it has certainly been heralded as a successful program, and it is bodies on the ground that have assisted in the success of that. That is how I have equated the authorised persons. The inspectors will investigate the offences, they will prosecute offenders and they will exercise the other powers of an inspector under the act, but authorised persons will do this lower level of surveillance. They will be, more or less, the greater numerical presence in terms of potential outbreaks.

It is stated in the act that the authorised person would have to be a Public Service officer or employee or another person as described in a regulation, but presumably always an appropriately qualified person. The amendment bill also provides for trace forward and trace back as far as pests are concerned. For many people there is going to be a huge level of concern with it. They will just say 'more paperwork'. When the industry per se sits down and thinks about it, if at the end of the day it will prevent another canker outbreak or isolate a canker outbreak more specifically to avoid collateral damage, then one would hope the paperwork will be well worth while. The overriding principle will be that, whatever paperwork is developed, it is simple, it is easy to fill in, it is easy to keep and it is user friendly. So I hope that the minister and the departmental people are working on paperwork of that nature.

The trace forward and trace back is going to be an obligation on the consigner of a host plant, and a copy has to be given to the consignee. However, consumers will be exempted from the record keeping and production requirements unless they are moving plants in a business. There is an element on which I would seek clarification from the minister when he sums up, and that is: is it consumers who move plants that are host type plants to these designated diseases or all plants? One of the growing industries not only in my electorate but also across Queensland is the markets where people buy and sell plants. A lot of those people propagate at home. Some maybe would not; they would be the next level of commercial business. But there is a huge number of people who use the markets as a hobby. It often does not generate sufficient income to be an income on its own; it is a hobby, an interest. I would like to

know whether they will be caught in this obligation to trace forward and trace back paperwork. So I would seek the minister's clarification as to how extensive this new obligation will be.

The legislation also creates the concept of 'serious pest' and these will be scheduled in the act. They are qualified as those plant pests which, if not eradicated—

... would cause significant public loss, either—

- (i) directly, through serious loss of amenity or environmental values, or serious effects on households; or
- (ii) indirectly, through very severe economic impacts on regions and the State economy; or
- (iii) through trade losses with flow-on effects through the State economy ...

All three of those have been a result of this canker infestation. A serious pest may also be declared by regulation or notice, and that is something that we have adopted in other areas of legislation where it has been essential that action be taken in a timely manner, and a regulation is certainly much more timely than legislation. Whilst overriding changes and overriding powers should be granted through legislation, it is understandable in this instance that a regulation can be quickly drawn up in relation to a new and emerging pest.

This legislation will also confirm that a quarantine notice or regulation may require the destruction of infested plants. It has become evident that section 11 of the current act is silent on the capacity for an inspector to destroy infested plants in a pest quarantine area. I think overwhelmingly the majority of producers in our state would be cooperative in terms of working with the department to ensure that a pest outbreak did not expand. However, there will always be one or two operators, particularly those with extensive operations, who will attempt to protect their investment at all costs. I understand this part of the legislation is to clarify that the destruction of infested plants can be done without question and objection.

The capacity is included for inspectors to destroy infested host plants, and the legislation will manage the legal liability of the state by ensuring effective destruction and preventing spread of the pest. I noticed when I was reading the explanatory notes that with citrus canker the trees had to be poisoned and burnt. There had to be specific care taken that not even ash flew into the atmosphere because there was sufficient infection capacity, even in ash, for the canker infection to spread. So I can understand why this legislation is heading towards inspectors being the only appropriately qualified people to do the destruction.

My concern is with the costs. We had an issue several years ago where inspecting for ticks was something that the government cooperatively did with landowners and there was some cost to the landowner. The government changed its position and the cost of tick inspections blew out. Rather than having landowners cooperating with the government in trying to eradicate ticks from many, many areas of our state, we found that the cooperative front, the cooperative interface, ceased to exist with farmers being quite aggressive and annoyed at inspectors when they came on to properties because they could see the cost of that work blowing out. So I would put to the minister that there should be a very careful constraint placed on the costing of these inspectorate generated destructions, particularly in the smaller enterprises where they possibly got the infection through no fault of their own.

Once the cost begins to blow out on the landowner, the risk is that the cooperation that is inherently there at the moment will diminish. The legislation also increases the penalties for breaches of the act and, if part of what I have been hearing about this current outbreak is true, the penalties need to be increased. However, many landowners could be inadvertently caught up regardless of any actions of their own. It would be a tragedy to see some people disadvantaged further through the use of heavy penalties when perhaps they have been trying to do the right thing.

The legislation also deals with the removal of legal challenges of quarantine decisions and actions for serious pests. I believe this came about because, in this particular infestation, the state government, DPI and forestry found themselves arguing about the potential for defending injunctions that would have prevented the department from eradicating canker infested host plants. I guess many producers would be disappointed by that. They may understand the economics of it, but they would find it very disappointing. In particular, people close to the Emerald area who were at risk of canker infestation would be disappointed in any lack of cooperation by the owner of the current farm. However, it does happen and the need to absolve the state from an obligation to defend injunctions is necessary for the timely eradication of pests.

However, it should be kept in mind that this is a serious breach of fundamental legislative principles and that the application of these quarantine measures, particularly the destruction measures, must be carried out with the greatest of care. I was advised at the briefing that the destruction would not occur only on the basis of a site inspection; it would occur only after laboratory confirmation that a serious pest infestation existed. That was, in great measure, a great comfort in my mind.

The review ouster will not influence the right of persons to initiate legal proceedings for loss or damage caused by negligence. However, I remain concerned in case there is loss or damage caused by mistakes.

The bill also clarifies that inspectors may undertake destruction of plants under subsections 13 and 14 of the act. Again this goes back to the requirement for inspectors in certain plant infestations to physically do the destruction themselves. Say a landowner is directed to destroy plants, both infected and healthy plants, in circumstances where the risk of infection is perhaps less than with citrus canker, that is, they could be sprayed and burnt without the same risks of cross-infection as canker has shown. I would hope that they would be able to do that, particularly where the destruction could occur by the landowner at a much reduced cost. Again I make the point: wherever one designates that a particular person must do work and that particular person is not the owner of the land, there is the potential for cost blow-outs. At all times it must be borne in mind that people in rural areas are not making a great living. They are subject to the vagaries of many things, particularly at the moment the weather. An unforeseen cost blow-out would be the cost of destruction of both healthy and infected plants. If they could destroy those plants themselves because it was a simple process, I believe that that cooperative link should remain.

The legislation also deals with the conduct of surveillance programs. The current act is deficient in not providing the capacity for surveillance programs. In our briefing it was stated that these programs are critical in determining the presence and extent of the spread of a pest for the purposes of determining the definition of a pest quarantine area and the objects and nature of the quarantine.

There are a number of pests in citrus, bananas and all sorts of fruit and vegetables and it is necessary for us to be constantly vigilant. I would like the minister to clarify: who will cover the cost of that surveillance? Will it be the landowner or will it be borne generically across the state, bearing in mind that that surveillance program benefits not only the landowner but also the broader community? It is easy to say that it will not be a big cost. I do not know how to cost it, but let us say that it is \$10 a hectare. That soon generates a huge bill over a period. Currently, the cost of addressing the outbreak is being funded by the government on a cost-share basis with other states because it is quite a serious outbreak on a very big farm. For the record, I believe that the landowner involved should be sharing significantly in the cost if allegations of previous importation of non-certified root stock is true.

However, in terms of surveillance programs, the beneficiaries are not just the landowners on whose properties the surveillance will continue. There is a broader community benefit. I believe that the cost of that surveillance program should not just be borne by the landowner but by the broader community of the state as well.

I certainly support this legislation. There is one area in my electorate that I believe currently has the potential to be a risk area. I say this with some caution, because it is an area of horticultural production that has been in existence for many years. They have produced export quality fruit for many years. However, the landowners in the Targinie area, through no fault of their own, have found themselves displaced in great measure. Not all landowners have gone. The ones who remain are, I believe, vigilant and responsible in terms of their production areas.

However, a significant number of properties purchased by the Department of State Development have fruit-producing trees such as avocados, mangoes and other soft fruits. To my knowledge, at the moment there is no surveillance of those properties in terms of their safety from infestation of any sort. I believe that the government—and everyone talks about 'the government', but they are the owners of those trees—needs to take a responsible role for properties where there is no landowner so that those trees are kept under surveillance to ensure that a problem is not generated inadvertently because of a lack of husbandry. I repeat that the farmers are very responsible people. Many have left their farms with tears and a great deal of regret, but they have left. So what is residual on the farm needs to be kept watch over to ensure that there is not an inadvertent problem that will devastate the few who are left.

With those few comments I commend the bill. The area of plant protection is one in which we have to be vigilant constantly. Often the landowners carry the cost. Again I ask that that cost be shared amongst the community of the state because, after all, the community will be the final beneficiaries.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (7.48 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2004. During the course of the attempts by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to eradicate the potentially devastating citrus canker disease from a single property near Emerald, the owners of that property took the government to court. While the legal action delayed the department's action, fortunately it did not prevent the department from undertaking the work.

The proposed amendments to the Plant Protection Act 1989 will remove outright the ability of owners of properties infested with the most serious pests and diseases to seek injunctions and take legal action to prevent eradication and other emergency response activities. It will clarify the right of the state to carry out the necessary treatment or destruction within a pest quarantine area. It will provide greater pest and disease surveillance powers to inspectors. It is imperative for inspectors and authorised persons to exercise appropriate powers and functions to facilitate the thorough checking of properties for pests and/or diseases.

The bill includes specific information on the make-up and duties of inspectors and authorised persons. Inspectors and authorised persons will be appointed only if they are Public Service officers or

employees or an individual in a class of person prescribed by regulation as being appropriate for appointment. The other individuals may only be appointed as inspectors or authorised persons if they have the necessary expertise or experience or they have achieved the minimum competencies in an approved training program. For example, a consultant with specialist knowledge or skill in diagnosis may be an appropriate person for appointment as an authorised person to undertake surveillance for the presence or absence of the pest for which the consultant has expertise.

All inspectors and authorised persons will receive an instrument of appointment that defines their powers and conditions of appointment. They will be managed by Biosecurity, which is within the department, to ensure legislative compliance. This will address the exercise of powers and functions in strict accordance with the act and any limitations imposed by their instrument of appointment.

Other safeguards on the exercise of powers by inspectors and authorised persons included in the bill are the requirements to give an information notice when entering land that is infested with a pest and a requirement to display or produce identification cards when exercising a power and to give offence warnings when making a business document request or giving an information notice. In addition, the conduct of surveillance programs is limited to actions that are reasonably necessary. Surveillance programs must be advertised before being implemented.

The clarified and wider powers in the bill are about abundant caution in order to ensure that there is no further unanticipated risk to continuing action to deal with citrus canker and, therefore, no further risk to Queensland's citrus industry. By necessity, contingency plans for dealing with plant biosecurity emergencies include high impact quarantine measures such as movement restrictions, treatment protocols and destruction of infested and surrounding crops. Government agencies and industry bodies tasked to managed contingencies such as citrus canker would understandably be reluctant to commence an emergency response without the certainty and confidence of robust and protective supporting legislation.

The citrus canker outbreak at Emerald is a major economic issue for Queensland and the department is well advanced in implementing a nationally approved response plan, including containment, surveillance and eradication, as well as re-establishing market access. The Queensland government approved the temporary waiver of plant health inspection and certification fees for market access subject to ongoing reviews. This has an estimated cost of up to \$800,000 over three months.

At the height of the emergency response the department had in the order of 250 staff working full time, which included the mobilisation of existing staff and the recruitment of new inspectors to approve interstate and export movements in accordance with the protocol. In addition, an advertising and communications strategy to encourage and increase statewide consumption of Queensland citrus was undertaken by the department. This set out to inform consumers that the disease does not affect human health.

The Queensland government's response has been comprehensive, efficient and has proven to be successful in maintaining consumer confidence in citrus fruit and in re-opening the interstate market. The minister and the department, under the leadership of Director-General Jim Varghese, should be commended for the solid work undertaken in response to the recent outbreak of citrus canker. It is fitting that we amend the current legislation to further support their efforts to protect Queensland's biosecurity. It is imperative that we ensure that they are not hindered in their response to any plant, pest and disease outbreaks in the future. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (7.53 p.m.): I rise to speak in the debate on the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2004. The citrus canker problem which has occurred at the Evergreen farm in Emerald is right on the eastern end of my electorate. I see the minister is present in the House. I congratulate the minister and his department for the firm and decisive action they took in putting a remedy in place to address this serious problem. Had this not been done we could have seen the whole of the \$700 million Australian citrus industry jeopardised. That swift, ruthless and decisive action rescued a situation that could have destroyed the Queensland industry and ultimately the Australian industry and taken us right out of the international equation. We well know that we do not have access to the markets for the 2005 season. I hope that with the proper monitoring of this problem we might see those barriers lifted so that we can be a party to those markets in 2005.

My colleague the member for Toowoomba South has canvassed this issue very well in the House this evening. The industry in Florida, United States, fought this predicament in the courts for three years in order to get an outcome. Had we had that situation here and if the government had not moved as swiftly as it did and we had a court injunction upheld for three years we would have seen the demise of the horticultural industry in this state and in this nation.

When we talk about this \$400 million Australian industry, one of the issues that a lot of people do not take into account is the employment that the industry generates. Whilst it is seasonal, the millions of dollars generated are spent in many of the country towns in question—whether it is the Emerald region, the South Burnett or anywhere else throughout the state. That is also the case in the Granite Belt where they have different fruits. These people move around and those dollars stay in town. That is something

that we must remember. I know that at this time we are locked out of the domestic market. I hope that we will see that situation rectified in the not-too-distant future.

The other issue I want to address involves those unfortunate people in the Emerald region who do not have access to the international market. I know people from the Department of Primary Industries have made representations on behalf of some of these unfortunate people to see whether they can find an international outlet for them. They cannot sell their product. They do not have the income to access the market in question. Ultimately, they borrow money to develop their properties or whatever else has to be done. Irrigation is a prime factor and a costly exercise. At this point in time I trust that the negotiations to help those people ride this wave and become viable and operational again in the 2005 season are still ongoing.

It is paramount that we see this industry grow. It is paramount that we see these impediments removed from the industry. I thank all those people out there who have been affected by this outbreak for their patience and congratulate them for the cooperation they have shown and the progressive way that they have assisted Department of Primary Industries personnel.

I think this is a wake-up call to all of us. This could be a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in our livestock industry. It could be some other outbreak in some other industry. We cannot have enough trained professionals on the ground to make sure that we counter this all the time. I believe this piece of legislation is going to be a template in making absolutely certain that we are at the forefront of showing who is running the camp and who is the boss. This is going to make absolutely certain that the successful people who have invested millions of dollars to make their industry viable are protected and that the Department of Primary Industries or the appropriate bodies will move swiftly to make certain that the programs are put in place to address any anomalies.

I want to make mention of Chris Adriaansen from the Department of Primary Industries; Paul Walmsley, the acting regional director of the Department of Primary Industries in Rockhampton; and John Moore, who the minister put in charge to oversee the operation in question.

Mr Palaszczuk: Good bloke, John Moore.

Mr JOHNSON: They are all good blokes.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: That is the point I am coming to. I take the interjection from the Minister for Public Works and Housing, because there were many people there who had no relativity at all to the industry of primary production. That is where I am coming from in terms of the issue of biosecurity. It just goes to show that we have to train more personnel. Whether we have to send those people to Asia or the United States or wherever, we need to make absolutely certain that they have the experience, the knowledge and the know-how to address these issues in future. We talk about biosecurity. I have said this in the House time and time again, but the minister pulled people out of the area of animal agriculture and trained them at the eleventh hour to detect this disease in order to secure it in that isolated area in question. As I have said, if this was foot-and-mouth disease or some other exotic European or Asian disease, there would be all of the trouble in the world with our livestock.

That brings me back to an issue that I have raised previously—and I say this seriously—and that is stock inspection services at Alpha. It is absolutely paramount that the department has a fully operational service in Alpha with a full-time stock inspector. Whilst it might be only 50 per cent of the time that that service is delivering services with regard to stock inspections at the tick line, biosecurity is another issue. That is where the flaw in the system will creep in if there is not that surveillance there. The minister knows as well as I do that there are cowboys in every industry. There is always somebody who will jeopardise it for somebody else and who will break the rules. If it costs the government \$100,000 a year to put that stock inspector in Alpha, for God's sake do it, Minister, because in time it could save the industry countless millions of dollars. We are going through a period of dry seasons at the moment. With regard to those areas near the tick line and if there are wet seasons further south and further to the west, we will find ourselves in a situation where there will be a third-party part-time operator who does not have the professional capacity to detect ticks. As a result, we could see the situation where the tick line could be moved further south.

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: I hope it does not, Minister, but I can assure him that if that happened it would further jeopardise our industry in terms of our stock going into New South Wales and further south.

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: There is one of the best blokes in the industry acting in a part-time capacity there now in Mike Egan. He is a fantastic stock inspector. I know that he has retired and has come back to help, but it is people like him who can help train others. There is nobody with more professionalism than blokes like him who can help train people. The shadow minister made reference tonight to the stock inspectors who are missing right throughout the state. Another valid point, and the shadow minister touched on it this evening, is that these fellows are people who are highly regarded and highly respected

in their communities. I remember the days when you had to go to the stock inspector or the local police station to get a permit to lift cattle. With regard to the Move Easy program, I reckon it is a licence to steal cattle. It is overworking the Stock Squad. There are the honest people whom we will never have a problem with, but there will always be that element who want to violate the agreement. No-one knows this better than me. I have grown up in that industry. I cut my teeth in it. In relation to this industry and the road transport industry, I see how it works every day of the week.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! I might need to bring the member back to the Plant Protection Amendment Bill.

Mr JOHNSON: This is about the Plant Protection Amendment Bill. We are talking about biosecurity, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a very important part of what we are talking about. I have spoken to producers in my area, and I note that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is in the House tonight. No doubt he will add more to this debate, as his electorate is more affected than mine because it has a bigger fruit-growing area in the horticultural industry. But the important thing to remember about this legislation is that it will remove the ability of some owners of diseased properties to seek injunctions to prevent eradication. I made mention earlier of the case scenario in Florida. The bill also provides greater disease surveillance powers to inspectors and allows inspectors to access records wherever located to trace the movements of potentially diseased plant matter. It also increases the penalties for breaches of the act, including personal liability for company directors, and clarifies the right of the state to carry out necessary treatment or destruction within a pest quarantine area.

I saw the minister on the television tonight making reference to the remainder of the 250,000 trees at Evergreen and the fact that they will be removed. My old man always said, 'You've got to be cruel to be kind sometimes.' This is a case of being cruel to be kind, because it will isolate that property totally and allow the surveillance of this disease to be done properly. Hopefully it has been isolated so that other farmers in close proximity can now get on with their business. The other thing I want to make reference to tonight is the backyard growers. That is an area that has gone undetected somewhat, and it is an area in which surveillance has to be fast-tracked. The minister's personnel have done a grand job in doing their surveillance work to date in trying to get the industry back on an even keel and a productive footing, but at the same time there are many places where this disease could crop up. There are probably even nurseries that might not even know whether they have it or not, and please God they have not.

The real issue as I see it is that this is a damned good piece of legislation. It had to be introduced into the parliament. The implementation of this legislation will send the message to industry that the government of the day—whoever it may be—will not tolerate people trying to keep inspection services out. This is another way we can protect our industry. We are regarded as the best farmers in the world, regardless of the line of production. That is the way we have to keep it. If that means introducing legislation into this House to do precisely that, we will do it. I can assure the minister and the government—and I know that the shadow minister has made reference to this tonight—that I support every step that the minister has taken so far on this. I told him that that day in the boardroom at the Emerald Shire Council meeting. This is about protecting an industry regardless of what the industry is. I can assure him that with a bipartisan approach to a situation like this we can correct the problem. I do salute and thank the minister for the way he included me in those talks that day and the briefings that day, because it was paramount that we all knew where the other bloke was coming from. It gives me great pleasure to support this legislation.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (8.07 p.m.): I am pleased to make a contribution to the consideration of the Plant Protection Amendment Bill in this parliament. As previous speakers have outlined, this bill had its genesis in response to the citrus canker outbreak and some issues that became apparent in the government's response to that citrus canker outbreak. Most members in the House would know that a very considerable proportion of the Queensland citrus industry is located within my electorate. So not only did I have a very close interest in the government's response to that disease outbreak, but I certainly have a very keen interest in the elements of this bill before the House tonight. I want to deal with some of the issues that surrounded the disease outbreak of citrus canker at Emerald and some of the effects that it had on my constituents.

The central Burnett area is probably Queensland's biggest citrus growing area—around the towns of Mundubbera and Gayndah extending north to Eidsvold and extending down the Burnett River to Biggenden and even further down the Burnett River into the Kolan shire and there are also extensive plantings of citrus around Monduran and Gin Gin, all of which are within the Callide electorate. I think that within that area some 25,000 to 30,000 tonnes of fruit are produced annually. It is a very big proportion of the Queensland citrus industry and it is of inestimable value to the communities that are based in those areas. The towns of Gayndah and Mundubbera especially are very much based on that citrus industry.

So it was that the outbreak of citrus canker in the Emerald area and the subsequent closure of southern markets had a huge effect on my electorate and all of those communities. It is very difficult to fully comprehend the effect that that has on individual people, on individual farmers and on communities

generally—on the pickers and all of the support services that were in place in those communities at that time. When the disease outbreak was detected in the central Burnett, it was in the middle of the picking season. That had an effect primarily on the fruit growers, because they were the people who were seeing the results of 12 months of their work being threatened at the point of the realisation of that 12 months of work. But the businesses within the community and all of the associated businesses that depend on the seasonal workers were also affected.

I take this opportunity to say to the minister that I was able to get some good information from departmental officers. I thank the minister for that. We were able to stay in close contact with what was happening during that period. That was not only reassuring for me but also gave me the opportunity to reassure the people I represent that, while the situation was far from good—and during those couple of weeks there was an enormous amount of uncertainty—things were happening and things were being put in place.

In such a situation, things never happen fast enough for the people who are involved. Certainly there was a deal of criticism from my constituents that things were not happening fast enough from the point of view of the department and its response. I know that over a period in this parliament there has been criticism, especially around budget time, of the money that is allocated to the Department of Primary Industries and the effect that those continual budget cuts have on the department's capacity to perform a whole range of tasks. When a disease outbreak such as this occurs, the capacity of the department becomes all important. I believe that the capacity of the department to respond in this particular case was certainly less than it would have been in years past because of that run-down in the department budget over a period. I think that the department has lost a degree of the capacity that it had to respond to issues such as this.

If the citrus canker outbreak does nothing else, it should emphasise to the Beattie Labor government the importance of maintaining a response capacity within the Department of Primary Industries not just for the sake of the people who are directly engaged in primary industries but for the sake of all of the communities that rely on primary industries for their contribution to their economic base, all of the people who rely on primary industries directly for their jobs and all of the people who rely indirectly on primary industries through the flow-on jobs that stem from primary industries.

In this instance it was the citrus industry. Unfortunately, a range of other industries are also susceptible to such outbreaks. While we all hope and pray that those outbreaks will not happen, I believe that we all have a responsibility to ensure that the department has the capacity to respond to be able to limit the outbreak and the damage to the barest minimum if and when those disease outbreaks happen. We all live in fear of things such as foot-and-mouth disease, which is a lot harder to contain than the outbreak that happened in the fruit industry. Obviously, with a livestock disease and the greater movements of livestock, a range of issues and problems make it a lot harder to contain such a disease. In this particular instance, it was an outbreak of a fruit disease which, although it occurred in the middle of the picking season, occurred in an area that was geographically isolated to some extent from the main production areas, which are the areas within my electorate.

So although without any exaggeration the impact of the outbreak has been profound on my electorate, it was gratifying to see that, as the weeks passed, the department was able to isolate and control the disease to that area in the Central Highlands. That raises the question of the department's capacity to respond to the other types of disease outbreaks that are possible. I hope the minister's department looks—and I am sure it will—at the response to the citrus canker outbreak and considers its capacity to respond to a range of other situations that may well affect other industries.

In terms of the impact that the disease outbreak had on my constituents, it could not have come at a worse time. It was right in the middle of the picking season. It came in the middle of a season that followed a number of very difficult seasons for growers. So it had a very profound financial impact on those growers. While we now have protocols in place that have allowed the fruit to be returned to the southern markets, those protocols themselves will continue to have an impact on the profitability of growers. But at least growers were able to get that fruit to market and in most instances, throughout the areas that I represent, they were able to resume their season within about two and a half weeks.

I believe that the whole issue really brings into focus the importance of biosecurity and our quarantine status as a country. It really gives us a glimpse of the type of thing that could happen if our biosecurity capacity and our biosecurity laws are not rigid enough and do not have the integrity to ensure that we are protected from the diseases that could be imported from overseas. It gives us a small glimpse of what could happen. In that respect, it should reinforce the commitment that we all have—as legislators and as community leaders and industry leaders—to ensure that that status that we have as a clean, green supplier of food in the world market is preserved at any cost. If that means allocating more money to the whole issue—not just the response to any particular disease outbreak but to research capacity and quarantine capacity at the point of entry—then that is a small price to pay compared to the cost of a major disease outbreak in any one of a number of industries. It also raises the issue of people who ignore those quarantine requirements and, in doing so, put industries at peril.

I know that investigations into the source of this particular outbreak are ongoing, and I wish the department well in establishing the source of this outbreak. On behalf of the growers I represent, I urge the department to spare no effort in establishing just how this disease outbreak came to happen and to use the full force of the law if it is found that there were illegal imports of plant material or whatever that led to this outbreak.

No industry can afford to have particular individuals within that industry who put the whole industry at risk for the sake of personal profit. Any participant in a particular industry who ignores the quarantine regulations that are in place to protect the industries of this country and ignores those quarantine regulations for some perceived benefit to themselves, putting the whole industry at risk, deserves no mercy if and when that greed leads to a disease outbreak. I hope that in time we can establish the source of this disease outbreak. If that has been the cause of this disease outbreak then the appropriate action can be taken.

This legislation before the House seeks to address a number of issues that arose during the handling of that disease outbreak, to address them in a way that makes it easier for the government and the Department of Primary Industries to respond and to correct a number of issues that caused delays at the time. Therefore, I think the bill should have the support of every member of the House. It certainly would have the support of everybody I represent involved in the citrus industry. At the time, the criticisms coming to me from the growers in the central Burnett and in the Kolan shire that I represent were that things were taking too long to happen and the department was being slowed down in its efforts. I know that that was as a result of actions being taken by the particular individuals whose property was found to be infected.

The elements of the bill before the House tonight will mean that if in the future this situation is repeated then those opportunities to slow down the department's response will not be there. It needs to be acknowledged that the minister has acted quickly to amend the legislation to ensure the department is in a better position to respond.

I hope that willingness to act extends to the next budget we see in this parliament. I hope we see a greater allocation for the Department of Primary Industries to ensure that the department does have the capacity to respond, that the run-down that I believe has happened in the department over a period of years is reversed as the importance of maintaining a capacity to respond is—

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I am not wrong. The department was out there trying to get people back out of retirement.

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr SEENEY: It was. The minister cannot deny that the department was out there trying to get people back out of retirement, because a number of the people who had the expertise to respond to this disease outbreak had left the department for a range of reasons directly related to the priority the Department of Primary Industries has within the government. That priority is reflected in the funding arrangements. Until the Department of Primary Industries is funded properly and there is sufficient money within the department to give those people the opportunity to develop their skills and to value the skills of those professional officers within the department, of course those people will be lost to the department, and the department will be the poorer for it when it has to respond to this type of issue. That is what happened. The minister can sit there and shake his head, but I just hope that the minister and the government have learnt from that and seek to rebuild that capacity.

I am pleased to see this bill before the House tonight. I certainly welcome the changes that it makes. I welcome any change that will make it easier for the government to respond to a disease outbreak such as the citrus canker outbreak. I commend those growers in my electorate who have worked their way through the difficult season that has been the result of the citrus canker outbreak. I hope that in the years to come the citrus industry can continue to make a great contribution to the economy of not just the central Burnett, central Queensland and my electorate but also the whole of Queensland. It does make a great contribution and provides a lot of opportunities for a lot of people in a lot of different associated industries. I hope that it can continue to do that, as does primary industries generally. The whole biosecurity issue is of enormous importance to ensuring that primary industries can continue to make that contribution. This bill before the House will hopefully do that. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MOLLOY (Noosa—ALP) (8.25 p.m.): I rise in the House tonight to speak to the Plant Protection Amendment Bill. It is heartening to see the swiftness and professionalism displayed during this recent emergency. I congratulate the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, Henry Palaszczuk, on the way he managed this issue, along with the staff who have dealt with this emergency.

This bill is in response to the citrus canker disease outbreak in Emerald in recent months. This last outbreak made it clear that the government needs to be able to respond to situations such as this with speed and powers which enable the department to execute its duties as it deems necessary.

Citrus canker is an exotic disease of a highly contagious nature. It has devastating impacts on the citrus industry in other countries around the world and is believed to have originated in South-East Asia and is now found in Indonesia, Japan and the Middle East. It could be imported to Australia via propagating material or fresh fruit. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service closely regulates these items to guard against their importation. Citrus canker does not harm humans, nor is it believed to be a risk to animals or birds. The blemishes on the fruit make it unattractive for sale.

Unfortunately, the department's power to eradicate was challenged recently in the Supreme Court. One can only be left wondering about the stupidity of this challenge. Hence, this legislation will clarify the position and responsibilities of the government and strengthen the act in other areas. This bill will ensure that the department has the powers to monitor for the presence of the pest. Monitoring is necessary not only to detect but also to gauge eradication treatments after such procedures have been carried out. It is apparent that scientific processes have to be put in place to guarantee the ongoing management of this highly valuable industry to the health and wealth of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (8.27 p.m.): I rise to support the Plant Protection Amendment Bill, because I think it is extremely important. This bill is absolutely essential if we are to eradicate diseases and pests that occur in Queensland from time to time. Let us face it, more and more we see people trading with this state and travelling to this state. I believe that as that continues we will have more problems associated with pests and diseases coming into Queensland.

I know that every endeavour is being made by AQIS to ensure that pests do not come in but, even with the best of intentions, sometimes they do. I think we have to be very vigilant and ensure that when a pest does arrive or a disease that is not endemic to Australia occurs we get onto it very quickly and do something about it.

Over a period of time I have faced a few of these problems. I will deal with them in a moment. Over a two-week period there certainly was a great deal of uncertainty in the area in which Evergreen farms are located. An injunction was put on any activity that could have been carried out by DPI. It was absolutely out of the question. I know that this bill will rectify that situation. It needs to do exactly that.

We have a very small citrus industry in north Queensland. Despite the fact that they were some thousands of kilometres away, it was not possible for people to trade with the likes of pomelos and limes during the period that there was uncertainty about the other states' involvement with taking the fruit. What we saw happening later on if they dipped it in chlorine—and inevitably if an area of freedom could be made available—was some real prospect of being able to trade with other states. A lot of that product, because it is grown up there in the winter period and can be produced for markets down south, is very attractive and they get quite a good price for it.

We suspect there was an introduction of plant material in the citrus canker outbreak that occurred in Evergreen farms, and we can only suspect that because nothing has been proven. There is some likelihood that it had to come in somehow and the way it probably would have come in is either on fruit—which is probably not the case—or, more likely, on bud wood. The issue that we have to deal with is how to stop this thing happening.

I am very familiar with what happens with the introduction of plants into Queensland because I have done it myself. I brought lychees in from China on a couple of occasions, and we had to go through the DPI's Hamilton quarantine station. It is a very rigorous process. The plants are in quarantine for some nine months or so and they go through a methyl bromide gas treatment. It is very tough on the plants and the survival rate is not particularly good. Out of probably eight plants that we brought in, I think only two survived and even they took some time to recuperate from the rigours of being put in methyl bromide. But that is the sort of thing we have to do to ensure that we do not bring bud wood or plant material—whether it is Marcotts or whatever it might be—into Queensland. The people there are very cooperative to deal with. They certainly ensure that every endeavour is made to attend the plants because it is a pretty rough period after they come out of the methyl bromide.

It is not very attractive to go through this process, and so I believe some people try to get around it. It is very slow, it is very arduous and it is very difficult to get a great amount of material in in a short period of time. Whether this material that we saw at Evergreens was brought in by bud wood or by plant material we do not know, but if the minister could pursue this matter that would be appreciated. Everybody who is involved in trying to bring plant material into Australia would welcome the minister giving those people who are trying to flout the system a clear signal that it is not on; that it is not going to happen here in Queensland. There are methods they can adopt to bring it in, be they slow and be they time consuming, but if we do not go through that process we run the likelihood of not just citrus canker but also a whole range of pests and diseases that can be brought in.

I went through the papaya fruit fly episode, and that was quite a difficult one. It occurred in October 1995. It covered some 78,000 square kilometres altogether, and that was at a time when there were a lot of food crops coming off in north Queensland. There were bananas, pawpaws, lychees, mangoes and so it went on. What had to be adopted by Queensland growers, particularly in the northern region of the 78,000 square kilometres where there was a quarantine zone in place, were some

protocols, some ICAs, that would pass other states' requirements for introduction of fruit into those states. About 60 per cent of what we produce in Queensland finds its way interstate and it is absolutely paramount to keep that trade happening.

It did happen. It was pretty difficult. We were dipping material in the likes of Dimethoate and some of the grapes had to be gassed. The eradication took place in 1998. Had that continued for another year, there would not have been a grape industry in Queensland. When they were gassed with methyl bromide the stems used to go black, the grapes dropped off and all the advantages they had of early markets was lost. So it was a great loss for those people who had to go through that process. It could have been even worse had they not eradicated the papaya fruit fly during that period.

The other issue is that it was very costly. There was a lot of labour involved in dipping and it was not very pleasant to have to do that. We also saw the introduction of hard green in a protocol dealing with bananas. That was something that had been adopted in other countries. That stood the industry in good stead. I believe it developed a better situation for the supply of fruit into the markets even after the papaya fruit fly outbreak occurred. We also saw black sigatoka. The first instance of this in any major operation was at Alexandra Farm. That farm is north of the Daintree River. It is a farm that did not use chemicals. It very successfully grew bananas and supplied them to the Japanese market. In 1997, to ensure that the industry as a whole throughout north Queensland was not put at risk of spreading any further disease, all the bananas on that farm had to be destroyed. That was pretty tough for the operators of Alexandra Farm. Even before that time we had seen the likes of the Banana Industry Protection Board, which is funded by the banana industry, going through the cape to ensure the likes of bananas that grew up as ferals and were on little plantations were taken out and the risk of black sigatoka was reduced.

Inevitably, in April 2001 the Tully Valley, which is probably in the centre of the major commercial banana-growing operations throughout north Queensland, unfortunately got black sigatoka and this gradually spread. In the interim the measures that were adopted to deal with it were to destroy the plantations where this disease first became apparent. As a consequence to some degree they curbed the activities of black sigatoka, but that did not last forever and gradually we saw it spread throughout other areas. So the industry made a conscious decision that, rather than destroy any further areas of plantation, they would get involved in a very stringent program of controlling the disease and hopefully wiping it out.

The banana industry has a disease control levy and they keep it in a trust reserve. What they do is raise this money from the level of zero to 10c, and as a result of that they have a fund that has been gradually built up over a period of time which they used at Alexandra Farm to assist those people. They also had sufficient money in the funds at that time to pay out the growers who had to destroy the bananas that were first detected with black sigatoka in the Tully area.

Gradually, as we progressed, the industry, the state government and the federal government—each sharing one-third of the cost—got involved with the eradication program, and this on top of the papaya fruit fly episode was a first for Australia and for the world. We eradicated a pest and a disease that was endemic to other countries in the world, but it was a nuisance that had been introduced in here that we did not want. I think that was a major achievement. It was only through the stringent controls that the industry imposed upon itself, it was only the fact that the industry recognised that if they did not get rid of it they would have to live with this pest and these diseases forever, and that was not very attractive.

Basically it meant that if other countries made an application to import bananas into Queensland and we had black sigatoka here, there would be one less reason to refuse the application. Therefore, it was extremely important that that occurred and I really have to congratulate the industry on what it did.

I have spoken about the surveillance work that was done on Cape York and the industry has been very vigilant in carrying that out. Of course, they are confronted with imports constantly and recently an application was made from the Philippines to bring in bananas. The Philippines has another couple of diseases that are very detrimental to the banana plant such as moko and banana bract mosaic virus. I know a lot has been going on with biosecurity. It has on been an on-again, off-again situation as to whether that application would be accepted and the industry has been fighting it very professionally.

If ever there was an agricultural industry in Australia that had an extremely competent group of people operating and directing it, it is the banana industry. This industry has had no controls and, over a period, it has recognised the need to look after itself. It raised the funds to do exactly that when it was needed. Of course, the possibility of imports coming in from the Philippines or other countries will certainly be fought very strongly and stringently.

I have picked up on an issue that I thought particularly interesting and the minister might even comment on this. In 2004 the Plantplan program was finally agreed to. Is the minister familiar with this?

Mr Palaszczuk: Yes.

Mr ROWELL: I think it is great because the Plantplan is a technical response that describes the Australian approach to responding to emergency plant pest incursions. Application of the Plantplan is

triggered by a detection of an emergency plant pest. The procedures, roles and responsibilities described in the Plantplan are generic for all pest emergencies. Plantplan is based largely on the Ausvetplan which is currently managed by Animal Health Australia for the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement.

One of the central elements underpinning the Plantplan is a formal cost sharing agreement covering industry and government funding arrangements for the eradication of emergency plant pests, or EPPs. In 2002, Plant Health Australia members endorsed the preparation of a formal cost sharing agreement for plant industries. This agreement replaced the informal arrangement between the Australian government and the state and territory governments.

Under the proposed emergency plant pest response—EPPR—governments and plant industry signatories will share the cost of eradicating EPPs based on the assessment of relative private and public benefits flowing from the eradication of the pest. The EPPR is designed to ensure a rapid and effective response to any new EPP incursion. I think that is exactly what we want. Coupled with the legislation that the government has put together, it has all the ingredients to ensure that if an incursion takes place, we have some mechanism—a contingency plan, I guess—to ensure that we can act quickly.

From my experience of dealing with a couple of these diseases in north Queensland, early detection is the best option. Somehow or other, we have to encourage property owners who see something that is abnormal, something that may be out of kilter with what they normally experience in terms of pests and disease, to immediately grab hold of the DPI. It is essential that DPI staff are easily accessible so that they can go to the property in question. We must have people who are good at disseminating information to the growers and who can give a breakdown of the material, whether it is a bacterial or fungal infection, or whatever. And let us face it, there is no end of possible problems and they run wild around the world.

With this legislation and the plant protection group working throughout Australia, we have all the necessary ingredients to ensure that, if there is a quick identification made, we can provide a response and hopefully eradicate these pests very quickly. I am familiar with all the angst that can occur if we do not do that.

We need to take into account the time that is consumed when dealing with other states when industries are reliant on us. We may say to workers, 'We are going to do this today,' but the work is not actually accomplished because there are problems associated with the picking or the time spent in transit, et cetera. It can become very onerous for growers to get directly involved in all the things that are absolutely necessary to their livelihood, yet they are prepared to do it.

From what I have seen of the two major incidents that occurred in north Queensland, I know that there is a lot of concern up there and there was a degree of controversy about what the problem was. Issues were raised by the skeptics as to whether it was the pest, whether it was a stunt or whatever. However, at the end of the day, we need to instigate instant responses to ensure that we know what measures are required if a problem occurs again.

The other issue that we have to look at is the need to be aware of all the pests and diseases that are likely to come here and develop contingency plans for them. We need a plan for what might happen and how we react to it, but we also need to know enough about the pests and diseases to immediately be able to say, 'Okay, we know what type of measures have to be adopted to curb this.' Sometimes we cannot stop the damn things so we isolate them and hopefully, over a period, the problem is eradicated. Unfortunately, some of the land has to be bare fallow for three or four years before one can get rid of the pest.

Some pests we cannot identify. I had an experience myself recently with lychees. We grew a culture but could not identify the root pest. People have to be prepared to say that there is something wrong and approach the DPI, which has some very good pathologists. It is well serviced. However, much of what has been said by other members in this House is a fact. It is difficult to access staff if one does not live close to a main centre. I have experienced that difficulty myself. I have to say that, while the staff are very willing, sometimes it is an issue of money. There are issues related to dealing with the environment and I think that sometimes we can do better in that respect. However, if growers are prepared to help themselves, I believe that the DPI has to respond, too. If it is an important issue such as a disease or something of that nature, especially something that comes out of left field, it augurs well if we can encourage growers and the DPI to become closely involved.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (8.47 p.m.): I rise to support the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2004. As the shadow minister for primary industries has indicated, the Nationals are very supportive of the legislation before the parliament. Certainly some issues of deficiency showed up following the recent citrus canker outbreak in central Queensland. It was a devastating outbreak and it has been necessary to ensure that legislative amendments are made to address that for the future. We really need to make sure that our response is adequate and that the legislative tools exist to ensure that the department is able to do its job.

Like many members, I was concerned when that outbreak was first reported. Certainly a degree of blame shifting and finger pointing went on at the time. Personally, I expressed some concerns about the issue of ongoing surveillance. I think that was a deficiency. Without wanting to plough old ground, I suppose that that is a concern we have. Regardless of the sensitivities of property owners who may find themselves potentially under surveillance, this whole episode has shown us that one can never have too much surveillance and these problems can be sitting below the surface and they need to be properly monitored and addressed. The question of how that particular devastating disease came into the country still has to be resolved, as does the question of what action may be taken against any individuals or corporations as a consequence of that.

I wish the department in Queensland and the federal authorities all the very best in trying to isolate the cause and then hopefully being successful in some prosecutions further down the track. I understand that some fairly sophisticated work is being done to try to identify that citrus canker strain. It is beyond the bounds of reasonable credibility and belief to think that that citrus canker strain just blew in on the wind from wherever. I think it is highly unlikely that it came in on somebody's shoe or on somebody's skin. We know that there are certain standards of proof that need to be applied. I wish the authorities all the best in trying to isolate the cause of that outbreak.

Biosecurity is one of the biggest issues that we face in agriculture in this state and in this country. I suppose tied in with the recent events from around the world is bioterrorism. There are opportunities for individuals to seek to compromise the pristine agricultural environment or the disease-free status of Queensland or Australia. Therefore, we need to be doubly vigilant at state and national levels to ensure that we are not only able to respond but also to be proactive in our approach to identifying these problems, making people aware of what to look out for in terms of potential disease outbreaks and having all of the legislative tools in our armour to be able to respond and tackle it up front.

I would encourage the government to put more resources into the area of biosecurity in Queensland. We have concerns that biosecurity is not sufficiently resourced. We believe that there should be more resources in the area of biosecurity in this state. The citrus canker outbreak manifested itself in the citrus industry. We never had a problem like that before. We have magnificent citrus in this state—some of the best in the country if not in the world. We had one outbreak of one citrus disease and then virtually the whole state was quarantined.

I would like to acknowledge those people in authority in the industry who worked very hard to make sure that the protocols could be put in place to open up the southern markets to our citrus fruit. There was no way we were able to consume all of that in Queensland. It was going to be virtually impossible.

We need to be ever vigilant in the future. Whilst it may be fair to say that we are never going to be completely prepared for that sort of outbreak, it identified the lack of skilled and trained staff able to move in very quickly and respond to it. Sure there were people moved from within the department to address that immediate problem. Some other people were brought out of retirement.

I would encourage the government to never drop the ball in terms of biosecurity staff. We have raised in the past in this place in a range of debates the need to ensure that we have the stock inspectors, the agronomists—a range of people in the area who have the skills and can provide information to those in industry. As we found out with the citrus canker outbreak, those people were absolutely invaluable because their skills were quickly updated, they were multiskilled and diversified so that they were able to go in there and assist in that area. The people brought in were very professional. But I think we did find a deficiency because we did not have the skilled staff necessary immediately, but in the end I think it came together quite well.

This legislation is a response to a number of issues that arose. One of those was the owners of diseased properties seeking injunctions to prevent eradication. Frankly, out there in the general community people think that is nuts. I am sure the minister thinks it is nuts. There are general natural justice principles that most people think we can abide by. But if we have a virulent disease problem—we know that other properties are at risk, we know that it can spread very quickly on the wind or by some other vector—then we have to get in there and eradicate it.

Mr Palaszcuk interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: As the minister said, if it rained we would have been in big trouble. I would love to see it rain, but not necessarily at that time. We had that very immediate problem. People can go to court and apply for injunctions. That extends the time to make the response that one needs to be make.

We absolutely welcome the greater disease surveillance powers. That is something that we indicated had been identified as a deficiency. We have to have the capacity to allow inspectors to access records, wherever located, to trace the movements of potentially diseased plant matter. There is no other choice.

The bill seeks to increase the penalties for breaches of the act. Frankly, I do not think that any penalty can be too great for a breach of the act with regard to matters that we are dealing with. We are

looking at a multimillion-dollar citrus industry not only in Queensland but across Australia. If somebody wants to breach the act, if somebody wants to treat the law with cavalier intent, then frankly we have to jump on them. The need for the clarification of the right of the state to carry out necessary treatment or destruction within a pest quarantine area is important as well. When we were briefed by the minister's officers I was quite intrigued how that was done. They did it extremely well. That destruction work has to be done and the ongoing treatment work has to be done as well.

I now turn to another area of potential plant disease that concerns me. A problem for people in my electorate, particularly in the apple industry, is fire blight. Fire blight is a very devastating disease. Fortunately, we do not have it in our apple orchards in Australia. We should never have it happen. Stanthorpe is Queensland's only commercial apple-growing area. I am not saying that there are not people around with apple trees in their backyards. A lot of the varieties of apples that are grown out there are grown in southern states but they come on first in Queensland because of our climate and our altitude.

If we ever have a fire blight outbreak in Australia, Stanthorpe or the Granite Belt is going to be most affected. The reason it will be most affected is the climate—the humidity and a range of factors. There is no way on earth that we should have any risk of this whatsoever. Therefore, I am very concerned that Biosecurity Australia has even suggested in any way whatsoever that we should be opening up the Granite Belt or Australia to the importation of apples which may cause a fire blight problem.

This whole notion of minimal risk, as being some sort of acceptable protocol, I find completely and absolutely brainless. There can be no guarantees. It should be zero risk. The treatment protocols in New Zealand quite frankly mean that fire blight spores can still be within the fruit. The chlorine baths will never reach down in the stem to knock that out. The risk is too great.

I find it extremely strange that we may be able to bring apples in from New Zealand where there is a risk of fire blight—however minimal it may be—but Queensland is subjected to a far stronger protocol when it exports apples interstate. We will not be able to put our apples into places like Tasmania because of the risk of codling moth. It is a rare affliction in apples. But we are going to have stronger protocols and stronger quarantine barriers within our country than we may have for apples coming in from New Zealand.

If nothing else, this citrus canker outbreak should have proven to us that no apples should come in from New Zealand. The risk is far too great. We have to stop it. My constituents who are apple growers are saying, 'I told you so.' If we can have citrus canker come in so easily and potentially spread so easily, then how are we ever going to be able to identify and control a fire blight outbreak.

It has taught us something. I know that the costs have been high, but I say in conclusion that we support this bill. We think it is a good bill. I just say on behalf of the apple growers in the electorate of Southern Downs: let us now use this particular example to rally against the importation of apples from fire blight places throughout New Zealand and the rest of the world.

Debate, on motion of Mr Springborg, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (9.00 p.m.): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Boating Industry

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (9.00 p.m.): Hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders enjoy boating in what is probably one of the most beautiful waterways in the world. It is estimated that the boating industry contributes over \$1.3 billion to our state's economy. Of course, safety is one of the most important concerns whenever anyone responsible goes boating. So members can imagine my concern when I am shown proof by a responsible gentleman, a keen boatie in Tony Connell, warning us that this state government—Peter Beattie's state government—is compromising and ignoring the safety of our boating community. This is the Peter Beattie Labor state government that would not listen to warnings about the electricity crisis, that would not listen to concerns about the health crisis, that will not listen to the community about the land clearing and farming crisis, that will not listen to the community about the child safety crisis, the same Peter Beattie state government that has been continually shamed into policy backflips and has taken corrective action only after a run of bad media headlines and opinion polls and is again living up to its reputation of not listening to the community.

This Labor government has ignored warnings and repeated requests from electronic charting companies since 2001 and from Mr Connell since February this year to provide accurate and up-to-date maritime navigational charts to the public. How difficult should this simple request be? Mr Beattie and

his smart socialist state already know how to use the Big Brother technology. Just ask any smart socialist state farmer or landowner who cuts down one extra tree or a smart socialist state fisher who drifts into a GBRMPA green zone and catches that extra fish. If one asks those people if Mr Beattie has the technology to reproduce accurate maps, I think that they will find that the answer is a resounding and deafening yes.

All Mr Connell has received from Peter Beattie's Labor government and departments has been excuses. The most damning excuse I have read was from the general manager of Maritime Safety Queensland who stated on ABC television—

We've got a budget. We've got to stick to it. It's our priority.

I would have thought that the lives of the 190,000-odd Queensland boaties would have been a priority, especially when we are talking about a problem which would not cost all that much to fix. It is basically bureaucratic red tape and a lack of political will that are the main obstacles stopping boaties being able to access accurate maps. Mr Connell has told me that the area of coastline which is not covered by accurate maps stretches from the New South Wales border to the Burnett Coast. In closing, I remind the House that this is a simple problem to fix. It is not like fencing off the Great Barrier Reef, but—

Time expired.

Palm Beach State School; Rock Eisteddfod

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (9.03 p.m.): Tonight I want to congratulate a school in my electorate which has an interesting and innovative policy. Palm Beach State School has a multiage philosophy. It does not place children in classes based on their age as is the traditional method but moves the children through three stages—junior, intermediate and senior—based on their social and physical achievements as well as their intellectual ones. This allows the school to build the curriculum around the students rather than fitting the child into the curriculum. It also allows for greater continuity with teachers, as the children often spend two or three years working in partnership with the one teacher. Decisions on the appropriate time for a child to move through the stages are made by the parents and teachers in consultation and based on the child's current needs rather than his age.

Palm Beach State School calls its classes 'families' which further encourages the spirit of collaboration. There are four junior families, three intermediate and four senior. This arrangement allows the school to use its teachers in a different way. Many of the families have two or even three teachers which allows the classes to use a variety of groupings often based on the interests of the children themselves. Multiage philosophy has many advantages for the children. It encourages an atmosphere of collaboration rather than competition. Older children are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility and nurturing for younger students who are part of their family. Most importantly, it allows for developmentally appropriate teaching which means that the children learn at their own rate and can experience the satisfaction of achievement even if they are learning more slowly than others of their age.

Multiage philosophy also allows for students who are quicker than the average to be encouraged rather than held back. The traditional method of age based divisions means that schools are working on a program based on the average student. Multiage philosophies remove that necessity and allow for the programs to be individually designed to fit the students. Palm Beach State School is the only school on the Gold Coast to offer this philosophy, and its results are impressive.

Tonight I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate Palm Beach Currumbin High School, the winners of the rock eisteddfod last week. Its performance was based on the novel *Wild Swans* and the talent and energy displayed were outstanding. I particularly want to congratulate the backstage crew. Often their work goes unrecognised, but without them there would be no performance. I was fortunate enough to be in the audience for the rock eisteddfod grand final and was overwhelmed by the professionalism of all of the acts. If anyone really believes that young people are lazy and apathetic, I suggest a visit to next year's eisteddfod as a tonic. They were all wonderful.

Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme; Public Transport

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (9.06 p.m.): Over the last 12 months the Queensland Council of Social Services has carried out a number of public forums to discuss the difficulties experienced by Queenslanders having to travel in order to access health services. In October last year a forum was held in Gympie in order to gauge the public perceptions of and experiences with having to travel for a medical appointment. The results of this meeting when collated showed that there is a real lack of adequate transport in the community, particularly for outlying areas such as Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach. The barriers to health services include the fact that demand often outweighs service delivery. Access to information and available resources seem to be an issue and one which I have often come across myself when people come to me and say that they have never even heard of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, let alone taken advantage of it. There also seems to be a lack of information at

the medical surgery level, which is ideally where patients should be able to pick up brochures and general health information.

There is an inflexibility in appointment times for people who have to travel distances of more than two hours and who rely on public transport, along with some people having to wait all day at one medical facility due to the infrequency of public transport. The forum also established a lack of understanding with regard to the role of the QAS as non-urgent transport. I know of some constituents in my electorate who were of the belief that ambulances take patients back home following a hospital stay and treatment. There may be some merit in a transport officer being employed by hospitals, particularly in rural and regional areas, who could coordinate transport and transport options for patients and also assist patients to negotiate discharge times with transport availability. One of the suggestions to come out of the Gympie forum was the possibility of formulating a database which could be accessed at public libraries and local community centres which would give people up-to-date information about the services on offer.

There are a lot of people in my electorate from the Mary Valley to Rainbow Beach who do not have their own vehicles and who do not have access to public transport, and it is not just health related matters that see people disadvantaged due to a lack of transport. With the population ageing, there will be fewer people able to drive in the not-too-distant future. These people will still need to shop and visit their GPs. Access to transport is so important, and mobility is vital and has both a personal and social impact. Lack of mobility can lead to a loss of personal quality of life, a burden on carers and society in general, particularly for elderly people who have had to hand in their licences and who are unable to get around due to inadequate transport options.

I know from personal experience when I first moved to Queensland the difficulties I had in finding employment due to the fact that I did not drive. The practice where I worked in Noosa meant that sometimes I worked until 9 p.m. at night. The last bus was just after 8 p.m. so I had to get cabs. This can prove extremely expensive if these types of shifts occur a few times a week. Then when I moved to the Mary Valley there was no transport at all and I had to rely on my parents to drop me off at interviews, take me to work, pick me up, take me shopping, et cetera. It is soul destroying not to have the sort of independence that goes with mobility, and I can only imagine the sense of hopelessness many unemployed people feel when they cannot get a job because they cannot guarantee that they can get into town and they will never be able to buy a car because they cannot a job. It is a vicious cycle.

Time expired.

National Party

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (9.09 p.m.): I have noticed an alarming trend of increasing personal abuse in this House. A good example occurred in the debate on the estimates hearings in the last sitting when I pointed out the paucity of the two National Party members' questions in Estimates Committee A. Apart from personal abuse, the member for Callide went one step further and said basically that I was wrong and that at the estimates hearing he did ask questions about the electricity distribution network and Energex and Ergon. He said that I should go back and check pages 57 and 69 of *Hansard*. I did. I checked the whole *Hansard* and the member for Callide did not ask a question about the electricity network. He asked about GOCs, but at no stage did any of his questions relate to the state of the electricity distribution network, maintenance, bonuses, governance or board membership. Maybe the member was confused. There were questions asked about Energex and Ergon, but they were asked by the leader of the Liberal Party. Bob will have to watch the member for Callide when the Liberals go back in coalition with the Nationals. The member for Callide will keep trying to claim credit for his work.

As for the member for Darling Downs, when I pointed out the lack of depth in his estimates questions he just could not control himself and called me unparliamentary names. It seems that the old adage is true: the biggest bullies have the biggest glass jaws and the thinnest skins.

It seems that the old National Party has returned with a vengeance. Everyone thought that when the National Party dumped Mike Horan that it would change its image. Despite Lawrence Springborg trying to promote a youthful image, the same rotten smell still seeps to the surface of the National Party. In the *Weekend Australian* there was a story about Mr Springborg writing to the Premier on official opposition letterhead asking the government to make a \$1 million ex gratia payment to Sir Joh for his contribution to modern Queensland and because Sir Joh had fallen on hard times and needed the money. Next Mr Springborg will be recommending that the government should also pay some money to Don Lane, Leisha Harvey, Brian Austin, Russ Hinze, maybe Terry Lewis and possibly Jack Herbert. They all made contributions to modern Queensland, but I am sure that we will remember them most for the stench of corruption that they fostered. As we saw over those years, the stench of corruption that they fostered in the National Party went on and on. But thankfully with the Fitzgerald inquiry, that has certainly come to an end. We are all thankful for that. But perhaps Mr Springborg would also like to wrap Sir Joh's \$1 million payment in a nice brown paper bag just to bring back old memories.

Mr Horan interjected.

Ms MALE: What a cheek from the Opposition Leader asking the government to hand over \$1 million. I am sure that the member for Toowoomba South is not actually backing him on that \$1 million request that he has put in. Anyone who is feeling hard done by should get on to Mr Springborg straightaway so that he could champion their cause. Of course, maybe the Leader of the Opposition would be interested in hearing from only people who are longstanding members of the National Party and who were part of the most corrupt government in Australia's history.

Cairns Yacht Club

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—NPA) (9.12 p.m.): In late July I had the pleasure of having a couple of meals at the Cairns Yacht Club. They were most enjoyable meals, with the inside of the yacht club very pleasant and with a view out to the water. While I was having lunch I spoke to some locals who were on the veranda enjoying a meal. They felt that it was one of the few places in Cairns on the foreshore that had an historical link to Cairns's past.

I believe that the Cairns Port Authority, as a quango of the state government, has a moral obligation to find a solution so that the heritage of the Cairns Yacht Club can be built into the redevelopment of the site. Unfortunately, the club has been in limbo since 1999 when it was not able to renew the lease with the Cairns Port Authority. As the port authority was the only original objector for the listing of the Cairns Yacht Club in 1999, as I have stated earlier, surely it is up to the port authority to negotiate with any future developer of the site to include the Cairns Yacht Club.

What has also concerned a lot of Cairns people is the way in which the Queensland Heritage Council has handled the process. It ignored its own advice and when the vote was taken on the issue, two northern delegates were absent from the vote and it still required the casting vote of the chairman to have the Cairns Yacht Club not listed as a heritage site.

The local view is that the input that the Cairns Yacht Club has had over the years into the community is worth 20 times the dollar value of the land for the port authority. The Cairns Yacht Club not only has great support from the local north Queensland populace but also from thousands of backpackers that it has taken sailing on a Wednesday afternoon. For some of these backpackers, it is the first time that they have sailed on the ocean. This is the type of experience that the backpackers and other tourists will talk about when they go back home. It is the type of advertising that the tourist industry cannot pay for. It is priceless.

The 70 per cent of Cairns people who support the heritage listing of the Cairns Yacht Club deserve to be listened to. Hopefully, the Labor members from the Cairns area will become involved in this area and find a workable solution that not only satisfies the Cairns Port Authority but also satisfies the Cairns Yacht Club. Surely the club should be saved. With some good consultation and planning, this can be a win-win situation not only for Cairns but also for the Cairns Yacht Club.

Health Services, Thuringowa Electorate

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (9.14 p.m.): Tonight, I would like to invite all honourable members to imagine that they are in my electorate of Thuringowa for a while. For a moment I would ask members not to focus on Thuringowa's beautiful vistas, its vibrant community, or the wonderful North Queensland Cowboys. I want members to cast their thoughts to the health needs of the Thuringowa locals.

Thuringowa is the forgotten city in our federal seat of Herbert, especially when it comes to the provision of health related services by the Commonwealth government. Recently, I was supplied with figures compiled by the federal Health Department. It is a list of urban areas in desperate need of GPs. The document is indeed an indictment on the Howard government's neglect of our health system, especially in our state of Queensland. In all, 72 areas of severe GP work force shortage were named, half of those being in Queensland. Yes, I will repeat that. Half of those were in our state of Queensland.

Parts of my electorate, the forgotten area of our federal seat, were named 13th on the list. That is a shame and a measure of the inadequacy of the local federal Liberal member who has represented Herbert since 1996. It is just not—

Ms Nelson-Carr: Just a disgrace.

Mr WALLACE: I take that interjection from the member for Mundingburra. It is a disgrace and it is not good enough. It is just not good enough that my constituents have to suffer the 13th worst record of patient to doctor ratios of all the urban areas in our nation. The people of Thuringowa deserve better and should have GPs to treat them and look after them.

I am told by GPs who practise in my electorate that recent knee-jerk announcements by the federal government will not solve the problem of the lack of doctors in our area. The government needs to be serious about this problem, not trying to solve this haemorrhaging with a bandaid.

In harking back to the list, I sympathise with my colleague the member for Waterford, who has the area of most need in Australia. Perhaps he will be fighting on this issue as well. But the federal

government neglect of Thuringowa health needs does not end there. Recently, I posted some 18,000 cards to every household in Thuringowa seeking their support for a local Medicare office. Just like our lack of doctors, we also lack a local Medicare office. Indeed, we are one of the few cities in Australia not to have one. I have received some 3,000 of these cards back showing the high level of support for this vital service.

But just like their lack of support for local doctors in Thuringowa, the local Liberals will not support a Medicare office in our city. Indeed, the current member, Peter Lindsay, has consistently attacked me for daring to stand up for my electorate. Therefore, members can imagine my surprise when last Friday he asked me for copies of the cards after lambasting me continuously through the media and saying that a Medicare office was not needed. Following this change of heart, perhaps Peter could rename the road to Thuringowa his road to Damascus.

Jetstar; Rock Eisteddfod

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (9.18 p.m.) Labor appear to be undecided on whether the airline Jetstar is beneficial to the Gold Coast or not. In recent media articles, the Tourism minister could not praise Qantas enough for stating that Jetstar will bring thousands of new tourists to Queensland and provide a multimillion-dollar boost to the state's tourism industry. The minister was quick to express her delight that Jetstar was providing a low-cost leisure airline that would dramatically improve access to the popular Queensland holiday destinations. The minister also stated that the benefits would be far reaching, boosting capacity into the Gold Coast from Sydney and Melbourne by 20 per cent.

However, the member for Southport has a different opinion on Jetstar's influence on the Gold Coast. Of late Mr Lawlor has been extremely vocal about Jetstar's no frills standard of service. He rightly reminded this House that the Gold Coast is not only an important tourist destination but also a growing business and conference destination. Here we have a Labor minister throwing her full support behind Jetstar and a Labor Party MP saying that we have accepted Qantas's decision to withdraw its full services too easily through the introduction of Jetstar.

The member for Southport needs the minister to come on board and wake up to the fact that in the long term the lack of Qantas flights to and from the Gold Coast will have a negative effect on our business community and on our tourism. Tourism may well gain from Jetstar initially, but it would seem to be short-sighted to disfranchise potential conference attendees and businesspeople because all they are offered is cattle class.

This government has boasted of being responsible for the newly opened conference and exhibition centre on the Gold Coast, yet already we are losing big conferences because of unsatisfactory air travel. Key business representatives including our prominent chambers of commerce are up in arms over the stripping of services. Conference organisers representing a national conference of 1,200 delegates and an international conference of 1,500 delegates withdrew their interest when they learned there was no business class or full service into the Gold Coast. Until we have the Tourism Minister and the member for Southport on the same flight path, we will continue to experience the turbulence created by Virgin and vergin' on the ridiculous.

On a lighter note, I wish to acknowledge Palm Beach Currumbin High School in my electorate for winning the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge. Over 150 students, along with teachers and parents, rehearsed their performance, called *Wild Swans*, weekly since May. This dedication paid off with them winning this year's title. Here is a great example of our youth engaging in proactive, enriching activities. They are to be heartily congratulated.

Rock Eisteddfod; Mr T. Candy; Coolum and Sunshine Beach State High Schools

Ms MOLLOY (Noosa—ALP) (9.20 p.m.): I would also like to congratulate that host of young people from Palm Beach Currumbin High School. I had the very special honour of representing the minister, Anna Bligh, and presenting that young group with their first prize at the rock eisteddfod. It was truly a thrilling evening.

The Noosa electorate continues to shine as a lovely tourist destination as well as a wonderful place to live. On 29 May this year I had the honour of attending the Queen's Scout celebration of Tim Candy of Noosa Sea Scout Venturers. The welcome was given by Mr David Caldwell. The Queen's Scout plaque was presented by the much-loved Desley Staatz. A response came from Tim Candy and a vote of thanks was given by Tim Staatz. It was good to see the Noosa Sea Scout Venturers and all the sea scouts from Noosaville present at this highly respected and not-to-miss ceremony.

I have watched Tim over the last few years grow into a fine young man surrounded by warm and friendly supporters and family. As the only government representative at Tim's ceremony, I felt especially proud of Tim and his achievements and the remarkably strong community spirit of the sea scout community. The families came together to celebrate and congratulate Tim Candy. Congratulations and well done. I wish you many more years of wonderful scouting and a bright and happy future. You are a born leader.

Speaking of young people, I would also like to congratulate all the young people who made their debut this year from Coolum State High School. My husband, Ivan, and I thoroughly enjoyed our evening with the youngsters. I was especially honoured to have the debutantes and their charming partners presented to me. I congratulate you and your parents, who all feel extremely proud of you all. We look to you as the future leaders of this state and, while some of you do not know this yet, you are all amazing people. Apart from looking absolutely wonderful, you did your families proud by your ability to party hard and keep safe. We welcome you to the adult world, which we want to share with you. What an honour it is for me to represent you all in our Queensland parliament.

It was only today that I heard someone here being uncharitable about the young. To them I say: visit your local high school and get involved in your local community and you will be pleasantly surprised.

Mr Cummins: Hear, hear.

Ms MOLLOY: I take that interjection. Sunshine Beach High School also hosted a great morning for their leadership badge ceremony on 16 July 2004. The introduction was given by Allara Barber and Craig Kurkowski and the acceptance was given by Emma Gibbs, student youth parliamentarian 2003 and 2004, and Ryan Palk. I was delighted to perform the role of investing the student leaders along with Vivien Griffin from Noosa council and Deb Purdon from Noosa Youth Services. The new school captains are Emma Gibbs and Ryan Palk. The forum chairs are Alana Rostron and Matthew Higginson. The committee chairs are Georgina Menzies, Linsey Rendell, Giverny Baggott and Emma Truz. The sports captains are, for Banzai, Bella Herbert and Ben Gill; for Mundaka, Letita Power and Justin Mayes; for Uluwatu, Carly O'Loughlan and Scott Russell; and for Waimea, Jessamy Watts and Tyren Viertel. Again, congratulations to you and to your parents and teachers. We are all extremely proud of you. Bonnie, you and Shelley Treloar go to the best school. Thanks for being such great little kids.

Time expired.

Gore Highway

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.23 p.m.): I rise tonight to speak about the dangers of the Gore Highway running west from Toowoomba, the number of fatal accidents that have occurred on that highway and the need for some improvement, particularly to the access roads to that highway. There was another fatal accident on the Gore Highway on Sunday, 22 August, where Wyreema Road joins the highway.

People in the area are getting extremely concerned, particularly because of the increasing numbers of people who are living just to the south-west of Toowoomba, around the Westbrook area, in the Wyreema area and along the Gore Highway leading out past Southbrook and Pittsworth. A lot of people are starting to live there and travel into Toowoomba. There is a whole network of school buses for both primary and secondary schools that operate through that area—going into the Drayton school and into the secondary schools of Toowoomba. A number of students also travel to the USQ, which is located in the south-western corner of Toowoomba.

I would like the Minister for Transport to take note of what I have to say today. I have been contacted by a number of constituents. One constituent in particular has talked about the fact that when that highway from Toowoomba to Millmerran was constructed inadequate work was done on a number of the approach roads and intersection roads. Some of these junctions have since been upgraded or corrected, but there remain too many that are inadequate and dangerous junctions.

The particular one I am speaking about tonight is where vehicles exit from Wyreema Road to the highway. When looking to the western side visibility is poor and restricted due to the curve on the side of the hill. It is a Y-shaped junction. If taking the eastern arm to turn towards Toowoomba, looking left to check for traffic also requires looking back over the shoulder. My constituent has written to me and told me of this.

My constituent also says that for vehicles travelling south-west from Toowoomba and exiting the highway to Wyreema Road there is not a suitable slip lane for traffic to move off the highway and prepare for the left turn. This causes disruption to the following traffic flow. There are also other problems with vehicles travelling towards Toowoomba, particularly visibility at the Wyreema Road junction, which is very poor.

I refer to the second range crossing, which has been mooted for some time. The federal government has put some \$30 million into this project already to purchase properties in the corridor and do the detailed plans. It is a road that has to be constructed by the federal government. It will take an enormous load off Toowoomba itself, particularly James Street, the main east-west road of Toowoomba. Thousands of B doubles travel that road every day. It is the heaviest freight carrying road of Australia. It has 16 sets of traffic lights. Then as the B doubles go south-west towards Melbourne, they go out to the Gore Highway through these populated areas. I call on the Minister for Transport to do what he can to fix this problem.

Time expired.

Alcohol Management Plans

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (9.27 p.m.): Since the introduction of alcohol management plans just over 18 months ago there has been a great deal of speculation about the effect, if any, they will have on tourism businesses in Cape York Peninsula. While I think the jury is still out, there is a growing amount of data and anecdotes available to begin forming some opinions.

There are some scurrilous people out there claiming that alcohol management plans are having a devastating impact on tourism, but the empirical evidence does not support that view. This year has seen a significant increase in the number of camping permits issued by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in far-north Queensland. In fact, camping permits have increased by 61 per cent this year. I refer also to the *Tablelands Advertiser* of 30 June and its report on the Laura race and rodeo weekend. In the article the assistant secretary of the Laura District Rodeo and Campdraft Association, Debbie Gostelow, is quoted as saying that the numbers at the rodeo were as good as the event's 25th anniversary two years ago and that at least 100 more attended this year's rodeo than last year's rodeo.

On 8 July the DPI inspection station near Coen inspected a record number of southbound cars for a single day since it was opened in 1997. The proprietor of one of the fuel outlets in Coen, Mr Rhys Gardiner, told me that his fuel sales had increased by 12 per cent this year when compared to last year. On Friday, 16 July the manager of the Seisia Resort and Campground at the tip of Cape York Peninsula informed me that he was having his busiest year on record.

I am not going to stand in this House and say that it has all been gravy for tourism operators on Cape York since the introduction of alcohol management plans. I do believe that fewer fishermen visited the cape this year and that indigenous tourism operations also suffered. Sales are also down at most of the cape's pubs and liquor outlets. Notwithstanding this, I think the long-term prospects for operators are good.

There is a growing number of so-called grey nomads—retired baby boomers who hit the road and travel from caravan parks to camp grounds all over Australia. A greater number of these tourists are visiting Cape York Peninsula. I believe that if we can make indigenous communities safer they will attract more tourists and a different mix of tourists than the beer-drinking fishermen that some DOGIT communities are reliant on at the moment. There is a growing awareness of Cape York as a wilderness area and there is a growing number of people looking for a unique experience away from the homogenous offerings of Western cities.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is doing its bit to inform tourists about alcohol management plans. In addition to the web site, help line and brochures, it has put ads in specialist travel publications such as the RACQ's *The Road Ahead*, *4WD Monthly*, *Fish and Boat*, *Caravanning Australia* and *Outdoor*.

It is important to note that 85 per cent of Cape York is unaffected by alcohol management plans. There is still alcohol available in most communities. There are plenty of people showing confidence in the future of the industry with significant capital investment, and the long-term prospects for the industry are extremely positive.

Time expired.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 9.30 p.m.

