



WEEKLY HANSARD

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51ST PARLIAMENT

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THURSDAY, 11 AUGUST 2005

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. T McGrady, Mount Isa) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 am.

PRIVILEGE

Answers to Questions on Notice

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I refer to the matter of privilege raised yesterday by the member for Warrego, who also wrote to me about the matter. Given that the matter involves my actions in a former capacity, I have decided to delegate any decision making in this matter to the Deputy Speaker, who will report to the House in due course.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Boat Ramp, Kierle's Landing

Mrs Menkens from 122 petitioners requesting the House to provide a permanent all tidal access boat ramp facility at Kierle's Landing, Rita Island

Big Brother

Dr Flegg from 4,122 petitioners requesting the House to immediately withdraw all financial support provided to the Big Brother television program and commit to not funding Big Brother or similar ventures in the future; immediately cease the promotion of sexually explicit and highly graphic material to children and young people; withdraw all previous public statements of support for Big Brother; and take all practical measures to ensure inappropriate material is not made available to children through another medium including internet, mobiles or any other new media, in particular where the alternative medium is promoted to children on television or radio.

The following honourable member has sponsored an e-petition which is now closed and presented—

Big Brother

Dr Flegg from 3,701 petitioners requesting the House to immediately withdraw all financial support provided to the Big Brother television program and commit to not funding Big Brother or similar ventures in the future; immediately cease the promotion of sexually explicit and highly graphic material to children and young people; withdraw all previous public statements of support for Big Brother; and take all practical measures to ensure inappropriate material is not made available to children through another medium including internet, mobiles or any other new media, in particular where the alternative medium is promoted to children on television or radio.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Murrumba Electorate, Immigration Detention Centre

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.33 am): Without a single word of consultation with local community groups or the Queensland government, federal Liberal minister Amanda Vanstone announced on 29 July that a detention centre would be established at Burpengary. The question has to be asked: why did the Liberal government keep this a secret until the moment it was announced? It is because the Liberals knew that the detention centre would be opposed by local people. Once they build a small detention centre, what is to stop them building a bigger detention centre? Remember that the Liberals were talking about the need for a detention centre housing more than 500 illegal immigrants.

It seems the only person consulted about the centre being established at the Shaftesbury Centre was Teresa Gambaro, the federal Liberal member for Petrie, who was a former member of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration. She backed the plan and then moved her office away from the Redcliffe peninsula before the storm broke. Her personal page on the House of Representatives web site still shows the Redcliffe office address, and I am reliably informed she has moved to Aspley so she can be close to her home in Carseldine rather than close to the voters at Redcliffe.

The Liberal minister announced that not only would the centre hold people who had been refused entry at Queensland airports; it would also house people identified through compliance operations. She said that the centre would be run by GSL Australia, which also operates the maximum security Port Phillip Prison in Melbourne for the Victorian government and the low- to medium-security Mount Gambier Prison for the South Australian government. The Liberal minister announced that the detention centre would be surrounded by a standard swimming pool fence—some security that!

The former federal minister previously stated that he would not impose an immigration detention centre on a community that did not want it. I say to the minister: this community does not want it. This minister is determined to build the centre there even though people do not want it. There is the chance for the voters in the Redcliffe by-election to say no to the Liberals and their plan to build this detention centre.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The Liberal members don't want to hear it but I say to them: they have not heard the end of this, because I made it absolutely clear that my government will oppose this detention centre. I met with the three local members last night and they share my view. We will oppose this every step of the way. If this process was so transparent, why did they not come and talk to us? There is silence from the Liberals now. They know what this is all about. Frankly, we will fight it every step of the way. Let the record show that the Liberals here support the detention centre; we oppose it.

Mr Quinn: You are so desperate.

Mr BEATTIE: I am delighted to take the Leader of the Liberal Party's interjection. I am happy to circulate this *Hansard* record to all the people of Redcliffe. The member for Robina, the Leader of the Liberal Party, supports the detention centre. I thank him for that interjection.

Dr Flegg: What's the name of your candidate?

Mr BEATTIE: The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party supports the detention centre as well. I thank both of them for conveying their comments on the record.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Violent Video Games

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.36 am): I am today writing to the federal Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock, seeking his action to ensure that a new video game is banned in Australia. The game has not yet been released in Australia and I hope it never is. The game *Getting Up: Contents under Pressure* glorifies high-risk, law-breaking, violent and even deadly behaviour. It flagrantly promotes graffiti, including the highly dangerous tagging of the inside of railway subways and entire rail carriages, and other civil disobedience. It makes heroes of a cast of reckless characters. One of them is described as 'the notorious Bronx bomber and destroyer' and another has supposedly taught a fellow tagger to bomb entire subway cars.

From a gaming point of view, I am told that it is very slick and will appeal to 10- to 30-year-old males. The makers, Atari, brought in Sean 'P Diddy' Combs and a range of other celebrities to do voice work on it, which indicates that they expect it to be popular. It has worrying potential to steer impressionable young people into activities that will endanger life and limb and earn them criminal records. If the prerelease publicity and media reporting on the game are factual, then there is a compelling case for banning it from sale throughout Australia. Anything less than a national ban would not prevent young people from accessing the game.

In the course of seeking information this week about *Getting Up*, I learned of the existence of another computer game which also may warrant action. *Fable*, which has been classified M15+ with the consumer advice 'medium level animated violence', is said to promote violence. Women's groups have complained that it encourages male violence against women. This is anathema to most Queenslanders and certainly to this government. Domestic violence is a crime; it can murder, it can maim and it can leave women and children traumatised and emotionally scarred. As we see too often in Queensland, it can throw families and entire communities into dysfunction.

The government encourages creativity and Queensland's home-grown computer game industry as well, but we condemn the glorification of violence to young people. The Office of Fair Trading's classifications officer is currently examining *Fable*. If it is determined that the game promotes violence, we will not hesitate in asking the federal government to take appropriate action.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Engaging Communities

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.38 am): On Sunday I will be officially opening the first international conference on Engaging Communities at the Brisbane Convention Centre. During the planning stages for the conference we anticipated it might attract 1,200 to 1,500 delegates. There are now more than 1,800 confirmed delegates. The conference has been organised in a partnership involving the United Nations, seven of our universities and the Queensland government. I seek leave to have the remainder of my ministerial statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

I will be providing details to the conference about our successes in a wide range of engagement and community consultation programs. For example, I will outline how we introduced Regional Parliament Sittings in September 2000, with the Parliament meeting in Townsville. The three-day sitting was attended by more than 8,000 people.

In August 2002, we introduced e-petitions allowing citizens to make formal requests directly to Parliament. To date, nearly 22,000 e-signatures have been recorded. In April 2003, we introduced live Internet broadcasts of our Parliament.

Another important initiative has been our Community Cabinet Meetings. Ministers have seen more than 6,500 formal deputations, as well as thousands of informal deputations. Over 31,000 people have attended Community Cabinet meetings to talk to Ministers and senior Departmental officers about a range of topics of interest to them.

We also conduct Ministerial Regional Community Forums in 8 regions simultaneously across the state. We hold Negotiation Tables, providing a culturally appropriate form of engagement between government and Indigenous communities.

Our Smart Service Queensland provides a central access point for information, government transactions and referrals. In May 2003, we began an online community consultation program, in which we engage the community on selected issues and policies. Some 8,600 responses have been received so far. Those are just some of the reasons why my Government has received international recognition for its leadership in community engagement.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Lions Partnership

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.39 am): At midday today I will be launching Smart State, Safe State: Partnerships for a Safer Queensland and the first partnership in this program, the Brisbane Lions partnership. This innovative program has been developed by the Department of Communities under the direction of Minister Warren Pitt.

While it is obvious that the Lions are great role models for many young Queenslanders, it is not well known that the team is committed to improving the safety of Queensland communities. Community safety is a responsibility of everyone in the community. It is particularly satisfying to see an organisation like the Lions take up the challenge.

This partnership will see a range of community safety initiatives developed through the Department of Communities. Many of the programs are still being developed, but the first is the Brisbane Lions Communities Youth Development Initiative. It will involve young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in a range of activities to inspire and encourage them to develop leadership skills. This is a great partnership with tremendous potential. I congratulate the Brisbane Lions on their commitment to it, and I congratulate the minister on this initiative.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Investment Corporation and QSuper

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.40 am): The Queensland Investment Corporation consistently beats industry benchmarks for performance. On 5 July the former Treasurer revealed that the preliminary estimate of returns on the state's investments through the superannuation defined benefit scheme was 18.46 per cent. I can now report that the final figure is even better—18.52 per cent.

The 2004-05 budget assumed a long-term rate of return of 7.5 per cent on investments held to fund future employee entitlements and other liabilities. In finalising the 2005-06 budget, 14 per cent was used as the estimated actual rate of return assumption for 2004-05. The final result will not be known until Treasury completes the 2004-05 Report on State Finances due for tabling in October. However, the actual return of 18.52 per cent is likely to increase the 2004-05 budget surplus by some \$580 million, taking the surplus to over \$3.5 billion. These additional returns will be reinvested as a buffer against future market downturns.

In managing more than \$30 billion in superannuation investments on behalf of QSuper and the state government, Queensland Investment Corporation again exceeded the benchmark in 2004-05. Over the past two years it has delivered more than \$8 billion in superannuation investment returns to QSuper's 430,000 members—one in every nine Queenslanders. Returns were approximately 25 per cent from Australian equities portfolios and 14.5 per cent from international portfolios. Bearing in mind the importance of this to our finances, I seek leave to incorporate more detail in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Fixed interest and property also earned in excess of 10% in 2004-05, when the QSuper Accumulation Balanced option returned 15.38%.

SuperRatings ranks QSuper as Australia's 2nd best performing superannuation fund.

The Mercer Pooled Fund Survey shows the Queensland Investment Corporation has allowed QSuper to consistently deliver above-average returns.

Defined Benefit fund returns (which have a different asset allocation from Qsuper) were 18.5% for 2004 05.

While Queensland Investment Corporation is responsible for individual investment decisions, QSuper and Treasury keep a close eye on the investment strategy.

Queensland Investment Corporation makes a significant contribution to Queensland's status as the only State with a fully funded superannuation scheme.

QSuper is a recognized industry leader, with one of the lowest fee structures in the country.

That means more money in members' pockets.

Obviously, certain investments perform better than others.

For example, biotechnology investments performed poorly in 2005, but biotech stocks represent only about 0.2% of the corporation's total investments and only 0.5% of direct equities investments.

In the scheme of things this is minuscule, and did nothing to dent the corporation's stunning performance as a national industry leader.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Patel, Dr J; Prosthetic Limb

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.42 am): It is my sincere hope that a young man whose life has been tragically affected by events under scrutiny in the Bundaberg Hospital Commission of Inquiry will soon have a new high-technology leg. The teenager, whose story is familiar to those following the inquiry, has endured more than a lifetime's worth of suffering in just 15 years. Nothing we can do will completely restore fairness to his life or reverse the trauma he has experienced.

However, the Minister for Health, Stephen Robertson, and I have discussed his circumstances and exchanged correspondence about him. He is the youngest of the potential claimants affected by Jayant Patel. He deserves a life that is as independent and fulfilling as possible. We have asked Queensland Health to urgently give him a high-tech prosthetic leg. This will be provided as a clinical service and will not relate to any claim he may have for compensation. I do not want a vital health service for an injured teenager held up by the legal complexities of the compensation process.

I am advised that the Amputee Clinic at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital is urgently acquiring a leg to suit this teenager. Measurement, casting, manufacture and fitting will take about a fortnight. The prosthesis is valued at about \$80,000 over five years, not including expenses such as medication and physiotherapy. It gives this young man mobility, independence, confidence and self-esteem, and it will be worth every cent. I thank the Minister for Health for his quick action in this matter.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ekka Dinner

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.43 am): The annual RNA cabinet dinner at the Ekka will be held tonight. Like thousands of other Queenslanders, I look forward to the Ekka because it puts on show the best of the bush in our capital city. People living in the bush know that they need to have a plan in order to succeed. The same applies to the state. If we want to succeed we need to have a plan. That is why we will be working closely with people from the bush to develop the Blueprint for the Bush for the next 10 years. In fact, on Monday cabinet will meet in the bush. I seek leave to incorporate more details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The Blueprint for the Bush will be a 10-year plan with strategies to ensure the sustainable future of rural and regional Queensland. I am urging Queensland communities and organisations in the bush to make submissions to the discussion paper. We have extended the deadline to October 14.

The Queensland Government has a very colourful and informative presence at the EKKA this year. The theme of our pavilion is "Smart Queensland: knowledge, creativity and innovation."

Cabinet will meet again at the Ekka on Monday—it will be our seventh annual Ekka Cabinet meeting.

This year, there are 35 competition sections, which have attracted some 27,000 entries. I am tabling a list of the competition sections and ask that it be incorporated in *Hansard*.

2005 EKKA Competition Sections:

Apiculture (Bees and Honey)

Boer Goats

Combined Beef Cattle (Stud and Prime Beef Cattle and the Led Steer & Carcass Competition)

Combined Fleece Breeds (Alpacas, Prime Lamb Carcasses, Stud Angoras, Mohair Fleeces, School Sheep and Wool)

Combined Horses (Thoroughbred Horses, Stud Horses, Horses In Action, Pony Club and Showjumping)

Creative Art & Craft (Cookery, Creative Art & Craft, Painting & Drawing, Sculpture and Photograph)

Dairy Cattle

Dairy Goats

Dairy Produce (eg cheese)

District Exhibits & Fruit (Commonwealth District Exhibits, Queensland Youth District Exhibits, Fruit, Australian Banana Championship and Australian Pineapple Championship)

Dogs

Fruit Wines

Pisciculture (eg exotic tropical fish)

Poultry, Pigeons and Birds

McDonald's Education on Show

Strawberry Competition

Royal Queensland Wine Show

Quilts Across Queensland

Sheep Dog Trials

Woodchop & Sawing

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Online Payroll Tax System

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Minister for Finance and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation) (9.43 am): I am pleased to report to the House that Queensland employers are embracing a new online payroll tax system developed by Treasury's Office of State Revenue which allows business to lodge returns and pay electronically. Of the 70 per cent of taxpayers who have so far lodged their payroll tax returns since the system became operational on 4 July, around 90 per cent have used the new online system. This is an impressive uptake, and it is great news for business.

The new revenue management system is the first of a series of e-business initiatives designed to streamline taxation transactions and to reduce paperwork for business. Around 14,000 Queensland employers are currently registered for payroll tax, which is a requirement when their total Australian taxable wages exceed \$850,000 per year. It is pleasing to see the majority of employers embrace the new system, which reduces the time, cost and effort of complying and makes cumbersome paper returns a thing of the past.

The new system is simple. Any registered payroll taxpayer with internet access can enter the system through the Office of State Revenue web site using their own unique secure user ID and password. The system guides each client through smart forms that display only the information they need to complete their returns and automatically calculates whether they have a liability or are due a refund. This system provides a complete e-business solution for payroll taxpayers that will help cut their business costs.

The payroll tax component is the first stage of the Office of State Revenue's new revenue management system—

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Lockyer, I warn you.

Ms BLIGH:—and will progressively apply to stamp duties, land tax and fuel subsidy. To access this system or to find out more, I urge business and the opposition to visit the Office of State Revenue web site.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Industrial Relations Reforms

Hon. TA BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (9.45 am): A lot of words have been uttered in the debate on industrial relations reforms proposed by the Howard government. Let us look in detail at one of the statements made by the Prime Minister late last week in an interview with Alan Jones. The Prime Minister said—

... the reason we need these reforms is they will boost workplace productivity and a boost in workplace productivity will lead to an increase in living standards in the future, more jobs and a maintenance of the living standards for Australian families.

This is simply not backed up by international evidence. In March the OECD released a report that compared the labour productivity performance of OECD countries between 1994 and 2002. The United States, which is the centre of deregulation—a path the Prime Minister wants to take us down—was used as the benchmark for this comparison. Interestingly, the report showed that a number of nations—including Norway, France, Belgium and Italy—outperformed the US in terms of labour productivity. These are countries that have greater labour market regulation than the US, and they still outperformed the US on productivity. This must cast doubt over the Prime Minister's assertion that further deregulation will lead to better economic outcomes. We must not be fooled into believing that deregulation is a precondition for economic success.

Deregulation has produced adverse social results without necessarily improving economic performance. The OECD has found that countries with the most deregulated labour markets have the biggest gap between the rich and the poor. In the US, where the federal government sets the minimum wage, the minimum is currently \$US5.15 per hour. Yet another example is that New Zealand and Australia had similar levels of productivity in the 1980s. When New Zealand introduced the deregulated industrial relations system in 1991, its level of productivity fell below one per cent for the decade, well behind Australia's increase of more than two per cent. The performance of the Queensland economy also reinforces this fact. Under Queensland's fair and balanced industrial relations laws, we have a booming economy, high employment and low industrial disputation. The answer to increasing labour productivity is not going to be found in stripping away the entitlements of employees.

It is high time that the Prime Minister admitted that industrial relations reform is not the solution to boosting productivity. The fact is that greater labour market deregulation is likely to widen the social divide and erode confidence in our economy. Despite what the Prime Minister would have us believe, that cannot be good for our nation's productivity.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Police at the Ekka

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.49 am): Tomorrow the exhibition starts in Brisbane and the police will be there again to provide and maintain a visible and professional presence that will promote good public order and a safe environment for everyone. There will be 42 police officers rostered each day to specifically perform duty at the RNA. Police will be there 24 hours a day under the supervision of Senior Sergeant Damian Hansen from the Valley police and Senior Sergeant Dale Ulrich from the city station.

In addition, on each of the 10 days there will be up to 26 officers attached to the Brisbane Central District Traffic Branch, Criminal Investigation Branch, Juvenile Aid Branch, Public Safety Response Team, Mounted Police, Railway Squad and police liaison officers who will supplement the work of the other 42 rostered police.

One of the main duties of police is to reunite children who have lost their parents. Most of us would remember when we were young our parents told us that if we became lost at the show to find a police officer or report to a temporary police station. The old message still applies. However, to make it easier to reunite lost children and parents, this year the RNA will provide wristbands for children who attend the show. The brightly coloured wristbands will have the word 'Ekka' printed on the outside. On the inside there is space to write a contact name and phone number in the event that the child is lost. All police officers will be equipped with plenty of these plastic wristbands and will be giving them out during the Ekka.

These wristbands were used for the first time last year and not only led to a reduction in the number of children who became lost, but also significantly reduced the time spent by police looking for their parents. Last year police reunited 171 children who had become lost with their parents. As a parent I know the importance of keeping an eye on young ones and given the large number of people who are heading for the show this is not always easy to do. However, if children do get away from parents it is good to know that police will be there to match them up. This year if parents do not get a wristband for their children police are encouraging parents to write their mobile number on the inside of a child's arm or wrist.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Bundaberg Base Hospital; Patel, Dr J

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (9.51 am): Later today I and my parliamentary secretary, Jo-Ann Miller, will be visiting Bundaberg to visit the local hospital and meet with the support group representing former patients of Dr Jayant Patel.

First, I want to see for myself what is happening at Bundaberg Hospital and discuss a range of issues with both clinical staff and management. I will also be attending a scheduled meeting of the Bundaberg Patients Support Group—as I promised Beryl Crosby—to discuss the range of strategies we have in place to support and manage the patients of Dr Patel. Much has already been done to assist patients through strategies being implemented by Queensland Health in conjunction with Bundaberg Hospital. We established a patient liaison service in April to identify all patients who had some form of contact, however minimal, with Dr Patel. As a result, patient liaison officers spoke with patients prior to sending each identified patient an explanatory letter in order of clinical urgency. These were: 900 surgical patients; 200 non-surgical in-patients; and 400 patients who had endoscopies as day procedures. These patients were sent a specific letter with further instructions for the necessity and

manner of seeking a medical review of their condition. The families of deceased patients were all personally contacted and we are providing counselling and support to all those other patients who have accepted our offer.

To date, approximately 294 patients have been counselled. Our medical teams have to date reviewed the surgical cases of 430 former Patel patients, completed surgery on 32 and have ongoing surgery scheduled for a further 54 patients. Another 318 patients have been scoped, require endoscopies or are subject to either ongoing treatment or ongoing investigation. A further 452 cases have been fully assessed by doctors and determined to require no further action.

This work will continue as part of this government's commitment to provide remedial medical treatment, support and counselling for all patients who suffered at the hands of Dr Patel. The patient liaison service will continue to function under the management of Bundaberg Health Service District to work with these patients to support them, manage their cases and provide them with medical treatment where appropriate.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sugar Industry

Hon. GR NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (9.53 am): The sugar industry is absolutely vital to the economy of Queensland and the single desk marketing system has been invaluable to the industry for many years. But the industry also has been one in which there has been a range of regulatory reforms. These reforms are necessary if the industry is to remain competitive on world markets.

As part of the 2004 heads of agreement signed between the sugar industry and the Queensland government a number of reforms were agreed and implemented. In the heads of agreement the industry also indicated that it would be forming a working group to examine potential new marketing arrangements for raw sugar. That working group was formed and comprises leaders of the industry. The government has observers at the meetings of the group. The industry has developed and submitted a proposal to the Queensland government in relation to future marketing arrangements. This proposal is based on what type of voluntary marketing arrangements might be appropriate in the absence of any legislation.

The proposal was made jointly by key figures of Canegrowers and the Australian Sugar Milling Council. It is significant that industry has taken this initiative and come to the government advocating reform. This would suggest that the momentum for change in the sugar industry is being maintained.

Given the nature of the proposed changes, the Queensland government will consider industry's proposals and meet with industry representatives to further consider the matter. The Queensland government is open to suggestions for further reform of sugar industry regulatory arrangements. However, there will need to be support across the growing and milling sectors and also from the relevant mill unions. As I said in this House on Tuesday, a meeting was held on 1 August between government and industry representatives. Due to ill health I was not at the cabinet meeting on that Monday, nor at the meeting with the industry leaders. I advised the House—

Subsequent to the decision of cabinet, industry had put a proposal to government about the new way in terms of single desk selling and we have reached agreement with the industry on a way forward.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Lockyer, this is your final warning. You have already been warned. One more outburst from you and you are out.

Mr NUTTALL: I also said—

after the cabinet meeting that afternoon I understood that the Premier met with industry and an agreement was signed. So it is an agreement between the industry and the government on a way forward.

Subsequently my department has advised me that no agreement has been signed. However, an agreement had been reached between the parties to further progress these matters. The record needs to be set straight and I do that today.

The way forward will involve further negotiations and consultation on implementation issues associated with the proposal, which I will not elaborate on at this stage. But it will involve a close working relationship between myself, my department and industry groups such as Canegrowers and the Australian Sugar Milling Council, both of which I spoke to yesterday. This government is committed to working with the sugar industry to deliver the best outcome for all concerned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Shared Visions Conference

Hon. FW PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors) (9.57 am): It gives me great pleasure to be able to inform the House today about the great success of the recent disability conference held on the Gold Coast. This is the first conference of its kind held in Queensland. The fact that more than 500 delegates from all over the state attended is evidence of its success. These delegates comprised people with a disability, their families and carers, service providers, advocates, peak bodies and government representatives. The conference provided a forum for all areas of the disability sector—not to dwell on the past, but to focus on the future. I believe the conference was very successful in that respect.

This inaugural disability conference—called Shared Visions: exploring the future for disability in Queensland—was exceptionally well received and will undoubtedly help to shape the future. As a result of the conference the disability sector now has a clearer picture—a shared vision, if you like—of how the future should be. This shared vision of the disability sector will provide an invaluable tool for the Queensland government to help shape how services and supports are developed and delivered in the future.

I would like to thank the Premier for opening the conference. I know he was impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm he encountered. I would also like to thank the member for Nudgee, Neil Roberts, for his hard work and contribution to the success of the conference. The shared visions conference proved so successful that other regions are now bidding for an opportunity to host future conferences. This strong regional interest, combined with other sponsorship arrangements, will ensure that we maintain affordable registration and attendance costs for all delegates. I can inform members that Townsville has been named as the location of the next disability conference, which will be held in October 2006.

I would like to publicly acknowledge the contribution of all delegates and, in particular, my departmental staff who worked so hard to stage a successful event this year. I will keep members informed in the lead-up to the 2006 conference.

REGIONAL SITTINGS, ROCKHAMPTON

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (9.59 am), by leave, without notice: I move—

- (1) The House notes the Constitutional Instrument signed by the Governor on 26 July 2005 to change the place for sittings of the Legislative Assembly to the Pilbeam Theatre, Rockhampton on 4, 5 and 6 October 2005.
- (2) The sessional orders for the sitting of the Legislative Assembly at the Pilbeam Theatre, Rockhampton on 4, 5 and 6 October 2005 circulated in my name be adopted.

SESSIONAL ORDERS FOR THE SITTING OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AT THE PILBEAM THEATRE, ROCKHAMPTON ON 4, 5 AND 6 OCTOBER 2005

TIMES AND ORDER OF BUSINESS

Unless otherwise ordered and notwithstanding anything contained in the Standing and Sessional Orders, the times and Order of Business for each days sitting at the Pilbeam Theatre, Rockhampton shall be as follows—

Tuesday 4 October 2005

9.30am—10.30am—

Prayers
 Messages from the Governor
 Matters concerning Privilege
 Speaker's Statements
 Motions of Condolence
 Petitions
 Notification and tabling of papers by the Clerk
 Ministerial Papers
 Ministerial Notices of Motion
 Ministerial Statements
 Any other Government Business
 Personal Explanations
 Tabling of Reports
 Notice of Motion
 Private Members' Bills (Introductions)
 Private Members' Statements

10.30am—11.30am—

Question Time

11.30am—12.30pm—

Matters of Public Interest

12.30pm—1.00pm—

Government Business

1.00pm—2.30pm—

Lunch break

2.30pm—7.00pm—

Government Business

7.00pm—7.30pm—

Adjournment Debate

7.30pm—

Adjournment

Wednesday 5 October 2005

10.30am—11.30am—

Prayers

Messages from the Governor

Matters concerning Privilege

Speaker's Statements

Motions of Condolence

Petitions

Notification and tabling of papers by the Clerk

Ministerial Papers

Ministerial Notices of Motion

Ministerial Statements

Any other Government Business

Personal Explanations

Tabling of Reports

Notice of Motion

Private Members' Bills (Introductions)

Private Members' Statements

11.30am—1.00pm—

Government Business

1.00pm—2.30pm—

Lunch break

2.30pm—5.00pm—

Government Business

5.00pm—6.30pm—

Dinner break

6.30pm—7.30pm—

Private Members' Motion

7.30pm—8.30pm—

Question Time

8.30pm—9.00pm—

Adjournment Debate

9.00pm—

Adjournment

Thursday 6 October 2005

9.30am—10.30am—

Prayers

Messages from the Governor

Matters concerning Privilege

Speaker's Statements

Motions of Condolence

Petitions

Notification and tabling of papers by the Clerk

Ministerial Papers

Ministerial Notices of Motion

Ministerial Statements

Any other Government Business

Personal Explanations

Tabling of Reports

Notice of Motion

Private Members' Bills (Introductions)

Private Members' Statements

10.30am—11.30am—

Question Time

11.30am—1.00pm—

Government Business

1.00pm—2.30pm—
Lunch break
2.30pm—7.00pm—
Government Business
7.00 pm—7.30pm—
Special Adjournment
Adjournment Debate
7.30pm—
Adjournment
Motion agreed to.

SITTING DAYS AND HOURS; ORDER OF BUSINESS

Sessional Order

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.59 am), by leave, without notice: I move—

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended to enable the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill to pass through all remaining stages at this week's sitting and that the debate of this bill will commence following the passage of the appropriation bills. This is to ensure:

- That this parliament does all it can to protect workers of Queensland and their families from the harsh and unfair industrial relations proposals of the Howard government that threaten families' take-home pay and living standards; and
- That the Queensland parliament enacts laws before the Howard government uses its newly acquired majority in both Houses of the Commonwealth parliament to pass harmful industrial relations laws that would override Queensland state awards which provide protection for entitlements such as:
 - Annual leave
 - Sick leave
 - Parental leave
 - Carer's leave
 - Bereavement leave
 - Long service leave
 - Notice of termination
 - Ordinary time hours of work
 - Penalty rates
 - Public holidays
 - Redundancy pay
 - Stand down provisions
 - Dispute settling procedures
 - Casual employment

I believe that, because this is a state issue, because we are seeking to protect state awards—this is about state rights, this is about protecting families, it is about protecting family living standards—it is important that this parliament enact laws to protect the average Queensland family and the average Queensland worker.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.01 am): I rise to oppose the motion which has been moved by the Premier. The simple reality is this: this piece of legislation was introduced into this parliament on Tuesday of this week, and what we see again is this government applying what it cutely calls standing order 63-15. Its view is that there are 63 of them and there are 15 of us in the official opposition and it does not matter. If this government was serious, then it would have introduced this legislation some time ago. The Premier postulated this legislation when the parliament was last sitting in the budget session. He should have at least had the decency to bring this legislation in at that particular stage so that all members of this parliament had the opportunity to see it, to judge it, to consult on it and to see it for more than the stunt which it obviously is. This means that the standing orders of this place are no longer worth the paper that they are written on.

What is the urgency of this particular matter? If the government was serious, then it would have introduced this legislation in the May sitting. The Premier was talking about it in the May sitting, but he did not introduce it in the May sitting. What he has done is he has contrived it. He has then orchestrated two by-elections in Queensland and then he has put this legislation in place to try to make it some sort of sneaky political stunt with which to win political favour from those voters. He knows full well from Labor's research that it is heading for a flogging in both of those by-elections. But he also knows that there is one issue—this is indicated by their research—in regard to which there is a degree of sensitivity, and that is the issue of IR.

This is not about any genuine concern for workers in Queensland. This is not about doing the right thing and having the right sort of legislation. This is about a political stunt on the eve of two by-elections which is more about this government protecting itself and its own political survival than it is about this government doing the right thing and protecting the workers of Queensland. What we have seen from this Premier and this government in the past is simply this: when it comes to their own

political survival, they will act with indecent haste. When it comes to the survival of patients in our hospitals, the safety of our kids and genuine workers' issues, we do not see anything. We do not see anything decent and we do not see anything that is proper and we do not see anything that is bipartisan.

As I said, if the government wanted to be fair dinkum about this, then the legislation should have properly been laid on the table of this parliament for the statutory 14 days so that we have a proper chance to look at it, to see what its practical effects are, to balance it against the principles which have been enunciated by the Commonwealth government in putting forward its industrial relations proposition and to make the proper decision, not a decision which is based on political emotion and some sort of scant regard for process in this place and some sort of desperate political attempt by this government to mitigate the concerns of people in two by-elections in Queensland. That is what it is all about.

We do not even properly know at this stage what principles are being laid down by the Commonwealth government, but I can tell—

Government members interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: They can laugh. This is a laughing, guffawing matter. They are always laughing and guffawing. As I have already said on behalf of the Nationals in this place, we have some issues principally on states' rights and some other matters. I have already said that, and I have taken up the concerns of our side of politics with the Commonwealth government. But what we have to do is to make sure that we are making the right decision. How does this government know that those sorts of issues that it is seeking to protect in this legislation are not principally enshrined one way or another insofar as basic minimum standards are concerned? I wish that we had more information to work on, but it is not right to play on the concerns of people—the basic insecurities of people—with legislation like this, which quite frankly is a cruel hoax on the workers of Queensland.

Why would the government dare come into this place without time for proper scrutiny? The reason we need proper scrutiny and the 14 days is so that the business community of this state, the union movement in this state and the other people who have a decent and a proper interest in this have the capacity to sit down and to see if this has any practical effect whatsoever or whether it is going to be constitutionally nullified. It will be constitutionally nullified, but that is the reason that this government is bringing it in today. That is why it wants to circumvent the standing and sessional orders of this place so the bill is not lying on the table for 14 days. It wants the legislation to sneak through before the likes of the business community in Queensland and the union movement are able to stand up and say, 'This is not worth the paper it's written on,' because they know and this government knows and the former Attorney-General knows and the current Attorney-General knows and the minister for IR knows and the Premier himself, who is a lawyer, knows that any legislation which goes through this parliament that is in any way subordinate or in any way contradicts what the Commonwealth government is seeking to do becomes immediately null and void once it has been challenged. The Premier knows that. The minister said so the other day when he introduced this legislation into the parliament. So they are wanting to rush it through today before there is a chance for proper scrutiny so that people can work out that it is constitutionally invalid and it is nothing more than a cruel hoax and a stunt.

A government member: Thanks for the legal advice!

Mr SPRINGBORG: The same sort of legal advice was referred to by the minister when he put this forward in parliament the other day. He said that it might have been a statement of principles, basically to paraphrase, but there will be a legal challenge and there are going to be constitutional issues. We know that. That is the issue that is occupying the minds of premiers right throughout Australia at the moment. The other day the Premier of Tasmania was exercising his mind on how they can make this process constitutionally valid.

It is a waste of this parliament's time, frankly, to be putting this legislation through posthaste when we know that it is constitutionally invalid and nothing more than a cruel hoax. Also, we have taken the opportunity over the last 24 hours to talk to some of the interest groups. There has been no consultation, to the best of our knowledge—after talking with the Australian Industry Group or with Commerce Queensland. There has not been any consultation. They are key business and industry groups in the state of Queensland. So where else has there been consultation, or a lack of consultation? Has there been consultation with the Retailers Association? Has there been consultation—

A government member interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Well, you have cut out Commerce Queensland.

Government members interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: They can laugh and they can guffaw. They think that they have come up with some sort of grand political stunt. They have not talked to the Australian Industry Group, either, from what I can gather. It is not happy about it. So they are a couple of stakeholders that are not happy about it.

What about the other industry groups in Queensland? What about the other employer organisations? Do the unions know that this is nothing but a cruel hoax? Has the government actually consulted?

A government member: Yes, we have.

Mr SPRINGBORG: No, the government has not. Has the government told them that this legislation is going to be passed through the House? Has the government given a justification in any way whatsoever as to why this parliament should suspend its standing orders and should ignore its sessional orders and rush something like this legislation through the House today? Has the government given any form of justification for doing this? The simple reason for it is this: it is a slippery action on the eve of two by-elections where this government is facing its comeuppance in the face of an electoral revolt over its mismanagement of the health system in Queensland, over asbestos in its schools, over stone mastic on our roads and a range of other emerging issues.

This motion is nothing more than a diversion. It is about reducing the political blowtorch heat from the belly of the Premier and trying to shift it somewhere else. But Queenslanders have had enough of these stunts. They have had enough of government by deception. They have had enough of government by spin. They want a government that is prepared to govern and do the right thing, that is, introduce legislation into this parliament which has received proper consultation, which has been properly considered and which has the broad support, or at least the understanding, of those groups that are most affected by it. That consultation has not happened.

We will not support this motion. We will not support this government's contemptuous, arrogant approach by using its huge majority in this parliament to bulldoze and ride roughshod over accountability and the standing orders of this parliament. We will not support the government's use, once again, of standing order 63-15.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Robina, on Tuesday I invited members to participate in debate in a robust and passionate way. I am pleased to see that happening. But I also said that members should be allowed—and they are entitled—to make their contribution in silence. I do not want to throw anybody out, but I will not hesitate to do that.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (10.11 am): I also rise to oppose the motion moved by the Premier. We can see whether or not there is a genuine desire by the Premier to move this motion for good and proper reasons. I contend that this is nothing but a political stunt. Members can see that quite easily when they consider the motives driving this motion. If, in fact, there was a genuine desire to do something about improving the conditions of workers—which the government really could do—then there is no urgency in moving this bill through all the stages of the House today. It should lay on the table for 14 days, because the Commonwealth government has indicated that it is not going to introduce its legislation into the federal parliament until October. So there is plenty of time for this bill to be debated under the normal course of the standing orders of this parliament. There is no need to move to suspend the standing orders in order for the legislation to pass through all stages today.

The only need to do this is a political one. What is the political need? Two by-elections: one in Redcliffe and one in Chatsworth. That is what is driving this motion. It is nothing more than a crass, political decision by the government of the day to give it some impetus in two by-election campaigns. This is not a genuine effort to protect workers' rights. If it was, the government would allow the bill to sit on the table for the full 14 days to allow a proper examination of it and then, as is the normal course of events, allow the bill to be debated. There is plenty of time for this legislation to pass through this House before the Commonwealth introduces its legislation. That is what is driving this motion. It is nothing but a crude attempt, a crude political stunt, to get some traction in two by-elections that will be held in about 10 days. This motion is as transparent as that.

Of course, in the long term this motion is a waste of time and a waste of resources by this government. Where there are inconsistencies between the Commonwealth legislation and the state legislation, the Commonwealth legislation will override the state legislation. This government does not know what is in the Commonwealth legislation. So this legislation is a grab bag of all of the things that it wants to put in legislation for its own base political purposes—for the two by-elections coming up. That is why this motion ought to be opposed. It is not a genuine effort to protect workers' rights. There is no overwhelming urgency for the legislation to be passed, except there are two by-elections coming up.

This motion goes to show the extent to which this Premier and this ALP will go to serve their own political purposes in 10 days time. We should all be aware that this government is about diverting attention from the real issues in the Redcliffe and Chatsworth by-elections—the government's failure to properly manage our health system, the government's failure to do something about asbestos in schools and the government's failure to do something about public transport in Redcliffe. All of those issues are on the agenda in those by-election campaigns, not the IR legislation that the Commonwealth government is going to introduce into its own parliament.

This motion is just a crude, political attempt to divert attention from the government's inaction and the government's poor record over the past 12 to 18 months—nothing more. It should be seen in that

light. That is why all members on this side of the chamber should oppose this very flimsy excuse for moving this bill through all stages of the House today.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (10.15 am): I rise to speak to this motion and to oppose it. Today, I believe what we are seeing happen is the very thing that the federal opposition has been criticising the John Howard government for doing, and that is pushing bills through the House without due process and without the bill being given due consideration. The Queensland parliament is one of the few parliaments in Australia that has only one house of parliament. We do not have a senate and we do not have a house of review. The best we have is a committee system. This motion will override the opportunity for a number of our committees to consider the bill and provide advice to all members of this House on how it will impact on a range of issues.

There is no expectation that the federal government will tomorrow introduce the legislation that I understand this bill is aimed at addressing. I believe there is no urgency. We are due to return to this chamber in a fortnight's time to debate bills that impact on ordinary Queenslanders. I believe that would be an appropriate time at which to debate this bill—after the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has had a chance to consider the implications of this bill.

I had a quick perusal of the explanatory notes and I noted that reference is made in them to community consultation. Yet when I read the minister's second reading speech, in relation to any reference to community consultation the best we have is two simple paragraphs. There is no listing of the various community groups in Queensland, the various employer groups in Queensland and the various employee groups in Queensland who have been consulted. We simply have a throwaway two sentences.

My challenge to the backbenchers of the government is to take courage, be prepared to stand up for ordinary Queenslanders, exercise their conscience vote and not support the motion that the Premier has moved this morning.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.17 am): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the Premier today. This is parliament at work.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: If members want to criticise the way in which Queenslanders voted to put this parliament together, so be it. The reality is that the people of Queensland chose this parliament and this parliament has at its disposal this instrument by which to pass this bill. The Leader of the Opposition said that this bill is not urgent. I ask him to tell that to the families out there who are currently going through all manner of anxiety because of the duplicity of the Prime Minister, who is all over the show with this matter.

The Queensland people believe in good government and definitive government. In my view, nothing defines government better than how it sees its own people. How this side of parliament sees its own people is very well established. We believe in working conditions that are fair and reasonable. We have an enduring industrial relations system here that is the envy of anywhere in Australia and I think probably the world. We will fight to protect that. Is that urgent business? You bet it is! I am happy to defend that on any street corner in my electorate. I am happy to defend that, because that is what I was put in this parliament to do.

The fact is that this bill is a matter of supreme urgency. It will not be a bill that will be rushed through. If necessary, we will sit tomorrow. That is what this parliament is about. Any member who does not want to sit tomorrow and who does not want to deal with the business of workers should go back to their electorates and tell the people there that that is the decision they have made.

The fact is that this is a parliament for the people, and the people in my electorate are telling me that this is an urgent matter. The bill that we have put together is not rocket science; it does not require 40 Philadelphian lawyers to work it out. It does not require lengthy briefings of industry and all the rest because we do not propose to change any of the current arrangements in the state. There are no surprises whatsoever in here.

The opposition and the Liberal Party are surprised about it. I am not surprised about that. This is a matter for this parliament. It is appropriate that this parliament deal with it as a matter of urgency. It is important that the people of Queensland get their message through this parliament to the parliament in Canberra. If opposition members want to do us over, so be it; let them live with the result of that. But let no person in here shirk their responsibility for the workers in this place: the people who stack shelves in the middle of the night, the people who work in the tourist industry on the weekend, the kids out there who are going to be exploited by this. I say to members opposite: for heaven's sake, have some intestinal fortitude and get up and have the debate on this. Do not try to squib it by opposing this motion. I support the motion.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (10.20 am): I rise to speak against the motion to push this legislation through in a hurry. There has been ample demonstration by people in my electorate and in other electorates that they are concerned about the proposals that John Howard's government has put forward. However, the people in Queensland also voted and support due process. We need time to read the legislation, to understand it and to consult with our communities.

The federal government's legislation has not even been tabled and that is part of the problem. We are debating issues that have been brought to the community's attention through press releases, interviews on radio and TV and other statements made by minister. However, we have nothing of any detail.

I expect that the bill before the House will not contain anything concerning in terms of protecting workers' rights. My opposition is to it being pushed through with undue haste when in a week's time it could be debated fully as the first item on the *Notice Paper* and it could receive proper consideration by those of us who will defend it later on.

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (10.22 am): Let us be clear about what we are doing here today: we are protecting the existing rights of Queensland families. This is not rocket science. No-one needs to be terribly concerned about notice or otherwise. All that this legislation does is protect existing rights.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Cunningham.

Mr BEATTIE: I understand the nervousness of some people. This is a case of whether the opposition stands with Queensland workers and Queensland families or not. This is not a matter that needs to be examined and dissected over the next 20 years. This is very basic. This legislation protects the existing rights of Queensland workers. All we are doing is enshrining them in legislation. Let us not have any doublespeak or hypocrisy about it.

I have been talking about this since 1 June. Everybody has had plenty of notice. It is not hard. It is about whether members opposite stand for and with Queensland families and their current protection for holiday pay—

Ms Bligh: Penalty rates.

Mr BEATTIE: Penalty rates—all the things that protect Queensland families' living standards—or they do not. That is the choice. It is very simple.

Let us talk about a few other things. The Leader of the Opposition said there has not been consultation. The minister has met with AIG, Master Builders and Commerce Queensland. One of his representatives has also met with National Retailers. So they have been briefed about the legislation. The reality also is this—

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr BEATTIE: The Leader of the Opposition protested because there will soon be two by-elections. I say this to the Leader of the Opposition: let the people of Redcliffe and the people of Chatsworth have a say. They can have a say and their say will be whether they support this legislation or not.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. Exactly. Why should the member run away from it?

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes. Do honourable members know why the National and Liberal parties are opposed to this? It is because they do not want the people of Redcliffe and Chatsworth to know that they secretly support John Howard.

My challenge to the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party is very simple: put on the record during this debate today or tomorrow what they really think about penalty payments. Do they think families should be able to have four weeks annual leave? Do they think people should be paid holiday pay? Then they should go out and tell the people.

The Leader of the Opposition talks about democracy. I say to him that democracy means people get a vote. Let these two by-elections be a referendum. Let there be a clear message sent to John Howard as to whether the people of Redcliffe and Chatsworth support the existing legislation, which we will hopefully pass, or the existing entitlements they have now. Of course it will be difficult in seats like Gladstone, because every working family in Gladstone will want to see this legislation passed; they will want to see these things protected.

I know that the Liberal Party has some quaint faith in John Howard's honesty. I do not. There is an urgency about this, and I will tell honourable members what it is. I want to send and I want Queenslanders to send a strong message to John Howard to back off and not take away the average living standards of Queensland families. Let me be clear about this. This issue is black and white for every member: they either stand up for Queensland families, their current entitlements and their living standards or they vote against it. They have a choice. Look at them squirming because the wood has been put on them. They have a chance to vote for families or against them.

Yes, there is urgency. Yes, there are two by-elections, and that is where people have a say. That is what democracy is all about. I make no apology for standing up for Queensland families and their industrial rights. More than that, let no-one lose sight of this. This is a state issue. It is about state awards, protecting Queenslanders and protecting the rights they have under state awards. I do not want to see state awards eroded. I want to see state awards and the family values that go with them protected. The question today and tomorrow will be: do members opposite stand up for Queensland state awards and families or not? We will see how every one of them votes. They are either with Queensland families or against them. We stand for Queensland families.

Mr SEENEY: Queenslanders have just seen a Premier in panic.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Callide will take his seat.

Mr SEENEY: We have just seen a panic-stricken attack from a Premier who knows he is going to get a hiding in a fortnight's time.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Callide.

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

In division—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Callide, have some respect for the chair, please.

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

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

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! As question time has started three minutes late, I propose to have question time go through to 11.33 am.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Overseas Trained Doctors

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.33 am): My question without notice is to the Premier. I refer to sworn testimony at the Morris inquiry yesterday that the Premier's recently appointed deputy director-general for health, Gloria Wallace, threatened to replace specialist consultants who had complained about patients dying whilst waiting for angiograms by saying that she had a list of overseas trained doctors she could replace them with. Is this not just another example of the bullying and intimidation of the Premier's government, and will he now act to stand his deputy director-general aside in the light of these startling revelations?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. I highlight to him that Commissioner Morris indicated yesterday that the evidence given had not been tested, and it is appropriate for us to wait until that evidence is tested before we comment further. But let me take up a point made yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition made reference to 'Third World witchdoctors' working in our Queensland system. I think this is a very unfortunate remark. The reason I say that is that, because of the shortage of Australian trained doctors, we need to have overseas trained doctors here in Queensland. Yes, there was a mistake made in relation to Dr Patel—a tragic one—but that should not be used by the Leader of the Opposition to blacken the name of any doctor born overseas or trained overseas.

I want to make it clear that some of the greatest Australians have actually been born overseas, and, Mr Speaker, that includes you. I want to make it absolutely clear that I, as Premier, am not prepared to sit by and see overseas trained doctors or people who are born overseas vilified by the Leader of the Opposition. I want to make it absolutely clear—and I say this to overseas trained doctors who every day save lives in our system—that we value them and we thank them for providing those services in Queensland. They are valued and respected by the Queensland government—

Mr Messenger: When are you bringing Patel back?

Mr BEATTIE:—and they should ignore the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition and the interjection that was just made. What was said yesterday was an attack on any overseas born person who lives in this country and who is practising as an overseas trained doctor here or who has built their life here. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that this country was, in fact, formed by migrants including his family and mine. I think it is unfortunate and despicable for him to use the derogatory term of 'Third World witchdoctors'. He was not referring to Dr Patel. He used a broad brush. That is what he said yesterday.

Ms Bligh: He did.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. He had a broad spray against anyone born overseas. There was a tragic mistake made in relation to Dr Patel which is why my government established an inquiry. But I want to make it absolutely clear that if we continue this sort of nonsense—

Mr Messenger interjected.

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

Mr BEATTIE:—from the Leader of the Opposition we will not get overseas trained doctors to come to Queensland. We already have a problem, because of the number of things that have happened, in getting overseas trained doctors to come here. If we have personal vilification by the Leader of the Opposition, we will get fewer and fewer overseas trained doctors to come here. I urge the Leader of the Opposition to show some maturity and restraint. Those comments are not fit for an alternative Premier.

Office of the Speaker

Mr SPRINGBORG: Crocodile tears. My second question—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, can I ask that when you stand up to ask a question you ask the question and do not come out with silly remarks like that.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Mr Speaker, unfortunately I have to sit through the Premier's misrepresentation—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, I warn you. You ask your question to whichever minister you want to. There is no need for those sorts of remarks.

Mr SPRINGBORG: My second question without notice is to the Premier. I refer to the Premier's statement yesterday in relation to the former Speaker's unreported and unaccounted for taxpayer funded trip in 1998 in which he said—he could not say it a couple of months ago—

... according to my information the trip was previously approved by me ...

I will say that again—

... according to my information the trip was previously approved by me ...

Will the Premier supply this House with a copy of that approval and will he tell us who accompanied the former Speaker on that overseas trip?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. I am advised that there was a trip between 4 and 13 December 1998. Under the heading of 'was there prior approval by the Premier?', I am advised that the answer to that is yes.

Mr Springborg: Can you table it?

Mr BEATTIE: The approval? The approval is simply a formal document where I tick off the trip. That is a formality. The report is the one that would deal with any other information. I have indicated on this matter that I had given approval for the trip.

Mr Springborg: Table it.

Mr BEATTIE: Just be patient. I would not have done that unless it fitted the guidelines and I had been satisfied with it. I approved it. Any reporting to this House is a matter for the former Speaker. In terms of my approval, that is the process that I have followed. Any details of it is a matter for the former Speaker himself.

Let me conclude my remarks by saying this: I tabled in the House this week new guidelines for the operation of the Speaker's travel, entertainment and management of this office. That is the first time that we have had comprehensive rules. Those rules have not applied to that level before under National Party Speakers or Liberal Party Speakers. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to come in here and go through all these issues about past approvals of past travel, I am sure that former Speaker Lingard would be happy to go back and produce all of his reports. I am sure that we could go back to previous Speakers to the beginning of time. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to play this silly game, he will find that the National Party Speakers who were around—

Mr Horan: Table it.

Mr BEATTIE: Hang on—would not have complied with the guidelines that I have tabled in the parliament this week. That is a fact. The reality is that we have a new standard that will apply.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Well, it is a fact. They did not apply. Those opposite are aware that one of the previous National Party Speakers had to repay money as well. They know that there was an argument about that. They know that there were issues about the approval, or the lack of approval, for various things and that these have been tidied up by these guidelines. If those opposite want to have an ancient

history lesson that is fine, but they should not come in here and pretend that they have clean hands; they do not. The standards that now apply should have applied in the past for Speakers of both sides of politics but they did not. Therefore, from my point of view, we have a new start and that is where we are.

Health System

Mr CHOI: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. The federal government has consistently refused to play any part in reforming the health system in order to provide more doctors, more specialists and suitable aged care funding that will enable elderly people to be looked after in their own homes rather than hospitals. I ask the Premier: is he aware of any move by the federal government to make changes to the health system?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. The answer is, yes, I am aware of proposed change but it has nothing to do with helping patients. Earlier this month the federal health minister, Tony Abbott, told the media that federal cabinet considered privatising Medibank Private. He said that he would be surprised if it remained in government ownership in the long run. The Prime Minister said that no decision had been made but he did not rule out a future sale.

In 2002 the federal government decided against the sale of Medibank Private. However, that was in the context of Medibank Private's \$175 million loss in 2001-02. An operating profit of \$42 million in 2004-05 creates a very different atmosphere. Medibank Private is a not-for-profit organisation and is Australia's largest health fund. It has about 36.5 per cent of the private health insurance market in Queensland. The sale of Medibank Private could have major implications for Queenslanders. It could lead to structural changes throughout the Australian private health insurance industry.

An industry of private corporations without a major government owned private health insurer serving as a separate benchmark would be a very different industry. There would be more pressure to maximise profits by raising premiums, reducing benefits or even introducing a no-claims bonus system like in other insurance industries. Consumers would suffer and we would have less reason to take out private insurance. This would, in turn, increase the burden on our public hospital services.

Many Queensland families are already paying huge amounts for private health cover that they were forced to take out by the federal government. The purpose of this was to take pressure off the public hospital system—or supposedly—but because of the unknown nature of the gap between what they get back from their private health cover and what the specialists charge many of these people are still using the public hospital system.

Mr Mickel: That's right.

Mr BEATTIE: That is the core of the problem. Even Tony Abbott on a six-figure salary as health minister admitted that he weighed up whether to be a public or a private patient when he needed an operation for a kidney stone. He says he went private and then, despite his healthy salary, woke up in a cold sweat about a possible gap. The sweat was obviously not big enough. He says that he was relieved when two procedures in hospital left him with a gap of no more than \$500.

Mr Mickel: That is beyond the average family.

Mr BEATTIE: Just imagine what that is like for the average family. Research commissioned by the federal health department and conducted by an independent company last year found that 44 per cent of respondents returned home from hospital to face gap payments—an amount left for them to pay after Medicare and health fund rebates. On average, these amounted to \$720 per trip to hospital. If Mr Abbott went into a cold sweat and believes \$500 is not excessive, how are Queenslanders on a much lower income going to feel? The only answer from the federal government has been a bit of hand wringing about the high cost of specialists. We need the federal government, which is responsible for forcing people to take out insurance, to look after—

Time expired.

Bogus Doctors, Ministerial Briefings

Mr COPELAND: My question is also to the Premier. The Premier yesterday refused to answer my question when he was advised about either of the two bogus psychiatrists employed by Queensland Health in Townsville and Toowoomba. Premier, I again ask: given that the former health minister had full briefing notes prepared in 2002, when was he advised about either of these bogus psychiatrists?

Mr BEATTIE: Let me be pretty clear about this—

Mr Johnson interjected.

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

Mr BEATTIE: I do not believe any Queenslanders, regardless of what side of politics they are on, would seriously expect the health minister of the day to brief the Premier of the day on every matter involving every doctor in every hospital in the state. More to the point, I do not believe that the people of Queensland would expect the Premier of the day to remember every briefing that he or she received on every matter in every department and every portfolio of government. So the member's question is an

absolute nonsense. I will answer the member's question by saying this: all material that I have in relation to advice that came to me or to my department has been provided to the Morris royal commission. He should let the Morris royal commission—

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Cunningham, I have warned you once before. I am not going to fall into the trap of previous speakers and keep warning you. One more outburst from you and you will march.

Mr BEATTIE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me make the point: it is a matter for the Morris royal commission. If the Morris royal commission believes this is in any way relevant, or even remotely relevant, to improving our health system in this state, I am happy to do another search, search, search of every part of the world. I am happy to send people to any part of the world to see if there is any other document that I have not already found. This has got to the stage of being very silly.

As I have indicated in material that I have provided to the Morris royal commission, the material sent to me and any material provided to my office that is relevant has already been sent on all matters involving health I have also sent to the royal commission two memoranda from former minister Wendy Edmond—one to Jim O'Dempsey, the executive officer of the Office of Health Practitioner, and one to the Director-General of Health. The member's question was: when these matters were raised, did something happen? Yes, it did. The then minister referred it to the appropriate people—one, the director-general; the other, Jim O'Dempsey—to take appropriate action. I table both of those letters for the information of the House.

As I have said, any relevant information that I hold in my department pertaining to this matter has been provided. In relation to any other issues that come up, I am happy to provide them with that information. Frankly, we have a month and a half to go while these inquiries complete their work. I think we should let them get on and do their job. We will act on those recommendations when they are finished and we will improve the health system in areas where it needs to be improved.

Overseas Trained Doctors

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: My question is directed to the Premier. The Premier is aware that yesterday in the House the Leader of the Opposition referred to 'Third World witchdoctors' working in Queensland. How do these comments from the alternative premier match the reality of overseas trained doctors who are working in our hospitals?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the member for his question, because yesterday the health minister and I were with him at the Prince Charles for the turning of the sod for the expansion to take place at that hospital.

Mr Terry Sullivan: Over \$80 million worth.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right; over \$80 million. I know that he has a keen interest. I am saddened by this unfortunate remark by the Leader of the Opposition. In talking about what people want from the public hospital system, the opposition leader said that they do not want Third World witchdoctors in Queensland attending to their needs. I want to say very loudly that Queensland not only welcomes overseas doctors but also depends on them because of years of federal government neglect in restricting the number of Australian trained doctors. We are left with this problem because of the federal government's incompetence. Let us not forget that in his interim report Peter Forster said—

Many of Queensland's highly credentialed and professional doctors on whom the public health system depends, who happen to have been trained overseas, are currently feeling unfairly condemned and criticised although they have done no wrong and in some cases have devoted many years of service to their employer, Queensland Health.

People at public forums raised uncertainty, doubt and a lack of trust in public sector doctors. The interim report also states—

In some districts, overseas trained doctors with long experience and of high standing commented that this dynamic was much more noticeable and prevalent and had become a significant problem in the doctor patient relationship.

The interim report further states—

Queensland Health's reliance on overseas trained doctors has been increasing over the past several years. This can be primarily attributed to insufficient numbers of locally trained doctors.

It is not a problem unique to Queensland. Mr Forster says—

It should be noted that other western countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and New Zealand are also increasingly relying on overseas trained doctors to meet workforce shortages.

What the Leader of the Opposition is doing is encouraging doctors to go to countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. This means that people in the bush will miss out. If people in the bush and the regions miss out, they can thank the Leader of the Opposition for this intemperate and ridiculous remark. The interim report from Peter Forster states—

Internationally, there is some evidence that the current publicity around overseas doctors and some of the changes associated with Area of Need certification is making Queensland unattractive. It is therefore possible that service provision, particularly in provincial and rural areas may decline as the ability to attract clinicians in these centres diminishes.

All the Leader of the Opposition did was make it worse for the bush. In other words, the world is watching. The opposition leader has just made the problem even worse. Mr Forster is right: it is in the National Party's heartland that the problem is going to be the worst. I urge the opposition leader to make a very loud and public apology and help us attract foreign trained doctors, not alienate them.

I table a page from Peter Forster's interim report on which he sets out the successes of the health system which have been supported in part by overseas trained doctors. This speaks for itself.

Sugar Industry

Mr HORAN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. I refer to the minister's answer about the 1 August cabinet submission on the sugar industry's single desk. In his answer the minister stated—

After that cabinet meeting—that afternoon I understand—the Premier met with industry and an agreement was signed.

A Canegrowers media release issued yesterday states—

The new state Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries Gordon Nuttall was in error when he told state parliament yesterday an agreement on new marketing arrangements had been signed between the government and the Canegrowers organisation.

Does the minister's confession this morning mean that either he deliberately misled the parliament or he is not up to the job of being a cabinet minister? Or was he confused again, like he claimed when he misled the estimates committee?

Mr NUTTALL: I clarified the situation in my ministerial statement to the parliament this morning. I also spoke with both Canegrowers and the milling council yesterday to clarify the issue.

Australian Workplace Agreements

Ms CROFT: My question without notice is to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. What are some of the characteristics of the current AWAs? How will workers' protections be eroded by the Prime Minister's proposed changes?

Mr BARTON: I really do thank the member for the question because she is always concerned about what happens to people in the work force, particularly young people, of which she has many in her electorate.

The Howard government has been trying to allay the fears and legitimate concerns of workers by talking up what it is intending to do in its legislation. It is telling workers not to be worried about losing basic entitlements, but should workers believe them?

Let us have a look at what is already happening to workers' entitlements under the current arrangements for Australian workplace agreements. It is useful to look at a research sample of AWAs that has been published by the Office of the Employment Advocate on its web site. We can assume that some careful consideration went into deciding which AWAs would be included in that sample, because that is the government's own body that approves them.

Here are a few highlights. An AWA for security guards allows for ordinary hours of work to be worked on any day, inclusive of public holidays, and at any time of day without any additional pay.

Mr LINGARD: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I would ask for a ruling about whether this question is related to the IR legislation.

Mr SPEAKER: I have just sought advice from the Clerk. The question is in order.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The employees do not get paid any sick leave. The employees do not receive any annual leave. They do not receive any loadings or allowances of any sort.

An AWA for painters cashes out all entitlements to allowances and increases the weekly working hours to 40 per week. Overtime is paid at the single time rate of pay. The employee does not receive any paid annual leave. The employee does not receive any paid sick leave. The employee does not receive payment for working on public holidays. If the business turns down the employer can stand down the employee without pay.

These look pretty bad, but at least they are AWAs made for adults. What about 15-year-olds? The South Australian Industrial Court published a decision as recently as last Friday in a case where a 15-year-old child had been forced to sign an AWA in order to get a job with a local bakery franchise. In that case the court found that this child had been ripped off to the tune of 25 per cent. Again, the AWA included no paid leave of any sort or allowances or loadings.

This is what is possible under the current system, not just the worse proposed system. Imagine how much worse it will be when arrangements are no longer tested against comprehensive award standards! It is likely that the sorts of agreements I have just mentioned will become the norm.

The Prime Minister has refused to say whether there will be protection for meal breaks, rest pauses and public holidays in his new legislation. Employers who are already making the types of agreements that I have outlined today will be lobbying hard to make sure that these sorts of basic protections are excluded. We need to send a message to the Prime Minister—

Time expired.

Berg, Mr V

Mr QUINN: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the government has been aware of the bogus doctor Vincent Berg since former health minister Wendy Edmond was personally briefed in December 2002, I ask: what steps has the government taken, or directed the health department to take, to revoke and nullify two glowing references provided by Queensland Health certifying that Vincent Berg is qualified and fit to practise as a doctor? I table those two glowing references. What steps have been taken to ensure that Mr Berg cannot use these glowing references from the Queensland government elsewhere to get another job on bogus grounds?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. Let me answer it in three ways. Firstly, these issues are now before the Morris royal commission. Whatever recommendations it makes, or Peter Forster makes, about improving the system will be made. Members are aware that we have already made significant changes in terms of the Medical Board. Members are aware that when Gordon Nuttall was health minister we both reported to this House, and measures were brought in immediately to make changes. That is the first point.

Secondly, in terms of approval, I indicated to the House yesterday that there were a number of failures in the system, including the immigration system. I have written to Amanda Vanstone suggesting that in fact there should be consideration given to revoking his Australian citizenship. The member is aware of that. I went through that at some length yesterday. It is all very well to dump this all on the health system, which no doubt has to accept some responsibility, but it has to be remembered that the immigration department did a check and he became an Australian citizen. We have to say that Mr Berg was obviously very capable of producing fraudulent documents—there cannot be any doubt about that—and responsibility here has to be shared. The Leader of the Liberal Party cannot come in here and simply beat up on us without accepting that there were issues that needed to be dealt with by the immigration department. The member cannot have it both ways. That is that second point.

Thirdly, in terms of the references that I have now seen that have been drawn to my attention, I do not know what action the health department has taken in relation to the withdrawal of these references. The member would be aware that both references are from doctors. They are references that have been given by two doctors that the member for Robina has provided.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Hang on. Is the member trying to tell me that they are not doctors? These are both doctors, unless my sight fails me. I do not know why the member wants to nitpick about that.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: They are two doctors who gave him a reference. I am just reading what the member tabled. Let us not try to rewrite it.

Mr Robertson: Employers would no doubt check those references.

Mr BEATTIE: Exactly. I would have thought that, in terms of the amount of publicity that has been given to this particular person, the chances of him being employed are about zilch, nil, none at all.

Forgetting that as a measure—that is not good enough—I will provide copies of these to the health minister and he and I will ensure that, if it has not already been done, these are withdrawn and an appropriate notification is given wherever it can be given to broadcast this widely. The member would be aware that we have already used the net to send this message globally. I am prepared to ensure that this is actually put on my web site or the minister's web site where it is appropriate. If these have not been withdrawn they will be immediately withdrawn, and the health department will publicise that as widely as is possible. I do not know what the health department has done and I do not think the member would expect me to. If the department has not yet done it, it will be done.

Mr SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the teachers, parents and students from the Mater Dei Primary School in the electorate of the member for Toowoomba North.

Carindale, Ambulance Station

Mr FENLON: My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. I note that the Queensland Ambulance Service will build a new ambulance station at Carindale. Can the minister please inform the House what this means for Brisbane's southside residents?

Mr PURCELL: I thank the member for Greenslopes for the question and his ongoing pursuit of the best service he can possibly get for his constituents. The member would well know that this Carindale station will make that service all the better and what we are going to do in relation to the Balmoral station will certainly keep up that great service for his area.

Last week I joined the Premier and the minister for natural resources to launch a site for the new 24-hour station at Carindale. The new station will be an additional station for the area and it will improve service delivery and ambulance response times for local residents. There also will be a replacement

station built for the current Balmoral station. The residents in the suburbs around these two stations will be the big winners. The new Carindale station will have an additional 16 highly trained paramedics. This is on top of the 19 paramedics already based and employed at the Balmoral station.

There is no doubt about the need to construct a new facility to improve the operation of the Balmoral Ambulance Station. Recognising the concerns of the community over the delay in delivering this project, the Queensland Ambulance Service has accelerated its intention to construct a new ambulance station at Carindale. As I did the other day, I thank the Premier for the assistance he has given to me and the Ambulance Service to bring this to a quick conclusion. The new station at Carindale will improve response times to this area, as well as provide backup to the South Brisbane, Mount Gravatt, Capalaba and Wynnum ambulance stations. The search for a suitable alternative site for Balmoral has commenced. The Beattie government is fully committed to delivering these important projects and I will take a personal interest in seeing them through.

Queensland Health; Medical Prescriptions

Mrs PRATT: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a 99-year-old lady was admitted to hospital and the carer was sent to get medication which the hospital claimed they did not have. The chemist informed her that she needed a script, so she went back to the hospital. She eventually got the script and returned to the chemist only to be told that the hospital could have prescribed a different brand which they do stock. Why was that not done and is this yet another example of Queensland Health's penny-pinching?

Mr ROBERTSON: With due respect to the honourable member, I do not think that that is a particularly fair question, not just to me but to any minister for health. I would have absolutely no idea of the particular case that the member is referring to, but if she would do me the courtesy of writing to me with the particulars of that case I will have that matter looked into. Quite frankly, and with appropriate respect to the member for Nanango, I would hope that in the future, rather than trying to use question time to pursue such matters, she would approach me as my door is always open to her, as it is to any member, in following up a particular case. But if the member thinks for one moment that I will discuss particular cases here in this House, then she is mistaken.

Mrs Pratt interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Nanango!

Mr ROBERTSON: It was a policy quite appropriately pursued by my predecessor and one that I will continue with because it is the appropriate thing to do.

Show Bags

Mr REEVES: My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development. This morning my two-year-old daughter, Brianna, and I were looking at the *Courier-Mail* Ekka guide.

Mr Lucas: Was she reading it to you?

Mr REEVES: She was pointing out the pictures.

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr REEVES: She gets her intelligence from her mother. We were looking at the show bags guide from yesterday's *Courier-Mail*. She was very excited to see the Dora the Explorer show bag. I was wondering if the minister could tell me whether the Office of Fair Trading conducted safety checks on this year's Ekka show bags and, if so, what were the results of these checks just so that we know when we go to the show on Monday?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for his question. He obviously has a very smart daughter for a smart member in the Smart State. She is a very smart consumer, because she is doing her research before she goes to the Ekka with her daddy and her mummy. I am sure that one of the very first places that the member for Mansfield and his family will visit, like tens of thousands of other families when they visit the Ekka, will be the show bag pavilion. In fact, each year the Product Safety Unit of the Office of Fair Trading checks show bags at the Ekka to ensure that toys and novelties are as safe as possible.

The annual Brisbane show bag blitz tends to establish the benchmark for what is supplied throughout the state over the following 12 months, with the majority of suppliers servicing all of Queensland. New show bag safety guidelines were developed last year in conjunction with the industry and other state fair trading agencies. These new national guidelines are much broader and place the onus of safety at the point of sale, encouraging suppliers to take more responsibility for the safety of the goods that they sell.

The Beattie government directly informed suppliers of the new guidelines, which came into effect on 1 January this year, on numerous occasions last year and the industry, I am pleased to say, is to be commended for its responsiveness. I am very pleased to report to the House that this year, after checks of over 300 show bags and 1,200 products, no unsafe items were detected—a first in many years. This result is testament to the commitment of toy suppliers to comply with standards and the ongoing work of the Beattie government to put the safety of Queensland children first.

As in previous years, the Office of Fair Trading will undertake further spot checks at Sideshow Alley during this year's Ekka to ensure that sideshow operators do not make misleading claims about the chances of winning prizes and that any conditions placed on the games are made clear to consumers. Also there will be more spot checks of show bags. I urge the member for Mansfield and all other parents and carers taking children to the Ekka to always be aware of the potential dangers posed by toys and novelties. Remember, the smaller the child the bigger the toy. I also encourage Queensland mums and dads to remember to shop smart and compare the quality and cost of show bags and other items before making a purchase.

Ekka time is about fun and family. If show goers have any consumer or product safety concerns they can report them to the Office of Fair Trading's Ekka stall in the Queensland government pavilion.

Western Hardwood Forests

Mr HOBBS: I have a question for the minister for primary industries. I refer to the minister's announcement that the million hectares of state forest the Premier proposes to lock up in the western hardwoods region has now been awarded World's Best Certification for Sustainable Forestry Management. Given that the minister has said that these forests are already being comprehensively environmentally managed, does that not prove his government's proposal to close down the western hardwood timber industry is purely a political decision and not one based on genuine science or commonsense?

Mr NUTTALL: With regard to issues around the sustainability of our forests, we are happy to work with the industry to ensure that that is maintained.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Pumicestone, I acknowledge in the gallery the parents, teachers and students of St Michael's College in her electorate. I also acknowledge the second group from the Mater Dei Primary School in the electorate of Toowoomba North.

Creativity is Big Business Strategy

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Finance and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation, the Hon. Anna Bligh.

Mr SPEAKER: Excuse me, but can you add 'MP' after that?

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I beg your pardon, Mr Speaker: and MP for South Brisbane. Would the minister please advise members of the progress of government strategies to help our huge creative industries sector become more business savvy—namely, the Creativity is Big Business: A Framework for the Future Strategy and the Vortex 4 pilot program 2005?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. She referred to a strategy from our government called Creativity is Big Business. This was a strategy developed and launched by my colleague the now minister for employment and training, the Hon. Tom Barton, and developed further by the honourable the Speaker. The government put some priority on this area of industry, because it is a very important industry to Queensland's continued economic growth. Creative industries every year contribute about \$1 billion to our economy and employ approximately 28,000 Queenslanders. The government committed \$4.4 million over four years to the strategy. The member for Pumicestone, who has a great interest in these areas, as well as other ministers who have been predecessors of mine in this portfolio, would be pleased to know that the efforts of this strategy are now starting to see some real successes.

The program seeks to provide business support to creative industries, particularly those that have an export potential. The department has supported a number of events to help Queensland writing, fashion, music and other related industries enter the US market. I am pleased to advise the House that Brisbane writer Rebecca Sparrow, the author of *The Girl Most Likely*, has as a result of these activities now secured US representation through Inkwell Management in New York. Well-known Brisbane writer Nick Earls has had film options taken up on his novel, *48 Shades of Brown*, and that is now filming in Brisbane. I am sure that, like me, others are looking forward to seeing that movie hit our screens.

Brisbane band Shifter has received a licensing deal with Mo-Phonics and representation with US company BOO Management. Well-known bands around town Resin Dogs and Intercooler have secured an opportunity to play in a number of international festivals and gained radio airplay in the United States which has proved very valuable to their profile and hopefully to their continued sales into that market. These programs will be complemented in a few weeks time by activities under the Vortex 4 pilot program, which is about practical marketing skills and advice to groups that have market and export

potential. These companies will get practical business advice via an intensive lecture program and companies involved include Auran Games to develop new internet applications. Join Pty Ltd, an innovative furniture company, will be working to expand its business model. Little Workers, which is a children's clothing company, and Nightlife Music Video, which does audio-visual entertainment for clubs, will be looking to expand their overseas sales, and Cru Creative, a graphic design company, and PROdesign, which is an industrial design company, will be looking to develop market strategies. Depazzi Pty Ltd, which makes jewellery, will also be looking to launch its products into the European market. As I said, this a very important industry to Queensland.

Time expired.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Moggill, I acknowledge in the gallery the students, teachers and parents of St Patrick's College and Mercy College in the city of Mackay.

Princess Alexandra Hospital, Emergency Department

Dr FLEGG: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to the extreme and unprecedented action by senior medical staff at the PA Hospital of refusing to accept patients from the Queensland Ambulance Service into the emergency department of the hospital because in their expert medical judgment the overcrowding of the emergency department renders accepting more patients unsafe. Why do the minister and his department allow non-medical staff who are not based in the emergency department to overrule the clinical judgment of senior doctors as to when conditions in the emergency department have become so overcrowded it is dangerous to patients?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am unaware of the actual particulars of the circumstance that—

Dr Flegg: I'm aware of it.

Mr ROBERTSON: I was about to offer the member the courtesy of writing to me about that specific matter. I will have it investigated. Of course—

Dr Flegg: The ban started yesterday.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Moggill, you do this every day. You ask your question and then you interrupt the minister. I will not tolerate it.

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Of course the member has the ability to refer this matter to the Morris inquiry. If he is so concerned about this particular matter, I would certainly encourage him to do so where it will be fully investigated. The purpose of setting up both the Morris inquiry and the Forster review, as the member is well aware, is for such issues to be ventilated, to be investigated and for recommendations to be brought forward to government as to how to address those particular matters. So if the member is as concerned as he suggests about this particular case, and I certainly am just from the very brief details that he has provided, then please make them available to me. I will do him the courtesy, as I would any member of parliament, of investigating that particular matter and have a response provided to him. But as the member suggests, given the seriousness of the matter, I would also encourage him to refer that particular instance to Mr Morris and his team and, if appropriate, Mr Forster and his team.

Work Outreach Camps, Warwick

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I understand that the minister has recently made a trip out west to visit some of the WORC sites following recent changes to the way these open custody prison camps operate. Could the minister please explain how the program has changed and if Mr Springborg's claims are true that one of these camps in Warwick is going to be scrapped?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for Woodridge for the question. It probably will not surprise members to know that the Leader of the Opposition has been scaremongering yet again. He has been out there in Warwick feeding the media with a story that the women's WORC outreach camp is likely to close. On 26 July the *Daily News* printed a story headed 'Female prisoner program may stop'. It said—

This program, which has been operating successfully in Warwick for the past decade, has been suspended and may be scrapped altogether.

The *Southern Free Times* writes under 'The women in custody program under threat'—

Mr Springborg is going to make representations to the Police Minister, Judy Spence, to take every step in her power to reinstate the program.

That was then followed in the *Daily News* again on Saturday, 30 July with a headline 'Issue resolved' and in the *Southern Free Times* on Wednesday, 3 August with a headline 'Women in custody program saved'. Was this program ever under threat? No. It was merely some scaremongering by the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, it was absolutely untrue. The program is operating successfully. I am told that nine women inmates are out there working in the Warwick outreach camp as we speak. They work there Monday to Friday and go back to Helana Jones on the weekend. They do some fantastic work for the council in Warwick and organisations like the Warwick community kindergarden.

There are no plans by this government to scrap any of the WORC outreach camps. In fact, we support these camps and we want them to work more efficiently in the future. We have 11 of these WORC outreach camps in Queensland, and they are unique to this state. I was very pleased last month to visit three of the camps. We went to Boulia on the eve of the great camel races. There were about five prisoners working to prepare the showgrounds for those camel races. The prisoners were going to be cooking there during the weekend. I also looked at the fantastic work those prisoners had done in landscaping around the sports centre in Boulia. Then we moved on to Julia Creek, where the inmates have done a wonderful job—a very classy job—of paving the CBD area in Julia Creek. They have also painted much of the facilities at the racetrack in Julia Creek. Then we moved on to Winton, one of our oldest WORC outreach camps, where the prisons do a lot of gardening and maintenance. They even go around to the homes of old people in Winton and mow their lawns.

As well, the prisoners are fencing 180 kilometres for National Parks and Wildlife. So our WORC outreach camps are a success. In the past 12 months we have been realigning these camps so that the prisoners do not return to Wacol but are attached to another prison in another part of the state.

Home and Community Care Funding

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Home Assist/Home Secure, administered by the Department of Housing, provides much-appreciated modifications to assist people to remain in their homes longer. We had a circumstance in Gladstone where modifications costing in excess of \$1,000 were required. This resident's rehab officer, based in Brisbane, expected that assistance would be available through Home Assist/Home Secure from HACC funding in central Queensland similar to that available in the south-east corner. I ask: will the minister review the availability of the state component of HACC funding through Home Assist/Home Secure to ensure equity of access for all Queenslanders?

Mr ROBERTSON: I give this undertaking to the honourable member: if she contacts me with the particulars of that matter it will be fully investigated and a full reply will be provided to her.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Fitzroy, I welcome to the public gallery the *Queensland Country Life* Miss Showgirl 2005 finalists. I inform all members that I am having lunch with the ladies today.

Country Racing

Mr PEARCE: My question is to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing. In March the Beattie government, under the guidance of the minister for racing, introduced a new structure to allow country racing to better represent local clubs. Could the minister tell the House how these reforms are giving country racing a stronger voice in determining their own future?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for his question. Unfortunately, now that the parliament will probably be sitting tomorrow, he and I will have to forgo attending that wonderful event at Middlemount on Saturday that we were looking forward to. But it is well worth the sacrifice and I am sure that the Middlemount Race Club will understand.

I note that last night the member for Charters Towers derided what the Labor government had done about country racing. Obviously, he is not aware that in his own backyard there is a great deal of support for what is happening in country racing. For a start, Mick Searle, the president of the Townsville Turf Club, said in the *Townsville Bulletin* on 30 July this year, 'We haven't had this many horses for years.'

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The member can laugh at Mr Searle if he likes, but Mr Searle will stand by his words that it was the best race meeting the club had had for years and that he was delighted about it. I might add that, as I predicted in this parliament when I introduced this legislation, giving the power back to country racing would be embraced by those people. An excellent line-up of people have come forward, including Tony Fitzgerald, Colin Ferguson, Noel Brosnan, Graeme Saunders, Helen Guilfoyle and Gary Peoples. I am particularly pleased about the support of Gary Peoples, because he represents not only—

A government member: Aramac.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Not only does he represent Aramac; he is also a licensee, a trainer, an owner and a bookie. The group also includes Ranald Ferrier and Peter Webster. This is a very good group of people who are determined to make this work. I spoke with Bill Ludwig, who is the chair. He is delighted with the response that he has received. Already that organisation is going to talk about the \$2 million that this government makes available for track subsidy. It is going to make a decision about where that should be spent and what equity it can bring into it.

The crux of the matter is this: all the doomsayers over there wanted to go back to the old roty days and all the ordure that came with that. The reality is that this system of democracy will work. It will work because people like Gary Peoples are involved with no agenda other than to drive this forward. It is the same deal with Saunders from Mount Isa. All of those people have put their names forward and have been through a process of selection whereby they will be in a position to do what is right for country racing. As I have said before, they can have as many dates and as many meetings as they like—Queensland Racing has advised me that that is of no interest to Queensland Racing—provided they have proper meetings. Already we have seen clubs like the one at Gatton looking at other events they could have with race meetings. I believe that this will ensure the future of country racing. It is about people putting aside what previously were their parochial views of the world and actually acting in the interests of country racing.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I again recognise in the gallery the teachers, parents and students of the Mater Dei primary school in the electorate of Toowoomba North.

Office of the Speaker

Mr SEENEY: My question without notice is to the Premier. When I asked the Premier yesterday about the repayment of money for the AWU function held by the previous Speaker he indicated that the Speaker's expense allowance could be used for such functions. If the previous Speaker's expense allowance had been used, why was the matter referred to the CMC and why did the CMC consider it necessary to refer the matter to the DPP? Was this function paid for as an official function or was it paid for out of the Speaker's allowance?

Mr BEATTIE: I am more than delighted to answer the question asked by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, because if he had been following developments he would know that the allowance is a new allowance brought in as part of the reforms. Therefore, previously the Speaker did not have an allowance so he could not pay for anything out of that allowance, because it did not exist.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Callide!

Mr BEATTIE: The point I am trying—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Oh, you did not.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Callide, it is a beautiful day outside. I would ask you to go outside now under standing order 253 and experience the delights of Queensland winter. You have been warned three times. I ask you now to leave the chamber.

Mr BEATTIE: I simply make the point that the allowance did not exist. It is a new allowance that has been brought in. Hence I could—

Mr Seeney: Are you throwing me out?

Mr SPEAKER: I am throwing you out under standing order 253. You have sat here today and I have warned you on three previous occasions. I have made it perfectly clear that members will ask questions and ministers will reply, and I expect silence. You are playing your games. You will not play with me. I ask you now to leave the chamber.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: I ask you to leave the chamber.

Whereupon the honourable member for Callide withdrew from the chamber.

Mr BEATTIE: Let me be very clear about this. What I said yesterday is absolutely consistent with what I have said all the way along the line in relation to this. That is because under the previous rules there was not an allowance. If I recall correctly, an allowance was paid to the Deputy Speaker and to the whips but was not paid to the Speaker. The reason the decision was made by me to in fact give the Speaker the \$2,250 allowance—similar to what was paid to the Deputy Speaker and the whips—is so that incidental expenses could be met. The accountability mechanism is then to the Australian taxation commissioner.

In other words, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was not correct when he said that there is no accountability. It is in fact accountable to the Australian Taxation Office. If the allowance is not used for particular purposes then the tax office will make sure that tax is paid on it. That is the way all allowances work. That is the way it works in relation to allowances paid to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Clearly, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition does not have a clue about what was happening previously or what happens now. The question he asked me today shows extraordinary ignorance. He did not follow exactly what the changes were—what processes existed previously and what exists now. That allowance has come about as a result of the reforms—the new, improved system that will avoid what happened in the past.

Brisbane International Film Festival

Mr ENGLISH: I refer the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts to the recent Brisbane International Film Festival, and I ask: given the festival's move to South Bank, was this year's festival a success?

Mr WELFORD: I thank the honourable member for his question. The 14th Brisbane International Film Festival—or BIFF as it is fondly known—closed on Monday night. I am pleased to advise members of the House that this year attendance figures increased by approximately 20 per cent overall. Indeed, I was able to attend the final screening on Monday night of the film called *The Jacket*, which will be appearing in Brisbane cinemas shortly. I can assure members that it was well worth seeing.

Almost 300 films were screened over the festival's 13 days with many of the festival's major screenings selling out. The move to South Bank was a great success for the holding of the festival, and the organisers of BIFF, as it is known, believe there are many opportunities to expand the festival even further into the popular entertainment precinct and link it with other arts organisations in the area.

This year many thousands of people attended free events such as the screening of the Fast Film Competition finalists, family fun days in the piazza and the festival's seminar program. It was this opportunity to introduce more people to the tremendous range of international films at the festival that prompted the expansion and relocation of the festival to South Bank.

The family days on the two Sundays proved extremely popular, with South Bank visitors exposed to the festival through roving entertainment and instructional displays. I am also pleased to inform members that film and television production in Queensland is booming in the south-east at the moment, with major television series and feature films in production or about to begin production on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane.

Ms Keech interjected.

Mr WELFORD: I take the interjection from the minister for tourism. It is a huge deal for the tourism industry.

After only six weeks of the new financial year, confirmed film and television production expenditure in Queensland has already reached \$34 million, compared with \$91 million for the entire 2004-05 financial year. About 1,000 full-time jobs have already been created as a result of these productions and, as an economic impact on the wider community, about \$75 million of investment. The latest production to make Queensland home is a \$10 million children's television series entitled to *H₂O—Just Add Water* on the Gold Coast.

Bilborough, Mr C

Mr LINGARD: I ask the minister for fair trading: why has her department taken over two years to recover \$860,000 from property marketeer Chris Bilborough and what steps has she taken to ensure that mum and dad investors are not caught out by another of this marketeer's scams?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Two minutes.

Ms KEECH: Protecting the consumers of Queensland is an absolute priority of the Beattie government and the work we do through the Office of Fair Trading. The allegations of Mr Bilborough and particularly his involvement in proposed land sales in the Warwick area came to my attention through the *Courier-Mail*. In fact, yesterday I had a meeting with my director-general with regard to this issue. I do agree that it has been an ongoing issue. In that meeting I advised the director-general that I expect tracking down Mr Bilborough to be given priority by the Office of Fair Trading. The advice I have received is that Mr Bilborough is the subject of serious complaints with respect to being a rogue operator. In fact, on numerous occasions we have tried to serve Mr Bilborough personally with tribunal papers and, to date, these activities have been unsuccessful. I have been advised that attempts have included the use of registered mail, process serving companies as well as personal attempts by the Office of Fair Trading.

I have been advised that Mr Bilborough is apparently aware that the Office of Fair Trading has attempted to serve the tribunal papers on numerous occasions and is attempting to maintain a very low profile in order to avoid servers. As I have indicated to the House, I have directed my office to ensure that this is a priority because I really do believe that the people of Queensland deserve to be protected from the likes of people such as Mr Bilborough.

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

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Estimates Committee D

Report

Resumed from 10 August (see p. 2309).

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (11.34 am): I rise to speak on the Estimates Committee D report. The committee hearings began with the Minister for Health seeking to incorporate in *Hansard* a statement which was lengthier than the prescribed time for the minister's introductory remarks allowable under the rules. This creates several problems. I believe that in the future this should not be permitted. Firstly, there was no opportunity for members of the committee to examine this material. The minister's introductory remarks should be made verbally so that the members can examine it. Secondly, it gave the minister the opportunity to introduce new policy initiatives and other matters that were not directly related to the business of the estimates committee.

In relation to the further conduct of the estimates hearing, I say what a difference a month makes. Since the conduct of Estimates Committee D, of the four people at the minister's table, three no longer hold their positions. I guess the fourth person would be getting pretty nervous.

Opposition members interjected.

Dr FLEGG: Three out of four of them have gone within a month.

An opposition member: What is the punch line?

Dr FLEGG: There is no punch line.

The resignation of the minister was followed by retribution being exacted against senior Queensland Health officials Dr John Scott and Dr Buckland. Their summary execution from their jobs did not occur because of their administration of the Health Department during the ensuing time when the various crises arose but because of their failure to assist the minister with his discredited line that he had never been briefed on the problems with overseas trained doctors. Tragically, this was done, once again, without regard to the benefit of patients in Queensland. The summary removal of these officials also robbed the incoming minister of the opportunity of a handover from those officials.

The new replacements who have been appointed to the Health Department have been at the direction of the Premier and are clearly politically motivated to produce a political outcome to control damaging revelations coming out of Queensland Health as well as showing the government has not learned a thing. This bodes ominously as the culture of suppressing information, bullying and intimidating those with constructive criticisms has led to a huge human cost for patients in Queensland. Yet the Premier moves to deliver Queenslanders more of the same.

During the hearings I questioned the minister in relation to the decline in real recurrent health spending. The recurrent Health budget increased by only 2.7 per cent, and this following real declines over the previous two years. Allowing for the inflation rate of health costs and the population growth in Queensland, this was a decline in the Health budget over three years of \$450 million. In fact, under the present circumstances of the health crisis, it is outrageous that the government feels it can make budgetary savings by cutting the real level of health spending.

We have an acute emergency in the provision of health services. Queensland has nowhere near enough hospital beds. Our accident and emergency departments are at the point of failure. Patients are dying because of the lack of intensive care beds. There is a mortality rate of between one in five and one in 20 patients when moved from one hospital intensive care unit to an intensive care unit at a different hospital when beds are not available. There is approximately one death per week on cardiac waiting lists and maternity units are disappearing from around the state quicker than carrots on a Bugs Bunny cartoon.

It is impossible to understand what is in the mind of the government when, despite the seriousness of the health crisis and the government's reasonable financial position, it seeks to hold back on urgently needed health spending. Another area that I raised during the committee hearing was the surprising and disappointing fact that there was no increase in funding at all for the non-government mental health sector.

Time expired.

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (11.38 am): In 2005-06, the government has earmarked another record Health budget at \$5.35 billion—up almost 8.5 per cent on last year. This year's budget provides greater support for Queenslanders recovering from pre-existing diseases and illnesses, for patients with heart problems and cancer and for better health for Indigenous communities. It also provides for new and improved facilities and equipment such as new emergency departments, new community health services and new aged care homes. Importantly, it allows us to put more staff into the places where people live. In terms of better medical treatments, a \$151 million funding package over four years will help to prevent chronic diseases and the key risk factors for those diseases such as heart conditions, diabetes and renal failure. In turn, this will help to reduce avoidable hospital admissions and improve overall quality of life.

An initial investment of \$10 million will be earmarked for improved prevention initiatives to address key risk factors such as physical inactivity and poor nutrition; the introduction of better health care models for patients that extend from GPs right through to hospital treatment—and we will begin in the North Lakes district, Logan-Beaudesert and Innisfail this year; increased community based staff to support the care of patients with chronic illnesses in their homes; and a new chronic disease management plan to help give patients access to all the health services we offer, in a single program.

Over the next four years \$60 million will be allocated to improving cardiac services in Queensland, including treatment and measures to help prevent heart conditions. As part of this investment, \$5.8 million will help to improve hospital and secondary care, including \$4.8 million in additional funding to operate the new cardiac catheter laboratory at the Gold Coast; \$300,000 for additional cardiac rehabilitation programs; \$300,000 for the management of heart failure at the Princess Alexandra Hospital; and \$400,000 for additional early intervention procedures like stents into the heart to prevent heart failure.

The amount of \$5.5 million will be allocated in 2005-06 from a four-year \$62.5 million commitment towards the treatment and care of cancer patients. This year's funding will target four areas: \$4.5 million towards antismoking measures; \$500,000 to continue the statewide positron emission tomography, or PET, scanner service and cyclotron at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital—state-of-the-art technology to help with medical imaging; \$250,000 for a medical cancer specialist at Royal Children's Hospital; and a further \$250,000 for a specialist medical doctor in haematology, or blood disorders, on the Gold Coast.

The amount of \$7.6 million will be allocated in 2005-06 to improve the health of Indigenous Queenslanders and implement Queensland's health response to the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. Targets include increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders working within the health system; strengthening responses for the prevention and early intervention in chronic disease; supporting health and safety for children, young people and families; strengthening responses to alcohol and substance misuse; and improving information, research and evidence.

The amount of \$8.2 million will be provided in 2005-06 as part of \$65 million over four years to support community mental health services. These include 19 clinical positions to provide expert psychiatric assessment and management of patients with concurrent physical and mental health symptoms in general hospital wards, 29 positions to enhance the quality and safety of community and acute care services and to ensure that vital clinical time is dedicated to the care and treatment of patients, and more than 100 community mental health positions.

The government is also committed to improving access to its very extensive range of health services. Ongoing funding in 2005-06 will provide greater access to services including elective surgery—some \$20 million over two years to continue to reduce public hospital waiting lists and to allow an additional 4,000 people to receive elective surgery. This will build on the current \$110 million commitment over 3½ years, including \$40 million in 2003-04. Emergency departments will receive \$5 million to continue the health hotline initiative, to provide 24-hour access to health information and advice about health services. The Gold Coast Hospital Birthing Centre will receive \$800,000 to operate a birthing service on the Gold Coast, allowing up to 300 women each year access to this service which will be closer to where they live. The blood and blood products funding package will receive an additional \$6.5 million to ensure that Queenslanders have access to safe and sufficient blood supplies in both public and private facilities. There will be improved inpatient capacity at Redcliffe—\$1.3 million will be allocated to improve care for inpatients at Redcliffe, including 12 new beds, more nursing capacity and increased clinical supplies.

Time expired.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.44 am): Estimates Committee D blew apart the whole Beattie government facade with regard to health care. It demonstrated quite clearly that the bullying, the cover-up and all the media stunts that the Beattie government has carried on with for years was shown for what it was. The health service under the Beattie Labor government had declined seriously because of this culture of cover-up and bullying. It was shown at these estimates to extend right to the top when, quite clearly, the minister misled the parliament, misled the estimates hearing, and the correct and truthful answer was given by Dr John Scott, who is a person I have known to have great integrity and commitment to the public health system.

It must break the hearts of many people in Queensland Health to have seen a system like Surgery on Time developed that had so much promise and so much ability. It would do the health minister well to stay here and listen to this instead of walking out. Surgery on Time, which I am proud to say I put in place when I was health minister, was put together by experienced and dedicated people in Queensland Health, such as the senior and most experienced theatre sisters, senior surgeons and anaesthetists, and senior managers in the hospitals who knew how we could make the system more efficient. We took the money that we saved by getting rid of one entire level of bureaucracy and we put it into Surgery on Time, and we set targets.

The first target, which was set for 1 July 1996 to 1997, was to have 95 per cent of those people classified as category 1 have their operations within 30 days, and we achieved that. The second target was to have 95 per cent of those people classified as category 2 have their operations within 90 days, and that target was set for 1 July 1998. We had only up until 1 May or mid May when the election was called but, from my memory, 75 per cent or so of people within that category were able to have their operations within that time. That figure for category 2 should have improved as we went on from year to year, and it did for a while. This is what Surgery on Time was put in place to do. It was to eventually achieve the target of 95 per cent of those people classified as category 3 having their operations within 12 months.

Sadly, what has come out during the budget estimates hearings is the dramatic decline in surgery operating times in Queensland under this Beattie Labor government. It is an absolute tragedy and an indictment of this government. When we took over government in 1996 the biggest problem facing Queensland Health was the massive waiting times for elective surgery. In the following two years from 1 July 1996 we completed approximately an additional 13,000 operations to what had been done in the two years previously. That figure should have kept increasing, and it did for a short while because of the systems put in place. But now to see the sad decline is an absolute indictment of this government, and the people are finally seeing through the facade of the media stunts and publicity.

I want to talk about the community midwife position in Toowoomba for Young Women's Place. Young Women's Place is an absolutely outstanding service for young women who are in need of assistance when they are in quite difficult circumstances, particularly those young women who are pregnant. This community midwife position helps those young women through that time. Since it has been in place, which is approximately 1994, it has proven to be so worth while. I have met mothers who have since successfully married and had families, and they owe so much to this community midwife position.

Some very important things need to be done. The security of this position has been taken away by Queensland Health. Imagine that! We need a service agreement. Queensland Health lowered the pay of the community midwife approximately one or two years ago. It needs to be brought back to the modest level which it was at before. Queensland Health took away the administration fund that it had to run the service at Young Women's Place. These are cruel, callous acts by Queensland Health which show that it has no regard for the very basic, core business that Queensland Health should be doing—that is, looking after young women who are pregnant because that is one of the most important things it can do in this area of health.

There is an urgent need for three new specialist psychiatrist positions in the mental health unit at Toowoomba. It covers a vast area right out to Birdsville, Goondiwindi, Kingaroy and Gatton. We have two positions vacant at the moment and a third one is about to become vacant. It is essential that this important regional hospital at Toowoomba has those senior positions, because the staff are working themselves to the bone. They have to travel out to these rural areas as well as look after the needs of the city. It is essential to get these three positions filled as a matter of urgency.

Time expired.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (11.50 am): May I start by commending the member for Aspley, Bonny Barry, the chairman of Estimates Committee D, for the way in which she both conducted herself and controlled the committee. She did an excellent job under very trying circumstances. I also congratulate all members of the committee who took part in the debate on that particular day and here in the House yesterday and today.

In the few moments that I have, I would like to confine my comments to the office of Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. There is little doubt that the office of Attorney-General is one of central place in our justice system here in Queensland. In fact, with a strong justice system we have a society that encourages honesty and accountability and, more importantly, readily deals with significant and major social issues. There are few in this House, in my opinion, who would doubt that a pivotal component of that system is the criminal justice system. If I may quote the Chief Justice of the High Court, Murray Gleeson, at the Family Law Conference in Sydney 2001, he said—

The importance of the administration of criminal justice not only to public safety and security but also to the decency of a society and its respect for human dignity and rights is too obvious to require elaboration.

In my opinion the Chief Justice is absolutely correct, and I am fairly confident we could not find a more important or more esteemed officer of the court than the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia.

In Queensland the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions holds a central place and is a strong element in the criminal justice system. As a consequence, the Director of Public Prosecutions holds a very important role in the overall scheme within the state. It was disappointing to say the least that the former Attorney was either unable or unwilling to provide details of the process of reappointment of Leanne Clare, or was unable and perhaps not willing to provide details of his reasons for her reappointment. To do so, in my opinion, cheapens the role of the DPP and calls into question the process undertaken by the former Attorney in exercising his judgment.

It was also surprising to note that the former Attorney-General did not take heed of the warning clearly stated in the High Court's determination on the question of special leave by Diane Fingleton. A clear warning was given that if Ms Fingleton was successful in her appeal to the High Court then it would be a major ground of miscarriage of justice. It is quite concerning that the Attorney-General during the estimates process, one, was not even aware of the time line of the special leave question being heard by the High Court and, two, did not take into account the High Court's clearly stated reasons for judgment when granting the leave to appeal.

The Office of the DPP has been under very close scrutiny for some time here in Queensland with a number of high-profile cases—Volkers, Fingleton and Hanson. I would have thought that in those circumstances the scrutiny of the reappointment should have been fairly open, fairly accountable and based purely on merit. There were certainly grounds in the recent past to warrant a process of appointment for this officer and perhaps other officers of a similar nature being more than simply left in the hands of one individual officer. The processes of accountability and transparency may well need to be more evident to the public of Queensland.

One other issue that arose during the committee determination was that of compensation, first of all to Diane Fingleton and then to Pauline Hanson. The cases are quite distinct, and the former Attorney rightly made the comment that the Fingleton matter was more in the unusual category and in those circumstances consideration should be given to any application filed by her. To my knowledge, Ms Fingleton has not filed an application with the government or sought a compensation payment from the government at this point in time.

The second matter of Hanson is much more difficult. It is a matter where the person involved, Pauline Hanson, was found innocent on appeal. The distinction is quite clear. In the Fingleton matter it was found that she should never have been charged in the first instance. There is quite a degree of distinction between the two cases. However, the question of compensation was clearly raised within the committee confines and again—

Time expired.

Hon. LD LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Minister for Justice and Attorney-General) (11.55 am): Before I speak to the Estimates Committee D report, I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of this House and the wider community for their forthcoming congratulations upon my recent appointment as Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. I want to particularly acknowledge that the Leader of the Opposition and shadow Attorney-General, Lawrence Springborg, has been most forthcoming in publicly congratulating me, and I thank him for his sincerity in expressing well wishes towards me.

I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, the Hon. Rod Welford. As I meet with key stakeholders in this portfolio I hear nothing but high praise for the work that Rod has done over the past 4½ years. I think everyone in this House should give recognition to this work. In a lot of ways, I have big shoes to fill.

I would also like to acknowledge the members of Estimates Committee D for their contribution to the hearing and also for their report under the able stewardship of the member for Aspley, Bonny Barry. The estimates committee process is an important accountability measure where ministers can, and should, be asked to explain where money has been spent in the past and how it will be spent in the future.

In reviewing the Department of Justice and Attorney-General's Ministerial Portfolio Statement and reading the transcript of the estimates hearings, I was impressed by the great deal of work that had been done and is being done to contribute to a safe, just and supportive Queensland. The report to this House by Estimates Committee D outlines a number of these achievements. For example, this government's commitment to providing modern, responsive justice centres continues apace with the completion of the new Brisbane Magistrates Court, the western districts court at Richlands and the refurbishment of the historic Mackay court.

As part of this commitment, we are continuing to install leading-edge technology such as CCTV and video-conferencing facilities as well as special rooms that ensure victims and vulnerable witnesses can give evidence without confronting offenders. But, as was demonstrated in the estimates

examination, our innovative efforts extend beyond the courtroom. The JPs in the Community program, which sees volunteer JPs provide their services in shopping centres, has gone from strength to strength. In fact, more than 100 JPs are now volunteering their services as part of the program across Queensland.

The report also details the program of capital works for 2005-06. Again, there is an obvious emphasis on expanding access to justice and a strong commitment to the most vulnerable in our community, with new funding of \$8.4 million over the next four years allocated to the Adult Guardian and the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal.

The budget also supports the government's courts modernisation program, with \$5.65 million for capital works projects across Queensland including new courthouses at Sandgate and Ipswich. I also draw to the attention of the House that funding has been made available to purchase land for a new courthouse in the Pine Rivers shire area. The land identified is in the seat of Kurwongbah, but I do stress that these decisions were made before my appointment as Attorney-General. As we can see, the estimates committee process and the subsequent report provide a wealth of information about the many initiatives under way in the Justice and Attorney-General portfolio that are contributing to a strong, healthy, safe and vibrant Queensland.

However, I note the statements of reservation submitted by the member for Cunningham and the member for Caloundra. In particular, their statements in reply refer to the reappointment of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Although not the minister at the time, I am happy to assure the two members and the House that I have full confidence in Leanne Clare as the Director of Public Prosecutions. Leanne Clare is a very experienced and very skilled prosecutor. Her office handles 12,000 prosecution matters every year and plays a vital role in protecting our community.

Secondly, the process for reappointment was rightly a matter for the Attorney-General of the time. He fully explained to the committee why and how he made that decision. I am very much looking forward to supporting the Director of Public Prosecutions as she continues to implement the reforms that are revitalising her office and as she strives to provide the best possible prosecution service for Queenslanders.

Time expired.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee E

Report

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! The question is—

That the report of Estimates Committee E be adopted.

Hon. H PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines) (12.00 pm): Before I comment on Estimates Committee E, I bring to the attention of the House a very historic moment here in that we have women in the roles of the deputy speaker and table officers. This is a first for the parliament of Queensland. Congratulations. Now there can be a changing of the guard.

This financial year the Beattie government is spending a record \$576 million in the Natural Resources and Mines portfolio, which is a clear statement of our intent to ensure the state's natural resources are managed well. Key budget initiatives announced in the latest budget include \$66.4 million over four years to continue water reform, progress water infrastructure options, investigate supply alternatives such as desalination, stormwater harvesting and reusing waste water. We will also finalise regional water supply strategies, improve water use efficiency and secure Queensland's future water supplies.

We must all understand that water is a commodity that now carries both an environmental and economic value. To adequately manage exactly how much water is being extracted from rural bores and other off takes we need to be able to manage the resource. If we cannot measure the resource we cannot manage the resource. Therefore water meters will be introduced gradually throughout the state starting in areas where resource operation plans are already in place. The first of these will be installed in the Boyne catchment in the coming weeks. South-east Queensland, with its massive growth in population, is facing major challenges, but I believe our government is addressing them.

The South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program has listed \$860 million in proposed future water infrastructure projects in the south-east region. However, I want to emphasise that we are addressing water issues throughout the state and are doing this on a catchment by catchment basis. Queensland's quality of life and prosperity depends on the wise management of not just water but all of our natural resources. That is why the government introduced its vegetation management legislation last year.

As announced in the budget, 40 new vegetation management staff will be employed over the next 12 months to help land-holders adjust to the phasing out of all broadscale clearing by December 2006. The \$150 million financial package continues to be rolled out. The government has recently broadened the eligibility criteria for the \$130 million vegetation management structural adjustment scheme being administered by QRAA. Through this scheme, enterprise assistance is available for property build up or for specific projects to help land-holders develop their farm businesses.

Since the estimates committee hearing on 12 July, \$1.1 million of funds have been allocated in enterprise assistance. This year we also awarded an \$8 million contract to AgForce to manage AgForward, a program to assist land-holders improve their land management practices. This will help land-holders increase their productivity and profitability and improve the long-term future of the land.

I am also pleased to report that three-quarters of the 200,000 hectares of land available to be cleared through the ballot process has already been allocated to land-holders. The \$12 million incentive package, the Vegetation Incentive Program, has now received over 100 expressions of interest throughout the state excluding the south-east region. Calls will soon be sent out for expressions of interest in the south-east region. This program pays eligible land-holders for the management of high value non-remnant vegetation on their own properties.

Fodder harvesting has been an important issue in regional areas during the current drought. All applications to harvest fodder are assessed against the regional assessment codes, which are currently being reviewed by the department—I mean they are being reviewed by the department. The aim of the review is to finetune the codes and ensure they are workable, grounded in truth and result in the best outcome for land-holders, the environment and for our economy.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all honourable members on both sides of the House for their participation in the estimates process. Whilst I do not agree with many of the findings by the opposition in the report of Estimates Committee E, I still thank them for their participation.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.05 pm): This particular estimates was able to clearly demonstrate a number of major failings of this portfolio under the Beattie Labor government. Probably most important is the fact that on a year-to-year basis the Beattie government has reduced the budget of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries from \$381 million in 1997-98 to \$313 million in 2005-06. Over the past three years—whether it has been in the actual amount or the budgeted amount—there has been a clear trend down, down, down. No wonder people say that the DPI has lost its way. No wonder people say that the DPI is short of staff. Members should try to find a stock inspector in some parts of the state. The DPI simply does not have the staff to be do that. The National Party intends to put forward a policy at the next election that will show the people how we can revitalise the DPI so the staff can be proud of it and so the people who receive the services—whether it be in fisheries, forestry or agricultural—will be proud of that department and know that it serves its purpose.

In the estimates we only get to ask approximately 23 or 24 questions because ministers take up their full three minutes to answer questions. The first eight questions that I asked were on the very contentious issue of citrus canker and the need to have proper compensation. We were able to demonstrate through those eight questions the litany of mistakes made by the previous minister. These included the way the minister had led people in the citrus canker area up the garden path by telling those farmers who had healthy farms to keep going and the government would get them market access interstate. He knew it would never be agreed to by the other states or the other citrus growing areas, yet he continued with that cruel hoax. Of course it came to pass that the citrus growers could not get access to the market. The citrus growers had spent more and more money on maintaining their trees—the pruning and labour costs, water and everything else. Then the decision was brought down—six or seven months too late—to get rid of all the trees on the eight farms that make up the Emerald citrus growing area.

I was very saddened to see the way it was handled by the minister. It is not the fault of the staff of the DPI. The minister and the leadership refuse to do what should have been done in October last year when the proposal was put forward to get rid of all the trees then. It had the full agreement of the growers. A modest compensation package was put forward. It could have been dealt with quickly and swiftly. It could have saved the rest of Australia and that citrus growing area at the same time, but it was not to be and it lingered on and on.

The new primary industries minister, both federally and state—with the assistance of Vaughan Johnson, the local member for the Emerald area, and some meetings I have had in the background, particularly with the federal minister—have moved quickly to inspect the area. We have announced a compensation package. It is not as much as we would have hoped. I am hopeful that it will help those good people through this very difficult time because those people are not going to have much of an income for seven years. How anyone can survive in those circumstances is almost unbelievable. Those farmers will go two years without a crop. Then they will plant a crop and they will not get anything decent off the newly planted trees for four to five years. I do thank those two ministers for acting quickly. I think a watch needs to be kept on this situation because there may well be some additional help needed as time goes on.

In relation to the National Livestock Identification System, the beef industry is worth over \$3 billion a year to Queensland. The work chain of that for employment, from saleyards and cattle properties through to transport, meatworks, export and so forth, is immense throughout this state and yet this government has provided only \$690,000 to the implementation of the NLIS. This identification system will save this massive industry and its jobs and will protect and secure it against possible outbreaks of any exotic diseases or any bioterrorism. It is so important that this industry receive some support. This government gives \$11 million a year to the IndyCar race, most of which probably goes to the American drivers. Here is a chance to support an industry worth \$3 billion that covers all of Queensland and the government cannot do it.

I also brought up the issue of the revised fee schedule for commercial fishing licences. The fishing industry has been hammered from pillar to post by this government, whether it is in relation to the complementary zones, the incorrect quotas applied or the myriad regulations, closures and quotas applied, and it is about time the government gave them a breather, left them for two or three years without any more of these massive increases.

Hon. NI CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (12.11 pm): I rise to support the report of Estimates Committee E. The estimates hearings are complex, time consuming, expensive and necessary in a democratic system and I congratulate and thank both ministers, their staff and departmental members for the very comprehensive responses to the diverse range of questions that were asked.

In the Estimates E hearings the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries spoke of 13 priority budget highlights in his portfolio, including issues that affect my electorate of Bundaberg such as the continuation of funding aimed at achieving sugar industry sustainability and the funding to upgrade the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol vessel fleet. The minister answered questions on almost 40 different and diverse issues.

The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines was equally able to address questions on almost 50 different issues. The issue of most interest to my electorate in this portfolio was the provision of water infrastructure and, ironically, I was going the very next day to the official opening of the new Eidsvold Weir. This weir is one of four that will be built or raised and together with the major Paradise Dam or Burnett River Dam will make up a \$240 million water infrastructure program being implemented by this Beattie state government for our district. The \$20.3 million in this budget should ensure completion of the major dam by the end of this year.

The Bundaberg irrigation scheme that was completed some 30 years ago ended up very different from what was promised. Political decisions at that time deprived us of one of the two major dams that were intended and the area between Bundaberg and the coast, known as the Pemberton area, which has some of the richest red soil farmland in Queensland, was left out of the scheme. No channels were provided to this area, leaving those farms without access to irrigation and totally reliant on underground supplies. Those underground supplies are now in a critical state because of saltwater intrusion and those farms now desperately need to be connected to the irrigation scheme.

Our extra dam is now being built by this government after almost 30 years of battling by the farmers in our area and our entire district will reap the benefits. It now remains for our irrigation scheme to be truly completed and to get fairness for those farmers who were left out of the irrigation scheme. I know a lot of work is being done by the department to resolve this issue and I appeal to the minister to give this his early consideration.

I am surprised at the opposition's statement of reservation that clearly shows the opposition's lack of understanding of just how much time and public funding is tied up with the estimates hearings. The time provided is adequate to allow plenty of questions prior to and again at the hearings. I was not aware of any time that the 20-minute sessions deprived the opposition of the opportunity to pursue issues.

I would like to congratulate the member for Mackay, Tim Mulherin, on his very capable chairing of the committee where I believe all members were given every courtesy and I would like to thank the parliamentary staff who keep these hearings going in an efficient manner.

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (12.14 pm): I am pleased to rise today to speak on behalf of the member of Callide who was a member of Estimates Committee E. There are a number of points that have been raised, in particular in the statement of reservations, that need to be addressed. One is the limit on the number of questions on notice able to be asked as part of the estimates process. Another is the receipt of replies to questions on notice less than 24 hours prior to the actual hearing of the committee. It is totally unfair for anyone to have to try to analyse all that detail in such a short period. In many instances some of the departments were not able to respond even within that 24-hour period and were late. We have to either have a situation where that period is brought forward to at least a week or maybe questions have to be in earlier. If that is the way to solve it, then that has to be done. Those questions on notice must be responded to earlier in order to ensure a fair dinkum estimates process.

There is also the limited time available for the conduct of hearings for each department, thus limiting the capacity of the parliament to explore issues of concern to finality; the limit on each questioning session generally to 20 minutes, inhibiting the capacity of committee members to pursue

issues of interest to finality; and, importantly, the use by ministers and government members of questions to provide a basis for propaganda statements, grandstanding and media stunts, for example, in this particular committee, urging committee members to drink recycled water rather than genuinely exploring issues relating to departmental expenses. This is a budget estimates process, not a media opportunity for the ministers. This is their time to actually answer questions, not the other way around.

The minister also claimed that water is a major focus of the budget. But as predicted, it is all about plans on paper, not concrete, rather than action. The previous member spoke about the Bundaberg dam, the Eidsvold Weir and some work on the Paradise Dam, or whatever it is called these days. There is some work being done there, but it should have been done a long time ago. Dams are needed in other areas; water is desperately needed. This government will not build them, that is for sure.

One of the so-called highlights of the budget is \$8.5 million to fund land acquisition, which is mostly to cover the Premier and Treasurer's embarrassment after they discovered that they did not own 90 per cent of the touted Wyaralong dam; they only owned a third of it. More money had to be found for that. The government also claims that it is committed to water reform, but its water planning is hopelessly behind schedule with about half of last year's targets for water resource plans and water resource operations plans being missed.

There are also some unrealistic claims about possible funding for land-holders hit by the land clearing ban. We have all heard about this. How much money has been paid out? Next to nothing. About \$100,000 was identified as being spent at that time from the \$130 million tree clearing assistance package. Yet they are now claiming that \$5 million will be spent this financial year and another \$41 million will be spent in the next financial year. The changes announced by the Premier recently at the AgForce conference will increase it by a little bit more again—just a little bit more, but not very much. Those who know the industry realise it is just a stunt, just a cruel hoax. Money to help land-holders face massive economic losses because of these new laws will go unspent unless there is a major overhaul of the package and its eligibility criteria.

Further, the budget papers show that the Beattie government did not spend a cent in the 2004-05 year acquiring land to protect native vegetation, despite claiming that it would spend \$5 million. The Beattie government has also signalled its intention to unleash more tree and water police on rural Queensland land-holders through an extra \$2.5 million a year. We have all heard what happened in relation to trying to demonise land-holders by saying that they were out there clearing all this land and there were thousands of cases where they were going to go out and inspect these people's properties. How many did they convict? Hardly any, because they found they were wrong. They are putting on more tree police when they should be putting people out there who can work with land-holders. They would do a far better and more comprehensive job than what is being done now. This morning we had the case of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries—

Time expired.

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (12.19 pm): It is a pleasure today to speak to the report of Estimates Committee E covering the portfolio areas of Primary Industries and Fisheries and Natural Resources and Mines, which cover very important parts of the Queensland economy. Before I go any further—and I have said this before when I have spoken about estimates committees—I want to go to the statement of reservations. I do not know if members have had an opportunity to read the statement of reservations—

Mr Lawlor: Why would you bother?

Mr HAYWARD: That is the problem—that is, the statement of reservations has become so generic and every year in many ways it is the same. Consequently, it has limited effect or absolutely no effect. As a result, something that is an important part of the estimates process is lost through that opportunity for the statement of reservations because it is so commonplace now. The examples that I am going to use today are almost silly in that they have no practical effect and then of course there is no impact through having a statement of reservations. It just seems like it is the done thing to do, and from the way these read it is like the people who did them really could not think of anything else to say.

The first weakness is the limit on the number of questions on notice able to be asked as part of the estimates process. Fair dinkum! There has to be a limit. We all know that, and it is an agreed process. Of course there has to be a limit. That is considered, as part of this statement of reservations, to be some kind of weakness. Another weakness is the limited time available for the conduct of hearings for each department, thus limiting the capacity of the parliament to explore issues of concern to finality. Again, we have to be practical about these things. How long do people want these estimates committees to plod on for? The fact is that there has to be a limit. We all know that. It just seems that by having this as a statement of reservations it devalues the whole process of reservations.

The next issue listed as a weakness is the limit on questioning sessions generally to 20 minutes, inhibiting the capacity of committee members to pursue issues of interest to finality. Is there any other way to do it? If there is, let us do it. But, in the end, again, we have to have a limit on the number of questions that an individual member of parliament can continually ask as part of the estimates process.

We have to remember that the estimates process comprises not just non-government members but also government members. The same argument could be presented then from someone from the government side—that is, that they want to get to finality with a particular issue and proceed and proceed and proceed and leave the opportunity for non-government members basically out to dry.

With regard to the issues that are highlighted in this report as weaknesses, I simply do not accept that they are weaknesses. I accept that they are the reality of the process. The reality of the process is that we have to have some time limit on questions. The reality of the process is that everybody should have a turn. To consider these things as weaknesses, as both shadow ministers did in this case, simply devalues the process of the statement of reservations, to put them in a position where there is no media interest in the reservations as presented by the shadow ministers. There is no impact at all of reservations like this, because anybody who has even thought about the process—and most members of this parliament should have had the opportunity to at least think about the process—would know that these are not in effect weaknesses; they are the reality under which we operate here in this parliamentary setting. The things that are mentioned in this report as weaknesses simply demonstrate an impractical approach that the shadow ministers in this case had towards a very important part of government administration, and to list them as weaknesses is, as I said, a mistake. There were a number of issues considered during this, particularly—

Time expired.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (12.24 pm): At the outset I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker Copeland, on your elevation to the role of temporary chairmen. I know that you will do well and I know that you will enjoy it, and I wish you well.

One of the most important parts of the budget estimates hearings is not only scrutinising the budget and getting answers from ministers and departmental heads but also getting genuine outcomes to ensure that the dollars are going the right way. Today I want to talk about primary industries. Other members here have canvassed issues in relation to natural resources, but this government has to be made aware that primary industries is one of the most important forms of income earning and wealth generation in this state today. Whether it be the mining industry or the agricultural industry, it is those industries where the bar is set in terms of dollars generated. That brings me to recent issues in my own electorate.

I refer to the citrus canker issue at Emerald, where a multimillion-dollar industry has been destroyed. As a result of representations that I and Mike Horan, the opposition spokesman for primary industries, have made, I have to applaud and say thank you to the new federal minister, Peter McGauran, and the new state minister, Gordon Nuttall, for acting so swiftly in going to Emerald and looking first-hand at the disaster that has been created there. Yesterday a package of \$11.5 million was announced as a result of those visits and as a result of deliberations between those two ministers and their relevant departments. Whilst \$11.5 million is a long way shy of the mark of some \$30-million odd that we were hoping for and whilst I say thank you for it, I was hoping that it could be considerably more given that 2PH farms have lost another 143,000 trees since May. If this money was announced in May, it might have been enough.

The other thing that I have said to the Queensland minister is that, if fraudulent farming practices have been a part of the operation at Evergreen and there has been a breakdown in AQIS scrutiny of the operation, maybe there is a need for further investigation. With regard to fraudulent practices, if we are going to allow our biosecurity to be eroded by people who do not uphold the law in the traditions of this land, we have to do something rather drastic. As I said to the minister for primary industries yesterday, if the case of Evergreen is a situation of fraudulent farming practice against that operation or if those people have conducted fraudulent farming practices, that farm should be confiscated, sold and the proceeds distributed evenly amongst those other people who have had their livelihoods ruined. I cannot emphasise that enough. If it were a drug deal or a drug runner on the coast, in Brisbane or somewhere else, their assets would be seized, sold and put back into areas where they can help the people affected, and that should be the case here. There are no ifs and buts about it and I do not make any beg your pardons, either. At the end of the day, if I have to put my neck on the block to protect an industry that has been fraudulently eroded and cut away by crooks, if they are, I say so be it.

The other issue that I want to touch on relates to stock inspectors in rural and western areas in particular. In recent times there has been an issue in relation to the stock inspector at Alpha, which is a tick inspection operation. There is no room there at all for a part-time, third-party operator to scratch those cattle after they have been inspected and let them go on. We need stock inspectors who are trained in the field of checking cattle and we need stock inspectors at places like Quilpie and Winton, which are huge trucking centres and rail heads, to ensure that we are doing the job properly and that, regardless of where those cattle are destined to go, they are destined under the right documentation and the right inspection services. If we are going to see an erosion of this type of service in western Queensland, we are certainly going to see an erosion of biosecurity in more ways than one because that tick line is so important at Alpha.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (12.29 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment. Could you also pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on his appointment. I rise to speak in support of the report of Estimates Committee E. As the chair I would like to thank the rest of the committee for their assistance in conducting this year's hearing. I would also like to thank the Hansard staff, parliamentary attendants and the research director, Deborah Jeffrey, and executive assistant, Michelle Benham. I extend my thanks to the former minister for primary industries and fisheries and the former minister for natural resources for their time and patience during the proceedings. The ministers were assisted by their departments. I thank all departmental officers for their involvement.

In the consideration of the estimates for the departments, many important issues were raised and discussed. The hearing gave the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries the opportunity to detail the budget allocation that the government has provided to his department and the benefits that this investment will generate for Queensland. The department's budget for the 2005-06 financial year will target important areas such as forestry, the development of a major aquaculture centre, fishery resources and the management of biosecurity. As the member for Gregory said, biosecurity is a major priority and increased funding has been allocated to provide confidence to markets and the community that key biosecurity and animal welfare risks are managed.

The former minister for natural resources and mines provided an overview of growth in the mining sector and issues relating to water. Water is a resource that has a direct impact on our economic growth. Most members have witnessed the devastation of the drought and the effects that it has had on their communities. The committee was advised of the key priorities that were developed for the water infrastructure plan, which would support Queensland on a number of levels—from servicing industry to providing water for the domestic market. Those priorities include funding to continue water reform and to deliver an integrated response to the increasing pressure on water resources; the investigation associated with the proposed weirs on the Mary and Logan rivers, a new dam at Wyaralong and water storage options on the Mary River; funding for land acquisitions associated with new water infrastructure; and the investigation of alternative water supply sources, such as desalination, stormwater harvesting and water reuse.

Both the former ministers for these portfolios demonstrated a thorough knowledge of their departments. I thank both of those former ministers of these portfolios for their time and effort. The estimates process undoubtedly increases the workload on ministers and their staff, but it is an important process that allows this parliament to scrutinise the budget.

I was disappointed to note that the opposition had indicated in its statement of reservation that there was limited time for the conduct of hearings for each department—and this is picking up what the member for Kallangur said. One of the points that the opposition made was that it limited the capacity of parliament to explore issues of concern to their finality. That statement astounds me. The deputy chair and I met with the research director. We discussed the hours of the hearing for Estimates Committee E. We agreed that we would conclude at 4 o'clock. We could have gone to 7 o'clock, but the opposition agreed to the times that were set down. To see such a comment made in a statement of reservation indicates a certain amount of hypocrisy.

I wish to clarify another point that is raised by the opposition in its reservation statement. It stated that limiting each session of questioning to 20 minutes inhibited the capacity of committee members to pursue issues of interest to their finality. I raised the matter of time allocation with the opposition. I asked the opposition members if they wanted to ask questions in 30-minute blocks or 35-minute blocks against each subsection of the portfolio. They wanted to have the 20-minute time allocation for each side of parliament. Under the standing orders, both government and non-government members are given an equal time in which to question. In fact, as chair I think I was more than fair in this process. Timekeeping records show that the time allocated to non-government members was longer than the time allocated to government members. For the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, 77 minutes of questioning time was given to the non-government side and 69 minutes of questioning was given to the government side. For the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, 78 minutes of questioning was given to non-government members and 74 minutes was given to government members. So overall the non-government side received an extra 12 minutes of questioning time.

Mr Lawlor: And still whinged.

Mr MULHERIN: And still whinged, as the member for Southport interjected. Aside from the points that I wanted to raise, I believe that overall the estimates committee hearing was an effective process. I reiterate my thanks to the members of the committee who worked well together on the day—Mr Jeff Seeney, the deputy chair and member for Callide; the Hon. Mrs Nita Cunningham, the member for Bundaberg; Mr Mike Horan, the member for Toowoomba South; Mrs Dorothy Pratt, the member for Nanango; Mrs Desley Scott, the member for Woodridge; and Mr Craig Wallace, the member for Thuringowa. I commend the report of Estimates Committee E to the House.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (12.34 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee E. At the outset I would like to speak about the fishing industry. It is crazy that, when we go into our major food stores, we have only to take a cursory glance over the seafood on offer

to realise that 70 per cent to 80 per cent of it is imported. I think that indicates what has happened to our seafood industry. The people in that industry have been pulled from pillar to post and they really need some relief.

The appointment of a new primary industries minister offers an opportunity for him to meet with seafood representatives. Certainly, I know that John Olsen, the President of the QSIA, is very keen to meet with the new primary industries minister. According to John, currently not much is happening within the industry. As I said, the QSIA is waiting to have a meeting with the new minister. John has asked me to relay to the minister through speaking in this House that the organisation would very much like a chance to meet with him. In fact, it is counting on him to meet with it. The QSIA welcomes the new minister to the portfolio, but it will wait and see what happens and then make a judgment. I think the general opinion is that nothing is going to change in this industry, and that is a shame because things need to change to improve the lot of our fishers.

John Olsen believes that there is a serious need for amendments to where fishing can take place in some areas. I will say the nice words: he says that it is too blooming hard, because when it comes to filleting, it is very heavily regulated. People are hanging up their nets because it is too hard to keep going with all of the tough regulations that are in place. John is pleased that the proposed changes to regulations to allow more commercial operators to fillet their catch are now being discussed with the government. He hopes that the government will act on the proposals, which are in the form of a discussion paper at the moment, and put them into practice. John believes that any changes to the regulations will increase the amount of fresh fish fillets available on the market.

John welcomes the state government's attempt to seek a compromise on proposed increases to fishing licence fees. Those increases to the licence fees, as proposed by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, would dramatically increase the average professional fisherman's fees from hundreds of dollars to thousands of dollars per year. Quite simply, John says that the industry cannot afford that. At this stage of their professional life, fishing families do not need this extra pressure. John has told my office of one family whose annual fees will increase from \$850 to over \$8,000 and another family's licence fees will increase to well over \$5,000. Plenty of other fishing families are looking at paying \$4,000 annually in licence fees. Might I say, too, that I have a lot of respect for the fishing families in my area. They are hardworking people. They are not looking for handouts, but in many cases these families are being forced to accept handouts to survive.

Recently, I met with a number of people within the egg industry. Small businesses in the egg industry are also struggling. A spokesperson in the Burnett region said that those small businesses particularly support the introduction of the egg safety scheme, but, as they understand it, paying the annual and ongoing fees to register with Safe Food Queensland is not a viable option for them. Mr Arkell, who diversified from cane farming into the egg industry, said that he now finds his livelihood no longer viable due to government charges and unrealistic expectations.

Mr Arkell's farms are only small, consisting of free range and caged birds. It is Mr Arkell's calculations that the fees for his 1,000-head egg farm are 30 per cent of the net profit without a wage being considered. While Mr Arkell acknowledges that his 1,000-head farm may not offer sustainable living, his farms are run in conjunction with other farming enterprises. We have heard time and time again within the rural sector that farmers have to diversify or die. It is tragic that these farmers have diversified into egg farming and now are facing these extra charges and pressures on those farms.

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (12.40 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you on your elevation to the position of temporary chairman, and I wish you all of the best.

It gives me great pleasure to rise to support the report for Estimates Committee E. Since our public hearing, which was held on 12 July 2005, of course both the former minister for primary industries and fisheries and the former minister for natural resources and mines have shifted to different portfolios. From the calibre of evidence that both ministers presented at the hearing it is clear to see why they have been promoted within the cabinet. I say congratulations to both ministers and their respective staff, both ministerial and departmental, on providing professional and concise responses to members' questions.

Compare Minister Palaszczuk's and Minister Robertson's masterly handling of their portfolios with the lacklustre performance of the ragtag bunch of bunglers opposite. It is no wonder that when I speak to people, including primary producers, in Queensland they have nothing but disdain for the once mighty National Party. Henry really is the farmers' friend and the new Minister for Health did not put a foot wrong during his tenure at Natural Resources and Mines.

Looking over the report that we are debating today, I commend to the House several budgeted highlights contained with the budget papers. Firstly, I will mention those relating to the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries followed by Natural Resources and Mines. Having travelled to Asia and South-East Asia a number of times, I have come to appreciate the high esteem in which Australian, and especially Queensland, produce is held in those markets. That is why it is pleasing that \$1.5 million has been allocated over the next three years to spearhead a horticultural export drive in partnership with industry and Asian markets. The many mango growers in the vicinity of my electorate are, I can assure the House, looking forward to accessing the burgeoning Chinese market.

I have previously spoken in this place about the wonderful prawns grown by Mr Rick Hobson and his Prawns North operation. Indeed, a number of fellow members joined me in sampling some of Rick's wares, much to the delight of their tastebuds. So it is gratifying to see funding of \$4 million to support the development of major aquaculture sectors. This developing industry will play an ever-increasing role in the supply of fresh seafood to various markets.

Then there is the large boost to DPIF Forestry to plant a further 1,000 hectares of hardwood plantations and 6,554 hectares of state owned softwood plantations. The protection of our primary industries from exotic diseases should be paramount in the minds of all Queenslanders. One has only to look at the havoc wrought on central Queensland citrus growers by citrus canker to see why this is so important. The Commonwealth must step up to the plate in this regard and do the job it claims to have a mandate to do: protect Australia and its citizens. That is why the state has to again take over this role and increase funding to provide confidence to markets and the community that our biosecurity risks are managed. The Asian bird flu, foot-and-mouth disease and various other threats must be kept out of our state, and the DPI is doing its job in this regard.

Finally, in relation to the Primary Industries portfolio, I would like to comment on the continued funding for development and innovation in the sugar industry. As a Home Hill boy, I am passionate about the future of this great industry and am pleased that the Beattie government is standing up for our canefarmers, mill workers and the thousands of Queenslanders who rely on sugar production. Finally, thanks to the member for Inala from the people of regional Queensland for his handling of this portfolio.

Turning now to Natural Resources and Mines, I would like to comment on the government's recognition of the importance of water and its conservation and prudent use. The harsh drought that has gripped Australia and most of Queensland over the last couple of years has forced our community to recognise the importance of this life-giving resource.

In relation to water conservation, the DNRM budget highlights make good reading. Major funding for water initiatives contained in the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program will cater for the future phenomenal growth in the south-east corner. Dam spillway upgrades are another major item in this year's budget. Indeed, as I have mentioned previously in this place, Ross River Dam, which is located within my electorate, will undergo rectification works valued at over \$90 million, with the state contributing some \$80 million. This dam provides water to the cities of Townsville and Thuringowa which, as the minister for local government and planning mentioned earlier this week, are growing faster than any other area in Queensland outside the south-east corner.

I would also like to apprise the House of interesting plans foreshadowed by the former minister for natural resources with regard to recycling of waste water so it can be used again for consumption. As I told the estimates hearing, I have consumed similar water in Singapore where it is labelled 'new water'. I believe the city of Toowoomba is looking closely at using reverse osmosis technology—

Mr Shine: That is right.

Mr WALLACE: I take the interjection from the member for Toowoomba North. He is a fine advocate for that fine city. That city will use that technology to get through this tough time with regard to water. I believe that other localities will use similar technology in the future as our population expands.

In the few seconds allowed me I congratulate fellow members, especially the member for Mackay and—

Time expired.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (12.45 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the consideration of the report of Estimates Committee E. I did not participate in this estimates committee hearing, but of course I have spoken on many occasions about my concerns with the direction that DPIF and DNRM are taking. I find it somewhat ironic that in his contribution the member for Thuringowa criticised the opposition for the way it handled itself during this estimates committee hearing, yet we have seen that the former minister for health, who was dumped because of his performance at an estimates committee hearing, has been foisted upon the farmers of this state in DPIF. Instead of criticising the opposition, the member for Thuringowa should think about where the real criticism should be directed. It certainly goes some way to showing the attitude of his government to the people who live outside of the south-east corner and the metropolitan cities across this state.

Time and time again we have seen DPIF and DNRM staff ripped out of our regional and rural communities. The member for Gregory enunciated quite clearly the problems that he has had. On many occasions I have stood in this parliament and relayed my concerns about the changes in both departments, particularly DNRM, from service delivery departments to regulatory departments. Sadly, I think that has been to their detriment. Those two departments have been respected for years and years, both within Australia and internationally.

We have seen the staff ripped out from our regional communities. They were there to assist producers, to make sure there was an efficient use of our resources and to help with the continued development of our primary industries and the sustainable development of our natural resources. That simply does not happen anymore. Now regulatory bodies have been put in place to police the myriad regulations that this government has put in place in both DPIF and DNRM. I think that is a great shame.

I have spoken about the concerns I have about the Pittsworth office of DNRM. We had a very experienced DNRM officer there who was able to achieve the most amazing advancements in environmental solutions on the inner southern downs that have ever been achieved when it comes to farming practices. This person was also responsible for the soil conservation work that was done on the Darling Downs. People like that are responsible for the implementation of things that are not particularly sexy, that do not grab the headlines and that do not grab the metropolitan media about environmental solutions to problems. However, they are tangible, real, effective solutions to what are very real environmental issues in relation to farming practices. Those farming practices have increased substantially, which was largely due to the work of that officer in Pittsworth and other extension officers around the state.

This government has ripped that position out and it has not been replaced. That officer retired and we do not have that position anymore. Now we have seen the same thing happen with a very longstanding, respected officer in the Warwick office who was able to provide vegetation and other extension advice to farmers. He has retired. What has happened? That position has disappeared. That is simply typical of what this government does when it comes to DPIF and DNRM. We are having to live with the consequences of it. We see headline-grabbing attempts to get environmental votes, but when it comes to real environmental outcomes and real achievements this government really does not give a damn. It withdraws those services and people and it turns them into police who are employed purely to look after the myriad regulations that have been put in place.

I would like to take some issue with both the member for Kallangur and the member for Mackay, who criticised the dissenting report. I say that there are limitations on the estimates committee hearing process. I do not think we can say that what we do now is the best outcome. We can learn a lot from what happens in the federal parliament, for example, where members can actually drill down and pursue a line of questioning without the three minutes starting again and without wasting the 20-minute block. By the time the allocated time is split in half and distributed among the government and opposition members, there is no time to drill down in some detail on those issues. The member for Kallangur said that government members also want to ask questions and should be able to pursue them to finality. I think that is a great idea. I think the government members should ask questions that have not been supplied to them by the minister so the minister does not have a briefing note. That would be really effective. I see some of the members opposite nodding. That is the way that we could make the estimates committee process effective. With the way it operates at the moment, we might as well as just table those questions and responses and leave the rest of the time to drilling into some detail. I remember seeing the former Treasurer thrown by a question that either he was not advised of or was ruled out of order. He was furious. That should happen more often.

Time expired.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (12.49 pm): It was a privilege for me to be part of Estimates Committee E, which reviewed the expenditure of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Primary industries and mining have always very much underpinned the budget of this vast state. As a member representing an urban area, it is very refreshing to be able to gain greater knowledge and understanding on issues relating to rural areas and to learn more of the measures undertaken to ensure the long-term protection and viability of our natural resources.

The Smart State philosophy has permeated many areas of endeavour in this state, and our rural industries are no exception. Although we have now been through many disastrous years of drought, nonetheless there are many reasons to have great hope for the future. Whether we are looking at forestry, crops—such as grain, sugar, fruit—horticulture, aquaculture, the meat industry, wool, wine production or our fisheries, we see new methods being used, scientific research being carried out to protect against disease and new drought resistant methods of growing crops.

Yesterday we enjoyed Science in Parliament, and I shared a table with officers from DPIF and the CSIRO. Scientific research has benefited our primary industries to a great degree and those who work in these departments are very dedicated to their important tasks. Australia has the advantage of distance when it comes to disease in crops and animals. However, we must be ever vigilant, and this department is a very important part of our protective work.

It was recently my great pleasure to take my father back to his birthplace of Longreach. His father was also born there, so our family connection to the area goes back to the late 1800s. My father is now almost 93. He moved to Brisbane with his family around the age of eight or nine. He has not been back to the area since that time. He and my mother are in good health and so we had a delightful few days visiting Longreach, Ilfracombe, Barcaldine and Winton. And, yes, we even met up with Minister Palaszczuk on our journey out there. The country had received rain, so there was a tinge of green across the pasture and water lying by the roadside.

A visit to the western regions of our state is a fantastic experience and, believe me, the grey nomads were there en masse. However, visiting the western areas of our state brings one face to face with the vastness of the land, the remoteness of those who live on the land and the reality of how tough one needs to be to endure droughts and floods and such things as citrus canker and low commodity prices.

Turning to Fisheries, I believe that our government has looked to the future sustainability of the industry, as well as the huge recreational sector, to protect this valuable resource.

Turning to my own electorate of Woodridge, our community is tremendously grateful for the measures being undertaken to eradicate fire ants. These tiny creatures have the potential to affect our outdoor style of living which we take so much for granted. I understand that progress has been positive but the search for the last fire ant goes on, and we wish the team great success.

Turning to Natural Resources, our very existence depends on protecting our water, land and vegetation. We face huge ecological challenges with global warming, along with the recently identified global dimming, water shortages and salinity. There are so many challenges which require urgent action. Managing water is obviously going to take many diverse measures. A number of new dams and weirs are planned, including weirs on the Mary and Logan rivers and a new dam at Wyaralong, as well as desalination, stormwater harvesting, recycling of waste water and, importantly, education of the urban masses, who I suspect do not understand the parlous nature of our water shortages.

Vegetation management has been a very long-running issue, which I am pleased to say that this government has taken serious measures to address. Much has been done to protect endangered species and the declaration of wild rivers has forged a new era in Australia. Pest management is also a very important issue, with our cane toad making advances into the Northern Territory and southern states. In addition, I believe that our native title issues are being dealt with in a far more equitable way and seem to be working well.

The mining industry in Queensland is again on the rise. Exploration is under way for petroleum, coal seam gas and geothermal energy sources. Much is once again being invested in the state to add to our export dollar for the world market. Our ports are being stretched to cope with the traffic of cargo.

I once again enjoyed this estimates process. I want to thank our very competent chairman, Tim Mulherin, committee members, parliamentary staff, as well as the ministers and departmental staff.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee F

Report

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lee): Order! The question is—

That the report be adopted.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (12.54 pm): I was delighted to have the opportunity to chair Estimates Committee F this year, which looked at the portfolio areas of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Energy; and Transport and Main Roads. They are all vital areas of concern for all Queenslanders, particularly in my part of the world. I have some policy interests that go deep into those areas.

I would like to thank, in particular, the ministers who were involved in the hearings, Ministers Lucas, Pitt and Mickel, their departmental staff and their own office staff, who all bent over backwards to ensure that the examination of these complex areas went through as smoothly as possible. I would also like to thank the secretariat staff, who again conspired to make the politicians on the committee look good. Steve Finnimore, Ali de Jersey, Andrea Musch and Siwan Davies all did an excellent job. They had to work harder with some than others; nevertheless, they did an excellent job. I would also like to thank my fellow committee members. The meetings of the committee were conducted very harmoniously and expeditiously. I would like to thank the members for Maroochydore, Greenslopes, Cook, Ferny Grove, Charters Towers and Gympie, as well as those other members who attended as guests of the committee.

I would like to make a couple of brief comments on some of the administrative aspects which are coming through today in some of the statements made by various members, in particular about statements of reservations. I, too, am of the view that pro forma statements of reservations add nothing to the debate in this place and, indeed, are something of an abuse of process. Watching opposition members put in pro forma statements of reservations identical in each case really does not help anything at all. Indeed, it takes away from the importance of this process and the bipartisanship that is an important part of growing accountability mechanisms which this parliament is still learning about. This is still a new process. We have had estimates hearings only since 1994, and I think we are all learning.

In particular, there was perhaps only one moment of difficulty in my hearings which was in relation to the Energy portfolio when the member for Callide appeared as a guest of the committee and had some difficulty asking the questions that he wanted to ask. I ruled them out of order because they were not in relation to the ministerial portfolio statements which we were examining. I made that ruling and that ruling stood. No-one challenged it. The opposition and non-government members of the committee had taken the opportunity to go home. Again, I think it is a little disappointing to complain about questions not being allowed when the person writing the statement of reservations had actually left. Having said that, I again thank everyone who was involved and commend the report of the committee to the House.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.58 pm): I was going to thank the chairman for his chairmanship, and I will with regard to the committee meetings. But I have to correct the record because there is nothing pro forma about my statement of reservations, and I urge him to read it. I did note that the time for Transport and Main Roads had been cut back by the government with regard to this estimates process.

A government member: It was cut back by the committee.

Miss SIMPSON: No, it was not cut back by the committee. I opposed the time frame for Transport and Main Roads and I made it quite clear that there had been a cutback. The government members tried to dispute that but it was noted for the record, and I note now on the parliamentary record, as per my statement of reservations, that last year over four hours, nearly five hours, were allocated to the Transport and Main Roads portfolio. This year only three hours were allocated to the Transport and Main Roads portfolio in the estimates process.

I believe that is extremely disappointing considering that the three hours is then cut in half and there is only really an hour and a half which is available for the scrutiny of the Transport and Main Roads proportion of the portfolios in this estimates process. That was something that I strongly disagreed with, and I restate my disagreement in this forum, as I have previously done in the committee. No-one should be under a misunderstanding that there was any agreement to that, because that is not correct.

What we saw with Main Roads was a number of very important issues, and one was the issue of the stone mastic asphalt surface near Federal, south of Gympie. Finally, the government announced that it was going to bring forward the resurfacing of this road to this year—it was due to commence next year—due to the safety concerns with regard to that road surface. This is something that we called for. It is amazing that at the time the government said that it would do it next year and that seemed to be a satisfactory time frame, but after the weight of public concern and the concerns that we raised the government brought it forward. I am pleased that it has been brought forward, because it was the department itself that released the documents that said that this road surface at this location was dangerous. That then set in train our questioning regarding where else it has been used, and we wanted some independent checking of that process.

During the estimates hearing I tabled departmental minutes which established that the department's technical experts report into these issues—being the stone mastic asphalt and other issues—already exists and was reviewed by senior management on 30 June 2005. I requested that the minister provide that report, and the answer provided to the estimates committee was that it was a draft and therefore more work was being done on that draft. We are still waiting to see the final report or reports released.

I am calling on the minister once again to release these reports. Make them public. Do not just put out a press release saying that everything is fine. We have seen from the way that this government has acted to date that is not the case. We also provided documentation to the estimates process about an internal departmental memo or minute which showed that there was concern about the replacement of timber bridges, and it was not being progressed in accordance with risk assessment, meaning that some bridges which are of higher risk are being kept in place while lower risk infrastructure is being replaced. This is also a public safety issue and we will continue to pursue this.

The almost mythical Tugun bypass issue was raised, and on the basis of the minister's response it appears that there is little prospect that any meaningful construction of the bypass will be achieved in this current financial year. That continues to be a major issue of concern.

I am pleased that the Sunshine Motorway bridge has been brought forward by 12 months. That is something that I have lobbied hard for, and it has been a major issue of contention on the Sunshine Coast. We will continue to scrutinise the delivery of that project given that an existing duplication process between Maroochydore Road and Buderim Avenue is currently not finished and was due to be finished in January this year. Quite frankly, continuing to blame the weather just does not wash.

There is another issue that I would like to put on the record regarding the Ipswich Motorway in Toowong and the capacity issues which were raised. The minister advised that the only proposal to upgrade capacity of that infrastructure will be the addition of bus transit lanes in each direction. Current infrastructure documents indicate that the construction of these lanes will not commence before 2009.

Time expired.

Sitting suspended from 1.04 pm to 2.30 pm.

SITTING DAYS AND HOURS; ORDER OF BUSINESS

Sessional Order

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (2.30 pm): I advise honourable members that the House can continue to meet past 6.30 pm this day. The House can break for dinner at 6.30 pm and resume its sitting at 7.30 pm. The order of business shall be government business followed by a 30-minute adjournment debate.

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL****Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)****Appropriation Bill****Estimates Committee F****Report**

Resumed from p. 2385.

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (2.30 pm): I rise to speak in relation to Estimates Committee F. I start by making a general comment about the estimates process. I know that there has been some ongoing comment after this round of estimates about the future of estimates committees and their function. I think in general we have to say that the estimates process is still a fundamentally valuable process. Whether the opportunity is availed of, the estimates process itself is extremely important to ensure that people do have the opportunity to raise matters in relation to this very central element of the governmental process—that is, the budgetary process itself. Perhaps there is some scope to streamline that.

I think it is important that we continue to debate this. The estimates process is one of the fundamental reforms that came out of the post-Fitzgerald era through the nineties. It is important that we continue to revisit this particular process to evaluate how it is working and to see how we might improve upon it. I certainly encourage any reconsideration of that.

Estimates Committee F dealt with the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, and the Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. I am personally very pleased with the very concrete outcomes from each of these portfolios in my own electorate and as I see them impacting upon the state.

In relation to the department of transport in particular, I was very pleased with the minister's exposition of the young drivers DVD package. I am a parent who, over the next couple of years, is about to go through the process of having a daughter apply for a licence and go through those very worrying stages. The feedback I have had about this package from people who have seen it is that it is incredibly good. It will engage young drivers at the most important time—when they first get their licence. It will make sure that they are very conscious of what confronts them and start to educate those young drivers about the most important aspects of their own safety and the safety of those who travel with them.

In terms of my own electorate, we are continuing to build upon the tremendous infrastructural reforms that have been put in place in the past decade including the busway. We can see that more major changes are planned in terms of the south-east Queensland transport plan, the rail corridors in south-east Queensland et cetera. These will build on the gains that we have already made.

I was also very pleased with the work being done by the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. I have a particular interest in the Queen Alexandra Home community centre. When the member for Mulgrave first became the minister he visited that great facility and was able to meet with local groups. I am pleased that there is ongoing work there regarding ways in which his department can enhance ways of engaging members of the community and supporting members of the community, particularly seniors. That work is ongoing. The budget gives every encouragement to ensure that there are adequate programs in place so that we can assist in some of those areas.

The Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy conducted himself admirably, as did his staff. We have a long way to go, as we all know, in terms of advancing reconciliation—

Time expired.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (2.35 pm): First and foremost, I would like to thank the chair and members of Estimates Committee F for allowing me to ask questions in relation to the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. I am very grateful for that.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is a very important department. There are a lot of people who are pretty quick to judge, pretty quick to criticise and pretty quick to make statements without thinking them through in relation to this department. While Indigenous people make up only two per cent to three per cent of our population, they are people and they deserve to be treated as such. One of the best things that has happened in recent times is that those communities have come under the department of local government, which gives the Indigenous people direction, purpose and autonomy in more ways than one. This is probably one of the better ways that we can see reconciliation working—seeing those people being treated as equals. Whilst countless millions of dollars have been wasted in those communities over the years, two wrongs do not make a right.

I was very privileged to be selected by the Premier to be on the Palm Island Select Committee. For two or three months the members of that committee have agonised over trying to get genuine outcomes to see how we can make the lives of our Indigenous brothers and sisters better. I think once that committee hands down its report we will see some very real outcomes and statements that I believe will be a template for the enhancement of other communities.

On Tuesday I mentioned international Indigenous day. The issue of housing will always be of great interest to Indigenous people. There are things such as native title and other ways of trying to improve the lot of Indigenous people through Indigenous land use agreements. Whilst not a lot of this has been resolved, I think governments of both persuasion and parties, whether they are in opposition or government, have to show some genuine commitment to getting that outcome so that we break down that barrier between black and white.

Another of my areas of responsibility is corrective services. Many of the women prisoners at Stuart Prison and Lotus Glen prison are Indigenous. Many of them have been driven there, because of alcohol or substance abuse, by the male members of their communities, whether as a result of resentment to being sexually, physically or mentally abused or their children being subjected to that type of treatment. Together we have to look very closely at how we can get genuine outcomes to make these communities better.

I know that the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is genuine about this. I have spoken with his director-general and other members of his department about this. It concerns me greatly that in the past we have seen dollars squandered there. I believe that we need some financial administration and support to assist these people in making certain that their dollars are going into the right areas for the right reasons. I am talking here about genuine outcomes for good health services, women's health issues, child health and also in areas of education.

Once we can break down those barriers I believe we are going to see significant purpose come from these people who genuinely want to be a part of mainstream Australia—mainstream Queensland, more importantly. We can do that together. We can only do it by constructive positive criticism, not by the negative criticism that has been going on since time immemorial. I come from an area where Indigenous people are a very important part of my life. I have to say that many of them are out there having a big go. I can show you many non-Indigenous people who are absolute derelicts; they are not even having a go. We cannot point the finger at one side and not the other. We have to put that arm out to bring them together. As a result of this, I think we have a genuine outcome here and I hope that we can see some changes and some improvements in their lot in the coming year.

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (2.40 pm): It certainly was an unbridled pleasure to participate in the estimates committee for 2005. As a member of this parliament who strongly believes in the scrutiny of the executive, whether that executive be a Labor executive, a National Party executive or a coalition executive, I believe that a crucial role of the parliament is not just its representative role but also its role in scrutinising the executive. Obviously, there are a number of mechanisms that are available to members of parliament to scrutinise the executive outside of the estimates committee.

There has been some criticism of that process during the debate that we have had over the last couple of days. I think honourable members opposite sometimes forget that there are a range of mechanisms that they have available to them within this democracy to ask questions of relevant ministers and to get the information that they are seeking from the relevant departments: they have questions on notice, questions without notice during the parliamentary sitting day, annual reports from departments, auditors reports. There is a whole range of checks and balances that are available to members of the opposition and to all members of parliament to ensure that the executive is making the proper and correct decisions in regard to resource allocations and policy directions for the people of Queensland. The estimates committee is just one of the tools that the opposition has in its kit bag in order to put ministers under the spotlight.

Unfortunately, a lot of that time in Estimates Committee F was wasted, I thought. There could have been a broader range of questions asked on a whole heap of matters, but certain members certainly seemed to want to concentrate on a few issues without really getting into the detail of some of the things that I think they should have been concentrating on. Members opposite seem to think that scrutiny must be negative; that when scrutinising the executive they must be negative in their approach, that they must look to catch out ministers and find shortcomings. But I think scrutiny also includes allowing the government to show some of the positive things that it is doing.

I think that if we are fair and reasonably minded we would recognise that over a range of portfolios, including the three portfolios that Estimates Committee F scrutinised, there is a range of government initiatives that are doing great things out in the community. I think members opposite could have positively scrutinised some of those initiatives, like the one the member for Greenslopes was talking about in relation to Transport and the young drivers CD. There was a real opportunity for members opposite to build on the work that the department has been doing to perhaps ensure that that CD was available to a wider range of people rather than just those who are getting their first licence. Instead, the opposition wanted to concentrate on stone mastic asphalt.

I have to tell members that in my part of the world where we have stone mastic asphalt on the Captain Cook Highway, it is playing a part in reducing traffic accidents. We have stone mastic asphalt being put down on roundabouts at Machans Beach, Holloways Beach and other sections of the Captain Cook Highway. That is a highway that goes between Cairns and Port Douglas. It is a very scenic route. In fact, the *Australian* once listed it as one of the top 10 scenic drives in Australia. There has been incredible work done to upgrade it over the last four to five years, including the laying of stone mastic asphalt, and the improvements have reduced the traffic incidents on that highway considerably.

So while the opposition wants to see that particular service as a negative, and I understand there have been some problems with it in Gympie, it is not across-the-board. There are some instances where the surface is working and is giving real benefits to Queensland drivers. I think that if the opposition had waited for the expert to report before wanting to attack the minister on the use of that particular surface, they may have given themselves a better opportunity to provide better scrutiny on other issues.

There are so many other things that we talked about, but time is running short. I certainly commend both the minister for communities, Warren Pitt, and Mr Mickel for their efforts. It was great to see Warren back on deck and as sharp as a tack in answering his questions. In fact, the member for Charters Towers commented a couple of times on how he agreed with the minister.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (2.46 pm): I welcome this opportunity to speak to the estimates debate and at the outset I thank the panel of Estimates Committee F for allowing me to be part of that process. In particular, I would like to speak about the Department of Communities in the area of Seniors. It is a significant and forward step that the Queensland government has recognised the importance of seniors; as have all levels of government and the community certainly recognised how important seniors are to our community. This new portfolio for seniors has made some considerable steps. Seniors, as I said, are an extremely important part of the community, they make a huge contribution, and it is important and pleasing that we do acknowledge that contribution.

Over and over we hear figures on how we are becoming an ageing community—I guess I am starting to join that ageing community—and how the retirement age for active workers will rise rather than fall. I think this is important. But more importantly, the level of health care and the knowledge of health matters is improving every year, to the extent that people can expect a longer and healthier life on average than previous generations.

The Queensland Seniors Card is certainly appreciated by members of the community. I noted that the cost of administering the Seniors Card was in the financial breakdown of the costs. The real cost to the state of the Seniors Card would be significant. I am unaware of what those costs are and I am not aware whether those costs have been made public. They would be significant bearing in mind the concessions that are based on this. However, regardless of the cost, I believe that the Seniors Card is very worth while. The Seniors Card provides some concessions to independent retirees. This is a group of people who are unable to access most of the concessional benefits that are available to age pensioners. The Seniors Card is one of the few privileges available to them.

I encourage the government to look towards enlarging those concessions for independent retirees to bring these closer in line to those available to pensioners. Whereas a small proportion of independent retirees may be able to look forward to a financially comfortable retirement, the majority of our independent retirees cannot. This is an area of people who must not be disregarded and all of us must put much more effort towards encouraging future self-funded retirees. Our independent retirees have worked very hard all their lives to provide for their security in retirement and as such are relieving the government of this responsibility. It is a significant responsibility they have actually relieved the government from and they do require every encouragement from us at all levels.

Our independent retirees have worked very hard all their lives to provide for their security in retirement and as such are relieving the government of this responsibility. It is a significant responsibility they have actually relieved the government from and they do require every encouragement from us at all levels. The proportion of aged people to younger people is growing at a very fast rate, and, as we know, more so in Queensland as we welcome so many from the southern states. Various projected figures show that by the year 2020 in Queensland there are likely to be just over 2.4 people in the work force to every one person over the age of 65. It is quite obvious that at that proportion provision of the aged pension will become almost impossible and every encouragement must be given to people to provide for their own retirements. There are many more incentives that could be made available to this group of people.

Recently as part of a presentation on non-profit organisations I was very interested in figures quoted by Professor Chris Ryan from QUT in Brisbane. Non-profit organisations make a huge contribution to the total Australian economy. Their contribution to the gross domestic product is \$21 billion, which makes up 3.3 per cent of the GDP. The sector involves well over half a million people and there are over four million volunteers involved. The majority of volunteers of course are drawn from the retired population, and the contribution that seniors as volunteers make to their community locally, statewide and nationally could be measured in very significant terms. I salute them all and I certainly commend their further efforts.

Major issues that affect our magnificent seniors are health, safety and quality of life. To obtain many of these services, access to services is one of the first priorities. Of course, access requires transport. This is often an issue that in smaller communities can present many difficulties. Most of our smaller communities do not have ready access to buses, often not even to taxis.

Time expired.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (2.51 pm): The Beattie government is committed to a first-class transport system that serves all Queenslanders. This government provides international standard road, rail, public transport, port infrastructure and even airstrips in remote areas. I welcome scrutiny of our budgets for Queensland Transport and Main Roads because we have a good story to tell. I thank the estimates committee for its interest in relation to the debate in what is a very important part of the democratic process. We are providing a record \$2.83 billion for capital investment works with a heavy emphasis on transport infrastructure, including \$1.4 billion provided through port authorities and QR to build coal export capacity and \$1.1 billion for state controlled roads.

I now want to return to general portfolio issues for Queensland Transport and QR. This year we provided a \$1.58 billion capital expenditure for QT, 44 per cent more than last financial year. This includes \$500 million for port and airport development, \$410 million directly for coal transport infrastructure, and \$360 million for capital investment and public transport. Our funding supports trade growth, the creation of new jobs, regional development and it produces upbeat communities.

Committee members have asked about specific programs and activities. Major funding allocations for rail include \$760 million for upgraded and new rail infrastructure and more rolling stock throughout Citytrain, freight and coal haulage and long distance passenger services; nearly \$152 million on the metropolitan train network; and the first full-year funding for a \$212 million contract in Maryborough for 24 three-car electric trains for Citytrain. In the area of passenger transport, we are providing more than \$306 million for the Inner Northern Busway. There is almost \$28 million towards integrating bus, rail and ferry services. Some \$27 million is being provided for a new eastern busway from Buranda to Boggo Road and the green bridge. More than \$18 million is available for bus priority measures in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast, and \$8.7 million is provided over three years for public transport in regional Queensland. In ports, around \$215 million is provided for an expansion at Gladstone. There is more than \$160 million for works at the port of Brisbane. We have earmarked \$72.5 million for developments at Cairns airport and for the city's waterfront renewal scheme, Cityport. There is also \$50 million for expansion at Abbot Point.

The opposition is always vocal when it comes to attacking the Beattie government over roads, but it is silent to the point of inaudibility when it comes to taking on the federal government and its poor record of road funding in Queensland. The other day the opposition leader was defending Barnaby Joyce for having a go at the federal Liberal Party, and that is fair enough. That is quite appropriate. But where is the Leader of the Opposition or indeed the shadow spokesperson when it comes to the Ipswich Motorway? I have not heard them say once that the federal government needs to spend any money. When have we ever heard them when it comes to the issue of the Telstra sale? We do not want Telstra sold, but if it is sold where is the money for regional roads in Queensland in places like Townsville? Where is the money for the second range crossing in Toowoomba? I would have thought that that was classic National Party homeland territory. So Barnaby Joyce is happy in the federal Senate to get out there and put it on the feds, but Lawrence Springborg has gone missing in action.

Campbell Newman is prepared to put it on the federal government when it comes to important state and city responsibilities, but Lawrence Springborg is again siding with the Liberal Party federally. Why is that? It is because he wants to take over Bruce Scott's seat and go to Maranoa. It is all about Maranoa—not about the people of Queensland but all about Maranoa and his preselection, and that is extremely disappointing.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr LUCAS: It does not care about it. It is so interested in Redcliffe it did not even run anyone. In the past the National Party held the seat of Redcliffe, but it is now so interested in it that it has not done that this time.

In relation to some of the matters raised in the estimates report, in the roads portfolio Main Roads has instigated a wide range of investigations to improve safety on the Bruce Highway near Federal. Again, of course, ultimately it is about a bypass of Gympie. I look forward to hearing something said about that from the other side of the House. Investigations include a road safety audit into the Bruce Highway south of Gympie as well as a review of the appropriateness of stone mastic asphalt use in Queensland. On Tuesday I announced that work has begun to replace the stone mastic asphalt surface at Federal. Main Roads has also been able to fast-track this project by five months, finishing in November this year, weather permitting.

As I also informed the House on Tuesday, Main Roads has accelerated its audits of streetlights owned by the department across the state. These audits will be completed over the course of next

month. The most recently completed audit in the Gold Coast district did not identify any serious defects. As I indicated the other day, I treat this matter extremely seriously and it is a matter of great importance. If we do not comply with the Electrical Safety Act, very serious consequences can happen. There has been action to replace timber bridges in Queensland. Some \$18 million was allocated in the 2005-06 budget to begin the \$88 million Accelerated Road Rehabilitation Program. There is a lot of other good news, but I will leave it for another time.

Time expired.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.56 pm): I rise today to make my contribution in the debate on the report of Estimates Committee F. I was a member of the estimates committee and I want to place on record my thanks to the chair and all other members of the committee, the research director and the Hansard and parliamentary staff who all put in a great deal of hard work to make the estimates committee run smoothly. That being said, I believe there is considerable room to reform the estimates committee process so that non-government members are able to properly scrutinise the government of the day.

During the committee hearings I asked the minister how many families in rural and remote areas were unable to regularly access respite services. The minister was unable to provide the relevant information to me at that time, and I am hoping that the minister will address this issue. While I recognise that the minister and his department face unique challenges in providing respite services to rural and remote families, I simply cannot emphasise strongly enough how important this is to those families. As a member representing a large rural electorate, I would hope that we see greater endeavours by the government on this matter in the future.

It also concerns me greatly that there is an extremely high level of unmet needs in the community. The government needs to allocate additional funding for children with disabilities. We are all aware of the great benefits of early intervention and the profound impact that early support can have in later life. Children are often neglected in the funding maze or lost amongst the desperate bids for resources within the disability sector. Sadly, this means that some children are not able to receive the appropriate treatment and support that they desperately need. Currently, funding allocated by the state government to services for children with disabilities makes up just 26 per cent of the Disability Services budget. Many service providers receive only marginal funding to assist children and, while I welcome any funding grants that target adults, it is a heartbreaking situation turning children away who are in need because they are not funded to provide those services. This is particularly tragic as we are all aware of the enormous benefits that early support can have on a child's entire life.

There is also a need for improvement in service for adults with disabilities. Many families and individuals who have approached me have told me of their difficulty in accessing support, particularly the adult lifestyle support package. I believe that every attempt should be made to assist Queenslanders with disabilities. There is also a large, eminent need for training programs for people in dealing with all types of disabilities, and the need for accommodation and respite is essential in these rural and remote areas. Many people in my electorate are forced to travel long distances to access services that are not available in their area. I directed a number of questions to the minister about the Disability Services registration of need database and I was very concerned about the high number of priority 1 and priority 2 clients who were not receiving the support that they required.

This is a critical issue that the government must address. I raised a number of issues with the minister, including the extremely high rate of abuse at the Basil Stafford Centre, the long-term care options for young people in nursing homes, funding for schools, festivals and funding to assist problem gamblers.

I would like to comment on an issue that I have raised with the minister regarding youth detention centres. I recognise that these detention centres have a responsibility to reform, retain or re-educate those youths who have gone off the rails and put them on a path of being responsible members of our community. I am aware that there is a considerable issue with youth crime in my electorate. Unfortunately, many youths do not see detention as any form of a deterrent. During the hearing I made the minister aware that for some young people detention was almost considered a rite of passage. I do not endorse the glorification of youth detention. I think the minister must address this issue if he truly wants to address the problems in relation to the juvenile justice aspect of his portfolio.

I believe we need to investigate the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. It is known as 'Camp Cleveland'—a place which provides good food, games and new track shoes. Spending time there is regarded as a badge of honour among youth. The Cleveland Youth Detention Centre should be a deterrent for juvenile crimes. However, it has become a place where, to get into it, juveniles are prepared to steal, destroy property and become a public nuisance and inflict serious bodily harm on people. People need security. They need a guarantee from the state government that everything possible will be done to protect their lives, their property and their safety.

In closing, I would like to thank the member for Burdekin for her valuable contribution on a number of seniors issues, on which she will comment—and has commented. I would also like to thank the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors for his contribution.

Hon. FW PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors) (3.01 pm): I thank the shadow spokesperson, the member for Charters Towers, for his contribution today. I can assure him that at some time when we both have a little more time I will take the time out to educate him on the good work that is being done at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and perhaps straighten out a few of the misconceptions that he may have in respect of that facility.

Estimates committees are a very important part of our democratic process in Queensland. Although at times some people can express a certain cynicism about the estimates process, it still represents a great opportunity for members of parliament and the public to learn more about the details of government programs and budgets. When the process is treated seriously, it is an effective way of ensuring that we remain accountable to the public.

I would like to put on record today my appreciation of the efforts of both the government and the non-government members on Estimates Committee F who took part in the hearings for the Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland. I would also like to thank the member for Burdekin, who also took part in her capacity as the opposition spokesperson for seniors. I think it was clear that all the members who participated took their responsibilities very seriously.

Since both my departments deal with some of the most vulnerable people in our community, this was very reassuring. Those vulnerable people deserve no less. I told the committee I was very proud of the government's commitment to both my departments as shown through very significant funding increases in this year's budget. The budget for Disability Services Queensland and the budget for the Department of Communities shows that the Beattie government is a government with heart. We are delivering on core Labor values while maintaining the Beattie government's commitment to responsible economic management.

The budget for Disability Services Queensland for this financial year was again a record allocation, bringing spending on Disability Services to more than half a billion dollars for the first time. This is indeed a great achievement. Funding for this financial year has been boosted by \$68.5 million over last year's allocation. That will make a real difference to the lives of many Queenslanders with a disability, their families and carers.

In relation to the Department of Communities, a total budget of \$358.7 million has been allocated this financial year. Again, that very significant allocation reflects the Beattie government's commitment to building strong communities and improving the quality of life for all Queenslanders wherever they live. A key component of that commitment is \$24.3 million allocated over the next four years for a new initiative, the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations project. This project aims to find better ways to provide practical support to organisations that deliver services funded by my departments. This initiative is about helping NGOs become stronger and ultimately provide more and better services to Queenslanders. I will be launching this very important project in Toowoomba next week.

Once again, let me say how pleased I was to have the opportunity to appear before the committee and answer members' questions about my departments. I understand that the shadow spokesperson felt that some questions were not answered in their entirety during the estimates committee process and I note that he put some of them on notice in this House. He will receive full and comprehensive responses to those questions. I thank the members of the committee for their forbearance. I thank the officers of my departments for the effort they put into preparing me for the estimates committee process and for providing information in answer to questions that were placed on notice by members of the opposition.

I am very proud of my departments' achievements. I am extremely proud of this government's commitment to vulnerable Queenslanders, as evidenced by this year's budget. As we roll out the extra funding contained in this year's budget for both the Department of Communities and DSQ, I give a guarantee that I will keep members informed of how Queenslanders and their communities are benefiting.

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (3.05 pm): The portfolios of both Energy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy play critical roles in the day-to-day lives of Queenslanders throughout the state. A number of key items were discussed during our estimates committee hearing. I am happy to provide some of those highlights.

In the DATSIP portfolio, the main focus of the questions was obviously the alcohol management plans. As I did in this House earlier this week, I welcome the keen interest in the alcohol management plans. Mr Deputy Speaker, I know you feel this first-hand in your electorate. I commended you in the estimates committee hearing. I do so again today. I also welcome the bipartisan support for our programs at state, local and federal levels from the member for Gregory, who indicated that the member for Callide, who sadly is not with us today, is also supportive, and from the member for Charters Towers. The only discordant note was from the Leader of the Opposition. I pointed that out in this House. I stand by it. It is a shame that we have bipartisanship except from one person in this House—the Leader of the Opposition. It is hard to see why these plans would not be supported, given the extensive study by Tony Fitzgerald which showed that to do nothing was simply not an option.

I would also like to mention the issue of wage reparations where the Queensland government is taking the lead in extending the reconciliation process. To date, the government has paid \$15.86 million in individual reparation payments as part of the Indigenous wages and savings reparations process.

I turn to the Energy portfolio. We continue to face three challenges: population growth, economic growth and growth in airconditioning. Of course, the first two we are happy to have. Anybody would be happy to have a state where people are willing to come to it and where there is great economic growth. Electricity consumption will continue to rise over the next 10 years at an average rate of 3.2 per cent annually, outstripping our southern counterparts. Well positioned to manage this growth is the fleet of electricity generators which are the youngest and among the most efficient in Australia. We deliver internationally competitive electricity prices and we have an internationally competitive industry. How do I know this? Because we have international companies that are wanting to invest and are investing in our state.

The government has responded quickly to the recommendations of the Somerville report and will continue to ensure the significant investment required to maintain a reliable supply of electricity to Queenslanders through the state's transmission and distribution networks. I note that the member for Maroochydore placed a statement of reservation in the report of Estimates Committee F about the hearing into the Department of Energy. I do not quibble with the statement of reservation. There was only one problem with it and that is that the honourable member was placing a reservation when she did not even bother to attend that part of the hearing.

Miss SIMPSON: I rise to a point of order. The minister is misleading the House. I was present at the hearing. I had delegated in the afternoon for the shadow minister for energy to ask questions, but he cannot lodge a statement of reservations.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr MICKEL: The member for Maroochydore was not there. The point of order princess was not there. That is the point.

The reservation was about the Somerville report. The member for Callide wanted to ask me about the Somerville report in relation to the late Mr Maddock. There is one little problem with that—only one. The Somerville report came out on 26 July 2004—a month before I was appointed Minister for Energy on 25 August and two months before the untimely death of the former CEO. This is a Somerville report about distribution done by a chartered accountant. Mr Somerville was not Nostradamus. He did not know about the untimely death or the actions of the former CEO two months before his death.

For 20 minutes the member for Callide opposite went on about a distribution program. What does she ever read? I look at the question on notice that the honourable member for Maroochydore asked me about Powerlink. She asked, 'Tell us about the network distribution of Powerlink.' They are a transmission company. Page 43 of the report would reveal that. No wonder she did not show up. I do not mind that. I can understand it. I would not show up either if that was all I knew. They delegated it to the poor old thing from Callide who is no longer with us.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee G

Report

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! The question is—

That the report of Estimates Committee G be adopted.

Mr POOLE (Gaven—ALP) (3.11 pm): I rise in this House to speak to the report of Estimates Committee G. I had the privilege and honour of once again chairing an estimates committee, this time being G, and being responsible for reporting certain proposed expenditures for the portfolios of Tourism, Fair Trading and the state's wine industry; Emergency Services; and, lastly, Environment, Local Government and Women.

The first thing I noticed during the hearing was how knowledgeable and competent the minister's staff are. I take this opportunity to thank all those involved for their contributions, from the director-general to personnel who are drafted for the hearings to give an expert insight into what they may be asked.

I take this opportunity also to compliment Meg Hoban, the research director on Estimates Committee G, for her hard work and special desire for nothing to be left to chance. It seems that the research team do all the work and we all get to look good. Thanks also to the executive assistant, Carolyn Heffernan, for her enthusiasm.

I also take this opportunity to tell members of the chamber how impressed I and other government members on the committee were with how the ministers handled the hearing. It was wonderful to see how Chris Cummins, Margaret Keech and Desley Boyle approached their portfolios. I

suppose there is some sadness in Minister Cummins leaving a portfolio of which he had so much knowledge and backing. I was also impressed with how prepared they were for the cheap shots from the opposition and how they protected their staff from being targets. I read with amazement the statement of reservation of Ian Rickuss in which he stated that he was not allowed to pull stunts for a press grab by asking totally irrelevant questions of a particular director-general when all in the room realised he was only kite flying and trying to be recognised as some kind of head kicker. I was disappointed as he appeared to me to be just a big, warm, fuzzy kind of guy. Looking at some of the words he used in his statement I would say that he probably did not write it himself, anyway.

The estimates hearings exist to enable honourable members to examine expenditure and the budget. If the opposition takes umbrage with me keeping them focused, so be it. I thank my committee, which comprised my deputy chair, the aspiring Speaker, Mr Ted Malone, the member for Mirani; the member for Ipswich West, Don Livingstone; Carryn Sullivan, the member for Pumicestone; Paul Hoolihan, the member for Keppel; Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer; and of course 'Mr Consistency' Peter Wellington, the member for Nicklin. I commend this report to the House.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.14 pm): Before actually speaking to the Estimates Committee G report, I would like to table additional information provided by the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women relating to the estimates expenditure referred to in Estimates Committee G.

Leave granted.

Mr MALONE: It was also my pleasure to be part of Estimates Committee G in conjunction with others on the committee and to be deputy chair of that committee. As previous members have said, a number of statements of reservation were made, one of which was made by me. I was concerned, as all members of the House are, about the local government boundaries in Queensland. I respect the fact that the government is providing funding to enable local government areas to look at their boundaries and to come up with some issues that may or may not be able to be accommodated in terms of providing more sensible boundary changes and to try to do that in a cooperative manner. Unfortunately, the minister was not able to clarify for the committee exactly what position the government would hold at the end of the consultation process in terms of the government making moves to forcibly ensure that boundaries were changed and the local government areas were amalgamated. That was one issue about which I was concerned.

Another issue that concerned me relates to the Aboriginal and Islander local government authorities that have been set up in recent times to, hopefully, become in some way self-sufficient. As we move forward in this brave new age of trying to bring those communities online into the mainstream local government authorities, one would think there would be recognition of the fact that legislation et cetera has to be put in place in order for them to be self-sustaining.

The wild rivers legislation, which is currently before the House and will be debated at a later time, is going to have fairly large impacts on the ability of those communities to graze or to actually grow crops. A lot of those communities have substantial areas of good quality land that will be imposed upon by the current Vegetation Management Act. So they cannot afford to clear that land in order to become self-sustainable. People might say that perhaps they could become sustainable by—

Mr Cummins: This is estimates, then?

Mr MALONE: Absolutely! It relates to questions asked in estimates.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! I warn the honourable member. He is talking about bills that are currently before the House in terms of the Wild Rivers Bill. I warn the member not to anticipate debate.

Mr MALONE: I am reading from my statement of reservation.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That does not mean that the member can still anticipate debate.

Mr MALONE: The Vegetation Management Act was amended a year ago and impacts on the self-sustainability of local governments in the Islander communities. There are issues that are still unresolved. Other issues were raised, and they were very pertinent. I congratulate the minister on taking on board a lot of comments that were made.

A code of practice for local governments is something that is moving forward. I know it will not pertain to all of the six shires in my electorate because they are all well behaved and that is not going to be an issue. Just in case somebody is out there thinking that because they are a councillor they can upset the apple cart, this legislation will be helpful.

Water recycling and grey water use is a big issue and it needs to be addressed in a sensible way as we move into this—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! Again, the member is referring to a bill that is currently before the House.

Mr MALONE: I will refer to it as grey water then.

Mr Reeves: You wanted to be Speaker. You should know the law. Come on.

Mr MALONE: I am reading from my statement. I will talk about the grey water then. I am pretty safe in that area.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! No, the member is not. That is a bill that is currently before the House.

Mr MALONE: Let me say on reflection that we are all concerned about the water use in Queensland. I take on board the comments of the minister for local government in regard to that matter. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate.

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (3.19 pm): At the outset I thank all members of Estimates Committee G for their contributions to the debate of the report of the committee. I particularly thank the chair, the member for Gaven; the deputy chair, the member for Mirani; government members, the members for Keppel, Ipswich West and Pumicestone; and non-government members for the way in which they conducted themselves during the proceedings of Estimates Committee G.

It was my pleasure to present the expenditure of my portfolio for investigation to the committee. In particular, I was very proud that the Beattie government was again providing a record base budget for Tourism Queensland, as well as special purpose funding for marketing Brisbane, the outback and conventions. In particular, we have earmarked \$3 million for regional tourism organisations for this financial year. Funds from licensing arrangements negotiated for Tourism Queensland's commercial operations will be invested in international marketing initiatives, providing benefits for communities across Queensland. As we know, more international visitors to Queensland and more domestic visitors to Queensland mean more jobs for Queenslanders.

I am very excited about Queensland's first ever long-term tourism strategy, which I will be launching on the Gold Coast tomorrow. This is the government's blueprint for the sustainable development of our great tourism industry over the next decade. In fact, surprisingly, the Queensland tourism industry has never to date had a long-term industry strategy which has been supported by industry and which has been presented to cabinet. Tomorrow's regional workshop will be the first of 20 workshops to be held throughout Queensland. The strategy will be developed through intensive consultation with industry. I look forward to eventually presenting the strategy to cabinet.

The member for Mirani in his contribution indicated how important it is for Indigenous communities to be self-sustaining. Mr Deputy Speaker O'Brien, there is probably no-one in the House who understands that more clearly than yourself as the member for Cook. I have on many occasions in this House commended you personally for the courageous leadership that you have shown, leading your community through a challenging era at the present time.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Ms KEECH: I acknowledge the 'Hear, hear!' from the government members, and I know that they join with me in commending you for your leadership in your community. In fact, it was my great pleasure recently to travel to your electorate to look at tourism opportunities in Cape York. The additional tourism opportunities at Mapoon are really fantastic, and I commend you and the Mapoon community on what you are doing, particularly in relation to the turtle conservation project.

The Beattie government is also committed to protecting Queenslanders in a range of other ways. For example, the budget has allocated \$1 million for a liquor licensing flying squad—a rapid response unit which can be deployed anywhere at any time across Queensland. I have directed my Liquor Licensing Division to take a tough stance when it comes to licensees who are breaking the law. The great majority of licensees understand the responsibilities and always do the right thing by their communities and by the industry. Unfortunately, there is always one or two out there who give the rest of the industry a bad name. I commend the flying squad for their proactive compliance raids recently in both Rockhampton and Gladstone. The very pleasing part of those investigations shows that many licensees, as I indicated, are doing the right thing and that there were no problems with their compliance activities.

With respect to the Office of Fair Trading, it is a very busy time as usual for the OFT. It is progressing reviews of the Security Providers Act, the Retirement Villages Act, the Fair Trading Act, the Associations Incorporation Act and the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act. A very exciting project that it is progressing is the review of the Body Corporate and Community Management Act. I am very pleased that the Beattie government has allocated an additional \$1.6 million in recurrent funding for enhanced information and dispute resolution services for the community titles sector. In fact, when I finish addressing the House, I will be leaving the chamber to continue a meeting with the body corporate sector, particularly members from the Unit Owners Association of Queensland, the Community Titles Institute of Queensland and the Queensland Residents Accommodation Managers Association, to discuss with them the Beattie government's initiatives.

Time expired.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (3.24 pm): That this department has five or six different sections and some sections are open to questioning for only 20 minutes—that means that the opposition is given only 10 minutes for questioning—shows how ridiculous some of these estimates committee hearings have become. Each section has completely different personnel as they are completely different areas. The opposition has only 10 minutes in which to ask constructive questions, which means probably only two or three questions. Quite honestly, that is ridiculous and somehow or other we have to address that situation.

As the opposition was allowed only 10 minutes for two or three questions about an industry like the wine industry, about liquor licensing or about dispute resolution—they are very big divisions—obviously it was impossible to get anywhere. The other issue is whether strategic issues are enough to cover the whole department and whether the opposition should be allowed to ask questions about personnel. It is quite obvious that the Premier decided he would take questions covering the whole of his department. I noticed that then Deputy Premier did exactly the same. But in this department the minister continued to avoid questions regarding the role and performance of the director-general.

I know it was an extremely touchy issue, and obviously there is a reason for this. But here is a director-general who has been referred by the minister to the Public Service Commissioner on allegations of bullying. Here is a director-general being paid for out of the budget—a budget which we are investigating. We were asking about the role of the director-general. We were asking questions such as: has the director-general ever issued a direction to staff of the department, either verbally or in writing, that no member of staff is to have any contact with a member of parliament?

Ms KEECH: I rise to a point of order. The member is actually misleading the House. I did indicate that the director-general was fully able to respond to questions. However, the chair did make rulings that those questions were out of order because they were not questions relating to the budget.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr LINGARD: Clearly the minister did seek the support of the chair in making sure that these questions were not asked and certainly not answered. The department has to look at why people within this department are relaying this information to the opposition. Is this an example of the bullying of departmental staff that has occurred under the director-general and which is common in the Queensland Public Service? How many of the executive management team of the department were acting in their position during 2004-05 and how many were permanently appointed to their position? They are fair questions to ask at estimates hearings because they are about staffing arrangements.

Has there been an embargo on Public Service appointments within the minister's department in order to assist with budget management? That is a fair question. Did the director-general abolish meetings of the executive management team of the department and insist that they report directly to her to receive instructions? Here is a director-general who has been referred by the minister to the Public Service Commissioner on charges of bullying. Did the director-general insist that she was the only person who would brief the minister on matters and forbid members of the executive management team to brief the minister directly? How many senior managers of the department have resigned in the last 12 months? Is at least 13 correct? One would think that one would be able to have those questions answered at estimates.

What percentage of staff of the department are permanently occupying the position in which they are currently performing? Is it correct, as has been alleged from within the department, that approximately 50 per cent of the staff of the department are temporary appointees? If this is not true, what percentage of the staff of the department and its agencies are temporary employees? The opposition was unable to get any of those questions answered, but they are particularly relevant to this department.

I also refer to the concern about liquor management and liquor licensing within the Cape York area which is administered by this department. Continually when we ask for infrastructure that has been supplied by this government regarding the management of liquor within the Cape York area, the only answer we ever receive—and I have the answer here—is all of the community action plans that refer to the staffing within the Department of Health and what these staff will do.

Time expired.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (3.29 pm): Unlike the previous speaker, I had none of those concerns and I was very grateful this year to be part of the process of Estimates Committee G, which examined the Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development, the Department of Emergency Services—and I acknowledge the two ministers in the chamber—and the department of the environment, local government and women. I was pleased to be able to direct a number of questions to the relevant ministers, and I was very grateful for their most concise and detailed responses. I want to extend to them my appreciation for the time that they gave to the process and my appreciation to their staff. Their staff always keep the electorate of Pumicestone constituents up to date with everything that is going on. As I said, that is really appreciated.

Ms Keech interjected.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I thank the minister for that. These estimates hearings are a fairly lengthy process and we need a fair bit of patience, but it is important to remember one thing: they were set up by the Goss government in 1994. Prior to 1994 there was no accountability in government. There was not one single process that called for accountability in government. So I am really proud to be part of the Labor government that introduced that.

Ms Keech: So am I.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Thank you, Minister. Firstly, with regard to the Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development portfolio, I was privileged to be able to ask a number of questions of the minister about the wine industry—an industry which this government is very passionate about. The development of this most important industry over the past 10 years has been incredibly fast, and there is an opportunity to further promote it in the electorate of Pumicestone, which I represent, in the near future.

Bribie Island is an area that has been unable to attract big business. Even though there are many family businesses and light industry, there are unfortunately limited job opportunities. The minister knows how keen I am to promote tourism in this area so I found it of great interest when she recently told me that an Australian company, Vin Australis, is looking for a suitable site to set up on Bribie Island. Vin Australis is a multifaceted, permanent wine exhibition being developed to assist winemakers and restaurants. It has the potential to promote tourism by becoming a major tourist attraction. People would be able to sample many Australian wine vintages in one location and chefs would be able to access the facility to find the best wines for their menus. Vin Australis may also develop its own hospitality training, including a kitchen set up with television broadcast capabilities, and will promote regional tourism with tourist board representation and information about its cellars. I am hoping to meet the CEO, Roger Loose, and general manager, Ms Kyle McCutcheon, to explore further opportunities for job creation on Bribie Island.

The tourist budget has increased substantially, and the Beattie government is committed to ensuring that this vital industry continues to get the support it needs. I would like to thank Fair Trading for its continued and regular updates of scams. My constituents are pleased with the ongoing information, and the booklet called *Consumer Wise* has been well received.

With regards to Emergency Services, I must say that the Pumicestone electorate appreciates the minister, the Hon. Chris Cummins—

Mr Cummins: Former.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Sorry, the former minister for emergency services for his former regular visits.

Mr Lucas: They still appreciate him.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Obviously. The Hon. Chris Cummins attended the launching of the Caboolture East Safety Project and the commissioning of a new state-of-the-art ambulance in the past 12 months, and they have been very welcome additions to the area. I would also like to congratulate the Hon. Desley Boyle and her department. The Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women portfolio is in good hands.

I have recently been elected as the chair of the environment caucus committee and I am proud to be a part of the minister's team. I am a strong advocate for the environment and have been keen to support many legislative changes that have benefited it. The recent recreation area management plan which covers over 85 per cent of Bribie Island is a testament to this government's attitude to protecting the environment. I am keen to see more infrastructure and facilities in these areas and I will continue to lobby for this on behalf of residents. As I have done in the past, I congratulate and thank all those involved in the estimates committee process, particularly the chair, Mr Robert Poole, the member for Gaven; the research director, Mrs Meg Hoban; and the executive assistant, Ms Carolyn Heffernan.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (3.34 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak in the parliament to the report of Estimates Committee G and, in particular, to address some issues in regard to women's policy. It is a great year: we are celebrating 100 years of the vote for women in Queensland. As has been noted, while there are things to celebrate there are still many issues that we need to pursue in order to ensure that women have the best opportunities to live full, healthy and happy lives.

Ms Nelson-Carr: How many women have you got in the National Party?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! The member for Mundingburra!

Miss SIMPSON: This should not be a party political issue and I am very disappointed that is the way that the member wants to interject. I wanted to address an issue that should be one that is addressed across the community with a bipartisan approach.

Ms Nelson-Carr: Well you should have good representatives.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mundingburra will cease interjecting.

Miss SIMPSON: It has been 100 years since women gained the right to vote; have a little respect.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Maroochydore to address the chair.

Miss SIMPSON: We have women suffering from domestic violence—

Ms Nelson-Carr interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am disappointed that there are women in this House who are laughing about the issue of domestic violence. That is very poor and I am quite disgusted. This is an issue that should be approached in a bipartisan way, not in a frivolous manner by a member opposite. We have women in our community who need to have this issue addressed as a bipartisan issue. We do not need others trying to turn it into a frivolous matter. That is very disappointing.

I want to acknowledge the work of a group in our community on the Sunshine Coast. Its members put their hands in their pockets, went out into the community and got great support. They were able to build three houses to help domestic violence victims in the area of Noosa. I am referring to a church group that enlisted the wider support of the community along with Noosa Shire Council. Noosa COC along with Noosa Shire Council and numerous businesses recognise that the way forward on this issue is to address the issue across party lines, across the community; not with a face of abuse in the public arena and not with a face of abuse in private either.

I want to acknowledge the work that they did because I believe it is a model for other communities. The future is one where we value people; one where we recognise that there are those who suffer in private and they need public help to build the facilities and send a clear message that violence is not acceptable in any community. I believe that the work in this particular community deserves recognition. But there are other domestic violence services and other people across the Sunshine Coast and Queensland who are on the front line assisting women and men who are in times of trouble.

Sexual assault is also a matter of concern in our community. I am disturbed that there is still not an adequate, coordinated approach to help minimise the trauma of, firstly, when people go through sexual assault and, secondly, when they go through the legal process and the follow-up with government medical officers or GPs. I know that there have been attempts in the past to coordinate it, but they have fallen through. Many times there has been a lack of female GPs available to act as GPs, but there is altogether a lack of appropriately trained people on hand to ensure that the time frame it may take for women to be seen and consulted—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Maroochydore, I have given you some leeway but I would remind you of standing order 236 on relevance. I hope you will address the estimates before the House.

Miss SIMPSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I think you would understand that sexual assault against women is a women's policy issue, and this is something that has not been addressed in this estimates process. I think it is extremely relevant when it can take up to eight hours for a woman—or a man—to be seen by a GPMO to have the necessary tests in order to capture the evidence that may lead to a conviction.

Ms Nelson-Carr interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Mundingburra, I warned you before. This is my final warning.

Miss SIMPSON: This is a women's policy issue. It should not be a matter of partisan debate; it should be one which engenders cross-party support to ensure that there is a better way forward than the one the system currently provides. If it takes eight hours for a woman to have a shower after she has been raped because she cannot see a government medical officer in time, it is not good enough. I do not accept the words of those who have guffawed and carried on during this debate that it is good enough. I want to raise this in the House at this time because it is still a failing system. It has not been addressed in the budget. I do want to raise this matter with the minister and the government and say that as a parliament we need to do better.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (3.39 pm): I rise to speak to the report that has been tabled in the House and the conduct of the hearing of Estimates Committee G. I appreciated having the opportunity to be involved in the hearing process. I believe the estimates committee hearing process plays a very important part in the checks and balances of government in Queensland because, as I said earlier this morning, we are one of the few parliaments and the few governments in Australia that has only one house of parliament.

I note that it is now just over 10 years since the estimates committee process was first introduced to the Queensland parliament by the Goss government. In saying that, I wonder if perhaps the government and the Leader of the Opposition could consider a bipartisan committee being formed to genuinely look at seeing how we can improve or finetune the estimates committee hearing process. Many days are allocated to these hearings by the various ministers. Many departmental staff go to a lot of trouble and effort, both in preparing work for the ministers and for the directors-general. Many departmental staff also travel great distances from around Queensland to attend the hearings to be available to answer questions that may be put to them by government members, opposition members or Independent members.

In all sincerity, I say to the government, the Premier, the Leader of Government Business and the Leader of the Opposition that today I believe there is an opportunity to sit down around the table with the door shut and see how we can genuinely improve the estimates committee process without the politicking but in an effort to improve the process for the good of all Queenslanders.

Can I also say that it was great to see how the official opposition, the Liberals, the Independents and One Nation were able to work together in putting forward questions to the various ministers in the limited time that we had available. Again it is an indication that, irrespective of our political persuasions, we can work together in this parliament to try to prise some answers from the relevant ministers on issues that we are concerned about.

On that note, I inform honourable members that I questioned the minister for tourism on the issue of what the Queensland government was doing about the unacceptable position of the Japanese government on whale slaughter. I can confirm that I have written to the federal Minister for Small Business and Tourism, Ms Fran Bailey, but to date unfortunately I have not had a response. Notwithstanding that, I would urge the minister for tourism, when she attends the next ministers' forum in Hobart, to take the liberty of trying to raise this matter, either on the agenda or off the agenda or perhaps just in discussions with her fellow ministers from round Australia and the federal minister to see if we can genuinely, without the politicking, put this matter on the agenda to let the Japanese government know that enough is enough.

As I said during the estimates committee hearings, we have had a lot of discussion in this chamber and in previous parliaments about Migaloo the white whale, which is a unique whale. I would hate to see the situation where, in a couple of years time, we may not see Migaloo again because it may have been one of the whales that have been killed by the Japanese harpoons.

The other issue that was raised during the hearings was with the then Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Kawana, in relation to the fee to meet auditing expectations and requirements by the department to enable some of our volunteer rural fire groups to access administration grant funds. I have taken this up with the new minister, and he is looking into that. I am looking forward to a future meeting with Mr Purcell to discuss this matter. Hopefully, together we will be able to find a simpler way of ensuring the accountability that is required by the government—we have no problem with that—without having to spend such large amounts of money on auditors or accountants.

I know other speakers wish to speak on this matter. I enjoyed being involved in this process. It was a privilege. I genuinely hope that all members of the government and the opposition can, perhaps without politicking, sit down around the table and come up with some improvements to our committee system.

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (3.44 pm): I want to assure the previous speaker that we will get together and have a look at getting that audit matter sorted out.

I would like to thank the previous Minister for Emergency Services, Chris Cummins, his staff and departmental officers for their great efforts during the estimates hearing. I thank everybody for their contributions to the estimates process.

The Department of Emergency Services has about 8,000 staff and 85,000 volunteers who are dedicated to keeping Queensland safe. It is no exaggeration to say that without our huge base of volunteers the Department of Emergency Services would cease to function. Through a record budget for 2005-06 provided by the government, the department will continue to support, train and safeguard its permanent and volunteer work force. This budget will allow the development and implementation of flexible service delivery models and strategies to respond to Queensland communities, particularly in rural and remote areas. A key component of this will be the accelerated roll-out of the iZone program. This is the bushfire danger zone where urban housing developments meet bushland. Other important strategies will be to enhance fire safety on the rural fringe of urban communities and the enhancement of volunteer capability through the Volunteer Support Package.

The previous minister officially launched the Queensland Rescue helicopter service's new \$8 million helicopter on the morning of the estimates hearing. The 2005-06 state budget also provides \$12.2 million to commence the replacement of the Queensland Rescue Bell 412 helicopter fleet. The \$12.2 million is part of a two-year, \$40.8 million program to replace the three Bell 412 helicopters based in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns. In further good news, the budget also allows for \$7.9 million over three years from 2006-07 for the upgrade of aeromedical and air rescue helicopter services in the Torres Strait and the northern peninsula area.

These funding allocations come from the government's eighth consecutive record Emergency Services budget. The total Department of Emergency Services budget is \$667.5 million. With the new police station at Carindale, the budget will top \$670 million. It will give all Queenslanders better access to world-class fire, ambulance, and counterdisaster and rescue services.

Central to this year's budget is a record capital expenditure allocation of \$110.4 million. A key feature of this is the enhancement of the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy at Whyte Island in Brisbane. The academy will develop into a national and international centre of

excellence for emergency management training and community safety. \$20 million over three years will deliver a new breathing apparatus and training facility for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, and an operational scenario village for multiservice training.

The 2005-06 Emergency Services budget will also ensure that Queensland's emergency services have the resources and support to improve services and community safety throughout Queensland. Other highlights of the department's budget for 2005-06 include an additional 70 paramedics—that is probably now 86 extra paramedics—as part of the 240 new paramedics over three years to address growth in demand, maintain emergency response times and improve service to rural, isolated and remote communities; training 20 paramedics each year for three years in conjunction with Queensland Health to expand their role so that they may assist remote area nurses and rural doctors with ongoing patient care, which is very important in this day and age; \$7 million for an automated data system to help reduce paperwork by paramedics and improve service delivery; \$3.3 million over four years to enhance bushfire response capability in the iZone; \$15 million to continue the redevelopment of the Roma Street joint ambulance and fire facility in Brisbane; \$2.4 million to commence or complete joint emergency service facilities at Highfields, Roma and Palm Island; \$13.2 million for new or replacement urban fire vehicles; \$7.9 million for replacement ambulance vehicles; \$3.8 million for rural fire vehicles; and \$2.5 million for SES floodboats, equipment and trailers.

The previous minister made sure that there is plenty of money in the budget. The list goes on. For example, there will be enhancement of community capacity-building programs, including \$500,000 in ongoing support for CPR for Life and \$100,000 to broaden the role of Neighbourhood Watch. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this debate.

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—NPA) (3.50 pm): I also appreciate the opportunity to speak in this debate. I thank the members of Estimates Committee G. I would like to thank the staff, particularly Meg, who assisted us.

Unfortunately, some of the ministers have so many portfolios that the length of time the opposition has to ask questions is a bit of a joke. Even the limits on the number of questions able to be asked on notice are almost laughable. Then the responses were given to us so late that we had no time to thoroughly examine the answers.

Questions are limited to 20-minute blocks. This inhibits the opposition's capacity to pursue issues of interest until finality is reached. The Dorothy Dix questions from the government are simply regurgitations of ministerial press propaganda statements rather than questions of relevance that affect the electorate at large. I feel that the legitimate questions about the output in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and how they are administered are ruled out of order without reasonable guidelines. Estimates committee are becoming more and more sterile as each year goes by. The creative accounting and statements made in these MPSs should not be designed to hide the true performance of the departments. They should be clear and concise and enable the reader of the MPS to understand what is happening in the government department and how funds are sourced and spent.

I was particularly disappointed in the minister's decision to abolish solar hot water rebates. At a time when the government is trying to make communities aware of the environmental issues, the minister cuts one of its leading environmental rebates available to the public at large. The minister does not seem to have the best interests of Queensland at heart. Surely the benefit of having all Queensland homes with solar hot-water systems is self-explanatory. I am sure that the minister could do a lot more for the green energy programs. This was highlighted by the fact that virtually all of the department's executives—over 50 officers—were supplied with conventional cars. I hope that the minister will look at this situation and will have improved the number of executives driving the hybrid type of vehicle by the next estimates committee.

I also draw attention to the minister's failure to fund the removal of noxious pests and weeds in protected areas of the state. It is unfortunate that the Queensland government has not given the EPA enough funding to manage weeds and feral animals in parks. I presented the estimates committee with photos of brumbies taken in Carnarvon National Park. I have been told by reliable sources that over 4,000 brumbies are doing untold damage in the park. It has been revealed that an estimate of only \$22,000 has been allocated for the removal of feral animals at Carnarvon. This would hardly buy the bullets to control the horses. This does not take account of the pigs and goats.

I suggest that the government starts to think outside the square on feral animals in parks and turns the problem into a solution that can be managed for the parks. There are also opportunities for the successful eradication of these feral pests at no cost to the department, but the minister procrastinates. I can only assume that the minister uses *Russell Coight's All Aussie Adventures* DVDs as training videos so that she keeps up to speed with modern bush and environmental skills. I only hope that the minister realises the importance of managing the weeds and pests in our parks.

The minister has been keen to highlight the horse trails, in particular in the Noosa area. I have noticed that the trails only became draft trails when the problems arose. Even though there are an excess of 4,000 feral horses in Carnarvon National Park, to be able to justify the exemption of riders from some of our state forest fire trails seems rather extreme. It is a bit unfortunate that the state

government has claimed the credit for these trails when a lot of the work had already been done by the local councils. Taking the credit for these trails was all the government wanted to do, as it definitely did not provide sufficient funding for the upgrade and maintenance of these trails. The minister treated the truth rather carelessly when she blamed bad weather at Easter and on Anzac Day for the drop-off in numbers in the parks over the last five years. I checked with the weather bureau, my own records and those of other people who keep rainfall data. I hate to tell the minister, but the weather was wonderful, particularly in south-east Queensland over those times. To try to blame the weather when the parks' maintenance is in such a poor state shows how this government will resort to spin at every opportunity. Poor resourcing is undoubtedly the reason for poor staff morale. If spending on national parks were improved, I am sure staff morale would also improve.

The department seems to be at a loss as to what to do with ROSS land. This is land originally put aside for public use. Areas such as Mount Barney, which is still a cattle paddock, are being locked away from public use and made into national parks. I do not think this was the purpose of ROSS land. Surely the minister should show some leadership and keep this land for public use.

I had a lot of other questions to ask and areas to investigate but, unfortunately, with the time allocated to environment and heritage being reduced from three hours to less than an hour and a half, this was not possible.

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women) (3.54 pm): I thank the chair and members of the committee; they did an excellent job. Generally the opposition was constructive in its contribution to the estimates process; however, the shadow spokesman, the member for Lockyer, has been very unjust in putting on the record his statement of reservations, a statement which is not correct. He has reiterated those comments today; they are unworthy of him. He can do better than that.

Let me correct the record. Firstly, the solar hot-water system rebate scheme has served its purpose to more or less kick-start the solar industry. Giving people financial assistance to install solar hot-water systems has driven up demand. When the scheme first commenced in 2000 less than 1,000 solar hot-water systems were being installed each year in Queensland. In the 2004-05 financial year this has increased to some 12,000 systems being installed. It was always a five-year program and it has run its course. Now we have moved on to the next stage by mandating greenhouse efficient hot-water systems in new homes. This will mean that developers will buy in bulk and we believe that the prices will come down.

Secondly, may I say that feral pests and weeds on park estates is clearly a problem that is recognised by the government. Let me make it clear that Queensland's national parks now have more rangers and more management funding than ever before. National parks represent approximately four per cent of the state's land mass, and we take our responsibilities for pest management very seriously. Pests such as wild pigs and horses are not confined to national parks. For this reason we have coordinated a cooperative approach with local governments, with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and with neighbours to tackle this problem. This is our good neighbour policy. Funding for feral pest and weed management programs has increased by \$1.5 million per year for three years commencing last financial year. This means a total of \$4.5 million in operating money is allocated this year alone.

Turning to horse riding, the government is transferring state forests to national parks to maximise protection of our natural environment, minimise impacts on it and keep it in as natural a state as possible. The honourable member for Lockyer well knows that we are working on these alternatives. In fact, he himself has been in the media calling on people to become involved and make submissions. So for him to accuse me of failing to provide safe and usable alternatives is hypocrisy at its worst.

I seek leave to table the two proposed horse-riding trails—extensive trails of over 200 kilometres each—in the Noosa, Beaudesert and Gold Coast regions. They are final drafts so that, quite properly, the horse riders themselves can have a say before they are put finally in place.

Leave granted.

Ms BOYLE: With regard to the EPA's passenger vehicle fleet, the House should be aware that the Toyota Prius vehicle was introduced to the government fleet in November 2003. Prius hybrid vehicles currently represent one-quarter—and growing—of the EPA's current passenger vehicle fleet. This trend will continue. I am glad that the member for Lockyer is advocating the greater uptake of hybrid vehicles. If he really wants to play a constructive role he could join me in working with his federal colleagues to relax import restrictions on these vehicles to give more and better choices. I do, however, thank all of the workers who have contributed through the Environmental Protection Agency to an excellent budget and commend it to the House.

I want to turn now to the statement of reservations submitted by the member for Mirani regarding the local government and planning portfolio. We are, despite his statements, working hard on swimming pool fencing. The amount of \$65,000 was allocated in 2005-06 for a dedicated officer to work with councils on improving inspection programs.

On the topic of forced amalgamations, I am proud indeed that local governments in this state are taking the lead for their future with regard to size, shape, sustainability and structure. I stand behind them supporting them and encouraging them. They alone amongst local governments in Australia may well be able to lead the way in finding a wise future that does face really difficult issues of amalgamation, joint arrangements and the like. Until they have had the chance to formulate their own views and put them to me as the representative of the state government, I will not force any amalgamations—force any changes in fact—neither will I assure them of the comfort to stay as they are. I have said, 'Do nothing is not an option. Look to the future. Find the clearest way forward.' I commend the budget of the department of local government and planning to the House.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (4.00 pm): It is with pleasure that I offer this contribution to the Estimates Committee G 2005 report, specifically in the area of emergency services. I first take this opportunity to congratulate the Wulguru community and its fire and rescue officers on the redevelopment and upgrade of their new station. This is a growing area and the provision of emergency services units is a really positive step in safeguarding residents' lives, and I will be very pleased to attend the reopening of the Wulguru Fire and Rescue Station at the end of this month.

It is unfortunate that, while there are some positives to report—and I am always more than happy to give credit where it is due—there do continue to be some negatives. My following comments will deal with the negative effects that changes to the roster system are having on our ambulance officers. I did note very happily the minister's comments about providing further paramedics, which I noticed in the minister's earlier statement to the House. However, I do have to say that they are due now, not in three years time. It would seem that again bungling and lack of planning has brought this about. In this case, changes to the roster system have done nothing to improve conditions for ambulance staff and instead have placed increased stress on them as they endeavour to carry out their duties.

Mr Cummins: It's got nothing to do with estimates. You weren't even there!

Mrs MENKENS: It is to do with the estimates because it is to do with budgetary constraints. These are frontline staff and part of the first response team who daily assist hurt and injured Queenslanders. They are often first on the scene and witness some of the most horrific sights we can imagine. I cannot speak more highly of their work and dedication to a job that many of us simply could not and would not do. It was brought to my attention several months ago that all was not well with the emergency services department and there was a wide degree of dissatisfaction within the QAS at the roster changes. I do not doubt that the changes were implemented and agreed to with the very best of intentions and the welfare of the officers at heart rather than for budgetary considerations, as some might think.

There was a significant amount of media on the issue and we were led to believe that the situation had been resolved satisfactorily. If I was inclined to be cynical, I have no doubt that there may have been a level of disciplinary action over officers who chose to speak out. That the changes have led to improvements is now obviously not the case if I can go by the number of contacts to my office. Because of these changes, QAS officers, paramedics and staff are working overtime, receiving less remuneration, missing family time and are experiencing much higher stress levels. Those who choose to join the Ambulance Service are dedicated, caring people and to see them treated like this because of budgetary constraints is very concerning.

Because of the enforced changes, we now have a snowballing effect where officers are being overworked and fatigued and many are choosing to leave the service. Members are aware that it takes three to four years to train a paramedic, and we cannot afford to discard them or their expertise lightly. The simple fact is that the QAS is already short staffed and underresourced and the roster changes are only applying fuel to the fire. The cavalier attitude this government has towards its management of essential services and its dismissive manner when dealing with human resource issues is to be deplored. Surely the Premier is sick of the now daily reports of the failings of his ministries. I know that I, my colleagues and the Queensland public certainly are.

It seems incredible that people's lives and careers are placed second to yet another department's obsession with budgets, yet this is the case. We are witnessing management by dollars and cents and not by commonsense. The concerns over overtime and meal allowances are used as justification for the imposition of these onerous changes, and it is unbelievable. I wonder what could be achieved for the QAS if instead of spending over \$60 million on a third pedestrian river crossing someone responsible decided that it might be better spent elsewhere. The problem is bad enough in the larger stations. Imagine the effect on smaller, one-person stations. These people are on call 24 hours a day and often have no other support to call on in an emergency. They are very well trained, but no training can prepare them for having to deal with a series of incidents quite often on their own with no assurance that they will get the necessary time to wind down and de-stress. It is well known that the effects of stress are cumulative, but this has not been taken into account by the bean counters of the emergency services department.

I must also make note that the chapters are still being written about the continuing saga of the building of the new Ayr Ambulance Station. The residents of Ayr and the surrounding districts are certainly looking forward to its long, long awaited resolution.

Hon. CP CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs) (4.05 pm): I start by saying that the last speech in this debate was so far from the truth that it beggars belief. The next bill to be debated is the IR bill. The IR bill is a prime example of what those opposite would rather: they would rather our paramedics work 14 hours a day rather than what we have done, and that is reducing a 14-hour shift to a 10-hour shift. Industrial relations; that is what they are on about. They would have children not only down the mine but up sweeping chimneys for 2s 6d if they had their way. It is proven statewide and internationally that a 14-hour shift is far too long. The other side of politics wants our paramedics driving high-speed vehicles and making clinical, lifesaving decisions after a 14-hour shift while you and I take our children to school. That is where their IR law is. That is where they stand—in the 19th century. They stand condemned.

I want to thank the chair of the estimates committee. He shows strong interest in support of all emergency services in his electorate, as do those members on the committee who attended—unlike the previous speaker. The Department of Emergency Services plays an essential role in the lives of all Queenslanders, which is why I was very disappointed with the lazy Queensland Liberals during my estimates hearing. Not one of them showed enough interest to even be there—not one. At the very least I would have thought that the Liberals shadow would have made the effort. I call him the 'no show shadow'. He has shown a complete disregard for our hardworking emergency services personnel, and it is little wonder that the member for Currumbin seems to have taken the running on emergency services issues for the Liberals lately. But, then again, she was going nowhere fast in the area that she was supposed to shadow. I will compliment those non-government members of my estimates committee and, surprisingly, they asked some very pertinent and relevant questions.

People have been trying to talk down the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, just like the previous speaker in this debate tried to talk down the great QAS. The bleak picture that they are trying to paint for their own ends could not be further from the truth. More than \$300 million has been allocated to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service budget to enhance training, provide new and refurbished stations and deliver new vehicles as part of this 2005-06 state budget. Since 1998 under the Beattie government funding for fire services in Queensland has risen by over \$100 million, well above the level of inflation. The budget delivers a solid \$313.3 million for the Queensland Ambulance Service.

We heard the previous speaker talking about paramedics leaving in droves. We have less than a three per cent turnover in the ambulance or fire departments. I think the Public Service average is about six per cent, so we are less than half. People know that if they get into the Queensland Ambulance Service or the Queensland fire service the vast majority of them are there until they retire. As the Queensland population continues to increase at twice the national rate, our budget ensures that the Queensland Ambulance Service will continue to deliver its world-class service to all Queenslanders. As part of this ongoing commitment, there will be 240 extra paramedics statewide over three years and \$4 million plus allocated for the additional 70 paramedics this year.

Of course, the CDRS—the Counter Disaster and Rescue Services—budget has also benefited. The highlights in the CDRS budget were \$12.2 million as part of a two-year, \$40 million program to replace the IFR Bell helicopters, which the new minister spoke of. This year's budget will ensure that our operational staff and dedicated network of volunteers in the Department of Emergency Services will have the resources they need to provide world-class emergency services to all Queenslanders on a daily basis.

I would like to conclude by saying that I thoroughly enjoyed my time as emergency services minister. I wish the new minister well as he continues to take the department forward. I would like to sincerely thank all Department of Emergency Services staff and the 85,000 volunteers for not only the estimates committee hearing process where I was assisted but also all my time as emergency services minister.

Report adopted.

Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.

Schedules 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (4.10 pm): I would like to add that the 2005-06 budget will do more than any other to shape the future of Queensland. Seven years of sound, disciplined financial and economic management by my government has built a solid foundation for future prosperity for Queensland. My government has not only dramatically increased services to Queenslanders but also made a record investment in public infrastructure to meet the current and future needs of all Queenslanders.

Key highlights of the 2006 budget include the first ever long-term plan for infrastructure development for south-east Queensland, including an additional investment of approximately \$2 billion over four years for the first phase of the plan, more than \$470 million over four years to support the 10-

year Smart State Strategy and comprehensive measures to assist the most disadvantaged people in our communities, including an additional \$180 million over four years for Disability Services, further funding to support our Child Safety reforms, initiatives to improve Indigenous health and a package of initiatives to address homelessness.

This morning I advised the House that the surplus would be in the vicinity of \$3.5 billion, but I just highlight to the House that that is last year's surplus. The projected surplus for this year is \$934 million. With extra money needed for Health, the surplus for this year will be considerably less than last year, but it still will be a surplus as we continue to pursue sound economic management for the state. I thank everyone for their contributions in relation to the budget debate and I look forward to next year's budget with even more enthusiasm.

Third Reading (Cognate Debate)

Bills read a third time.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (4.14 pm): I move—

That government business orders of the day Nos 2 to 8 be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 9 August (see p. 2205).

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the Leader of the Opposition, I acknowledge in the gallery Mr Bill Ludwig of the Australian Workers Union and his executive.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (4.14 pm): At the outset I want to reiterate some of the points that I made in this place this morning when the government moved the motion to suspend standing orders in order to put this bill through all stages during the course of the day. It may not be known to many people outside of this place, but what the government did today was to interfere with the process of this parliament's sessional and standing orders.

I say again that if we are going to have rules of parliament—rules that this government itself put in place—then the government must be prepared to stand by them. Why was it that some years ago the government was prepared to support an order in this place that said that when legislation was introduced that that legislation should lie on the table of the parliament for some 14 days? Of course, the reason for that was quite clear. It gave a greater time for consultation and analysis of that bill before the House. What has changed in that time? I dare say nothing.

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I will come to that in a moment. Nothing has changed with the process of legislation which is required for proper consultation. Why is it that it was good enough for the government to introduce those changes to the rules in this place some years ago and now it is prepared to flagrantly disregard its own rules? Why is it that rules that used to say that legislation had to lie on the table for seven days were changed to 14 days? Now those rules are going to be abrogated in one fell swoop by this arrogant government that is going to use its standing order 63-15—that means 63 of them, 15 of us—to push through this legislation over the course of the next few hours.

This is nothing more than a cynical political exercise. It is panic politics brought about by two by-elections—the Redcliffe by-election and the Chatsworth by-election. Anyone who was in this place this morning and heard the Premier from the public gallery, heard the Premier over the internet, heard the Premier subsequent to that on the radio broadcast out of this place or read what has been placed on the *Hansard* record of this parliament ever since would realise and understand that it is all about two by-elections—the Chatsworth by-election and the Redcliffe by-election.

This morning the Premier stood here and said unashamedly that those by-elections should be a referendum on the Commonwealth government's industrial relations legislation. I say that the Nationals are not prepared to cop that hoax. We are not prepared to cop what is basically a hoax on good, decent working people in Queensland. I will come to the reason for that in a moment.

This government knows, based on the research it has done to date, that it is going to suffer a major kick in the pants in those two by-elections. It knows that. The Premier knows that I know what his research says. The research says that the only hope Labor has of being able to pull back the situation in

Redcliffe and Chatsworth is to make some desperate attempt to make the by-elections a quasi referendum on the proposed changes by the Commonwealth government to the industrial relations legislation. The Premier knows that to be the case.

Why is the Premier not prepared to go out there and make the by-elections a referendum on his mismanagement of the health system? Why is the Premier not prepared to go out there to the good people of the electorates of Chatsworth and Redcliffe and make the by-elections a referendum on the issue of asbestos in our schools? Why is the Premier not prepared to make the by-elections a referendum on the issue of his mismanagement of our roads system, of the traffic networks? No, the Premier is not prepared to do that, because he knows—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Just hold on. I warn all honourable members that this is a very emotional piece of legislation and everybody has strong feelings. I am not going to tolerate interjections. On my first day here I stated quite clearly that members from both sides are entitled to stand up and be heard in silence, and I mean that. That applies to both sides of this chamber. I have already asked one member to leave this chamber this morning and I will have no hesitation in doing the same to members on either side. So I ask members to please allow members to stand up and be heard in silence.

Mr SPRINGBORG: As I was saying a moment ago, why is this government not prepared to go out there and use these two by-elections to have a referendum on its issues and its management of the Queensland Health system, on our road system and asbestos in our schools? It is not prepared to do that so we see this ruse here today where it introduces—

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister for transport! The next time someone interjects I will warn them and I will ask them to leave the chamber. I am serious.

Mr SPRINGBORG: We had a panicked performance here this morning from the Premier when he came into this place and moved the suspension of standing orders to allow this bill to be truncated through this parliament in two days when it should have laid on the table for 14 days. That just shows the sheer political panic on the part of this government with regard to its political situation, as will be judged by the good people of Redcliffe and Chatsworth on 20 August.

When the Premier talked about those by-elections he mentioned making it a referendum. Why is he scared to go out there and stand on his record on the health system in Queensland? Why is he scared to go out there and stand on his record on asbestos in our state schools? Why is he not prepared to go out there in those electorates and stand on his record with regard to the mismanagement of stone mastic and a range of other issues in this state? He is not prepared to go out there and stand on what are expressly state issues, issues on which he has failed the people of Queensland—the basic issues of health, child safety, asbestos in our schools, our road system. He is not prepared to do that, and for that he deserves to be condemned in this place.

Instead of that, the Premier comes in here and truncates a debate which could have been just as easily held when the parliament resumes on 23 August. What is the urgency? If we had that debate on 23 August we would have had the chance to look at this legislation, analyse it and properly consult about it. He is not prepared to do it because he is running in fear of his political life and the expression of the will of the people in the Redcliffe and Chatsworth by-elections.

This is the most cynical political exercise that I have ever seen. The Premier has known now for a number of months about the speculation surrounding the introduction of legislation by the Commonwealth government which will change the industrial landscape in Australia. He has known about that. If he was genuinely concerned, why did he not introduce the legislation when the parliament last sat? Why can it not wait?

The simple reality is this: the Commonwealth government is not going to have its legislation in the House and passed before we come back. The least the Premier could have done is give us an opportunity to see what is properly expressed in that legislation. Frankly, what we are doing is taking air blows at this stage. The Premier has put a wish list here in this piece of legislation, a wish list which seems aspirational and noble on the surface but does not stand the test of scrutiny and will not stand the test of any contradiction with Commonwealth legislation. If the Premier truly wanted a bipartisan approach in this parliament—and I say that there was a significant opportunity for that—he should have done it the right way. However, he has not been prepared to do that.

What is the supreme urgency? The Leader of the House stood in this place this morning in support of the truncation of this debate and said that there is a supreme urgency. I ask: what is that supreme urgency? Surely if we are going to get this right we need to be able to see what we are actually debating against, what we are trying to legislate against. At this stage we do not know. We have some indication of what we are dealing with, but we do not know the full details of it. From my perspective, it is not supreme urgency; it is supreme arrogance, it is a supreme hoax. That is what we are dealing with here today.

I note the presence in the gallery today of the representatives from the Australian Workers Union who obviously have an interest in this—and a lot of people out there have an interest in this, including many people in my electorate and in the business sector. There has been a lot of dishonesty in the comments about what we are facing due to these industrial changes—and, I dare say, it has probably been on both sides. I am not prepared to come in here and give cart blanche approval to a bill that is not going to stand the test of legal scrutiny in this nation, and it is not going to do that.

I have said on behalf of the Queensland Nationals a number of things in relation to what the Commonwealth is proposing. That is a matter of public record. It has not necessarily won me any friends south of the border. I am going to continue to raise some issues and concerns. I speak frequently with Senator Barnaby Joyce—I spoke to him last night—and I am going to continue to talk to him about some of these issues. He is the one who has a greater capacity to be able to change these things than any stunt that we are seeing in this parliament today. My issues are numerous and they need to be addressed. The issues of the Nationals are numerous and they need to be addressed. However, we are not going to give the government cart blanche without us necessarily being able to see the final detail of what we are debating against.

Let me say this very clearly today: we have no problem with trying to legislate to ensure minimum standards for workers in Queensland or across this nation. The Nationals have no opposition whatsoever to that particular principle—none whatsoever. However, it has to have some legal standing. It has to be something that withstands the scrutiny of the court or has the opportunity to be properly balanced against what the Commonwealth government is proposing when we see that.

Make no bones about it in this chamber tonight: the Nationals support minimum conditions for hardworking Australians, whether they be blue-collar workers or white-collar workers. However, that does not mean that we will extend cart blanche support for something which, frankly, is untested and provides false hope for many working Queenslanders. That is what it does, and I will go through that in a moment. We will support proper minimum working conditions for Queensland workers, but we are not going to support a hoax. There is no doubt that the perception of the Premier is going to be that the Labor Party stood up for workers in the Queensland parliament today and this is our expression of support. But as to any legal standing of this, it does not take too much scrutiny to see that it starts to fall apart.

The other issue I have—and unashamedly so—as the leader of a party that believes very much in cooperative federalism—and I dare say there would be members on the other side who share that particular view—relates to a single unitary industrial relations system in Australia. I have expressed those particular concerns federally. I have expressed them to my federal leader and I will continue to express them. Whether my concerns can be addressed is yet to be seen. Senator Joyce is expressing the same sorts of issues at a national level as well.

My concerns are about basic working conditions and rights and also a unitary system and what that unitary system may ultimately mean for our capacity to run a separate industrial relations system in Queensland. In my opinion there is a whole range of good reasons why it is important for us to maintain that. There would be people who will fall outside the scope of what the Commonwealth is proposing to do and also our public sector. As I have said previously, we have to be very cautious about putting all of our eggs in one basket.

I have also said—and I will say it here again today—that Queensland has enjoyed a settled industrial environment over a long time. The credit for that goes not only to this government but also to previous governments. Generally, governments over a period have been able to work in quite a pragmatic way in trying to balance ideology and putting through sensible, workable legislation in this parliament and establishing a framework. I think we have a fair model in Queensland. However, that does not mean that there is not room for some improvement. There is always room for improvement, but it has to be balanced. It has to balance the interests of working Queenslanders—and I say working Australians—and employers from Queensland and also those throughout the rest of the country. We should not be prepared to stand here and say cart blanche that we are against any further practical changes to our award system, AWAs or QWAs which would see more flexibility in the workplace, see us being able to maintain the productivity gains that we have made in recent times and also see us being able to compete in the broader world—and we know the challenges of the broader world as well. Once again, it is a balance.

There are many people in this place who would say that this is a union versus employer issue. It is not necessarily. There are a lot of people who have various issues that need to be dealt with in relation to this. It is about setting down a flexible framework. The way in which working Queenslanders see their role as workers and what they do as workers is now markedly different from what it was when I entered this place in 1989 and from when the honourable minister had a significant role to play in the Trades and Labour Council in Queensland. There has been a paradigm shift in the thinking of not only workers but also employers about the types of arrangements that they need in this day and age. The arrangements that we have now in the 21st century could not have been envisaged at the start of the last decade let alone in the 20th century. There would have been riots and union marches in the street.

We have seen a paradigm shift with regard to the workplace and the way in which people engage in the workplace, the flexibilities that people want in the workplace and the entry of more women in the work force—people are working part time, casual, balancing family and work responsibilities, wanting to be able to and being able to negotiate and wanting more a flexible workplace environment. We have to consider all of those sorts of things. There is much merit as well in what is being proposed by the Commonwealth government as long as in the view of the Nationals it properly balances the minimum work requirements and standards that workers in Queensland and in Australia should continue to enjoy and that that balance is in some way maintained in the future.

The minister and others indicated this morning that there was a process of consultation before this bill came into the House. My understanding from the discussions I have had with employer organisations is that there were certainly some briefings given to employer organisations, but the feedback that they have given me is very simple—that is, there is a difference between a briefing and an opportunity to be able to significantly change the parameters around which the legislation has been built. When something is presented as a fait accompli, that is a briefing. When something is presented as a white paper or a green paper or a discussion draft, that is a different issue and one would have the chance to be able to have input and significantly change the parameters of the legislation which is going to be presented to parliament.

The information that I have is that the latter opportunity was not presented, at least not to the employer groups or those representing major retailers in Queensland. It may have been presented to the union movement. I do not know. But from the information that I have from the employer groups it was not properly presented. When we are talking about legislation like this it behoves the government to make sure that there is a proper process of consultation, that there is a genuine attempt on the part of the government of the day to take on board the concerns of those industry organisations and other interest groups when drafting the legislation. This legislation is very simple. There are a lot of people out there at the moment struggling to understand what we are dealing with. There is a lot of debate; there are a lot of claims and counterclaims. So it is very difficult, frankly, for anyone to be able to say in an informed way what is going to work and what is not going to work.

I mentioned before the issue of the constitutionality of this bill. I acknowledge and I thank the minister and departmental staff for the briefing they provided to me and others just before lunchtime today. I appreciate their candidness. It seems to me that we are entering uncharted territory. This legislation is basically a wish list from the government: this is what it hopes it will be able to ensure post 1 September this year in new Australian workplace agreements or other agreements or awards. I have raised concerns publicly in parliament this morning and again now about the constitutionality of this legislation. We all know that state legislation which in some way contravenes or contradicts Commonwealth legislation becomes, as per our Constitution, subordinate to the Commonwealth legislation. We all know that. I have asked for constitutional advice from the government. I understand that it has sought some preliminary legal advice. Basically, the preliminary advice says that this legislation may be defensible. I do not have the full detail of any crown law advice that the minister has. So we are relying on the minister. Even the minister himself in his explanatory notes said that 'to the extent that it is constitutionally possible'. If I recollect rightly, the minister is saying that he believes that this can stand.

Mr Barton: It can if they leave the field vacant, which is what they are publicly saying they are going to do.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I understand. That was the point that I put to your advisers and departmental officers before lunch. If it was left quiet, then it may stand. But that is an unknown at this stage. We have heard certain things said but if it is left vacant then it may very well be. I understand that the Premier's counterpart in Tasmania made a comment last weekend or the weekend before at the ALP conference in Tasmania that he had absolute rock solid, ironclad, guaranteed legal advice that they had found a way to overcome what the Commonwealth may be seeking to impose and thereby ensuring that the state regime is totally defensible. I have not seen the basis on which Premier Lennon concludes that. But they are going to have to have some pretty crack constitutional legal advice that will really stand up.

The experience in our courts in recent years has been that legislation which is passed by the states that may infringe upon the Constitution, insofar as the Commonwealth's supremacy of law making is concerned, is knocked over straightaway. Anyone who was in this place in 1997 would have seen state powers that we thought would always stand the test of time—the capacity to impose a fuel tax or not impose a fuel tax, the capacity to impose a cigarette tax or not impose a cigarette tax, the capacity to impose a tax on alcohol or not impose a tax on alcohol—taken away from us. I suppose one could have read that in the Constitution; nevertheless, the legislation was here for a while. We have also had a range of other legislation which the former Attorney-General was responsible for which has been deemed unconstitutional. Even cooperative arrangements between the states and the Commonwealth with regard to the transfer of powers in our courts, which had been established 10 or 15 years ago, were deemed to be unconstitutional or unworkable by the High Court, even though there was not any kerfuffle or antagonism between the various jurisdictions.

My concern about this legislation is that it provides false hope to workers in Queensland. As I understand it, anyone who is a part of an AWA or other agreement after 1 September this year is going to be protected by these particular conditions which are laid down in this legislation. If they relate to what the Commonwealth is seeking to do, they are going to stand unless specifically excluded by the Commonwealth's proposed provisions. That is as I understand it. Again, any agreement that is signed or entered into after 1 September this year can have as a part of that agreement the conditions laid down in this legislation unless those conditions are specifically excluded or in some way varied by the Commonwealth. I understand that that is to be the case. Once again, that is something that I think will need to be legally protected and legally challenged, and it will be legally challenged.

If we enter this brave new world of industrial relations reform, I find it extremely difficult to believe that AWAs, if written, will not have some form of exclusion clause. Whilst on paper this may provide some comfort to Queensland workers, we have to rely on the fact that those particular agreements that will come into effect after 1 September this year will not have some form of exclusion clause. If they are to have anything that excludes it or varies it, then they are not going to operate. They cannot possibly continue to operate because they would be subordinate to any Commonwealth legislation and therefore null and void. So, in effect, it is not really worth the paper that it is written on. If the government passes this legislation tonight—and it has the numbers to do that—it will provide to the workers of Queensland a view and a belief that they are going to be protected by these minimum requirements, and it is a false hope in many ways because it is very much untested.

The other thing that needs to be said today, amongst all of the misinformation that is floating around, is that what is proposed by the Commonwealth, as I understand it, will not have any effect on changing the conditions of those people who are operating under an agreement or an award prior to the introduction of the new regime. That is the understanding that I have of it and that is the confirmation which I have of it. The new regime will come into place some time after the introduction of that legislation. So, when we see the colour of this thing, when we start to understand it, workers need to be very clear that what the Commonwealth is proposing does not apply to anything that exists prior to the passage of that legislation but will apply at a time afterwards. So a person on an award or a workplace agreement will not be affected, but if they change jobs and enter into a new award or a new agreement then it may very well start to affect them at that time. It will depend on what the award or agreement says at that particular time.

That is the grey area which we are trying to deal with here and we are trying to second-guess today. Frankly, from the viewpoint of the Nationals, we are not going to be a part of what is, in effect, a stunt to provide false hope to many workers throughout Queensland. I am not principally opposed, if I read it on its superficial attractiveness, to many of the things contained in here. These are fairly much motherhood statements. The concern that I have is: why do we go about the business of putting through a piece of legislation posthaste, circumventing the rules of this parliament, in order to provide a false sense of security to Queensland workers when we are shadow boxing? We do not know what we are going to deal with.

The federal government might come out with something different which completely nullifies this on day 1 of the passage of legislation through the Senate—if indeed it gets to that particular stage. That is a risk that I am not prepared to take. I am not going to be part of that particular stunt. Let me again make it very clear: I have no problem with regard to basic entitlements, but I do not believe this is the way to go. Again, I simply say that if the government wanted to make it genuinely bipartisan it would have had a greater chance of doing that if the legislation had lain on the table for the required statutory time and if we also had the opportunity to properly peruse what the Commonwealth is proposing. My challenge to the government today is: if these concerns are founded, bring the legislation back in a few months time when we see what the Commonwealth is on about and they may get the bipartisan approach in here that they say they are seeking today.

Let us look at the government's own record when it comes to dealing with its workplace in Queensland and the people that it employs—the public sector. The public sector in Queensland has not been treated very well by this government. We hear a lot of talk about the need to protect workers in this state—something which we can all generally agree with. What we never hear from this government is what it is doing to allay the concerns and fears and to address the legitimate issues of the public sector in this state. Surely, if the government stands up here and professes to be the worker's party, the worker's party should also be looking after those people who work in the public sector in Queensland. I suspect the rhetoric which it postulates across this state with regard to concern for workers is not necessarily backed up by what we are seeing in action in many areas. Only the other day on the front page of our major daily newspaper we saw concerns from the Main Roads department in Queensland about the conditions that their staff may be subjected to under new arrangements and agreements that the Queensland government is looking at.

Members should look at Queensland Health and the conditions that staff work under in that system. They are leaving Queensland and travelling interstate and also overseas. Members should look at the Premier's attitude to voluntary medical officers in Queensland Health who have negotiated an agreement which set a 4½ per cent wage rise per annum. The Premier turned around and said that that

was not acceptable at a time when our parity was falling behind the other states and at a time when we desperately needed specialists and the general skills of those visiting medical officers. He basically declared some sort of political or industrial jihad on those people and we had a great big confabulation in the newspapers and across the media. That is not how the government wins favour among the people that it is supposed to be representing and standing up for. It cannot look after its own public sector in Queensland Health.

I will not go through the industrial issues in Q-Build but there are more problems there. Yesterday staff were on the verge of a march, as I understand it, until the minister promised that he would do something there. We know what happened with the veterinary officers at the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. There are issues regarding the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Emergency Services. We heard concerns expressed the other day by the firies. Where does it stop?

This government needs to be judged not on its rhetoric about standing up for workers but on its actions. When this government was elected in 1998 it had a policy in its background of having 12 weeks paid maternity leave. Where is that? We have not seen it. It disappeared into the ether. This government says that it stands up for women in the workplace. It wants to make our workplaces more friendly to women. Who introduced paid maternity leave? Joan Sheldon. This government said that it was going to expand on it. If it were not for Joan Sheldon, we would not have anything. That is an example of the hollow rhetoric that we hear. What we are seeing with this legislation today is more hollow rhetoric which is more concerned with the government's political survival than it is with legitimate issues raised by workers in Queensland and their and their families' survival. It is a cynical exercise which is all about setting things up for the Chatsworth and the Redcliffe by-elections.

It is the intention of the Nationals to move an amendment in the consideration in detail stage on the issue of secret ballots, because it is something that this government has dodged for a long time. We have secret ballots everywhere else. Why can we not have secret ballots in the union workplace? What is wrong with giving people the opportunity to properly and fairly express themselves without some form of intimidation? If the government is serious about making the workplace a contemporary place, if it is serious about genuinely standing up for workers and giving them some real choice, then it will also support that particular amendment which will be moved by the Nationals.

In conclusion, let me restate our view. It is very simple and very clear. We have no problems supporting, even in legislation, minimum standards for workers in Queensland or across this nation, but we are not going to be part of a political hoax and we are not going to give people the false impression that they will be protected by something that they will not be protected by. If this government is genuine, it will halt this legislation and wait until we see exactly what the Commonwealth is proposing. I can guarantee the House that if there is anything that needs protecting in Queensland's statute then the government will have our support. That is the commitment that I and my colleagues can give the government here today. But we are not going to be a part of something which is going to fail on its first legal outing, and that is what is going to happen. In a press release earlier today the minister for industrial relations said—

Once the laws are passed the federal government will have to mount a legal challenge to remove the state's laws through the High Court.

That is not technically true. It is the other way around. This is my concluding point.

A government member interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Well, the member opposite has heaps of them, too. It is simply that—as the Premier would know because he is a lawyer and as others in this place would know—if the Commonwealth government passes legislation and the state government passes legislation and the state legislation seeks to contradict what the Commonwealth legislation is doing in some way, then it becomes subordinate. The federal legislation is superior to it and has affect. My understanding is that if the members opposite want to seek, in some way, to have the state legislation upheld they have to actually mount the challenge. My understanding is that it is actually the other way around.

Whatever is going to happen out of this, it will end up with a High Court challenge. I do not think this is a sensible, pragmatic or bipartisan way to go about what is an issue of genuine concern for Queensland workers and families.

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (4.50 pm): What we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition is that he supports this legislation but he will not vote for it. That is what he basically said—he supports it but he will not vote for it. Frankly, members are judged on how they vote and not on hot air, and that is what we have had—hot air!

The reality is if members opposite agree with us about this bill they should vote with us. This is not rocket science. This bill basically protects existing rights; that is what it does. There is no point someone coming in here and jumping up and down because we have put the wood on them. Members opposite have been out there trying to say they support this and that, but when it comes to the real test—that is, how they vote—they are found wanting. How can the member opposite possibly say that he supports something but he will not vote for it?

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Well, let us see. There is a lot of hot air in the National Party. It is really good at producing hot air, but when it comes to voting for and delivering something it is found wanting. Let the people of Queensland understand this: the National Party is going to vote against the retention of the basic rights of Queensland workers and their families. The National Party is going to vote against it. Let there be no doubt in anybody's mind what this is about. There are many issues that come into parliament that are not black and white. This issue is black and white. They are either in favouring of protecting the existing work conditions of Queenslanders or they are not. It is that simple.

The member opposite says, 'Oh, well, we're not sure we're going to succeed,' and all the rest of it. This is a struggle. This is a struggle to protect the basic rights of Queensland workers. That is what this is about. We want to ensure that we send the federal government a clear message about what is important for Queensland workers. That is what we are doing. Of course it is a struggle and, yes, it may end up in the High Court and, yes, the federal government may try to overrule us, but that does not matter. What matters is that we are fighting to protect the work standards and conditions of Queensland workers. That is what matters.

I want to make it very clear that the Leader of the Opposition can say whatever he likes, but we want to make certain that, while this legislation is being drafted by the Commonwealth, it gets a clear message from us about what is important. Let us deal with that up front. I have never heard such hypocrisy and nonsense in my life as someone saying, 'Oh, I'm for it but don't ask me to vote for it.' That is hardly the way to support Queensland workers.

I wish to make another point at the outset and I want to be very plain about it. The sole purpose of this legislation is to protect Queensland families' income and their entitlements. What the Leader of the Opposition forgets—because too often politicians get a bit comfortable about their income—is that there are many workers in this country and many workers in this state who struggle to make ends meet every week. Not only that, they rely on overtime, they rely on penalty payments and they rely on being paid for their holidays. They rely on getting a break at the end of the year with four weeks annual leave and with the holiday rates that go with it. That is what ordinary families have to put up with. That is what ordinary families have to live with week in week out. That is what this struggle is all about. It is about giving families a fair go. Some of us may feel that we are comfortable, and that can be seen by comments from the Leader of the Opposition. We should remember that the rest of the community is not as comfortable as he is.

I also want to make it very plain and very clear at the outset that when it comes to industrial relations it is very much a state issue. We make laws to give everyone a fair go when it comes to IR. We have a right to fight the federal government to protect our state system. What could be more important when it comes to states' rights than the income and employment conditions of Queensland families? That is what this is all about. No-one should say that this is not a state issue. We are about protecting state awards and state employees.

Our legislation does not place any new demand or burden on employers. This legislation is designed to protect what Queensland families already have. People would think a conservative opposition would be prepared to support the conditions that already exist, but it is so conservative that it will not even support conservative positions. I say to all MPs that the vote at the end of this debate will record whether they vote with us to protect Queensland family incomes or they do not. The record will be there for everybody to see. The record will show whether they are standing up for the living standards of Queensland families or whether they are backing the federal Liberal Party employment minister, Kevin Andrews, who wants to force through reforms at the expense of working Queensland families. Are members with us or against us when it comes to employers being able to push employees on to individual contracts that cut their take-home pay and do not include provision for overtime, weekend, public holiday and shift work penalty rates of pay as well as other basic award standards? These are the choices. As I said before, they are black and white. There is no rocket science here. Members either support these conditions or they do not.

The other question is: are members with us or against us in fighting for the many families who rely on shift penalties to maintain their living standards and pay their mortgage? Are members with us or against us in trying to protect the take-home pay of the thousands of Queensland employees working early mornings, evenings, nights, weekends and shift work who risk a drop in their income? Are members with us or against us in making sure people who work in shops, pubs, clubs, factories, cleaning, security, transport, storage and health do not lose their penalty rates? They are the issues.

People will be able to check the list of MPs voting for our legislation to see who voted to protect existing overtime provisions, to protect existing weekend rates, to protect public holiday rates where they apply and to protect shift work penalty rates. That is what Mr Springborg, as Leader of the Opposition, does not want. He does not want this debate. Why is he jumping up and down about it? Why did he jump up and down this morning when I moved the resolution? He does not want to have his hypocrisy exposed because everyone will be able to see how he voted on each one of these clauses.

Mr Terry Sullivan: We'll see his true colours.

Mr BEATTIE: Exactly. The Liberal apologists argue that this is a federal matter that has no relevance to the Queensland parliament. I want to come back to this and make it very clear. Let me tell members how relevant this legislation is to Queensland families. When the Liberals force the legislation through parliament in Canberra—and who knows whether it will be in October—Queensland's state industrial relation system will be slashed from covering seven out of 10 employees to only about four out of 10 employees. So six out of every 10 employees in Queensland will be out in the cold. That is what it means. It means that most Queensland workers will be subject to the Liberals national legislation. The Liberals are advertising that employees will be free to bargain on pay rates and holidays. Just listen to this hypocrisy! But if members read the Howard government's plan on the federal government's web site they will read how, when it comes to making agreements, the new laws will give 'employers more choice and flexibility about what type of arrangements they want in their agreements.' In other words, the employer will be able to tell the employee, 'These are the conditions I'm offering. Do you want to sign or not? If you don't, well, I'm very, very sorry, I'll see you later.' That is the sort of insecurity that the Australian family should not have to put up with.

Let us be clear what the National and Liberal parties will do today or tomorrow in voting against this. They will support job insecurity, which is the most vicious attack that can ever be made on Australian families. Let us hope that if the National and Liberal parties continue to do this we will give them some job insecurity in the next little while in whatever elections are coming our way.

This debate is not just about maintaining incomes. This debate is also about retaining jobs. It is also about the ability—which the Liberals and National support—of companies to sack people. They are the core issues in all this, and we should not lose sight of them. The Liberals want to exempt all businesses that employ up to 100 people from unfair dismissal laws. That amounts to 98 out of every 100 company employees in Queensland. Just think about that. That is what Mr Springborg and Mr Quinn support.

Let us be really clear about this. When it comes to unfair dismissal laws applying to businesses that employ up to 100 people, Mr Costello has said that there is no magic in the number 100. Well, why have 100, Mr Costello? This is just the thin end of the wedge that we are seeing with these Liberal reforms. One hundred will become 200 and that will become 1,000, and before long no-one will be safe from unfair dismissal. In other words, if an employee is sacked and that employee complains that it is totally unfair, well, tough. That is their view on the conservative side—tough.

It also means that we are headed for courts full of people contesting unlawful dismissal when genuine unfair dismissals should be dealt with in the Industrial Relations Commission. The Liberals are arguing that no-one will be worse off. However, as I demonstrated twice yesterday, the Liberals say one thing and do another. If they were genuine about wanting to increase people's pay, why did they try to hold back the minimum wage? If the Howard government's position regarding the minimum wage case is any guide, Australian workers would be \$50 a week worse off right now. That is his attitude—\$50 a week worse off right now! That is more than \$2,500 a year. In this case, they say that no-one will be worse off. However, when federal Liberal employment minister, Kevin Andrews, was asked to sign a guarantee—and this is the test—that no-one would be worse off under the new legislation, what did he do? He refused. If they say something, why don't they guarantee it? He would not do that because he knows—dare I say it—that it is an untruth. If I was outside this place, I would say it is a lie.

The Prime Minister was asked the same question by Alan Jones. Listen to what the Prime Minister said. He said, 'I am not going to make the mistake of purporting to guarantee the take-home pay of every single individual.' What a cop-out. This is about the award system; this is about protecting family income; this is about protecting our work force. These are basic rights that we want to protect today. That is what this is all about. The Prime Minister does not understand. He has been in federal parliament for too long. He has forgotten what it is like to be an average Australian living on an average Australian income, with a family, with children to support.

As far as I am concerned, what the Prime Minister has said is a clear admission that he knows his laws will cut the wages of many Australian workers, probably those least able to afford it. This is despite wasting millions of dollars of taxpayers' money on a campaign that claims people will be better off.

Let us talk about the relevance of all of this. The Leader of the Opposition complains that there are two by-elections and that this bill should not be relevant. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that it is relevant, all right. This is the only time that Queenslanders will be able to vote on these issues prior to the federal government introducing its laws. What is wrong with giving the people of Redcliffe and Chatsworth an opportunity to send a message to the Prime Minister? Why is Mr Springborg against that? Why does he not want that? He knows that the average Australian family out there wants a fair go. This is about democracy. Why is he afraid of this becoming an issue in the by-elections? Why? Is that not democracy?

The people of Chatsworth and Redcliffe do not have to agree with me or the government. They can vote down my candidates, the government's candidates, the party's candidates, and we can lose. Let the people decide. Why is Mr Springborg afraid of letting the people decide? Why is he afraid of us making this an issue in the by-elections? I am making it an issue in the by-elections, with the support of

my colleagues, because I think that the people should have a say. It is very simple. Is that not what democracy is all about? We will let the people have a say. They have a chance to send a very clear message to John Howard and to the Liberal Party. Bear in mind that the candidate for Chatsworth Michael Caltabiano is the president of the Queensland Liberals. You could not have a better person to send a message to.

Michael Caltabiano stands alongside the federal Liberal minister, Kevin Andrews, and the Liberal Prime Minister, John Howard, in threatening the incomes and the jobs of Queensland families. He is part of all of this, as the president of the Liberal Party. Of course, Mr Caltabiano's closest companion in the Liberal Party is Santo Santoro, the man chosen by Mr Howard to persuade people that the IR reforms will be good for them. We know what he was like when he was in this House.

A government member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Exactly. Where did the Prime Minister put him? He put him on the committee to sell this. Well, the feeling is mutual. When Mr Santoro was sacked by the voters of Clayfield, he got a job as a senator. In his maiden speech at the end of 2002 he said that Michael Caltabiano was a close friend who had given him unconditional loyalty for the best part of 26 years. What a cosy pair of chums they are.

The man chosen as deputy chair of the Prime Minister's task force on workplace relations reform is a perfect example of why we should all fight these reforms. As the Queensland minister for training and industrial relations, Santo Santoro was responsible for a disaster in Queensland's employment, training and industrial relations system. If the Queensland experience of Santo Santoro's IR reforms between 1996 and 1998 is repeated, people can expect this: an increase in lost working days due to disputes, an increase in unfair dismissals, a decrease in employment, and an increase in the unemployment rate. That is his record. In the 2½ years that he was a minister, his draconian IR laws were responsible for an average of a massive 25.6 working days being lost due to disputes for every 1,000 employees each quarter. Under former minister Santoro's harsh approach to industrial relations, an average of 1,920 unfair dismissal applications were made every year, even though employees in businesses of fewer than 20 employees were not able to complain if they had been unfairly dismissed. The industrial relations system that we have introduced, which is fair to everyone, has reduced that figure to an average of 1,502 a year since the last election.

Santo Santoro presided over a freeze on capital works in 1996, which resulted in an average unemployment rate of nine per cent. We have vastly increased capital works spending, broadened the economy and have brought the unemployment rate down to an average of 5.3 per cent since the last election at the start of 2004, and it is currently five per cent. There is no point going on any further about Mr Santoro. His record speaks for itself and everybody understands that.

Let me return to the legislation. This legislation is straightforward and it protects the existing conditions. Everyone already knows all about the issues and knows their positions on these issues. The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party cannot come in here and say that this is rocket science. I will repeat it. This confirms the existing workplace conditions in legislation. That is it. There is nothing complicated about it. It is very simple.

My government's position is that we need to act urgently to protect families from what will happen to them if John Howard gets his way in eroding workers' rights. Frankly, we do not believe the Liberals. We do not believe that they are not ready to introduce the legislation. We do not accept their assurances. As we saw in the 'never, never GST' and as we saw with more troops in Iraq, the federal government cannot be trusted. John Howard said that there would be no GST, and we all know what we got. That is the end of that.

This legislation is very simple. It protects annual leave, sick leave, parental leave, carers' leave, bereavement leave, long service leave, notice of termination, ordinary time hours of work, penalty rates, public holidays, redundancy pay, stand-down provisions, dispute settling procedures and casual employment.

We do not want to just protect workers' conditions and way of life. By doing this, we will also be preserving the basis of Queensland's astronomical economic growth. We have the lowest strike rate in 30 years and strong employment. For that we owe a debt of gratitude to the union movement, which has played a positive and constructive role. I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of members of the AWU and the Queensland Council of Unions, and the other unions that are represented here. I welcome them to the Queensland parliament.

Queensland lost just 4.3 working days for every 1,000 employees to disputes in the year to March. That is well below the national rate of 10.2 working days and the 8.2 days lost in Victoria, which has succumbed to the federal regime. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: go and tell the employees of this state that you want the Victorian disease in Queensland. Go and tell them that—go on—and see how excited they will be. That would be really good. That is another reason we are fighting to keep that Victorian industrial disease out of Queensland.

The Prime Minister claims that his radical industrial relations changes are all about creating choice for businesses and workers. If that is the case, the Prime Minister should allow employers and employees to continue to choose to operate under Queensland's successful industrial relations laws. If the Prime Minister wanted a good system, he would adopt the Queensland system and get rid of the national system—that is what he would do. He would adopt our system, which has the best record in Australia.

Our Industrial Relations Commission can intervene to settle industrial disputes. That is why we have the lowest strike rate in the country. Why should the Liberals want to change an IR system that has the lowest strike rate in the country? Why would they want to destroy that? It makes no sense. Why would the Liberals want to change an IR system which has resulted in our unemployment rate running at five per cent or less for the last nine months? Why would the Liberals want to change an IR system that is fair to unions, fair to workers and fair to everyone? Members should ask themselves why the Liberals would want to change an IR system which has led to the highest growth rate in the country. We have stunning jobs growth and strong economic growth, which is higher than it is in the rest of the nation. Why would they want to change all of that? Because of some mad, ideological obsession of the Prime Minister and Kevin Andrews, that is why. It makes no sense at all.

The other point that I want to make is this: I see that Mr Springborg has circulated an amendment to take away the discretion of the secret ballot. In essence, it forces a secret ballot. There is currently an option on a secret ballot. So what he wants to do is take away choice as well. It just seems to me that what he wants to do is have a whole lot of draconian measures that undermine the basic conditions of not just families but to give a fair go to unions in the workplace. My government has always been about a fair go for unions and employers and employees. The only way the system works is if there is a tripartite approach. That is the only way it works. Mr Santoro did not understand that, but we do.

The Nationals are not even standing a candidate to give the public an opportunity to express a view on its position in these two by-elections. I do not understand what it is so excited about. If it is running a protection society for the Liberal Party, it will be a very extinct one. The reality is this, and let me sum up: this is a very serious issue. This is about protecting Queensland families, and I make no apology for bringing this debate on today and I make no apology for saying to every member: I will make sure that every Queenslanders understands how you vote today or tomorrow. This is about fighting for the basic rights of Queenslanders. I ask members to imagine and think about this: ever since we were a nation, senior generations have passed on better working conditions. If John Howard succeeds, we will be the only generation of Australians to pass on worse working conditions to our children, and that is a disgrace.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (5.11 pm): Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your election to the office of Speaker. On 26 May 2005 the Prime Minister announced the federal government's plans for industrial relations reform. The announcement sent shock waves around Australia. Working families had been shocked by the sheer audacity of his plan, which will threaten their living standards and job security. They have turned out in tens of thousands to voice their opposition to the Howard proposal. They have sent messages to state Labor governments around the nation that they will not cop the Howard plan. The Liberals and Nationals propose to take superannuation, long service leave, jury service leave and notice of termination out of federal awards. They propose that federal individual and collective agreements are to be made and approved without reference to current awards. Instead, agreements will have to contain only five minimum conditions of employment covering annual leave, personal leave, unpaid parental leave, the maximum number of ordinary working hours and a minimum wage. When one talks about a minimum wage, is the minimum wage a maximum wage?

The proposal means that unless federal employees can bargain with their employers they could be moved on to agreements and lose access to the 20 allowable award matters, including conditions such as penalty rates, overtime, allowances, redundancy pay and shift loading. But why do the Howard Liberals and Nationals want to see an end to the industrial relations system as we know it? They would like to do away with the industrial relations system because they would like to do away with the unions. They do not value the contributions of working people. They do not think that we should be allowed to organise collectively. They do not see the protection of our hard-won wages and conditions as important. They would like to replace what is left of our arbitration system with the law of the jungle where the independent umpire is removed, along with the ability of unions to organise on behalf of their members.

John Howard's Liberals and Nationals want to use the corporations powers of the Constitution to take over the states' industrial relations systems. He wants to bypass independent tribunals and replace them with direct control by government. There is no doubt that over time this would lead to the abolition of our conciliation and arbitration system. So serious is this threat that it has been described by Professor David Peetz of Griffith University as the most serious challenge to the principles of balance and fairness that Australian employees have faced in a century. Howard is packaging his attack on working families as necessary economic reform instead of his ideologically driven hatred of the current industrial relations system and the role of the unions in this system.

In Queensland the current Industrial Relations Act 1999 provides a modern, flexible industrial relations system underpinned by basic principles of fairness which has allowed the Queensland economy to prosper without the fear by working families that their jobs and hard-fought conditions will be threatened or that they will be treated unfairly. Queensland is the envy of other states with job growth of 5.7 per cent compared to 3.6 per cent nationally, low unemployment of 4.9 per cent compared to 5.19 per cent nationally, a strike rate less than half the nation's average, and economic growth of 3.5 per cent compared to an average 1.1 per cent for the other states. This flexible industrial relations system has driven this economy.

Working families in Australia have given state Labor governments a clear message that they want the state Labor governments to protect these hard-won wages and conditions. The Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005 will ensure that Queensland families continue to enjoy a fair and balanced industrial relations system regardless of developments at the federal level. The bill will provide for the existing entitlements of the Queensland Industrial Relations Act to be extended to employees under federal award agreements.

Members opposite have complained about bringing this bill before the parliament by suspending standing orders to enable its passage at this sitting. This is really the only chance the people of Redcliffe and Chatsworth will have to send John Howard and his Liberals and Nationals a clear message on what they think of what they are trying to do to their working conditions and job security. Most members opposite will have made up their minds and will vote against this bill not because of the pretence that the bill was brought on quickly but because fundamentally they agree with the principles espoused by the Howard Liberals and Nationals. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (5.15 pm): I rise to speak to the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005 in my capacity as the Liberal spokesperson for industrial relations. As a relatively new member, I wish to record my absolute disgust with the manner in which the Premier has arrogantly disregarded standing orders and brought forward the debate on this bill. The Liberal Party does not support this bill as it stands before the House because there is simply no point imposing new legislation on our state with no substantiated reasoning behind it. This is a complete waste of taxpayers' money as the federal workplace relations legislation, which will override state laws, is due to be debated in October this year, some two months away.

This bill seeks to implement totally needless legislative changes that will cause many businesses and workers to be catapulted into a state of chaos just to satisfy the Labor government's agenda of political point scoring. To introduce these changes at a time when the state Labor government has no substantiated facts on which to base its case could be deemed gross negligence on behalf of Queenslanders. But we all know the real reason we are debating this bill in such a hurry. It has nothing to do with protecting workers and everything to do with protecting the seats of Chatsworth and Redcliffe at next weekend's by-elections.

How confident are the unions and the state government that they know what is contained within the federal legislation? They are not. They are only guessing. The Premier does not know what is in it. The Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations has not seen what is in it. How can members opposite say that existing workers' rights are under threat when no-one has seen this legislation? This is only more scare tactics, more smoke and mirrors, to get the focus off the real problems in this state like our chronically ill health system and our clogged transport. I take particular umbrage when the members opposite say that the Liberals do not stand up for families. This is truly a case of the pot calling the kettle black if ever I heard it. What a disgraceful state of affairs was discovered in the families department this government was in charge of! The Premier even called an election for our children and created a new department, so great was the shame.

More people are now in work than ever before in Australian history. With real wages for Australian workers more than 14 per cent higher than they were when federal Labor was in government, workers are benefiting from our country's strong economic performance thanks to the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, John Howard, and Treasurer, Peter Costello. The role that workplace reform has played in sustaining our economic performance cannot and must not be underestimated. If we are to continue to maximise this economic growth, then we need to adopt a more flexible labour market. There are currently six different workplace relations systems in Australia with literally thousands of federal and state awards. This system creates confusion and unnecessary costs for all Australian businesses and employees.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Southport, please, that is my final warning.

Mrs STUCKEY: This system creates confusion and unnecessary costs for all Australian businesses and employees. A new single nationalised system will replace the current myriad of conflicting laws and reduce the compliance burden on businesses.

At present, major areas of economic activity such as state public sectors are administered with regard to workplace relations by state governments. While the consequences of this administration have substantial impact on the cost and quality of services for which the state is responsible and the taxes

levied on the public, the decisions made by the states, particularly by state Labor governments as in Queensland, appear to be made in isolation of the broader requirements of a coherent workplace relations strategy that ensures long-term growth of the economy, employment and income shared fairly by all.

Some of the more dramatic outcomes are seen in this state government's catastrophic failures of administration in health, in Energex and in Indigenous affairs. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the organisation structures and the lack of preferment for technical skills in high demand similarly exist in the Queensland public sector, reflecting an institutional failure of Queensland workplace relations.

This state Labor government is not being supportive of employees and even the Premier has acknowledged that Queensland workers transferring from state awards to the federal system could end up being paid more. Speaking at the Queensland 400 Business Summit on 6 July this year, the Premier said, 'Employees under Queensland state awards are paid less than those under federal awards.' So what is his problem? He does not know what is in the federal government's legislation, yet he spends tens of thousands of Queensland taxpayers' dollars on scare advertisements. In the next breath he admits that federal awards pay well.

I would also like to take the opportunity to remind the Labor members of the House of comments made by their union colleague Bill Shorten in 2002 that the situation of having '... 130 pieces of state and federal legislation pertaining to industrial law ... is ridiculous and illogical.' That came from the Prime Minister's speech delivered on 18 July this year.

This really is nothing more than an unjustified scare campaign, because this Labor government is terrified it will lose control of workers' rights by giving them a say in their future. This is indeed a cheap stunt by the Beattie government to take the focus off the shocking state of decay into which he and his ministers have allowed Queensland Health to disintegrate.

The Liberal Party believes in working conditions that are fair and reasonable for employers and employees. The Beattie Labor government is continually trying to drive a wedge between employers and employees, reinforcing a 'them and us' mentality. What an insult to workers and employers alike. Good workplace relations—

A government member interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order, please! I call the member for Currumbin.

Mrs STUCKEY: Good workplace relations are not founded upon division and a reluctance to talk things through. They are formed by creating relationships based on goodwill and trust.

Members opposite have used a predictable negative broken record argument that Liberals do not like unions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Beattie government has abandoned them in this state—

Government members: Ha, ha!

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will take as long as it takes, if members opposite keep interrupting.

The Beattie government has abandoned unions in this state. Let us take a look at our Ambulance Service. Many long-serving ambulance officers are appalled at their treatment by their union, which has forced an unfair roster system upon them. Before the minister and other government members try to scream me down over the roster hours and safety issues, I will say to them that they have missed the point. It is the manner in which they were treated that has really upset them. It is the disregard for their rights of expression that led over 80 of them to congregate outside my Currumbin office. That is right; union members had to lobby a Liberal because no Labor members on the Gold Coast were interested in their concerns.

Union representatives have actually admitted to me they feel more like managers than union delegates. Union delegates themselves are quitting left, right and centre in protest over the way in which they are being treated. Many have been threatened with job losses and whisper about a culture of bullying and low morale that is burning out long-serving, dedicated paramedics.

Only today I read a letter to the editor in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* from a disgruntled representative of the Queensland Taxi Drivers Association. I quote from the newspaper cutting—

The Beattie Government continues to deny Queensland's taxi drivers even the most basic working conditions, despite nearly five years of desperate pleas for help from the Queensland Taxi Drivers Association (QTDA).

No super, no sick pay, no holidays—are these the horrific conditions 'Spin Tart Pete' is so worried about?

Well, they already exist in Queensland.

And now the contract to supply security cameras in taxis (which will eventually make Queensland drivers the last to get them) is before the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

Could someone please tell me the difference between 'Dr Death' and the State Government ignoring cabbies being bashed on a daily basis?

The Beattie Government deserves to lose both by-elections and then the next state election.

This campaign of fear reminds me of some of the hype that surrounded the Y2K bug that was going to end our technology and stop absolutely every appliance, such was the fear and innuendo that was spread. Perhaps we could relate the story of Chicken Little running around saying that the sky is going to fall, and we all know what happened then, don't we? This government is trying to tell workers that the sky is going to fall.

This bill is yet another example of the Premier's spin and grin. He thinks he can make mileage from fabricated claims based on rumour and innuendo. The Premier likes to claim Queensland as the smart state. However, he is not being very smart with this serious matter. and I imagine that there are many citizens in Queensland who can see through this cheap stunt to win votes at the forthcoming by-elections. The Liberal Party does not support this bill.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (5.26 pm): If anybody ever wanted any evidence of why we cannot trust the Liberal Party, there it was. Ten minutes of absolute platitudes, with absolutely no commitment to the workers in this state whatsoever. This bill is pretty simple. It sets out chapter and verse what people in this parliament believe should be the mainstays for workers' rights in this state. Grace Grace from the Queensland Council of Unions must have sat there shaking her head at the suggestion that the Liberal Party is some sort of friend of the union movement in Australia, or indeed, of working people or poor people, that is, people who are on the lowest wage.

I was amused to hear how wages had gone up by 40 per cent. Most of that has resulted from union activity, yet who opposed them at every turn? The Liberal government! The Cole royal commission cost a couple of hundred million dollars when everything was added up, but what did it find? Absolutely nought! They dragged me down to the commission because I had the temerity to try to make a level playing field in the construction industry in Queensland. I appeared before Mr Cole, who is a great old tory mate from way back, and all the other parasites who were paid by the federal government to find what? To find nothing whatsoever! There was no evidence to prove their claims, yet the previous speaker tells me that they are a friend of the union movement.

The Liberals have opposed every single minimal wage increase for low-paid workers in Australia. As the Premier said before, workers would be \$50 out of pocket now if the federal government had its way. So is it little wonder that we say we have a fair idea of what is coming around the corner? As reported in the *Courier-Mail* today, the Prime Minister has said, 'Judge us on our performance.' I am very happy to do that, and that is exactly why we are here tonight.

The federal parliament is sitting next week, the following week and the week after that. I would not put it past Mr Howard to pull a giant rabbit out of the hat next week, whack legislation on the table and away we go. Therefore, it is absolutely urgent that we get a message to those people that at least the Labor Party in Queensland is prepared to stand up for the cornerstone of what makes our community, which is the right to a fair and reasonable living, to have the protection of a state industrial commission, to ensure that those people who have to work after hours—especially those who do menial jobs—to try to feed their families get some reward through penalty rates. They are the sorts of things that we stand for. Was there any mention by the previous speaker of that? No, of course there was not. That speech was probably written in a federal minister's office somewhere today. It had all the hallmarks of it. Certainly there was a lot of input from one of them, I would suggest.

Mrs STUCKEY: I rise to a point of order. I wrote that speech. I would like the minister to withdraw.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I am glad the honourable member owns up to such shabby work.

The reality is very simply this: tonight we are seeking to apply the spotlight on people like the previous speaker to see exactly what they stand for. The Leader of the Opposition squirmed and wriggled and tossed and turned but could not come out and make a statement about what it is that we believe in. He could not say what we need to do as a parliament, which is to unanimously state that these are the things that are not for sale, these are the things that are not negotiable, these are the people whom we believe are important as Queenslanders. He could not state that we believe that families in Queensland deserve the certainty of knowing that they are going to work and that they are not going to be sacked by a boss simply because they do not like the colour of their hair or the fact that they saw them at the Catholic Church or over the road at the pub the night before, or for some other personal dislike. The reality is that this would not be necessary if we had a government in Canberra that had some trust.

I am dying to hear the Liberal leader's little effort tonight. I am happy to go out there and letterbox drop his statement to the electorates of Chatsworth and Redcliffe because people out there have a right to know what the state Liberals stand for. They have a right to know whether they are going to be stood over by their mates down in the south and whether they are going to allow all of those conditions to cascade away. Tonight was the opportunity to say, 'We believe these things should be enshrined in stone.' This legislation will do that while there is a capacity for it to be overridden. We know that; we know what laws can be passed federally. We also know that, if the federal government chooses, it can leave these things alone. It is more likely to do that if we have some bipartisan support. That is the reality of the issue. However, we have not seen any of that.

The members opposite can all run but they will not be able to hide. The Chatsworth by-election will be the first opportunity Australians will have to say to the Tories in this country, 'We do not agree with you. We think you have gone far enough. We think that you people have gotten too big for your boots. You have lost sight of the fact that we as Australians will not tolerate people being pushed into penury and poverty.' As far as I am concerned, that is the opportunity that these two elections give us. A lot of Australians will be watching and they will be depending on the voters in both those electorates to carry the flag for the poor people of this state, for the people who are forced to work on weekends and for the people who work physically hard during the year and are entitled to have four weeks break. Those are the sorts of issues that concern people.

I make absolutely no apology for bringing this debate on tonight—none whatsoever. The reason we have this provision in the parliament is for exactly this purpose. We have the threat of a federal government—an all powerful government—that is out there at the moment trying to persecute the National Party's Barnaby Joyce, trying to roast him, because he is standing up for the state. I heard him say the other day that he is prepared to stand up for this state. We are saying to him tonight, 'If you are taking your job seriously you will stand up for us on this one.' I say to the other federal Liberal ministers that they should not display the lack of spine that we have seen from the local Liberals here tonight. They should stand up to them. Of course, that is another issue.

The gentleman from Lockyer is waving his hands around like he has some sort of problem. The reality is this: he can stand up for the workers in his electorate. He can stand up and vote with us.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The member opposite should not just sit there and speak about it; he should vote with us. Every other person over there should do the same. At the end of the day that is how they are going to be judged. They can get up and talk about it, but it is the way they vote that matters.

I can personally assure honourable members that I would have a great deal of delight in publishing those lists out there so that everybody can see who voted and how they voted. They cannot hide on this one at all. I say to those opposite to have the backbone to remember that they are state representatives and do not accept what is coming around the corner from Canberra.

Hon. MF REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (5.35 pm): Tonight's debate is a very important one for this parliament and, indeed, a very historic one for this parliament as well. I came into the parliament today to hear the member for Currumbin talk about workers' rights. I have to say to the Liberal Party—the one representative of the Liberal Party here tonight—and the couple of National Party members that there is only one party in the history of Australian politics that has been able to amply demonstrate that we can work collectively on behalf of the workers of this nation, and that is the Australian Labor Party. Over decades the Liberal Party has demonstrated in a very apt way—and, before that, when it was the United Australia Party—that it was not about the working class but people who did not need any protection from governments at all. In fact, when we look at the philosophy of the Australian Labor Party as part of the labour movement in Australia, we see a singular difference in our philosophy. We are collectivists: we collectively look at and work with the community with regard to what benefits, wages and conditions the workers of Australia need.

We need to remind members on the benches opposite of the hardworking gains that the union movement has won over decades for their workers. The conditions that we have in our existing state awards now were hard fought for by strikes that needed to occur. They were hard fought for in a very responsible way. Today in that gulf we have with the Liberal Party we see a party that is about individual rights—not the collective rights of a society, not looking at the public good, not looking at those people in society who deserve our attention most and it is going to stamp over anyone who is going to in any way, shape or form compete against those individual rights. That is what we see in the principles of John Howard's bill that he is bringing in.

I say tonight that the National Party is a different breed. National Party members are the old agrarian socialists. That is why a few of them such as Barnaby Jones—

Mr Terry Sullivan: Barnaby Joyce.

Mr REYNOLDS: I said 'Joyce', didn't I? I have read his name a bit in the paper the last few days as well. That is why the Nationals' new senator is down there in Canberra concerned about voluntary union membership, Telstra and this industrial relations bill. The fact of the matter is that many members opposite are as well. The problem is that they have not got the gumption tonight to work—

Ms Nelson-Carr: They do not have the leadership.

Mr REYNOLDS: I take that interjection. They do not have the gumption or the leadership. The further they go down this track, the sillier they look. They know that the workers in the electorates of Lockyer and Maroochydore need their support now. Look at the polls in those areas and look at what they are asking their state representatives to give. If the member for Lockyer had some gumption tonight he would be voting with the government.

This morning the Premier moved the motion to deal with this legislation as a matter of urgency on behalf of the workers of Queensland. The by-elections in just eight days time give electors the opportunity, as the Leader of the House indicated a little while ago, to say to the Howard government, 'We're not going to be conned by your industrial relations agenda.' This bill put forward by the minister for industrial relations protects the very important rights of Queenslanders. The Commonwealth proposals threaten to have adverse and far-reaching implications for Queensland workers. We know that if the proposals are implemented Queensland's industrial relations system will be reduced in coverage from the current 70 per cent of employees to about 40 per cent of employees. We know that the industrial relations agenda of John Howard, the Liberals and the Nationals in Canberra is about taking away workers' rights.

I stood very proudly as a candidate for the seat of Townsville about eight years ago as chair of the workers' rights coalition. We campaigned in Townsville collectively to ensure that the very damaging impact on WorkCover was going to be reversed by this government. What did the Beattie government do? We reversed it. We ensured that workers' rights were not trampled on by the Tories in the way in which the Borbidge government did. In my capacity as member for Townsville, I support the urgency of this bill, I support the bill going through in its entirety, and I support the workers of Queensland. It is only the Australian Labor Party that will give them support. Let us get on with the job of getting this bill through to make sure that we have a firm base of support for the workers of Queensland and that we give that message to the federal government.

Ms STRUTHERS (Alger—ALP) (5.42 pm): Two of the most important issues facing families in my local area are the need for them to balance their weekly budget and the need for them to balance their work and family responsibilities. I have been doing weekend stalls with information and a petition to fight against the likely destruction of job security and family security under the Howard government's workplace changes, and let me say: people are not happy, John. They do not want to face any more insecurity. They do not want insecurity in their incomes and they do not want insecurity in the workplace with their jobs. Local families are flat out paying their bills each week and they are telling me things like, 'No, I won't go to the Ekka this year because I just can't afford it.'

My colleagues and I make no apologies for bringing this industrial relations bill into this House. We make no apology for our determination to use every power available to us in this state to give security to families in Queensland. We make no apology for urging members on the other side of the House—non-government members—to support this bill, to give security to workers in the face of John Howard's drive to look after the top end of town at the expense of hardworking, loyal workers in Queensland. I pay tribute to the trade union movement in Queensland because it has for many, many years been true to the cause. It has been fighting hard to achieve the gains that John Howard wants to destroy with the stroke of a pen in the federal parliament.

There is a key difference between the ALP and conservative parties. The ALP will never let working families down and will never let hardworking, loyal employees down. The Liberal MPs in Queensland are letting families down. The federal member in my local area, Gary Hardgrave, does not go to the federal parliament and defend working families, and the Liberals in this chamber are not doing that, either. They are letting families down. Gary Hardgrave, for instance, is supporting his leader, John Howard, as he always does. He does not challenge his leader. He has no guts. Gary Hardgrave said in federal parliament on Thursday, 26 May 2005 in relation to Labor's defence of security for working families—

So much for Labor's Chicken Little misinformation and mythology when it comes to workplace relations.

...

I said at the outset that this government trusts employers and employees to make the right decisions in the workplace.

Gary Hardgrave does not want a system of support. He wants to leave it to employees and employers to do the deals. What do we know about that sort of relationship? Who has the power in that relationship? Employers. So Gary Hardgrave is not a champion for families in his own area, and the Liberal members in this House can hang their heads in disgrace because they are certainly letting families down as well. So who is trying to stand up to their leader? The Nationals in this state are trying to have a go. They are questioning the Howard proposals.

Ms Nelson-Carr: Not the Nationals in here.

Ms STRUTHERS: The member for Mundingburra should listen to this because they are trying to have a go. The National Party member for Charters Towers, Shane Knuth, has fired a shot at the Prime Minister. He has had more guts than the Liberals. So I expect that he will stand up in this House and vote with us. Let me indulge the House by quoting him—and this was just very recently. Anyone would think he was a Labor member. In his little column 'Talking Politics with Shane Knuth' in the *Miners Midweek* on 13 July 2005, he wrote—

Industrial relations is the main issue in Australia at the present moment. I believe that the Howard government's proposal to introduce a national industrial relations system, abolishing the state system and removing states rights is a recipe for disaster for generations. Members of the Australian work force have fought hard to maintain a fair and just wage fixing system that ensures a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

Good on you, Mr Knuth! He goes on to say—

At present we have a system that works and works well, protecting the wage earner and giving people the freedom to choose between a state and a federal system. When the Prime Minister boasts that since he has been in government there has been an increase in wage growth, low unemployment, higher productivity and higher living standards, this has been achieved as a result of Australian owned small businesses, workers unions and companies all working together. The balance of this collaborative partnership is of the utmost importance, and I have written to Senator Barnaby Joyce to raise these concerns. If it's not broke, why fix it?

Mr Knuth, come on down! He should come and join us when the vote is on. We will have him. I have some Labor Party forms in my draw and I would be happy to give them to him. That is what we want: we want members with some guts. We want those Liberals to hang their heads in shame because they are certainly not sticking up for working families. The member for Charters Towers should go and have a chat to them and get them on side, get some sense into them and have them vote with us when we divide on this bill.

Earlier this week I had the great privilege of launching a public display at the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, commemorating former Maryborough resident August Prove in the pioneering role which he, the Australian Workers Union and the Queensland commission played in Queensland's unfair dismissal laws way back in 1916. Mr Prove was the first worker in Queensland to be reinstated after being dismissed unfairly by his employer. Honourable members should take note that the year was 1916.

This bill protects conditions and workers' rights which Queensland workers have relied upon for a century or so. But John Howard would have us believe that unfair dismissal is new and came in in the 1990s or thereabouts. It has been around for a long time. If it ain't broke, why fix it? These are rights which the Howard government is seeking to overturn in a destructive agenda. But, as with August Prove way back in 1916, he needed the protection of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. He deserved it and he got it. Let me tell the House his story very quickly.

August Prove was a Maryborough-born worker. Mr Prove was employed by the Maryborough City Council. He was a sanitary van man for 13 months prior to dismissal on 24 June 1916. It was alleged that Mr Prove neglected his work by dumping. Do members know what dumping is or are they too young for that? They are too young for that, I guess. So what is dumping?

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms STRUTHERS: Members want me to get to the point. Some members are far too young to know about these things. Dumping was an illegal practice of leaving half-empty collection pans in people's outhouses. This is what Mr Prove was allegedly doing. So, in response to Mr Prove's dismissal, the AWU, the Australian Workers Union, and the council employees rallied behind Mr Prove. Acting Judge Frederick Dickson in his wisdom decided wholly in favour of Mr Prove and became the first judge in Queensland to order the reinstatement of an employee who had been unjustly dismissed. Good on you, Judge Frederick Dickson.

If August Prove were alive today and he was dumping, under the Howard government proposals he would be in the outhouse. He would be dumped. He would have no protection at all. It is not good enough. No Australian working family deserves that. No Australian worker is going to get that while Labor has a say in this state. That is why this bill is important. That is why we need to have a solid system of support to protect working families. This bill is vital to ensure certainty for Queensland workers. It is important that they know—and they know very clearly, particularly at this time with these by-elections—that they have a very important opportunity to send a very clear message to Mr Howard. What is that message?

Ms Barry: Don't dump on workers!

Ms STRUTHERS: Don't dump on workers!

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—NPA) (5.50 pm): Why could this legislation not lay on the table for 14 days? Because of two by-elections. The government wants to push through this legislation. It is not about supporting workers; it is about winning two by-elections—stunts and PR. I have employed people for over 25 years—good, hardworking people whom I now represent—and I will support them for fair working conditions until the day I die, but I will not try simple PR stunts like this bill to make out I support workers.

I would not be game to face the hardworking people of my electorate with shonky legislation like this. This just goes to show how far this Labor government has moved from its core constituents. Some of those members opposite should go and talk to some real Labor people—some real working people in the city and in the regions, not the pretend Labor people we have in this place. The Premier should be trying to resolve this issue, which is a federal piece of legislation with the federal government, not a PR stunt in the state parliament to try to win two by-elections.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: I support real Labor people in my electorate; those opposite do not. I support more Labor people than any of those blokes even look like supporting. Have a look at the socioeconomic groups in their electorates. I support the Labor people in my electorate and I will until the day I die, but I will not support rubbish like this.

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.51 pm): After that dump from the member for Lockyer, I will hopefully bring a bit more sense to the argument. I will keep my arguments brief tonight because there are a few speakers on the list. The last thing that those opposite want to talk about this evening is industrial relations. They just cannot bring themselves to stand up for the mums and dads and the families who make our state great. They want to stand here and bleat about some standing order 63-15. Mr Deputy Speaker, you are a learned man; you have been in that chair a long time. I am sure, like me, you have had a good look at the standing orders. There is no such thing as 63-15. There are, however, mechanisms that allow us as legislators in this state to pass legislation urgently if needed.

Have no doubt that the passage of this legislation is urgent. With the coalition taking control of both houses in Canberra, the blow could fall on the heads of Queensland workers and their families at any time. That is right; at any time the people of Queensland could lose their holiday pay, their service pay, and their leave, be dismissed on the spot and forfeit the rights that our forebears have fought for a century to obtain. This parliament needs to send a message to the federal government in Canberra that it cannot step on our state's rights and our workers' rights. That is why we need to pass this bill as soon as possible.

I note that the Leader of the Opposition mentioned in his speech this afternoon that he is speaking to Senator Barnaby Joyce—or Barnaby Jones, as the member for Townsville called him—about Queensland rights. What better way of helping Senator Joyce do the job he was elected to do than voting for this piece of legislation? It will give him more ammunition in his fight with those Liberals in Canberra. But, unfortunately, I do not think those opposite will have the intestinal fortitude of Senator Joyce when standing up to the Liberals down there.

My great-grandfather started work at the Inkerman Sugar Mill in Home Hill some 90 years ago. My granddad worked there all his life except for his war service. My dad is currently the chief cane inspector at the same mill. My brother worked there and I myself have also done stints at that very mill.

Mr Barton: So have I.

Mr WALLACE: I take the interjection of the minister for industrial relations. He is a good Inkerman mill worker as well. Over those 90 years their rights have been protected by the state of Queensland. The salary and wages that they rely on, be they penalty rates, overtime and shift allowances, have sustained our family for over 90 years. The certainty that they were going to be guaranteed a fair and equitable wage allowed the Wallace family to grow and invest in the local community. It allowed my parents to raise five kids, sending two of us to university in Townsville. That certainty is now at risk. The Howard government has said that it is going to get rid of our workers' rights. It will hurt Queensland families—people who work hard to make a living, pay off a house and raise a family. Indeed, I note today in news reports that the South Australian Industrial Relations Court has found that Bakers Delight paid a 15-year-old girl less than she was entitled to and that there are 50 similar cases involving AWAs in South Australia. This federal change will just rip our workers off. It will make it so hard for mums and dads to put bread and butter on the table.

Like my colleagues on this side of the House, I cannot and I will not stand for that. To do so would be neither right nor safe. I challenge those opposite to support this bill and support the working families who live in their electorates. It is a bill about protecting our families and saying to Canberra: back off, fellas.

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (5.55 pm): It gives me pleasure to rise to support the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005, a bill with one central principle: the protection by the Beattie Labor government of Queensland workers' wages and conditions; to enshrine in state legislation the hard-fought human rights that are currently afforded to workers in this state; and to say to John Howard and the Liberal Party, 'If you are hell-bent on destroying the decent working conditions of Queenslanders and their families, then you will have to get past us, the Beattie Labor government, first and we will fight you.'

Unlike the state Liberal Party, who are John Howard's henchmen in this war against workers, or the National Party, who are like a roo caught in the spotlight and unable to decide which oncoming truck they should jump towards—

Mrs Attwood: A dump truck?

Ms BARRY: A dump truck, yes. This state Labor government will stand and fight John Howard's destructive industrial relations reforms. Workers in this state, quite frankly, deserve nothing less. The provisions contained in this bill are intended to protect casual loading payments, annual leave loading, shiftwork, loading for afternoon and night shifts, weekend penalty rates, redundancy pay, public holiday rates, overtime, meal breaks, outworker protections, annual leave entitlements, long service leave, superannuation, allowances like higher duties, X-ray—and nonnurses will like this—foul linen allowances and a raft of leave entitlements.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Ms BARRY: Yes, and other matters. It would not surprise honourable members that the protection of these provisions is of critical importance to Aspley constituents. While I have a considerable number of small businesses in my electorate, there is no doubt that most people who are in my electorate are workers who rely upon a weekly wage. Dealing with hospitality, trades, construction, nursing, health, police, ambulance, fires, managers, teachers, retail workers and admin officer workers are the everyday bread and butter issues of my electorate work. One could say that I consult every day with workers of my electorate on what they believe is important to their working lives.

The amount of money in their pay packets every week matters to my constituents—a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. But dollars afforded to families through penalty rates and overtime mean the difference between their paying the mortgage or not paying the mortgage. Annual leave entitlements, long service leave and annual leave loading mean the difference between having time to spend with their families, having a holiday or simply taking time off during the school holidays to save on child-care costs.

Working extra shifts, a weekend or a night shift is the difference between buying a new pair of shoes for a kid who grew two sizes in two weeks, replacing the broken washing machine or paying the school fees. Having access to career paths, minimum wages and classification structures is the difference between a workplace being able to attract staff to do the work or leaving those scant remaining workers to carry onerous workloads. Thousands of Aspley constituents and millions of Australians rely on enterprise agreements and, where those enterprise agreements and awards are to be stripped to exclude those conditions that we seek to protect here today, it will leave Queensland workers in precarious, potentially dire financial positions that, quite frankly, should be untenable to any decent political representative in the state or the nation. No amount of wishing and hoping that employers will do the right thing, or that all employees will be successful individual workplace negotiators, will alone protect workers' pay packets in Aspley.

The most obvious examples are the impact that this legislation will have on nurses. Nursing is a predominantly female, highly casualised work force heavily reliant on penalty rates, leave loading, overtime, weekend and public holiday rates, and additional leave entitlements to compensate for a difficult and often socially punitive profession. Nurses enjoy, through hard-fought industrial battles—battles that I had fought every single day of my working life as a nurse with the help of nursing unions—a raft of entitlements and conditions that are critical in achieving nursing's competitive edge in attracting staff and, quite frankly, making the job worth while.

In my 25 years as a nurse I never once recall gaining an improved entitlement from the good graces of my employer alone. Each and every hard-fought improvement in my nursing wage or career was only ever gained through the hard work of my union, the courage of the nurses who belonged to the union and the good decision making of the independent umpire, the Industrial Relations Commission. There is an old motto that still stands true today—dedication does not pay the rent.

I started nursing in 1977. I worked throughout some of the toughest industrial professional battles that nursing has ever fought. Whilst it is very hard for any worker to walk off the job in order to achieve industrial and professional improvements, it is exceptionally difficult for nurses to leave their job. I do not think that there are many workers who can say that they have had to leave people who are dying in order to achieve industrial improvements. I did so—and so did many of my nursing comrades—and so I am able to stand here today with nurses enshrined with decent working conditions and entitlements—entitlements that John Howard fails to indicate that he will protect because, quite frankly, he will not protect them. Those decisions made by nurses in the past are too hard fought for us to sacrifice here today without a fight.

The entitlements that will be swept aside by John Howard's industrial relations reform will have a crushing effect on the nursing profession in this country and consequentially cause poor outcomes for health care in this country. At a time when health is, without doubt, the most important issue to our community, what conceivable benefit can be achieved in throwing nurses and their hard-won wages and entitlements to the wolves? None. Quite frankly, there is no benefit at all. It will create a disincentive for young people to work in those professions that have shiftwork and are essential services such as health, police, hospitality, retail and emergency services.

John Howard will not, and cannot, justify his claims that his reforms will be good for Australia because they will not. In fact, they will strike at the very heart of this country's most important industries in the most damaging of ways. On the other hand, I stand here today with my comrades and support the urgent actions taken by my government in this place today to defend workers' rights and entitlements in this state. They are the actions of a government determined to protect the workers in the state. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (6.02 pm): I rise to speak to the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005. At the outset I say that I will be supporting this bill, especially as at this point in time I do not know the full extent of the new federal government's proposal for industrial relations for Australian workers.

Ms Nelson-Carr: It's just the same.

Ms LEE LONG: I do not believe that the federal government should be trying to take the responsibilities away from the states. I also support this bill for the simple reason that I support average working Queenslanders—those honest, decent people who are the backbone of the state. I have done shiftwork myself. My late husband and myself have employed many people. I am also aware of the impact that overtime, weekend, holiday and shiftwork can have on someone and especially on their family life.

Yes, there are always going to be industries in which these kinds of hours are necessary, but that does not change the fact that people expected to work them should be properly compensated. Time after time we see changes to laws governing our economy, our workplaces, our employment and governing changes to our trades and so on. The single consistent thing about these changes is the way they benefit the big end of town and the way the big end keeps ripping more and more out of the average working man or woman's pockets. There is no argument about this. Governments talk about needing to keep industry strong, about needing to ensure that investment stays up and so on, but the truth is that along the way they tear down the rights and privileges of the ordinary people of Queensland.

The University of New South Wales sociology professor Michael Pusey wrote a book looking at the impact of all this economic reform. He called it *The experience of middle Australia: the dark side of economic reform*. He looked at how Australia's wealth—its gross domestic product—changed over the 20 years to the year 2000. GDP falls into three broad categories. The first one is the government's share, the second one is the profit share—which is essentially big business and corporate earnings—and the third one is wages and salaries. That is the share going to working men and women. What did he find when he looked at this? He found that in those two decades the slice going to wages and salaries slumped six per cent. Where did that share of the nation's wealth go? To profit share. That is, to big business, to corporations and their executives with multimillion-dollar salaries, and to their shareholders. Their slice of the pie jumped seven per cent at the same time as wage and salary earners were getting less to the tune of six per cent.

It is true that many ordinary Australians are shareholders, but it is also true that the biggest slice of the share market is in the hands of those same big corporations. If those changes—six per cent down for workers and seven per cent up for business—do not sound like much, let me put it this way. On the ABS figures for 1999-2000, those changes meant ordinary Australians were getting \$37,753 million less and big business was getting \$44,044 million more. That is where all of this economic reform, these workplace reforms, these trade deals and so on are taking us.

What real defence does the average worker have? They should at least have the defence of their elected representatives. They also have their unions. I disagree from time to time with the paths some unions choose to take. That is almost always when they step outside the workplace and become involved in unrelated matters. But that does not stop me from recognising the absolutely essential role that unions play in giving average people a voice on workplace matters. I think unions need to show, by the benefits and workplace representation that they are able to provide, that taking up union membership is appealing enough for people to want to join those unions. Having said that, I also happily recognise that important parts of our daily life are the result of unions working well for their members.

It appears that the Howard government wants to tear down basic workers' rights to benefit—as I have proven—the greedy, rapacious robber barons at the big end of town. They have taken enough from ordinary Queenslanders. Unless they are stopped, we really are looking at Third World wages for people and First World profits for the corporations. It must be stopped. I support the bill.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (6.06 pm): The people of Australia need to be very fearful of the Howard government's proposed industrial changes. I remember our Prime Minister wanting to lull us into a feeling of being comfortable and secure. Well, I can tell members that the people of the Woodridge electorate—many of whom work long hours for moderate take-home pay—are very concerned that they are about to lose benefits that have been hard won over the past 100 years.

When I hear members of the federal coalition saying that we have to become more competitive with China and India, that means just one thing—stripping away our working conditions and a reduction in income. In fact, even wishing to follow the working conditions and income in the United States should make us fearful. We all recognise that in America the divide between the rich and poor is vast. A worker can earn as little as \$US5 or \$US6 an hour and live in utter poverty while still in full-time work and get a miserly two weeks leave per year. Australia is still the land of the fair go, but I wonder for how much longer.

It is a well-known fact that in America good education and health services—the most basic of services—are available according to your income. Even if someone is on a reasonable income and they have the misfortune to have a serious accident or illness, they may lose their home, their income and live in abject poverty and no-one blinks an eyelid. This is supposedly the land of great opportunity. The privileged send their children to the best schools and universities, thus perpetuating their place of privilege, and the average worker battles along to put bread on the table. More and more I see our country being taken down the American road, and I do not like what I see. Australians do not want to see their country divided, but that is happening more and more.

I proudly represent the people in the electorate of Woodridge—good, honest, hardworking people. It is a well-known fact that Australian workers now work harder and longer than many workers in similar countries. They well and truly earn their four weeks rec leave each year. Many low-paid workers rely very heavily on their overtime payments to make ends meet; it is not to supply the luxuries of life. They are now facing being stripped of overtime payments, weekend and shift penalty rates, casual loading and even redundancy payments.

Instant dismissal at the whim of a boss may become commonplace. The ability of the average worker to negotiate a suitable workplace agreement that will be equitable and fair is minimal. Sure, there are some bosses who appreciate their staff and reward them accordingly. However, I am afraid that more and more the mighty dollar is driving much of what people do. To say that increased profits will necessarily result in increased employees and increased wages is not necessarily correct.

Our friends in the union movement have made huge gains for workers over the years. They have gone into bat for the average worker, who, without their efforts, would still be working under conditions from 50 years ago. The recent win of gaining \$17 a week would certainly not have happened had John Howard's new regime been in place.

Queensland has enjoyed an industrial harmony greater than that of many other states and certainly better than a number of decades ago. However, should the federal government go ahead with these feared industrial laws we should be ready for workers to take to the streets in protest. It is already happening.

It is the aim of the federal government to get rid of the Industrial Relations Commission and the independent tribunals, to get rid of the unions and break their strength and power, which has been a great protection and strength to workers over the years, and to leave workers vulnerable to the whim of their employers. Members well remember Chris Corrigan and the waterfront dispute, with dogs and guards on the wharfs. It seems that was the entree and we are now about to have the main course. John Howard's gift to his wealthy mates is workers dished up on toast.

We have seen the meanness of John Howard in his treatment of refugees, in social security belt tightening, in disadvantaging the most vulnerable and in myriad other decisions. We know that the Prime Minister's mantra is an open market where if you work you eat, even though it may be meagrely, and if you do not work we will throw you some crumbs.

I am anxious to see as many people as possible enter the workforce, in particular the many good people in the Woodridge electorate, some of whom may need to gain a few skills in order to find a job. However, we do not want to see people being forced into the work force while their children are still young, placing their children in child care at a high cost, their income diminished and financially worse off, and being driven to find two incomes to make ends meet, which currently happens in the US.

People deserve to be paid a decent wage for their labour. We live in a time where shareholders rule, many workers have lost their jobs, customers are often last in line for service and it will be easy for many chief executives to reduce wages to produce greater profits for shareholders. Once again, the workers will come at the end of the line. I have great pleasure in supporting this bill and I commend the bill to the House.

Ms CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (6.12 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005. The Howard government's proposal to create a national industrial relations system will, without any doubt, have a drastic impact on the lives of working families and on employment opportunities in Australia and have devastating social implications. The federal Liberal government proposes to take superannuation, long service leave, jury service leave and notice of termination conditions out of federal awards.

I am deeply concerned—but not surprised—that the Howard government's changes will enable individual and collective agreements to be made and approved without reference to current award conditions. For the average worker, this means that any individual working agreement written up by an employer will not have to contain the up to 20 or so benefits to workers that are available in most awards. The agreements will have to contain only five minimum conditions of employment covering annual leave, personal leave, unpaid parental leave, the maximum number of ordinary working hours and a minimum wage. The Howard government's proposals will, therefore, have federal government employees bargaining with their employers about matters such as penalty rates, overtime, allowances, shift loadings and redundancy pay. Workers could lose the right to up to 20 allowable award benefits.

The Prime Minister stated in his address to the Sydney Institute in July this year that these changes would create a new breed of worker—a worker called the enterprise worker. Imagine a worker having to bargain one-on-one with their boss for every reasonable and just workplace condition that has been won over years by the collective action of our unions. I do not think that this is enterprising; it will be begging. I think John Howard sees and believes workers to be beggars. Under the Howard government's proposal for a deregulated labour market, there will not be enterprising workers in Australia; there will be workers who are forced to do two jobs, perhaps three, to maintain a decent, regular weekly wage to meet the needs of raising a young family, meet mortgage repayments and prepare for their lifelong dreams. Of course, the enterprising workers will not have time to enjoy the money that they earn, as they will be working more hours than ever before.

The move towards a more deregulated system should be made in the full knowledge that further inequity and widening of the wage gap is the likely result. In the US the federal government sets the minimum wage, which is currently \$5.15 per hour. Earnings inequity has increased substantially over the last two decades in the United States, the centre of labour market deregulation, and this is exactly where Australia is headed if John Howard's changes are applied.

I am pleased to stand strong with my labour colleagues and comrades, Australian workers and unions against the Howard government's IR reforms because they will reduce the protections and the living standards of employees. We all know that from this proposed style of deregulation, lower and middle income earners will feel the pinch like never before—the workers who work the extra shifts at Christmas to put extra money in the bank. Business and industry know that this is the kind of thinking behind why the Howard government will not do anything to improve our economy and address the skill shortages being identified in many of the growth industries, such as construction and automotive. It will do absolutely nothing to encourage people to consider taking up work in areas that are already drastically understaffed, with poor working conditions, such as aged care.

Under our system, employers and employees are able to reach agreements that suit their needs. The Industrial Relations Commission is there to help parties resolve disputes, if necessary. The Queensland government stands strong for fair and balanced unfair dismissal laws which protect the rights of employees to job security. All Queensland employees should be treated fairly and decently, and their basic rights ought to be the same irrespective of whether they work for a small or a large business.

One of the key elements of the federal government's industrial relations proposals is a plan to exempt all businesses with up to 100 employees from unfair dismissal laws. For businesses with more than 100 employees, it is proposed to increase the probationary period during which employees are exempt from unfair dismissal laws from three months to six months. A rate of 99.9 per cent of private sector employees in Queensland work in businesses employing fewer than 100 employees. These employees, if their employer is incorporated, will have no recourse to unfair dismissal procedures. Is this just or fair? No. Queensland's tried and tested unfair dismissal provisions should not be conditional upon the size of a business.

All workers are entitled to a fair system. The federal government's proposal is not about fairness or equity; it is about strangling the rights of Queensland workers in small business. To justify its proposals, the federal government has argued that unfair dismissal laws have only been around since the 1990s and the federal unfair dismissal laws have acted as a significant brake to unemployment. Both of those arguments are misleading.

Firstly, the principles behind the current unfair dismissal laws have been around for almost 100 years in Queensland. As the member for Algester mentioned, the state's unfair dismissal laws have their origin in 1916, when Maryborough-born sanitary van man August Prove became the first Queensland worker to be reinstated after being unfairly dismissed, or dumped. The 1916 Industrial Court decision to reinstate Mr Prove was based on the principle that an employee cannot be dismissed without good cause, which has become the backbone of Queensland's unfair dismissal laws.

I am very proud today to have the ability to talk for the very first time and to place on the public record my own personal experience and dependence upon Queensland's unfair dismissal laws and my opportunity to raise a matter in the Industrial Relations Commission. A couple of years prior to becoming a member in this House, I had the unfortunate experience of working for an employer who paid me an ordinary wage to work on a Saturday, the same wage as working any time between Monday and Friday.

After taking this concern to my employer at the time, the next opportunity I had to speak with him I was given an AWA to look at. Because I refused to sign the AWA, I was then given a letter to advise me that my resignation had been accepted. This was unacceptable and I felt that it was wrong. It was unjust and unfair. I took my complaint to my union and it represented me in the Industrial Relations Commission. I know exactly what it feels like for workers to be dumped and dismissed unfairly. I know that I depended on my union to represent me in the Industrial Relations Commission. I know that my union understood exactly how I felt about not having a job because I was unfairly dismissed. I know that my union knew what it was like to not be able to pay my mortgage and pay the bills that I had to pay. That experience gave me the strong resolve to come into this House and work with my union to develop and establish the Tour Guide Award to improve the lot for other tour guide workers working on the Gold Coast and throughout Queensland.

There is no evidence to support claims that the federal unfair dismissal laws have acted as a brake on employment. Rather, a full court in the *Hamzy v Tricon International Restaurants*, trading as KFC, case in 2001 found that the growth in employment in Australia in the 1990s was at its strongest when federal unfair dismissal laws were at their most protective. The federal government proposals will allow the majority of employees in Queensland to be dismissed without any reason at all and with no right to seek a remedy unless they are willing and able to take the matter through the law courts. I could not have afforded it and I am sure that there are a lot of people in my electorate who would not be able to stand up for their rights by taking their cases through the law courts.

The issues surrounding the dismissal of an employee are never easy for either the employee or the employer. There will be cases where an employer has a good reason to dismiss any employee, just as there are cases where a dismissal has probably been unfair to the employee. Often it will not be so clear cut. There may be fault on both sides, but the current Queensland unfair dismissal laws are working for both employers and employees in this state. Industrial disputation is at historically lower levels, with the average quarterly strike rate to the year March 2005 standing at just 4.3 working days lost per 1,000 employees. I ask members to compare this to the national average of 10.2 or Victoria, which comes completely under the proposed federal system, where the rate was 8.2 working days lost.

As a government we are determined to do all that we can to protect Queensland employees from the harsh impact of these proposals, and that is why we introduced the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005. We have demonstrated in Queensland that fair and strong employment rights and protections are an integral part of a successful economy and not an impediment to it. The bill being debated today will help to ensure that Queensland employees continue to have access to unfair dismissal laws and access to benefits. I support the urgency of this bill. I support the bill going through in its entirety today, and I support workers in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.23 pm): The process which saw, first of all, the introduction of this bill this week and then bringing it straight into the parliament for debate and transgressing all of the standing orders of this parliament is probably one of the most callous, calculated, cruel, contemptuous and cheap shots that I have seen for a long time. There is only one reason that this bill is before the House today, and that is that the government fears a flogging in Chatsworth and Redcliffe. Do members know what the Labor Party is doing? For all of the patronising statements that we have heard today and tonight, the real reason that we are debating this bill is that this is a cheap political stunt to try to save Labor's skin in Chatsworth and Redcliffe.

This bill should have sat on the table for the appropriate 14 days. This bill should have been properly examined. But the main point with regard to this bill is that those opposite know that this legislation carries absolutely no weight and they are prepared to use the workers of Queensland as cannon fodder to try to save their skin in these two seats. What we have had in Queensland in recent times with the Bundaberg Hospital has exposed the disgraceful litany of stunts, the massive employment of media people, the marketing and all of the advertising and glossy brochures and all of that which makes up the pack of cards that is the Beattie government. Beneath that we have the bullying of staff. We have the cover-ups. We have staff not able to go out and tell the truth of what happened, and that is what has driven the fear into this government to bring this bill into the parliament.

The government is using this bill for one reason only, and let us not kid ourselves about it: this bill is a smokescreen. It does not care about the workers. It only cares about winning the seats and getting another two members back into this parliament. It only cares about covering up what has happened at Bundaberg Hospital and all of the other hospitals throughout the state and the myriad other things that have happened. It is treating workers cheaply by using them in this way. That is the only reason we are debating this bill now. Why do members opposite not stand up and tell the House that this bill will mean nothing when the federal government brings in its legislation?

The only way to work is the way the National Party will be working, and that is with our senators and when we know what is in the legislation. No-one knows the detail of what the federal legislation is going to be. No-one knows that, yet this bill has been brought on for debate just so the government can put the smokescreen up for these two seats. I say again: this bill is a charade because it would not do anything for workers, even if it was passed, and the government should be honest enough to say that. The only reason it brought it in is as a stunt. Queenslanders know that and have woken up to these stunts. We heard the minister for public works talk about letterboxing Chatsworth and Redcliffe. Of course we know that is what it does. That is how this government works. It brings legislation in here as some sort of document, even though it is false and it is a hoax and it is all a set-up. It just wants to get the vote the way it wants it and it will then go around and do the letterboxing, because it does not want people to make a proper judgment about what has happened in the health system and what has happened elsewhere.

One important thing we have to remember is that working-class people have been through some pretty tough times. I can tell members one pretty tough time—when interest rates were 21 per cent. Can members imagine how it was for workers then? I was trying to raise my family and pay a place off. I worked nights, weekends and days, as did my kids, to try to keep our enterprise above board when interest rates were 21 per cent. What do we have at the moment? At the moment we have the lowest and most sustained inflation we have had for many years. We have the lowest and most sustained unemployment figures we have had for many years, and that in fact is happening right across Australia brought about by the Howard government. Interest rates are no longer 21 per cent; rather, they are much lower. Most people are now paying something like a six per cent or seven per cent interest rate on their house and it has made things affordable.

For once working-class people are able to have a job, to have low inflation and to afford some of the things in life that many of us could never afford at that stage of our lives because of inflation, because of unemployment and because of interest rates. Almost across-the-board—and we know that

there are exceptions of people who are in difficult circumstances—the Australian economy and Australian workers have more opportunity at the moment than ever before under the Howard government. We know that at different ends of the spectrum there are the extreme cases of poverty or richness, but generally speaking—with interest rates the way they are, the ability of people to buy housing, to buy vehicles and to look after their kids and make choices for their kids—lives have improved dramatically.

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr HORAN: I hear the member for Toowoomba North interject. He should try debt at 21 per cent and compare that to debt at six per cent or seven per cent, and he will find a big difference.

We have also seen that Australia is facing some unbelievable challenges. We can put our head in the sand if we like and say that we are going to put a wall up around us and stop all of our exports and stop all of the imports. However, the reality is that since the First Fleet arrived Australia has had to export. We are only a small population in a big country, but we have had to work and fight way above our weight within the world scene. With the threats that the world economy will be facing from the massive growth in China, India, Brazil and so forth, we have to be at the forefront. We have to be at the cutting edge. We have to look after our workers in a way in which we can keep their jobs, let them grow, let them improve and let them earn what they are worth. We also have a changing economy and lifestyle, and let us for one moment talk about women in the work force. Due to the time, I will continue that issue after the dinner break.

Sitting suspended from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

Mr HORAN: Before the House adjourned for dinner I outlined how in recent years Australia has enjoyed probably one of the best and most sustained economic periods that we have seen for many years. We have had sustained low inflation, sustained and record low employment, and sustained low interest rates. I do not think any of us would want to go back to the time when, under the Keating government, interest rates went up to 21 per cent. I remember that well. I remember that if people missed only one or two repayments they were gone. At that sort of interest rate, they were in trouble. Now many people in Australia have an opportunity to borrow at reasonable rates. They can have confidence in their jobs and they know that inflation has been maintained.

As a modern nation we have to stay at the forefront whilst looking after the base needs and rights of our people, particularly those people who are vulnerable. Before the dinner break I said that we are facing the emerging nations of China, India, Brazil and others. We have to be modern and competitive. It is no good putting our heads in the sand.

Times have changed greatly. Now most of the women in our communities work and have careers. Many of those women want to balance their careers or jobs with the ability to look after and have quality time with their children. They need to have flexible arrangements that allow them to drop their kids off at school and pick them up after school, or that maybe allow them to do some of their work at home. They need flexibility in a modern workplace and in a modern environment.

Retail shopping hours have been extended to seven days. Previously, Monday and Tuesday were probably the busiest days in retail. Now, the other days are far busier. The whole relevance of a retail industry that operated from nine to five Monday to Friday, and perhaps Saturday mornings, has changed. The same thing has happened in tourism and hospitality. We also see changes occurring in mining with the fly-in, fly-out arrangements.

The other day I heard a miner talking about a wonderful new arrangement whereby, in return for giving up one week of his holidays—that is, going from four weeks to three weeks annual leave—he could work seven days and then have seven days off. Therefore, if he flew to the mine in the morning he could probably spend eight nights at home and six days at work. He explained how good that was for family arrangements. It suited him fine to have consistent, quality time with his family.

Under older awards and arrangements, workers have always been paid according to the amount of work that they did. For example, shearers and fruit pickers have always been paid that way. In some enterprises—not all—it is reasonable to pay according to the amount of work that one does. Shearing is a good example of that. People who are involved in sport—perhaps they need leave to represent their country—need flexible arrangements. People with disabilities may have certain needs.

One of the problems that we face when debating industrial relations is that everyone seems to think that employers are all ogres of some sort. A very small minority of people could be classed as bad employers. At the other end of the spectrum, a very small group of people could be classed as bad employees who will pull the pin at a moment's notice, walk out and leave people in the lurch. By the same token, there are bad employers who do not treat people with respect.

At the end of the day, someone can only run a successful business and be successful in what they do if they value their labour, if they treat the people who work with them as part of their family, if they treat those people with respect and value what they do and the contribution that they make to the business. Employers must endeavour to encourage people to be loyal and long term. They should encourage training and promote enjoyment of and participation in the business. A happy work force brings about a far better result, and successful people know that.

Tonight in this parliament the hypocrisy that we have seen is almost breathtaking. When I took over as health minister I promised that the blue-collar workers in Queensland Health would keep their jobs. I said that I believed in and respected those people, who were mostly AWU people, because they made a major contribution to Queensland Health and they were important. A hospital cannot run without the essential services provided by its blue-collar staff. The health ministers before me, Minister Beattie, Minister Elder and Minister Hayward, were all going to privatise the hotel services of Queensland Health. It was a breath of fresh air—and the union officials appreciated it—when the Nationals won office and said, 'No, the workers stay. We believe that they are an integral and most important part of our process.'

If we want to treat workers with genuine respect, tonight we will deal with these IR issues in a way that is compassionate and understanding of the people who are vulnerable and need to have union support if they go into an AWA, as is allowed under the provisions of the Commonwealth government legislation. At the same time, we need to allow people to be flexible to meet the modern and changed needs of young Australian families and young professional people. We have a vastly changed workplace, where many activities now take place over the seven days of the week. Once such things only took place from Monday to Friday, everybody played football on Saturday and Sunday was a day of rest.

Many people would prefer to have an arrangement where they are paid a higher amount per hour so they know consistently what they are going to earn, rather than be subject to the vagaries of being offered a certain amount of work with the possibility of some overtime. They would prefer to know that they can work X hours per week, and instead of getting paid, for example, \$25 per hour they will be paid \$28 or \$29. Under such an arrangement, they do not have to work Monday to Friday, nine to five, but can agree to the particular hours that suit their needs. We need that flexibility, because the whole scene has changed. For example, universities no longer simply work to term. Some universities work right through the year. Working life as we knew it has changed.

Let us look at workers within our own parliament. Mr Speaker, you would know of the number of backpackers who are employed by the catering department. They are lovely young girls, but they have been brought in to perform casual part-time work. We could offer such a flexible arrangement to Australian mothers who could come in for a certain number of hours when parliament sits, which would probably suit them. Maybe they could work at night when their husbands are home and their kids are in bed. That could work, yet the government of the day has chosen this system of employing backpackers in hospitality.

The hypocrisy of the whole exercise that the government has undertaken is absolutely breathtaking. I finished the first half of my speech before tea, and during the break I found out that there are something like 30,000 people on the waiting lists at just two hospitals. The cover-up has involved something like 20,000 people. That is happening at two hospitals alone. At the start of my speech I spoke about the two by-elections and the smokescreens, the stunts, the hoaxes and the callousness of using workers as front-line cannon fodder to try to cover up the dreadful things that are happening in Queensland Health and under the Beattie Labor government.

People on the opposite side must feel like real cowards. They cannot fight an election on state issues and stand on their record. Instead we see stunts and hoaxes from the Premier. I do not think people will fall for it anymore. People have been appalled by what has happened at the Bundaberg Hospital, which is just one example.

What about the workers? Under the current negotiations by the government into the core enterprise agreement for Q-Build, the government wants to restrict union ability to come into the workplace. They were going to campaign against it here, but a little deal has been done to keep them away at least until the parliament is over.

What about the firefighters in this state? At seven different venues in this state their compatriots—casual firefighters whom they hold in high esteem but who are not as well trained as they are—are being brought in. The government should talk to the firefighters so that it can understand what they have to do in highly emergent situations, whether it be a major smash or a fire. Even though some of those casuals are friends from their community, they do not want to have those people with them until or unless they are trained to the same level.

The bullying has been exposed in Health. We hear in this House the platitudes about the Labor Party and this, that and the other. The real test with workers is whether the government looks after them in the job and whether it treats them with respect. The bullying that has occurred under this government has to be seen to be believed. It has occurred in department after department—in the EPA, the health department and other departments.

This whole issue relating to the federal industrial relations bill has been a smear and fear campaign. We are here tonight debating a bill that has been introduced for false reasons simply because of those two by-elections. We do not know what is in the federal industrial relations legislation. We know some of the broad principles, some of the protection and flexibility that is involved and some of the very minimum provisions that are provided. However, we do not know the full details because that

legislation has not been introduced into the House of Representatives. There is one message for the people of Queensland: we have sustained nearly eight years of government by media stunts, press releases, hoaxes and all these smart tactics that are used these days. One such tactic that we have seen from this government relates to the introduction of legislation into this parliament. When the opposition votes against it, the government then sends that around to the electors and it thinks it makes a difference. However, people are starting to think a bit differently now. People are awake up to this government; they are awake up to all the failings of the government. They know that this government treats its own employees with absolute disrespect. Some of the stories I have heard about the bullying and the pushing people out of jobs in various departments would make the hair on the back of your neck stand up.

The only reason we are debating this bill here tonight is that the government cannot stand on its own record in state business and state affairs, particularly in Health, in these two upcoming elections of Chatsworth and Redcliffe. I think that using workers like this when the government's own track record is absolutely deplorable is a callous, cowardly act. It is obviously preplanned. It is all worked in with the advertising. This government cannot stand on its own record in this state. It is a disgrace. I think that the workers of Queensland will revolt against it. They will stand by people like the National Party, who are fair dinkum when it comes to looking after workers. Our track record is that we are fair dinkum. We look after them in a straightforward way. We treat workers with respect. We know that if we give them some respect and job security, if they have the ability, they will work their way up the ladder and earn a bit more. They should have that opportunity. They should not be held back from doing that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the member for Bundaberg I recognise in the gallery the students and teachers from the Indooroopilly State School in the electorate of Indooroopilly. Welcome to Parliament House.

Hon. NI CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (7.43 pm): I rise to support the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005. The federal government's proposals threaten to have adverse and far-reaching implications for Queensland workers. Our Queensland workers need our support. If the federal government proposals are implemented, Queensland's state industrial relations system will suffer badly. Employees caught in the federal system under those proposals could see their current rights and entitlements significantly reduced or simply taken away altogether—entitlements like superannuation, long service leave and termination notice that impact directly on the take-home pay, the living standards and the quality of life of thousands of workers in Queensland and their families. As a government we must do all we can to protect Queensland employees from the harsh impact of these changes, and that is why this legislation is before the House today.

The primary aim of these amendments is to provide protection for workers whose entitlements will be eroded or removed under the federal government's proposals, but not to burden employers by interfering with current arrangements under awards and agreements. As the minister said in his second reading speech, this legislation will not add to the labour costs for Queensland employers as it will have no impact on current state or federal awards and agreements and no impact on non-award employees.

This bill provides a safety net for those employees who will be most affected by the federal proposals. There is growing community concern in my electorate of Bundaberg, throughout Queensland and throughout the nation about the impact of the federal government's proposed industrial relations changes. This concern is widespread and it is growing. People are questioning why the federal government is so determined to proceed with change that will hurt ordinary working Australians and their families. That is not the way to build future prosperity. It is not the way to lift, or even maintain, the quality of life of Australian families. It is not the way to build a strong economy and it is not the Australian way. It is certainly not the Queensland way. Industrial relations must be based on fairness and equity.

John Howard's excuses that we need his industrial relations reforms to achieve high economic and jobs growth, low unemployment and low levels of industrial disputes are totally false. Queensland currently has the lowest unemployment level in 30 years. We are enjoying an historically low level of industrial disputation. Queensland's economic growth rate was more than double the national average last year, and jobs growth of 5.6 per cent in June exceeded the national growth rate of just 3.6 per cent. We have proven in Queensland that fair and strong employment rights and protections are an integral part of a successful economy, not an impediment to it. The Queensland government will not stand by while the federal government destroys Queensland's industrial relations system without doing all we can to protect the interests of Queensland businesses and their employees.

The federal government does not have exclusive jurisdiction over industrial matters, and state laws can apply as long as they are not inconsistent with federal laws. This bill before the House will help to ensure Queensland employees continue to have access to their hard-earned entitlements in the wake of the federal government's proposed industrial relations changes. I support the bill.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (7.47 pm): Members opposite tonight are saying that we are here because we wish to cover something up in the health system. The members opposite have a unique understanding of the term 'cover-up'. We have a problem in the Queensland health system. We currently have the Morris inquiry, a public inquiry. We have the Forster inquiry, another public inquiry,

and we also have the CMC conducting investigations. Let us try to understand what the Liberal and National parties are trying to say. They are saying that with two public inquiries and the CMC looking into the matter we are trying to cover it up. Compare this with John Howard's open government—sorry, I would be misleading the House if I said that. Compare this with John Howard's government's investigation into the incompetence and stuff-ups that are occurring inside the immigration department. What was Howard's response to this? To have one closed, secret inquiry and then to adjust the report before it was released to the public. Have there been any public inquiries into the problems inside the federal immigration system? No. It is okay to deport Australian citizens and to lock them up and not give them psychiatric help, but heaven forbid having a public inquiry into it. Yes, we have problems with the Queensland health system, and the Queensland government is committed to improving the Queensland health system.

We are here for one reason and one reason alone: because the Liberal and National parties are asking us to trust Johnny Howard. Let us look at his record. This is John Howard who said, 'No, never, ever a GST.' We have one. This is the same John Howard who told the Australian people that illegal immigrants threw their children overboard. He just forgot to tell us that the boat was sinking and there was a boat in the area to rescue them.

Ms Male: A disgrace!

Mr ENGLISH: It is an absolute disgrace. This is the same John Howard who is either deliberately deceptive or incompetent and stupid to say that Australia's deployment in Iraq has not increased Australia's threat or risk of terrorist action, despite what the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police says, despite what ASIO and other intelligence agencies say. So the Liberal and National parties are asking us to trust John Howard. I refuse to do that.

Mr Poole: Look at his track record.

Mr ENGLISH: Exactly. Look at his track record. I cannot trust him. The Liberals and Nationals are saying, 'He said he is not going to bring it in until October-November.' I do not trust him and I do not think the Queensland workers can afford for the Queensland parliament to trust John Howard, not with his track record.

So why are we here? We are here tonight to protect the Queensland workers against a pre-emptive strike by John Howard. John Howard is simply not believable. Why is he undertaking the maniacal hunt in industrial relations reform when the Queensland economy is leading all of the other states in Australia in jobs growth? Why is he attacking the Queensland industrial relations system when we are leading the country in economic growth? Why risk tampering with a very successful system that has led to the lowest strike rate of all states and territories in Australia? No members opposite have been able to answer this.

What is John Howard proposing to do to Queensland workers? He is proposing to abolish protection for unfair dismissal for four million Australian workers employed in companies with fewer than 100 staff. He is allowing employers to put workers on individual contracts that cut take-home pay—a federal system that reduces employment conditions to only five minimum standards, that changes the way minimum wages are set and that effectively abolishes the award safety net and replaces it with just five conditions. Those five conditions are: a minimum hourly rate of pay, which is currently set at \$12.75 an hour; eight days minimum sick leave; four weeks annual leave; unpaid parental leave; and weekly working hours. I hope many workers this year enjoy the Exhibition holiday—in the Redlands it is on Monday and in Brisbane it is next Wednesday—because it could be the last Ekka holiday they ever get to experience.

John Howard wants to keep unions out of the workplace and decrease their ability to collectively bargain. Of course, John Howard wants to take away the powers of the independent umpire, the Industrial Relations Commission. I agree with the member for Toowoomba South when he said that Australian industries are facing threats from Asia and other countries. He mentioned China. They are a competitive threat to Australian industries. However, what the Liberal-National coalition wishes to do is drag Australian work conditions and Queensland work conditions down to Third World standards. The Australian Labor Party is standing up here tonight saying that we acknowledge the threat identified by the member for Toowoomba South, but we will work with the international workers organisation and other organisations to try to raise the standard in Third World countries and not to lower Australia's standards to be competitive with Third World countries, which is what John Howard wants to do. So rather than raising the standard in other countries, the Liberal-National coalition intends to tear down the standards for Australian workers.

The member for Broadwater gave a very impassioned first-hand account of the ability of employers to intimidate young workers. There is an inherent power imbalance in the relationship between employers and employees. Workers need protection. They had that protection via unions and via the independent umpire. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission has a very proud and strong track record of resolving disputes. Earlier this year an industrial dispute occurred in my electorate that had the potential to put children's lives at risk. This was identified at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and by 9 o'clock that night all of the parties were in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission

having a discussion and the matter was resolved. Are we going to get the same level of service from some fat cat sitting in Canberra? Would that issue have been resolved so quickly and effectively if we had to access the federal system? I think not.

Members in rural and regional Queensland are already upset and have the perception and are concerned about control from Brisbane. Workers in those regional and remote areas should be very much concerned if we now have to go all the way to Canberra to try to seek arbitration or conciliation from the federal Industrial Relations Commission. There is so much more I could say tonight on this bill, but I know that many of my colleagues are keen to speak. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (7.57 pm): It should come as no surprise that I rise tonight to oppose the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill.

Government members interjected.

Mr QUINN: I can see that some are shocked on the other side—mock shock. As I have said earlier today, there is no need to have this debate on the bill tonight. There is plenty of time for the bill to be debated in the normal course of events. John Howard and the coalition in Canberra indicated that they were not going to put their bill before the federal parliament until October, if not later. I think everyone now understands the transparent nature of the stunt we have seen here today. Certainly most people outside this House now understand what transpired here today.

I place on record my views that I mentioned in the public arena when the federal coalition first indicated that it was going to proceed down this path. I said that I believe that a uniform national approach to the IR regime would be of tremendous benefit to Australia. There are six different IR systems, with thousands of state and federal awards. It is that confusion and complexity that are adding costs to employers. If that level of complexity is removed and those awards are simplified to make it easier for employers to understand what their obligations are and for employees to understand what their rights are then businesses will be more productive and competitive. It is as simple as that—more jobs and, more importantly, jobs will be more secure. That is the basis upon which I have supported a uniform approach to industrial relations across Australia.

I have also said that I support a more flexible industrial relations regime. I have commented that, because the nature of work, the nature of our lifestyles, the intermingling of employment, training, education and expectations of our jobs—all those things—are changing, we need to make sure that we have a more flexible approach that meets individuals' needs rather than a series of compartments that we ask people to put themselves into. People these days have different expectations of their lifestyles. The old nine to five, Monday to Friday jobs have gone. There is a whole range of new expectations within the community, and I think we need to have a much more flexible approach to industrial relations as a result.

I have said on the record that I thought John Howard was better placed to understand and put in place these sorts of changes. This has drawn some comments from the other side. Naturally, I expect those sorts of comments, because they have a view of John Howard's record and obviously I have a view of John Howard's record.

Ms Male: What is your view of John Howard's record?

Mr QUINN: I am glad the member opposite asked that question because she is about to find out. Much has been made of John Howard's record over the years that he has been Prime Minister. Let me put these facts on the table. Let me dispel all the myths and the emotion that are attached to this debate and put the hard numbers on the table so people can see in black and white which party has better managed the economy of Australia, given the working men and women and their families more job security, more jobs and a better future in this nation over the past nine to 10 years.

Government members interjected.

Mr QUINN: I know they will not like them. They do not like the facts and figures. They would rather go on the emotive nonsense that they have peddled in this debate tonight, but here are the facts and figures. We have the lowest interest rates in more than a generation. If those opposite talk to businesspeople and families, that is one of the greatest boons to family life. They can plan their future with confidence and security as a result of low interest rates. Coupled with that is low inflation. I can cast my mind back some time ago when businesses were paying 21 to 22 per cent interest and home loan rates were 12 per cent. There is nothing more soul destroying than seeing young people and young families unable to afford a home because of really high interest rates. That has been a huge boon to the Australian working people in this nation.

There are now almost 10 million people in work in Australia—the highest level ever. Over 1.6 million jobs have been created since March 1996.

Government members interjected.

Mr QUINN: I know they are unpopular numbers but those opposite should just sit back and listen and learn. Then those opposite can have an informed debate rather than the rabble that they have been carrying on with for the past couple of hours. So there are over 1.6 million more jobs since March 1996.

Full-time jobs have been a real hallmark of the federal coalition since it came to office. Since March 1996 full-time employment has grown by over 860,000. Under Hawke and Keating, Labor managed only 54,000 full-time jobs in the last two terms of their governments. That is a stunning comparison.

The participation rate was 64.5 per cent in April this year—the highest ever—and significantly higher than the average recorded under the last seven years of Labor at 63.2 per cent. Let us have a look at the unemployment figures. Unemployment today is five per cent across the nation—the lowest level in 30 years and the lowest level since 1976. That is an economic record unmatched by the Labor Party. Let us look at the unemployment rate in some of the categories. Seasonally adjusted, the teenage unemployment rate—that is, 15- to 19-year-olds—is about 63,000 at the moment. That is less than half the Labor peak of 133,000 in 1992.

Ms Nolan: Tell us no worker will be worse off!

Mr QUINN: In April this year long-term unemployment stood at about 91,000 or 0.8 per cent of the entire labour force. This is the lowest level on record and 72 per cent below the peak of 329,000 recorded in May 1993 when Labor was in office. But the real cruncher is in terms of higher wages. We can have low unemployment rates, low interest rates, low inflation and more jobs, but the real crunch point is looking at wages.

How much better off have the workers and their families been in Australia since John Howard came to government compared with the previous years when Labor was in government federally? Here is the cruncher. This is the figure that really disproves that Labor is the worker's friend. Real wages have risen by 14.1 per cent since March 1996. So there has been a real rise in wages of over 14 per cent since March 1996. What was the Labor figure over their terms in office between 1983 and 1996? A miserable 1.2 per cent. Is it any wonder that the workers of Australia and their families have more money in their pockets these days, they can buy their own homes and they can buy their own cars? There has been a consumer boom over the past four or five years in a whole range of consumer items. Those are the figures that underpin that sort of economy.

Ms Nolan interjected.

Mr QUINN: I know they do not like it. It is not popular to understand what these figures mean because it dispels, as I said, all the nonsense being peddled by the Labor Party during this debate. We only have to look at the comments by Kim Beazley to see that those figures are verified. Let me give the House the quote by Kim Beazley on 1 April—incidentally, April Fools' Day. We will know who the fool is when we hear this comment. This is Kim Beazley's comment when he was talking about his term in government with Keating and Hawke—

We achieved 13 years of wage restraint under the Accord. The wage share of GDP came down from 60.1 per cent when we took office to the lowest it had been since 1968. We left office with the wage share of GDP at 55.3 per cent. That allowed corporate profits to rise to record levels in 1984.

Who would believe this? This is the Leader of the Labor Party. What he is saying is that they kept a lid on wage growth, corporate profits rose and he is boasting about it. Compare that with John Howard's record of real wages rising by 14 per cent over the term of his office compared to 1.2 per cent during the Keating and Hawke years. That is the cruncher. That proves that what is put about by the Labor Party that they are the worker's friend is so much hot air. Those opposite cannot argue with the facts and figures. When they get up here and say that they are the worker's friend, tell us in real terms that we can understand. Cite the facts and figures. I have not heard one of them say that tonight. The reason why they cannot is that it is not true, because the figures bear out exactly the opposite. The coalition is Canberra has presided over the greatest increase, the real wage rises for workers in this country, over almost the past 10 years.

John Howard and everyone else can sit on their laurels and say, 'We have done this fantastic job. We do not have to do any more reforming of the industrial relations system. We have this fantastic record.' What will happen is that sooner or later we will be forced, as we have in the past, to change our industrial relations system in a dramatic way because our competitive neighbours—nations we trade with—are always moving down the reform path, changing their IR system, making their businesses more competitive and making their products on the international marketplace more competitively priced. Unless we keep moving down that path, we will be overrun by our competitors and all of the gains we have made will slip back the other way. That is why we need to keep going down the industrial reform pathway. We cannot stop. It never stops. Any government that stops and stands still gets run over in this world. That has been the lesson of all the countries around the world. You stop, you stand still, you get run over. That is why we need to continue down the reform path.

I do not know what is in the substance of John Howard's legislation. I have not given it a blank tick. What I have said is that I support the uniform national approach, I support more flexible working conditions and the way in which that will occur. I have not said that I support everything in the legislation, quite frankly, because the legislation is not in the House.

Ms Nolan: What about holidays?

Mr QUINN: We do not know what the details are. Until those details are in the House, I will maintain the position of supporting a national approach and a more flexible arrangement.

Ms Nolan: What about overtime?

Mr QUINN: As far as I am concerned, we will wait and see what the legislation contains before I make further public comment. That is the responsible approach. It is a pity others did not take the same responsible approach.

Ms Nolan interjected.

Mr QUINN: Because everything else is just scaremongering. They are trying to speculate about what may or may not be in the legislation.

Ms Nolan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Ladies, please. I am being tolerant here. I cannot see which woman it is, but please have a bit of respect for the chamber. The member for Robina.

Mr QUINN: In summary, I will oppose the bill on the basis that, as everyone can see, it is nothing more than a stunt. I think the record I have outlined of almost 10 years of the Howard government speaks for itself. It puts to bed many of the myths put around by the Labor Party. Until members of the Labor Party can stand up here and argue on the figures rather than the straight out rhetoric, they really have nothing to argue about. This legislation should be seen for what it really is—just a transparent political stunt in the run-up to two by-elections.

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (8.10 pm): I stand in this place tonight to support the IR bill before the House. We as a government had to take action to protect workers from John Howard's federal government's selfish and deliberate attack on workers' rights and conditions. I speak for the workers and their families who depend on their take-home pay to provide for their families and for their futures.

Before I get too involved, first of all I want to congratulate the ACTU and the Queensland Council of Unions on their excellent campaign in alerting the people of Australia to the consequences of John Howard's industrial relations reform. Why should workers be worried about the federal government's changes to workplace laws? The ACTU and the Queensland Council of Unions have done an excellent job in making people aware. The TV ads have been getting the message across. They have been making people sit up and take notice of the situation. Fact sheets have been circulating, giving people information as to what the consequences will be. I will quote from one of their brochures to lay the foundations for what I will say during my contribution to the House. It states—

Workers can be sacked without warning and without a right of appeal which could lead to a rise in bullying, intimidation and harassment in the workplace.

Another thing that can happen is a decline in workplace safety. How many times have unions and the industrial processes that we have in place been able to improve workplace health and safety for our workers? The brochure continues—

Almost four million workers will have no remedy against unfair dismissal.

It has become quite clear that about 99 per cent of private sector firms employ fewer than 100 permanent employees. That the proposed changes will allow private employers with fewer than 100 workers to take action and unfairly dismiss workers is a real concern. The brochure states—

The probation period for employees will be increased to six months.

I have a good story to tell about that later on. The brochure continues—

Employers will have a right to terminate an employee during this period.

Employees wishing to claim unfair dismissal could only do so through the expensive court system.

Wages will no longer be adjusted by the independent Industrial Relations Commission.

The Federal Government's Australian Fair Pay Commission will set a rate of pay on a periodic basis.

...

The Government is intent on changing the way minimum wages are set to make sure they are lower in the future.

That is what people have to start focusing on. That is one of the real reasons the federal government is moving this legislation. I will try to explain that a little bit more as well. The brochure states—

The Federal Government will abolish the IRC's role in setting wages and employment conditions. The award safety net will be effectively abolished and replaced with only five minimum conditions:

minimum wage rate (as set by the Australian Fair Trade Commission on a periodic basis), annual leave, personal leave, parental leave and minimum number of ordinary hours.

These minimum conditions will be the only comparison used for testing whether a separate workplace agreement disadvantages a worker. Conditions to be cut include ...

We do not have the full list, but people only have to be close to workers to get an understanding of what they stand to lose—

classification structures, overtime rates, redundancy pay, annual leave loading, casual loading, public holidays, pay for work done on public holidays, penalty rates, allowances, repayment of work expenses like travel, long service leave and superannuation.

These are all things that people will have to bargain for if they have to sit down with the boss and come up with a workplace agreement.

The Howard government wants to position the nation's employers so that they can, under the protection of industrial relations law, attack workers' rights and conditions at their place of employment. Employees with no bargaining power could be left with just the minimum wage and four legislative conditions and lose entitlements such as overtime, shift loadings, severance pay and public holidays. These changes will affect the people I represent. It will impact on families, make jobs less secure and undermine working conditions which will, in turn, lead to a decline in workplace safety.

When one works at the grassroots level of the labour force like I do, one comes to understand why people work rostered shiftwork and overtime. It is not because they want to work themselves to death and isolate themselves from their families; it is because workers are making sacrifices because of the financial rewards that they get from giving this commitment to work. They want the extra money so they can provide a quality of life for their families. They buy new homes, buy motor vehicles and provide for their children. That is what Australian families are about. Australians are about achieving goals because they want to prepare their families and themselves for the future.

If there is one outcome that John Howard wants for Australian employers, it is for them to be able to reduce their costs. If members just think about it for a minute, most of the cost for any employer today—anybody in industry—is the portion that is attributed to the wages and the conditions that people get. I think in the coal industry it is around 40 to 45 per cent of costs. Employers want to be able to cut that cost. They cannot do that at the moment, but Howard's legislation is being set up so that employers will be able to attack and reduce a part of their overall costs—that is, wages and conditions. That is what this is all about.

As a former mine worker, I have benefited from the conditions won by the union movement. Over the last 100 years the unions have taken up the battle to win fair and reasonable wages for labour. Through their wins, unions have set benchmark standards for all employees to benefit from. Our history shows that collective bargaining is the best means of delivering decent wages and conditions to workers. John Howard is about killing off the unions and killing off the ability of unions and people to collectively bargain so that they can get a fair go.

A government member: That's what he wants to do.

Mr PEARCE: That is what he is about. I have been a negotiator for workers at the industry level and at the parliamentary level. I have a good understanding as to what motivates employers. I have been there, and I have seen the stubbornness of people driven by self-interest. I have seen the disrespect for workers. I have seen the disrespect for those people who work and deliver the product. Without the support of the union, I can see that workers are in for a hard time in the future. In fact, I predict that workers will cop a real flogging.

The legislation before the House does not change anything, and that is what the people on the other side of the House need to understand. It does nothing more than enshrine in legislation the current rights of Queensland workers in state awards. I cannot understand why the National Party members and the Liberal Party members do not want to protect the interests of workers in this state. They have an opportunity to show that they really care. I cannot understand why the members opposite will not support legislation that protects men's and women's income, protects their holiday pay, protects their long service and protects their sick leave. I just cannot understand the thinking of people who are not prepared to get up and support legislation that at least protects those things and makes it more difficult for Howard to achieve his agenda.

Howard himself admits that there will be cuts to the take-home pay of Australian workers. He admits that. Does that not set off enough alarm bells that the people we represent will be affected by Howard and his industrial agenda? However, the Nationals and Liberals are speaking out against the legislation before the House tonight and I just cannot understand why. The urgency of the matter should be evident to any member in this place who is in touch with their electorate. If members are out there, talking to people, communicating with them, then they will get the message very quickly. The ordinary people of this state—the workers, the people we represent—are focused. They can see what Howard is up to and they are looking for people like us—elected representatives—to stand up for them in a place like this, to make our point and to put up an argument for them. However, there are members on the other side of this House who are not prepared to do that. I will make sure that everybody in my electorate knows that.

Workers in central Queensland have been saying to me in the last couple of weeks, since Terry Mackenroth and Ray Hollis resigned, that we should use the upcoming by-elections to kick John Howard's backside. We should use the upcoming by-elections as a means of sending a powerful message. On behalf of the people I represent, the families of central Queensland, I urge the voters in Chatsworth and Redcliffe to speak up, use their votes to voice the concern of all Queenslanders and reject the Liberals.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (8.21 pm): Workers in my electorate are up in arms. Their ability to earn a decent wage under decent conditions—and the implications of that—and their ability to support their families is under attack. Workers keep our society going. They go to work each day, they earn their wage, they pay their tax and they participate in their community. What is their reward? According to the federal government, their reward is to be stripped of their conditions, to have their access to unions reduced or removed, and to have their ability to access penalty rates—which is sometimes the only thing that keeps a family's head above water—removed. It is an absolute disgrace.

The Liberal and National Party coalition in Canberra is evil. It does not care about workers, it does not care about family life and it does not care about humanity. Previously in the parliament there was at least the chance that the Senate would provide some balance and stop the worst of their proposals. As we know, and regret, the Liberal National federal government now has a majority in both houses of parliament.

I am not scaremongering. Let us look at the facts of the federal government's proposal. On any logical reading of the proposed federal legislation, the federal government wants to take away most of a worker's basic rights. The federal government plans to abolish all unfair dismissal protection for employees in workplaces with less than 100 employees. It will also change workplace agreements, both individual and collective, so that they no longer have to contain minimum award redundancy provisions, and it will take away the right of a worker in small business to redundancy pay.

This means that 99 per cent of private sector employers—around 4 million working people—will be able to sack workers unfairly, and they will not even have to give a reason. The federal legislation will allow employers to put workers on individual contracts that cut take-home pay and reduce employment conditions to only five minimum standards.

Let us think about Australian workplace agreements for a moment. An AWA can lead to an individual employee's conditions being reduced one by one. It can prevent collective agreements which help protect the vulnerable from being disadvantaged. AWAs can do away with penalty rates for weekends, shifts and public holidays, not to mention getting rid of overtime allowances and other loadings. When this is combined with the changes to the unfair dismissal laws, how many workers will be brave enough to refuse to sign an AWA? They can be sacked, with no recourse to unfair dismissal laws, or they will not be offered the job. This is an out and out attack on workers.

Indeed, in this House this morning, Tom Barton, the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, told us about AWAs. He told us that security guards do not receive loadings for any of the extra days that they work and they do not receive any additional allowances for working late at night, early in the morning, on public holidays or on days that they could spend with their families. We also heard how some workers on AWAs do not receive sick leave or payment for public holidays. This type of situation arises all the time in AWAs. It affects our workers, their lifestyles and the lifestyles of their families.

The attack on the unfair dismissal laws takes away the security of workers and the security of their jobs. Bob Quinn, the Leader of the Liberal Party, stood up in this House and said with a straight face that the federal government's legislation means that workers will be more secure.

Mr English: Not likely.

Government members interjected.

Ms MALE: I take all of those interjections from Labor members. That is just not true. That he could stand up here and say that, in the face of all the facts, just astounds me.

A government member interjected.

Ms MALE: That is right. This is an attack on workers and no-one should forget that—and no-one should forget that in this House the National Party and Liberal Party members stood up and supported the attack on workers. They are not here for the workers. They are not here to make sure that people have decent lifestyles. They are here to support their friends in the federal government and undo all of the hard work that unions have done over the years.

Mr Poole interjected.

Ms MALE: That is a very relevant point. Once again, he was the one who was standing here talking about job security for workers. It is an absolute outrage.

The federal government wants to replace the awards safety net with just five minimum conditions, those being a minimum hourly rate of pay, eight days sick leave, two weeks annual leave, plus two weeks which can be bought out, unpaid parental leave, and a maximum number of weekly working hours.

Frighteningly, the federal government is looking to reduce the powers of the independent Industrial Relations Commission. I find it offensive that the Leader of the Opposition calls the federal government's proposal 'a brave new world of industrial relations reform'. He has faced the challenge of standing up and fighting for the rights of workers and he has stumbled at the first hurdle. I urge the Leader of the Opposition to read the Prime Minister's ministerial statement on 26 May 2005. It spells out exactly how he will strip rights from Australian workers.

I listened to the National Party member for Toowoomba South talk about how in his world, all of the employers actually treat all of their employees as members of the family and care for them and nurture them. Now, some employers do that. There are some really great employers out there who do that. However, other employers are not interested in their employees or their wellbeing or in protecting their lifestyles or their wages. All they want is the bottom line profit for their company, and that is all there is to it.

Let us not live in some sort of fairy world where everything is wonderful and everyone looks after each other, because that is not the real world. We have been fighting for far too long for reforms for workers and making sure that workers' rights are protected to listen to that sort of rot in this House tonight.

The laws that we are debating tonight—the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005—are actually there. This legislation will provide protection for Queensland workers through the Queensland state awards. It will protect entitlements to annual leave, sick leave, parental leave, carers leave, bereavement leave, long service leave, notice of termination, ordinary time hours of work, penalty rates and public holidays. A public holiday is due next week. If all of John Howard's reforms are passed, will we have public holidays where people can have time with their families, time for that wonderful lifestyle we know and love in Queensland?

We will see the reduction or removal of redundancy pay and dispute resolution procedures, and an increase in casual employment. We need to protect people's employment options. If someone wants to work casually or part-time, that is entirely fine, but they should be entitled to job security and to full-time jobs so that they can live the life they want.

The primary aim of these amendments is to provide protection for workers whose entitlements are eroded or removed under the federal government's proposals. It is not to burden employers by interfering with current arrangements under awards and agreements. It should be noted that the minimum entitlements legislation will not add to the labour costs for Queensland employers. That is an important aspect that has often been overlooked by members on the other side. We are not about denigrating business. Business does a good job in this state. We are looking at the right to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. We are looking at safe and fair conditions for employees—great treatment in the workplace—and if something goes wrong, that they have the recourse through the Industrial Relations Commission to be able to obtain that.

I heard Bob Quinn, the Leader of the Liberal Party, say that nobody was talking about the actual figures as to what is happening. When one compares Queensland to Australia, Queensland has the lowest unemployment rate of 4.7 per cent compared to five per cent nationally and 5.2 per cent in Victoria. We have, as I heard the member for Redlands say, an historically low level of industrial disputes. Queensland has less than half the rate of industrial disputes that we see in other states. Under John Howard's model, he would trample over workers' rights. The workers of Australia are not going to take it and the workers of Queensland are not going to take it. When he brings in these unfair proposals for workers, the only thing that they are going to be able to do is to stand up and withdraw their labour, because that is the only way that they are going to be able to make a difference. Like we did hundreds of years ago, we are going to have to do that again here now.

Queensland's economic growth rate was more than double the national average last year, with Queensland at 4.25 per cent, with the national rate at two per cent and with Victoria at 2.75 per cent. We have demonstrated quite clearly that Queensland's industrial relations laws work. They work for the workers, but they also work for business. Business is growing and the unemployment rate is dropping, and that is because we have the perfect conditions up here. We do not want to muck with those. We do not want to see this federal government attack workers here in Queensland. As a government, we are determined to do all that we can to make sure that this continues, that we can continue the growth that we experienced over the past couple of years, that we can continue to bring down unemployment and that we can continue, as we should, to support the rights of workers. I very definitely support the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005 and would ask members opposite to reconsider their rash decision and support this legislation as well.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (8.31 pm): The Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005 before this place today is nothing more than a Labor Party sham and an attempted cruel hoax on Queensland workers. It is a document consisting of 19 clauses which the Labor Party wants Queensland workers to believe will save and protect their wages and conditions. The only thing that this hastily thrown together piece of legislation is designed to save and to protect is Peter Beattie's political neck. Peter Beattie and his Labor Party thugs know that they are heading for a well-deserved electoral flogging come the 20th of this month when voters have a chance to make their voice heard at the two Brisbane by-elections.

Why have the standing and sessional orders been extraordinarily suspended so that this legislation can be rammed through this place? Why has the due process of this parliament been undermined? Why has our state democracy been subverted? Why has Peter Beattie crafted the presentation of this bill so that the members barely have time to scrutinise and critically evaluate the

legislation? Because Peter Beattie needs a distraction now before the by-election. Would this piece of legislation be before this place if the by-election had been held two weeks ago? No. We could be using this valuable parliamentary time to talk, for example, about the 10-year-old homeless Aboriginal boy I saw this morning after I went for a run. He and his friends are living in squalor under the Grey Street bridge in Brisbane. Maybe we could be working on a piece of legislation which would save that poor lad instead of this desperate Labor Party stunt.

If the Premier was fair dinkum, if he wanted to do the right thing by the workers of Queensland, the only sensible time to present state IR legislation designed to protect minimum pay and work conditions which were threatened by a federal government dumb enough to try to take away our workers' rights is after that federal legislation is presented in our nation's capital. This piece of legislation is a piece of political flim-flam. Peter Beattie needs an electoral smokescreen and he needs a red herring. He needs a distraction. It is a distraction drawn up by Labor spin doctors which will try to divert attention from a state health system which is on its knees, an education department which cannot guarantee the safety of our children from exposure to asbestos, drugs, school bullying and violence. It is a distraction drawn up to try to divert attention from the massive waiting lists for public housing, the army of forgotten homeless wandering our cities and the public servants bullied and threatened with fines and jail sentences for speaking the truth.

This document is pure political humbug, because the reality is quite clear: if one is a Queensland worker and the federal IR laws are drafted and finally presented to our national parliament some time later this year and then if they get through a National Party controlled Senate and made law, if they as a worker are under a current award agreement they will not lose one entitlement. I repeat that again for the members present: they will not lose one entitlement—not a cracker. That is the simple reality. They will not lose annual leave. They will not lose sick leave. They will not lose parental leave, carers leave, bereavement leave, long service leave. They will not lose notice of termination, ordinary time work, penalty rates, public holidays, redundancy pay, stand-down provisions, dispute settling procedures, nor will they lose casual employment. It is deceitful to try to suggest otherwise. The government is preying on the fears of Queensland workers and it is preying on the fears of Queensland families. The Premier would have us believe that Queensland is the utopian state for workers. If one believes that, then they believe in fairies at the bottom of the garden.

One needs look no further than the workers in Queensland Health—nurses, allied health professionals and doctors—to discover workers who are being abused and whose rights are being destroyed. Doctors are working 36 hours straight. We have heard evidence of that. Nurses are trying to care for patients while not having enough resources. Just tonight on the news we found out how long the waiting lists for surgery and hospitals really are. There is the real waiting list and then there is Peter Beattie's waiting list. We found out that in Townsville waiting lists were 2,000—that was on the books—and then off the books, the little black book that Peter Beattie keeps, it is 10,000.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Burnett, will you please concentrate on the bill itself.

Mr MESSENGER: Mr Speaker, looking at industrial relations, I had an interesting conversation with a nurse who was discussing her work conditions with me. She is a remote area nurse who says that she works 28 days straight and is then allowed five days off. She has no doctor to work with, apart from the flying doctor who supports her community. To rub salt into the wound, a couple of years ago remote area nurses were reclassified from level 5 to level 3, so she was effectively given a pay cut. I find that absolutely unbelievable and disgusting. I support workers. I am a union member myself, as I have said before in this parliament. I am an MEAA member. I know what it is like to be bullied by employers and unfairly sacked. I remember the phone call.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Members, please. I have been fairly tolerant tonight. I am going to name the next member who calls out or screams out.

Mr MESSENGER: I remember the phone call from the employer. I was caring for my mum here in Brisbane while she was undergoing chemo and radiation treatment. I was sacked by an employer because I failed to turn up for a retraining exercise. According to the voice on the end of the phone, it showed that I did not have the right attitude. I tried to bring unfair dismissal charges against this employer, but because I had been employed less than 12 months I did not have a leg to stand on. It was the best lesson I had ever had and it was one of the reasons why I pledged to the people of the Burnett that I would be there to speak up for those people who had been bullied, forgotten and ignored. Because I publicly made that promise, that is one of the main reasons why the nurses came to me and told me the truth about what was happening with their work conditions at the Bundaberg Base Hospital and eventually 'Dr Death'. I take this opportunity to make that promise again: I will be there to be a voice for those Queensland workers who have been bullied, forgotten and ignored.

My father was a canecutter, my mother was a field worker and then a cook, one of my brothers was a boilermaker and the other was a stockman and mine worker. My first job out of school as a 15-year-old was as an apprentice electrical fitter in the RAAF. I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth and I know about struggle. I know about families doing it tough. I do not need some chardonnay-

sipping socialist Labor Premier, who is leading a parliamentary party made up of cultural and intellectual elites who have never got their hands dirty in their lives, lecturing me or the Nationals about families doing it tough.

The Premier has turned this state into a disastrous dictatorship that has run the state into the ground. Right now, every major department in Queensland—Health, Education, Transport, Natural Resources, Primary Industries and Child Safety, just to mention a few—is in crisis. One of the reasons for that is that many union leaders are more concerned with sucking up to and covering up for the Labor government, their Labor mates, than they are with looking after their membership.

I can say that because I have been looking after and standing up for the rights of their workers. I have been speaking out and guaranteeing workers' rights when the unions went missing in action. I say this to union leaders: Peter Beattie and his Labor mates have been proven to be morally bankrupt. They have been responsible for the deaths of many of my constituents and for untold misery. If you lay down with dogs, you are going to end up with fleas.

I will never sell out the families of the Burnett, nor will I be conned by a slippery, duplicitous, desperate Premier. I will not support this political stunt. In closing, I say this: if the Howard government does compromise workers' rights, members on the opposite side had better get out of the way, because I will be the first to man the barricades.

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (8.41 pm): I say at the outset that it gives me absolutely no pleasure at all to stand here today and speak on this legislation. When I first entered this place four years ago, I would not have believed that in the year 2005 I would need to stand in this House to defend the fundamental rights of workers. I could not have imagined that public holidays would be at risk. I could not have imagined that I would have to defend sick leave entitlements. Those rights were not given to us. They were not a birthright. Those rights were earned.

Workers' rights were earned by hard labour, sweat, tears and, at times, imprisonment so that the workers of this country could get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. In other parts of the world, workers have earned their rights with their lives. Those same rights were hard fought for by our forefathers over 100 years ago. Along with other members on this side of the House, I will not stand idle while the workers' rights of this nation go backwards and workers are treated with contempt.

I have had the privilege of working in many different jobs in my life. When I was going through university I worked as a labourer, and I have worked as a bartender, a kitchen hand, an assistant chef, a tutor in engineering at QUT and then as an engineer and project manager. I believe in the workers of this state. I understand and identify with the workers of this state.

I have also experienced the pressure of running my own business. When my business started in 1988, I worked in the garage of my home with three people: I, me and myself. I grew the business to a point where, at one stage, I employed close to 100 people. Therefore, I can say that I understand the inspiration and the hard work required by small business operators in this great state.

As chairman of the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council and previously as a member of the same organisation, I have met hundreds and hundreds of SME operators. I am prepared to accept that there is a case to argue for some flexibility in terms of unfair dismissal for very small business operators such as husband-and-wife teams that employ fewer than three to five employees. I understand that after working 16 days often seven days a week, the last thing that they want to do is more paperwork. The government is committed to reducing red tape and has a specific task force to address those issues.

The Howard government is proposing to extend the exemption to the unfair dismissal laws to businesses employing up to 100 people. I believe that that would cover 90 per cent of all the private sector workers in the state. I say to the business community that its customers are mostly workers and employees. They need to have job security to plan expenditure. They need to take holidays to spend their hard-earned money. If their income is reduced, the business community will lose its customers.

A positive industrial relations environment is important for the future success of any business or industry. National and international research shows that IR systems that provide workplace flexibility but also provide a significant role for unions and workers' protection legislation are best able to deliver the joint benefits of productivity growth and high work force morale.

Queensland has a fair, flexible and stable state industrial relations system that is easy to use. Many large and small businesses are covered by the state awards and agreements, and the system gives employers the flexibility to make arrangements that suit their business needs while ensuring that workers are fully protected. The independent empire, the QIRC, is also there to help parties resolve disputes if they need assistance and can travel to regional and remote areas as the need arises, which it does.

Currently, employers have a choice of which system they operate under. Employers under state awards are able to make federal agreements that take them into the federal jurisdiction. However, many employers are happy to remain in the state system because they know it is a good system. Both large and small businesses find that the state system provides a relatively simple environment that suits their

needs. As a result, Queensland has the greatest proportionate coverage of any state industrial relations system, with around 70 per cent of all employees covered. The IR system has been a key factor underpinning Queensland's continuing strong economic performance. The results speak for themselves.

The Queensland economy will outperform the national economy for the 10th consecutive year. In 2004-05, economic growth is estimated to be 4¼ per cent, which is more than double the two per cent growth estimated nationally. For June 2005, Queensland's unemployment rate was 4.7 per cent. In fact, in my electorate the unemployment rate is below 3.7 per cent. Queensland's unemployment rate is the lowest in the country and is below the national average of five per cent.

Historically, industrial disputation is also low. For the year to March 2005, Queensland's average quarterly strike rate stands at just 4.3 working days lost per 1,000 employees. We can compare that with the national average of 10.2. Victoria, which comes completely under the federal IR system, has a rate of 8.2 working days lost.

The Premier has mentioned that Queensland has the strongest and best industrial relations system, yet it balances the rights and responsibilities of employers with those of employees and their families. We have the lowest strike rate, the highest economic growth and more jobs for our workers. Why would we want to change that?

The honourable member for Nicklin and the honourable member for Gladstone argued that they would not support this bill because it is being rushed. They need more time to consult and understand—

Mrs Liz Cunningham: That is not what we said.

Mr CHOI: I thought that Peter Wellington said that it was being rushed through. With respect, and notwithstanding the fact that the government is not introducing any new legislation or new policies, we simply want to ensure that the existing—and I emphasis the word 'existing'—rights of workers are protected. I appeal to those members and to all other Independent members of this House to please not throw away the baby with the bathwater. I ask them to look at the merits of the legislation. It may seem a bit rushed to them, but they should ask: is the bill itself worth supporting? Is the bill, which is designed to protect workers' existing rights, a fair thing to do? Is it right that we enshrine in legislation a worker's right to take a holiday to spend time with his or her family? No matter how valid the timing issue may be in their minds, will rejecting the bill send a wrong signal to the federal government—that is, that they are not concerned enough to put other issues aside?

I know most of the Independent members care a lot about workers. In fact, they care a lot about families. They also understand the demands on families and that many constituents rely heavily on overtime and penalty rates to make ends meet. They need the holiday that they have earned to spend time with the children. At times it even saves marriages. Members opposite can voice their concerns about timing during the debate, but I say to them: please do not trade the welfare of the workers in their electorate for the need to voice their displeasure. I ask them to reconsider their position and to vote for this legislation.

This government has fought hard for years for awards and conditions to support workers. Workers themselves have fought hard—and so have unions—for decades to achieve fair and decent working conditions. This government is about the people of this state. It is the Liberals who are letting the family down. Even those here today are unsure about having the guts to stand up for their own constituents in this regard.

Most recently it was this government that drafted groundbreaking legislation so that some of the state's hardest workers could enjoy some of the entitlements that had been beyond their reach up until this year. It was the Beattie Labor government that introduced the Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Bill to parliament this year.

The Howard government's IR proposals attack the fundamental values of our society. They attack workers' rights. They attack family values. They attack the very essence of a fair society. Fair-minded Australians are putting the Howard government on notice. We will fight it every inch of the way. We will fight it in the courts, the workplace, the family homes, the media and in the streets. This is not only about workplace equality and equity; it is about who we are as Australians. It is about a sense of justice, a sense of equity and a sense of right or wrong. I wholeheartedly commend this bill to the House.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (8.51 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2005. I say at the outset that I support the intent of the legislation to codify the current Queensland workers' minimum rights. I also support the amendment that the Nationals have flagged, because I do believe very passionately in the right to secret ballots. However, I am very concerned about the effectiveness of this legislation and how it may unfold when we finally see the federal government's legislation introduced into the federal parliament.

We will all have to wait and see if there is any inconsistency between the proposed federal legislation and the Queensland legislation, which we are debating tonight. As I understand the current laws in Australia, there is no doubt that the federal law will override any inconsistency with the Queensland legislation which will then, no doubt, lead to a challenge in the appropriate court.

I now move to what this debate in my mind is really all about. This afternoon and this evening we have heard numerous government members justify the urgency of this bill relating to workers' rights becoming law in Queensland and how that is affected by the close proximity of the two by-elections in Redcliffe and Chatsworth. Speaker after speaker from the government side has spoken about the upcoming by-elections as being a vote on workers' rights. They have tried to say that the Labor government is the only government in Queensland that will work for and protect workers' rights. Government members have said, 'We will fight for employees' rights, fight for job security.' I genuinely believe that is simply a ploy to try to persuade the voters in the coming by-elections to support the Labor Party candidate.

I put on the record that if this government was genuinely concerned about caring for Queensland workers' rights, Queensland nurses' rights, Queensland patients' rights and Queenslanders' rights for honest information about the waiting lists in Queensland perhaps we would not need to have Queenslanders spending so much money on a royal commission into the health system in Queensland. In the short time I have been in parliament I have heard so many times issues about the secret waiting lists, the waiting lists for the waiting lists. I could not believe it tonight when I watched the 6 o'clock news and I heard the Premier saying, 'I don't know anything about this.'

I wonder where we are going when the government is so passionate about workers' rights and employees' rights, yet here we have a royal commission investigating the rights of Queenslanders to receive honest information about what is happening in our health system. I reflected on this a while ago when I attended a meeting at a hospital which a former health minister also attended. Many staff rolled up to that meeting with a lot of anticipation and excitement about meeting the new minister. After the initial pleasantries there was almost deadly silence because the former minister basically read the riot act to all those in attendance, saying that he would not stand for criticism and that if people spoke out or did not want to go the way the boat was going, they should get off the boat. I actually made a comment to the media that I was stunned that the minister was so adamant that he wanted Queensland Health not to speak out about matters involving Queensland Health.

At the meeting I made the comment that in my experience the only staff in Queensland Health who have ever spoken out, who have ever approached me anonymously—and many have—were staff who were concerned about patients' rights. The only staff who wanted to speak out about Queensland Health were staff who were concerned about patients' rights. Not one staff member has ever approached me trying to rattle the can or tip a bucket on this government. They only ever wanted to approach me, talk to me confidentially or publicly about patients' rights. I was actually stunned. There was deadly silence at this meeting. This is a leader of a government of Queensland—a former minister.

I find it difficult tonight to listen to government speaker after government speaker saying how passionate they are about the rights of workers and yet on the other hand our leaders, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are sending a very different message to the real workers—the people who make the wheels turn, the people who are involved in the operations which are so dear and so important to Queenslanders. I have heard some government members talk about the importance of this matter and the fact that people are lobbying them to raise the issue of industrial relations. People have certainly raised with me the issue of the uncertainty surrounding the future federal government legislation.

I put on the record that something more important has been raised with me in my electorate over recent days and months—much more important than the anticipated unknown future federal legislation. It is about Queensland Health. I say to the voters in Redcliffe and Chatsworth, 'Please think seriously about who you are going to vote for in these upcoming by-elections. Please do not waste your vote, because you are going to elect a candidate to sit in this House, to be involved in future Queensland laws, to be involved in issues impacting on Queenslanders and on Queensland services.' There is no doubt that industrial relations is one of the many issues about which Queenslanders are concerned and one of the many issues with which Queensland politicians will be involved. I would hope that the voters at the upcoming by-election will not waste their vote but will think about whether the government candidate or another candidate is more worthy of receiving their vote for the balance of this term.

When we finally see the legislation introduced into the federal parliament I would like to see the Parliamentary Library or perhaps a staffer of the government or a staffer of the opposition do some comparisons between the legislation and all of the certainties that we have heard from the government side tonight. One of the government members said that the federal government legislation will do this and will have that, as if the government members already know what is going to be in the federal legislation. We talk about honesty and accuracy in parliament. I will be very curious to see tabled in this House a report of comparisons done by an independent person. Let us do some comparisons between the federal legislation and the comments that have been made as to the certainties of what is going to be in the federal legislation. I will be very interested. Who knows? It may be the case that the government members who have spoken so passionately about what will be in the legislation may be right. Who knows? They may be wrong.

I will be supporting the government's proposed codification of minimum rights for employees in Queensland, but I will also be certainly supporting the Nationals' proposed amendment. I think it is right and I think it is about time that we had some debate on the issue of secret ballots. The real issue is about trying to persuade the many voters in the two upcoming by-elections to vote for either the government or someone else. I suppose it will come down to the ability of the various candidates to present their cases as best they can. We will all have to wait and see the outcome of those by-elections. I look forward to the vote on this bill.

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (9.01 pm): It is my great pleasure—in fact, it is the greatest pleasure I have had since being elected to this place in 1998—to stand here to support the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill. Like my good friend and colleague the member for Capalaba, I am actually dismayed that I am in this situation, that we as a government are in this situation and that Queenslanders are in this situation. The last thing I would have ever thought when I was first elected to this place in 1998 was that I would be standing here 2½ terms later having to pass legislation to protect meal breaks for workers in Queensland, to protect annual leave for workers in Queensland, to protect 10 days of sick leave, not eight, for workers in Queensland—conditions that are so integral to the fabric of working life for all Queenslanders. No-one could have conceived in 1998 that we would be standing here today having to defend those integral daily rights of workers from the harsh attack of the people on the other side of this chamber—the National Party and the Liberal Party—whose colleagues in Canberra they are in league with and are happy to support this foreshadowed federal legislation.

Other speakers—one of whom has just left and to whom I was going to address these comments, and I appreciate his indication that he is going to support the bill, subject to the amendment—have made the observation: how come we know so much about the federal legislation such that we can take a step right now? It is actually pretty simple. There are two simple points to make. One is that the Prime Minister made a statement on 26 May 2005 and said that he will change the federal legislation so that only five conditions will be enshrined in federal legislation and thereby protected—annual leave, personal leave, unpaid parental leave, maximum ordinary working hours and the minimum wage. So nothing else will be enshrined; everything else other than those five conditions will be subject to negotiation between the employer and the employee responding to their respective bargaining positions in the labour market. What conclusion are we driven to make other than that all conditions other than those five points are up for grabs? So, whatever the standards are under state awards, in the bargaining process those conditions are liable in the marketplace to be eroded to the disadvantage of workers in Queensland.

Ms Nolan: And they're saying we should believe John Howard!

Mr WILSON: Curiously, they are, and on this occasion I believe everything that he says and that he will do what he has foreshadowed he is going to do, if not now then some time later. There is no great mystery about the prospect of what will happen. It is true that there is a range of things that are uncertain. For example, it has been indicated by the Prime Minister or by one of his ministers that there will be restrictions on the right of entry of union officials to the workplace. There has been some indication that that restriction might go so far as to say that a union official has a right of entry once per worker per six months, and that is at the invitation of the worker and in the absence of permission granted by the employer. It may not be like that. Who knows? It might be 12 months.

Ms Nelson-Carr: What worker is going to be game enough to do that?

Mr WILSON: Exactly. What worker is going to red light themselves by asking for the union to come? I do not want to dwell on it too much. I just wanted to make the point that there is no mystery about what is not going to be enshrined, and therefore we are well guided as to what we need to do here.

The other simple point to make is that all we are doing here is codifying the existing entitlements. What did we do with the Queensland Constitution only two or three years ago? We pulled several acts, some of them quite old, together and codified the Queensland Constitution, as it then was located in disparate places. We pulled several acts together and codified them into a single act of parliament, many parts of which contain provisions that enshrine procedures to do with the governmental system in Queensland. It was no big deal; we just captured what existed at the time. I hope I have put that issue to bed.

I want to focus particularly on the likely impact of the National Party and Liberal Party attacks on workers, particularly in relation to young workers. I just want to acknowledge, as other speakers have, that we on this side of the chamber draw upon our own work experiences—and those on the other side of the chamber also draw on their experiences—prior to being in this place as a way of being well informed about the likely impacts of this legislation. For most of my working life I was an advocate for workers in a range of industries not only in Queensland but also throughout the country, for a while as lawyer and then as a union official like other members here who have directly represented workers. So we are ably equipped to make sensible comment about what is happening.

There are a number of fundamental points that I think need to be borne in mind. Every Queensland worker, in my view, is entitled to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, justice and fairness in the workplace, employment security and a decent standard of living. It is the Labor Party that has

always stood up for this, along with the trade union movement in Queensland. Secondly, a deregulated labour market where the economically powerful exploit those who have nothing but their labour to sell will inevitably destroy fairness in the workplace and seriously damage the living standards of workers and their families. John Howard and the National Party and the Liberal Party, and their representatives in this chamber, support such a deregulated labour market. It is only through governments intervening in the labour market that the economic and human rights of workers and their families are protected and advanced.

The federal and state industrial relations systems, built up by Labor governments over the last 100 years—not 100 years ago, but year after year since the beginning of the arbitration systems in the colonies and then since Federation—together with the work of the trade unions, are systems of regulation to ensure that there is balance and fairness in the workplace. The National and Liberal parties have given clear notice that they will sweep away all but a handful of workplace protections, as I indicated. The Beattie Labor government, along with other state Labor governments, such as the Tasmanian government and the Western Australian government, is legislating to enshrine existing workplace rights and conditions. The reasons for the Beattie government's initiative are well set out in the speeches made by the Premier and the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, the Hon. Tom Barton, on Tuesday, and in many cases recited today, and they do not need to be repeated.

The details of the National-Liberal parties' proposals are well set out in, firstly, the Prime Minister's statement of 26 May that I spoke about earlier and, secondly, a fantastic web site put together by the ACTU called 'Your rights at work—worth fighting for'. If members have not looked it up, look it up. Everything they need to know about what Howard is proposing I think they will find there. There is no need to repeat the issues.

I want to particularly focus on the impact that Howard's IR proposals will have on young people. We have to remember that this is not just happening overnight. In the nine years that Howard and his National-Liberal colleagues have been in government in Australia they have gradually and systematically eroded permanent employment. Casualisation, which they have been hell-bent on promoting, has been one of the principal devices for eroding the entitlements of workers.

Only last Thursday I received this email which I think is quite telling and indicative of the impact on young people of the Howard government's IR policies. With the liberty of the House, I would like to read this into *Hansard*. My good friend who is a community worker in the Mitchelton area has written—

Geoff, it's often challenging to find hope amidst what I view to be such 'hopeless' times that will become even more challenging and overwhelming now with the coalition Senate majority.

For example, I went to a beauty salon the other week, and the therapist was in a miserable state—complaining about the pressures of her workplace—she was being forced to work if sick and she could not find a replacement from the roster, she was of course, on casual rates—full time, for the past four years, and hasn't had a weekend off since she couldn't remember. She's about my age—

About 25—that is, the age of my friend writing to me, I hasten to assure the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Ferny Grove, are you misleading the House?

Mr WILSON: I was momentarily but I have corrected myself, Mr Speaker. The quotation continues—

And although didn't understand much about the changes—believed that it would only support her employer. She wanted to start her own beauty business (primarily so that women who couldn't afford a treatment could)—but believed that she would never be able to have the capital to do so. She just felt things were spiralling downwards.

I referred her to the QCU and YWAS, she was appreciative.

Her story got me wondering, how much worse things could be?

Of course, the 'evil' of my past experience with my former employer is a constant reminder of how challenging things will be if employees are not given the opportunity through the Industrial Relations Commission to seek justice where it is due. I thank God that I at least had this avenue opened to me, and that the process afforded me a favourable outcome.

As I shared with you this morning, my good friend has a chronic mental illness that will see her requiring financial support for some time ahead. She is battling with her former employer's health insurance scheme to pay her entitlements regularly, but this has never been her experience, and she finds herself constantly in debt and or with no means of financially supporting herself. Her Psychiatrist suggested that she move back into Centrelink payments, but Centrelink staff advise her to stay with the Insurance company because at least she is guaranteed payment. Next year, if she was to transfer to Centrelink payments, she will not be entitled to the disability pension, and she will be forced back to work—or a reduced pension. Undoubtedly this experience exacerbates her health.

Given these stories and experiences, coupled with countless others, things can become so frustrating, disappointing and despairing. I continually search for hope and renewal in faith.

Today's breakfast—

she was at a function that I invited her to—

gave me this opportunity, a fresh perspective and sound inspiration.

And she talks about how hopeful the speaker was to her. That is one anecdote. If members read this book titled *Dirt Cheap*, written by Elizabeth Wynhausen, who used to be a journalist with the *Australian*, published this year, she describes that happening to 40 to 45 per cent of Australian workers

throughout the country. She took 12 months off from the newspaper, went and worked in jobs across five industries over one year and has written a story of the working poor in Australia under John Howard.

Ms Nolan: It's not a happy story.

Mr WILSON: It is not a happy story. I want to put on record some information kindly provided to me by the Young Workers Advisory Service, which has been funded by the Queensland government and has been operating for the last three years giving advice and advocacy to young people. It points out that no such funding is available from any federal source. These are some of the observations that the service has had as a result of working with young people over three years and its concerns about the impact of the federal legislation.

Young people are already at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to bargaining with their employers. They have less experience in the work force and hence limited negotiation skills. It is rare that a young person has developed the confidence to be able to approach their employer and ask for a pay rise, to insist on their right to get a pay slip—such a basic thing; you cannot even get a pay slip out of some employers—to address issues of underpayment or to challenge a warning. The federal government's proposed minimum system of five standards suggests an underlying expectation that workers are to bargain directly with their employer for employment conditions above and beyond those minimums.

They talk about their experience of young people being disproportionately represented in small businesses, particularly in the retail and hospitality sector, and how the abolition of unfair dismissal laws for employers with fewer than 100 employees will have a serious impact on young people. They also point out that young people are often working in relatively unskilled occupations and there is a significant imbalance between the employer and the employee in the negotiating situation.

Fair process and natural justice have generally been considered to be underpinning elements of the Australian legal system, and yet with the abolition of the unfair dismissal laws they will be stripped away. Individual contracts championed by the federal government through its AWAs assume that all employees are skilled advocates, able to identify, for example, a fair monetary value of their work and able to insist that this be reflected in an agreement. The AWAs are private, legally binding documents between the worker and the employer, and there is a concern that young and inexperienced workers may be under pressure to not get advice on the contents, or alternatively sign the AWA or try somewhere else for work. Equally concerning is that there are no age limits for a person signing an AWA and it is one of the only recognised legally binding documents that can be signed by and enforceable to a minor. There is also concern that young people are less familiar with the practical worth of fundamental workplace rights such as annual leave and sick leave, and so will be more inclined perhaps to bargain away those entitlements under a Howard agenda.

YWAS's experience over three years gives these sorts of figures: 27 per cent of approaches for assistance to YWAS involve employment conditions; about three per cent occupational health and safety; about 29 per cent pay and pay records; and 21 per cent—disturbingly—workplace bullying. What is that the product of? An unbalanced bargaining situation or power relationship between a young worker in the workplace and their employer—not always but I would suggest commonly.

Some of the other difficulties in relation to which YWAS receives requests for information, advice and assistance from young people in the workplace are illustrated by these examples: requesting time off for social, schooling, family or sporting events; turning up late once only but getting into trouble for that with the prospect of termination; difficulties in exercising their entitlements for meal breaks and rest breaks; difficulties confronting them when not completely following a directive when there is a lack of understanding in how to complete a task, in other words, inadequate training; and the failure of employers to respond adequately to requests for training and assistance.

Another question that has been raised not once but several times is whether a directive is lawful. For example, 'Do I have to do the babysitting while my employer leaves to run errands if I am working as a retail assistant?' There are also questions concerning how to go about making a grievance in the workplace. These are some of the experiences already being recorded over the last three years by young people.

I want to conclude with a procedural observation. There was a lot of hoo-ha this morning about how terrible it was that this bill was being put through under an urgency motion because we do not really know what the feds are going to do. I can tell members that there are 32 bills that are sitting ready to get put back into the Senate that have been to the House of Reps, gone to the Senate, been rejected and been through the House of Reps again. They are now waiting to go through the Senate the second time now that the federal government has a majority. Thirty-two bills were placed in the lower house over the last 18 months that deal with the deregulation of the labour market.

Secondly, the Liberal Party and National Party complained today about using the urgency motion to address this legislation. In the 2½ years of the Borbidge government, how many bills were put through under an urgency motion?

A government member: Tell us how many.

Mr WILSON: Not one, not two but 12! Three of those bills were the WorkCover Queensland Bill, the Workplace Relations Bill and the Industrial Organisations Bill. How many people on the other side were on the front bench of the Borbidge government? Messrs Springborg, Quinn, Hobbs, Horan, Lingard, Johnson and Rowell. How hypocritical the members on the other side are! I strongly support this bill. I am confident that Queenslanders want us to pass this legislation, and I am confident that they want to express their opinion about it at the next two by-elections. They will send a message to Howard that they do not want anything to do with his proposals that are so damaging to Queensland workers.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (9.21 pm): At the outset of my speech this evening I must say that the timeliness of this bill being debated is dubious. I am left to wonder whether the bill's urgency is more about the fact that Queensland is facing two by-elections and the fact that the government's recent actions—or inaction—has placed it in a very precarious position rather than out of a genuine concern for the workers in this state. It is also unusual that we are debating the maintenance of certain IR rules and regulations when we have not even seen what the federal government is actually proposing. At this point everything is pure supposition and, to use the Premier's oft quoted words, simply scaremongering.

Having said that, IR reforms are of concern to all of us, but the reality of the situation is that the federal government would not have felt the need to consider reforms to the current system if the regulations had not gone too far. It is a very similar scenario to that which the unions experienced in the mid- to late nineties. The unions had abused their power to such a degree that Peter Reith had to step in and we ended up with the drama at the wharves in Sydney.

I do not want to sound as though I have no understanding or appreciation of what it is like to be an employee. I have experienced both sides of the coin—as both an employer and as an employee. The reality is that the current IR system is very much in favour of the employee.

Over the years life for employers has become more and more difficult. This is particularly so for small businesses which are, for the most part, overlooked. The average person regards a small business as employing less than 50 employees, not 100 as the Prime Minister has stated. Unfortunately, many people feel that laws have forced employers and employees to become pitted against each other in an us versus them mentality. I would like to think that all employers are reasonable enough to support the worker's right to sick days, maternity leave, annual holidays, paid overtime, meal breaks, night shift rates, and weekend and public holiday rates. One must not forget that it was the federal Labor government that started all of these changes with enterprise bargaining and the Keating push towards the whole globalisation ideology such as that which has just continued on under the present Liberal government.

However, there should also be provisions for employees to negotiate their working conditions. Presently in many instances, however, employees hold their employers over a barrel. There has to be a sense of fairness on both sides. Sadly, I believe that the work ethic has gone right out the window. People now have a sense of expectation about their rights. I have had the experience of staff saying, 'Oh, I'm not coming to work today,' not, 'Elisa, is it okay for me to have today off for such and such a reason?' In 99.9 per cent of cases I would say, 'Sure, no worries, have the day off.' Even if a staff member wants a day off without pay, they are well aware of their rights and can say that they are entitled to have the day off even if their boss says no. This is employee rights going too far.

Once when I worked in the private sector I asked my employer, a month in advance, if I could have a particular day off so that I could attend my graduation ceremony from uni. I was told that I could not. I was flabbergasted. So I told my employer that I would resign on the spot because she was being so unreasonable. This is just an example of where there has to be some understanding and flexibility from the employer, so it cuts both ways.

The difficulty with this bill is, as I have already stated, the fact that we do not know exactly what is going to be in the Commonwealth legislation, and it is hard to fight for or against something that we do not know anything about. I am hoping that we are not going to turn back to the conditions of the industrial revolution. If we were to do so, surely it would be against some UN convention somewhere.

Since my election I have heard many complaints about the cost to small businesses—that is, those business with less than five employees—who have to pay two employees at once when one is on maternity leave. I have a friend in New South Wales who works for the public sector. She gets pregnant, goes on maternity leave, returns for three months, then gets pregnant again and does the same thing again. She has done this three times. This is a blatant abuse of the system.

I also concur with the member for Nicklin regarding the rights of workers in Queensland Health. I, too, know of the rights of Gympie nurses who were disregarded when they were threatened with the reduction of shifts if they continued to speak to me. So much for caring about families, whom I hope includes nurses. What about their need for shifts and money to take home? It appears that this government picks and chooses who deserves to be paid and who does not benefit from the current IR laws.

Another example of the current laws going too far occurred when I was in the defence force in Sydney. In the branch I worked in we had a civilian working with the Chief Clerk, who just happened to be an Indian. This woman was really sweet and great fun to be around. However, the poor woman could hardly speak English let alone write English. She did not understand how to write signals that had to be written a certain way. She was also responsible for typing letters for the Colonel if his PA was busy or away. The military Chief Clerk tried everything to get this woman transferred. He did not want her to be fired; she was just not up to the position she was placed in. Whilst the responsibility should have been laid with the personnel manager, we still could do nothing. She went on to accuse the Chief Clerk of racism. This was the furthest thing from the reality of the situation. The poor man was devastated. This woman then went on stress leave, and we were without an admin clerk for around six months. I hope the members in this House can understand just how ludicrous the situation can be when the current system is abused.

I have been, and will always be, of the opinion that if people treat their staff with respect and understanding they should get that returned. I have no hesitation in letting my staff go home if they need to only because I would expect the same of an employer.

Finally, due to the fact that we do not know what we are fighting for or against, this whole exercise could be completely futile. It could be this government placing the cart before the horse. I doubt that this great concern for IR at this specific point will take attention away from the real issues of this government and its part in the deaths of so many innocent Queenslanders.

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (9.27 pm): People's rights at work are worth fighting for. On behalf of the residents of the wonderful electorate of Indooroopilly, let me send this clear message to John Howard: bring it on! Bring on his pathetic attacks on working Queensland families because we are ready. The union movement is ready, workers are ready and this fine state government is ready to fight for Australians' working rights and it is ready to win this historic battle. The state government is standing up for workers' rights won over 100 years of struggle. For instance, this bill will provide for the adoption of wage structures that encourage the development of employee skills. It will make sure that apprentices who complete their apprenticeships are paid at least the minimum trade rate relevant to their trade. It will make sure that the overall pay and conditions of outworkers are fair and reasonable compared to the pay and conditions of workers performing the same work at the employer's premises under a relevant award.

The bill will make sure workers maintain conditions like jury service make-up pay, a 38-hour ordinary working week, paid overtime, unpaid meal breaks of at least 30 minutes after five hours work, annual leave loading of 17.5 per cent, casual loading of 23 per cent, shift loadings for afternoons and nights, overtime for working on public holidays, weekend penalty rates, redundancy payments and also appropriate notice prior to termination.

The Liberals in this parliament oppose this bill. They oppose protecting these important conditions for working families. How pathetic, how mean spirited and how downright evil. The Liberals and the Nationals ought to be ashamed. They are opposing this sensible legislation that protects some very basic workers' rights.

Earlier in this debate, the Liberal Party leader asked us for figures and he asked us for numbers. What a surprise that the Liberal Party leader has asked for numbers, because the Queensland Liberals are always looking around for numbers. With the tension surrounding the leadership of the Liberal Party and with his tenuous hold on the Liberal leadership, I would have thought he would be in this place fighting for redundancy pay and for some appropriate notice prior to termination of a worker's employment. The rights that this bill guarantees are rights which Australian citizens are entitled to. They are entitled to these rights as citizens of this great nation and they ought to be guaranteed.

The Howard government, aided and abetted by the Queensland Liberals, is doing a mischief by the Australian people and to the very fabric of our nation. I believe that the Liberals will pay a hefty political price. People who support the Howard government's proposition—be they individuals, businesses or industry groups—are also doing our nation a disservice. John Howard wants to frustrate the organisation of working people and their ability to collectively bargain on behalf of their members. Why do Howard and his perpetual sidekick—the ever frustrated Peter 'The Smirk' Costello—so greatly fear the influence of working Australian families in our great democracy?

Let us look at what unions have achieved in Australia over the past century and earlier. I want to refer to just a few achievements, as listed on the web site of the trade union of which I am a member, the Australian Workers Union. Unions have achieved shorter hours, a better system of secure employment, safer workplaces and, importantly, a fairer distribution of our national income. Let us be clear: working Australians deserve a fair share of Australia's national income. They should be allowed to share in the fruits of their hard work—their physical and mental toil. They have a right to home ownership. They have a right to provide a good education and extracurricular activities for their kids. These should not be privileges in this great nation. They should be rights for working people and for all Australian citizens.

Organisations of working Australians have had an overwhelmingly positive influence on Australia's fabric as a nation. Unions have sought industrial peace with fair representation of workers. Unions have avoided strikes. Unions have ensured that our rights are determined by fair laws and by fair

bargaining relationships. The Liberals and their lapdogs in this debate, the Nationals—who have followed the Liberals' extremist line of Howard's antiworker agenda—need to know this: workers are ready, unions are ready, Labor is ready and we will win. Queensland's families deserve nothing less than our total support.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (9.31 pm): If ever there was a debate that we had to have and if ever there was legislation that is urgent, then it is the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill being debated this evening in this House. The Howard government's draconian legislation, which we know a little about—we know enough to know that it will take this country and the workers of this country backward—is indeed and undoubtedly the greatest threat to workers' rights that this country has faced in over 100 years, since the days when unions were first formed in this country. As awful as the days of Corrigan and Reith and the attack dogs on the wharfs were, that threat to unionism in this country almost pales into insignificance in the face of the threat to all workers in this state and in this country under the Howard government's proposals.

It is true that community awareness is growing about the issues and the truth of Howard's proposal. Rallies have been held all around the country and, indeed, around this state. The workers of this state need to know that this Labor government will stand up, and is standing up, for their rights. One way in which we are doing that is through the legislation before the House today.

Recently, I had the pleasure of representing the Minister for Industrial Relations at an industrial relations rally at Collinsville. I was pleased to stand in for the minister on that occasion. The workers came out in force. Hundreds of workers gathered on the sports oval a little over a week ago to hear the views of a diverse range of people about what the Howard government's proposals will mean for them and their families.

The day was organised by the retired miners union. I pay tribute to Arch Tudehope, in particular, for his work in organising that event.

A government member: He is a good man.

Ms JARRATT: He is a good man and he did a good job. However, it was the range of speakers at that rally that was so impressive. I guess one expects to hear from someone like John Maitland from the CFMEU. However, probably most surprising was the passionate speech delivered by none other than Bob Katter Jr. It sat me back in my seat to hear Bob Katter stand up and espouse the rights of workers and decry the proposals that the Howard government plans to bring down upon our heads. It made me realise how widespread the feeling is about this proposal. This is not just about the Labor Party and the union movement. Ordinary people and people from the right of politics in this country can see very clearly how far backward these changes will take us.

In my electorate, workers in the tourism and hospitality industries already suffer under an unfair burden of casual labour. They face more than their fair share of broken shifts and lack of permanent employment. It makes it very difficult for them to enter the housing market. Banks certainly do not like to lend people money unless they have a full-time, secure job. As if it is not hard enough for people working in the tourism and hospitality industries in a place like the Whitsundays—in the boating industry or on the islands—how much harder will it be for them when they do not have the security of basic rights such as penalties and weekend loadings? It will be an almost impossible situation for them.

I fear not only for the workers and their families but also for the tourism industry. The chief of the Tourism and Transport Forum, Christopher Brown, recently sounded a warning when he said that the option of cashing in holidays would cut the amount of holidays taken by workers. What impact will that have on our tourism industry? It is already balanced on a fairly fine knife edge. People think that the tourism industry is fairly robust, but we only need something like an outbreak of bird flu to the north of us, and a place like the Whitsundays will—

Ms Nelson-Carr: Perish the thought.

Ms JARRATT: Perish the thought, all right, because places like the Whitsundays could conceivably go under very, very quickly. His concerns are shared by the chief of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, Daniel Gschwind, who has described Howard's plan as a 'bad move'.

It is widely recognised that it will have a serious impact on tourist areas and on workers in the tourism and hospitality industries. Minister Margaret Keech has pointed out the possible impact of these changes. Her fear—and I share it—is that the workers in tourism and hospitality will depend on handouts and tips for the extra money they need to survive. That is not something that I or the workers in my electorate want.

Interestingly, we have had occasional support from opposition members, including some National Party members. The rally at Collinsville referred to letters sent by the member for Burdekin, Rosemary Menkens, and the member for Charters Towers, Shane Knuth. Both expressed their support for the workers. Unfortunately, they could not be here tonight and I am yet to hear them speak on this bill. I only hope that when and if they do, it will be in support of the workers in their electorates—the mine workers and tourism workers in the electorates of Charters Towers and Burdekin. We have already seen the

written support of the member for Charters Towers for the workers in his electorate. I think those members need to stand up in this place and speak on behalf of their workers and then vote on behalf of their workers. That is the right and decent thing for them to do. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (9.38 pm): Tonight we have heard a lot of speeches about what John Howard has done and about the urgency of this legislation that has been put forward. The urgency with which this came about absolutely bewilders and amazes me.

John Howard addressed the wharfies front-on, and he won the election. He brought in the GST, and he won the election. What did Keating bring in? He brought in unfair dismissals.

I will tell members tonight what this legislation is about. It is about two upcoming by-elections. When a bill is introduced into this House, it is supposed to sit for 14 days. What do we see tonight? We may even have to come here tomorrow to debate this legislation. That is the urgency of this legislation.

The only urgency for this debate tonight is two by-elections. This Beattie government knows that it is in such dire straits that the Premier has two more seats at his beck and call that he must win, because he knows what the urgency of this debate is all about. He knows that the people of Queensland have turned bitterly against his administration of this state of Queensland. He knows what he has done recently and he knows that he is not the Premier that everyone accepted not that long ago with his hand on his heart. They are sick of the big wide smile. They are sick of the false pretences. They are sick of being misled. Regardless of this debate tonight, the front page of the *Courier-Mail* in the morning will no doubt be about hospital waiting lists. Hospital waiting lists have been hidden. This bill might help to be a distraction, but it will not attract nearly as much media attention as the Premier thought it would. Tomorrow morning, strewn across all Queensland papers, will be the state of the leadership of this government, and it disgusts me.

This week we have seen a government in absolute dire straits. It has lost Mr Mackenroth, who was the guiding hand and the administrator of this government. For the first sitting week we have seen it operate without the former Treasurer, and what a mess it is in. It holds 63 seats and all this debate tonight is about trying to win two by-elections. The federal government has not even put this legislation forward yet. This legislation has not even been put forward yet, but we see the Premier in panic mode—in absolute panic mode. Earlier tonight in the gallery we saw the union bosses. We saw big Bill Ludwig sit up there, and we on this side of the House all know about big Bill Ludwig. We all know what he is doing to the racing industry at the moment. We all know exactly what he is doing.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Darling Downs, please make your comments relevant to the legislation before the parliament.

Mr HOPPER: Mr Speaker, I will. But we all know exactly what is going to happen in the racing industry with the union boss who sat up there tonight. Do members notice that they are not sitting there now? Do members know why? It is too late for them to work! They are union thugs, and that is what heads this Labor Party—union thugs. That is what this legislation is about tonight. They are scared at what the Prime Minister of this nation is going to introduce, because that will jeopardise their future and their thuggery. This is a threat to their position. They will lose hold of their base people when those base people realise exactly what this legislation is about. If someone does not want to take four weeks holiday a year, it is up to them. They can choose. I have people living in my electorate who fly to the mines in north Queensland. They do seven days on and seven days off. They can then choose whether they want to have a four-week holiday or a two-week holiday. Some of those men are earning a good living doing that, and this will suit them down to the ground.

Let us look, for instance, at the small business owner who employs a person under unfair dismissal laws. That person looks like a good, honest, hardworking person and out of the goodness of their heart that employer gives them employment and two weeks later the employee shows up and is not nearly the person the employer thought they were and is not performing to the same standard as when they started. Under Keating's rule of unfair dismissal, those employees can then sue that person or get stuck into them over a payout if they are dismissed. I ask members to name an employer who sacks a good person. I have employed many people over the years. Before I was elected I employed many people and never once did I ever dismiss a good, hardworking person. Good employers reward hardworking people, and that is what the Howard legislation is about. Premier Beattie through Minister Barton has tried to absolutely deter and dismiss the absolute truth of this legislation.

Let me suggest a few things. Several unions involved in the public sector are engaged in various degrees of industrial activity and protests about working conditions, remuneration and bullying. Let us look at the Queensland Health system. A survey conducted by the University of Southern Queensland for the Forster review revealed low levels of participative decision making where the comparative benchmark is already significantly below the Queensland public sector benchmark; high levels of excess work demands showing a deteriorating situation; and the fact that high levels of conflict and antagonism in the workplace, most likely to be related to work pressure, add to the powerlessness associated with decision making.

Employees have considered that they have been subject to implied and real threats at least once a month and even once a week. The Forster review found Queensland Health provided salaries up to seven per cent lower than other states—seven per cent lower than other states. The doctors and nurses have complained for years about poor remuneration. Queensland Health has acted like Scrooge on nurses' entitlements. In fact, an application has been lodged by the QNU and the ANF in the Federal Court seeking an interpretation of the section 170MX award provision in relation to qualifications entitlements. In lodging the application the unions claimed a break of the award by Queensland Health. A directions hearing has been scheduled for 29 August 2005.

Doctors and nurses have complained for years about dangerous rosters and unsafe working hours. Queensland medical tribunal chair and District Court judge, Debbie Richards, presiding over the Doneman case criticised the practice of making young doctors work extensive hours. Dr Doneman was forced to work 24 hours straight. However, some doctors within the public system are still working 36 hours straight. That is much more than our union bosses did tonight. They came in here and stuck their heads in for an hour and a half and made representations. They have now gone. They are home in bed while we are sitting here.

Unsafe working hours were being caused by understaffing, high staff turnover rates, poor management practice and a lack of penalties when Queensland Health endangered patients and staff. We know what the member for Burnett did six months ago, and he nearly got laughed out of this House. His actions six months ago have caused this government to be in the dire straits that it is in now. That is what caused the Premier to bring this legislation on for debate. That is what caused the Premier to bring this legislation before the House, because we had a member willing to put his job and his name on the line. Just look at the fruits of it. Look at what the inquiry is turning out right now. Look at the state of Queensland Health. That is just one part of it. What about the number of Queenslanders who have died because of the lack of leadership that this government provides? I now turn to Q-Build under my portfolio.

Government members interjected.

Mr HOPPER: Q-Build under my shadow ministry.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! It is not your portfolio.

Mr HOPPER: Mr Speaker, I retract that statement; under my shadow ministry. I see that the minister has walked into the chamber. Let me tell members a little bit about Q-Build. Q-Build employees along with RoadTek workers were going to march on Parliament House this week. However, a source advised me that Premier Beattie, Minister Lucas and Minister Schwarten contacted the various affected unions and persuaded the unions not to march on the parliament. The unions were told that if they aborted the march the government would make them an offer after the by-elections. However, they were also advised—

Mr SCHWARTEN: I rise to a point of order. The shadow minister is obviously—

A government member: He's delusional!

Mr SCHWARTEN: That may be one word that describes the circumstance in which he finds himself, but certainly what he is saying is untrue and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr HOPPER: I withdraw. The source also advised that prior to the Premier's departure to the State of Origin this year Mr Beattie proposed a similar deal with the unions—that is, that a good offer would be made. However, no good deal was provided and only sackings resulted. Workers were very disillusioned with the Premier going back on his word time and time again.

Mr BEATTIE: I rise to a point of order. That is untrue. I find it offensive and I seek for it to be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Will the member for Darling Downs withdraw?

Mr HOPPER: I withdraw. Let us look at the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. In April 2005, the QPSU delegates raised the issue of accrued time at the department's consultative committee. The department has proposed to limit an employee's ability to take accrued time to no more than two full days in any month. As a result of union interest, the department moved its position to the extent that employees now will only be able to take a total of 22 hours off with the approval of a manager or supervisor. Of particular note, public servants gave up their right to paid overtime outside the hours of 9 am to 5 pm, in exchange for flexible hours and accrued time. The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries now wants to slash employees' entitlements and make DPI&F employees worse off than those in other government departments. The union has called on public servants to protest.

Let us look at Main Roads. Its enterprise bargaining agreement expired last month. Main Roads has not made a wage offer five weeks after the expiry of the agreement. Management has made no offers that will deal effectively with the recruitment and retention issues that confront Main Roads. Main Roads has difficulty employing or keeping electricians, due to the 27 per cent increase paid by the government to Energex electrical workers. Main Roads has made no offer that deals effectively with building capacity within the organisation. The QPSU organised stop-work meetings that will be held today in the city at 2 pm, Spring Hill at 3 pm, Cairns at 3 pm, Woree at 3.30 pm, Townsville at 3 pm, the Gold Coast at 3 pm, tomorrow in Toowoomba and another stop work for Townsville.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I rise to a point of order. I must again question the honourable member's integrity and reliability. I call into question his accuracy. I ask that he withdraw the statement that a meeting will be held at 2 pm today, another at 3 pm today and so on, when the time now is 10 minutes to 10 at night.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Will the member for Darling Downs withdraw?

Mr HOPPER: I withdraw. Further activity is likely which includes working 7.2 hours a day, work bans, snap stop works, overtime bans and on-call bans. The collective action has become necessary because of the continuing failure of the department to stand up to central agencies and tell those agencies that the department needs to recruit over 2,800 employees over the next five years to meet the road construction needs of the state. Main Roads has serious recruitment and retention problems.

In early 2005, a situation arose in the Environmental Protection Authority that required the QPSU to take action to protect the welfare of its members. According to the QPSU, in recent years there have been widespread reports of bullying and unacceptable management behaviour in a number of Queensland government agencies. One agency that had a particularly high number of reports was the EPA. A staff survey was initiated in March 2005. That survey produced the largest response of any survey in QPSU history, with 745 respondents and several hundred more recorded.

I turn to the Department of Emergency Services. On 22 July 2005, Channel 10 News quoted Minister Chris Cummins as saying that morale within the QFRS was high. He said that he knew that because people were not leaving in droves. Can members guess what? A survey issued by the union yesterday shows something quite different. Of the over 300 responses received in one day, the overwhelming feeling is that in regard to the administration of the QFRS morale is low. The minister appears to have a gut feeling, but we have hard data. Of the 313 responses, 252 or 80.5 per cent say that morale is low; 58 or 18.5 per cent report that their morale is medium; and only three respondents, which is less than 1 per cent, agreed with the previous minister.

Government sources are quoted as saying that they have an agenda, and that is that there is a case currently before the Industrial Commission regarding shift penalty payments. The minister got it wrong again. The case concluded on 28 June and we are currently awaiting a decision. Perhaps someone in the minister's office or in the upper echelons of the QFRS should have enlightened him on that before such totally unfounded and misleading public statements were made. What possible connection could be drawn between the current issues being raised and the night shift penalty rate case anyway, apart from trying to deflect attention from the real issues?

We can see clearly that this government is in dire straits. The legislation that has been brought forward is dire straits legislation to try to win two by-elections. No doubt those two by-elections will go to the Liberal Party.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (9.55 pm): Firstly, I will say 'Happy birthday' to my good old friend and comrade, Tom Barton. I have spent a lot of birthdays with my old mate here, but the happiest one he will ever spend will be this one, spent here tonight looking after workers. We thank him for that. We have had a lot of happy birthdays together and I hope we have a few more.

Debate, on motion of Mr Schwarten, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (9.55 pm): I move—
That the House do now adjourn.

Retirement Village Legislation

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (9.56 pm): Last night this government slapped in the face every pensioner living in a retirement village on a lease arrangement right around Queensland. Since 2001 I have been working with the residents of Willowglen and Drayton Villas retirement villages in my electorate to try to address the issue of pensioners being unfairly treated when it comes to rate rebates. It has been a long and difficult process.

Last night it was extraordinary to hear the minister say that it did not take a legislative change for these rebates to occur. In 2001 when I started working on this matter, the then minister wrote to me saying that it did indeed need a legislative change. Therefore, suddenly, when it suited its needs, the Labor government simply would not support giving pensioners who live in retirement villages on lease arrangements the rebates that people living in freehold retirement villages enjoy.

Under the current terms of lease arrangements, residents are responsible for all of the costs associated with the operations of the village, including administration, maintenance, salaries, rates and other utilities through a service fee. If they held a freehold lease, they would get the rates remission, but unfortunately under long-term leasehold arrangements they do not.

Last night the minister argued that it is up to the local governments to put this in place. She congratulated some local governments that do provide the rebate—and I agree that they should be congratulated—but there is absolutely no requirement that they do so. In fact, the Toowoomba City Council does not rebate. I can understand why it does not as it is not reimbursed by the state government as it is with the rebate for freehold retirement villages. For the minister to stand up and say that it is the responsibility of local government is absolutely ridiculous.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Mr COPELAND: I take the interjection from the member for Pumicestone, who believes that pensioners living in long-term lease retirement villages should not get a rates remission. That is clearly what this government says and what it displayed last night. I think that every pensioner living in those retirement villages around Queensland should take notice of what happened last night.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I rise to a point of order. That is not what I said. I find it very offensive and I ask that he withdraw it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Will the member withdraw?

Mr COPELAND: Withdraw what?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has found those words offensive.

Mr COPELAND: What did she find offensive, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You referred to the member personally. She finds the words you used offensive. Will you withdraw?

Mr COPELAND: Whatever she found offensive, I withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Unconditional withdrawal, please.

Mr COPELAND: I withdraw. It is clear that last night the government voted against the private member's bill to give pensioners in long leasehold arrangement retirement villages rates remissions. I think that that is atrocious. Clearly it shows that this government does not care for people living in those retirement villages.

Time expired.

Emu Park

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (9.58 pm): On the southern end of the electorate of Keppel is the township of Emu Park. Emu Park is a very picturesque and lovely little village. In actual fact, for two years it was the retreat of one King O'Malley who founded the Commonwealth Bank and was a very large figure in the overall politics of the nation. On 19 June the Lions Club of Emu Park had its Festival of the Wind. It was a great afternoon and the population swelled to three times the normal size. The Festival of Wind celebrates nature.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I point out to those honourable members who do not understand the Festival of the Wind that it is about kite flying. They fly haiku fighting kites and many other kites. They have sand sculptures. As I said, the population of Emu Park swells to about three times its normal size. It is the major fundraiser of the year for the Lions Club of Emu Park. It has markets on the third Sunday of every month and during June it has this afternoon of fun and merriment. One of the entertainment acts that afternoon was belly dancers. A photograph was published on the front page of the local publication which showed that I should not take up belly dancing.

A government member interjected.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I was there, but I do not think I should ever take up belly dancing. That afternoon finished with fireworks. As I said, the population of Emu Park trebled. It was a great afternoon and I congratulate the Lions Club of Emu Park on its input into its local community.

Queensland Health; Hunter, Mrs A

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (10.01 pm): A doctor in my electorate contacted me this week. He wrote—

The old waiting list farce is continuing. Please note the following:

- 1 Gladstone Hospital do only general surgery.
- 2 All Orthopaedics, ENT, Ophthalmology and the rest are being referred to Rockhampton.
- 3 The actual surgical waiting lists once characterised is in some cases much too long but:
- 4 What is worse is the waiting time to get to see a specialist in the public systems i.e. even before a person is given a category for a specific waiting list they can in some cases expect to wait a year or longer TO BE SEEN BY THE SPECIALIST in the 1st place. The waiting times for the outpatient appointments has been completely ignored in the debate on waiting lists. We would like to see these initial waiting times to be published for all to see. Only then will the public be getting a better picture of how bad things really are in QLD Health.

This week Audrey Hunter, a lovely lady in my electorate, spoke to the media about her waiting time for knee surgery. Audrey Hunter has been waiting 10 months to be placed on the waiting list for a knee reconstruction. On 1 October last year an AMA representative and doctor in my electorate referred Mrs Hunter to a surgeon at Rockhampton Hospital for a knee reconstruction, but 10 months later, and despite the doctor questioning the hospital, Audrey is still waiting to see the surgeon. Now her other knee also needs a reconstruction. The doctor said that if she saw the surgeon tomorrow they would classify her as category 3 and she could still be looking at another 12-month wait for her knee reconstruction.

Rockhampton Hospital has sent her at least three letters asking her if she still wants to be on the waiting list, suggesting she consider other options. The doctor said the never-never waiting list applied subtle pressure on patients to consider private health care and was a way of manipulating the true state of the health system.

There are so many people in our electorates who simply cannot afford private surgery. The doctor said that the waiting lists are manipulated to best suit the political motive and they become meaningless and farcical. He continued to say that the number of people waiting was deliberately made immeasurable. He said—

Two things make me angry. One—this is the way we are treating people like Audrey. Two—the lack of transparency. There's no honesty, integrity or openness. That lack of transparency is a problem of the culture of Queensland Health. It's really difficult for them. They're vulnerable. It's disappointing that we have that lack of transparency despite what has gone under the bridge recently and people like Audrey are paying the price.

When talking to Audrey she breaks down. She is in a lot of pain. She lives out on Calliope Station. She cannot go outside without a walking stick because of the undulating ground. She is in fear all the time of falling and, because of that, she is restricted in what she can do. She says she cannot sit down too long or her legs stiffen up.

Time expired.

Beerburrum State School

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (10.04 pm): It is my great pleasure to rise this evening to tell honourable members about the wonderful town of Beerburrum and, in particular, the events that have been held in conjunction with the Beerburrum State School. In the past couple of months at Beerburrum I have been involved in quite a few exciting events. First up I attended a healthy school breakfast, and I say thank you to the volunteers who have assisted in this excellent program.

Two weekends ago, on 23 July, was the Matthew Flinders Festival 2005. The school hosts the event, which has performances by students, stalls, excellent food, competitions, face painting and, obviously, the Beerburrum Mountain Climb where we re-enact the first climb by Matthew Flinders at Bongaree on 26 July 1799. The result of the day was a profit of almost \$5,000. That is not bad for a tiny school of just under 100 children and a very small community.

I say a big thank you to all of the organisers; the P&C; the staff; Jenny Easey, the school principal; the parents who assisted on stalls; the student council; and all of the businesses and individuals who donated goods, prizes and money. I say thank you also to the Glasshouse SES for supervising the mountain climb and to the Beerwah Lions Club, which made sure there was plenty of food available throughout the day.

The day was enjoyed by all, and the students provided much wonderful entertainment through the school band and choir as well as the Beerburrum Idol competition. I say thank you to Madeleine and Dylan, the school vice-captains, who stepped in on behalf of the captains to do the welcoming speech.

Earlier this year, the school joined forces with the Department of Main Roads and Forestry Australia to convert the entrance to Beerburrum township from a gravel and dirt stockpile into a lush forest. Whilst the lush forest is, admittedly, some years off, the school staff, parents and students are the ones who are making the dream a reality. It was great to see all those kids out there planting up the road reserve and doing their bit as part of the Beerburrum community. I am so proud of them all.

The links that the school has made with the Glass House Mountains Landsborough RSL have proven to be very successful and have ensured that an important historic site in Beerburrum has been transformed. The Beerburrum Cemetery had been closed for many years and had been allowed to run down. The Glass House Mountains Landsborough RSL subbranch decided to take this on as a project and facilitated, in conjunction with the Caloundra City Council, the refurbishment of the site. New wrought iron fences with the name incorporated in it were installed. Graves were repaired. A commemorative memorial with a plaque to those servicemen buried in unmarked graves was added. New trees were planted. The school students go down there regularly to keep the area neat and tidy. It is a pleasure to see the work being done. Last Tuesday was the rededication of the cemetery with another tree planted by the school captains. The community gathered to remember those who gave their lives, and it was a touching ceremony.

The new partnership with the RSL continued on Saturday, when students and the principal attended the Glass House Mountains Landsborough RSL subbranch 60th anniversary of Victory in the Pacific celebration. I say thank you to George Pike, the president, and his team for organising this fitting ceremony. It was stated that, whilst the celebration was one of victory, it is more important to recognise and show commitment to the need for forgiveness, goodwill, continuing peace and fellowship with all mankind. It was interesting to hear veterans' stories about their contribution during the war in the Pacific. It reminds us all of the sacrifices that were made but also of the dedication to humanity which shone through it all. Beerburrum is a lovely community supportive of its young people and is committed to improving the lives of all residents. It is my home town. I am very proud of the school and the wider community.

Time expired.

Department of Natural Resources and Mines; Gladman, Mr J

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (10.08 pm): Mr Jason Gladman from Dalby has asked me for my assistance in acquiring from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines in Toowoomba a copy of the bore logs and any other descriptions relevant to the water bore which was completed on his property on lot 22 Thoroughbred Parade, Colkerri Estate, Dalby on 25 January 2005. Mr Gladman came to me simply because the work done was not up to standard. The bore has collapsed and he has very serious problems. I ask: does the pipe in question meet Australian Standard AS/NZ 1477-1999? Why can Mr Gladman get results from investigations carried out by himself while DNRM works on hearsay evidence submitted by its ex-colleague Mr Ashley Miller? Why can DNRM not liaise with the supplier in question directly about this pipe? How can it state that he cannot be sure whether the pipe meets Australian Standards and then submit a predrafted letter stating it does meet Australian Standards, making reference to a letter received by Mr Ashley Miller from the alleged supplier? It is noted that these standards are governed by DNRM and yet it cannot identify legal casing from illegal casing.

Who, in turn, then is really policing the drillers and their standard of conduct? Some investigation needs to be made into why Mr Gladman has received three letters from different officers within the Toowoomba branch of the DNRM stating that the whole bore meets standards and regulations when we have evidence that proves it does not? Why is it in print in the *Minimum Construction Requirements for Water Bores in Australia* that a bore log must be submitted with the DNRM within 30 days of completion of the bore, yet this log has only been submitted some five months later and only after proceedings from the person concerned questioned the whereabouts of the bore log? Why is it acceptable for him to lodge this document five months later, yet every other driller is required to submit the log within a 30-day period? Why out of the 11 key responsibilities of the driller stated in the *Minimum Construction Requirements for Water Bores in Australia* handbook has Mr Miller not delivered on any of these points, yet no action has been taken against him?

Why did DNRM people avoid Mr Gladman's phone calls to the point where Mr Gladman was left no option but to drive to Toowoomba and refuse to leave the office until he was seen? Why is the DNRM favouring Mr Miller's actions when evidence is to the contrary? Why did staff refuse to view the video of this bore and refer back to a former colleague of Mr Miller's? Who will be footing the bill for the loss of work time, fuel, correspondence, telephone calls and having to follow up on other people's lack of interest in this matter? Why has no action been taken against Mr Miller and his code of conduct in relation to this matter? Why has Mr Miller been able to continue drilling without even a warning while the investigation is being undertaken?

Time expired.

Woodridge Electorate, Department of Corrective Services

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (10.11 pm): Following a joint seminar held by the Hon. John Mickel and me in Logan, the Department of Corrective Services has come out of the closet. For a department that up until now has quietly nestled on Station Road, Woodridge, in a very unobtrusive way, the seminar attracted 40 or so participants who all came to learn more about the workings of the department and to investigate the possibility of the organisation offering some appropriate work for participants on work orders and thus having an extra pair of hands to do some of the volunteer work. Those who attended came from Neighbourhood Watch groups, schools, sporting groups, community centres and the like. Ms Kate Martin, the area manager, gave a very professional presentation to both enlighten community members to the work of the department and outline opportunities for groups to access some significant assistance for their own services.

It is a fact that in the electorates of Woodridge and Logan there are many offenders performing a wide variety of tasks to either fulfil court orders or carry out parole orders to assist with their assimilation back into the community. The whole exercise is to have offenders cease their offending behaviour and become contributing members of our community. It is often possible to have offenders perform tasks that relate to their offence, such as graffiti removal. There is no better way to get the message through than to have a graffiti vandal spend many long hours laboriously removing his or her own handiwork.

Community service may be performed in bushland regeneration, laundry work, sorting donations at charitable organisations, sorting recycled items such as at Logan's Smart Tip, charity mailouts, and grounds maintenance in areas such as local parks, sporting clubs, schools, hospitals and cemeteries.

Each day Corrective Services officers supervise an average of 12,807 offenders in the community, allowing them to put something back into a society they have harmed while still maintaining their family and employment links. At the same time, we have approximately 4,375 prisoners on any given day—at a far greater cost to our community. Of course, there are many who need to be incarcerated to protect the community but, wherever possible, intensive community orders may help offenders connect back to their community and possibly learn some valuable skills, thus enabling them to access employment. Seventy-four per cent of offenders complete their community orders and only 11 per cent return to further supervision. I believe that these statistics speak for themselves.

Community Corrections enlists the help of many other departments and agencies. Turning a life around is often a collaborative effort. An offender often has drug and alcohol problems. Logan House is a wonderful facility.

Time expired.

Surfers Paradise Surf Life Saving Club

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (10.14 pm): My wife and I were very pleased recently to attend the Surfers Paradise Surf Life Saving Club annual dinner. As usual, it was an interesting and very pleasant evening. The Surfers Paradise Surf Life Saving Club has enjoyed some wonderful success over the years and has kept the Surfers Paradise beach very safe. Considering it is amongst the busiest and most well-known beaches in Australia, that is a wonderful achievement, aside from the marvellous competitive results that the club has enjoyed over the last decade. When I say 'busy', that is no understatement, with 400 rescues in the last year. That is more than one rescue a day. When one considers all that goes into a rescue and the split-second decision making and training that is required for a successful rescue, more than one rescue a day is a big ask. When one considers also the fact that the vast majority of those rescues will be in summer, the task that these lifesavers undertake is truly remarkable, and I am happy and have always been happy to be associated with the club.

A government member: And the council lifeguards.

Mr LANGBROEK: Yes, I would like to acknowledge the council lifeguards. They also do a wonderful job, and there were a number of council lifeguards at this dinner as well. Along with the 400 rescues, there were also 2,000 preventive actions. Again, when one considers the training to prepare for such incidents, the rate at which they occur is truly remarkable. It is just a great tribute to the members of the club. It was quite amazing to hear the number of patrol hours that a lot of these members do. The top 10 get awards. A lot of them spend their whole summer at the beach. It is certainly great, considering the fact that they are all volunteers and they put in the hours because they love the club and they love the place. It is certainly something which a lot of us get a lot of inspiration from.

The club started in 1925. It has a wonderful record with eight Australian club championships to its name, 113 individual Australian champions and 30 world champions. The Surfers Paradise Surf Life Saving Club has been a pioneer when it comes to surf-lifesaving and has been quick to institute many initiatives that have been taken up by other clubs. One of these initiatives is the dawn till dusk patrols. Members may be aware of some incidents where tourists, unaware of the danger of the surf conditions, go early morning swimming before the patrols start and, unfortunately, there have been a number of drownings. Members of the Surfers Paradise Surf Life Saving Club took it upon themselves to do dawn till dusk patrols on the weekends for many years. But in response to a number of early morning tragedies, they have extended this from 6 am to 8 am on weekdays as well.

The club is certainly going through a bit of change, and after 80 years it is going along very strongly. It is trying to put plans in place now that will take the club toward its 100th year. I commend President Jon Neilsen and all of his team on a marvellous year and the building of a marvellous club. I look forward to my continued association with the club. As I have said to members in this House before, if they get the opportunity to give to the surf-lifesavers, please do. They do a marvellous job, and I commend all of the work that they do.

Time expired.

Caboolture Rugby League Football Club

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (10.17 pm): In May I spoke in this parliament about the failure of the Sunshine Coast Rugby League Division to admit Caboolture Rugby League Football Club to its competition this year. As I said in parliament then, all sorts of reasons were given as to why that should not happen. The reasons ranged from such things as there would be a bye in the competition. It did not matter that there was a bye in the National Rugby League, but they could not have one in the Sunshine Coast competition. Another reason given was that there were not enough sponsors to go

around. Another reason presented was that there would be player shortages. The decision was made on the basis of four-four, with a casting vote made by the president of the Sunshine Coast Rugby League to exclude Caboolture from the competition.

The great news is that in 2006 the Caboolture Snakes will play in the A-grade competition on the Sunshine Coast. They will field a reserve grade side and either a under 19 or under 21 side, depending on what the Sunshine Coast Rugby League competition decides to do. As I said in parliament last time, one of the strange things that happened was that, within weeks of the decision to exclude the Caboolture Rugby League Football Club from the competition, other clubs indicated that they were unable to field a reserve grade side or an under 21 side. Caboolture now fields an under 21 side and a reserve grade side in that competition, despite the A-grade side not having been admitted. Importantly, both sides will be in the finals and have a great chance of winning the premierships in their respective divisions.

The admission of Caboolture to the competition is the culmination of a long saga after the failed application to be admitted for the 2005 season. Interestingly, the decision this time was also by majority in the sense that some clubs still chose to try to exclude Caboolture from the competition, but this time their numbers did not prevail.

The Caboolture club has taken the opportunity to appoint Glen Tomlinson to be the coach of the A grade side for next year. Currently he is the coach of the reserve grade side. He is an experienced young local person who has great experience playing in the English superleague with a couple of clubs in that competition. Importantly, while in that competition, he had the opportunity to play under very experienced Rugby League coaches. I wish Glen a great season next year as the inaugural coach of the Caboolture Rugby League Football Club A grade team.

Mr Lawlor: Go the Snakes!

Mr HAYWARD: As the member for Southport said, go the Snakes. As the member for Glass House and the member for Pumicestone know, they are historically part of the local competition and I wish them great luck in the next season.

Time expired.

Beaudesert Electorate, Equestrian Centre

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (10.20 pm): Two or three years ago there was a great move to build a world standard equestrian centre in south-east Queensland. This demand was quite obvious because it was felt that, unless a world standard centre was built, we could not match it as far as equestrianism in the world was concerned. The department of sport and recreation allocated \$2.5 million to find a special spot where they would build this worldwide equestrian centre. Because it was undecided between six regions, it was decided that three centres would build an equestrian area and a decision would then be made about the success of each of those three centres where a worldwide equestrian centre would be built.

An amount of \$500,000 was allocated to Warwick, \$800,000 was allocated to Toowoomba and \$1.2 million was allocated to the Gold Coast. I know that Warwick and Toowoomba went ahead with those centres, but unfortunately the Gold Coast, which had to contribute dollar for dollar for an equestrian centre on the Gold Coast, has not been successful, No. 1, in going ahead with the centre and, No. 2, in finding a suitable area.

Fourth in line was Beaudesert. Beaudesert has always been an area where we find magnificent horse development. We have the Parade of 1000 Hooves and we have Wadham Park, where a \$25 million centre has been built for equestrianism. I would say to the department of sport and recreation: if it is that the Gold Coast cannot use its \$1.2 million, if it cannot allocate it dollar for dollar and if it cannot find a suitable centre, then I believe the fourth selected area, which is Beaudesert, should be granted the chance to go ahead and develop an equestrian centre so that we have centres at Warwick, Toowoomba and Beaudesert.

For those centres to show their great potential and great development we need to not only have horses in the area but also have the support of the public. It may be that one of those three centres becomes a typical equestrian area which then becomes a world-class centre. I believe a very suitable equestrian centre should be built in south-east Queensland.

Yeerongpilly Electorate, Tennis Centre

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (10.22 pm): Like the member for Beaudesert, I hope that we have world-class equestrian facilities. I am sure that the new parliamentary secretary for sport will look into that straightaway. I am pleased to talk tonight about world-class sporting facilities in my electorate of Yeerongpilly. I, along with the Premier and the then Deputy Premier and minister for sport, was pleased on 27 June to announce that Brisbane and Queensland would be getting a new world-class state tennis centre and that that tennis centre would be constructed in my electorate of Yeerongpilly. We had

announced that we were going to construct the centre some time ago, but on 27 June we were able to announce that the tender process had come up with a suitable project—a suitable developer—and this is a pretty exciting development in my electorate.

The proposal is to use the existing 12-hectare site of the old Tennyson Power Station, demolish that run-down building and construct 23 tennis courts. It is Australia's first purpose-built facility to have the three different grand slam courts on it, so it is a pretty exciting development. It is pretty good news for my local residents as well, because the project involves significant traffic infrastructure that will better manage traffic on Fairfield Road. The project involves minimal parking on site so that major events will be managed in the same way that we manage Lang Park—through public transport. A walkway will be constructed from Yeerongpilly station to the site. Currently that is a very dangerous area in my electorate. People push shopping trolleys down the middle of Fairfield Road and then lift them over the concrete barrier in the middle of the road. They do not need to do that but they choose to do that.

It will open up public access to the riverfront on a beautiful bend of the Brisbane River to which currently there is no public access and provide families with outdoor recreational space. It will also connect the cycling track around Brisbane so that cyclists will be able to connect all of those tracks without the need to be on some of our busy roads. It is an example of how this government can work in partnership with business. It is a private-public partnership arrangement that sees the state receive a state tennis centre and develop and provide that with the ability to put some low-impact residential units on the site but also will see great facilities for Queensland. So it is a good result for locals, a good result for Queensland and an excellent outcome for a government in partnership with business.

I look forward to the day when local kids aspire to play on centre court in Tennyson and when Australia's leading tennis players are from suburbs like Rocklea, Moorooka, Salisbury, Coopers Plains and Yeronga.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 10.26 pm.