



WEEKLY HANSARD

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E-mail: hansard@parliament.qld.gov.au

Phone: (07) 3406 7314 Fax: (07) 3210 0182

51ST PARLIAMENT

Subject

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THURSDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2005

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

PARLIAMENTARY ANNEXE LIFTS

Mr SPEAKER: I understand that one of the lifts in Parliament House is not working and that is the reason some of our members are having difficulty being in their chair by 9.30 am.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Mr SPEAKER: I remind honourable members that the annual general meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Queensland Branch will be held in the chamber at 1pm today.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Rail Freight Yards, Parkinson

Mr Caltabiano from 808 petitioners requesting the House to honour its pledge to the people of Queensland and immediately withdraw the plans to develop rail freight yards at Parkinson; the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to both provide written assurances that this development will not proceed; amend the South East Queensland Regional Plan to exclude these sites from the urban footprint; transfer ownership of these properties from Queensland Rail to an environmental custodian; and that these properties be included in the "Glider Forest" conservation park.

Logan and District Services Club

Mrs Scott from 30 petitioners requesting the House to appoint an inspector from the Office of Fair Trading to investigate, under section 110 of the Incorporations Act, the substantial injustice and denial of natural justice that has been done and is continuing to be done to more than thirty-nine Logan and Districts RSL Sub Branch Members by the Board of Directors of the Logan and District Services Club.

Logan and District Services Club

Mrs Scott from 25 petitioners requesting the House to give urgent consideration to appoint Inspectors from the Office of Gaming Regulations—to investigate a Substantial Injustice regarding of the gaming profits at the Logan and District Services Club t/a "the Diggers" and a denial of justice to RSL Sub Branch War Veterans.

Russell Island, Bridge

Mr English from 888 petitioners requesting the House to consider building a bridge to Russell Island that will allow quicker and easier transport and will allow improved access to sewerage to protect Moreton Bay.

PAPERS

MINISTERIAL PAPERS

The following ministerial papers were tabled—

Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (Mr Mickel)—

- CS Energy Ltd—Annual Report 2004-05
- CS Energy Ltd—Statement of Corporate Intent 2004-05
- ENERGEX Limited—Annual Report 2004-05
- ENERGEX Retail Pty Ltd—Annual Report 2004-05
- ENERGEX Limited—Statement of Corporate Intent 2004-05
- Enertrade—Annual Report 2004-05
- Enertrade—Statement of Corporate Intent 2004-05
- Ergon Energy Corporation Limited—Annual Report 2004-05
- Ergon Energy Corporation Limited—Statement of Corporate Intent 2004-05
- Powerlink Queensland—Annual Report 2004-05
- Powerlink Queensland—Statement of Corporate Intent 2004-05
- Stanwell Corporation Limited—Annual Report 2004-05
- Stanwell Corporation Limited—Statement of Corporate Intent 2004-05
- Tarong Energy Corporation Limited—Annual Report 2004-05
- Tarong Energy Corporation Limited—Statement of Corporate Intent 2004-05

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Kalpowar Station

PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.35 am): Earlier in the week I indicated to the House that I had received a communication from the Cape York Land Council in relation to the Kalpowar state land dealings. I am pleased to report to the parliament that Mike Reynolds, Minister for Child Safety, has met with Major Jim Irvine and Charles Brown from the Vietnam Veterans Association this morning. The meeting was a very positive one. They are very happy with the commitment from the Cape York Land Council. We resolved that the meeting between the Vietnam veterans and the Cape York Land Council should be held early and that the government should appoint a liaison officer from the native title unit to assist the veterans, and I will ensure that that is arranged. I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of both the gentlemen I referred to, Major Jim Irvine and Charles Brown, and other Vietnam veterans and I welcome them to Parliament House.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Economy

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.36 am): I have more good news on the strength of the Queensland economy. According to the latest Investment Monitor published by Delta Electricity and Access Economics, the total value of investment projects in Queensland continued to rise strongly in the September quarter, increasing 7.9 per cent from the previous quarter. Even more impressive is the 27.2 per cent growth recorded over the year.

The total value of investment projects in Queensland, including those under construction, those committed to, those under consideration and possible projects increased to \$73.9 billion. This represents an increase of \$5.4 billion from the June quarter. Access Economics assesses the environment for investment in Queensland as very positive, pointing to the state's significant resources sector and ongoing high population growth. It is clear that Queensland remains a smart place to invest and the growth state of the nation.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Anti-Terrorism Bill 2005

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.37 am): I had a discussion with the Prime Minister on Wednesday in relation to the anti-terrorism laws. During that discussion we covered a number of items, including the view of the Solicitor-General that there were some constitutional issues that needed to be dealt with. We also dealt with the need for the Public Interest Monitor to be included in legislation that would apply in Queensland. As we all know, the Public Interest Monitor has an important role to play in protecting the public interest. We also had a discussion about the so-called shoot-to-kill provisions.

I am happy to report to the House that my office has received communication from the Prime Minister in the following terms—

Following on from the Prime Minister's discussions with your Premier regarding the proposed use of force provision in the Commonwealth Anti-Terrorism Bill 2005, the Prime Minister proposes to modify the Bill to address the concerns that have been raised.

In a general sense, as a result, the state laws that would apply will apply in those circumstances. I welcome that because those state laws currently exist. I have also written to the federal Attorney-General in response to that discussion with the Prime Minister indicating—

I have asked my Solicitor-General, Mr Walter Sofronoff QC ...

I had a meeting with the Attorney-General this morning about this—

... to organise a meeting to progress the joint submission to the Commonwealth government on how the Draft Bill might be amended to reduce the possibility of a successful constitutional challenge.

Given the strict timing imperatives attaching to the Bill, I would appreciate it if I could receive an indication of your willingness to have your Solicitor-General participate in the development of a joint advice as a matter of urgency.

Indeed the Prime Minister wrote to me in these terms—

As discussed this morning, I would be happy for the Commonwealth Chief General Counsel and Solicitor-General to discuss any concerns the Queensland Solicitor-General may have in relation to constitutional issues. I have asked the Chief General Counsel to contact the Queensland Solicitor-General to facilitate this. Should those discussions identify any amendments to the legislation which could address the Solicitor-General's concerns I would be happy to consider them provided that they do not alter the substance of the measures agreed at COAG.

I have written to all other premiers and chief ministers in similar terms.

I table a copy of the letter from the Prime Minister of 25 October, a copy of my letter to the federal Attorney-General and a copy of the letter that was sent to my chief of staff. The particular provisions of the legislation, of course, are not included because they are a matter of ongoing discussions.

I had a meeting this morning with the Attorney-General and some of my staff. I have asked for continued work to be done to ensure that the legislation reflects our requirement for the Public Interest Monitor to be included. We obviously note and accept the Prime Minister's view in terms of state laws applying to the force to be used in relation to preventative detention orders. The other issue in relation to constitutional matters will be pursued by the Attorney-General through our Solicitor-General with the other states.

We are trying to be constructive in resolving these matters, but there is no point to the states agreeing to laws that could effectively be challenged in the High Court. Yesterday I spoke to Steve Bracks, the Victorian Premier, and Geoff Gallop, the Western Australian Premier. I am hopeful that these matters can be resolved. I have written to my colleagues interstate seeking a cooperative approach from our respective Solicitors-General.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Bird Flu

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.41 am): The task force on avian influenza has made its first report to the State Disaster Management Group. As a result, we have prioritised expansion of existing Queensland stockpiles of personal protection equipment and other resources and the funding of recovery from a pandemic. I have some details that I will seek leave to have incorporated in *Hansard* in a moment, but I want to advise the House that there is a specific health pandemic plan being completed by Queensland Health. We are fortunate in Queensland to have Professor Mark von Itzstein, a Griffith University researcher who is credited with discovering the first world-wide vaccine for influenza, a drug called Relenza. I seek leave to have details incorporated in *Hansard* for the information of members.

Leave granted.

Immediate planning will include further work on:

- Defining essential services in a pandemic period;
- Establishing numbers and individuals for priority protective measures;
- Developing guidelines for infection control in the workplace;
- Determining the feasibility and logistics required of mass quarantine; and
- Ensuring we work closely with local governments.

The central taskforce of six dedicated core staff was convened by the State Disaster Management Group from health, primary industries and fisheries, communities, public works, and emergency services, and includes a media officer to advise on public communication.

The taskforce was taken offline from other duties and is stationed at the Emergency Services Complex at Kedron, for up to three months to ensure our plans for dealing with an outbreak of avian flu are as comprehensive as possible.

It is drawing on expertise across government using the existing disaster management networks and will continue reporting to the State Disaster Management Group and keep Treasury informed.

I want to pay tribute to the senior officers, scientists, health and medical professionals and emergency services and other experts who have swept into action to establish Queensland's co-ordinated response to this health threat.

In the event of a pandemic, a whole-of-government pandemic plan will be activated to deal with State-wide social and economic impacts.

The plan outlines policies, legislation and strategies to maintain essential services, and how the community will be kept informed in the event of an outbreak.

The plan also provides clear guidance to departments and agencies, disaster districts, local government, and the private sector.

There is also a specific Health Pandemic Plan being completed by Queensland Health to protect the health of Queenslanders in the event of a pandemic.

In Queensland we are fortunate to have some of the best people in the world to advise on our response plan, including people like Griffith University researcher, Dr Mark von Itzstein, whose research is credited with discovering the first worldwide vaccine for influenza.

As I mentioned on Tuesday, H5N1 is the sub type of avian influenza that has spread throughout Asia resulting in the death and destruction of millions of poultry and more than 60 human deaths.

Recently there have also been cases in birds in parts of Europe.

The threat is real.

We need to be prepared—and we are ensuring that we are prepared.

I will undertake to keep all members and the community informed as we further develop our plans over the coming months.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mini Budget

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.41 am): As members know, the mini budget this week was not just about health; it also contained an additional \$2 billion over four years for new capital and infrastructure projects. This money builds on our record \$8 billion capital program announced just 20 weeks ago in the state budget. I seek leave to have more details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

A few of the initiatives detailed in the mini Budget include:

\$350 million towards replacing more than 100 old and obsolete road bridges in regional Queensland over the next five years;

\$16 million as part of the Queensland Government's contribution to feasibility studies for the Airport Link project;

\$5 million towards a Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation,

\$9 million acceleration of a \$120 million program replacing asbestos roofing in schools;

consideration of a \$341 million three stage transmission electricity upgrade between central and north Queensland;

commitment to the identification of a new multi million dollar generation project for North Queensland; and

\$27 million towards the cost of upgrading the Wivenhoe Dam Spillway.

The additional funds also include \$1.3 billion for the Gateway Motorway upgrade as well as infrastructure investment by Government Owned Corporations.

Mr Speaker, funds in the mini budget will help grow our State and build on the largest ever infrastructure program undertaken by a government in the history of Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Premier of Queensland Export Awards

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.42 am): I will have the pleasure tonight, along with the Deputy Premier and minister for trade, at the Brisbane Convention Centre of presenting the 2005 Premier of Queensland Export Awards. Our exporters are doing a fantastic job, and I want to pay tribute to them. I seek leave to have details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

These awards are the culmination of 11 Regional Awards and 2 Bilateral Chamber Awards: The Australian British Chamber of Commerce Export Awards and the Qld Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Export Awards.

Over the last financial year, Queensland achieved the highest rate of merchandise export growth of any state.

At 30%, it was almost double the Australian average, and was worth \$26.2 billion.

In the 5 years to 2004, Qld recorded 21.1% growth in overseas goods exports, compared with 15% for the rest of Australia.

Last financial year, coal exports rose by 61%.

Continued growth in India and China and the expansion of port facilities at the Port of Gladstone should ensure demand for Queensland coal remains strong.

My government is developing and implementing programs to assist local businesses to expand exports in a number of knowledge intensive industries.

The awards program not only recognises the achievements of existing exporters, it helps to encourage others to investigate the potential benefits for their companies.

A special feature tonight will be the presentation, for the first time, of an award to commemorate the distinguished career of Dermot McManus.

Dermot was a highly respected public servant who showed outstanding dedication in promoting Queensland's exports.

Dermot was Queensland's Agent-General and the Commissioner of the Queensland Government Trade and Investment Office for Europe.

The McManus family have chosen to recognise "Innovation in Export" as the theme of the new award.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Cricket Australia Centre of Excellence

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.42 am): On Saturday I will have the pleasure, along with Cricket Australia, of fulfilling a commitment to future generations of Queensland cricket heroes by making the Smart State the home of the new Cricket Australia Centre of Excellence at Allan Border Field in the electorates of some very distinguished members, including the member for Clayfield. I will be officially opening the centre on Saturday and look forward to it becoming

the hub of cricket development in Australia for the next 20 years. I seek leave to have details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Cricket Australia announced in 2003 that Queensland would be the new home of the Cricket Australia Centre of Excellence.

It was a smart choice—we have great weather, outstanding facilities, and some of the Country's very best cricket coaches.

The Centre of Excellence is providing a world class program for cricket development and will be Australia's leading cricket training venue.

The new facilities are purpose built for training and playing cricket and include a pavilion and grandstand, gym, change rooms, plunge pool, canteen, administration area, function room, amenities and undercover seating.

Queensland's elite cricketing squads, including the Under 17 and 19 men and women's teams, the Queensland Academy of Sport's second eleven and the Queensland Bulls are already enjoying the use of the new facilities.

A range of initiatives have already been delivered at the Centre of Excellence, including the Australian under 19 training camp, Emerging Players Program and tournament, National Umpire Forum and the Indigenous Players' Camp and Match Program.

Cricket Australia has put a strong emphasis on fostering the growth of international cricket by establishing an international program that accepts students and teams from other countries.

Participants trained at the Centre's previous home in Adelaide, and will now enjoy the new and improved facilities in Brisbane.

Since the inception of the program 10 years ago, players from Bangladesh, England, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and West Indies have attended the academy, benefiting from tuition at the same facilities as Australia's elite young cricketers.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Wesley Hospital, Operating Theatre Complex

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.43 am): As I indicated earlier in the week, later today I will be officially opening a new operating theatre complex at the Wesley Hospital. Opening additional private health facilities is appropriate this week. The mini budget I delivered on Tuesday showed that this government is prepared to make the largest investment in health services that Queensland has ever seen, and I want to do everything I can to encourage the private sector to continue to invest in health as well. I seek leave to have details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The mini Budget I delivered on Tuesday showed that this Government is prepared to make the largest investment in health services that Queensland has ever seen.

The mini-budget included extra funds for cancer services, emergency departments, elective surgery, intensive care, cardiac services, mental health and workforce training.

However, no matter how good our public system is—and the five-month review of our system by Peter Forster found it is the equal of any in Australia—we also need a first-rate private sector.

The new development at the Wesley continues a long and proud history of health service delivery by this hospital.

The Wesley is now one of the state's largest private hospitals, with more than 2,000 employees and more than 800 visiting and full time medical staff.

On any given day, the hospital will be caring for up to 600 patients.

The four new state-of-the-art operating theatres that I will be officially opening this afternoon take to 17 the number of operating theatres at the Wesley.

In addition there is a new 20-bed recovery unit which meets the highest clinical standards.

The four new theatres will focus on orthopaedic and major general surgery, including plastic surgery.

The new facilities were built at a cost of \$9 million, all raised by the Wesley Hospital.

The facilities are a tribute to the hard-work and dedication of Wesley Hospital management and staff.

The contribution of organisations like Uniting HealthCare through complexes like the Wesley Hospital is invaluable in ensuring that Queenslanders have access to the best available health care.

I welcome their investment in the new facilities and the significant new health services those facilities will deliver.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Service Delivery and Performance Commission

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.43 am): I am sending a message to public servants in relation to the establishment of the independent Service Delivery and Performance Commission. As part of our transparency, I seek leave to have that message and details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

LETTER FROM THE PREMIER TO QUEENSLAND PUBLIC SERVANTS ANNOUNCING THE SERVICE DELIVERY AND PERFORMANCE COMMISSION

It is hard to argue that a state with the nation's largest employment growth, low tax and an enviable record of attracting business in growth industries is not doing a few things right.

We are doing very well and in large part that is due to the performance of our government and the support of our public service especially in the effective delivery of services. But we can always strive to do better.

In this regard, small improvements can have a big effect. The Queensland Government, like any large employer, needs to constantly review and improve to ensure services are provided efficiently and effectively.

The Commission will review and identify possible cost savings, waste or inefficiencies in Queensland Government departments to ensure taxpayers are getting good value for money. Most departments already have strategies to maximise their performance. This Commission will create some consistency and support across government for performance improvement.

I wanted to write to you to assure you that your work is highly valued. In recent years, we have increased the budgets of many agencies to increase the number of people delivering essential services on the front line—teachers, police, emergency services workers, disabilities and child safety officers, and of course, health workers. We will not reduce the number of front line service delivery staff.

The Performance Commission is designed to ensure that the Government spends the budgets it has, to apply good practice and effective economic strategies to reduce potential waste. It helps us to do what we already do—only better.

Performance is not just about efficiency. It is not code for cutting staff or squeezing budgets.

The Commission will work in partnership with agencies to develop effective ways to target performance objectives, to improve performance and to measure improvements. That is a modern, transparent and accountable way to manage any government.

I appreciate the effort that you, as an integral member of the Queensland public service, put into the design and delivery of our services and programs. I want to see that effort count every day.

Finally, I want to thank you for contributing to the continually steady operations of our professional public service, especially during the recent months of public scrutiny of government departments and administration.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mini Budget, Commerce Queensland

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.43 am): I notice that Commerce Queensland had a little bit to say about our mini budget earlier in the week, and I seek leave to have my response incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

On Tuesday the President of Commerce Queensland, Graham Heilbronn, went on 4BC and said he would give the financial statement I presented "3 out of 10".

Coming from Commerce Queensland, that is probably a high mark.

Because Commerce Queensland, and its President in particular, have become a part of the Opposition. They prop up the Opposition, and push it around in a way that is not good for democracy.

So when Graham Heilbronn "evaluated" the statement, and the government's comprehensive program, he should have declared his conflict of interest that he was speaking not only as the President of Commerce Queensland, but as the driving force behind the ill fated "one conservative party" Lawrence tried to put together ... the one the member for Callide and the Member for Robina both ran interference against.

But what has not been revealed is that Graham Heilbronn was one of the small group of business people who forced the Liberals to enter into what purports to be a "coalition" with the Nationals—the "claytons coalition".

And the Liberal Party gave in because this small group of business people threatened to starve the Liberals of campaign funds.

When that happened Senator Santoro and the Member for Chatsworth could not sign up quickly enough. And they signed up despite the opposition of the Member for Robina and the Member for Moggill, and the rest of the Parliamentary Liberal Party.

So when Graham Heilbronn pretends to be the independent spokesman for business and commerce he is misleading the people of Queensland.

He is as partisan and as passionate a political player as anyone on the other side of the House.

He should be honest and declare that bias whenever he comments on my Government, or on the Queensland economy and political scene.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Private Health Funds

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.43 am): I want to deal with the issue in relation to private health funds. In recent days my government has dared to raise the topic of treating people with private health insurance in public hospitals. We have raised this issue because Peter Forster, in his comprehensive review of the Queensland health system, identified it as a potential source of additional revenue for Queensland Health. He found that Queensland collects 60 per cent less than the national average from patient revenue compared to other states. He says that if Queensland Health were to collect patient revenue at the same rate as the average of other states and territories we would raise an additional \$115 million a year for public hospital services.

In response to this finding, my government has appropriately identified the treatment of private patients in our public hospitals as an area where we can do better. In short, we want more people who have private insurance to use it when they are treated in a public hospital. Our strategy is not about pressuring people to join private health insurance; it is about informing patients of their choice to elect to be treated privately and receive certain benefits, including being able to choose the treating doctor. It is

fair, it is reasonable and we make no apology for it. But for our trouble we have been criticised by the opposition and we have had private funds crying poor, which is a bit rich.

There are some facts I want to share with Queenslanders. The Commonwealth government, through its block grant funding arrangement, has limited the increase of its contributions to public hospitals to a meagre and insufficient indexation of 3.5 per cent a year. This is not sufficient to keep up with rising costs in health care, which amount to at least five per cent a year. It means that our public hospitals are being starved of Commonwealth funds and Queensland taxpayers are increasingly having to pay extra money, even though they have already handed over their Medicare dollars to Canberra. In 2004-05 the Commonwealth government's 30 per cent private health insurance premium rebate cost taxpayers \$2.5 billion. Queensland taxpayers' contribution was about \$500 million or 20 per cent. This is a \$500 million contribution from Queenslanders to the private health funds.

In 2005-06 private health insurers were granted permission to index fees by an industry average increase of nearly eight per cent in 2005-06—another added impost on the public. This is more than twice the level granted to public hospitals. They had similar rises in the previous three years. Taxpayers' funds and the increased fees from the public have helped private health insurance funds to post significant profits. Medibank Private, the largest private health fund and owned by the Commonwealth government, posted a net profit of \$130 million in 2004-05. Not bad work if you can get it! So lucrative is Medibank Private that the Commonwealth government has announced a scoping study to investigate selling it off. It could be argued that the Commonwealth government is using tax revenue to support the sale of Medibank Private through its approval of premium increases well in excess of the general consumer price index and other measures of the health consumer price index.

So despite public hospitals being underfunded by the federal government and private health funds posting significant profits, thanks to people being forced to dig into their pockets, the private funds are complaining about the prospect of people actually using their health insurance. Talk about a bit rich! The state Liberals and Nationals have a health policy which supports this. The coalition policy is to continue the underfunding of our public hospitals by the Commonwealth. In fact, it has twice voted in this parliament along those lines. The coalition policy is to continue to support public health funds.

Finally, and most ridiculously, the coalition policy is to continue to say that people with private health insurance should continue to fill public hospital beds and not ask the health funds to honour their insurance policies. This does not wash with me. I do not think it washes with the community, and we are going to push ahead with our plan to get these funds to pay their fair share for treatment provided in our hospitals.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Gold Coast Cruise Ship Terminal

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Minister for Finance and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation) (9.47 am): On 15 September I announced that the Queensland government would be seeking expressions of interest from developers to build a Gold Coast cruise ship terminal as part of the broader marine development proposed for The Spit area. I also announced that we would be initiating an environmental impact statement for the project. Today I am pleased to release both the expression of interest document and the draft terms of reference for the EIS. I am also releasing a document called *An initial advice statement*, which summarises the proposal that the government wishes to take forward. This proposal is designed not only to deliver much-needed new tourism infrastructure to the Gold Coast but also to improve the public amenity of The Spit.

However, it is vitally important that we fully assess the environmental, social and economic implications of the proposal with a comprehensive environmental impact statement. As a first step, we need to make sure the terms of reference for the EIS cover all possible issues of concern, which is why we are today releasing them in draft form for public comment. I would encourage anyone who has an interest in this proposal to take a look at these draft terms of reference and the accompanying initial advice statement and submit their comments. The deadline for public submissions will be the close of business on 28 November. I would also encourage potential developers to examine the EOI document, which also provides details of the area of land to the south of Sea World that the government would like to see developed as part of its overall vision for The Spit.

We will be placing advertisements in the *Australian Financial Review*, the *Courier-Mail*, the *Australian* and the *Gold Coast Bulletin* this Saturday advising people how they can obtain copies of both the draft terms of reference and the expression of interest. The material is also available online on the Premier's web site. In a related step we are also finalising the appointment of a project board to oversee the development. It will include both public sector and well-respected community figures, one of whom will chair the project board.

As I have previously stated to the House, the government is determined to guide Queensland in grabbing its share of the largely untapped cruise shipping industry, which nation-wide is valued at about

\$200 million. That is why we have announced the Gold Coast project and that is why we have announced the Townsville ocean terminal. We believe that the Queensland tourism industry can tap into this market to the tune of \$80 million.

However, at the same time we are equally determined to strike a balance between the need to enhance marine and tourism facilities in the Gold Coast area while maintaining and enhancing public open space and recreational facilities. The EIS is an open and transparent process and, once again, the government welcomes and indeed encourages submissions from anyone who has an interest in the project.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Proposed Correctional Centre

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.50 am): I am announcing today that a search has begun for land in the south-east corner to build a new jail. The government will be searching for up to 600 hectares of land upon which to build this new prison complex. Ideally, the land would be within a one-hour's drive of Brisbane and located on a major transport corridor.

This new jail will be a massive infrastructure project. We need to start planning ahead now to have room to accommodate an additional 4,000 prisoners in south-east Queensland. This is about planning ahead and identifying land as there is a five-year lead time before a jail is commissioned.

The master plan is to build a new prison complex that will provide residential, low- and medium-security as well as a women's prison and a hospice for geriatric prisoners.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I am trying to listen to what the minister is saying. Please keep your voice down.

Ms SPENCE: The complex would be built on one site behind a secure perimeter fence. Colocating these facilities will lead to big savings in construction and running costs. For example, the new correctional centre complex would use the same court videoconferencing facility for all prisoners, which will minimise the need for prisoner movement. All medical and rehabilitative services to prisoners could be better coordinated at the one central complex along with the supply of other goods and services to the jail. It is envisaged that the centre's prison industries program would also enable a more concentrated delivery of goods and services to local communities.

We have not built a new jail on a greenfield site since the Maryborough Correctional Centre, which was commissioned in 2002. Our prisoner population is continuing to grow, and we must take steps now to put community safety first. We simply have to take this step. We have already experienced a 142 per cent increase in prisoner numbers since July 1993 and a further 90 per cent increase is forecast over the next 10 years. This new complex will be in addition to the major \$231 million, three-year infrastructure program that we began this year to fund the planning and construction of an extra 511 beds in state prisons.

Today, there are approximately 5,300 prisoners in jail cells across Queensland. In five years time that number will have grown to 7,200, and by 2015 it will be 9,700. This is a massive infrastructure plan that will create hundreds of local jobs throughout construction and provide about 1,200 new positions for Corrective Services staff.

I expect many shire councils will put up their hands for this type of development, due to the huge economic benefit in terms of jobs and local economic boost. When land was being sought for the correctional centre that was eventually built at Maryborough, 23 local authorities had their hands up to have the centre built in their area.

We need this complex because more offenders are being caught and being sent to jail. This state government has increased penalties and people are now getting longer sentences. One of the reasons crime rates are decreasing is that more criminals are behind bars rather than in our community committing crimes. This government is tough on crime, but this is about planning ahead so that we continue to meet the community's expectations for a safer Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Industrial Relations Legislation

Hon. TA BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (9.54 am): The Beattie government remains steadfast in its opposition to the Howard government's draconian industrial relations changes which will be introduced next week. We have still only been given the bare-bones outline of what is proposed, but there is no doubt that it will have a dramatic impact on workers and their families and the very social fabric of Australia.

With the Howard government controlling both houses of federal parliament, the prospect of the legislation being rammed through is very much on the agenda. The Senate is to get only days to review the legislation—a clear indication of what the government has in mind. And yet opposition to the reforms is mounting daily, reflected in newspaper public opinion polls showing that the federal government's standing is being severely eroded. That opposition is not limited to the Australian public. There is particular concern from representatives of women's organisations, welfare groups and the churches who believe the proposals will put low-income workers at great risk of exploitation.

This government has fiercely opposed these ideology-driven changes from the first announcement of plans for a single unitary IR system and changes to unfair dismissal laws. Under Queensland's fair and balanced industrial relations laws, we have a booming economy, high employment and low industrial disputation. If John Howard's IR theories were correct, this state would be a basket case. Our response to the Prime Minister's plans are that 'if it isn't broken, you don't need to fix it.' The answer to increasing labour productivity is not to be found in stripping away the entitlements of employees.

The Beattie government has already moved to try to secure Queenslanders' current workplace rights and entitlements by passing our Industrial Relations Amendment Bill in August. But we can only do so much to protect the pay packets of Queensland families from federal reforms which threaten entitlements such as leave loadings and overtime rates.

The current obscene blitz of advertising fails to obscure a single fact—that is, neither the Prime Minister nor his minister Kevin Andrews has produced a real case in support of their argument that industrial relations reform is needed to boost productivity and secure Australia's economic future. The fact is that greater labour market deregulation is likely to widen the social divide and erode confidence in our economy.

After months of propaganda and speculation, the actual detail of this legislation is to be revealed in a few days time. Only a supreme optimist would not expect the worst. John Howard is clearly hell-bent on pursuing his ideological course at the expense of the battlers whom he claims to support. The Beattie government has said all along that it will look closely at challenging this legislation in the High Court, and I can assure members that that is still the case.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Health Staff Broadcast

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (9.57 am): As Queensland embarks on building the best public health system in the country, its dedicated staff should be kept fully informed of our actions and progress. Since being appointed, the Director-General of Health, Ms Uschi Schreiber, has sent regular updates to ensure that Queensland Health employees are aware of department changes as they occur. In fact, I think it is fair to say that the quantity and, indeed, the quality of communications to Queensland Health staff is without precedent. I have been pleased to join her on a number of occasions to address staff through live broadcasts and written messages.

Today, the Premier and I will further act on that spirit of open and prompt communication by conducting another live televised broadcast to Queensland Health staff. Our message will be transmitted to hospitals and health service facilities across the state and will be taped for playback, ensuring that all of our 60,000 Queensland Health staff have an opportunity to listen in.

The Premier and I want to personally thank our doctors, nurses, allied health and other staff for their dedication, professionalism and commitment. We will also explain how our health action plan will support and help them in their duties—how we will lift the pressures in the system by recruiting an additional 1,200 clinical staff over the next 18 months to work side by side with them on the ground.

We will also reiterate that Peter Forster found that our health system was as good as any other in the country—but that we will provide an unprecedented funding injection of \$6.4 billion over the next 5½ years to tackle current pressures and roll out the necessary reforms and new services to make our system the best in Australia. Our restructure will result in clinicians having more say in how our hospitals are run and administrative positions will be shifted closer to patient care so that our doctors are doing more clinical work and less paperwork.

When I became health minister some 90 days ago, it became quickly apparent to me that Queensland Health's most valuable asset is its work force. I have since visited more than 20 different hospitals around the state, some on several occasions, to listen carefully to the concerns of our staff. I have also thanked them for their hard work and dedication in what they do. Our health action plan builds on their hard work and dedication.

While those opposite snipe away and try to undermine our progress, we are delivering solutions. Our public health system is being funded like it has never been funded before. And, through our health work force, we will deliver better patient care for Queenslanders and build a public health system for the 21st century.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Pacific Motorway Upgrade

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.00 am): Today I can advise the House of a new milestone in the planned upgrade of the Pacific Motorway. The Pacific Motorway from Nerang to Stewart Road at Tugun is vital to the region. That is why in July 2005 at the Gold Coast community cabinet the Premier announced that we would proceed with planning towards the further upgrade, irrespective of any commitment of federal funding. Queensland has put \$392 million on the table over the next five years for the first stage of the eight-year upgrade—it is on the table, in my pocket—which is expected to cost over \$1 billion.

The Gold Coast is a world-class city and it is about to get a world-class rugby league stadium at Robina in time for the 2008 season. Main Roads is fast-tracking the work to plan construction of the Mudgeeraba interchange by February 2008—in time for the opening of the stadium. Community consultation for this project is about to commence. Brochures will be distributed to the community shortly, and displays are set for the Robina Town Centre and Mudgeeraba Markets Shopping Centre. The members for Robina and Mudgeeraba have been briefed, along with local councillors.

While I have asked Main Roads to proceed with planning and community engagement for the upgrade, I will continue to seek matching federal funding. If federal funding is forthcoming, Main Roads would be in a position to carry out much needed early works such as the Nerang south interchange at Niensens Road, closely followed by the Mudgeeraba, Robina and Reedy Creek interchange works. Detailed design for the Robina interchange is expected to be finished by February 2006. If the federal government provides funding for this important link—and we are talking about fifty-fifty funding, as it has provided in the past for the Pacific Motorway—tenders for early works for the Reedy Creek interchange could also be called in early 2006.

In addition, a wider Nerang to Stewart Road section would link up with the \$360 million Tugun bypass, which is on track for completion in late 2008, subject to receiving planning and environmental approvals. I first raised the issue of funding for the Nerang to Tugun upgrade with the federal government in 2004. But the residents of the Gold Coast are yet to see any federal dollars on the table. In fact, the last time federal roads money, despite AusLink, was devoted to the Gold Coast was the Tugun bypass and that announcement was made in about 2002.

Mrs Stuckey: \$120 million.

Mr LUCAS: I thank the member. Is she on to the federal government about it, asking why under AusLink it has not provided any money to the Gold Coast? No. There is no new money to the Gold Coast under AusLink.

The Pacific Motorway upgrade is too vital to the region and the state to let the project languish. The state government upgraded the Pacific Motorway north of Nerang in 2000. The section south of Nerang has exceeded its current capacity of four lanes, resulting in increased congestion and an increased accident risk. Over the past five years there have been more than 500 accidents and 11 fatalities on this section of road. Currently about 90,000 vehicles use the motorway south of Nerang each day, and the existing interchanges are unable to cope with the long ramp queues.

Despite all of this, the federal government has failed to match Queensland government funding. The people of the Gold Coast deserve the same consideration as New South Wales residents, who are getting \$645 million over the next five years from the Howard government for the Pacific Highway. If the Queensland government can find \$392 million, surely the Howard government can match it.

The Gold Coast loyally votes for Liberal Party members at a federal level, yet under AusLink no new money was devoted to federal roads. Tugun was previously announced in 2002 and there has been no new money. If the member for Currumbin wants to defend her federal mates who have not been able to achieve one brass razoo for the Gold Coast, so be it. I urge our Gold Coast state members to join Gold Coast Labor members in the state government to say that all we want for the Pacific Motorway is a fifty-fifty deal, which is what should happen. We have our money on the table. There is no new money under AusLink at all for the Pacific Motorway.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Teacher Excellence Week

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts) (10.04 am): This week we are celebrating Teacher Excellence Week—a time when school communities throughout Queensland recognise the contribution of our state's teachers. Teaching involves a lot more than just walking into a classroom and delivering a lesson in a single discipline. We expect our teachers to help students develop skills to guide them through their lives, to inspire our children to become tomorrow's leaders and innovators. In some cases, we look to our teachers to teach everything from

maths and reading, to healthy eating habits and social skills, coaching sports, putting on plays, even staging recitals.

The week is an opportunity to recognise the skill, innovation and dedication of our teachers. And I am pleased to say that innovation is a shining feature of our Queensland education system. Recently, I launched our new aerospace studies syllabus—which will strengthen Queensland's position as the nation's leading aviation training provider. This new syllabus gives students a fast-track into aviation as a career, providing the knowledge, concepts and basic skills that our aerospace industries believe are essential for people entering into their work force. It covers a range of aviation careers and will be trialled at nine high schools next year, with a further 13 schools interested in joining the trial in 2007. This innovative syllabus is a credit to the Queensland Studies Authority, Education Queensland, Boeing Australia Ltd and our government's aviation training centre, Aviation Australia.

Yesterday I was particularly pleased to present 23 teaching scholarships to aspiring young teachers. There were nine Bid O'Sullivan teaching scholarships for year 12 students from rural and regional Queensland, and 14 Pearl Duncan teaching scholarships for Indigenous Queenslanders, embarking on training for their teaching careers. The quality of applicants was outstanding, and I am confident these aspiring teachers will become excellent role models for our students.

Tomorrow—World Teachers Day—I will present more than 40 teachers with professional development grants to further develop their careers. These outstanding teachers are being recognised for their skills, dedication and innovation. They have been involved in programs ranging from encouraging prep students to explore the world through digital cameras and video, to helping students with disabilities through 'talking books' and 'smart wheelchairs'.

Teaching is one of the most challenging yet rewarding and noble professions there is. This week is an opportunity for all of us to celebrate the contribution and commitment our teachers, as professional educators, make to our children and to our community.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Foster Carer Recruitment

Hon. MF REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.07 am): I am delighted to report this morning that my Department of Child Safety's foster carer recruitment campaign, launched on 9 September, is proving successful in finding families who are prepared to share their time, their love and their homes with vulnerable children and young people. While it could take at least a year to reach our ambitious target of an extra 500 families across Queensland, the public response so far has been quite remarkable, with 503 members of the public expressing interest in the foster-caring role.

Naturally not all of those people will be suitable foster carers or will decide to go through with the training, but we are off to a very good start. We still need hundreds of more calls to reach our target figure. I feel confident that many more Queenslanders, from a broad cross-section of the community will embrace this campaign and take up the challenge of fostering a future.

The Beattie government has done much to make fostering at-risk children more attractive. Last year we increased the fostering allowance by \$40 a fortnight and we linked the allowance to regular CPI increases. Since the establishment of the new department, we have seen increases in remote allowances, loadings and, importantly, establishment payments.

This week is Children's Week and the theme is 'A caring world shares'—an important reminder that caring for children and young people is a responsibility for the whole community. Sharing the burden of care is something we can all do, for example, by supporting members of our family or other carers in the community, or by becoming a foster carer for vulnerable children.

Caring for children incurs a significant emotional investment and it is important that we recognise the commitment of these very dedicated Queenslanders. We must all strengthen our commitment to raising the profile of foster carers and identify more people who can fill this important role. It is only then that we can seek comfort in the fact that all children, who are unable to live at home with their parents, are cared for in a safe, supportive and loving environment.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Small Business Accelerator Program

Hon. CP CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs) (10.09 am): I am pleased to announce today more than \$65,000 in small business accelerator grants to 15 companies in Kippa-Ring, Rocklea, Acacia Ridge, the Gold Coast, Gympie, Brisbane city, Milton, Archerfield, Narangba, Rainbow Beach, Inglewood, Cabarlah and Toowoomba. The Beattie government launched the Small Business Accelerator program in 2004 to

provide grants of up to \$5,000 for eligible businesses right across the state. We have developed a program to help well-managed, fast-growing Queensland based small firms, often known as the gazelles of the industry. Businesses use the funding to help offset the costs of employing business professionals to help them capitalise on and better manage their business growth.

In 2004-05, 40 grants were awarded under the SBA program, and already this financial year there have been 74 grants and financial support packages provided to small businesses. Since it began in 2004, more than \$430,000 has been approved under the SBA program. Forty-nine of the SBA grants have been awarded to Brisbane businesses and 24 to Moreton region businesses. Another nine grants have gone to the Darling Downs region, six to far-north Queensland, 23 to the Wide Bay-Burnett region and three to the Fitzroy area.

With today's announcements, we are funding companies that are helping realise the government's Smart State ethos. Supa Coat Australia, a Gympie company, has grown its business by 1,400 per cent since it started in 1991, and its insulating cladding product could potentially help millions of people around the world because it is ideal for building low-cost housing and schools in places hit by natural disaster. Supa Coat is using the grant to focus on the export market for its revolutionary product.

The Gold Coast's Healing Hippo is a small company with a big vision to become globally recognised for its aromatherapy products including massage oils, body washes and sprays specially designed for babies, mums and children. Thanks to the Beattie government's SBA grant, Healing Hippo is planning exports to Asia, the UK and New Zealand.

In Toowoomba, two brothers are using their SBA grant to explore franchising options for their successful shop, the Lazy Fisherman. Blake and Luke Johnston started their fish and chip shop seven years ago and by 2002 had won the inaugural South Queensland Business Excellence Award. They have already established a franchise concept store on the Gold Coast and plan to open two more in the next two years.

Small business represents around 95.6 per cent of private sector business in Queensland and accounts for just over half of all private sector employment. The Beattie government's Small Business Accelerator program is another Smart State initiative to help Queensland companies plan and work smarter. I commend the program's already significant achievements to all members, and I encourage them to make sure their local businesses know all about the program and how to apply for the grants.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

State Emergency Service

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.12 am): I want to place on record my personal thanks and gratitude to the emergency service volunteers for the great work they did after the hailstorm on the Gold Coast earlier this month. I would also like to thank the member for Southport for his support since the storm on 12 October. The member joined me early on the morning after the storm and met with SES crews and Emergency Services staff and saw first-hand the great work being done.

SES crews from the Gold Coast, the entire south-east of the state and even from northern New South Wales came to help out as well. About 6,000 homes and cars were damaged on 12 October, and of this total more than 1,200 householders required assistance from the SES. The meeting that followed that morning brought together the Emergency Services personnel, councillors and staff from the Gold Coast City Council plus representatives from Queensland police, Q-Build, the Department of Communities, the Department of Transport, Telstra and obviously the member for Southport and me.

As you would know, Mr Speaker, one of the key roles of the Queensland State Emergency Service is to respond to these severe storm events and to make emergency repairs to family homes. Unfortunately, about 60 homes which were originally damaged on 12 October were hit again by storms this week, and our SES crews were back again hard at work on the Gold Coast for those householders.

I would like to quote from a letter to the editor in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* from Gold Coast resident Mr Cliff Rix, whose home sustained significant hail damage during the 12 October storm. The letter states—

Our roof was extensively damaged along with a lot of other roofs in our street.

About 9:30 pm there was a noise outside and it was a team of SES men and women. They climbed on to the roof and worked for nearly four hours. They left early in the morning after making the roof as watertight as possible.

I want to say a very sincere thank you to the SES. Their work has been a godsend to us.

This story of Mr Rix is not an unusual one. The next day there were many stories like that. The controllers literally had to pull people off roofs that night to get the SES crews to go home and they started again at 6 the next morning. I met with some of the crews the morning after the storm and visited them as they worked to help residents with damaged homes and cars, and I can truly say that they did a great job. They were very caring and very resourceful. A lot of those homes only had mum at home and the SES really looked after those people who needed assistance.

Also, the departmental officers from Counter Disaster and Rescue Services put in a top effort. They worked around the clock to ensure the best outcome for those affected by the storm. Some people think that SES crew members get paid, but they do not. They do fantastic work. Our SES people are volunteers and they use their time free of charge to help out their fellow Queenslanders in their time of need. I cannot thank them enough for their sterling efforts during incidents like those on the Gold Coast, and I am sure every member in this House would.

SITTING DAYS AND HOURS; ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.16 am): 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 then be government business followed by a 30-minute adjournment debate.

HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL; HEALTH PRACTITIONERS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Remaining Stages; Cognate Debate

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.16 am), by leave, without notice: I move—

That, in accordance with standing order 129, the Health Services Amendment Bill and the Health Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill be treated as cognate bills for their remaining stages—

- (a) one question being put in regard to the second readings;
- (b) the consideration of the bills in detail together; and
- (c) one question being put for the third readings and long titles.

Motion agreed to.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Comments by the Member for Nanango

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (10.17 am): Yesterday the member for Nanango made reference to an article by Greg Martin of the Energy Supply Association talking about electricity price fluctuations according to demand. The member stated that I had made a reversal on an answer to a question on notice responding to the statement that 'consumers should accept paying a lot more to power their airconditioning and retail pricing could fluctuate according to demand'.

Sadly, the member has demonstrated a total and utter misunderstanding of the energy sector and time of use tariffs. In fact, the member misled the House. The member's original question related to time of use metering—charging for appliances at different times of the day. The member's inference that yesterday's statement in any way relates to the new energy tariffs, which were foreshadowed by the Premier earlier this week, is completely incorrect.

As I have previously advised the member, electricity meters generally do not have the capability to provide electricity consumption data for different periods of the day or monitor electricity consumption by appliance type. In reading out parts of my answer to a question, she neglected to acknowledge the fact that Queensland already has time of use tariffs for domestic customers through tariffs 31 and 33. The new flat domestic tariff structure will lead to savings for low-energy users. Energy efficient customers will no longer effectively subsidise people consuming high amounts of electricity.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Public Health Bill

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (10.18 am): This morning ABC Radio reported that, as a known opponent of means testing in public hospitals, I had missed the vote in last night's health funding debate. While I am somewhat bemused at the notoriety I have received as some kind of maverick Labor member on this issue, it arises from the selective editing of a comment I made to TV last week in which I said that, while members were concerned about copayments, the government needed to raise the money to fix the health system. For the record, I was granted leave to go to speech nights in my electorate last night. I am very supportive of the government taking an honest look at all the options available to fund skyrocketing health costs.

PALM ISLAND SELECT COMMITTEE

Report

Resumed from 6 October (see p. 3301).

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (10.19 am): It is a pleasure to speak to the report of the Palm Island Select Committee. The report has made 65 recommendations. To understand how the committee arrived at these recommendations, I think it is necessary to give a background of the history of Palm Island. That history shows that the island became known as a penal settlement. Records show that 4,000 people were removed to Palm Island between 1918 and 1971. That is a blight on our history because we are really talking about relatively recent history. Accordingly, 57 different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups have been represented on Palm Island. That does not include the traditional owners. What a mix of different groups. It is a real melting pot of people.

On 19 November 2004 a young man died in police custody on Palm Island following his arrest for allegedly creating a public nuisance. After the results of the first post-mortem examination were released at a community meeting on Palm Island on 26 November 2004 a riot occurred, and 80 police were deployed to Palm Island to restore order. The Palm Island Select Committee was appointed on 19 April 2005.

The report explores some specific issues. As stated in the report, the consultation process showed a number of shortcomings in current governance arrangements on the island. Mostly these issues result from the broad and extensive services expected to be provided by the council to the community and the need to further develop leadership and capacity in the council to meet those expectations.

The island lacks an economic base. There is a need for definite inclusive programs that will generate profit and quality of life through different business initiatives. The report highlights that resulting high unemployment on the island is considered by many to be a significant contributor to behaviour such as alcohol abuse and drug abuse on the island. The effect of these issues is particularly felt by young people. Evidence given to the committee was that the island has already lost a generation of its people and that this should not be allowed to occur again with the current youth of the island.

There is a strong belief that the future of Palm Island lies with its young people. The committee was advised that there is a significant degree of frustration regarding the quality of life on Palm Island for reasons both within and external to the community. The events of November 2004 have had a significant impact on the community.

Let us look to the future. Some key principles must underline future dealings of the government with the Palm Island council and the Palm Island community. Importantly, as the report states, aspects of those key principles require commitment on behalf of the Palm Island council and the committee. Those key principles are set out as recommendation 1. They are things such as cultural respect, recognising and dealing with unresolved trauma, community engagement and building community capacity.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (10.22 am): It was an honour and a privilege to serve on this committee. I want to begin by giving my sincerest thanks to the people of Palm Island for their willingness to share their experiences, hopes and dreams.

Being on this committee gave me an opportunity to visit a very beautiful part of our state, yet in such beauty there is so much sorrow. Palm Island is so close to our mainland yet it is so isolated. This is a contributing factor to the complex problems this community faces. This report will assist governments, community and non-government organisations to deliver the outcomes necessary for a better quality of life for residents of Palm Island. For the recommendations to be successful there has to be a willingness to work cooperatively. All levels of government and the community must work in partnership to achieve outcomes to benefit the community and set the foundations for a better future.

All of us need to recognise and acknowledge the disadvantage of the past that this community has endured. However, it should never be used to impede positive outcomes for the future. The council must acknowledge that, like all local governments throughout the country, it has strengths and weaknesses. I urge the council to build on the strength of its community and develop initiatives to learn and to move forward.

Clear and accountable policies have to be implemented, especially in the area of housing. The state government has had money committed for critical infrastructure for too long while awaiting relevant council resolutions and documentation. Nothing will be achieved without the willingness and commitment of the Palm Island community to share responsibility and to work in partnership. Until this happens, the community will continue to suffer.

Young people on Palm Island are crying out for leadership, for knowledge of their cultural traditions and for acceptance of their uniqueness. The community needs to embrace these young people. Young Palm Islanders deserve the same opportunities as any other young Australian. I believe the recommendations in this report will lay the foundations to achieve this.

I want to thank all the committee members and the staff members because they all worked very hard and had a genuine concern and commitment to finding achievable outcomes that can make a huge difference to this community. I commend the report to the House.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Kalpowar Station

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.25 am): Everyone knows the commitment of the Nationals and Liberals to providing access to a piece of land in Cape York for Vietnam veterans. That is why our side of politics has been supporting Vietnam veterans from the start with their desire to access what was Kalpowar Station, now known as Pandanus Park. It is an appalling blight on the recent history of this state that this government has dillydallied with that issue over a number of years, causing heartache and concern for those Vietnam veterans.

If one considers what the Vietnam vets went through not only when they were sent off to a conflict that was difficult at its time but also when they subsequently returned to this country, one would think that this government would have been far more open to treating them with the concern and consideration that they should have been treated with. These people served with honour. They served with distinction. They served in a time that was extremely difficult in the history of this nation.

Let us not forget that many members opposite were encouraged by their own party at the time to oppose that particular war. They not only treated our involvement in the war with contempt but also treated some of those returned servicemen with contempt when they came back, at a time when the marches were going on in the streets. I would have thought that, given those circumstances, there would be a far more compassionate approach today.

These Vietnam veterans have been after a very simple process from day one. They have wanted an opportunity to have access to a piece of land for which they had a deed of grant in perpetuity. They have always said that they wanted to make sure that there was also access for the Indigenous people, so it was going to be a shared arrangement. This government has now turned that around.

We will be making sure that any of these commitments from this government are carried through. We want a guarantee from this government that there has been and will be an access arrangement and not just a form of, 'We'll look at it.' This government has to make sure there is an access guarantee.

springborg.com

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (10.27 am): A few of my fellow members know that I do not mind reading a bit of fiction. I reckon it helps ease tensions and puts the mind at ease after a hard day.

One great fiction site I can recommend on the internet is www.springborg.com. It is a ripping yarn at its best. Indeed, only the other night I was having a good laugh at its various pieces of fiction when I came across a story titled 'Nationals seek "local champion" to represent Toowoomba North'. We all know that Toowoomba North already has a local champion in the form of Kerry Shine. My interest was whetted and I read the first paragraph which stated, 'The Nationals are inviting nominations for people wanting to contest the seat of Thuringowa at the next state election alongside Australia's most popular opposition leader, Lawrence Springborg.' I rubbed my eyes. I thought I was seeing things. Did that headline not say 'Toowoomba North'? Well, yes, but, as we have learnt from the Clayton's coalition opposite, never let the truth stand in the way of a good story. The Nationals' State Director, Brad Henderson, continued, 'We're calling for nominations from people who want to provide the Thuringowa electorate with a real alternative.'

Coming from Thuringowa, I can tell the Leader of the Opposition and his director that Thuringowa does not need an alternative and is a long way from Toowoomba North. Do not get me wrong: I think Toowoomba is quite a nice place but it ain't no Thuringowa. It seems that the National Party has some problem with north Queensland geography. That is no surprise, really, for a party that is run by the southern squattocracy. Members will recall the opposition leader's attack only last week on my mate the member for Charters Towers over some issue. That is pretty poor form, really, when the Nationals have only 15 members in parliament. Using the Nationals' geographic reasoning in relation to Toowoomba versus Thuringowa, perhaps Mr Springborg thought Charters Towers was somewhere near Esk! Opposition members really do not have any idea. As the member for Logan so memorably put it, it is the best resourced but laziest opposition in history.

Ningi Bypass

Mr CALTABIANO (Chatsworth—Lib) (10.29 am): An ongoing issue for the residents of Bribie Island, Sandstone Point and Ningi is that of the Ningi bypass. The debate pertaining to the Ningi bypass has been going on for over seven years and it is high time the residents of these local communities had some answers from the Labor government. It is not just a matter of policy or funding; it is a matter of safety and one of great concern to the residents of these communities.

The minister for transport has stated that the future upgrade of the Bribie Island Road should be on the existing road corridor through Ningi. Yet he has also acknowledged that, as the area around Ningi develops, 'it will not be realistic to expect Bribie Island Road will continue to handle all east-west traffic.' The minister has acknowledged the need for a bypass, yet has committed to the upgrade of the existing Bribie Island Road at a conservative cost of \$28 million, knowing that of course it will not meet future community needs. The upgrade of the existing Bribie Island Road is not a solution for the existing and future problems of Bribie Island, Sandstone Point or Ningi.

A survey of the Ningi residents was commissioned by the Department of Main Roads and undertaken in February this year. The survey issued to residents was neither open nor neutral, and the content of it did not meet the basic criteria of a quality survey. Despite that and despite the desire of the minister to achieve an outcome, the recommendation was actually to support the construction of a bypass.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Transport!

Mr CALTABIANO: Numerous community meetings have been held and petitions have been signed and lodged with the government, yet these communities still have no definitive answer. A road corridor must be preserved now before development interests establish residential communities that will forever stop any chance of having a mature road network in this area.

The bypass is essential because the Bribie Island and surrounding communities are experiencing one of the highest growth rates in south-east Queensland. The average age of Bribie Island residents is 52 and the only access for ambulances to Bribie Island is via the Bribie Island Road. The residents affected by this issue want answers from the government and they want answers now. They are tired of the ambivalent, bordering on disrespectful, attitude of this Labor government.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Patel, Dr J; Compensation Claims

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.31 am): I refer the Attorney-General to the fact that on 5 October 2005 she advised the parliament that the victims of Dr Patel would be paid \$2,000 for a medical report and fixed legal fees of \$3,300, and I ask: as almost every case will require more than one medical report, which could cost more than \$2,000 each, and will require lengthy negotiations that will easily exceed the legal fees, is she not simply limiting the ability of these victims to negotiate with her government and forcing them into a no-win situation?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The special process for the victims was announced by the Premier just after the meeting with the support group in Bundaberg on about 3 September. The special process was announced as a process which will expedite the compensation claims for the victims of Dr Patel. That process had 10 points listed at that time.

Subsequent to the Premier's announcement, I met with the lawyers representing a number of the victims who were already on the record as putting in claims for compensation. The concessions given in the compensation claims were that the state would pay for the medical advices. The member must remember that the special process is going to be dealt with through the Health Rights Commission and under the auspice of the Health Rights Commission. In that commission and through those processes, there is access to all the medical records of the claimants.

It is also believed that they will require some medico-legal reports. The state has given an indication that we would pay for those reports, that those reports would be joint reports so that they would be available to both the patients and the state for the assessment of their damages and that those reports were believed to be up to a cost of \$2,000. It may well be that the medico-legal reports will not cost \$2,000. Most of the claims, as I understand it, for the victims will be claims that will require a report from a general surgeon. They will only require one report. My understanding—and my experience with the legal profession—is that those reports cost around \$1,000.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett!

Mrs LAVARCH: That is their right. I take that interjection. The interjection was, 'What if they do not choose the mediation?' It is the claimant's right not to choose the mediation. We are not forcing anyone through this special process.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Burnett, I warn you under 253.

Mrs LAVARCH: It is a process of choice. What we have done is put together a special process, and can I say that the special process has quite a number of concessions in it that would not normally be available to people claiming damages for medical negligence.

Patel, Dr J; Compensation Claims

Mr SPRINGBORG: I refer the Attorney-General to patients of the Hervey Bay Hospital who have suffered a failure of duty of care by her government, and I ask: why have they not been afforded any assistance by her government to present their case to the commission of inquiry or to assist them in addressing their need for remedial treatment? Is it not true that by not assisting them she is further victimising these people?

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mrs LAVARCH: I am advised by the Minister for Health that the Minister for Health and the Premier met with the Hervey Bay Patients Support Group last week, as did the Leader of the Opposition. So he should be well aware of the situation in relation to the Hervey Bay support group. I understand that a further meeting will occur with the Hervey Bay support group. I myself have not received any approach from the Hervey Bay support group in relation to its compensation claims. However, I am certainly happy to receive any information or any requests from it to assess its situation.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mrs LAVARCH: The Minister for Health has just advised me that the request that was made to the Minister for Health and the Premier was for assistance to travel to a hearing and presentation of a submission in relation to the inquiry, and that request has been granted.

I come back to the Dr Patel patients and the special process. The question that the Leader of the Opposition asked implies that there is not a special process for the Hervey Bay Patients Support Group. In relation to Dr Patel, I understand that to date about 200 claim notifications have been notified. The reason that we moved to have a special process in relation to the Dr Patel patients was in relation to the number of people who would be seeking claims and also in relation to the circumstances surrounding Dr Patel.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Gregory, I warn you under 253.

Mrs LAVARCH: In short, I will certainly be happy to meet with the Hervey Bay support group. I am happy to look at any requests that it wishes to make.

South East Queensland Regional Plan

Mr ENGLISH: I refer the Premier and Treasurer to the fact that the Beattie government was responsible for one of the most significant planning achievements in Australia with the South East Queensland Regional Plan, and I ask: what progress has been made in implementing that plan?

Mr BEATTIE: I am happy to advise the House that today marks a very significant milestone, and that is the first birthday of the South East Queensland Regional Plan. I know the member has a particular interest in it for obvious reasons: his area is a growth area. We are trying to protect the quality of life of people who live in his electorate.

It was on this date one year ago that we released the draft plan, a blueprint for future growth in this wonderful region. Through extensive community consultation and cooperation between governments we have created a vision of how our region should grow over the next 20 years. That level of planning has never existed before. This plan protects more than 80 per cent of our unique beautiful landscape while housing the extra one million people we expect to settle in this region over the next 20 years. Every day 200 people move here.

The regional plan is closely linked to our South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan. It details more than 230 separate projects outlining investments of up to \$55 billion over 20 years, the most significant infrastructure investment plan in the history of Queensland. It includes \$24.5 billion in road and public transport projects; \$72.5 million to investigate another possible \$11 billion worth of road and public transport projects; \$3.3 billion in social and community infrastructure; \$2.3 billion in water infrastructure; \$13.4 billion on expected energy network outlays.

That level of investment has never existed before. No government in Australia has ever done this kind of long-term infrastructure planning. Our investments have already started. For example, work has begun on potential routes for the eastern busway, tenders have been invited for the Gateway Motorway

upgrade and bridge duplication, and the feasibility of the airport link has commenced. The minister for transport and I will have the opportunity to announce that with the lord mayor on Sunday. Designs for the new bridge at Redcliffe are currently on public display, works are under way on the new Linkfield Road connection between Gympie and South Pine Road, and detailed design has begun on the new Caloundra-Mooloolaba Road.

Through the South East Queensland Regional Plan and the infrastructure plan our government is leaving the best possible legacy—that is, improved quality of life and a sustainable future for one of the most beautiful regions in the world.

One of the commitments that the government gave in the mini budget delivered on Tuesday is that we will continue to fund that project and there will be a slight reduction in the surplus as a result of ongoing commitments—that is, money borrowed to service and build that infrastructure. As I said, there are three ways that we would fund this plan: one was off the budget bottom line, two was from borrowings and the third was by public private partnerships. Yes, there will be a financial impact but, frankly, that impact is necessary to build the future of Queensland.

Budget Surplus

Mr QUINN: My question is directed to the Premier and Treasurer. I refer to the fact that the budget surplus has now been whittled down to a wafer-thin level and into the next three years falling to just \$142 million—

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister for Health, I warn you under 253.

Mr QUINN: I will start again. I refer to the fact that the budget surplus has now been whittled down to a wafer-thin level and into the next three years falling to just \$142 million in three years time, and I ask: why is the Premier leaving Queensland's budget with no capacity to cope with the next disaster that will inevitably arise under his leadership?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. I made it clear that Queensland has the best books in Australia, and that has been accepted. Standard and Poor's and all the independent agencies have said that; they are not just my words. What did we do? I indicated in the budget papers that we had reduced the surplus for this financial year, 2005-06, by \$216 million. At the end of it there is still \$718 million in surplus. Why? Because we are putting that money where it should be. We are putting that money into delivering services. We are putting that money into health. We are putting that money into infrastructure. We are putting that money where it should be.

I indicated, however, as the Leader of the Liberal Party quite correctly identified, that the budget will remain in surplus. It will be a reduced surplus but it will remain in surplus. Frankly, there is no point having an enormous surplus if we are not using it where it is needed—that is, in service delivery. The significance of the Leader of the Liberal Party's question is this—and I say this through you, Mr Speaker, with great respect to the Leader of the Liberal Party—you cannot have it both ways; we have brought in two measures to raise extra revenue. They are very minor measures, but measures nonetheless. One related to gambling, which the member opposite criticised, notwithstanding the gambling unlimited or pokies unlimited, as the Deputy Premier mentioned before, which the member had when he was in office, and a small change to the rich end of the property market. Members opposite cannot criticise us for bringing in a little extra revenue to protect the long-term surplus of the state to ensure that we do have money for education, training and other areas. They cannot criticise us for that on the one hand and yet on the other hand ask what we are doing about the surplus. What we are doing is ensuring that we protect the long-term surplus of this state by ensuring that we have the revenue to do so.

That is the answer to the question. I will just advise members opposite of a little bit of fundamental economics—maybe it is a bit more than fundamental economics, maybe it is basic maths. They cannot on the one hand criticise us for bringing in a little bit of extra revenue to protect the surplus and on another hand attack us for having a surplus that is still very strong. Every other Treasurer and Premier in this nation is green with envy about our bottom line. The forecasts that were done by Treasury, the modelling that was done for the outyears, is the same conservative modelling that Treasury has always had. I saw some misinformation that suggested that Treasury had changed its modelling. Our Treasury is the best in Australia. It is conservative. Its modelling has not changed. Those projected surpluses are conservative assessments by the best Treasury in Australia. We have moved to protect that surplus and protect the future funding of health by ensuring that there is some additional revenue. The important thing here is that no-one has managed the books as well as we have when it comes to the economy. We are the best financial managers in Australia, with a AAA credit rating and with Standard and Poor's reaching the view that we have one of the best economies in the world.

Water Infrastructure

Ms NOLAN: My question is to the Premier and Treasurer. Does the government have a comprehensive plan detailing the solutions to the serious water shortage problems that we have been experiencing in south-east Queensland?

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition!

Mr BEATTIE: I might finish where I started: I would have thought that the Leader of the Liberal Party would not want to see any effort to talk down Queensland. I would have thought he would have been with us actually trying to talk up Queensland not trying to undermine its financial position. Just stick with us, because we will continue to deliver good books.

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Robina, I warn you under 253.

Mr BEATTIE: One of the other reasons that we are ensuring that we have a strong surplus, and that we are using the money effectively, is to invest in infrastructure. I thank the member for Ipswich for her question. One of those areas is water infrastructure. Water infrastructure also featured heavily in the mini budget yesterday. To where is some of the surplus being directed? Part of it is water infrastructure. If it does not rain heavily by February 2006 we will be in the middle of the worst drought on record in south-east Queensland. Today I table a document called *Making best use of south-east Queensland's water*. I table it for the information of the House. It clearly outlines what we are doing to address this important issue including measures to preserve existing supplies, investment in recycled water and development of new water storages.

In addition, initiatives outlined in the mini budget include: \$20 million over two years to kick-start the western corridor recycling project, which is a two-stage project costing between \$400 and \$500 million—a very significant investment in the future supply of water for the south-east corner—\$7 million towards an Australia coast recycling project; \$20 million over three years for subsidies to local governments in south-east Queensland to address leaky pipes and pressure reduction; significant project status for the proposed \$250 million 120-kilometre southern regional water pipeline; and acceleration of the Cedar Grove Weir in recognition of the fast-growing Beaudesert urban area.

The industry recycling project alone could save between 40,000 and 85,000 megalitres each year depending upon the scope of the project—that is, 10 to 20 per cent of 420,000 megalitres used each year. In addition, through pressure reduction and fixing leaky pipes, we could save up to 75 Olympic swimming pools of water each day.

Water is liquid gold and through strategies such as those outlined in our mini budget we are playing our part in helping Queenslanders manage this valuable resource. In addition to that, as people will know, in the infrastructure plan we are building Wyaralong Dam and there are a number of spillways that are being lifted. We are investing in water infrastructure in a way that has never been seen before in Queensland.

That level of investment is important to ensure that we deal with the future water needs of Queensland. We will continue to do this. The amount of money that we are investing in water infrastructure is unprecedented and we continue to do it. But we have to also do one other thing: we have to encourage people to change some of their habits.

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Caloundra, I welcome to the public gallery students and staff of Wellers Hill State School in the electorate of Greenslopes, which is represented in this House by Mr Fenlon.

Patel, Dr J; Compensation Claims

Mr McARDLE: My question is to the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General. Can the Attorney confirm that she has received no request directly from the Hervey Bay Patients Support Group or on its behalf from the Premier, the Minister for Health or the member for Hervey Bay seeking assistance for legal representation or compensation?

Mrs LAVARCH: I have received no written request direct from the Hervey Bay support group as far as I am aware. I have not gone through my mail today and have not seen a written request. But, yes, I have had a verbal request and my office has been liaising with the Minister for Health's office and the parliamentary secretary for the minister for health to organise that meeting. I am certainly aware that the Hervey Bay support group has spoken to the Premier and the Minister for Health about the situation in relation to its claims for compensation for an adverse outcome from a medical procedure. If members took from my previous comments that I was suggesting that I had had no request, the request certainly has come in through the Premier and the Minister for Health. I am fully aware of that and my office has been dealing with the Minister for Health's office staff and liaising with the Hervey Bay support group over the last few days.

National-Liberal Coalition

Mr CHOI: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier. Last night Channel 10 highlighted that the coalition of the willing might actually be the coalition of the not so willing. Can the minister detail any further differences that have surfaced this week other than the obvious like daylight savings, tree clearing and business trading hours?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. Those who saw the Channel 10 news last night would have been interested to note that the commentators indicated that tensions are increasing in the recently reformed state coalition. Lawrence Springborg and Bob Quinn cannot even agree on whether or not there are problems within the coalition.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Cunningham, I warn you under 253.

Ms BLIGH: So members will not be surprised, I think, to find that there does not seem to be any discussion on the other side about what its position is on this week's mini budget and its outcomes or indeed on the health action plan that was announced by the health minister and by the government. The Leader of the Opposition said in the *Toowoomba Chronicle*, when questioned about extra health funding this week, that he—

... feared the money was nowhere near enough to fix the problem.

Clearly he believes there should be more money. The member for Moggill yesterday, however, ridiculed the government on health spending, saying in this House that all it does is throw a fistful of taxpayers' dollars at the problem. Similarly, the Leader of the Liberal Party last night said that tipping more money in will not solve the problem. We hear those opposite this morning whingeing about the surplus. Clearly the Liberal position is that there is too much money going into the health action plan. On the one hand, we have the Leader of the National Party and the Leader of the Opposition saying there is not enough money in the package and then we have the Leader of the Liberal Party and the member for Moggill, the health spokesperson, saying it is too much. I will again quote the Leader of the Liberal Party. He does not want to hear it, but what he said in here last night is that tipping in more money will not solve the problem. So he does not think there should be any more money. He does not think there is room here for more money, but the National Party leader does.

The member for Burnett in today's *Gold Coast Bulletin* said—

The only real deal with the mini-budget is that the Opposition can find out how much Labor has under spent ...

So he thinks we are not spending enough, but again the member for Moggill and the Leader of the Liberal Party—

Mr MESSENGER: I rise to a point of order. The minister is misleading the parliament. I was referring to the amount of money that has not been spent.

Mr SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ms BLIGH: Touchy; very touchy. So members could be forgiven for thinking that the National Party thinks one thing and the Liberal Party thinks another. But of course it is never quite that simple. The member for Burnett thinks something else entirely of course! However, the member for Gregory deserves some applause in this House, because he has been honest enough to go on ABC Radio in western Queensland and praise the government and welcome some of the initiatives. He welcomed the additional training for nurses. He welcomed the 235 doctor training places for Griffith University and he welcomed the \$32 million regional accommodation program. So I thank him for recognising that.

Diabetes, Suspension of Licences

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I have a constituent who has lost his truck licence because he is a diabetic and he cannot get to see a diabetic specialist. Apparently they are very few and far between in Queensland and it has been made a national regulation that a certificate from a GP is no longer suitable to retain a drivers licence if one has diabetes. I ask: if one does have to have a medical report from a specialist, who are as rare as hen's teeth in regional areas, what can the minister do to ensure that people's livelihoods are not disrupted? Will he consider allowing GPs to sign off on licensing again?

Mr ROBERTSON: I suspect the answer to the question probably rests with the minister for transport, who has responsibility for that area rather than me as Minister for Health. But I want to correct something the member may have said a couple of weeks ago with respect to access by diabetics to the free needle exchange program. I hope by now he has been able to check his facts and now understands that diabetics in Maryborough have the same access to the free needle exchange as anyone else.

Bribie Island-Caboolture Road

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: My question is to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. Can the minister inform the House about progress with the upgrade of the Caboolture-Bribie Island Road for which \$170 million has been identified in the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program?

Government members interjected.

Mr LUCAS: Oh dear! When one has their first outing on roads issues in parliament, we need to consult the history books. Today we heard the member for Chatsworth lecture the state government about the Ningi bypass. When it comes to the people of Bribie Island and the electorate of Pumicestone, the state government does not leave them wanting. That is why we announced \$170 million in the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan to four-lane the Bribie Island-Caboolture Road—a very important project. We see that the member for Chatsworth has thrown his weight behind a bypass. What particular bypass is—

Mr McArdle interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Caloundra, you are getting close to being asked to leave the chamber.

Mr LUCAS: What particular bypass of course we do not know, because it only takes a drive on the Bribie Island Road through Ningi to see that that road was always intended to have four lanes. The houses are set back from the road. In fact, anyone driving through it, let alone owning a house there, would know that those houses are set back to allow for four lanes in the future. But it is important to have a look at the history of the matter, and I see the member for Gregory over there and we will talk about him in a minute.

In the *Bribie Weekly* on 5 July 1995 there was an article headed 'Main road has become issue for election', which states—

Nationals candidate Bill Newton said that the whole road needed to be upgraded to four lane standard and if elected the coalition had pledged to do the work in the first three years in office.

'Rob Borbidge made that a commitment when he was last on the Island' ...

That is the member's coalition partner. What happened to that? It never materialised. In fact, in a question on notice, the then transport minister, the member for Gregory, said—

In the recent review of the five year Roads Implementation Program, careful consideration was given to including works to upgrade the remaining two-lane sections of the Caboolture-Bribie Island Road to four lanes. Due to the need to direct funds to projects that are of higher priority ...

But can I just say this for other members who might be a little bit more concerned, such as the member for Redcliffe, about what happens when they are elected in a result against the government: one only has to look at the *Northern Times* of 22 March 1996, because in fact the whole project got canned. Dennis Rounsefell, a local activist, referred to the issue. The article states—

A spokesman for Mr Johnson said Mr Newton's commitment was a 'local policy' and not authorised by the Coalition.

He said the promise to upgrade Bribie Island Rd to four lanes only would have applied if Mr Newton had been elected.

So that is their policy on it. Thanks very much for drawing attention to it. We are actually going to build the Houghton Highway in Redcliffe; don't worry about that!

The results of the survey are fairly evenly divided—37.6 per cent support an upgrade of the Bribie Island Road to four lanes, 41.9 per cent support a short bypass and 47.3 per cent support a long bypass. There is no clear view. Having said that, I am prepared to have a look at the long bypass—not a short bypass, because all a short bypass does is take it behind the existing route. But there are significant environmental issues. The \$170 million will not take account of that.

Queensland Health

Dr FLEGG: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Yesterday in this place he said—

... one of the things we have committed ourselves to is much greater input by clinicians in the decision-making process.

Given the minister's new-found commitment to allowing clinicians and medical staff some input, how does he explain the decision by his director-general to exclude the state's visiting medical officers from her advisory committee? Is this not just another example of the disastrous policy of picking advisers who tell you what you want to hear?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The simple answer is no. The reason is that my director-general, in casting around and asking for people to put their names forward to sit on that clinicians committee that will advise both my director-general and me, received about 220 applications for 20 positions. I am sure that even the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party can do some mathematics and work out that when 220 applications are received for 20 positions it is likely that someone is going to miss out. In fact, probably 200 applicants are going to miss out. But the 20 people who will be appointed to that committee by the director-general will be clinicians. Their input will be welcomed.

I have to say that I am very pleased that when we cast around for clinicians to put their names forward to be part of the team to rebuild Queensland Health we received 220 applications. That did my heart a lot of good—knowing that doctors out there want to be part of the reform process to give us a health system for the 21st century. The fact that some of them are going to miss out on a position on that top committee is disappointing. I understand that there are going to be some people who will be disappointed, but those people—

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: No, the member should be patient.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Moggill, I warn you under standing order 253. The next interjection, you will be going out.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am always happy to help the member with the truth. I know he is a bit of a stranger to it, so I will speak slowly. What will happen with those 220 applications is that when the 20 for the committee have been selected there will be a second round. Those people will be invited to put their names down for that second tier of clinicians committee at a district level and an area level. So if people are a bit disappointed that they have missed out—and I can understand that they may be—they are to get a second chance and probably a third chance to be part of the rebuilding process of Queensland Health.

Again, I put on record my thanks for those 220—if not more—applicants who put their name forward. I am pleased that they are so keen to be part of fixing our public health system. Whilst I understand that they may be disappointed, their names and applications will not be forgotten. They will have an opportunity to participate at a different level than the level that advises both the director-general and me.

Patel, Dr J; Lester, Ms V

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: My question is also directed to the Minister for Health. I refer to media reports about the support the government is providing to the former patients of Dr Patel to ensure that they get the treatment they require. Can the minister advise the House of the arrangements that are in place to provide surgery, travel and accommodation support to former Patel patients such as Vicki Lester and her family?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. She continues to care so much for her constituents in Bundaberg. Before talking about the situation with respect to Bundaberg, in relation to the questions that were asked of the Attorney-General I can confirm that last week the Premier and I met with Laurie Brock, the head of the patient support group in Hervey Bay. He made a request for assistance. That request is currently being considered by the lawyers for that patient support group, Carter Capner, in order to facilitate that meeting being held. That work is under way, so please let us not have any suggestion that any commitment that either the Premier or I gave with respect to facilitating a meeting has not been acted on. That meeting is being negotiated with Carter Capner, the group's lawyers, with the assistance of my parliamentary secretary, Jo-Ann Miller.

The government is committed to providing all the support necessary to the former patients of Dr Patel. I gave that commitment when I first became health minister and travelled to Bundaberg to attend a meeting of the patient support group. We have already demonstrated that commitment to date by providing assistance to 620 former patients of Patel at a cost of nearly \$1.2 million. That includes accommodation, surgery, doctors fees, theatre fees, medical investigations, travel costs, meals, medication, pathology, consultations and family counselling. As the Premier outlined on Tuesday, the government has also so far provided more than \$70,500 in financial assistance to the Bundaberg Patients Support Group.

In relation to media reports today about Ms Vicki Lester and her family, let me say that Ms Lester is being brought to Brisbane next month for surgery at a private hospital. It is anticipated that she will be hospitalised for between seven and 10 days. The government is paying all the costs of accommodation, fuel, travel and food for Ms Lester as well as for her husband and two children, who will be in Brisbane with her. This package includes accommodation in a fully self-contained studio apartment at Auchenflower for 10 nights at a cost of \$850. Together with fuel, food, rail travel from Bundaberg to Brisbane, plus air fares for the family to return to Bundaberg, this package totals some \$1,797 for the 10 days.

With regard to accommodation, I appreciate the needs of growing teenage children. That is why I am quite happy to have Queensland Health provide Ms Lester and her family with a larger two-bedroom apartment for the duration of their stay. Today my office has consulted with the Bundaberg Patients Support Group president, Beryl Crosby, about this matter. She agrees that the family would be more appropriately accommodated in a larger unit, but she also agrees that the rest of the government's support package for the Lester family is fair and reasonable. In relation to the Bundaberg Hospital Patient Liaison Service, I want to assure the former patients of Patel that we are doing everything that is possible to deal with their concerns.

Sports Facilities Grants

Mr SEENEY: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Finance. I refer to the minister's claims on Monday that not-for-profit community groups would not suffer from the changes that will see major sporting facilities funded by the same levy as the community benefit fund grants. How can volunteers who work for community groups throughout Queensland expect to get the same level of grants when the fund now has to repay the debts of the Gabba redevelopment and Suncorp Stadium?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question, because I think there may well have been some confusion about this and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to put the facts on the record. The funds that are gained from gambling revenue flow into a number of funds, but predominantly the ones that are available for these sorts of activities flow into the community investment fund. The community investment fund then allocates on a formula basis funds every year to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund, which is the fund to which so many non-government organisations in all of our electorates make regular applications for very worthy projects. That formula will not change, and nor will the funds that are available to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund change.

Similarly, the funds that are used for the Responsible Gambling Fund are also drawn from the community investment fund. But there are then funds that are left over and they have always been available to the government on a discretionary basis. We have said that that discretionary fund will now be used to fund the commitments to major facilities such as Suncorp Stadium and the Gold Coast stadium that were already being funded through the Major Facilities Fund. The effect of this decision is that discretionary funds that were left over from the allocation to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund and the Responsible Gambling Fund will now be used to fund those activities. By that decision, the government is effectively denying itself access to funds that were of a discretionary nature and were used for a range of community purposes and they have been identified in other budgets.

Mr Seeneey: Like what? What were they used for?

Ms BLIGH: One example is that some of the funds that were put into Disability Services—I think about two or three years ago—came from that source. I can give the member a list of the projects. There is no secret about this. As I said, from time to time there have been a range of discretionary projects for which the government has called on the remaining funds in the community investment fund to underpin.

In effect, we are denying ourselves the opportunity to have that discretionary leftover money available to us, but we think this is very important. We think the ongoing revenue that is generated through the levy that is paid by the high-taxed hotels should be dedicated to health. We understand that there is a strength of feeling about this matter in the community and we have acted on that. I am very pleased to have an opportunity to guarantee to the member for Callide and to every other member in this House that the first call on the community investment fund will be the Gambling Community Benefit Fund and the Responsible Gambling Fund, as it has always been. Nothing will change in terms of the amount of funds that are allocated in there or the formula that is used to calculate the amount of money in that fund. That will be something that can be demonstrated in every year's budget.

Unsolicited Phone Calls

Mr POOLE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I am aware of a growing number of seniors in the community who are fearful of receiving phone calls and when they answer the phone the person at the other end hangs up. Can the minister tell the House what the police advise they should do in these circumstances?

Ms SPENCE: I am very pleased to receive that question from the member for Gaven, because I know it is a very big issue out there in the community, particularly amongst seniors. I recently held a seniors safety forum in my electorate where the No. 1 concern seniors raised was the fact that they are continually receiving phone calls and when they answer the phone no-one answers and they hang up. Some seniors tell me that they are receiving four or five of these sorts of phone calls a night. I have not experienced that. I guess I am not at home enough to answer the phone and have that happen. It certainly is frightening and distressing for them. They believe that people are casing their house to see whether they are home to invade them. They have all sorts of ideas about why people should be ringing them and continually hanging up.

Police advise seniors to contact the police if they have any concerns or even contact the telephone company. But I am told that what is happening now is that it may well be the result of automated technology to assess whether a person is at home. In fact, the telemarketers have this automated technology. Once someone answers the phone, the technology hangs up the phone. The number is then logged for a telemarketer to ring knowing that the person is at home at the time and is likely to pick up the phone when it rings again. That is what is really happening to these people who are getting these phone calls. But it is very distressing for them.

I have raised the issue with the Seniors Task Force which is looking at crime and safety issues. One of the task force members Yvonne Zardani, who is also the President of the Pensioners and Superannuants League, said that these types of phone calls are forcing many seniors to avoid answering their phones because they are so distressed. In some cases seniors have gone so far as to disconnect their phone. Others, if they can afford to, have bought answering machines. But obviously we do not want seniors to have to outlay money for an answering machine that they really do not need or even go as far as disconnecting their phone, because it is a lifeline for many seniors who are housebound.

Next week the task force will have information on its web site about what people can do if they find themselves at the receiving end of this type of call. It will provide information on ways that concerned seniors can have their names taken off telemarketer phone lists to avoid getting this type of fright from such calls. Seniors will be advised to contact the Australian Direct Marketing Association and use their free 'do not contact' consumer service. This will stop a lot of the telemarketing calls. Not every telemarketer is an association member, but we are confident that if seniors go to this length and get their number removed it will eliminate many of these unwanted calls.

Anti-Terrorism Bill 2005

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: My question without notice is to the Premier. Concerns have been expressed to me by my constituents about the contents of the proposed federal industrial relations bill and the Anti-Terrorism Bill. These concerns extend to the process by which the bills are being introduced and rushed through federal parliament. As a co-signatory to the Anti-Terrorism Bill, will the Premier add his voice to the call for the Prime Minister to acknowledge these concerns and allow elected members as well as the community more time to consider the contents and implications of both bills?

Mr BEATTIE: I say to the member for Gladstone that the answer is yes, and I do so. I thank her for her question because I share her concern about both matters. Let me deal with both of those bills. Let me first deal with the Anti-Terrorism Bill. This was a difficult decision for all the premiers and chief ministers to have made. We are, in effect, introducing some very draconian laws. That is one of the reasons the premiers insisted on a sunset clause after 10 years, a review after five years, judicial review and, in Queensland's case, the Public Interest Monitor.

As I mentioned this morning, in my discussions with the Prime Minister on Wednesday I referred to three things. The first was that the constitutional issues may well lead to a successful challenge and the fact that our Solicitor-General, Walter Sofronoff, had expressed a view in relation to that matter. As a result of that conversation there will be discussions amongst the solicitors-general and they will try to work through those issues, including with their federal counterpart. The second was that the 'shoot to kill' provisions were not included in the COAG communique, and the Prime Minister has subsequently indicated that he will make changes and that, in fact, the state laws will apply. So whatever laws currently exist in relation to police powers will be encompassed in the legislation. I think that is a good outcome.

The third area—and there will obviously be ongoing discussion about this—related to timing. The timing of the debate of the bill is entirely a matter for the federal government, not for us. I know there were some debates about it being considered on Melbourne Cup day. Obviously if parliament is sitting it has to deal with some business, some legislation. But I do believe there needs to be maximum public debate. We signed up to that COAG agreement in the national interest. The matters that I have talked about today, such as the constitutional challenge, the PIM—and we insist on the Public Interest Monitor being involved, and that was another matter I discussed with the Prime Minister—and the 'shoot to kill' changes, are all matters about which we have concerns. What we will do is honour the COAG agreement—nothing more and nothing less.

In terms of the workplace law reforms, as a Labor government we are passionately opposed to those laws. The honourable member for Gladstone would have many people in her electorate—and I would venture to say the overwhelming majority of people—who would share Labor's view and her view and be opposed to these laws. I believe that as we have the best economic record in Australia, the lowest industrial dispute level for many years and the lowest unemployment in 30 years we have the economic circumstances that are making us one of the most attractive places in the world to invest and, as independent agencies have said, we have one of the best economies in the world. Why do we need to wreck it by changing the industrial laws? Our state based industrial system allows the early resolution of disputes, and we fully support it. We do not want to see it changed.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the member for Indooroopilly, I welcome to the gallery teachers and students of Wellers Hill State School in the electorate of Greenslopes, which is represented in this parliament by Mr Fenlon.

Summer Storm Preparedness

Mr LEE: My question is to the Minister for Energy. In the lead-up to summer, can the minister advise what sort of work people should be doing around the house to reduce the risk of damage to their property and to the electricity system?

Mr MICKEL: Yes, I can inform the honourable member for Indooroopilly that in the lead-up to summer we are putting out a brochure about some hard work that needs to be done around the house. That hard work should include clearing up some loose items that may be lying around the house. So we urge people to have a look at this brochure, and those people should be interested in doing that hard work around their house in the lead-up to summer. I commend that brochure to all honourable members.

Mr Speaker, you can imagine my surprise, however, when I opened the *Sunday Mail* on 9 October and there was an ad which I thought was an Energex ad which said 'Interested in some hard work around the house?' I had a close look at it and down the bottom of the page what I saw was not the Energex logo at all; it was the Liberal Party logo. The ad said—

There's a lot of talk lately about Queensland Parliament being in a sorry state. All thanks to politicians who are collectively seen as a bunch of apologetic media tarts, bludgers, liars, dopes and no-hopers.

We talk about cracks in the coalition; we have cracks about the coalition. I will leave honourable members to work out which of those opposite would fall into the categories of bludgers, liars, dopes and no-hopers. But there is a little anniversary coming up for the member for Moggill—and I note the question was asked by the member for Indooroopilly. Members might have noticed lately that there has been a lot of activity surrounding the member for Moggill. He looks a bit panicked and a little anxious around the place. It all has to do with the donor for political parties annual return because last year at this time this was lodged.

One would expect that an annual return would talk about the campaign contributions. Well, this one does not. What it talks about is contributions made by the Ryan FEC not to political campaigns but to local branches. For example, there is \$2,000 given to the Fig Tree Pocket Young Liberals and \$5,000 to the Centenary branch. Do members know why? Because that will buy 400 members—students, unemployed and all that. Where will they get to vote? They will get to vote in the Moggill preselection. That is why we are seeing all this activity. Most political parties raise funds to fight their political opponents. Liberal Party members raise funds to fight themselves. So we are waiting in a couple of days to see what the return does. That is why we are seeing all this panicked activity in and around the member for Moggill. I urge people to play it safe, as Energex does. Don't join the Liberals!

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Charters Towers, I acknowledge in the public gallery school leavers and teachers from Burleigh Heads State School in the electorate of Burleigh, which is represented in this parliament by Mrs Christine Smith.

Flying Foxes, Charters Towers

Mr KNUTH: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. For over five years the residents of Charters Towers have had to put up with the filth, the stench, the ticks, the parasites and the serious virus risk from plagues of flying foxes roosting among their homes.

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr KNUTH: The government's permits have proven absolutely useless and totally ineffective. Will the Premier put the health and the quality of life of the people of Charters Towers before flying foxes and give the community the appropriate permits to rid this scourge of flying foxes out of the residential areas once and for all?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question. By the way, I have a fairly good idea that he in fact is not in the Labor Party. I notice that his leader thought he was in the Labor Party, but I know that he is not. I would hope that at some point he would introduce himself to Lawrence Springborg.

Mr Seeney: Answer the question.

Mr BEATTIE: I am quite happy to do that. I want to make the point that the issue about flying foxes has been an issue for some time in Charters Towers, and I have actually been there. I had a discussion with the mayor some time ago and I had a discussion with the member's predecessor, Christine Scott.

We have tried to manage flying foxes in a number of ways. The reality is that the EPA has pursued a number of things. The issue is this: the council and the state government's EPA have worked to try to reduce the inconvenience concerned. The EPA has had sympathy for the position for some time. The EPA have also written to the Charters Towers City Council advising of changed permit conditions. They have extended the dispersal period from 5 am to 9 am and 4.30 pm to 7.30 pm. They have provided the CTCC sufficient flexibility to manage little red flying foxes, which are the breed, as the

member knows. They have extended professional animal welfare assessment services to the council free of charge. We have monitored relocation activities. They have confirmed a damage mitigation permit for the entire summer period until 6 March 2006.

I am advised that these conditions—that is, the dispersal hours—have not yet been fully taken up by the Charters Towers City Council. In the long term we are ensuring that there will be alternative roosting sites. Negotiations are under way with a sewage treatment plant and DRNM—

Mr KNUTH: I rise to a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would just like to say that they have been taken up, and they have proven useless and ineffective.

Mr SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr Reeves: A bit like you, really.

Mr SPEAKER: That's right!

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Take your seat.

Mr KNUTH: People are exposed—

Mr SPEAKER: It is not a point of order.

Mr KNUTH: People are exposed—

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Charters Towers!

Mr KNUTH: People are exposed to a serious health risk.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Charters Towers, please leave the chamber.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Callide, I warn you under 253.

Mr Seeney: That's outrageous.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Callide, I give you your final warning. I asked the member for Charters Towers to resume his seat on three occasions. He defied the ruling of the Speaker. I ask him to leave the chamber and I ask the Premier to continue.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: What is the point of order?

Mr SEENEY: There were so many interjections from the Labor back bench that the member for Charters Towers had no chance of hearing your warning. You did not do anything at all—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Take your seat. Member for Charters Towers, I asked you to leave the chamber under 253. I call on the Premier.

Whereupon the honourable member for Charters Towers withdrew from the chamber.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, as I was indicating—

Mr Seeney: That's an absolute disgrace.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Callide, this is your final warning. Do you understand?

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order, Mr Speaker. What is the rule with regard to the Labor backbenchers who were interjecting when the member was asking the question?

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Callide, I would ask you to take your seat. Member for Warrego—similar to you. I have made a ruling. I ask the Premier now to finish the answer.

Mr BEATTIE: We will do everything we can to continue to work with the local council. I would urge it to take up the offer that has been made by the government because this is an issue; it is a problem. We believe we can resolve it in partnership with the council.

Rental Properties, Bond Loans

Ms MOLLOY: My question is directed to the minister for housing and racing, Robert Schwarten. It has been drawn to my attention that a number of real estate agents on the Sunshine Coast are refusing applicants for rental properties because they have Department of Housing bond loans. Can the minister please advise if he is aware of this practice?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for her question and the fact that she wrote to me on 18 October about this matter. It is alarming, and it ought to be concerning to anybody who has any form of social justice in their conscience. Every member of this parliament knows that the honourable member is a sterling example of someone who has a very well developed social conscience, so it is not surprising to find that the honourable member is most concerned to learn that

real estate agents on the Sunshine Coast have been refusing to take people who have Department of Housing bond loans on their rent rolls and into tenancies.

The reality is that those bond loans are our way, as a state government, of trying to assist people who cannot raise the bond to access the private rental market. It is of grave concern to me and to the government that real estate agents are prejudging people who come to them with a bond loan supplied by this government and saying that they are not going to provide them with a tenancy. I say to those real estate agents that they should re-examine what they are doing in that regard. I thought we had long departed from that form of discrimination of prejudging people on the basis that they are poor. The fact that they are poor and cannot raise a bond loan does not make them bad people. I would have thought that we would have moved on from that presumption.

What can I do about it? Well at the moment not a lot, unfortunately. We cannot force real estate agents to take bonds, but I have asked the Residential Tenancies Authority to examine this matter with a view to seeing what we can do. Because my view is that, if those real estate agents do not want to take a bond from a person in those circumstances for no valid reason, then it might well be that the Residential Tenancies Authority does not take bonds from them at all and therefore renders their rent roll redundant.

I do not want to take that approach. I do not want to go in there with the big stick, but I am also not going to stand by and see perfectly good people discriminated against simply on the basis that they are too poor to come up with the necessary four-week bond that is required in those circumstances. I have asked the RTA to meet with the REIQ to try to unlock this situation. I do not for one moment expect private landlords to have people who do the wrong thing in their rental properties. We do not tolerate it in public housing and I do not expect private landlords to tolerate it either, but the reality is that this—

Time expired.

Smart Card Technology

Mr CALTABIANO: My question is to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. The implementation of smart card technology is an essential component of a more efficient, people friendly public transport system. The government has been claiming for years that the move to smart cards will increase patronage and reduce costs for public transport users. Can the minister confirm that again the smart card technology for the bus system has been delayed in its implementation with expected delays of more than five months? What impacts will this have on public transport patronage? What are the cost increases that the taxpayers of Queensland will have to bear?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. One of the wonderful things about TransLink and integrated ticketing is that it has now resulted in one of the largest integrated ticketing areas in the world—an area from Noosa on the Sunshine Coast to Coolangatta and west to Helidon. Indeed, patronage has increased in the vicinity of 30 per cent in some areas such as Ipswich, Logan, Woodridge and the like; I do not have the exact figures with me at the present time.

Currently we are in the very early stages of the smart card small trials in the Redcliffe-Sandgate area. Cubic are the suppliers of the technology to the Queensland government. The Queensland government has a contract with Cubic that requires it to meet all the standards that we have prescribed for the smart card prior to us going into full acceptance of the product. Cubic is still working on that. We will not be accepting the product until we are absolutely, completely, 100 per cent satisfied with it. We are not at that stage, though I am not told that it is not far off. We hope to have the smart card fully rolled out, as I have indicated before, in south-east Queensland by the end of next year.

One thing I make absolutely clear is that we want to make sure that the technology that Cubic has contracted to provide is absolutely, 100 per cent to our satisfaction before we fully accept it. I make no apology for that. They are getting paid a lot of money. I make no apology for insisting on the best outcome for our public transport users.

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

VAN TUONG NGUYEN

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (11.31 am), by leave, without notice: I move—

That this House—

Notes Australia's ongoing and unconditional opposition to the use of the death penalty;

- (1) Expresses deep concern regarding the decision of the President of Singapore, on the recommendation of the Singapore Cabinet, to reject clemency for the death sentence which has been imposed on Australian citizen Mr Van Tuong Nguyen;
- (2) Notes Mr Van Tuong Nguyen's full confession, his demonstrable remorse for his actions and his full cooperation with Singapore's authorities and the Australian Federal Police;

- (3) Respectfully notes the capacity under the Singapore Constitution to grant clemency in rare circumstances and notes Mr Van Tuong Nguyen's case fits the criteria;
- (4) Notes that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has urged states which still maintain the death penalty not to impose it as a mandatory sentence, or for crimes without lethal or extremely grave consequences; and
- (5) Respectfully urges the Singapore cabinet to reconsider its decision and show compassion and commute Mr Van Tuong Nguyen's death sentence to a custodial sentence; and
- (6) That the Speaker convey a copy of this motion to the President of Singapore.

In moving this motion, I am calling on the Singapore cabinet to reconsider its decision to reject clemency in the case of this 25-year-old Melbourne man. In doing so, I want to make it clear that we do not take this action lightly. We do not normally question the decisions of another country's government, but this is an extraordinary situation. This man has not only made a full confession but also assisted Singaporean authorities and the Australian Federal Police. He was convicted of smuggling heroin into Singapore in December 2002, but he has demonstrated his remorse. He should not have to face the death penalty.

I hope that members opposite will support today's motion—in fact, I hope that all members will support it—in the same spirit that the Commonwealth government and the federal opposition have taken a united stand on this issue.

This is not the time to debate the pros and cons of drug trafficking. We all know that drug trafficking is illegal. We know it is bad. We know that reasonable drug laws must be enforced. I would hope that all Australians would understand the perils of trafficking or using drugs in foreign countries as well as in this country.

I am totally opposed to drugs and drug trafficking, and I want to make that very clear. What we are saying today to Singapore is simply this: this Australian has made a mistake but he deserves to be shown mercy.

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (11.33 am): I second the motion. The sovereign nation of Singapore has every right to punish those who break its laws, but it does not need to take the life of this young Australian. Eighty-four years ago in this room the death penalty for murder was abolished. In the decade following there were fewer murders than in the decade before. The deterrent effect of a death penalty was nonexistent in Queensland.

We do not need to persuade the government of Singapore of this much. We only need to persuade it that there are reasons for clemency in this case. Mr Nguyen's confession, his cooperation with Singapore's authorities and his obvious remorse all speak strongly for clemency, as does the fact that the failure of his attempt to smuggle this substance means that this, his first crime, did not actually harm anyone.

Any country that has a policy of executing offenders, even if they cooperate with the police, discourages other offenders from providing information and deprives those who are pursuing the international drug barons of the necessities to do so. I urge Singapore to temper its justice with mercy.

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.34 am): It is true that within our society, and probably within this place, there is a diversity of views on the death penalty. However, the motion that has been moved today is a motion of the parliament that simply seeks to restate the position that has been held by the Australian government and certain arms of the United Nations and what has been proffered by the Australian government and also the United Nations. It also calls for clemency based on the circumstances of the case of this young man in Singapore.

I do make the point that by passing this motion today in no way whatsoever do we condone any way whatsoever drug trafficking. It must be kept in mind that drug trafficking is an extremely serious crime, whether it be in this country or another country. Drug trafficking, or the consequences of drug trafficking, harms people. It can destroy families and, in some cases, even take people's lives.

I just cannot believe that in this day and age, with all the publicity that abounds about the laws of countries throughout South-East Asia and the very strict way that they view drug trafficking and the death penalty—which they can apply, and have applied, to Australian and Queensland citizens—people are stupid enough to continue to do this. However, they do do it. I urge anyone who is considering doing this to look at the laws, consider the consequences, look at what can happen and consider the heartache for the people who are left behind.

This is a difficult situation for any government—a federal government, a state government or any parliament in Australia—to have to deal with. This motion simply states our established position as a nation and the broad principle of it is something that the opposition in this place can support.

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (11.36 am): The circumstances in which Mr Nguyen finds himself should serve as a stark and constant reminder to all Australians who are travelling overseas that when they do so they are subject to the laws of the countries in which they travel. As we know, many of those countries have severe penalties for crimes that we would not consider so severe in Australia. In many cases the death penalty applies. As others have said, members of this House in no way condone drug trafficking. It is to be condemned at all levels. In that circumstance, this person finds himself in

Singapore subject to that country's particular laws. I would encourage the government of Singapore to reconsider its decision not to grant clemency on this occasion. The motion speaks for itself. I will be supporting the motion.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (11.37 am): In many countries the vulnerability of young people to making poorly based decisions is recognised and acknowledged. Apart from repulsive crimes including murder, rape and similar crimes, the judicial system endeavours to err on the side of compassion to allow those young men and women the opportunity to recapture their futures after serving an appropriate custodial sentence. Mr Van Tuong Nguyen's family claim that he carried 400 grams of heroin to pay his brother's debt. Mr Nguyen has confessed to his crime and has shown demonstrable remorse for his actions.

No-one in this chamber would support drug trafficking. Each of us knows the devastation of illicit drug use. It kills; it splits families; and it alienates loved ones and changes drug users from loved family members to desperate, dysfunctional individuals. I would in no way wish to trivialise the seriousness of the crime committed.

Those who visit countries where a very hard line is taken in relation to drug possession or trafficking do so knowing the environment into which they go. This must also be acknowledged. This motion urges the Singaporean cabinet to consider its decision, show compassion and commute Mr Nguyen's death sentence to a custodial sentence. Once the Speaker conveys the concerns of this parliament to the President of Singapore, I would hope that compassionate consideration can be given to this request.

Motion agreed to.

TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 26 October (see p. 3562).

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (11.39 am): I rise in support of the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2005. I want to talk firstly about the amendments to the Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act. These amendments will enable the state government to take action to pre-empt any threats presented by unseaworthy ships. This is very good legislation. I am advised that Maritime Safety Queensland estimates that it would cost the state government more than \$6 million to remove known abandoned or derelict ships in Queensland at the moment and ensure that no trace of their unwelcome presence is left. That is an awful lot of money. The Queensland government must have the legal authority to enable it to address this issue.

I would like to mention in particular the new section 87A of the Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act. This amendment will enable our government to hold the person most recently listed as the owner responsible for a ship that is derelict, lost, stranded or abandoned. This will mean people simply cannot go away. They cannot go out and buy a rusting hulk thinking that they can make some quick money and, when it all becomes too hard, then sell it for a song and waltz off into the distance, leaving the government to pick up the bill for ultimately dealing with the vessel.

A major problem with abandoned or derelict ships in Queensland is that the owner has tried to cover up their link with the ship. They do not want anyone to know about the problem. They simply run and hide. This makes it hard for the government to take any action. The amendment will mean that the last known person to be the registered owner of the ship will be considered to still be the owner for the purposes of written directions about the ship or the recovery of costs involved in any clean-up or salvage. So the responsibility is on that last known person. People should be in no doubt that these vessels are a real threat to our waterways. This amendment will enable the Queensland government to manage this situation by making owners accept their responsibilities, as they should, so that we can maintain the safety, the amenity and the environmental integrity of all of our Queensland waterways.

Another essential amendment is the new section 186A. This section provides for data currently collected by Queensland Fisheries under its vessel monitoring system to be provided to Maritime Safety Queensland. This data will be vital in enhancing navigation safety and, of course, minimising the risk of marine incidents.

Since 1 July 1999 the Australian Transport Safety Bureau has investigated some six collisions in shipping lanes involving fishing vessels or, indeed, small craft. Unfortunately, these incidents have cost lives and also the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars in rescue operations. Saving lives is very important to our government. The amendment will also allow Maritime Safety Queensland to take a proactive role in alerting ships of potential hazards. It will also enhance the search and rescue operations through better information about ship locations. As I said before, saving lives is important, and minimising marine incidents is also important.

The amendments to the Transport Operations (Marine Pollution) Act are also of critical importance to our great environment. These amendments will enable the Queensland government to take action to pre-empt threats to the environment from ship-sourced pollutant spills. Maritime Safety Queensland estimates that it costs the state government more than \$1 million each and every year in response to these spills. Many of the spills could have been avoided if only, for example, fuel transfers were monitored—a basic thing, one would have thought. Ship owners and their operators must take responsibility for the management of these pollutants that they handle.

A number of pollutant spills from ships have occurred as a result of the overfilling of fuel tanks. An amendment to the Transport Operations (Marine Pollution) Act will require that a ship's owner and master ensure that transfer operations are monitored by a member of the ship's crew. I would have thought this was simply commonsense. This, of course, will reduce the number of spills that occur—for example, when transfer equipment fails or when a fuel tank simply overflows.

Another amendment to the Transport Operations (Marine Pollution) Act will enable Maritime Safety Queensland to intervene when a ship is believed to present a potentially serious threat to Queensland's marine and coastal environment. This is good news for Queensland. At the moment the state's powers to act are restricted to when there is a grave and imminent threat. This means that in almost all cases an incident has already occurred. The amendment will mean the agency can act against ships before they become involved in or cause marine incidents. This is very good in this day and age. For example, this ability to intervene early might have helped to prevent the grounding of the *MV Karma* near Agnes Water in November 2003. Preventing this incident would have saved the Queensland government some \$450,000. This money was used in salvage and clean-up costs. Imagine what this money could have been put towards. The amendment will afford Maritime Safety Queensland and the Queensland government the power they need to protect the marine and coastal environments, which are vital to this state. They are vital in a number of areas including the economy and tourism.

The other amendment I would like to support is the amendment which will clarify the role of marine pollution controller. This role is already recognised across jurisdictions, but it is recognised basically on an informal basis. The amendment will mean the marine pollution controller's role is clearly defined and, we hope, more clearly understood by all agencies involved in the response to a pollutant spill in Queensland coastal waters. These amendments will enable the Queensland government to minimise and manage pollution risks to Queensland's marine environment. We hope that this will allow all Queenslanders to continue to enjoy the amenity and also the environmental wonders of Queensland's waterways.

I thank the officers of the departments who have been involved in relation to this particular amendment bill and also the minister and his ministerial staff. I commend the bill to the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Barry): Order! Before calling the honourable member for Gregory, I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of students, teachers and families of the Wellers Hill State School in the electorate of Greenslopes and, with no degree of favouritism, students, teachers and families from Aspley Special School in the electorate of Aspley. Welcome to the gallery.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (11.47 am): I rise to speak to this Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. I will canvass only one aspect, which is the aspect very precisely canvassed by the member for Bundamba. She must have read my mind. The opposition spokesman, the member for Chatsworth, responded to the whole of the legislation at the sittings in Rockhampton, and I think he gave a very able summary.

As the member for Bundamba has rightfully said, these amendments in relation to marine safety are very important to Queensland. Just last week I had occasion to be in the Whitsundays and Mackay region, where I visited Hamilton Island and the Airlie Beach area. There are still too many people paying lip-service to the importance of having seaworthy vessels. I noticed that during my time as minister for transport and have also noticed it since then. We are all aware of the issue of the 'ships of shame'. However, those sorts of people still sail the seas and they do not care in what size vessel.

Believe it or not, we have some 7,000 kilometres of coastline in Queensland. That coastline is very important to our tourist and holiday industry, and it gives us the status of the holiday state. We need to look after that coastline and we need to look after those vessels that come here that are fair dinkum and are not a problem. However, there is always that element that exists.

At Hamilton Island last week I had occasion to witness first-hand the concerns of the custodians of the island about people visiting there. One bloke lost an amount of fuel. We are talking about the Barrier Reef, for God's sake! At the end of the day, what happens if it is an oil tanker that is losing fuel or somebody who does not know that it is happening? We need to police this and we need to make absolutely certain that we do not have a situation that will be detrimental to the state of Queensland and to the marine industry of Queensland.

There certainly are some situations where people are careless about refuelling and pollution. These fines are in place and I know that the act covers those fines very well. I trust that the minister will make it certain that some of these people will be punished according to the law, because in these types

of situations it is too late when it is all over. We all saw what happened in Alaska with the Exxon Valdez. We do not want that to happen in Queensland. It is best to have preventative measures in place rather than have the mishap occur. We have to make certain that there are authorities that are carrying out that surveillance. I made mention of Hamilton Island and the concerns of the people there. There are other people around the state on the coast who are gravely concerned about this issue. I say to the minister here today that we have to protect our coastlines from this element.

The marine pollution controller, which will be an integral part of this legislation, is a very responsible position and one that I cannot endorse enough. I say to the minister here today that it is not a case of one strike and you are out; it is not even two strikes and you are out. We do not even want half a strike for some of these people because I believe that they have been snubbing their noses at authorities. It is all very well to say that we are overpolicing our waterways and we are doing this and we are doing that, but we will not get two goes at this; there is only one go.

As I said earlier, we have an extensive coastline. That brings me to a situation that is volatile; we now live in a world where we have terrorism on our doorstep. We do not know at what moment it will strike. Back in the days when Simon Crean was the federal leader of the Labor Party, the opposition in Canberra, one of his policies was in relation to a national coastguard. I cannot endorse that enough. I believe that there is too much duplication—indeed, it is not duplication or triplication but quadruplication—of surveillance bodies. It just goes on. There are too many bodies out there doing surveillance, whether it is Customs, Transport, Primary Industries or Police. There are so many of them that there is an overlap in places. There should be a summit between federal and state authorities to make certain that we can put in place coastal surveillance that will take control of the whole agenda that we are talking about here today.

If we have a major oil spill as a result of a tanker running aground on the Barrier Reef it could be the ruination of Queensland's coast. A couple of years ago when the former minister, who is no longer in the House, was the minister we had an occasion where a heavy vessel ran aground in north Queensland. We knew at the time that this was a concern. It could have been one of those ships of shame that we do get from time to time. The department of transport does an exemplary job in Queensland in carrying out surveillance on this type of craft, but at the same time you never know when one is going to get through the net and whether they are trying to dodge an area of question.

I say here today that I cannot emphasise enough the importance of this aspect of this legislation and I endorse it in its entirety. I say to the minister and the government: do not go easy on this one, this is too important an issue to pay lip-service to. The opposition is supporting this piece of legislation. There are other aspects to the legislation but I believe this is one aspect that we have to make certain is set in granite. The government must give the authorities the tools to make certain that we rid our waters of this element of society that does not respect our waterways and our coastline.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (11.54 am): I want to speak very briefly to this important Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. It is a wide-ranging bill and includes traffic, passenger transport and road use management aspects of Transport operations. In relation to that passenger transport aspect, I inform the House that I recently had the pleasure of attending a ministerial forum meeting at Quilpie and drove from Quilpie to Charleville, Roma, Miles, up to Taroom and Theodore and then back to Toowoomba. I take this opportunity to pass on to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads my view that the roads that we passed over are in top-rate condition and I commend him and his department for the work that has obviously gone on and is continuing to go on. Communications, in particular in relation to the area of passenger transport, are vital to the livelihood and life of people living in far-flung areas of the state. In places like Taroom and Theodore we were also made aware of the need for that missing rail link to be attended to—that is, basically joining up the Surat basin with access to the port of Gladstone.

On the second point, that is the school crossing aspect of this legislation, I am pleased to note that the government has allotted an amount of \$33 million over four years that will be spent principally in the Highfields region outside the Highfields State School to overcome a problem that has arisen because of the dramatic increase in population that has occurred at Highfields. The road will be four laned from Cawdor Road to Reis Road, some two to three kilometres in length. Two sets of traffic lights will be installed, one at the intersection of New England Highway and Highfields Road and the other at the intersection of Borghardt Road and the New England Highway. This is a tremendous advance for Highfields. It is a lot of money. It includes, of course, the widening of the road from Highfields all the way to Crows Nest as well, mainly in the electorate of Darling Downs. But I think the principal amount of money will be spent in the electorate of Toowoomba North. I am grateful for that and so are the people of Highfields. It adds to the many aspects of infrastructure spending that the state government has spent in Highfields over recent years, including the acquisition of land for the provision of an ambulance and fire station, the tremendously increased power capacity, the appointment and construction of a police beat, the financing of the new Mary McKillop school and the upgrading of the Highfields State School. All of these things are happening and are consistent with the attention that has been given by the government to the Highfields area.

Also on that school crossing aspect of this legislation is the \$17 million being allocated to upgrading of the intersections of Ruthven Street with various streets in my electorate, namely Griffith Street, Jellicoe Street and North Street. Bridge Street, of course, has already been attended to. Jellicoe, Griffith and North streets are in the vicinity of the Harlaxton State School. That is one reason for the need for upgrading of those intersections, apart, of course, from the fact that Ruthven Street is a continuation of the New England Highway, which goes all the way up to Stanthorpe and out to Crows Nest.

That is \$17 million which is going to be spent within the Toowoomba City Council boundaries. It is a tremendous injection of large amounts of infrastructure funding for Toowoomba, again consistent with the attention that the government is paying to my neck of the woods. You, Mr Deputy Speaker, as the member for Cunningham, would also be grateful for the work that is being done on that roadway in your electorate. I am not sure which intersection it is, but I think it is Stenner Street. I am sure that you would join with me in congratulating the government for the continuing attention that is being paid to our region.

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (11.59 am): I rise to speak in support of the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2005. In my contribution today I want to focus on the amendments being made to the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995. In particular, I want to comment on the new legislative scheme that the bill establishes for school crossing supervisors. Currently there are approximately 1,700 authorised crossing supervisors in Queensland—that is, 1,700 individuals committed to helping their school community and to giving up their time for a modest financial reward to help ensure our children arrive at school and leave safely each day.

Last year the honourable the Minister for Transport and Main Roads attended Nashville State School in Brighton to officially recognise the 20th anniversary of Queensland's school crossing supervisors scheme. I want the House to note that since the scheme commenced in 1984 no deaths or serious injuries have occurred at a supervised school crossing. This is a fantastic achievement and is a credit to the scheme and of course to the many crossing supervisors who operate under it.

While the scheme has been operating successfully for 21 years now, the fact remains that crossing supervisors are entrusted by the community to engage with our children on a daily basis. As such, the community rightfully expects the government to ensure that the scheme operates appropriately and that our crossing supervisors conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. The amendments introduced by this bill will better regulate the activities of our crossing supervisors and, in turn, better protect our children.

In November last year the Premier moved amendments to the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000. These amendments significantly enhanced the blue card system and strengthened the safeguards for protecting Queensland children. One of the amendments moved by the Premier brought crossing supervisors under the umbrella of the commission. As a result of that amendment, by 17 January next year all crossing supervisors will need to hold a blue card. These are great people in their local community. This is no suggestion that we do not trust those people. Often they are former parents in the particular school community that they work at and are very much a part of those communities. They are a great sounding board in those communities. They certainly know what is going on in every one of those communities and, in that sense, provide a much wider function than they perform in their daily work as just a crossing supervisor.

At the time of moving those amendments the Premier rightfully talked about putting the safety of our children ahead of everything else. The amendments before the House today build on the amendments moved by the Premier. They extend greater protection for children by introducing a comprehensive legislative scheme to govern our school crossing supervisors. That scheme will have a number of very important features. First, it will provide the department with clear power to refuse to authorise a person as a crossing supervisor if they have been charged with or convicted of certain criminal offences. Second, it will require all crossing supervisors and people applying to become crossing supervisors to inform the department of their criminal history and any changes to that history. For example, if a crossing supervisor is charged with an offence that has implications for their suitability as a crossing supervisor, they will be obliged to inform the department of that change, and the reasons for that are obvious.

Third, it clearly specifies the grounds on which a crossing supervisor's authority can be amended, suspended or cancelled—for example, if the person contravenes a condition of their authority or if they can no longer perform their duties because of some medical condition. Fourth, the department will have a clear legislative power to immediately suspend a crossing supervisor, and that power will only be available where a child is put in danger or where it is otherwise in the public interest that the person be immediately suspended from duty. The power of immediate suspension is expected to be rarely invoked, but it is an important safeguard to ensure that the department can act quickly if needed.

Finally, and very importantly, the bill ensures that crossing supervisors receive procedural fairness in their dealings with the department. Any crossing supervisor whose authority is suspended or cancelled will be given written notice of the reasons for that action and will have full review and appeal

rights. These provisions ensure that an appropriate balance is struck between the rights of our children and the right of crossing supervisors to be treated fairly. The amendments contained in the bill will ensure that the high regard in which school crossing supervisors are already held is strengthened. They will also ensure that if a crossing supervisor is found to no longer be an appropriate person to act in that role then action can be taken promptly to protect the children of Queensland.

I want to personally pay credit to the supervisors who work in the Greenslopes electorate. They do a great job. They are extremely well respected in each of those communities. I am sure that they will continue that great work into the future. This is a piece of legislation that simply adds to the safety net of protection for our schools and for our children, and I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. NITA CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (12.06 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2005, which seeks to amend seven acts administered by Queensland Transport and the Department of Main Roads and includes consequential amendments to two other acts. The bill will improve safety on our roads and at sea. Changes with regard to port authorities will clarify provisions for establishment and abolition of a port authority and are necessary for future development of this very important part of Queensland's export industry. I draw to the attention of the minister the excellent port at Bundaberg and its very active port authority, which is working hard to encourage more development, freight and tonnage through our port.

While the changes relevant to busways are mainly relevant to the south-east corner, where public transport is used heavily, I want to support the clarification of the broader range of land that can be declared busway land, and I commend the minister on the funding that is being made available in regional areas like Bundaberg to expand bus services and to encourage the use of public transport in regional Queensland.

The amendment that will enforce the requirement to have a shipboard waste management plan based on a ship's overall length rather than its gross tonnage is much more practical. The introduction of a new position of marine pollution controller will provide certainty and direction during major responses to ship-sourced pollution within Queensland waters, as was seen following the grounding of *MV Karma* in 2003, and changes to the act will ensure that Maritime Safety Queensland can take action at an earlier stage.

Other changes proposed by this bill, such as identifying the legal owner of a vessel, the temporary closure of pilotage areas, the creation of exclusion zones around ships, the sharing of fishing vessel data and the recovery of costs incurred by the state in salvage operations, are all long overdue changes that will simplify the work of Maritime Safety Queensland and better protect Queensland's coastline.

I want to place on record in this House some of the transport infrastructure that this government is undertaking in Bundaberg and in the Burnett region. In Bundaberg the announcement of a \$42 million ring-road around the south of the city has been well received and will address the safety and amenity issues of heavy vehicle and freight movements throughout the city. We are all looking forward to the start of construction, which, I am advised, will start within 18 months at the Bargara Road end, with traffic lights to provide safe pedestrian crossings for children accessing St Luke's, East and Kalkie schools. I thank the minister for responding to concerns of a number of retirees near Walter Street who could not safely turn onto the highway. After the minister's intervention, those people will have the benefit of traffic lights within 18 months.

The \$11.8 million that has been allocated to upgrade eight intersections within the city will assist the council and increase safety for the residents. When this project is added to the construction of other major projects in Maryborough and Hervey Bay and the new roads and bridges that have been built in the shires in conjunction with the construction of the new Burnett River dam—which have been welcomed by the councils and the residents of those shires—we see the strong commitment by this government to providing road infrastructure for the entire region.

Credit should be given where it is due. I commend the minister for bringing this bill before the House. It contains so many positive and worthwhile amendments to improve safety on our roads and at sea. On behalf of the communities in my electorate, I also thank the minister for his very good work in providing much-needed road infrastructure to regional Queensland.

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (12.10 pm): I am delighted to rise in the House to speak in support of the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. I want to make a couple of very brief comments in support of what I think is very sensible legislation. Previously, I have placed on the record of the parliament my concern about marine safety and particularly the safety of people who are using the Brisbane River in canoes or small boats that are not motorised. Of late some serious problems have been experienced and the suggestion is that some CityCat drivers have not controlled their vessels in an appropriate manner. I want to place firmly and squarely on the record of the parliament my absolute disgust for any user of a motorised vessel who does not give way to a person in a non-motorised vessel. It is pretty straightforward that, when a person is operating a boat that has a motor, that person gives way to someone who is in a boat that does not have a motor. It is fairly simple.

Two months ago I was kayaking on the Brisbane River with the wonderful Indooroopilly Canoe Club. Indooroopilly is home to one of the biggest canoe clubs in Australia—certainly the biggest canoe club in Queensland. It is a great club that has produced Olympic and Commonwealth Games competitors. One Saturday afternoon I was kayaking on the Brisbane River and an operator of a motor boat was absolutely hooning up and down the river. The boat was darting in and out between jetties. I was paddling quite near the river bank. I had a serious concern that the operator of that boat could not see me and that by the time they did see me, it would be too late and we would have a very serious collision. That demonstrates how dangerous life can be on the water. I want to make sure that my constituents are aware that I share their concerns.

I also want to place on record my absolute, total and complete opposition to jet boat joy-rides on the Brisbane River. I want to thank the minister for transport for responding so well to my e-petition. His response to that e-petition was tabled last week in parliament. I have to tell the minister that my constituents are genuinely pleased with his response. It was sensible and I think entirely appropriate. We are going to wait and see if the buffoon who is proposing to run these joy-rides lodges an appropriate application—anywhere—and if that occurs we will oppose it. It is just not the sort of activity that we want to have occurring on our part of the Brisbane River.

I want to raise the issue of toll roads. Some of my constituents use the Logan Motorway. They have expressed a concern to me about the toll they are charged. These people use the electronic toll. They are concerned that they are paying significant amounts of money to get to work quicker by using that motorway, but for a significant period there has been a large amount of roadworks on the motorway that has really delayed their journey to work. During this time they have received no decrease in the amount of toll they have to pay. Their utility in using that road is decreased because they are getting to work later than they would when the traffic on that road is flowing freely. I suggest to the transport operators who run the toll operations that when roadworks on that toll road cause traffic delays, they should not charge the same amount of money to the people who use the road during those times. That seems to me to be quite logical. I urge all toll operators to do that.

I would like to commend the crossing supervisors who work so hard in my community. They offer a genuinely wonderful and often unrecognised service to the community. They are at the crossings every morning and every afternoon. I see them regularly at the crossing at Indooroopilly State School and the crossing at Milpera State High School at Chelmer. They also attend other school crossings. These people provide a wonderful service to our community.

I want to finish by raising two issues very briefly. I want to thank the minister for his response to my correspondence about bicycle safety in my electorate. I place on record that another serious accident occurred near my electorate, again involving a four-wheel drive hitting a cyclist. The driver of this four-wheel drive did not give way when turning left into a driveway and drove straight into a cyclist. Apparently the driver did not see the cyclist. I think that is an absolute cop-out. I think that is an absolute disgrace. People should look in their mirror and check their blind spot before they turn. That cyclist has spent some time in hospital. He was seriously injured. He is not sure whether he will ever get back the full use of one of his arms. I think that is thoroughly unacceptable.

What is worse is that the police suggest that the driver of this four-wheel drive who did this terrible thing simply failed to give way at an intersection and on that basis he might lose two points. Frankly, the driver's action was reckless and a two-point penalty for that is absolutely laughable. That driver was indifferent to the safety of other road users. His actions have had a dramatic effect upon this cyclist's life and may well have a lifelong effect upon his life.

I want to finish by drawing to the attention of the House another concern that I have that is related to users of the Brisbane River. A number of people who live along the river have jetties. They have set up an apparatus on their jetty by which to squirt water onto the jetty so that birds do not stay on the jetty and deposit their droppings. At a time when we have a water shortage, I think that is a stupid thing to do. I was paddling along the river and it was as if from nowhere water from those water jets started flying at me. Sometimes these people have not even set up the water jets properly. The water does not hit the jetty and instead goes straight into the water.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr LEE: I was getting in touch with my electorate. The minister would be aware that my electorate is the only electorate in Brisbane that spans the Brisbane River. I represent both the north side and the south side of the Brisbane River. During the time that I have represented the electorate of Indooroopilly I have lived on the north side of the electorate and on the south side. One afternoon I was kayaking on the Brisbane River and water spraying from a water jet genuinely surprised me. I was not aware that people had those things. I do not own a riverfront property and I do not own a jetty. But the water from those water jets sprays onto the jetty so that the birds do not sit on the jetty and leave their droppings. It is a tremendous waste of water. But what is even worse is that the people who install these blooming things do not even think to point the jet in the right direction. So as I passed by one of these things I saw a flock of birds sitting on the jetty doing God knows what and water spraying out into the river, which causes a nuisance to the users of the river. With that small contribution, I will say that I am delighted to support the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Copeland): Order! Before calling the honourable member for Redcliffe, I acknowledge in the gallery staff and students from the Eagle Junction State School in the electorate of Clayfield.

Mr ROGERS (Redcliffe—Lib) (12.28 pm): I rise to support the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. Generally it seems to be tidying up a lot of bits and pieces that need clarification. I do have two concerns, and I will put them on record. They are with regard to the extension of the definition of 'non-rail corridor land' and the declaration of busway land. My concerns relate to the Kippa-Ring to Petrie rail corridor and its importance to the people of Redcliffe. I see these amendments as making it easier for the current rail corridor, which I believe is owned, to be converted to busway land. Although this is probably not of great concern, as the south-east regional plan says that it is going to take some 10 or more years for the busway to get there anyway, I will be watching this land to see if any changes are made. Redcliffe and the people in the area need that railway, and we are going to keep pushing for the preservation of that land and for the railway to be built. I support the bill.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (12.20 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to acknowledge the notable contributions from both sides of the House on this bill, a trend I hope to continue. The seven amendments featured in this bill incorporate a large area of legislation and, while I will be unable to address all aspects of the proposed amendments, I believe that there are some which merit discussion.

Let me say at the outset that I am very supportive of several of the amendments proposed in the bill. In particular, I support the recording of boat licence qualifications on Queensland drivers licences, which will save time in terms of identification required for people seeking to hire boats. To be able to carry more forms of ID on one licence is quite innovative.

I would also like to voice my support for aspects of the bill which deal with conducting investigations into the criminal history of those people who conduct training in the operation of ships. As we all know, many high school students enrolled in marine studies classes undertake a boat licence as part of the curriculum. It would be irresponsible, therefore, for someone who has been convicted of a disqualifying offence, particularly one of a sexual nature, to be given the green light to be supervising children seeking to obtain a boat licence.

Although I have praised aspects of the bill, it should be noted that there are some aspects of the bill that I have concerns with. In particular, I was disturbed to read that the amendment to section 134 of the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act, concerning interference with vehicle identification numbers, clause 67, would see the maximum penalty for interfering with a vehicle's identification numbers increased from a \$3,000 fine or six months imprisonment to a \$7,500 fine or 12 months imprisonment.

My concern relates to the bombings in Bali that occurred three years ago. I note that the attackers had scratched clean the identity numbers on the van that they used to store the bomb that was detonated near the Sari Club. Fortunately, though, the bombers had not found a concealed identity plate on the chassis of the vehicle. It was only through this piece of good fortune that investigators were able to get a break in tracking down the merciless and bloodthirsty perpetrators of this cowardly act.

The lesson to be learnt is that, in the society in which we live, vehicles can be used as weapons to stage attacks on innocent human beings. While I understand that this is an extreme example—and we hope and pray that something in the manner of the Bali attacks never occurs on Australian soil—we must ensure that our laws regarding the issue of interfering with a vehicle's identity plates reflect the very serious nature of the offence. Depending on the circumstances of a case, perhaps this penalty may not be harsh enough. That is something I would ask the minister to consider.

Another part of the bill this government seeks to implement that I have issue with in a small way is clause 39, which establishes the position of marine pollution controller. I do not disagree with the establishment of the position. I think it is important for the government to take the issue of marine pollution seriously, and I can see it has by establishing this position. But I share the concerns of the shadow minister for transport—I spoke with him about this yesterday afternoon—about proposed section 93B. This will confer immunity on the marine pollution controller, and anyone acting under the controller's direction, from civil liability provided that—and I quote from the explanatory notes—they act in 'good faith without reckless disregard for the possible occurrence of the personal injury or loss or damage to property from which liability would arise'.

This was noted in the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's report, which sought comment from the minister, who did comment. I can understand that it says here that it would be unreasonable to expect the person acting in the role of marine pollution controller to be exposed to personal liability when acting on behalf of the state, but I would have thought that if they are given exclusion from their liability at any time then an annual report would be provided and the circumstances surrounding why this exemption was given would be investigated so that there could be an assessment of whether this was done appropriately. They obviously should be responsible for decisions they make, but some consideration should be given to providing an annual report.

Acting in good faith without reckless disregard for the possible occurrence of the personal injury or loss or damage to property from which liability would arise should not be something that provides the marine pollution controller immunity from culpability for making erroneous decisions. It should be a prerequisite for their holding the job. Noting the minister's comments to the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, obviously there are situations in which there will have to be considerations in this regard. The fact of the matter is that the marine pollution controller has an important role to play and should be held accountable to the Queensland public they are hired to serve.

I have always been a vocal supporter of tougher penalties for street hoons and those who endanger the lives of others on the road. It is pleasing to see the government taking notice of this problem, which we hear more about each day. In the electorate of Surfers Paradise—I had the honour of serving as the Chairman of the Surfers Paradise Community Consultative Committee—this issue was constantly being raised, and still is being raised, by distraught locals from various suburbs such as Surfers Paradise, Main Beach, Chevron Island, Isle of Capri and now extending to areas such as Ashmore and Benowa. There is a lot of hooning on local streets, disrupting neighbourhoods and posing a risk to the safety of children. Since I have been elected, not a week has gone by that I have not had a phone call about hooning on our streets.

I commend the police minister for her attempts to correct this problem by introducing legislation to confiscate cars after the third offence. To a degree this has worked. I know this was introduced by the previous police minister. Nonetheless, hooning and excessive speeding are still big problems on our streets, and that is why I support this bill—a bill that wields a bigger stick at those who wish to break the law by speeding in a reckless manner.

So often we read stories in the paper about someone being clocked doing some excessive speed. We all have our own stories of people we see on the highway, flying past us at speeds which could easily be in excess of 140 or 150 kilometres per hour. Also today, with the advent of more aggressive styles of driving and more cars on the road, these practices really are dangerous. We then read stories of these people getting off their charges or claiming hardship and having their penalty reduced. And we mutter to ourselves that they obviously were not suffering hardship when they were doing 40 kilometres an hour over the speed limit. In fact, in 80 per cent of appeals against administrative suspensions where 'excessive hardship' is claimed the appeal is successful. The mind boggles at this; 80 per cent of them get off. Someone has the gall to do 100 kilometres an hour in a 60 kilometres an hour zone and then claim excessive hardship to get off the charge.

I am sure there are some circumstances in which someone is suffering genuine excessive hardship, but in the vast majority of cases there is no excuse. One does not just accidentally drive at 40 kilometres an hour over the speed limit. It is a conscious choice. But there are some circumstances in which it can happen unconsciously. Many years ago I was driving in a 100 kilometres an hour zone that changed to a 60 kilometres an hour zone because of roadworks. I was chatting to my wife and had not noticed that one sign and was caught driving 40 kilometres an hour over the speed limit. But that was many, many years ago before this legislation existed.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): I think you should be careful about owning up to these things in the House.

Mr Lucas: I think he should be careful to own up about these things.

Mr LANGBROEK: I can certainly acknowledge that I have transgressed in the past and I will probably transgress again, but that was 20 years ago.

Mr Cummins: Did you get off?

Mr LANGBROEK: No, I got a fine, but we did not get our licences suspended back then. I thought that I may have, and I was prepared to cop it if I did. That is probably the difference. Speeding at 40 kilometres an hour over the limit is, sadly, a choice that is made not really knowing the consequences that the slightest slip or change in traffic conditions could have for the driver, passengers and those in the vicinity. For people then to go to court and say, 'I need my licence for my job,' or, 'I need it to run my kids around,' is ridiculous. These are considerations they should have thought of before speeding. They are important considerations and should have been important enough for the person to keep to the speed limit.

Drivers need to realise that driving is not a right; it is a privilege. Being on the road brings with it responsibilities as well as freedoms. I am very happy to see this legislation bring speeding into line with drink-driving in the way administrative appeals are dealt with and the manner in which penalties are sustained.

I commend the minister for the aspects of the legislation that deal with hoons and that bring in more stringent checks upon those people dealing with our children in the transport system. I state for the public record that whenever the government sees an opportunity to stop hoons in their tracks it will always have a friend in the Liberal Party.

I also urge the minister to reconsider the light sentences that will be imposed on those interfering with vehicle identification numbers in Queensland and implore him to subject the marine pollution controller to the same level of civil liability as is expected of all public servants and make his or her role one that is fully accountable to the Queensland public. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (12.29 pm), in reply: I thank members from both sides of the House for their constructive contributions to this debate on the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. It is quite a wide-ranging bill, amending seven pieces of transport legislation with consequential amendments to others. Though I might not agree with everything every member said, I certainly take their comments in the spirit in which they were contributed. That is part of the parliamentary process appropriately working.

I just wanted to briefly go through the issues raised by honourable members. I believe that, as they spend the time and effort in making a speech, I ought to give them the courtesy of responding to the matters they have raised. The member for Chatsworth provided a summary of the bill. He spoke about a number of issues, including the Brisbane urban corridor and tolling. I say to the honourable member that we would welcome the federal government making a strong commitment to deal with the issues of the Brisbane urban corridor. It is National Highway. I note that the Prime Minister has indicated his view on PPPs. There are people who advocate the removal of the tolls on the Logan Motorway. I wonder where they think the money would come from if that were done. The federal government says one thing in a policy sense and then at a local level people sometimes say others. When the Liberal Party and the National Party were in government, they sold off the Gold Coast corridor for rail. That is what they did. Not only did they close it down in 1965; they sold it. This legislation is about protecting corridors for the future if we have to come back and revisit it.

The shadow minister indicated that existing public open space should not get sucked into the declaration of busways without the necessary public input. I can assure him that there will always be full consultation on any public passenger transport infrastructure developments. Planning for busways involves a comprehensive assessment of busway options including preparing feasibility studies to investigate and consider all options for busways including environmental, social and economic factors. Queensland Transport is now a concurrence agency under the integrated development assessment scheme. So when new developments happen we can talk with the developers to ensure they do not do things that are contrary to good public transport outcomes around existing and future public transport corridors.

The shadow minister said it is important that non-rail corridor land is not being sold off for private sector use, not like the former lord mayor did in the City of Brisbane. I do not know about that, but can I say not like the former National Party government did on the Gold Coast with the Gold Coast rail corridor. What this does is it makes sure that new non-rail corridor land has the same status as existing non-rail corridor land, and we want to preserve such land for the future. We have negotiated with a number of local governments including at Hervey Bay to make that corridor available for bikeways, walkways and the like. I think that is a very important project.

The shadow minister talked about, as did the member for Surfers Paradise, marine pollution controller immunity. The function of the marine pollution controller's role comes into being when a major pollution incident requires a response. Their function is to direct a person and coordinate a response by the state and other entities in the event of a discharge or likely discharge of pollutant. The powers of the marine pollution controller mirror those of the general manager and authorised officer—for example, the power to direct that a ship be moved or the power to direct that a ship not be moved or operated.

It would be unreasonable to expect the person acting in the role of marine pollution controller to be exposed to a personal liability when acting on behalf of the state. Emergency situations, by their very nature, may require decisions to be made on an urgent basis and on the best information available at the time. Persons who can be affected negatively by a decision of the marine pollution controller retain a right of recourse against the state. This is an important thing. Persons can take action against the state insofar as they have a legal entitlement to do it. Frankly, they would probably be people with more resources than the marine pollution controller—being a private individual—might have. The marine pollution controller position is already dealt with administratively in the national plan arrangements. This proposed change gives statutory recognition of this important and nationally recognised role.

The shadow minister spoke about grave and imminent disaster. MSQ regularly reviews its legislation to ensure that it is achieving the safety and marine environment protection outcomes that it was designed for. It is through these regular reviews that the issue of the sufficiency of the grave and imminent test in preventing marine pollution incidents, rather than simply responding when they occur, was identified. I can assure the member opposite that Maritime Safety Queensland will continue to review the effectiveness of all these new provisions. As the member and I discussed, there might be a situation where a vessel is not at risk in a river but it is if it goes to sea. If it will be at risk only when it is at sea and the vessel cannot be stopped when it is in a river, then that is a bit of a problem: you do not want to wait until it is a measure of last resort.

The shadow minister asked about the *Pride of Airlie*. The board handed out 13 recommendations. MSQ then grouped the recommendations into three key areas. All of the recommendations have been implemented or are being progressed according to an implementation plan. MSQ has set a seven-year time frame for a complete response to the board of inquiry recommendations, which include developing a culture of safety within the marine industry. I would like to table the response of MSQ to the latest progress report on the board of inquiry recommendations.

In response to the particular issues of reporting and the development of safety strategies and implementation plans raised by the shadow minister, I am pleased to report that appropriate safety strategies and reporting arrangements are now well in place. Each of these specific issues is dealt with in detail in this implementation report. I would also like to note that progress is being made in progressing the generation of a safety culture among the maritime industry. There are two pilot projects to support a safety culture in Whitsunday and Brisbane. In fact, I note that there were some inspections and prosecutions there just the other day.

The shadow minister also raised the issue of operators notifying Queensland Transport if a driver commits an offence and they have to notify us. We have been approached by operators who want to advise QT about drivers who are charged, but they are concerned. Operators are concerned that their telling us might leave them open to legal action from a driver. So they are reluctant to advise of those situations because they are concerned about breaching privacy rights. This will give them that protection as well and require them to do it. We are not going to hound operators, but if they know that there is an offence then they should tell us. We of course have our own checking mechanisms as well.

The member for Mansfield spoke about the Brisbane urban corridor and how the federal government was dragged kicking and screaming into the study that it did with the state, but we do want the dollars. For Kessels and Mains roads, we have the money from the federal government to do the planning. Of course, we will need a commitment from the Commonwealth to construct it when the planning is finished. We should always remember the joint federal-state study showed that the vast majority of truck movements on the Brisbane urban corridor are local truck movements, not through movements. So we need to deal with what we do in the future in the Brisbane urban corridor in that light. Even if we did not have trucks going from Ipswich to the Gateway Motorway, the vast majority of trucks would still be there for local issues. The member for Mansfield also spoke about busway safety and its importance. He spoke about a taxi rank being moved nearer to the Mount Gravatt busway station. I will have a look at that.

The member for Maroochydore supported the minimum six-month disqualification for road racing and conditional licences. She spoke generally about hoons. She asked that mobile testing equipment be used more on the Sunshine Coast, and I will certainly pass that on to the relevant officers. In relation to marine pollution, she said that there is an obligation to monitor the transfer of the operation. Policing of marine sewage provisions is performed regularly by officers from MSQ as well as Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers. These officers have been predominantly targeting the commercial sector of the marine industry, as this group has the greatest sewage-generating capacity. The commercial industry is now well educated about its responsibilities, and enforcement intention is now being directed to live-aboards and the larger end of the recreational vessel fleet to improve their compliance. I can say this: we are not going to have the poo police out chasing everyone all over the countryside, but if people do the wrong thing we will certainly be directing those resources at them.

In relation to pump-out facilities, it is important that we do address those issues. We will soon see new facilities operating at Runaway Bay, the wharf marina at Mooloolaba, Tin Can Bay slipways, Tin Can Bay marina, Urangan boat harbour and the port of Airlie marina. There are continuing negotiations with a number of other areas as well.

It is important to say, too, that the vast majority of boat owners do not fall within these marine pollution requirements. My dad used to have a 12-foot tinnie. They do not normally have any toilets but you do not normally need to go to the toilet because you are not out that long. That is the situation for the vast majority of people, but we need to take into account the increasing concern about marine pollution issues.

The member for Maroochydore also raised the issue of the Caboolture-Landsborough upgrade and concerns about consultation in the area. I will say this about the Caboolture-Landsborough rail line: if there were one person who would benefit most from it, it would be the member for Maroochydore and her electorate. She ought to be embracing it very strongly. This is a \$480 million project that is necessary to build the CAMCOS line. The line has to be straightened and duplicated to get up there. We will make sure that we appropriately and adequately consult with local land-holders, but we need to build the line. I was on the radio this morning about it; I note the mayor has been on the radio this morning about it. We need to address transport and roads issues. Sometimes properties have to be accessed or properties have to be resumed to build rail lines.

The member for Hinchinbrook spoke about money being spent on the National Highway at Tully. I am pleased that the federal government was dragged, kicking and screaming, to it in the federal election campaign, but remember that federal Labor promised it first. He spoke about Mourilyan and the PCQ and the possibility of developing the live cattle trade and increasing the use of the sugar terminal.

The member for Hinchinbrook spoke at some length in a very genuine way about the VMS system and his concern that the VMS system did not respond to a vessel's distress signal. It is a fisheries management system administered by the department of primary industries. It regularly polls seven days a week—that is, it receives the electronic signal—but the system is monitored only during business hours because it is really to find out where people are fishing.

This amendment will allow us to get their data. The primary intent of that data will be to alert larger trading ships of the presence of the fishing vessels in the reef VTS area. The system is really very interesting. The vessel can be seen tracking. We also want to have the blips from the fishing vessels. The difference in the system is that MSQ tells me that it will be monitoring this information through reef VTS 24/7. It will be monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week by trained vessel traffic services officers. One of the features of the VMS system is the distress alert button. When the distress button is activated on a VMS unit, the distress report is forwarded to a rescue coordination centre. It is not reported to DPI, which is polling the vessels, because that is not its area of interest. This is a very important initiative. I thank the honourable member for his genuine interest in the area.

The member for Hervey Bay spoke about the Hervey Bay boat harbour. I will be pleased to work with him further in relation to that. He also spoke about transport corridors such as the old Hervey Bay rail line that I spoke about earlier.

The member for Mirani spoke about the Bruce Highway and the need for more overtaking lanes from Rocky to Marlborough. Excluding the \$80 million we received from the federal government for Tully, which we dragged kicking and screaming out of it in the context of an election campaign, we have \$240 million for the Bruce Highway in the next five years. That is not enough. We will keep on working with the federal government in relation to this.

The member for Mirani spoke about the Sandy Creek Bridge. We are now in the process of doing some work on that bridge. He also spoke about the Peak Downs Highway. I recognise the importance of the mining industry and its impact on the Peak Downs Highway. I am concerned, and I have indicated publicly, about the increasing use of wide loads. The member for Mackay has just raised it with me as well. The Peak Downs Highway is a very busy road to the mining community. These roads can be blocked up by heavy vehicles for significant lengths of time and the local community has to cop it without any consultation. I have raised with the industry my wish to deal with that further.

From June 2001 to June 2005 we spent \$22 million on improving the road. The total length of road widened and rehabilitated was 50.5 kilometres including 10 overtaking lanes. From June 2005 to June 2009 it is proposed to spend another \$30 million on the road for further widening and rehabilitation of the existing road plus two additional overtaking lanes between Nebo and Mackay, and an additional climbing lane at Eton Ridge. Also included is the replacement of timber bridges at Perry and Blackwater Hole creeks. I think that is a pretty comprehensive response in that regard.

The member for Nicklin spoke about the need for increased penalties for speeding. He also spoke about the Kenilworth-Eumundi Road. He also asked about radars operating on local council roads. I am told that since 1999 speed cameras have been allowed to be used on local government roads.

The member for Broadwater spoke about the importance of school crossing supervisors—I know she is very passionate about that—and better clarity under our scheme. She also spoke about boat licensing. I suppose that is a function of being a Gold Coast member where there are such a lot of boats and marine pollution.

The member for Toowoomba South spoke about the innovative bus system in Rangeville. I am a bit of a fan of that, as is the member. I was pleased that we rolled it out in Toowoomba as a first. That is world-class technology.

The member also spoke about grain trains and increased freight rates and the like. The problem that we had with the grain industry and freight rates—and this is a problem when governments and operators do not take long-term decisions—is that from 1992 freight rates increased by 11.5 per cent and CPI increased by 39 per cent. In the longer term that is a recipe for nonsustainability. Then what happens is people are faced with a non-economic operation where rates have to be increased massively to bring it back to something that is respectable. We will continue to work with grain operators on this issue.

I am aware of the issue in relation to increasing coal use on that line. That makes it difficult for grain operators given that coal users use it constantly. In the last five years we have invested substantially to maintain the operational reliability of lines including a rerail from Miles to Muckadilla, \$27 million; rerail Miles to Chinchilla, \$9 million; rerail and sleeper upgrade, Toowoomba to Rosewood, \$17½ million; rerail from Toowoomba to Goondiwindi; and a further \$15.9 million of track upgrades were undertaken between Toowoomba and Brisbane by QR and the coal companies. We will continue to work on that. The member spoke about the second range crossing. I get sick of federal government lectures about the second range crossing. I would not mind it lecturing if it actually put some money in somewhere.

Mr Caltabiano interjected.

Mr LUCAS: No. Actually, I put money into things. I had a go at the federal government this morning about the Pacific Motorway, but I have \$392 million to match them.

Mr Caltabiano interjected.

Mr LUCAS: Hopefully it will come because there is no money. The government has \$570 million for what it calls Brisbane urban connectors under the five first years of AusLink. How is it going to do the Ipswich Motorway, the Toowoomba second range crossing and any other projects it needs to do? It squibbed the Gateway; we are only doing part of the Gateway. It has squibbed that. Where is the money for the Gold Coast? It is going to have to allocate a lot more money than it is. We actually put the money into it.

As I was saying before the member for Chatsworth distracted me, the Prime Minister talks about PPPs. Great! I have been speaking for well over a year about a possible study for a PPP on the second range crossing for Toowoomba. It would cost \$10 million. Where is the money? It has not turned up. That is very unfortunate because that is a route that both sides of politics in this House agree on for the second Toowoomba range crossing. We just want the federal government to give us that money. Then we can plan it in the context of the second round of AusLink, not even the current round of AusLink, for the actual funding and the construction of it because we think we can structure it appropriately, but we cannot let it wait.

The member for Toowoomba South continued his ridiculous opposition furphy in Rockhampton about no-one being at the helm of the tilt train at the time it crashed. The report said—

The locomotive data logger shows that the driver was actively using the throttle and responding to the station protection magnet alarms from the time of leaving Bundaberg to the point of derailment. The locomotive data logger also shows that the throttle was moved rapidly to the emergency braking position while the train was travelling at 113 km/h, one second before train VCQ5 derailed. Some person was therefore at or adjacent to the controls and apparently conscious.

We will fix the issues arising from the tilt drain disaster, but let us not have silly calls from people who cannot read reports.

The member for Springwood spoke about toll flexibility that the legislation will provide. I think that is important. Toll roads will be more or less attractive to people depending on the hours of day that they are travelling. The ability to actually incentivise it, if that is appropriate, is important. There are also bus efficiency measures.

The member for Lockyer spoke about the Q-RIDE testing program and the safe driver group in his electorate. The federal government is actually doing some good work on a world's best case study for driver training. I note that the member for Currumbin spoke about driver training; I might mention it in my response to her. Driving training is not the be-all and end-all. One hundred and twenty hours driver experience is very important, but in many instances parents can play a strong role in this as well. It is a bit like golf. People go to get their lessons, but their golf will not improve if they do not spend hours and hours on the golf course practising. It is similar with tennis or the like. People cannot be expected to pay to have someone with them for 120 hours. If that was the case, no-one would be able to afford to have a licence.

The member for Lockyer also spoke about abandoned ships in Trinity Bay inlet. I appreciate the member's concern regarding the growing problems and dangers to safety in our marine environment posed by these hulks. That is why this legislation is the first step of better managing unseaworthy and abandoned vessels. MSQ has recently concluded a broader review of maritime legislation that was brought about by the grounding of *Karma*. Here is a nice picture of the *Karma* if anyone wants to see. It was not good karma; it was bad karma. This guy could build it and just take it for a burn. Unfortunately, what was essentially a small incident cost a fortune to deal with when it was grounded in Agnes Water in 2003. Similarly, the *Ascension* and the *Bamaga* caused significant costs to the state government in rectifying those issues. We have some more legislation to come in that regard.

The member for Mundingburra spoke about marine pollution and the port's reaction in that regard and about exotic species and their threats, which I thought was a very interesting point. That is predominantly a Commonwealth issue but I think it is an important one. She also spoke about increased penalties for speeding offences and about crossing supervisors.

The member for Gladstone actually spoke twice in the debate, but we will not quibble over that formality on a wonderful Thursday afternoon other than to make the observation. She raised a number of issues.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I presume the second time she spoke you should not have listened.

Mr LUCAS: She essentially repeated herself. She sought a clarification as to whether any other GOC port authorities are proposed to be abolished. I can tell her that the answer is not at this point. She spoke about disqualification for high-speed offences. She spoke about the 40 kilometres per hour speed limit in the case of roadworks even when no roadworkers are present and suggested that we do not want to have a situation where people get booked for speeding through those areas. The safety of our roadworkers is a major issue and I do not want to compromise on that. We have an education program in relation to ensuring that that is the case. The member should understand that it is not just a case of protecting roadworkers; when roadworks are being conducted on a particular stretch of road it may not be properly formed or yet sealed or whatever. If people think they can go through at the same speed just because it looks as it did previously or looks like it is fully sealed, that is a recipe for disaster.

The member for Gladstone also spoke about port security. We will continue to work with the Commonwealth government in relation to the new security regime. It is my understanding that all of our ports have met the deadline for the Commonwealth government of June 2005 as far as their requirements are concerned.

The member for Gladstone also spoke about the lack of consultation, as she saw it, in relation to the amalgamation of the Gladstone and Rockhampton port authorities. I can understand that the people of Gladstone would rather call it the Gladstone Port Authority. I would rather the Port of Brisbane be called the Lytton port authority or the Wynnum-Manly port authority. It would make me feel a lot better, too. The simple fact of the matter is that the Central Queensland Port Authority is at Gladstone predominantly. People know that it is at Gladstone. We are investing a fortune in the RG Tanna terminal expansion and the now Wiggins Island feasibility study. These are things that have big money invested in them. We are putting money where our mouth is when it comes to our support of that port. It is about taking Gladstone and Port Alma to a whole bigger world. It is a wonderful organisation. I am very proud of it. I had some good feedback about the Central Queensland Port Authority the other day from a very serious industry player. It is wonderful that it is doing so well.

The member for Gladstone also asked about criminal history checks for school crossing supervisors. Queensland Transport pays for those checks conducted on school crossing supervisors.

The member for Mundingburra spoke about shipboard waste management plans, and I think I have indicated that. The member for Capalaba spoke about speeding, drag-racing and marine pollution. The member for Cunningham spoke about the environment in marine areas from the perspective of his previous employment with Shell and his support of initiatives relating to disqualified driving for speeding, driver safety training and the second range crossing.

The member for Capalaba spoke about the Bruce Highway upgrade. We thank the federal government for its expenditure on that Caboolture area. We do welcome its money in that regard and we are continuing to work with it in terms of furthering that. In fact, when John Anderson came up to open it they all started talking about their code of practice for industrial relations. It is interesting to note that that section of the road was built without any industrial disputes and was delivered on budget.

The member for Caloundra spoke about young drivers and the high number of deaths, Sunshine Coast roads and the like and also public transport. I do not really have time to go into detail in response to what he said, other than to say that we have committed \$770 million to road upgrades on the Sunshine Coast over the five-year period from 2004-05, reflecting an increase in funding of 180 per cent over the previous five years. In fact, I think under the coalition about \$50 million a year was being spent, which is a bit more than what they are doing. We will continue to do that, and so we should because the Sunshine Coast is growing so rapidly.

The member for Fitzroy spoke about the effect of excessive speeding on injury, damage and crash—a very good point—about the need for a minimum six-month disqualification and also about young drivers. The member is very committed to that as chairman of the parliamentary Travelsafe Committee. He and I will be saying a bit more about that in the future in terms of his strong support of that area for young drivers. I have four children who will be young drivers in the not-too-distant future. From a personal point of view, I am very keen to deal with that.

The member for Currumbin spoke about the need for us to do further work with respect to young drivers. I fully support that. Again, as the government has indicated, we will have a discussion paper out in the not-too-distant future which will be very comprehensive on the young driver issue. It will involve the community in discussion on that. As I said before, it really is about parents having a role and young people accepting personal responsibility as well as governments having a role.

The member for Thuringowa spoke about the Townsville Port Authority and the need for construction of the port access corridor. The member for Mount Ommaney spoke about busways, bus safety officers, non-rail corridor land and driver disqualifying offences. The member for Clayfield is of course very passionate about the northern transport corridor and the airport link. If we can get the airport link fully up and running, when the contract is signed we will be able to dispose of those houses in the old northern transport corridor. She will be absolutely thrilled about that. I thank her for her strong advocacy in that regard.

The member for Glass House spoke about increased penalties for tampering with VINs—vehicle identification numbers—speeding, special hardship licences and crossing supervisors. The member for Stafford spoke about the airport link, the benefits of tunnels and also the importance of dealing with exhaust stacks and the like. The member for Bundamba spoke about marine pollution including the marine pollution controller, as did the member for Gregory. The member for Gregory also spoke about ensuring that polluters are punished according to the law and he endorsed the controller's operation. The member for Toowoomba North spoke about school crossing supervisors, as did the member for Greenslopes. The member for Bundaberg spoke about a number of issues concerning the Bundaberg bypass road—a \$42 million commitment from the state government holus-bolus which will make a big difference there.

The member for Redcliffe, as I said earlier today, will be pleased to know that, even though he was elected, we are still going to build the Houghton Highway because we are not like his side of the House and we are very committed to doing that. I should say that our commitment to do that was made long before the by-election.

Opposition members: Ha, ha!

Mr LUCAS: It was. It was part of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan. We will build that very important project, don't you worry about that, to quote someone who used to be here.

The member for Surfers Paradise spoke about a number of issues such as young drivers and the like and the penalties for people who exceed the speed limit and get their licences back. I want to finish on that point. I was very keen to insert in the legislation a provision whereby people who exceed the speed limit by more than 40 kilometres an hour will have to demonstrate hardship, either work or personal, to get their licence back for working hours and the like. In the past they used to just get it back and drive again. I thank everyone for their contributions.

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in Detail

Clauses 1 to 89, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Bill read a third time.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 5 October 2005 (see p. 3229).

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): I will call the honourable member for Hinchinbrook but it is time to break for lunch.

Sitting suspended from 12.59 pm to 2.30 pm.

Debate, on motion of Mr Rowell, adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Director-General

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (2.30 pm), by leave: I can announce today that I have decided to appoint Ross Rolfe as Director-General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to succeed Dr Leo Keliher when he takes on leadership of the Service Delivery and Performance Commission. Mr Rolfe has demonstrated over a long period that he has the expertise, flair, experience and ability to excel in this position. As a former director-general who was appointed as the result of a merit selection process, he can be appointed to the position without the need for a further selection process and I have therefore decided accordingly.

This is a smart appointment to continue putting our Smart State strategies into force. I want Dr Keliher, who has a distinguished background in the public sector, to start his important new work as soon as possible. I have appointed Dr Keliher to act as commissioner designate from Friday, 28 October to start preparatory work on the establishment of the commission. He will act in this role until he is formally appointed by Governor in Council, subject to the passage of the Service Delivery and Performance Commission Bill 2005.

I have some very able people in my department who would be able to act in the position of director-general but, rather than have a third hand on the tiller for a considerable time, I want my flagship department to be handed quickly from one long-term leader to another.

Mr Rolfe is a former director-general of the department of environment and heritage and was director-general of the department of state development from August 1998 until he became chief executive officer of Stanwell Corporation Ltd in January 2002. While he was Director-General of State Development, he was also Coordinator-General for the first time from 20 August 1998 to January 2002 and was re-appointed to this role in July this year. In the short period since then Mr Rolfe has taken decisive and far-reaching action on a number of major projects as Coordinator-General, and he will continue in this role when he becomes director-general.

His achievements include: facilitating the expansion of additional capacity in rail and port infrastructure to support the booming coal market; accelerating the approval process for a number of projects of state significance, including the Macarthur coal coke projects, the Ella Bay tourist resort, the Gladstone Nickel project and a range of water projects, including the Moranbah pipeline and the south-east Queensland water pipeline; developing the government's response to the challenges presented by the south-east Queensland drought; facilitating programs on the development of cruise ship terminals on the Gold Coast and in Townsville; and developing a strategy to coordinate the implementation of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan.

Mr Rolfe has been a director of the Queensland Resources Council; chair of the Queensland Manufacturing Institute; a director of the Institute of Molecular Bioscience; a member of the QUT council; a director of the Queensland Centre for Clean Coal Technologies; a director of iLab, Queensland's technology incubator; chair of the Beach Protection Authority; a trustee for the Council of Economic Development of Australia; and vice-president of Tennis Queensland. I figured after all of that he probably had some recreational activities.

A government member: He plays tennis once a year.

Mr BEATTIE: I take that interjection from a former minister of whose department Mr Rolfe was a director-general at one point.

I want to once again pay tribute to the leadership of Dr Keliher since he became my director-general in 2001 and to emphasise how valuable his work will be as the inaugural commissioner of the new Service Delivery and Performance Commission. Dr Keliher and Mr Rolfe will be two of the most important public servants who will do their best to ensure Queensland continues to lead the nation in so many ways.

Mr Rolfe will be appropriately remunerated for the position and will suffer no disadvantage in returning to the Public Service from the Stanwell Corporation. In other words, he will be paid what he is currently paid. Dr Keliher will be paid the same. It is vital that Queensland remains competitive in the remuneration it pays to our key people. We have addressed this in the context of the recent Health reforms. I have also asked the Public Service Commissioner to prepare advice on the remuneration levels of Queensland's chief executives. One of my concerns is that at the moment, because many of our senior people are not paid comparably with those interstate and certainly not with the private sector, many of our good people are being poached both interstate and from the private sector. It is an issue that we need to address. I have asked George O'Farrell, the Public Service Commissioner, to advise me on this and I will obviously have more to say about that on another occasion.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 3640.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (2.34 pm): On balance, the opposition supports the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill. Workers and employers play an intricate role in our economy. The manner in which we deal with the workplace is particularly important. Whether we are competing against imports or seeking opportunities with exports, it is essential that we have the best outcomes for our work force in the event that a person is injured. It is important that employers fund a scheme to provide the finances to enable the worker to receive support when they were injured and unable to provide their labour. It is most important that this scheme is observed in a prudent manner.

The annual report shows a degree of equity. I will raise some issues relating to the annual report. It talks about our average premium rate of \$1.55 per \$100 being the lowest in Australia and that that status has been maintained for the sixth consecutive year. It goes on to say that changes were made that saw the rate drop to \$1.43 per \$100 on 1 July 2005. That really does not tell the story accurately. During debate on the workplace health and safety and workers compensation bills last year reference was made to the report, which states—

This year we implemented charges that reduce the rate from \$1.55 per \$100 of wages to \$1.43 from 1 July 2005, taking into account the inclusion of superannuation in the wages base.

That is particularly important, because we have added something like nine per cent to the actual wage. With regard to what happened during the course of that legislation being passed last year, there was a determination that premium rates would be reduced by nine per cent. In the intervening period a few people have asked me why we are including the superannuation component in it. I have told them that it was decided to do that because it was a national issue. I told them to look at the premium they paid the previous year and the premium they paid this year and see if there was a nine per cent variation. For the most part, that was the case. While we are seeing a reduction from \$1.55 per \$100 to

\$1.43 per \$100, it is quite clear that the issue was not just about the premium being dropped; it was a matter of the superannuation component being included in the premium rate. I believe that WorkCover has done the right thing and we are seeing the variation that we anticipated.

There is another issue that I would like to raise and it deals with what has been said as far as the Queensland government is concerned. The minister has said that for the sixth consecutive year Queensland continues to maintain the lowest average premium rate of any state in Australia at \$1.43 per \$100 of wages. This compares with a rate of \$2.14 per \$100 we inherited. When the coalition came into government in February 1996, there was a major issue in terms of the WorkCover fund. Therefore, with the support of the member for Gladstone, the coalition enlisted the support of Jim Kennedy to deal with the problems associated with the fund and its equity situation. That report was tabled on 10 July 1996. It said—

The Queensland Workers' Compensation Fund is in a critical financial situation. It is estimated that at 30 June, 1996, the unfunded liability is between \$221 million and \$290 million. It could go even higher (subject to common law claim outcomes). The actuary has stated the Fund is 'out of control'.

The problems were:

- developing much earlier than has been acknowledged;
- capable of recognition much earlier than has been publicly admitted;
- were capable of being resolved much sooner; and
- in terms of the unfunded liability, the situation now is probably much more serious than has been acknowledged and reported previously.

The Government now needs to plan on the unfunded liability reaching \$290 million by 30 June 1996, up from the estimated unfunded liability at 30 June, 1995 of \$114 million. The problem is clearly demonstrated in a graph below.

I do not want to table the graph, but I can certainly tell members what the graph shows. The graph shows that, after 1989, when the National Party lost government, there was a gradual decline until 1995-96 when it went down to \$290-odd million, and that was optimistic.

There is great concern when issues such as this involve a superannuation fund, and WorkCover is an important issue in Queensland. The report continues—

There is a rapidly developing 'compo culture' in Queensland which embraces fraudulent claims, complainant doctors and lawyers. Some employers are rorting the system. They are avoiding premiums, or are not declaring appropriate wages for determination of their true premium. Some employers have a shocking workplace health and safety record and this cannot be allowed to continue. Bad debts run into many millions.

That was pretty much what the Kennedy report had to say. There were something like 78 recommendations and, as a result of those recommendations, we saw a better situation start to develop in 1997 and 1998 when the Beattie government came to power. It certainly was in a position to start looking very seriously at how it could manage the fund better than it had been managed to date. I believe we are seeing the fruits of what happened during that time now.

It is unreasonable for the minister to come out and say that the government inherited a fund that had a premium of \$2.14 per \$100 when of course the fund had a couple of very traumatic years when it had to make some corrections. I am pleased to see that the fund is back on track. We are very supportive of what is happening with WorkCover. The report that it has put out shows that there is a high degree of equity within the fund, and that is extremely important. Without that, if there are common law claims or there are unforeseen issues, the fund could again be in the situation that developed back in the mid-eighties. That is not good for the workers, the employers and all of those people who are so very dependent on the Workers Compensation Fund, or WorkCover as we call it nowadays.

In the area of workers compensation the bill makes a number of amendments, including extending the step-down in benefits for injured workers from 39 to 52 weeks, increasing compensation payable to dependent family members on the death of a worker, and introducing new benefits for totally dependent spouses and non-dependent family members, which is particularly important. The opposition does not have any issue with the changes to these benefits. However, we will be seeking some clarification from the minister on the figures as they are contained in the legislation and relating to a particular example provided in the minister's second reading speech.

In his second reading speech the minister gave a glowing assessment of the operations of WorkCover, and from what I can see there is justifiable reason to do that. While the figures portray the entity in a sound working order, the reality has been different for some Queensland government employees seeking to lodge statutory claims with WorkCover. As the minister would be aware from a *Sunday Mail* article a little while ago, instead of encouraging these claims to be made through WorkCover as the appropriate body, victims of bullying and stress are being referred to QSuper. As I understand it, with WorkCover a psychologist and psychiatrist examine the worker to conclude whether the government workplace was the cause of the medical condition. WorkCover also appoints an investigator to interview the witness.

By going on to QSuper sick leave under income protection insurance as opposed to lodging a WorkCover claim, this means that WorkCover can bypass all of the proper investigative processes and provision of support to employees. There is therefore no investigation process of the workplace abuse when the claim is registered through QSuper. Pushing government employees affected by workplace

bullying to take sick leave through accessing their superannuation is a very effective way for the government to ensure that these cases are not being added to the statistics collated by WorkCover. Putting it simply, this does not allow the real story to be told. I am very concerned about the abuse of any process that is seeing a most serious issue like workplace bullying being swept under the carpet through referring cases on to another body or flatly rejecting the claims so as to ensure that the government can keep the number of reports of stress claims down.

This is not acceptable and I would be strongly urging the minister to investigate this process and ensure that employees of our government departments are not having workplace bullying issues swept under the carpet and, by advising that cases be passed on to QSuper, denying them the ability to use a process that has been put in place to resolve these problems. I am quite concerned about that, because I am aware of an instance in my electorate where a person was put on to QSuper. I phoned the various organisations that she was involved with but could not get a resolution of the direction that was going to be taken.

The bill is part of a national competition review of workers compensation schemes. Self-insurance is a particularly interesting issue because it can be either issued or renewed, and the bill makes adequate provision for a number of changes to be made in the arrangements that are carried out by the particular organisation that is making application.

The workers compensation regulatory authority, Q-Comp, issues a licence to companies to self-insure. In order to qualify to receive such a licence, the assets of those companies have to be within 10 per cent of \$100 million. I believed that if a business does not have equity of \$100 million, but has assets of \$90 million and can demonstrate that it can increase its assets over a period, then it will be granted a licence to be a self-insurer. If the self-insurer is a good performer, the period of that licence could be for as long as four years. Initially, the licence is for a period of two years, but if the self-insurer can prove that it is worthy of being granted an extension, then it may be granted a licence for four years. Certainly, bigger organisations such as Telstra and the Commonwealth Bank—and I understand Optus in the future—are eligible to become self-insurers under Comcare, which is the Commonwealth scheme.

The issue of pre-exit claims of exiting employers must be addressed. We cannot have an organisation wanting to be a self-insurer, but somewhere down the track we find out that a debt may be owing for a claim that may yet to be resolved. That has to be taken into account because very often a number of these organisations have come from a situation where their employees are covered by WorkCover. I think it is absolutely essential to address the pre-exit claims of exiting employers, because there could be problems in relation to debt and WorkCover could be held to be responsible for them. I think that is taken care of pretty well in this legislation.

I do not think there is any doubt about the intent of self-insurers. They play a very important role. Certainly, it is a challenging area in terms of the issuing of new licences and the renewal of existing licences. I think we will probably see this occurring more in the future as the bigger organisations and businesses self-insure. Probably quite a few corporate bodies would be certainly interested in this process.

The bill recommends enhanced rehabilitation processes. Workers who return to work sooner will reduce the cost of WorkCover payouts. Certainly, that reduction reflects on the cost of premiums. Often people languish and they do not worry about going off compensation and returning to work. There is a cost to that in terms of the payout from WorkCover. That reflects very much on the premiums that the people involved have to pay.

I understand that under this legislation large employers with poor employee return-to-work rates will be required to engage a rehabilitation coordinator. That person could be a physiotherapist, or a person who is involved in the treatment of skin problems, such as burns, or it could be someone who is involved in the treatment of fractures. The employer can outsource the position of rehabilitation coordinator rather than create a full-time position. Very often employing a person on a full-time basis who does not have the necessary expertise creates a substantial cost.

I believe that, through this bill, the government is providing greater flexibility to improve employees' return-to-work rates. That is essential, because if we can do that the cost of premiums will reduce. That is important, particularly for those employers who are very dependent on their export income and who compete with companies throughout the world and for those employers who have to compete against imports. If we can reduce costs for them in any way that makes them more competitive.

Previously, an employer was required to keep a sick or injured employee's position open for six months to allow that employee time to return to work. Under this bill this period has been extended to 12 months. I have some concern about that. I think the intention is to apply greater emphasis on getting that employee back to work. But the only problem is that if an employee goes on leave for an extended period—for a couple of months or for as long as six months—very often the employer has to find a person to replace him. If that person has the right to return to work, it makes it difficult for the employer to know exactly what he can do in terms of employing someone else. Under this legislation, that period has been extended to 12 months.

I acknowledge that the minister said in his second reading speech that the prospects of reducing the premium next year are real. I believe that is a positive. Certainly, this bill will go a long way towards assisting a whole range of people in their work practices. The bill provides greater flexibility. In essence, the opposition supports most of it.

The bill also contains a statutory lump sum for permanently incapacitated workers. Under this bill, those workers can receive an entitlement of up to \$200,000. There is also an additional death benefit payment for a worker's dependants—increasing from \$300,000 to \$374,625. The bill also increases the lump sum death benefits for totally dependent spouses to \$20,000. That is a substantial increase, but the fund is in a reasonable position and the cost of living has increased. The loss of the major benefactor in a family—and that could be the husband or the wife—is a traumatic event. It is important that we acknowledge that. But at the end of the day, it is an additional cost. I think that we have to be cognisant of that. The bill also provides weekly benefits for children of injured workers under school age of \$72.38, which is eight per cent of the Queensland ordinary time earnings. I believe that would certainly assist greatly any parent who is injured. We do not want to see children disadvantaged.

Payments to workers with long latency diseases, such as those associated with asbestos, are aligned with these benefits. The bill goes into some detail about what happens to workers who have been exposed to asbestos and experience particular difficulties. The bill responds to the issues of latent-onset injuries by providing greater certainty of the payment of workers compensation to people who get into this unfortunate position. It proposes to achieve this certainty by aligning the calculation of these benefits with the methods used by the courts. The method of deciding whether a claimant is entitled to compensation or damages is ascertained by the insurer applying the relevant test applicable at the time the event occurred. This test is contained in either the existing act or in this bill, which will apply to the other elements of the claim such as provisions for application for compensation and review and, of course, the right of appeal.

The explanatory notes provide a practical example of this system. These changes to the way compensation is determined for workers who experience latent onset injury are positive, and the opposition is supportive of these. However, I can understand the frustration that might be expressed from workers who have applied for workers compensation under the existing scheme and as a result will miss out on the better coordinated process offered by these changes in this bill.

Other significant changes proposed in the bill are those which will give effect to the National Standard for Construction Work and the National Standard for Plant, as declared by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission. While these changes have to be implemented by all states in Australia, the opposition supports the intention of those changes to provide safe construction work sites and ensure that plant is maintained with the highest regard to the safety and health of those people involved. This refers to machinery which requires regular maintenance. Some of this machinery is quite large and heavy, and there could be a tendency to not adequately maintain it. It is absolutely essential that all the maintenance that is required is carried out.

Amendments to the schedule of the Workplace Health and Safety Act also provide for prescribed activities, specifically the process of demolition work and the removal of asbestos. The regulatory impact statement released on the minister's web site for public comment, which looks at the options for increasing licensing requirements for the removal of asbestos-containing materials, was prompted by the recent Workplace Relations Ministerial Council meeting. There are some issues with this. I understand that a licence will be required to remove a minimum of 10 square metres of asbestos. I might raise this issue during the consideration in detail stage. It is a very small amount, and there could be problems with people taking it upon themselves to carry out this work because of the cost involved in obtaining a licence to remove that material. There may also be capacity compliance issues for people who are very familiar with working with asbestos sheeting—fibro sheeting has been on houses for a number of years.

I believe it is about getting this right. In Western Australia a licence is required to remove a minimum of something like 200 square metres of asbestos. I am just a little perplexed about the fact that we are talking about a minimum of 10 square metres when I understand from HIA that Western Australia has set a minimum of something like 200 square metres.

Mr Barton: They will be coming into line over time.

Mr ROWELL: That may well be, but I am saying that that is an issue.

Mr Barton: They were at the same ministerial council meeting as me that agreed to it.

Mr ROWELL: I hear what the minister is saying. This meeting endorsed the decision of the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission to declare the National Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces as well as the revised National Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos. As I have said, it is a very vexed question. It has raised a lot of concern. When we see damaged roofs—and that could be a result of a cyclone or something of that nature—and fragmented pieces of asbestos or wall sheeting, it is particularly important that we do take very good care of who takes it away and ensure that people who are removing it are competent to do so.

I believe that there should be acknowledgment of the fact that in legislation we very often go to extremes with some of these things to protect people—to make sure that whoever is working with this substance is protected. Yes, asbestos has been proven to be very dangerous, and we have seen people die as a result of it. But at the end of the day the issue we have to deal with is the cost.

There are compliance issues in relation to the building code. When a property is being designed and it is valued over a certain amount of money we have to have the planning people and the builder involved. I am told that very often the subcontractors and people directly involved in building the property have to spend a lot of time on compliance issues which is getting to the point where the paperwork is getting horrific. If their spouse is prepared to do the paperwork, then that assists them greatly. But if they are on their own, the cost of compliance is a burden and they get to a point where they are doing a lot of paperwork that may not be entirely necessary.

In general, the opposition is very supportive of the bill. The bill has been gone through in great detail. We have had two bills in recent times about workers compensation. It is an important issue. The opposition will be supporting this bill.

Ms STRUTHERS (Alger—ALP) (3.06 pm): This bill is yet another example of the Beattie government's firm and ongoing commitment to safe workplaces and fair and decent treatment and support for injured workers. I commend the minister, Tom Barton, his staff and departmental officers in the Department of Industrial Relations for the good work that they continue to do to promote safe workplaces and to promote the needs of workers and their families when injured and largely for the work that has been done to prevent injury.

It is fitting that we are debating this bill during Work Safe Week 2005. It was my great pleasure to represent the minister, Tom Barton, at two events this week: firstly, at a session with over 300 employers, employees and managers of workplaces in attendance earlier in the week at a seminar on tips for managing the prevention of injuries in workplaces; and today at the Construction Training Centre at Salisbury. Blokes had downed tools and come off construction sites for a two-hour session on their work method statements that help them identify risks and manage those risks in the workplace. Work Safe Week has seen over 100 events around the state, and it is a great credit to the workplace health and safety division and industry partners around the state who are working hard to promote this very important issue.

This bill has three major elements that I want to comment on today. The bill implements outstanding recommendations from a national competition policy review undertaken in 2000. Issues reviewed included self-insurance licensing criteria, the use of allied health professionals, exclusive claims management by WorkCover and workplace rehabilitation requirements to fast-track the early return to work of employees. The bill increases benefits for longer-term incapacitated workers and dependants and families of those fatally injured at work. That is a very important area of activity. I commend our trade union colleagues and others who have worked with the government in promoting these very important needs and remedies.

The bill also contains provisions which protect the Queensland workers compensation scheme from the impacts of the federal government's decision to allow eligible corporations to self-insure nationally. This bill introduces a suite of reforms that align with the National Standard for Construction Work, and I want to touch on this again shortly.

The current Queensland situation is very good in relation to workers compensation. It is fair to say that the Queensland's workers compensation scheme is the best managed and best-performing scheme in Australia. I think the member for Hinchinbrook would accept that assessment. Queensland has the lowest average premiums of any state in the nation. So it is not a real burden on employers and companies, relative to other states. For the sixth consecutive year, Queensland continues to maintain the lowest average premium rate of any state in Australia at \$1.43 per \$100 of wages. This compares with the rate of \$2.14 that we inherited when the government was elected in 1998. The most recent WorkCover annual report shows a healthy surplus.

I am not sure whether the opposition can be called 'a friend of the worker', as Mr Howard likes to say, but it is interesting and I guess encouraging to hear the member for Hinchinbrook give bipartisan support to the provisions within the bill. But I guess they cannot be trusted because when we look back—and it is not that far that we have to go back—their record is not a good one. In 1996 when Santo Santoro was minister and he introduced the new WorkCover legislation that the member for Hinchinbrook referred to, what did that do for workers? Let us have a look. It limited the definition of 'worker' and 'contractor' to exclude a range of workers from compensation benefits. It toughened up the definition of 'injury' to limit claims. Santo Santoro and the ministers alongside him in the cabinet—that was the member for Southern Downs and the member for Robina; I think the member for Hinchinbrook was there, too—tried to wind back the common law remedy for workers. Today, thank goodness, they have seen the light and they are giving us bipartisan support. But I say to workers around Queensland and around Australia that they cannot be trusted—

Mr ROWELL: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have to take a point of order. The fund was in a perilous position and there was a need to make some very drastic changes.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Barry): Order! There is no point of order. I call the member for Algerster.

Ms STRUTHERS: Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not in any way want to diminish the bipartisan support they are indicating that they are providing. I simply want to say that they cannot be trusted. When they had their hands on the levers of government, that is what they did. They diminished the rights of workers. If not for the member for Gladstone, Liz Cunningham, when she had the balance of power way back then, those common law rights would not have been reinstated. Liz Cunningham, to her credit, assessed that she had to protect the rights of Gladstone workers, and she raised her concern in the House today about the federal government's IR legislation. Rightly so, she challenged those opposite as members of the government at that time, and they had to back down but they were under pressure to do that. So I simply say that it is great to see bipartisan support. I hope that lasts for the rest of the day, but they cannot be trusted.

Mr Wilson: Isn't Santo leading the charge for Howard on IR?

Ms STRUTHERS: I take that interjection. Santo has not gone away. He is in the big pond now—in the federal arena—and he is still savaging workers' rights.

I want quickly to focus on the construction industry, having attended an event with the industry this morning. I was pleased to see that the fellows who had come off the job to be at this seminar were right on the money with their information and understanding of workplace hazards and how to deal with them. It was a very practical, hands-on breakfast session this morning. To their credit, they were prepared to participate very actively. We saw images of bad workplaces with scaffolding all over the place and no harnesses on workers. They were quick to identify those problems and suggest how to fix them. It was a good session. It is one of many opportunities that workers around the state are now being offered, particularly through the activities of the Department of Industrial Relations.

Mr Wilson: We have some good unions in that industry.

Ms STRUTHERS: That is right; the unions were there. We had the CFMEU and the BLF. The Master Builders Federation were also there today. It is good to see that three-way cooperation on workplace health and safety issues. Our booming construction industry accounts for 7.7 per cent of our economy and equates to a total of \$8.7 billion. It employs 155,000-plus workers, which represents about 8.6 per cent of the Queensland work force. So it is booming, but it is a high-risk industry. We all know when we look down the city and see the cranes and the men and women up high on those sites that it is a very high-risk industry, and it is very important that we have very strong provisions in our Workplace Health and Safety Act.

This bill strengthens the existing obligations of principal contractors in relation to persons who are breaching the health and safety obligations for construction work. The bill also introduces obligations on clients to consult with the designer, project manager and principal contractor to ensure that construction work can be designed, planned and done in a way that prevents or minimises all risk to health and safety during construction.

There is a lot more work to be done. We have to make the industry as safe as we can. I heard this week, and I was quite alarmed by it, that we have over 85,000 injuries a year in Queensland. That is 85,000 too many. It is nothing like the record in China. Many members in this House would have seen reports this year of the mining industry. I cannot believe the way that workers in the mining industry in China are literally sacrificed. Seven thousand people, on average, die in the mines in China every year. The very responsible Chinese mining sector is saying 'We will get that target down to 5,000!' That is absurd. Why is it not aiming for zero tolerance? Why is an advanced country like China, with its strong economic growth, not aiming for a zero tolerance record? That is an appalling record. Workers are being sacrificed. It has a big population. It is as though industry players do not even seem to care.

Queensland is much more civilised and much more advanced. I am very pleased to be part of a government that makes safety, compensation for injured workers and rehabilitation high priorities. I commend the minister for his efforts. He is committed to these issues. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (3.15 pm): I would like to support the remarks of the member for Algerster. Like the member, I am on the minister's backbench committee, and hence my interest in this debate. I also support what the member had to say in relation to Queensland's recent history, that is, the Borbidge government's draconian measures directed against Queensland workers with respect to workers compensation legislation. One must, however, be fair and recall that the prior government also attempted to bring in fairly severe restrictions on workers' rights, particularly their access to common law rights. The procedures that are now in place are far more complex than used to be the case 15 or so years ago. That, I suppose, is to be expected.

Certainly those measures to constrain the rights of workers bringing actions in the courts were a major factor in my determining to take an active role in the Labor Party and to ultimately seek selection for election to this place. I have always, therefore, had a sincere and deep interest in workers compensation matters. I know that the current minister, in particular, is a passionate defender and supporter of workers' rights. It is very pleasing to note that under his stewardship—and, indeed, under the previous minister's—the fund is well conducted and well run.

The scheme is an outstanding one—the best in Australia—with a healthy surplus, which the honourable member for Algester referred to. It requires people to behave responsibly in the actions that they bring. It also requires the Workers Compensation Board to run the scheme, particularly in relation to court claims, responsibly. I believe that over the last few years that has been the case. The feedback I get, particularly from the unions and from the legal profession, is that the board's attitude to negotiation is sincere and realistic. A great majority of these cases is finalised in a timely fashion, which is cheaper for all concerned, including the fund. There is a lot of congratulations due. I hope it continues. I congratulate the board on its good work and on the way that it has managed the fund.

The legislation before the House is carrying on that tradition in terms of implementing further improvements, some of which have been imposed in the sense of the national competition policy in relation to the review undertaken in the year 2000. These refer to self-insurance licensing criteria, the use of allied health services, exclusive claims management by WorkCover Queensland, and workplace rehabilitation requirements.

The bill also provides for much appreciated increases in benefits for longer-term incapacitated workers and dependants and for families of those fatally injured at work. The bill also provides amendments to protect the Queensland workers compensation scheme from any measures to be taken by the federal government due to its decision to allow eligible corporations to self-insure nationally. I will not go into detail. In his second reading speech the minister covered the important points in that; I refer honourable members to it. Those reforms are obviously worth while. They continue in the vein that I referred to earlier.

It is a very rewarding experience to be on the minister's backbench committee in this area. I particularly want to mention the time and effort that he takes in attending those briefings. When he conducts the briefings he has a very hands-on approach. He is one of the most accomplished ministers that I have struck in terms of knowledge of his portfolio. I think it is appropriate to acknowledge that today. I support the bill.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.20 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill and to make a small number of comments. The member for Hinchinbrook mentioned workplace bullying. I put on the record my concerns about the way that bullying within a workplace can easily be hidden. That is not a reflection on government, because there is legislation in place in relation to the way people should and should not be treated at work. However, in one workplace in my electorate five senior people were off work, all as a result of stress. I raised that issue in this place several years ago. The relevant minister came back to me and said that my information was wrong and that only two people were on leave due to stress. When I checked, the reality was that they were all off work due to stress but that two were on designated stress leave, two were on sick leave and one had taken some holidays because they could not cope with the workplace as it was. Two of those people have subsequently left that workplace and another two are still receiving support.

Workplace bullying is one of those more intangible issues that requires a great deal of diligence. It has also been the case that when those stressed workers have to go through the workers compensation process that can add significantly to their stress levels if care and compassion are not applied to their situation. By that I do not mean that they should be treated with kid gloves or that questions should not be asked about the validity of their claims. But there have been instances in some of those five cases of their treatment exacerbating their condition.

The minister's second reading speech indicates that there could be a premium reduction next year. Whilst it is critically important to operate the fund in a financially sound way, premium levels remain a concern to small businesses. I acknowledge that Queensland has the lowest premium of the states. That is to be commended, but it is still relative. With the overheads that small businesses face, premium levels can be a significant concern to them. If there are savings that can be passed on, it will certainly be welcome.

I think the changes to the obligations for workplaces to have a rehabilitation coordinator will be keenly embraced by businesses. This is particularly so with smaller businesses, which could very efficiently share a rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator but still have the use of that officer efficiently within their workplace structure. It will also allow those businesses to cost share in relation to employing an appropriately qualified person.

The step-down in weekly compensation payments is also welcome. In 2004 that step-down was extended from the 26th week to the 39th week. This bill will extend that first step-down from the 39th week to the 52nd week, so it is one full year. I welcome that on behalf of injured workers. The obvious difficulty that people face when they are off on workers compensation is that it does not change their financial obligations in terms of home loan repayments and other financial obligations. This will add a considerable measure of peace of mind in relation to their ability to get well but also to take care of their prior commitments and their family.

Any family that faces the tragedy of losing a loved one deserves as much support as it is possible to provide. The changes to this bill increase the compensation payable to dependent members of the

worker's family to \$374,625 and to a totally dependent spouse to \$20,000. It also makes an allocation for dependent members or a child of the worker's spouse of 10 per cent of Queensland ordinary time earnings. That is welcome.

I would particularly like to commend the introduction of a new entitlement of \$10,000 to a totally dependent spouse in the tragic circumstance where they lose their partner and, if they have children, a weekly payment of eight per cent of QOTE. Unless one has been in that situation it is very difficult to understand the costs that are faced that arise without any warning, particularly in the case of a tragic workplace accident which means there is no time to adjust to changed circumstances. That \$10,000 will give enormous peace of mind, if that is possible in those circumstances, to those family members who find themselves bereft of the one that they love. I commend the minister for that introduction. I believe it is an extraordinarily compassionate move in terms of recognising the trauma of the situation being faced.

Clause 6 introduces a new subdivision to chapter 1. It talks about establishing the date of injury for latent onset injuries as the date of diagnosis by a medical practitioner of the latent onset injury. The explanatory notes go on to explain the process that will occur. The explanatory notes state—

For deciding whether a claimant is entitled to compensation or damages the insurer must apply the relevant tests applicable at the time that the event occurred. These tests may be in a former Act. The current Act will apply to the other elements of the claim such as provisions for application for compensation and review/appeal rights.

The notes then give an example. They state—

For example, a person is diagnosed with pleural plaques on 2 January 1996. At that time, the doctor states that, given the person's history of exposure to asbestos, the person may develop asbestosis. On 2 February 2006—

10 years later—

the person is diagnosed with asbestosis, and advised that this disease will develop to the point where it will significantly affect their life—

and also, in most cases, end it. The explanatory notes continue—

The relevant date of injury for the purposes of the proposed s 36A is 2 February 2006. For the purposes of determining whether the person is entitled to compensation the insurer must apply the legislation in force at the time of the person's exposure to the asbestos fibres.

I may be misinterpreting this all together, but I seek clarification from the minister about that.

Over time we have seen changes in government attitudes to particular elements and circumstances. Thirty or 40 years ago, the recognition of mesothelioma and asbestos related diseases was nil. In part that was because the companies that provided the product in the market found it advantageous to not make that information public. There was a long, hard battle to have recognised, not necessarily by the state government but by the federal government, the contribution that smoking made to cancers in returned service men and women. More recently we have had instances of people who worked inside F111 fuel tanks battling to have their illnesses recognised.

I just want to clarify at this point that these illnesses that have a significant incubation period may have been actively not recognised as diseases at the time the person was exposed. Governments have done that over time. No recognition was given to the validity of claims that exposure to agent orange caused a compromise in a person's health status. Is there any chance that this new part of the legislation, with its intentionally positive retrospectivity, could work negatively against a worker, particularly in those cases where the element of exposure at that time was actively discounted by the government of the day? I seek clarification of that situation.

I believe that the reasons behind the inclusion of this clause are sound. I want to make sure that there will not be an unintentional omission which will result in somebody being in dire straits. Otherwise, I welcome the legislation. I am sure it will give many injured workers hope. Certainly, it will give families in those tragic circumstances something to enable them to carry on through their sad time.

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (3.30 pm): It is my pleasure to stand and speak this afternoon in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2005. At the outset I say that this legislation is why workers in Queensland elect Labor governments, because it is this legislation that encapsulates a lot of the principles of looking after workers and their families in dire and difficult circumstances arising from their work.

I want to address my comments in two parts. Firstly, I want to address some amendments in this legislation dealing specifically with the construction industry and, secondly, I want to make a couple of miscellaneous comments about several points. Before proceeding on either of those two, I want to acknowledge the value I find in being on this minister's backbench committee for employment and training and industrial relations and echo the observations of my good friend and colleague the member for Toowoomba North about the role the minister plays with that committee and in his portfolio. I acknowledge up front, too, the value that I personally place on being able to talk to departmental and ministerial officers when issues require further examination and explanation. They could not be more helpful in my experience—and as recently as this morning when I met with a number of officers, who were very helpful.

The building and construction industry is of particular interest to me, given that my immediate background in employment was as assistant secretary of the CFMEU in the construction industry in Queensland. I am delighted that there are a number of changes here that are picking up some concerns that the CFMEU, the BLF, the ETU and a number of other unions involved in the construction industry have expressed for some time. These amendments are going a long way to help address those concerns.

No-one would deny that the building and construction industry is a high-risk industry, and it is a priority industry for the Queensland government for that reason in relation to workers compensation and rehabilitation. Once again, Queensland is leading the way with this bill, which introduces a suite of reforms that align with the national standard for construction work. During the various phases of a construction project there is a chain of obligation holders, for example, the client, the designer, the project manager and the principal contractor. All of these persons have a varying degree of control over the project. These reforms in this bill we are debating today will ensure that all these parties are accountable for health and safety.

Clients who commission construction work have significant influence and, particularly in major projects, have the determining influence over the planning of a project, given that they are often the primary, if not the only, source of funding. As such, they are in a position—mostly a unique position—in which they can affect health and safety performance and outcomes in the project which is later undertaken. The bill introduces obligations on clients to consult with the designer, project manager and principal contractor to ensure that construction work can be designed, planned and done in a way that prevents or minimises all risks to health and safety during construction. Designers also have the ability to positively influence health and safety outcomes through the adoption of safe design principles. As such, the bill extends the current obligations of designers under the act to ensure that the design of the building does not have the potential to expose to health and safety risks those who are engaged to build the structure.

The bill also introduces a new obligation on project managers to ensure that work is planned and managed in a way that prevents or minimises health and safety risks to construction workers and others at or near the workplace. However, the obligations on clients, project managers and designers will not apply to persons constructing class 1A buildings. This exclusion covers dwellings that are an attached house as well as attached dwellings, for example, a row house, terrace house, single-story townhouse or villa unit. This exclusion recognises that, firstly, housing construction design work is generally not as complex as commercial construction and, therefore, does not pose as many design related health and safety issues. The designers of residential homes have always been excluded from existing designer obligations. These amendments do not alter this situation. Secondly, it is extremely rare that housing construction work would have a project manager planning and coordinating activities. This is primarily reserved for the commercial sector. Thirdly, the so-called mum and dad clients who are building their homes should not be required to comply with the same obligations as clients commissioning large commercial projects. Fourthly, owner-developers who also design and construct homes would need to comply with an unreasonable number of obligations.

These amendments are consistent with the principles underlying the national standard for construction work in its application for additional upstream obligations to the commercial rather than the housing sector. However, they do not provide the housing sector with a blanket exemption from workplace health and safety obligations. The housing sector will still need to comply with general workplace health and safety obligations under the act as well as the amended principal contractor provisions that we have just spoken about. The bill strengthens the existing obligations of principal contractors in relation to persons breaching their health and safety obligations for the construction work.

The amendments before the House today will commence in 12 to 18 months, in particular the ones I have just addressed. Likewise, the definition of 'construction work' has been amended to align with the national standard. The new definition of 'construction work' is broader and encompasses activities that were not previously included as construction work, such as repair and renovation of a structure, and demolition and asbestos removal work. On assent of the bill, the new definition of 'construction work' will take effect along with a more streamlined procedure for the appointment of principal contractors. These amendments will enable significant and sustained improvements to safety performance and outcomes in this high-risk industry.

I will now briefly move to a couple of points that have arisen in my mind in the last short while that I want to place on record. I know my colleague Jim Pearce, the member for Fitzroy, who has enormous background experience in the mining industry, will comment at length about a number of these points. I want to briefly touch upon several of them. Firstly, in this legislation we are amending the principal act so that self-insurance licence periods are able to be extended up to four years for good performance. Presently the term of the licence, as I understand it, is for two years with little or no capacity to vary the term of that licence for a lesser time, let alone a greater time. As I understand it, the experience has been that in relation to the 26 or so self-insurers, when the licence renewal is being examined, mostly the level of performance has been such that it is appropriate for the licence to be rolled over.

At least one of the objectives of creating the opportunity for a renewal of the licence up to four years is to cater for the reality that is experienced that certain of these self-insurers are sufficiently performing to the standards required of them by Q-Comp that it is deemed not necessary to review them on such a fixed basis as every two years. The good performers will have the opportunity of having their licence extended up to four years. Conversely, the legislation also creates flexibility for Q-Comp to more specifically address self-insurers who may not be performing to the standard that they ought to be and so the licence might be able to be renewed under this new regime for one year, for example—to put them on a short lead, so to speak, to ensure that any changes required of them by Q-Comp are being fulfilled in a relatively short time period.

I urge Q-Comp and the highly reputable people who are on the Q-Comp board, chaired by former minister for employment and industrial relations Paul Braddy, who has an enormous amount of respect across industry, to be absolutely vigilant in the way in which they supervise the performance of these self-insurers against the standards set by Q-Comp. Particularly now that there will be the opportunity to extend the licence up to four years, that necessity to be absolutely vigilant, month by month, year by year, is heightened even further.

The second point is that within industry generally it ought to be better known to workers and their representative organisations—mostly trade unions—that, in the event that a worker has a complaint about rehabilitation, return-to-work coordinators and the effectiveness or otherwise of their experience of the system, in the absence of a formal complaint mechanism, such workers and their unions ought to feel free, as I believe some do, to complain directly to Q-Comp, to at least draw any concerns to the attention of Q-Comp. I understand also that the experience has been that some people have been thoughtful enough to alert the minister to any concerns that they have about the effectiveness of particular rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinators. I am sure that Q-Comp values that feedback and so, too, would the minister. I think that is an important facility to be available, and I would urge trade unions and others to make more well known that opportunity.

In passing I raise a query. If the Howard industrial relations changes are successful, as the ideologues in Canberra, led in Queensland by Santo Santoro, wish them to be, we will have virtually no trade unions in any industry in Queensland. One can only be left to wonder how workers who might be experiencing difficulties across-the-board in their work situation perhaps, but in particular in the case of rehabilitation and return to work, would get support, assistance and guidance on how to have their grievances or concerns addressed. One has to be left wondering how indeed that will happen. I think most people with practical experience in industry generally would readily say that it will not happen, because workers do need information and they do need paid support and assistance in taking up their grievances with employers, who are generally well heeled and have access to expert advice to suit them.

I know that the member for Fitzroy will also address this point, but, in urging Q-Comp to be absolutely vigilant in the way in which the self-insurers are regulated, I urge it to be particularly vigilant in the area of ensuring that the Chinese wall that in effect is created inside the company of a self-insured employer—separating the self-insured part of the employer from the true employer part of the company—is actually effective to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of the worker's information and background when he has made a workers compensation claim and is under process for rehabilitation and return to work so that the employer does not, so to speak, accidentally become aware of a whole range of matters that the employer is not entitled to be aware of bearing upon the medical condition and history of the worker but which information should only be in the possession of the insurance arm, as it were, of the employer. I believe that a recent case has highlighted that as an issue and that the department is addressing that. With those comments, I heartily endorse the bill.

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (3.45 pm): I rise to speak briefly to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill and some of the provisions in it. I will defer some of the detail to my learned union colleagues the members for Ferny Grove and Fitzroy. It gives me great pleasure to support this bill. All members in this House would agree that the levels of injury and accidents at work are way too high and that they have been too high since the first person was injured in a workplace.

Over the years new safety necessities have emerged and governments have addressed the needs of the safe workplace. Today, the legislative framework governing workplace safety is far more advanced than it was a few years ago. This bill arises from a national competition policy review of certain aspects of the current workers compensation scheme. It continues the work of the Beattie government to provide the legislative necessities to protect the rights of injured workers and provide a better future for people injured at work.

This bill increases the emphasis on the return to work and rehabilitation of injured workers, provides for additional benefits to be received by families of workers fatally injured, provides clarification about the claims processes applying to workers with latent onset injuries and provides for additional benefits to be received by workers who develop terminal conditions as a result of their employment. Unfortunately, many people injured at work find it difficult to return to work and often face impediments to

continuing to earn a living. The overall intent of this legislation is to provide greater emphasis on rehabilitation and return to work as a key part of that rehabilitation.

Currently the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act outlines employer obligations to assist or provide rehabilitation to injured workers, requiring employers to undertake all necessities to provide suitable duties to the worker. This amendment takes these requirements further by amending the definition of 'rehabilitation' to specifically state the object of returning a worker to the workplace. The current rehabilitation plan is strengthened to become a rehabilitation and return-to-work plan. In addition to the legislative framework this bill addresses, these provisions provide the necessities to, over time, influence the workplace culture so that an expectation develops of every effort being made to return an injured worker to work.

The legislation also provides certainties for workers who suffer a latent onset injury—that is, they develop an injury or illness some time after the event or events that caused the injury. Provisions of this bill clarify the times for making application for compensation and bringing claims for damages. These amendments provide the necessities for workers to be provided with legal certainty which in turn will result in decreasing the legal costs of bringing action under the current act.

In addition to providing certainty, this bill introduces amendments that provide for additional benefits for people suffering from latent onset injuries and for families of workers who are fatally injured at work. Importantly, this bill gives confirmation to workers with a latent onset injury that they are entitled to lump sum compensation.

The bill also increases benefits payable on the death of a worker and expands the provisions of enabling family members to receive support. Currently, only family members financially dependent on the deceased worker are able to receive benefits, and this bill recognises the need to expand this to enable non-dependent spouses and next of kin to receive a death benefit as well as increases the benefits for dependent family members.

There are several other provisions of this bill that provide greater safety for workers and greater certainty for employers, workers and their families. In particular I welcome clause 93 of the bill. This clause amends section 93 of the Industrial Relations Act which provides that it is an offence for an employer to dismiss an employee within six months of becoming injured solely or mainly because the employee is not fit for employment. This change alone will create greater impetus to rehabilitate injured workers back into work. I also acknowledge the amendment which will address clause 94 of the draft bill regarding reinstatement. I thank the minister and his staff for their response to concerns raised between the introduction of this bill and its passage today.

This bill is about improving safety in Queensland workplaces and providing greater support for people who are unfortunately injured at work. In addition to the improved legal certainties and increased benefits, the legislation aims to restore the livelihood and dignity of injured workers. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (3.49 pm): I am pleased to say a few words in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill. Like the member for Ferny Grove and indeed the minister, as an industrial officer for the Electrical Trades Union on many occasions I had the opportunity to represent, advise and assist workers in their applications for workers compensation and also to assist them negotiate the processes and through that experience know only too well the benefits of having a system that is run efficiently and effectively, one that provides fair and reasonable benefits to workers and also a system which has a very proactive program in place to manage worker rehabilitation and return to work. All of those elements exist in the workers compensation scheme that we have in place today, and I want to touch on a few of the reasons for that in a moment.

This particular bill proposes a number of amendments which will build on WorkCover's solid track record as Australia's best workers compensation scheme. As I have said, I want to talk more about the performance of the scheme in a moment but firstly I want to outline some of the more significant aspects of this bill and will try not to duplicate too much what has already been said by other members. The two key elements of the bill that I want to highlight are, firstly, that it continues to streamline the administrative arrangements of the scheme to enable enhanced service delivery—that is, as I have indicated, a system which deals efficiently and effectively with a claim that benefits workers through having their claims decided quickly and also then receiving benefits more quickly—but it is also of benefit to employers as well. Secondly, the bill passes on efficiencies which have been gained in WorkCover by way of increasing benefits to workers, and that of course complements the affordable premiums which have been delivered for many years by WorkCover as well.

Many of the changes outlined in this particular bill arise out of a national competition policy review of certain aspects of the scheme, including self-insurance licensing criteria, the use of allied health professionals, exclusive claims management by WorkCover and workplace rehabilitation processes. Some of the administrative changes include the ability of self-insurers to outsource their claims management functions and also for employers to outsource the role of rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinators. Under the current arrangements, workplaces with more than 30 workers are required to

appoint a rehabilitation coordinator. However, the new arrangements established by this bill will enable employers to access specialist rehabilitation resources on an as-needs basis and also provides an opportunity for industry associations to establish specialist services within their organisations which can assist their members in that area as well.

One of the key improvements in terms of benefits for workers, as has been indicated by the previous speaker, is the time limit within which an employer cannot dismiss an injured worker—that is, it has been extended from six months to 12 months. One of the outcomes which is desired from that is that more emphasis will be placed on return to work programs—that is, rehabilitation of workers to get them back on the job. Some of the other improved benefits include an extension of the second step-down in weekly compensation payments from 39 to 52 weeks, an increase in the maximum lump sum payment to permanently incapacitated workers to \$200,000, and an increase in the death benefits payable to workers' dependents to a maximum of \$374,625. As has been mentioned as well, two new death benefits are introduced and dependent spouses will also receive a weekly benefit for any children under school age.

These and a range of other proposed improvements to the WorkCover scheme will deliver more efficient arrangements and beneficial arrangements to both employers and injured workers. They have been made possible largely by a very disciplined and focused management strategy implemented by the WorkCover Board under the leadership of Ian Brusasco and also the management team and staff under the leadership of Tony Hawkins. I want to commend both the board and the management team for the great results that they are delivering on behalf of employees and employers of Queensland.

I want to take the time to outline some of the achievements that the board and management have achieved over the past year. A quick look at WorkCover's last annual report reveals a positive story of good financial management, claims management and the general administration of the scheme. Some of the key highlights from the report are that injured worker satisfaction with the services provided by WorkCover peaked at its highest ever result of 76.4 per cent. Employer satisfaction was 76.9 per cent, up from 74.5 per cent last year and just below its peak of 77.4 per cent in 2002. WorkCover continues to provide the lowest average premiums in the country, and average premiums have been maintained at that level of \$1.55 per \$100 wages for the last six years, and that is a significant achievement. On 1 July this year the rate dropped to \$1.43, further confirming the efficient and effective management strategies of the board and management. The WorkCover Board clearly signals in its annual report that it is dedicated to driving the average premium rate down even further. Just as a comparison, the New South Wales rate is \$2.57 and Victoria is \$1.99.

Another accolade was recently given by the independent Australian and New Zealand Return to Work Monitor, which rated WorkCover Queensland as the best workers compensation service provider in Australia. That is something to crow about and something that the organisation can be very proud of. One measure which supports this is the number of days WorkCover takes to make a decision on a claim. Under the new amendments to the act, WorkCover is required to make a decision on claims within a maximum of 60 business days for psychiatric and psychological injuries and fatal claims and 40 business days for all other claims. WorkCover's record is that it decides over 75 per cent of claims within 14 days. Again, that is a significant achievement. As WorkCover provides insurance to over 188,000 Queensland businesses each year that employ hundreds of thousands of workers, such performance indicators give us confidence that the interests of employers and employees are being well served by this organisation. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (3.56 pm): It is a pleasure to rise today to join in debate on the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill. The bill follows a national competition policy review of certain aspects of the current workers comp scheme. The review included a public benefit test to ensure that present arrangements complied with national competition policy. The review recommended greater flexibility in the self-insurance licensing and workplace rehabilitation requirements and a greater focus on return to work in the legislation. There are increases in benefits for injured workers and their families, and that can only happen when we have a scheme that is well managed and the proper auditing processes take place. That is a great win for workers and their families.

There has been widespread consultation with unions representing hundreds of thousands of workers. There was consultation with employer groups, insurers and legal professionals, so there has been good consultation. As everyone in this House knows, I have come from the coal industry and deal with workers in my electorate from right across the employment sector—from Queensland Rail to the meat industry but mostly from the coal industry. As the state's most hazardous industry, I want to see the coal industry unions play a more independent role in the development of policy or legislation when it comes to workers compensation. Despite what registered statistics may suggest, coalmining injuries are still at a very high level. Companies are not revealing the true number of lost time injuries. On that point, it is only a matter of time before I will be proven right on that issue. When it comes to talking about such important legislation, I always go to the industry and ask for feedback, so much of what I say here today is on advice and comment that I have received from people in the various industries who are close to the action where workers are getting injured and going through a compensation process.

From the comments that I have received, I can say that there is some concern about the outsourcing of rehabilitation to providers. I know the minister will note the points that I raise and respond to them in his reply to this debate. I think some of the concerns have been raised because at this time there seems to be limited access to the regulations. There is a feeling that the new changes are very open to interpretation. For instance, in the case of an employer with a poor track record in the management of injured workers and rehabilitation, who will protect the interests of the injured worker? The changes will allow for the outsourcing of rehabilitation. The work sites will lose contact with the workers. That is a bit of a concern. Maybe there is just a lack of understanding. If a person is away from the site and is being looked after by an independent body that is located away from the workplace, then the people who can best advise and help the worker are not around to give that advice. An employer who enters into a contractual arrangement directly with a rehabilitation provider will have no direct relationship with Q-Comp—the industry regulator—and the outsourced body.

There are also concerns about the confidentiality of an injured worker's files. People in the coal industry often hear the arguments that, because the employer pays for the insurer, the employer owns the file and it wants access to the information. Employers often use their influence to access information that is really private and confidential to the injured worker and the insurer. This issue is a real concern. It is occurring. I know that this issue will be advanced some time in the near future because it can contribute to people losing their jobs. I understand that just recently the president of the QIRC ruled in favour of a worker who worked at Woolworths. Information about that worker was leaked to the employer and the worker was sacked. But justice prevailed. That worker took the case to the industrial commission and won it.

I have sought advice from the department about those concerns. I will read into *Hansard* some of that advice because I want it to be on the record so that the people who have contacted me and raised those concerns have the opportunity to get an understanding of the department's position and can see that I have followed up their concerns on their behalf. I welcome further comment from the minister where necessary to clear up any misunderstandings that I may have. It is important that, if I do not have it right, the minister clears up the issue so that we have a clear understanding of this legislation.

I want to focus on those amendments in this bill that relate to the rehabilitation of injured workers, self-insurers and the role of the rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator. The rehabilitation coordinator has been renamed in this legislation and will be known as the rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator. Employers will now have the ability to outsource the role of that coordinator. Large and high-risk employers will be required to engage a rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator. The definition of 'rehabilitation' has been amended in this bill to give it a more return-to-work focus. The legislation now provides that the evidence provided to WorkCover that the provision of rehabilitation is not practical must be provided in writing.

I put some of the concerns that I have had raised with me over the past couple of days to the department through the minister's office yesterday. I thank them so much for their work in getting back to me so quickly. I had quite a few questions. They were quite complex and the information that they have given me is very, very helpful. I want to put those responses into *Hansard* so that the people I represent know that I have followed up their issues.

One of the concerns raised was whether self-insurers were allowed to outsource their claims management functions to Queensland based claims managers and how an injured worker's right to privacy is protected when so many levels of the case management process have access to files. Therefore, the confidentiality of a worker's file is now at a greater risk of access than ever before and can be abused to the disadvantage of the worker. I have already raised a couple of points in relation to those concerns.

I have been advised that Section 110 of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Regulation 2003 states that information obtained during rehabilitation must be treated with sensitivity and confidentiality by all parties. Section 110 also requires the worker's authority to obtain or release information associated with the worker's rehabilitation, except for the release of information to the authority or insurer. Furthermore, an amendment to section 110 of the regulation is proposed for later this year, which will identify clearly this section as a responsibility of the insurer and the employer and those acting on their behalf.

In most cases we would not have very many concerns about that, but I would have to say in the strongest terms that there are some real concerns about the behaviour of mining companies who are self-insurers or those people who act as their insurer. There are some real concerns because a lot of this activity happens in the same building: there is the operational side of the business and then there is the insurance side of the business alongside. There are some real concerns about what is happening there and the fact that an injured worker's information is getting to the employer, which is influencing the employer on how he might continue with that particular employee's work in the future. That issue really needs to be looked at.

The minister stated the following in his second reading speech—

Self-insurance licence periods are extended up to four years for good performers.

The question was asked: what criteria determines a good performing self-insurance provider? Who monitors that and what is the process for determining transparency and accountability? The advice that I have been given is that Q-Comp, the workers compensation regulatory authority, is responsible for monitoring the compliance and performance of self-insurers in Queensland. Q-Comp administers the performance management program for Queensland workers compensation insurers, which promotes high standards of claims management and rehabilitation and ensures insurer compliance with the legislation. The program provides a framework that enables Q-Comp to monitor insurers with transparency, fairness, accountability, impartiality and responsiveness. This program represents a comprehensive approach to compliance and performance monitoring with a single framework for all insurers. The program is detailed in a document that outlines the key elements in the program including what happens, how it happens, when it happens and who is responsible for each element, and provides performance measures for evaluating insurer performance. While the bill allows for the extension of self-insurance periods of up to four years, it is the Q-Comp board's responsibility to determine the licence period for individual licences based on their performance identified through audit activity. I guess the proof of the pudding is in how powerful that audit activity is and how deep it delves into the performance of the individual licensee.

Some concerns were raised about who monitors the performance of the rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator to ensure that the injured worker is getting the appropriate rehabilitation and assessment. What rights does the worker have if he or she feels that they are not being treated appropriately by the coordinator with regard to the rehabilitation treatment and assessment for return to work?

The advice that I received is that Q-Comp and the insurer monitor the performance of the rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator. The rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator's role is not to provide rehabilitation treatment or assessment for return to work. Those functions lie with the worker's treating medical practitioner. The rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator is responsible for coordinating suitable duties within the workplace in consultation with the worker and the insurer. An amendment is being prepared to the regulation to clarify the function of the rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator. The legislation does not make specific provision for complaints about rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinators. If the worker is not satisfied with the performance of the rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinator, that person may make a complaint to Q-Comp, which is responsible for the accreditation of rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinators.

That all sounds quite good when one goes through it and tries to understand what it all means. I have to say that I am still concerned that there is not a clear structure for how a complaint is to be made by an injured worker if they think they are not getting a fair go. I am not aware of any injured worker who knows what the process is if they have concerns about the treatment they are getting. I ask the minister to have a close look at this over the next couple of months to see what can be done to improve this situation.

There were other questions such as: what would be the criteria for an employer being able to legally dismiss an injured worker after 12 months? What protection is there for the worker being wrongfully dismissed on the grounds of being unfit for duty due to the injury for which he or she has been under a rehabilitation plan? The response from the department is that the amendment to the Industrial Relations Act will guarantee security of employment for injured workers for 12 months following injury. After this time, employers will be able to dismiss workers if they are not 'fit for employment'. I ask the minister to have a look at this as well because, as far as I can see, there is nothing in the act to ensure that the rehabilitation progresses during the 12-month period to prevent a dismissal. So it is important that the rehabilitation progresses and is supported by the employer, the self-insurer and the coordinator to ensure that the worker is getting the treatment and the assistance that he or she needs to put them in the best possible position to return to work. We have to make sure that is happening.

Other questions were: when does an injured worker qualify for entry into a rehabilitation program and who determines when that happens? What role will the employer play in determining when an injured worker is admitted into a rehabilitation plan? What rights does the worker have in this process? A lot of these questions keep going back to the rights of the injured workers involved in the rehabilitation process in relation to the new way they are going to go about it.

There are some concerns coming from union representatives and injured workers. They are not sure what their rights are when they get involved in this process. I know that, being part of a Labor government committed to the protection of workers, the minister will have a look at this and see what we can do to make sure that it is much more clear for injured workers to understand their rights and how they can object if they believe that they are not being treated fairly.

In response to those questions, the department advises that a rehabilitation plan must be developed for each worker undertaking rehabilitation. There are no statutory time frames determining when a rehabilitation plan should be developed as this will vary greatly depending on the nature of injury, the date of diagnosis, when the claim is lodged or accepted.

The only other point I want to make is that I am not sure what role the Miners Union has in the development of policy and rehabilitation plans. I know a rehabilitation plan will vary depending on the type of injury. I am sure that the workers' representatives at the union level would like to be involved in the process to ensure that the worker is getting the best possible treatment and that the worker is put in the best position to return to work as quickly as possible.

I speak about this today from my knowledge of the coal industry. There are some real concerns about the behaviour of some companies—and I say 'some companies', not all. Some companies are not fair dinkum when it comes to the way they manage injured workers. If an injury is of a serious nature, I could bet my bottom dollar—and I would have the support of people in the industry—that the employer would be looking for ways to phase that injured worker out of the workplace so that it did not have some sort of ongoing responsibility or, more importantly, that it did not finish up with a worker who requires a large payout from the company or its insurer.

This is good legislation. I congratulate the minister on his work and the way he is committed to the workers of this state. I congratulate the staff in his department for the way they have responded to me. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. TA BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (4.14 pm), in reply: I rise to respond to the debate on the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill. Before I get into the detail, I table a copy of the letter that I have forwarded to the Hon. Ken Hayward, the chair of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. Members will be aware that this has not yet been published in the *Alert Digest*. I think the *Alert Digest* includes my comments but my response has not been published. I table that response to the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's position so that members can avail themselves of it before they vote on this bill.

At the outset I would like to clarify a few points for the final speaker, the member for Fitzroy, because he has very comprehensively expressed his views about a raft of issues that were of concern to workers and some employers in his electorate. It is certainly my understanding that the explanations provided to him by my department in a very detailed way yesterday, which he has put on the record today, are consistent with my understanding of those provisions.

I congratulate him for doing that level of work around his electorate, as he always does. I know that staff in my department have found it very rewarding to be able to sit down with him and go through it in that level of detail. I make that point while he is here in the chamber, and I thank him for making that effort. That allows him to go back to all of those people in his electorate who have a direct interest in this bill to say, 'Here is the explanation that has been supported on the floor of the parliament,' so that they can have clarity about this bill. Obviously, regulations will be written and there will be an implementation period. But the more that people in the field are aware of what is occurring and what is intended, the better off they will be. I thank the member for Fitzroy for his kind words.

I should thank everybody who has spoken, not just the member for Fitzroy. Most of the government members who spoke were members of my committee. They work very hard with me and my department to make sure that we bring forward legislation that is relevant, well thought through and capable of being supported by this parliament. I particularly thank the member for Algester, who is my parliamentary secretary, for her hard work. She is also a member of my committee. But, as my parliamentary secretary, she has been working very closely with my office, which is her office in many ways and her own staff, and my departmental staff in working through this legislation in recent months. I might not have another bill before the parliament before her happy event takes place, so I take this opportunity to wish her all the best for the coming event in her life which is very important. It means that she will be taking a bit of leave from giving me a hand, but I am very proud that she is having that happy event. While we will miss her, we will welcome her back with open arms, and we will all be uncles and aunts in the office when she comes back.

We have heard from other members of my committee—the members for Ferny Grove and Toowoomba North. They have spoken with real passion about what this bill is about and about their commitment to workers in this state, to make sure that injured workers and their families—and that is what the Labor Party is all about; they are our first priority—are looked after in terms of workers compensation and having good and safe workplaces to attend. I also thank the members who talked about the employers, because it is a two-way street. I also thank other government members who spoke. I have mentioned the member for Fitzroy, but the members for Yeerongpilly and Nudgee have also shown a great level of commitment.

I also thank the member for Hinchinbrook, the shadow minister for employment, training and industrial relations, for his comments. I thank him for indicating that the opposition will be supporting this bill. I think that does show that we have come a long way from the days the member for Algester spoke of—those dark years when I and many others sat on the other side of the House. We were not very comfortable over there. They are very uncomfortable seats over there, particularly when we had the then minister, Santo Santoro, who is now in the federal parliament, making some of those changes.

I acknowledge, as the member for Hinchinbrook said, that the fund then was not in the very healthy position that it is in now. We felt that the then minister went too far and that his changes were over the top, but I guess that is part of history. That was almost 10 years ago, but it demonstrates the very real change that has occurred in that we have a bill before the House that recognises workers compensation and occupational health and safety in this state and it is supported by the opposition.

The member for Gladstone, an Independent, has also indicated her support for the bill. We have come a long way when everybody is up applauding what a good job WorkCover is doing. Ian Brusasco and his board, Tony Hawkins and his WorkCover team, and Paul Braddy and his CEO, Kath, of Q-Comp—which is the regulatory arm—equally do a great job of making sure that injured workers get looked after. It is also important when it comes to balance that employers in this state are also looked after and get a fair go. That is what this bill is all about.

This bill does two things: it provides some benefits to employers but it also provides some very real benefits to injured workers. We are very proud, as a government, that we can take those steps because we have achieved them on the back of the excellent performance of WorkCover—the only fully funded workers compensation scheme in the country, and that is even before we talk about its low premiums. The fact is that the premiums are the lowest in the country. Again, I repeat what I said in my second reading speech that has been referred to today and that I have repeated outside at a number of places, including at a forum on industrial relations in Melbourne on Tuesday with Kevin Andrews, who seems to want to take benefits away from workers. We are seeing our premiums fall to the lowest in the nation because of good performance. The board has indicated to me that it believes it could drop the premiums again next year. That is a decision that has to be made at the time, of course. There will be an actuarial assessment. The actuary will provide advice to the board. The board will then make a decision and provide advice to me for final approval.

Unless we have a major disaster somewhere, everything is well on track for there to be a further reduction in premiums next year. Because we have been able to do that and the fund is not only fully funded but also doing extremely well, it has allowed us to come in here and make these very significant improvements which benefit injured workers and, sadly, families of workers who tragically have been killed on the job. We think that is a good balance to have. We would expect nothing less from anybody else in terms of our responsibility to those injured workers and their families and the families of those tragically killed on the job.

This bill is very important. We are also making some further changes to occupational health and safety. I want to make a few comments, and I do not want to be negative because I do thank the opposition for its indication of support. It is greatly appreciated. I do not want to dwell on the history, but the facts are that there was a history: there was a problem, and that was higher premiums. The scheme has been so well managed in recent times that now we have a very healthy position of low premiums, a considerable surplus and a fully funded scheme which is actuarially incredibly sound. I thank the shadow minister for his view.

The member for Gladstone also raised concern about the level of stress claims. This is one of the most sensitive issues that we can deal with. I think it was the member for Gladstone who also mentioned that people who regularly have stress claims tend to get more stressed during the whole process. I think that is part of the problem. If they are stressed, the very process of being assessed—of not being at work, of not being with their mates and probably, in some cases, of seeing a little too much of their family because they are not at work and not having normal interactions in life—makes it hard for those people.

I have had considerable experience with that, having been a director of QSuper before I came into this parliament. I was a founding director of QSuper in this state and had been a director of Gosuper and State Super prior to QSuper being formed. I resigned from those positions at the time I nominated for parliament. What we are seeing is not unusual, I guess. There are sickness and illness benefits for QSuper, as there are, typically, with most superannuation funds. The whole issue of stress is not as straightforward as a person being stressed. The fact that a person is stressed does not necessarily mean they are stressed because of work involvement. Sadly, in many cases people in modern society are stressed for a whole range of things. Sometimes the stress is primarily caused by matters that are not work related but the work related matters, because they are already stressed, compounds it and makes it worse.

It is very difficult. That is why over the years there have been changes to the definition of 'stress'. These changes were brought in initially by Santo Santoro. Some changes were also made by Paul Braddy. We have had further changes in recent years as we have sought to make sure that we look after the interests of the people who are stressed. At the end of the day, this is a WorkCover scheme that has to provide for the people who are stressed as a result of their work, not stressed as a result of other issues, whether due to their life or due to a whole range of reasons.

I have also read that *Sunday Mail* article of some weeks ago. I learnt a long time ago that while you can believe most of what is in the *Sunday Mail* you cannot believe everything that is in there, particularly when someone is editorialising a story. But the assertion that there is some sort of

conspiracy in government for people to use up their sickness benefit or illness benefit through their superannuation or use up their sick leave is a pretty tough assertion to make. I know that I am responsible for the policy on bullying, but the day-to-day management of bullying and the response to bullying in the Public Service is not actually mine; it resides with the Public Service commissioner, George O'Farrell.

I know that there is a conspiracy theory out there, but we are unaware of any conscious policy to direct people to use up sick leave or to take illness benefits through their superannuation fund rather than seek workers compensation for stress where it is a genuinely work related and compensatable stress. I do not know that we will solve that one today. I think that debate has been out in the community virtually the whole time that I have been a member of parliament. It was a matter for debate when I and my colleagues were in opposition and Santo Santoro was the minister and changed the definition of 'stress' from a workers compensation point of view. I guess it has been a matter for debate in society all that time.

There will be people who genuinely believe that they have been disadvantaged. It has not been found to be stress that is work related; it has been caused by another event—or that is what the finding has been. I know from the number of letters that come to me that those people find it very hard to accept that that is the decision that has been made. Again, I back the professionalism of WorkCover and Q-Comp in overseeing cases where complaints are made to it as the regulator of workers compensation schemes, to ensure that the decisions are made on proper medical grounds and on a proper assessment basis. Certainly there is no political interference and certainly there is no administrative interference from a public sector point of view. I would be very confident in saying that that is the case, but I also acknowledge that it has been one of life's great debates for the last 10 years or more, and I do not expect it to be finalised here and now today. I expect that debate to go on in the community for some time yet.

We heard the Premier as recently as this morning talk about the commitment of the government to drive out the bullying culture that apparently was there in Queensland Health. It goes without saying that our view as a government is that, wherever bullying is taking place across the public sector, we will do everything we can to drive it out. The only balance I put into that is that a minority of people think that if they are told to do their job by someone, that is bullying. At all times superiors are entitled to tell their employees what they require of them in terms of the responsibilities of their job. Sometimes when someone says, 'I'm not happy with your work and what I require of you now is this, not that,' that is misinterpreted as bullying. I do not want to get into too heavy a debate about that because that is also wide open to interpretation and misinterpretation.

I did make some comment across the chamber to the shadow minister about the standards for construction work. I want to assure him and the parliament that the standards we are putting in place are as a result of the work of the now defunct NOHSC, the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission. It recommended standards to the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council. All of the ministers have committed to progressively implementing those standards over time. It might be the standards for housing and scaffolding. I know the HIA has had some views about that which have not necessarily been supported by the Master Builders, which is a bit of a problem at times. Different employer agencies even have different views about the same set of proposals.

The shadow minister indicated that the HIA had raised a concern about us moving to a standard of 10 square metres of asbestos sheeting being removed as opposed to the standard in Western Australia of 200 square metres. Ten square metres is a standard that all the states have agreed to work towards. It is my understanding that if the west honours its commitment to the Workplace Relations Ministers Council it will also progressively change that. Timing, of course, is a matter for the individual state.

I do not want to spend too much time on this point, but debate has been raging today and yesterday about the removal of asbestos from private homes. This means that up until this comes in—and we have a RIS out for the licensing requirements—any individual at home can go and tackle the super six fibro roof on their house themselves without ensuring that they are doing that work safely. There has been a continuous argument about whether it should be regulated by government or by councils. My understanding of it is that since 1937 it has been a council responsibility because my division looks after workplaces, not private homes. All public health matters are a matter for the council in that regard.

This makes it very clear that if someone is going to remove more than 10 square metres in the future, they will have to have some form of licence. It will be regulated. I think that helps with this debate. If I were the Local Government Association I would be very happy with the changes in this legislation and the further changes that will come about if the RIS is accepted in the community. It means that if someone is going to remove more than 10 square metres—in other words, renovate anything bigger than a small bathroom or take away the wall on the side of a carport, which is about what 10 square metres is; it is about the surface area of a small bathroom or the side wall of a carport, which is where a lot of the fibro is that is being torn down—then they have to have some form of licence to do it. That makes it a workplace.

There will be two standards of licence. That means that a private home owner can go and do the training, can do the test, can get the licence and can remove the asbestos themselves, but they will have to be licensed to do it. Because they are licensed it will be a workplace, and my inspectors will enforce the legislation. It leaves only the very small jobs in the hands of the councils to regulate, in my view quite properly, under the latest health legislation, but it has been their job since 1937.

I know the HIA may say that it should be 200 square metres. If I were the HIA I think I would want it to be 10 square metres because it probably means more work for the members of their association at the end of the day. If the professionals remove the asbestos and the fibro, then I for one will be a lot more comfortable. I take the point that the shadow minister made. I am a north Queenslander originally. I have seen a lot of fibro damaged after cyclones or severe storms. It is the same in Brisbane. We see a lot of hail damage and a lot of storm damage to fibro. The safer we can make it the better.

The member for Gladstone asked me to comment on a matter that she raised, and I will, about the amendments in clause 6, chapter 1, about latent onset injuries. I am very confident that I can advise the parliament that there will be no unintended consequences or unintended bad things happening as a result of this change. It is actually a big improvement for people in relation to the point when they are diagnosed with asbestosis or mesothelioma, that is, it is the date at which they get the actual diagnosis. The test that is referred to in that provision goes back to the test of whether they actually were in contact with asbestos in the workplace or elsewhere. That is the test that we are talking about. We are not talking about the test of did they have asbestos at that earlier date or how the exposure took place. Clearly if they were ripping the asbestos roof off a house 10 years earlier and that was the only known contact with asbestos, then clearly it would not be workers compensatable because they were doing it in a private capacity rather than in a workplace. But if they were a worker who was ripping a roof off and they contracted mesothelioma or some form of asbestos from exposure 10 years ago, it means that they get the maximum payout; they get today's payout. That is what is intended rather than them getting the payout that was a far lower figure at a much earlier date. I think that is the issue that the member for Gladstone was concerned about.

That probably covers most of the issues of concern that needed some form of explanation. In closing, I want to say on behalf of the government that this is very good legislation. It is legislation that has had a fair bit of thought put into it. I know we were here a year ago with some improved benefits and some changes to the formula. That is the other thing I want to mention. It was no sleight of hand, and I think the shadow minister agreed with me, when we changed the premiums from \$1.55 to \$1.43 this year. It was the result of the formula change in part. There was a real reduction, but part of that monetary amount is because superannuation is now included in the calculation of the figure. A few people have just woken up to that change. Not only have they been raising it with the shadow minister; some people have been raising it with me. When they get the explanation they go away happy because they do understand that it is not a sleight of hand on the government's part.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr BARTON: That is right.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr BARTON: Of course it will not be the same for everybody's premium because in some cases they have a different performance component to the premium, so there will always be the odd one out that we cannot definitively pin down. Our intention is very clear.

I believe that this is good legislation. It does help those private providers but protects the state fund. If people want to come back, they have to meet the disciplines. They have to pay their liability if they come back. Sadly, in many cases—not necessarily in this case—as a result of national competition policy, governments can be forced to go along with things that they are uncomfortable with. This bill has benefits for employers. It certainly has benefits for injured workers. I commend the bill to the House. Before I sit down, I will table the explanatory notes to the amendments that I intend to move in the consideration in detail stage.

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in Detail

Clauses 1 to 48, as read, agreed to.

Clause 49—

Mr BARTON (4.39 pm): I move the following amendment—

1

Clause 49—

At page 38, line 7, 'on or after'—

omit, insert—

'before'.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr ROWELL: I just want to raise an issue. The amendment does clarify, and I did not see it until I went outside. I have not actually got the amendments. I have not received them.

Mr Barton: I thought they had been circulated.

Mr ROWELL: No, they have not—not that I am aware of. I could not find them.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lee): Order! Can I clarify which clause you are speaking to?

Mr ROWELL: It is the amendment that was moved. It clears up something that was in the legislation. The amendment replaces 'on or after' with 'before'. The legislation said 'after', which would have been a bit of a misnomer. I cannot see any problem with it, but I did not have the actual amendment with me. I have not got any problem. I understand what it is about now.

Clause 49, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 50 to 93, as read, agreed to.

Clause 94—

Mr BARTON (4.41 pm): I move the following amendment—

2 **Clause 94—**

At page 75, lines 18 to 20—

omit.

Amendment agreed to.

Clauses 95 and 96, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Bill, as amended, read a third time.

ENERGY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 28 September (see p. 2892).

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (4.43 pm): I am pleased to make a contribution to the consideration of the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill. The opposition will not be opposing the passage of this bill through the House. It does not contain any controversial issues about which the opposition is concerned.

As the minister outlined in his second reading speech, the bill does make a number of minor consequential amendments to the Electricity Act. Following the commencement of new national electricity laws and the national electricity rules, it extends sections 112A of the Electricity Act 1994, which deals with the clearing of native vegetation for operating works of transmission entities, so that those provisions also apply to distribution entities. It removes section 123 of the Electricity Act 1994, which provides for the electricity restriction regulations to expire five years after they were made. It also removes sections of the Gas Supply Act 2003 which relate to greenfield gas distribution authorities and exclusive gas retail authorities to ensure consistency with Australia's obligations under international trade agreements. It also makes some minor editorial amendments which have been identified by the Parliamentary Counsel.

As I said, the opposition does not have any issues with any of the amendments that the bill makes. They are all, of themselves, relatively minor and are pretty much straightforward. It is, however, an opportune time to make some observations about the energy industry, especially the electricity industry, in this state when we have a bill before the House such as this to consider. It is opportune because the minister did table in the House this morning a number of reports from the energy GOCs which always make for interesting reading for those people interested in the energy industry in Queensland in general.

One of the things that was noteworthy in the reports that were tabled this morning by the minister was the extent to which Queensland's electricity industry is still ill prepared for the responsibilities that the people of Queensland expect from it. In both the Energex and Ergon reports there is a clear admission that both organisations have a long way to go to achieve the level of reliability of supply and the level of service capacity that Queenslanders have a right to expect of them. That is only to be expected in a very real sense, given the backlog that both of those organisations have had to make up since the Somerville report was brought down and since the problems in those GOCs and the industry as a whole were identified. It is one of a long list of failings of the Beattie Labor government that I do not think can afford to be forgotten.

While the attention of this parliament in particular and of Queenslanders generally has been drawn to a failing which has surpassed the failing of the government in its management of the electricity industry in recent times—and that, of course, is the failing in relation to the health system—we should not forget, nor should we not be diligent in watching, the electricity industry and the attempts that the government makes to put right the years of mismanagement of the GOCs that were involved.

Certainly Energex has drawn the most attention, because it is the one which has the most direct effect on electricity consumers. As we approach the summer storm season, electricity consumers will be watching with some trepidation the efforts Energex has made to make electricity supply more secure. However, it is noteworthy that in the report the minister tabled in the House this morning Energex did acknowledge that it has a long way to go before it achieves the levels of effective capacity and reliability that the people of south-east Queensland—its customers—have a right to expect from it.

Similarly, in the other areas of Queensland that Ergon services there is a recognition by the people in that corporation—and it is reflected in its annual report—that there is a long way to go before that organisation recovers the capacity that it should have had. Both of those organisations have lost that capacity because of the deliberate government policy of not reinvesting in infrastructure. That has been a feature of the Beattie Labor government. It has been a feature of this Labor government and it has led to a succession of major issues that the government has had to deal with. In a very real way, what we can expect from the government when dealing with the latest failings in the health system can be ascertained by the way in which it has dealt with the failings in the electricity industry since the problems there were drawn to parliament's attention. What we can expect of other instrumentalities in the future can be judged by what has been revealed in the electricity industry and in the provision of health services to Queenslanders.

It was interesting to note the attention that was paid to electricity tariffs in the lead-up to the mini budget. I was somewhat puzzled by the extent to which the government tried to turn it into a media issue. At this stage, it is uncertain what level of impact that will have on electricity consumers. Until now, we have not been provided with details of the proposed electricity tariff. We have been told that it will change the structure and there will not be block tariffs anymore, with reducing prices as electricity consumption increases. From a philosophical point of view, I have no great disagreement with that. However, the opposition will watch closely to ensure that the government does not take the opportunity to instigate a rise in electricity prices through the back door by using this as something of a stalking horse.

The uniform tariff for electricity is particularly important to people who live in rural and regional Queensland. Members on this side of the House will defend it very vigorously if there is any attempt to erode that uniform tariff. Whilst it is something that people in south-east Queensland probably do not appreciate, it is something that is held very dear by people who live in regional Queensland. In Western Queensland and certainly in north Queensland communities there is a great reliance on that uniform tariff. Hopefully, it will not come under threat from either side of politics in this parliament.

Another development in the electricity industry in recent times has been the availability of the third tranche of contestability. This means that more electricity consumers within the state have the chance to negotiate their electricity supply with electricity retailers. As I said in our response to the government's announcement, this should have been done a long time ago. It should have been done to allow electricity consumers to get the greatest benefit from the deregulation of the electricity market.

The arguments that the government has put forward for not doing that until now certainly do not stand up to scrutiny from anyone who understands the industry. It was only through the efforts of the ACC that the state government was finally forced into a position where it had to accept the introduction of the third tranche of contestability. I hope that Queenslanders are able to benefit from the opportunities that will become available to them.

It was interesting to note that, in responding to concerns about the change in electricity tariffs, the Premier seemed to suggest that commercial users—who are obviously big users of electricity and would be affected by the change in the block tariff structure—could somehow avoid being adversely affected by taking advantage of the contestability provisions. Of course, that applies to commercial users in areas where retailers are able to provide electricity at a level less than the regulated tariff.

One of my great concerns is that commercial users in north Queensland will be unable to take advantage of the contestability provisions. I am concerned that the third tranche of contestability provisions will not mean that a number of electricity retailers will be actively participating in the north Queensland market. If one combines that with the change in the tariff structure that the government announced last week, which will mean an end to block tariff structures for commercial consumers, there is a real possibility that commercial users in western Queensland and in northern Queensland, especially—any commercial users that are away from the heavily populated areas where contestability means there will be a number of retailers in the market—will be faced with the possibility of quite significantly higher electricity prices.

I ask the minister to take the opportunity in this parliament to assure the members who represent those areas that commercial users, especially in north Queensland, will not be impacted by higher electricity prices. The comments made by the Premier certainly did not provide any assurance in that regard. In fact, the comments made by the Premier in defense of the tariff structure should actually have rung alarm bells for all commercial users in north Queensland and western Queensland—especially in north Queensland. Obviously in the bigger centres there are a lot more commercial users on commercial tariffs.

It has been very difficult to pursue this issue until we find out just what the tariff structures will be under the new provisions that the government has put in place. As shadow minister, I have not made a big issue of it until I find out what is proposed. I hope that the architects of the new tariff structure ensure that there is not a huge adverse impact on commercial consumers in north Queensland. However, the Premier's contribution to the debate certainly rang alarm bells in that regard. Today is an opportune time, as we consider this legislation, for the minister to put on record the government's intention and the extent to which it has thought through these issues, and to reassure members who represent north Queensland electorates, in particular, and regional electorates in general, that their constituents will not be faced with an overall rise in their electricity tariffs.

The legislation itself or any of the provisions that are contained within the bill are certainly not controversial. We are happy to support the government in the passage of this legislation through the House and to take this opportunity to place on record some of the current issues in the energy business in Queensland, especially in respect to electricity. No doubt other speakers will take the opportunity to do that during the consideration of the bill.

I hope the minister will take the opportunity to address some of those issues in his summation at the end of the second reading debate. I certainly will not oppose the passage of the bill.

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (4.58 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2005. This government is committed to the expansion of reticulated gas networks in Queensland. Reticulated gas provides energy choice for consumers and delivers real benefits for the environment in terms of improved greenhouse gas outcomes.

The bill amends the Gas Supply Act 2003 to remove provisions relating to greenfield distribution authorities and exclusive retail authorities. These amendments will align the distribution licensing provisions of the act with Australia's international trade obligations and will provide certainty for both the state and the Commonwealth in meeting those obligations.

It is important to note, however, that these amendments to the Gas Supply Act will not adversely impact on the operation and growth of the gas market. To date, no greenfield distribution authority or exclusive retail authority has ever been sought or granted. Rather, natural gas distributors have consistently chosen to use commercial arrangements to secure their markets and invest in gas network development. Distributors are driving the development of the gas market by working cooperatively with developers to install reticulated gas networks in new residential developments.

I want to place on record my compliments to Fox and Bell, a developer in my electorate that is trying to lead by example. In trying to encourage developers in the area to install gas, it has taken the opportunity in one of its developments to install reticulated gas, which is fed from a gas tank similar in size to one that would be found at a service station. It has taken it upon itself to install this infrastructure in trying to encourage other developers in the area to come on board. Once we get a certain density of gas consumers, hopefully we can then connect to the reticulated main network. I certainly applaud those developers on that innovative and cutting-edge approach.

This approach has allowed distributors to achieve high take-up rates and a reasonable return on investment. The success of these commercial arrangements can be seen in many new residential estates around south-east Queensland. For example, in the last 12 months Envestra has significantly expanded its natural gas networks in residential developments located north of the Brisbane River and throughout the Ipswich area. These growth areas have focused around the western suburbs of Redbank Plains and Bellbird Park and the northern corridor extending from Carseldine through to Mango Hill and Deception Bay.

Energex, through its subsidiary Allgas Energy Pty Ltd, is also extending its natural gas network in many new residential developments on the Gold Coast, including a 1,800-lot development at Coomera Waters and a 900-lot development at Hope Island. Energex also plans to extend its natural gas network to the new master planned community of Springfield. In all, over 20,000 new home sites in south-east Queensland will have access to the Energex natural gas network over the coming years. The expected take-up rate for gas in these developments is high, with some new developments boasting 90 per cent to 100 per cent sign-up rates.

The high take-up of gas will be further supported by the introduction in 2006 of the new sustainable housing code and its requirements for more greenhouse efficient hot-water systems in new homes. The discussion paper on sustainable housing, released by the department of local government and planning in December 2004, stated that each household that replaces an electric hot water system with a greenhouse efficient system such as gas or solar would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least two-thirds.

This bill will achieve consistency between the Gas Supply Act and Australia's international trade obligations. Just as importantly, however, the bill does not affect the ability of gas distributors to continue to expand their networks, use commercial arrangements to secure their markets and provide high-quality services to gas customers. This bill reaffirms this government's commitment to expanding the gas market, providing choice to energy customers and supporting greenhouse efficient outcomes. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (5.02 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill. As a member of the energy backbench committee, I am very pleased to support this bill today.

Mr McNamara: A very active member.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I take that interjection and I very much thank the chair of the energy committee for that remark. Queensland is part of a national electricity market which has delivered significant benefits to the state. The amendments set out in this bill relating to the national electricity law and the national electricity rules support the clear and efficient operation of the market and reaffirm this government's commitment to working cooperatively with other jurisdictions to achieve better electricity outcomes for all. The Ministerial Council on Energy has embarked on a program of nationally agreed reforms to strengthen and improve the operation of the national electricity market. These reforms include the new national electricity law and the national electricity rules, which commenced in Queensland on 1 July 2005.

The national electricity law and rules are implemented in Queensland through two pieces of legislation: the Electricity—National Scheme (Queensland) Act 1997 and the Electricity Act 1994. The bill makes minor consequential amendments to these acts to reflect the commencement of the new national electricity law and rules. I must emphasise that these amendments are not required to give any effect to the new national electricity law and rules in Queensland. As already mentioned, they commenced on 1 July this year.

Likewise, the amendments do not change the regulatory obligations placed on participants in the national electricity market. Rather, the amendments will simply remove some redundant definitions and update the two acts so that they are consistent with the terminology and structure of the new national electricity law and rules. This includes recognising the two newly created regulatory bodies for the national energy market—the Australian Energy Market Commission and the Australian Energy Regulator.

As Queensland prepares for the introduction of full retail contestability from July 2007, it is timely to remember the benefits which have accrued to Queensland through our participation in the national electricity market. This market was established in 1998 under the state Labor government with the aim of improving reliability of supply, encouraging better uses of resources and increasing investment and competition in the energy sector. Since that time, \$5 billion or 75 per cent of new generation investment in the national electricity market has occurred in Queensland, making this state a leader in power generation in Australia.

Such investment has provided the state with the generation capacity not only to meet its own needs but also to export electricity to other jurisdictions through the national electricity grid, thus creating a valuable revenue source. Continuing investment in projects such as the proposed 450 megawatt gas-fired Braemar power station and the 750 megawatt Kogan Creek power station will further enhance Queensland's generation capabilities, enabling it to meet expected increases in electricity demand in this state as well as continue to sell excess electricity outside Queensland. Participation in the national electricity market has also benefited Queensland through lower wholesale electricity prices as well as lower retail electricity prices, which are the third-lowest in Australia for residential customers. These amendments support Queensland's participation in the national electricity market and reflect this government's continued commitment to delivering a better deal for electricity consumers across the state.

As I said before, as a member of the energy committee I am very proud today to announce some of the Pumicestone network initiatives. Energex is involved currently in the construction of a number of capital projects to increase supply and reliability to the network, and these major projects include the following. Energex will commission a new substation at Ningi by mid-2006 at a total estimated cost of \$6 million. I am told that this will service a further 5,000 customers. This substation will boost network capacity with a 15 megavolt amp transformer and improve reliability of supply by establishing three new 11kV feeders. Energex will upgrade the Caboolture bulk supply substation that supplies Bribie Island by May 2006, and this will involve replacing a 40 megavolt amp transformer with an 80 megavolt transformer at an established cost of \$3.5 million.

Also in the Pumicestone electorate there are a number of operating works going on, some of which have been completed. Prestorm patrols of the high-voltage overhead network by car and helicopter were completed in 2005. Work generated from patrols is being rectified on a priority basis, and that is an ongoing maintenance program. Thermoscanning of the high-voltage overhead network was completed in August 2005 and vegetation maintenance work, which is also an ongoing program, is

performed on a 2.5-year cycle or on a needs basis. The scheduled work in the electorate of Pumicestone will probably finish in the Bribie Island zone in June 2007, and the Toorbul Point zone is 70 per cent complete.

I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Energy, the Hon. John Mickel, and his staff for listening to the number of representations that I have made on behalf of constituents to ensure that we have enough energy to continue to service the electorate to keep up with this fast-growing area. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (5.08 pm): In rising to speak to this legislation, I want to put on the record my appreciation for the opportunity to be briefed by the minister's staff the other day and for their very willing participation in the questions and answers during the briefings.

I do not believe that this legislation would cause a great deal of concern within my electorate. A number of the amendments remove the duplication of a sunset clause. A number of expirations after five years were put in place into the Electricity Act 1994. One of the intentions of this bill is to remove them and make the act subject to the Statutory Instruments Act, which has a review and sunset time of 10 years. In that sense, it is more of a streamlining than anything else.

The other amendments that are contained in the bill appeared, from the explanations that we were given, to be very much machinery. They are either consequential to changes in relation to the Electricity—National Scheme (Queensland) Act 1997 or consequential to other changes in relation to the national electricity market. However, given the nature of this legislation, it would be remiss of me not to pass on to the minister some concerns that have been raised regularly in my community. Those are issues on which I have consulted with the minister or his staff. However, I want to place them on the record for the benefit of those constituents who continue to be frustrated.

The minister and the Premier have made announcements about increasing staff and improving maintenance and capital works in the energy sector, and that is certainly welcomed. However, because of the problem of recruiting suitably qualified staff, at least in my electorate, connection delays continue to be a source of frustration. Whilst I acknowledge that there is a recruitment program, those frustrations are no less real for constituents who are waiting for power either to domestic connections or to their businesses.

The other equally problematic and recurring frustration has been the cost of connections. I had a discussion with Mike, and I think it was Peter—

Mr Mickel: No, it is Mark.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I thank the minister.

Mr Mickel: He hates being called Mike.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I thank the minister for the warning. I refer to the additional cost that landowners face. This is a bit of an historical as well as a philosophical argument, and I guess it is not one on which we are going to find any shared position after the discussions today. However, I want to put the issues on the record because they have been and continue to be frustrating to the community.

The minister's representatives have outlined the philosophy or the policy that says that if a person lives on, say, acreage in a rural residential zoning or the like, they have chosen a particular lifestyle and there could be an increase in the cost of having power connected to their allotment, particularly if it is a stand alone connection, and that a pensioner at Woodridge should not be required to cross subsidise that connection. That may be true where the decision to buy acreage or to buy out of town was made on a purely lifestyle basis. However, not just in rural and regional Queensland but even in Brisbane and the south-east corner, people may decide to relocate to a bare block in a more rural area not because of a lifestyle choices but because of cost.

We had a situation in Gladstone that I am sure the government is aware of where the cost of housing escalated markedly. Quite a number of people bought out of town or outside small villages, or they bought small blocks of land that were available because that was the only way that they could afford to purchase somewhere to live. The option of staying in a rental property in town was beyond their means as well.

So the argument that a pensioner at Woodridge should not be cross subsidising someone who is purchasing a rural block as a lifestyle choice and should, therefore, be able to accommodate the cost of connection, whether that is \$10,000 or \$40,000, does not ring true consistently across the spectrum of our community. I know that a lot of people buy out of town simply because they can get a block of land and build a modest home for the price of just the block of land in an urban environment.

Additionally, a matter has been raised concerning a property owner who owned a double block and had the block cut in two. Power was already connected to the larger block via the stub connection—the little power box. He applied for connection to the subdivided block, which was 100 metres away. The cost will be \$11,000, as the ability to connect to the closest power point was unavailable because that particular point lacked sufficient capacity. Therefore, the power for the second subdivided block had to come half a kilometre or so from another point and that is where the cost was incurred. The minister's

office has said that that is not an isolated case, and I am sure it is not. The frustration is that the circumstances are beyond the applicant's control and yet they are being asked to carry the additional costs due to the limitation of the supply system.

The other issue that I wanted to raise, and one on which I have received a very good hearing from the minister's representatives, is the area of consultation. I acknowledge that a review is happening already within the minister's department about the way consultation is done and with whom. I have heard of a case where a 66 kVA line was going through a rural block—it was from myself to the member for Toowoomba North—from their dividing fence. They were not consulted at all and their house was only a number of metres inside the fence. We made representations on their behalf because they were quite disturbed by the large concrete poles and the 66 kVA line that was going to be installed. An engineer with not a lot of personality, if I can put it that way, told them fairly bluntly that because they were not directly affected, it was not a requirement that they be consulted.

I have to say that having made that harsh comment about one particular officer, other officers and the minister's permanent staff whom we deal with in my electorate are wonderful. With all of the constituent issues that we raise, we find that they are more than willing to be as helpful as possible and cooperative.

Mr Mickel: Let's not get too carried away.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Unfortunately, in this case the level of concern and frustration was reasonably high. The woman was due to have a baby and was obviously worried about things such as the electromagnetic field, which is an argument for another time. However, the first contact that we had with the minister's department was rather unfortunate and certainly less than productive.

The minister's officers have said that the consultation process is in train for review and that those who should be consulted, that is, the list of affected persons, is being reviewed and, where appropriate, a broader net will be cast. I would welcome that change to the process, because if someone's home is near a fence line, what happens outside that fence can affect their visual amenity and quality of life, even though it is not on their property. I welcome those changes.

I bring those matters to the attention of the minister because they are recurring frustrations for people in my electorate. I look forward to further cooperation from the minister's staff.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (5.18 pm): It is a pleasure to rise to support the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill. Again I congratulate the minister for the continuing reform process that is driving the energy growth in Queensland which is, of course, much needed due to our demand growth. Energy demand growth in Queensland is running at a bit over three per cent per year, but thankfully the government is investing very heavily in this most important sector and making sure that we exceed that demand growth.

It is a particular pleasure to speak on this bill today because I note that AGL has just announced that it will be building a new gas-fired power station in Townsville. Along with the honourable member for Capalaba, I was delighted to be able to travel to Papua New Guinea with the minister and some representatives of AGL to do everything that can be done to continue to encourage the eventual success of the PNG-Queensland gas pipeline. That will be an enormously beneficial project for Queensland and PNG. People on both sides of the Torres Strait are united in wanting to see that project go ahead.

AGL has announced that it will build a new gas-fired power station at Townsville, a 370 megawatt station, which will take about 20 petajoules per annum of gas. That is great news for Townsville and, in particular, great news for north Queensland, which is growing so strongly in its energy demand. These sorts of investments are very necessary. I mentioned that Queensland is growing by a tick over three per cent per year. The demand for energy in north Queensland's electricity consumption is expected to grow by 7.8 per cent per year over the next two years, which is extraordinarily high growth.

The encouragement which the Queensland government, through its commitment to the national electricity market, has given to private sector providers to come in and build these very important and very expensive stations—I note the new AGL plant in Townsville will cost \$350 million—has been a significant part of AGL's decision. I was pleased to be able to have some lengthy discussions with Deane Russell and other representatives of AGL on a recent trip to PNG. Their commitment to the growth and supply of the Queensland market and, indeed, the entire national market is very welcome and to be encouraged.

The Queensland government is, of course, heavily investing in the national electricity market and in our infrastructure and nowhere more so than in my part of the world—Hervey Bay. Hervey Bay has two very significant projects under way—a \$3 million upgrade of the Torquay substation and a new \$11 million substation at Point Vernon which is under construction. As well as that, a new 132 kilovolt feeder line is being mapped out currently to try to keep up with Hervey Bay's growth. I welcome the forward planning by Ergon for Hervey Bay and Wide Bay's very strong growth.

As I said, the Queensland government is certainly doing everything in its power, if I can borrow a phrase from Ergon, to make sure that we keep up with the demand. It is a welcome change for Queensland to have a government that is committed to keeping up with the demand for electricity supply here. It is not something that happened in the Borbidge years. In the two years of the last National-Liberal government it spent \$590 million each year on capital works across the network. I think it is worth bearing in mind that this year the Beattie government will be spending \$2.275 billion on capital works across the network as opposed to the \$590 million a year that the Borbidge-Sheldon government spent in its day. Criticisms from the other side of the House about this government's commitment to supplying electricity throughout the length and breadth of Queensland ring very hollow indeed when we consider the commitment of this government.

I congratulate the minister for this legislation. There is still some confusion in the community about the benefits of being in a national electricity market. Residents from my electorate contact me and say, 'Electricity is a homogeneous product. It looks the same when you get it. How can it be sold cheaper if it is competitive?' The reality is that there is no doubt that the national electricity market reforms have driven extraordinary competitive advantages for people in regional Queensland and Queensland generally, with wholesale prices tumbling due to that increased competition, with better service and with bundling products and services in innovative ways.

Queensland is in the very fortunate position of leading the nation in energy growth, leading the nation in building new supply and infrastructure and being in a position to supply excess energy to southern states that have perhaps not been quite so forthright in recognising the need to keep up with that demand. I commend the minister for this further piece of sensible and necessary legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (5.24 pm): I am thrilled to rise in the House today in support of this fine piece of legislation, the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill. In recording my support for this legislation, I thank the minister, his staff and Energex for the fine work they have been doing in the Indooroopilly electorate. Over the last couple of years Energex has spent a small fortune on electrical upgrades in my electorate. We have spent money on the Sherwood substation, the Indooroopilly substation, the Toowong substation and the Taringa substation. The minister also visited my electorate to watch a couple of kilometres of underground cabling being laid, linking the Toowong substation to the Taringa substation. My view of undergrounding electrical cables is that it is the right way to go. I understand fully that it is difficult and expensive to retrofit suburbs, but I am absolutely thrilled that we are taking this very smart step to underground the major electrical links between substations in my part of the world.

I have noticed as well over a period of time that the member for Moggill makes many criticisms of the electrical service that he receives in his electorate. I want to say for the benefit of the member for Moggill, for the benefit of the House and also for the benefit of my constituents that, as part of this government, I fought from day one to make sure that the government understood the need to fund electrical upgrades of substations and cables in my electorate. The government has delivered on that. The government has spent millions and millions of dollars upgrading the electrical infrastructure in the electorate of Indooroopilly.

I have to say that there are no significant complaints about the service that my constituents get from Energex. I can understand when there is a nasty storm and a few trees go down that people will be upset that the power goes out, but we at this stage have no significant infrastructure problems in the Indooroopilly electorate. The member for Moggill has a view that he does have infrastructure problems in his electorate.

Mr Lucas: Mainly him.

Mr LEE: Yes, I take that interjection from the minister. I say this to the good folk of the Moggill electorate: a member of this government can stand up in this place and talk about millions of dollars that have been delivered for Energex infrastructure, he can talk about the great service he gets from Energex, he can talk about undergrounding of electrical cables and he can talk about the strong voice that he has in this government. All a member of the opposition can say is, 'Things aren't going our way.' The question I would be asking if I were a constituent in the electorate of Moggill is: what has the current member done? But, more than that, what did the previous Liberal Party member for Moggill do to make sure that the constituents were looked after? I think that is a very sad indictment of the service that the Liberal Party has given to that electorate.

Another point I wish to make is about the types of homes that people are building. I have a serious concern about the airconditioning requirements when building in a certain way so that people can live in the conditions that they want to live in. I think we should be much smarter in how we build the homes that we live in. I have come to accept that there is no accounting for people's taste when it comes to what sorts of homes they build and what sorts of cars they buy. The fact is that when we live in a tropical climate like Queensland, where we have high temperatures, people are absolutely stupid to build a home that is not going to be appropriately ventilated and therefore is going to require airconditioning. One of the greatest mistakes in planning for the south-east corner is that we continue to accept that people can build homes that require large amounts of airconditioning.

Another point a constituent made to me recently—and I think it is worth bearing in mind—is the sheer number of computers that people now have in their private homes. There was a day when a family would own one computer and it would be shared by the parents and the kids. What is happening now is that when they buy a new computer they do not get rid of the old one. So, over time, families with three and four kids end up with three, four or five computers. When homework is being done, all computers are being used by all the children. That is fine and that is appropriate. The problem is that it puts immense pressure on the electrical infrastructure in certain communities. The day of having only one computer is gone. Families now have three, four and five computers. I note that we have the same problem when people buy a new fridge. They never get rid of the old one—it gets put in the garage and is used as a beer fridge and the like. We are using more and more electrical appliances that just were not used many years ago.

I want to finish on this point, and it concerns fridge manufacture. I notice there is a trend now when people purchase fridges to get that retro look in the design of the fridge. The one thing that is missing, and the one thing that 30 or 40 years ago was an integral part of fridge design, is insulation in the fridge. What we do now to stop condensation forming on the outside of a fridge, because it is cold on the inside, is we heat the outside slightly so that condensation does not form. Forty years ago we had insulated fridges. That is why they were big, bulky things to look at. It is using an immense amount of electricity in every single home in Queensland to keep our milk cool and to keep our food cool, because we are heating the outside of the fridge. I think when we buy fridges we should be saying to the manufacturers, 'We would like a fridge that uses less electricity.' A way of doing that is to go back to the way it was 20 to 40 years ago when fridges were appropriately insulated. They may not look as nice but they certainly do the job a lot better and use less electricity. I am thrilled to support this legislation.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (5.30 pm): Prior to the last election, 4,000 homes in my electorate were without power for up to 20 hours and some for even longer. This followed a devastating storm which ripped out trees by the roots and caused havoc everywhere. Energex did not have the capacity to cope with the number of calls it was receiving from consumers who were asking when their power would be restored. People were calling my office saying that they were frustrated with the message service and the lack of information provided through a recorded message. All they wanted to know was when their power would be restored so that they could make arrangements regarding the preservation of frozen food which was slowly thawing.

All of these issues were reported to the office of the then minister for energy, and all stops went out to repair lines, clean up debris and to restore power to people's homes. Shortly after, I encouraged residents to make submissions to the review about the issues they faced during the storm. A number of suburbs in my electorate were found to be severely affected by power problems, particularly during the storm season, and subject to frequent blackouts and brownouts over a long period.

I am pleased that the Minister for Energy took the findings of the review very seriously and conscientiously put a plan in place to improve the services to power consumers in my area. To that effect, Energex and Powerlink Queensland are jointly building a new substation at Monier Road, Sumner. Present demand in the area is met from substations at Wacol, Jindalee, Darra and Moggill. The new substation will augment these existing substations and provide for increased flexibility to cater for future residential, commercial and industrial growth, and simultaneously increase reliability.

The Sumner substation will supply the localities of Sumner, Darra, Middle Park, Jamboree Heights, Sinnamon Park, Seventeen Mile Rocks, Oxley, Darra, Westlake and Riverhills. The project includes the insulation of two new 60-megavolt amp power transformers to boost network capacity and connection of nine new 11,000-volt high-voltage lines radiating from the Sumner substation to connect to the existing network.

Earthworks started at the new substation site on 5 September this year and are due for completion in December 2005. The site's civil works are due for completion by February 2006, with new power transformers and modular buildings due for delivery in early March 2006. The project is due for completion and commissioning in the second half of 2006. In fact, the Minister for Energy and I will pay a visit to the new site in a couple of weeks time.

Queensland's energy sector is undergoing a period of consolidation and growth. To support this process, the government is working to refine and continuously improve the operation of the energy sector for the benefit of consumers and energy industry participants. The amendments do not involve any major policy issues and serve to finetune existing legislation so it can be administered in a clear, consistent and efficient way. These reforms aim to improve economic regulation and governance, and encourage increased investment and competition in the energy sector.

The amendments in this bill are not required to give any effect to the new national electricity law and rules. They have already commenced in Queensland on 1 July 2005 under the national legislative scheme, which supports the national electricity market. The amendments in the bill will simply remove superfluous definitions and update the two acts to be consistent with the terminology and structure of the new national electricity law and rules.

In the case of the national electricity market, Queensland's participation has delivered significant benefits to this state including a reduction in wholesale electricity prices and improved opportunities for electricity infrastructure investment. These investment opportunities have seen Queensland lead the way in the construction of power stations such as the 750-megawatt facility at Kogan Creek. Developments such as these, including the new Sumner substation on Monier Road, will not only help to meet the electricity needs of Queensland's growing economy but also allow excess power to be exported to other states, thereby bringing further economic benefit to Queensland. I congratulate the minister for his actions to improve the electricity industry for consumers in Queensland and I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (5.35 pm), in reply: I would like to thank all honourable members who participated in the debate. The member for Hervey Bay, who chairs my committee, made an announcement that I know is of concern to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I will share it with the House because some of the changes here deal with gas.

I have advised by media release that the Australian Gas Light Company today announced plans to develop a new gas-fired power station in Townsville. The 370-megawatt base load power station will be supplied with gas from AGL's wholesale gas portfolio. It is expected to consume around 20 petajoules per annum. The timing for construction of the \$350 million power station will be driven by the expanding requirements of the north Queensland energy market. The planned commencement date is in 2009, coinciding with the arrival of Papua New Guinea gas into Townsville. I know that the members for Mundingburra and Townsville and you, Mr Deputy Speaker, will be interested in that announcement because I know for far-north Queensland that has been an issue.

I also want to record my thanks to the members for Hervey Bay and Capalaba, who accompanied me on a visit to Papua New Guinea, where I met my friend the Deputy Prime Minister, Sir Moi Avel. Honourable members may be interested to know that Sir Moi has put out a statement this afternoon welcoming the AGL announcement. I am happy to share that with the House.

Let me come to the specifics of some of the points made by the members. I think the member for Hervey Bay covered the amount of investment by Energex this year. I had the pleasure last Friday of announcing the new summer preparedness strategy for Energex. I want to thank all the work force who have been involved in preparing that plan. They have of course been faced with those challenges that come with a growing state—growth in population. I think last month alone Energex did 2½ thousand connections. In some months it has been up as high as 3,000. They have had growth in industrial load and, as some members have indicated, growth in airconditioning.

Those are challenges that are growing pains of a growing state. Nevertheless, they are challenges that you like to have. I would rather have a robust economy. I would rather have people moving to Queensland. If, with all of that, we enjoy a better standard of living and people are putting in airconditioning because of the changes in housing designs and inner-city development, then we have to have a system that is there to meet that and meet those challenges.

The honourable member for Gladstone made a point that I think is salient and is one that I know is affecting not just the electricity industry but also local governments in some mining towns and mining companies, and that is a skills shortage. This is why the connections in Gladstone are slower than they should be. It is difficult attracting skilled staff, but this is one problem that we have with the boom times in some of those regional towns. I was in Emerald on the Monday of last week and the problem there was one of attracting people into local governments. Local governments have difficulty retaining skilled staff because they can get jobs in other areas.

I mention to the House, because it was raised by the member for Gladstone and I am happy to address it, that Energex and Ergon are taking positive steps to ensure that they have a skilled work force. Energex has made significant progress towards the recruitment of additional field staff since 2004. It has appointed 211 additional field staff since July 2004. It ran recruitment campaigns overseas. Last Friday I met two of the people who had come from the United Kingdom. They said they came here because they enjoyed the climate and the beer, but there was no way in the world I could get them to recant on the fact that England had won the Ashes. Nevertheless, I am hoping that in time we can convert them.

The problem is just as profound for Ergon. It has been working hard since 2002. Ergon has increased the size of its apprenticeship program from 100 to around 250. After the 2005 midyear intake, a further intake of 80 apprentices is planned for February 2006, so it is increasing its staff.

One of the things I am very pleased to announce and advise the House of is the engineering scholarships that the GOCs and a number of private sector firms are offering. When we were in Rockhampton we announced that three people had won bursaries from Central Queensland University. I announced some last week when I visited Powerlink. This is an attempt to attract people—graduates—into engineering, particularly electrical engineering.

The member for Gladstone mentioned a fair point about consultation when electricity infrastructure is particularly going near rural properties. I think there is a review under way with that. I thank the officers from my department who met the member for Gladstone. The point she raises is a fair one. It is one that I hope we can address in time.

The member for Hervey Bay mentioned the NEM. One of the aspects of the national electricity market, around which this bill focuses, is the reduction in wholesale prices for electricity that has occurred since Queensland came into the NEM. In both electricity and gas the reduction has been around about 50 per cent in those wholesale prices. That has put Queensland in a far more competitive position. That is why we are seeing the great investment occurring in Queensland at the moment, particularly in central Queensland. That is why 75 per cent of the investment in the national electricity market has occurred in Queensland.

I want to take one small issue with the member for Callide. He mentioned the role of the ACCC. I, for one, will not lament the passing of the ACCC. I say that for this reason. I am being very charitable; it is quarter to 6 on a Thursday night. I will mention this to the member. If the member accepts the proposition that Queensland is a low cost energy producer, that Kogan Creek will be the lowest cost power station when it comes online in 2007, 27 kilometres from the national electricity interconnector, then the issue that we are joined in is that that interconnector is constrained. It is constrained in northern New South Wales because of the high growth between Kempsey and Armidale. I am happy to supply the member with these figures, but it will be seen that in some of the winter months, when we had the ability to send more electricity south, that interconnector bound at 1078 megawatts. Right now we have an ability to supply a bigger southern market and cannot. We have had the devil's own job trying to get the ACCC to recognise that fact. It has changed the economic test. I welcome that. However, I am of the belief that the ACCC rulings in this have encouraged an underinvestment in transmission. As Queenslanders, we would be concerned about that if we want to enlarge that pie. Forty per cent of our generation is in the private sector. I think it is in both our interests to attract further investment in that. To do that there has to be a national electricity market that is truly national. That is, we cannot have a situation where electricity is bound up in those winter months.

I do not want to be jingoistic about this and say that Queensland will always be the winner. Of course there will be a problem from time to time in a generator up here; that is the way it goes. We then want the ability for that electricity to come up to Queensland. I am going to get these percentages mixed up, but I think in the national electricity market we can supply the national market certainly in the high eighties, maybe early nineties, per cent of the time. Those are the figures at stake.

As I said, if the member wants the figures on winter months I am happy to share them with the member. They tell the story. In praising the ACCC, I also want to congratulate Steve Edwell, a former Queensland— I hope he comes back to Queensland one day—for being the new head of the AER. We are hoping to get a better go out of the AER through Mr Edwell than I think we got under the ACCC.

With those few comments I hope I have addressed the concerns of people. I want to stress that these are minor amendments to the national electricity act. Nevertheless, they are very important because we are part of a process. I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in Detail

Clauses 1 to 39, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Bill read a third time.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 6 October (see p. 3334).

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (5.47 pm): I rise this afternoon to give my support to the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As the honourable minister for environmental and local government, Desley Boyle, outlined in her second reading of this bill, this bill is aimed at amending several pieces of legislation including the Integrated Planning Act 1997, the Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995, the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 as well as the Forestry Act 1959. Each of these acts is of extreme importance to us sustaining, maintaining and protecting our Smart State's natural environment.

Given the time constraint and the complex issues involved with each of these acts, it would be fruitless for me to try to cover them all in a detailed manner. In saying this, I do not intend to trivialise the importance of any of these acts. In fact, I have no doubt in my mind that each of these pieces of legislation is extremely important to ensure the best possible outcome for this state's environmental conservation and management issues with regard to protecting a sustainable future for our children.

I would like to make a few comments on the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Environmental Protection Act. It is a known fact that this government is transferring state forests to national parks to maximise protection of our natural environment and minimise the impacts on the forests to keep them in as natural a state as possible. Research in Australian national parks shows that at times horses cause degradation of fragile ecosystems in at least four ways—their feet trample vegetation and erode steep slopes and waterways; they feed on shrubs and grasses, some of them rare and threatened; their faeces spread weeds and insects; and they carry on their hooves, and spread, root rotting fungus.

There is an obvious need for horse riding in natural areas to be in a controlled environment in order to minimise degradation to the environment. At this point in time this bill provides for the continued access of horse riders to some future national parks in south-east Queensland up until 24 November 2013 whilst alternative trails are identified.

This delivers the government's promise to recreational horse riders to minimise impacts while alternative trails are being identified and developed. This government recognises that horse riding is such an important feature of the lifestyle of many communities in Queensland. This fact is reflected by the recent unveiling of new horse-riding trail networks for Beaudesert and the Gold Coast, which were the second in a series of world-class horse-riding trail networks that this government has planned for south-east Queensland.

Ultimately, this government is striving to achieve a win-win situation for all stakeholders in this area of environmental conservation. It is clearly our aim to implement appropriate legislation that will both protect the conservation values of forests and parks and provide the diversity of recreational experiences that mix with the community needs and desires.

Horse riders themselves have already had a say before the trails are finally put in place. There has been extensive consultation with the community. I am sure that a lot of horse riders are perhaps not entirely pleased with the outcome of the consultation. I ask that they be patient with the government and that they work with the government on those initiatives. The government promised to review those initiatives and see whether they are actually working the way we intended.

To achieve this standard of forest and park management, our systems need to balance social, economic and cultural issues within ecological constraints while maintaining options for the future. The government continues to support initiatives of this nature. In my opinion, we have gone out of our way to ensure that the comments of horse riders are listened to. With those few words, I commend this bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Reeves, adjourned.

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS ORGANISATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 4 October (see p. 3165).

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.52 pm): I am pleased to make a contribution to the consideration of the State Development and Public Works Organisation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2005. The purpose of the bill, as listed in the explanatory notes, is to seek to update and clarify certain provisions about environmental coordination for significant projects and the framework by which the Coordinator-General evaluates the environmental effects of those projects.

It has always been an area of concern for the proponents of projects in Queensland to ensure that the necessary environmental studies and evaluations are done as quickly as possible. It is in all of our interests. I think every member of this House wants to see these environmental considerations done properly. The environmental effects of these projects need to be properly examined, properly studied and properly evaluated before the projects proceed. It is in all of our interests for those evaluations and studies to be done in a timely manner and in a way that does not unnecessarily hold up the project and allows for the Coordinator-General and the government to give the proponents of those projects every opportunity to bring their project to fruition.

The proposed amendments in this bill put in place mechanisms to ensure the timely completion of those environmental assessments and ensure the construction of projects proceeds soon after the

Coordinator-General completes his or her evaluation. The bill also seeks to assist planning for the provision of linear infrastructure across the state by amendments to the existing state development area provisions to provide that the Coordinator-General can take land for multiuser infrastructure corridors.

The bill also seeks to improve the environmental assessment of significant projects by responding to changes proposed by the proponents and providing for the timely completion of environmental impact statements. The bill also seeks to ensure that a whole-of-government response is provided only to those projects of such significance to the state that they warrant facilitation through the significant project environmental impact statement framework. Projects not facilitated through the significant project framework can be facilitated through normal development assessment processes.

The bill also seeks to ensure that proponents commence a use approved under an approved development scheme for a state development area within four years of the approval being given. It also provides some links to the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004 and the Environmental Protection Act to enable the Coordinator-General to coordinate the assessment and facilitation of significant projects which require leases or licences. Some minor amendments are also required to the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act as a consequence of amendments to other acts.

This bill will certainly be supported by the opposition. The whole concept of the declaration of significant projects is something that the opposition has always supported. It is something to which all members of this House should lend their support. There are projects that come up from time to time—there are projects on the public agenda now—that obviously are significant projects to the state. There needs to be mechanisms in place to ensure that, for the benefit of all Queenslanders, those projects can proceed in a timely manner—that they are not held up unnecessarily by people who maliciously try to hold them up or simply because of unnecessary bureaucracy.

This bill seeks to provide mechanisms to allow the government to give the proponents of those projects every opportunity to bring their project to fruition. It does not, I believe, provide an opportunity to short-cut the processes or to do a less than thorough assessment of the environmental impacts of those projects, but it allows the government and the Coordinator-General in particular to ensure that those projects get a fair run.

The benefit of those significant projects is something that all Queenslanders share in. It is in the interests of all Queenslanders that we continue to develop those significant projects right across the state. There are some great examples of projects that have been developed as significant projects under the department of state development. The concept probably had its genesis in the previous Labor government before the last election when the department of state development had a more major role—if that is the right word—than it does today. I remember when Jim Elder, the former minister, was first made the minister for state development. He christened the department of state development the 'department of grunt'. Essentially, that sums up what I think the department of state development should be and the original intent of the department.

It was envisaged that the department of state development would have an overarching role to ensure that these projects did not get tied up in a buck-passing exercise between the range of departments that are involved in the assessment and facilitation of these major projects. In relation to any sort of major project of the size that would qualify it to be a project of state significance, a range of departments are going to be involved. A range of departments will need to make the assessments that will be necessary during the planning and facilitation of that particular project.

We need an overarching coordinating entity to bring those separate departments, and the processes they are responsible for, together into some sort of sequential order to ensure that one is not held up unnecessarily by another. Unfortunately, all too often that happens with bureaucracies. All too often it is a buck-passing exercise. I do not say that maliciously. Sometimes it is difficult to establish who is responsible for what, and which particular step needs to be taken in which particular order. It can lead to major projects becoming bogged down in what is euphemistically referred to as 'red tape'.

We supported the setting up of the department of state development to ensure that an overarching coordinating role was filled and all of those departments were brought together and coordinated in such a way that projects could proceed. To that extent, the position of Coordinator-General was made part of that department.

Seeing the operations of the government now from an outsider's view—members of this House would appreciate that I do not see the internal workings of the government—from my perspective, it appears that that role has been taken over, to some extent, in the current government by the Premier's department. It does not appear, from my perspective, that the department of state development has the same role it had when Jim Elder was the minister. It does not appear that the department of state development has the same coordinating role it had when Jim Elder was the minister.

The 'department of grunt' does not appear to have much grunt anymore. That grunt now seems to be exercised by the Premier's department. I am not sure that that is a particularly good thing, although it is probably just as well that the grunt is being exercised from somewhere. It is probably just as well that there is an entity somewhere within government that can bring together the diverse range of departments that are involved in the assessment and facilitation of a significant project.

However, I think that the original concept that was put in place, and which worked well under Jim Elder as the minister, was the better model. The Coordinator-General was part of the department of state development and, therefore, provided something of a balance to the Premier's department and Treasury, the two other major entities within government. The model, as I understood it, involved those three major entities. They balanced each other and coordinated the real power of the government.

From my perspective, that system is now out of balance. It appears to me that the role that was envisaged for the department of state development has been taken over by the Premier's department. Basically, only two major entities now exist in the government—the Premier's department and Treasury. That is reinforced by the fact that this bill was actually introduced into parliament by the Premier. That, in itself, illustrates the extent to which the minister for state development has been downgraded in terms of priority.

I take this opportunity, now that we have a relatively new minister for state development, to say that I hope the new minister for state development can exercise some of the influence and authority exercised by Jim Elder when he was the minister for state development, and turn that department back into the 'grunt department' or the 'department of grunt'. Under successive ministers—the ministers who followed Jim Elder—that was certainly not the case. Under Minister McGrady, the department certainly lost a lot of its authority and influence in government. I think that Minister Barton held the portfolio for some period during those years when the influence of the department was eroded.

I look forward to the department being taken on by the member for South Brisbane, the Deputy Premier. That is the level of government where the department should sit—with a very senior minister. As it now sits with the Deputy Premier, a wonderful opportunity exists to re-establish a balance at the top level of government between the Premier's department, Treasury and the department of state development.

It is just as well that the elements contained in this bill are being put forward by the government. We know from the Premier's second reading speech that there is a reason for these provisions being put forward. A number of projects have been and will be declared as projects of state significance which will benefit from the provisions in this bill. Hopefully, this bill will assist in making those projects a reality.

The bill can assist in making those projects a reality by streamlining the different parts of the assessment process and ensuring that they run in parallel rather than waiting for one particular part of the process to be completed before another part of the process can begin. That has been a frustration for proponents of these projects in the past. That frustration comes about because of the sequential nature of the assessment process. Proponents of a project had to complete one particular step before they could begin another, and so on, through a number of steps. The lead time for these projects then became unacceptably long. The provisions in this bill allow the assessment process to be carried out sequentially; a number of parts of that process to happen in parallel. That is particularly welcome and I think will make a significant difference to the delivery of major projects in this state that we all want to come to completion.

In my electorate, a particular example exists of the difficulties involved in delivering major proposals. I would be remiss if I did not mention it, once again, in the House tonight. In my electorate, for some years now—probably 50 or 60 years, in reality—probably since the days of the Goss government, the proposal for the Nathan Dam on the Dawson River has been looked to by everybody in central Queensland as a major project. It is a major infrastructure project that will deliver a whole range of benefits to central Queensland. It will enable the development of a range of associated industries across-the-board, from irrigated agriculture through to industrial development, and it will allow the development of mining projects to take advantage of the wonderful deposits of coal that exist throughout central Queensland.

The dam project was a serious proposal of the Goss government, even though it has been talked about, dreamed about and studied for some 60, 70 or 80 years. It is a wonderful natural dam site. There are a number of wonderful natural dam sites. A great opportunity exists to build a major water storage facility on what is a major river system and to provide a lot of water. It was a serious proposal of the Goss government. It certainly had our support then and it certainly has had our support ever since. However, the project has been held up.

Despite having support from both sides of the House, the project is still a long way from being developed. It has gotten to the stage now where the supply of that water is having a critical effect on the development of the whole of central Queensland. The project is very much supported by local governments in the area. Certainly the Banana Shire Council has been a long-time supporter of the project and the current mayor, Glenn Churchill, never fails to mention it to me every time that I see him, and I do that fairly often. Every time I have contact with him or any other councillors from the Banana Shire Council they raise the issue of the Nathan Dam and once again reinforce the benefits that it will have for central Queensland and the Banana shire in particular. It is expected that people like Glenn Churchill, as the mayor of the shire that will probably benefit the most—or probably suffers the most from the fact that the dam project has been held up—will continue to lobby representatives such as me to try to break the logjam that has developed around the construction of that project.

The project has been held up now for some years. I do not want to get into a blame game as to whose fault it is, but I know that I have spoken to a succession of government ministers about why the project is held up and what we need to do to get the project moving. I know that I first spoke about it to former minister Jim Elder when he was the minister for state development when I was first elected to this parliament. I remember him expressing his frustration to me in a very colourful way back then, six or seven years ago, about why he could not get the project to move as fast as he thought it should. I remember having an almost identical discussion with Tom Barton when he was the minister some years later. He expressed the same frustration to me, in an equally colourful fashion, I might add, about why the project remained stalled.

In recent years it has been stalled by actions that have been taken in the Federal Court by third-party groups. They are quite ridiculous actions, in my view, but they are actions which have been taken according to due legal process and which have continued to frustrate the project. I remember asking a question during the regional parliamentary sittings in Rockhampton of the current minister for natural resources about the provision of water infrastructure in central Queensland. Although I did not mention the Nathan Dam specifically, it was certainly something that the minister was aware of. The Premier came into the parliament the next day and made a ministerial statement about the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act introduced into the Commonwealth parliament as part of a trade-off with the Democrats for their support for the GST legislation. It has proven to be something that, while it was introduced in haste, has been used—or misused—by third parties to frustrate this particular project.

I remember the Premier said in his ministerial statement to the parliament that morning in Rockhampton that he was looking for bipartisan support to have something done about that Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act. I indicated at the time that I would be only too pleased to provide that bipartisan support and make some recommendations or make some approaches to our federal counterparts to try to have something done about it. I want to take the opportunity to reiterate that support in the House tonight.

I want to ensure that members of the government understand that there is bipartisan support, that we will certainly support any approach that is made by the Queensland government to the federal government to do something about that particular piece of legislation to ensure that other major projects such as this cannot end up in a mire of litigation at a federal level and that there is a provision there for the elected government of the state, be it the current elected government or some other future elected government, to make the decision—if the elected government decides that the particular project is a valid one and is needed by the people of Queensland and the economy of Queensland—that assessments can be made and the project is able to proceed and that the elected government of the state is able to ensure that a major project of state significance can proceed for the benefit of the people of the state.

That should be a philosophy—a basic belief—that every member of this House subscribes to, because essentially that is why we are elected. That is what we are here to do. We are here to make that decision, and we are here to make that decision on behalf of all Queensland, because we come from all parts of Queensland. Every Queenslanders is represented in this House and that decision-making role is ours. We should be able to make that decision. No doubt we will disagree about those decisions at different times, but it is part of the mandate of an elected government to make those decisions. If the current government makes a decision that a particular infrastructure project is advantageous to the state and is the best project at the current time, the elected government should be able to ensure that that project can proceed.

That certainly has not been the case with the Nathan Dam project that I use as an example. I believe that the current government does support that project, even though I could probably argue for some time that it probably has not done enough at different times to try to undo the logjam in which that project is mired. Even though it does lend support to that project and we on this side of the House support it, it continues to go nowhere. It continues to go absolutely nowhere.

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr SEENEY: It is. Absolutely. It is tied up in the Federal Court at the current time.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr SEENEY: Exactly. As the minister indicates, it is not the only project. I use it as one example, but it clearly illustrates that concept—that the elected government of this state, the representatives of the people of this state, should be able to take a decision to allow these types of projects to progress.

The bill that is before the House tonight is very much designed to ensure the basic philosophical belief that whoever is in government in Queensland—whoever sits on that side of this chamber; whoever has the government benches in this chamber—is able to make those decisions and is able to see these projects proceed. We all know that there is a range of projects, especially in south-east Queensland, which need to proceed. There is a range of infrastructure projects which are badly overdue.

I have spoken many times in this House before and there is no way this debate could proceed tonight without me once again making the point that one of the hallmarks of this government—one of the things that this government will be long remembered for—is the fact that in 7½ years the government has failed very badly in the delivery of that essential infrastructure. Now we face a catch-up period. It is a great glossy brochure that the member for Toowoomba North holds up, and that indicates the government's approach. To the Beattie Labor government, the provision of infrastructure is all about producing glossy brochures. That is what it does, and it does it well. There are boxes of those glossy brochures. We get them here in the parliament almost every day. All of the stakeholders in Queensland know only too well that their mailboxes are always full of glossy brochures. That is what the Beattie government thinks providing infrastructure is all about.

The member for Toowoomba North illustrates that much better than I could even if I were to use 1,000 words. As soon as I talk about providing infrastructure, the member for Toowoomba North seeks to justify his government's position by saying, 'We do provide infrastructure. Look at this glossy brochure.' That illustrates better than I could the approach that the government has to the provision of infrastructure, which is to produce some more glossy brochures, have a few more press conferences and get a few more photo opportunities with the Premier and the member for Toowoomba North in silly looking hard hats. That is about the extent of the infrastructure provision that we get from the Beattie Labor government.

Ms Nelson-Carr: What is under the hard hat looks great.

Mr SEENEY: I take that interjection. I have seen a lot of photos of government members in silly hats, and none of them look great. None of them look good in a hard hat because it is obvious that none of them are used to wearing a hard hat, with the possible exception of my good friend the honourable member for Fitzroy. He is probably the only member of the government who is entitled to wear a hard hat.

Mr WALLACE: I rise to a point of order. I have worked in a sugar mill previously and I have worn a hard hat on many occasions. I do take offence at the member for Callide's suggestion.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Barry): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY: I thank the member for Thuringowa for the interjection. I needed a drink.

Mr Mickel: Was it strong enough?

Mr SEENEY: No, it was not. A range of infrastructure projects in south-east Queensland badly need to be brought to fruition. Irrespective of what happens from this point forward, there is no doubt that a heck of a lot of catching up has to be done in the provision of infrastructure across a range of departmental responsibilities, especially in south-east Queensland but right across Queensland. No government can spend seven years producing nothing but glossy brochures, and not have to face the consequences. That is one of the things that comes with longevity of government. If a government is only in power for a short time, it never gets to face the consequences of not investing in infrastructure. To a very real extent, the Beattie Labor government has lived off the legacy of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the determination that he and his government had to build infrastructure ahead of need. They did not wait until they reached a critical situation in service provision before infrastructure was provided.

Once again that was illustrated at the regional sittings in Rockhampton where the transport minister seemed to take great delight in the fact that he had successfully completed the construction of—and I stand to be corrected on the figure—110 kilometres of new electric railway line. If members who came to central Queensland for that regional sittings had moved outside of their airconditioned hotels, they could not have missed the huge amount of infrastructure that the electrified railway lines provide throughout central Queensland. Those thousands of kilometres of railway line are the backbone of the export coal industry in central Queensland, and they were provided by Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the coalition government. The benefit that flows from that type of infrastructure has carried the Beattie Labor government through the seven or eight years that it has been in power. That is one example, but there are a range of other examples.

South-east Queensland has the same water infrastructure that it had when Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen left power in 1987, that is almost 20 years ago, yet a heck of a lot more people now depend on that infrastructure for their daily water supply. Is it any wonder that water supply is becoming severely restricted and people across south-east Queensland have to deal with the so-called crisis in the water shortage. We have a water shortage only because the Labor government has failed to provide infrastructure. It has continually failed to invest in the infrastructure that is necessary to make sure that the supply of water keeps pace with growth. Of course, there was no surprise that that growth occurred. Everyone knew it was going to occur, but there were all these woolly-headed suggestions that we could somehow avoid the responsibility of investing in infrastructure and concentrate on demand side management, which is the term that I remember being used extensively. Therefore, we would not have to make investments; we would just get by. As I said before, after seven, eight, nine or 10 years, inevitably the day will come when the disastrous results of that approach to the provision of infrastructure will come home to roost. To use the vernacular, the chickens will come home to roost. For the Beattie Labor government the chickens have come home to roost in a whole range of areas because they have failed to invest in infrastructure across-the-board.

During the debate on the previous bill discussed in the House, I mentioned the failure of the Beattie Labor government to invest in electricity infrastructure and we have seen what happened as a result. They can get away with it for a few years, especially if the system has been built ahead of the need and there is capacity in the system ahead of demand. However, in the end it catches up with you. The Goss government did exactly the same thing with electricity generators. It focused on demand side management and refused to invest in the generation side of the industry. That left the incoming Borbidge coalition government with a very serious shortage of generation capacity in Queensland. When the Beattie government came to power, that generation capacity backlog had been fixed, but the Beattie government did not continue to invest in the distribution and transmission side of the industry, and we have seen the results of that. To his credit, the minister has overseen the massive expenditure that Energex and Ergon have had to undertake to catch up on that backlog.

The same thing has occurred with transport infrastructure. When the coalition government was in power, we built the M1 motorway, the road between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. That is a wonderful piece of infrastructure. It was built to facilitate development in the south-east corner for many years to come. Much development has occurred along the M1 motorway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. There has been great real estate development. Many people have made their homes along that roadway because they know that the transport infrastructure will allow them to live in those areas and still have transport options.

A range of other transport infrastructure needs have not been met. New infrastructure has not been built and old infrastructure has not been maintained, especially in regional Queensland. Before I came to this job I was a member of a shire council. I recall vividly the efforts that we used to try to get the government to increase the spending on the maintenance of rural and regional roads. Back then it was a battle. The government's commitment to the improvement of the road system in rural and regional Queensland has diminished each year. Each year the maintenance budget has diminished and the capital works budget has diminished. We have come to the point where the replacement of three bridges is apparently a huge achievement. Twice in two weeks of sittings of this parliament three bridges have been announced. That sort of thing used to be par for the course. What used to be considered normal maintenance is now a reason for great rejoicing by the Beattie Labor government. That is the extent to which its investment in infrastructure has taken off. An ever-lasting legacy of this government will be that it failed to make those investments.

Hopefully, the bill before the House will allow this government and future governments to facilitate investment in projects of state significance right across the state. I certainly believe that the bill is overdue and that it should have been in place quite some time ago. I wish it a speedy transition through the House. I hope that the government has the courage to implement it and to deliver some of those projects of state significance for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

Sitting suspended from 6.31 pm to 7.30 pm.

Debate, on motion of Mr Shine, adjourned.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (7.31 pm): I move—

That government business orders of the day Nos 6 to 24 be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

CENTENARY OF WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE

Resumed from 30 September (see p. 3110).

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (7.31 pm): Honourable members might have been told at school that ancient Athens was a democracy or that the United States was the first modern democracy after its war of independence in 1776. They were not. They were both slave based economies that repressed women, in particular excluding them from voting. The fact that all males of a particular race have the vote does not make a place democratic. If women are excluded from full participation in the political system and some of the people are enslaved, the place is a travesty of democracy and a human rights disaster zone.

New Zealand became the world's most democratic place in 1893 when women were given the vote. South Australia went one better in 1894 by giving women the right to stand for parliament as well as vote, and that created the political reality that the new Australian Federation had to have universal suffrage, too. This occurred in 1902. Where the Antipodes led, other electoral systems around the world had to follow, or look repressive by contrast.

The history of the 20th century is punctuated with nation after nation falling into line with concepts of universal suffrage, first put into practice on this continent. The Scandinavian countries were the first to follow suit between 1908 and 1916. Canada, the UK and some European countries came next in 1918.

The United States followed in 1920. Mind you, achievement of this great reform was not shrouded in unblemished glory. From the start, little effort was made to put Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians on the electoral roll. It was not until after the referendum of 1967 that they had to be included in the census and thereby came to share the privilege long enjoyed by other Australians of being compelled to vote.

Nevertheless, there was no legal bar to them voting for most of the early parliaments in the 19th century, and some did. To our chagrin and to our shame, Queensland was one of the jurisdictions where there were legal bars that disfranchised the original Australians even after the achievement of women's suffrage in Queensland. Nevertheless, the right to vote first became universal on this continent, so we can justly claim to be citizens of the home of true democracy.

It is worth pausing to note that the achievement of universal suffrage represented a cultural shift that had unexpected consequences and contributed to other great events of our history in ways that we do not often acknowledge or even think about. After the First World War international statesmen did not fail to notice two facts: that no-one had fought more bravely than the Anzacs and that they alone of the combatants fought for a democracy.

Morale in a just cause is a surprising but logical consequence of universal suffrage. The Anzacs were the only soldiers in that war whose mothers, wives and sisters had participated in electing the government that sent them there. Whatever else troubled them, they were troubled by thoughts that their sacrifice was opposed by a disfranchised majority at home. One Anzac Day when I was a very small child I asked my grandfather why the Anzacs were so brave. He said, 'Well, I knew that your grandma and your great aunt had voted for what I was doing.' Our early achievement of universal suffrage contributed to our performance at a time of international crisis. This affected international perceptions of us and of our culture which included universal suffrage. This made it easier for other countries to follow our lead.

The achievement of universal suffrage 100 years ago was a triumph for the women of Queensland, but it was also a triumph for the men of Queensland. Human nature does not achieve its full potential in solitude but in participation in society. To deny the vote to a group is to deny them a kind of self-realisation. To give any group the suffrage is to accord them the opportunity for that kind of self-realisation, enriching them but also enriching those who interact with them. The achievement of universal suffrage was a victory for the human development of both men and women.

I have little patience with the Australian cultural cringe. Those who say that we have no identity or no culture of our own forget that we pioneered universal suffrage and therefore gave true democracy to the world.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (7.36 pm): We have been so privileged during this year to hear of so many women who have really forged the way for where we are today in the first decade of the 21st century. It would be intriguing to know what this century holds for the human race and, in particular, for women who will come after us—for our daughters and granddaughters. There have been so many firsts to celebrate and so many significant women in the 20th century to whom we owe much.

The names of Emma Miller, Margaret Ogg, Irene Longman, Elizabeth Brentnall and so many others are now etched into our psyche, and we have learned to give thanks for what they and, I might say, some of their male supporters have done. The role of women has evolved and progressed throughout the century. Sadly, such events as the world wars catapulted women into taking on many of the roles formerly occupied by men as a matter of necessity. Today, women in our country occupy many positions of power and for the most part are well respected.

I should note that as I was writing this speech I heard the Deputy Leader of the Opposition lauding the Deputy Premier, the Hon. Anna Bligh, for taking on the responsibility of state development and, of course, we know she will do a superb job in this portfolio. Women are, of necessity, practical, multiskilled, collaborative and strong. Our country is in a far better place for the role that women play in our society. There have been times when some may have pondered just what the world would look like if each country had a woman at its helm. Would there be wars, famines and the devastation that we see in some parts of the world today? I suspect not. When we look at the world in total there are many places where women have a long, long way to go to claim their rightful place of respect and equality.

Throughout my life I have been nurtured and mentored by very loving and significant women, of course starting with my mother, whom I love dearly and who is still a source of huge delight, much laughter and, in general, much 'girls' talk'. Through the years as a young mother, although being away from family interstate, the friendship and mentoring of other women has been a significant part of my development. However, where I have really seen the power and strength of women has been in my electorate of Woodridge. Women play significant roles throughout our education system and in senior positions throughout many of our government departments and non-government agencies. They show leadership in council and are the backbone of myriad agencies where volunteers are found.

Older women bring their wealth of experience, while young women still in our schools are often articulate, responsible young women who I know will carry on the banner of progress through this century. When I look at the role our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women play in our community,

I am humbled at what has now been accomplished. They are strong and proud. Within the 160-plus communities that make up the beautiful tapestry of our multicultural community our women are in the forefront. To name but a few would be to limit the influence of the many, for I feel so privileged to represent this truly wonderful community which is so blessed by all the women with whom I work on a daily basis.

My two magnificent angels of mercy in my office are loved by many, and I certainly owe them such a debt of gratitude. This has been a year to celebrate, for much has been accomplished but of course there is always someone out there to nurture and lift. It is up to each one of us to reach out to lift our women onto that higher plane.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (7.40 pm): I rise this evening to support the motion moved by the member for Mundingburra and am pleased to put on record my support for recognising the centenary of the milestone when women were afforded the right to vote in state elections in 1905. The passage of the blandly named Electoral Franchise Bill and the Elections Acts Amendment Bill, which were introduced in the Queensland Legislative Assembly on 5 January 1905, with assent given on 26 January 1905, meant that non-Indigenous women were finally able to have a say in how they were governed. But it is a sad indictment that today we can celebrate only 40 years of suffrage for our Indigenous women.

I stand here today and applaud the work of the early suffragettes in Queensland, the names of whom have passed into folklore, like Emma Miller, May Jordan McConnel and Eleanor Trundle. I applaud the various women's groups that campaigned with them including the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Woman's Equal Franchise Association, the Woman's Franchise League and the Queensland Women's Electoral League. These are the women who believed that the right to vote was the slight opening of the door which would then allow them and their sisters to kick that door down and demand to be treated equally in all aspects of their lives. We here salute them.

Australian mythology and Australian identity revolves around men: bushrangers, explorers, soldiers, writers—blokes, every single one. They are all part of history and all part of a very patriarchal society. But the struggle that women have waged to ensure their own decent working conditions, their property rights, their individual rights and their ability to look after their families is what this has all been about, and that is why it is important to remember the contribution of women.

Would we have been as brave as these first women who were ridiculed and badgered, harangued and harassed—all because they believed that women could make a difference in the world if they were listened to and treated seriously? The rights that they have won for us have been hard fought but, sadly, I see an erosion in the standard of living for many women today. Just think of an issue that would be deemed a 'women's issue'. Single mothers, child care, work force participation and the casualisation of jobs, volunteerism, domestic violence, sexual violence, equal pay, women's health and sexual reproduction rights—and what is the common thread? The common thread is that women are still not treated equally and still do not have equality of opportunity. It is up to today's politicians to remember the difficulties that women face and work hard to address these.

As a member of the Labor women's caucus, I am proud to say that we are working hard with the government to ensure that there is accurate data about women and their issues, and that government policy and legislation are updated to reflect what is actually occurring in society today. We are here to help women and girls be everything they possibly can be. There is a quote by Martin Luther King Jr, the civil rights leader, who said, 'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.' I look around the parliament today and I look at the many women in the non-government organisations and in our governments departments who are out there not being silent about things. They are out there working for women and girls. They are making sure that their lives are better and that they can make a difference in those lives. I know that silence is something that we are never going to have to deal with again, but the job is not finished, as I said before. There are still many things we need to do for women and girls to make sure that their lives run smoothly and that they can be everything they want to be.

Australian women have triumphed in all areas since the early days. We are in all levels of government. We are doctors, engineers, corporate leaders, lawyers, social workers, nurses, educators, pilots, mothers, daughters and sisters. We are all part of this community and we can all do anything we like. There is a bumper sticker we see all the time with the slogan 'Women can do anything and girls can do anything'. I truly believe that is the case, but I still think it is up to society today to think very hard about women.

I mentioned before the casualisation of the work force. Sometimes that works very well for women, especially for women who have the responsibility of bringing up their children. It means that they can be with their children when they need to be and they can work to help support their family, and that is a good thing. But when casualisation eats into their opportunities, prevents them from borrowing money—for example, for things like houses—and prevents them from having the lifestyle that they want when they have to work late at night on a weekend when they would rather be at home with their families, we need to remember these things. These are things that we need to fight for. We need to make sure that adequate child care is available if they choose to live that lifestyle. But if they choose to be with their family we have to make it easy for them to do that as well. We need to make sure that the support is there for men so they feel comfortable to stand up and say those things.

This is a very important date—this centenary of suffrage. I am glad we are celebrating it and having the opportunity to talk about issues that are reflected in all of our electorates. With 50 per cent of Queenslanders being women, we need to make sure that we are looking after them in the best way that we can—that we are bringing them up with us and making sure that their lives are full and that they can live them in hope and in happiness and to celebrate the time that is with them. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (7.45 pm): It is a real pleasure to be able to take part in this debate tonight. It is one that I have been anticipating for a while now and I have been honoured to listen to the very fine contributions by so many of my female colleagues who add so very much to this parliament. There is no doubt whatsoever that any of the long-term staff here will confirm that the parliament is a far richer and a far harder working place than it ever was. I understand that consecutive Speakers in recent years have had trouble making a profit out of the bar, and I think that we can certainly attribute the inspiration and the hard work of our female colleagues with changing many of the old-fashioned male attitudes around this place in such a positive way. I know that all of my male colleagues will join with me in saying that the female members of this House are an inspiration through their hard work and their attention to making the parliament a robust and effective place for all members of our community.

In my electorate of Hervey Bay we had a by-election on the weekend. I would like to offer my congratulations to Councillor Sue Brooks, who won that by-election. Sue was the only woman candidate in a field of 12 and she streeted it. She came home by more than 2,000 votes from her nearest rival in a very good win. Although in no way did Sue campaign on being the female candidate, nevertheless the voters of Hervey Bay—men and women—voted in no small way to say that they want gender equality in the council. The current ratio of three female candidates out of seven is reflective, I think, of a broad will in society to see equal numbers of men and women represent them. Many people in Hervey Bay told me they felt that a good balance of men and women in the council chamber makes the council a more effective unit. They—men and women—were voting for Sue not merely because she was a good candidate but because they wanted to see that balance. That is something that I think we will continue to see at all levels of politics, and 'hear, hear' to it, I say. It is a very positive development in our society. Across society there is now a very broad recognition of the value in a democracy—in a working parliament or a council—having equal gender representation.

I will conclude with perhaps the broadest of observations. The value of women in our society cannot be underestimated. The value of women participating not merely as voters but as leaders in our democracy cannot be underestimated. We often hear about the difficulties with young boys and men going off the rails, and it is one of those popular things that gets thrown up that that is frequently because of a lack of a male role model in the house. In my experience the presence of a strong female role model is more than enough in many cases. To the extent that boys sometimes lack direction, I do not think we can do better than to look to the many strong women who have done so much for us at home, at work and here. I commend this motion to the House.

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (7.49 pm): It is a great honour to speak in the parliament to support the motion acknowledging that this year marks the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in Queensland. We have a lot to celebrate. After a very slow start, the fact that there are 30 female members in this the 51st Parliament of Queensland is a reason to celebrate. The fact that many of our male colleagues are speaking in this debate with such enthusiasm is a reason to celebrate. The fact that women have now conquered so many firsts in political life is certainly a reason to celebrate.

We have come a long way. Queensland's sovereignty was 69 years old before the first woman member, Irene Longman, a Progressive National, was elected in the Brisbane Bulimba seat in 1929. She was defeated in 1932. The former teacher was clearly good enough for her constituents but, even after clearing the hurdle of democratic selection, she was not seen as fit enough to join her male colleagues in the parliamentary dining room. When the second female MP, Vi Jordan for Labor in Ipswich West, arrived in 1966, the system was so male institutionalised that there was not even a women's toilet in the parliamentary area. After there being only two women members between 1866 and 1974, the next eight years saw a comparable revolution with three women elected. It was the election of the Goss Labor Government in 1989 that saw an unprecedented influx of women being elected. Seven new Labor women brought the number of women MPs to nine, but the march was on.

As the only surviving woman member from the 1989 election, and the longest serving woman Queensland MP, I would like to use this opportunity to reflect on how far we have come not just in the last 100 years—many other speakers in the debate have done that admirably—but in the last 15 years. This is the case when we consider that before 1990 Queensland had no women judges, no women magistrates, no women heads of government departments and there was no state legislation to prevent discrimination, there were no state funds for women's health services, there was no Queensland government funded women's sexual assault program and there was no women's policy unit. In fact, we were the last state in Australia to establish most of these services. It is timely, then, that we reflect on how far women have come.

When I became involved in politics I was part of an era when police outnumbered marchers on International Women's Day and when marchers were arrested for offending against public order. It was an era when women had to chain themselves to a public bar to get a drink; when police, assisted by health officials, conducted highly publicised raids on abortion clinics; when male members of parliament got away with saying things like, 'the Women's Electoral Lobby, WEL, stands for "we endorse lesbianism"'—that was said in 1977 by Tom Aitkens, the then member for Townsville; or when we remember that in 1985 former minister Geoff Muntz said that 'radical feminists have instilled into youth deviate lifestyles'. It was an era when a feminist in parliament, Liberal Rosemary Kyburz, was pilloried and patronised by other parliamentarians including, infamously, Russ Hinze, who would make comments in parliament like, 'When are you going home, Rosie?', and likened her to a chook with her head cut off. It is then that we see how far we have come.

We need to remember, as Margaret Reynolds pointed out in 1986, that the government had an advisory board for poultry but not for women. The media colourfully interpreted this as Margaret saying that the state government treated chooks better than it treated women. This was a time when then Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen saw no need for a women's adviser because he had a woman pilot.

One of my reasons for standing for parliament was that I wanted to increase the representation of women in this House. In my inaugural address-in-reply speech I said that women representatives would help to strengthen the nurturing principle which dictates that the greatest attention should be devoted to those in greatest need, including areas such as the environment, cultural expression and the law. I said that the modification of the public agenda by women active in the formal political arena would be part of the broader economic and social changes that would influence the lives of Queenslanders. In my inaugural address-in-reply speech I also spoke about the government's commitment to establishing a women's policy unit to advise the government and to liaise between departments on programs affecting women. Looking back, it was quite a lofty, idealistic address, as it should be when one is young, idealistic, enthusiastic and determined to change the world.

A government member interjected.

Ms SPENCE: I may be some of those things, but I am older and a lot wiser. I am pleased to say that I have had the privilege to observe that much has changed for the better in the 16 years that I have been a member of parliament.

I might start with this parliament. This morning's behaviour in the chamber elicited some excitement by many members of this parliament and by the media of this state. I remember being a backbench member of parliament 16 years ago. I was young, I was female and I was pregnant. I had just walked out of tough high school classrooms. I thought I had seen a lot, but sitting in this chamber in those years was very similar to being in a year 9 or 10 cd. ed. class. In those days there was very abusive behaviour. I remember books being thrown and hitting the Clerk of the Parliament and I remember people being incredibly aggressive, incredibly loud and incredibly obnoxious.

They were the days when male members of parliament thought it was a term of derision to call their other male colleagues 'girlies' or 'sissies'. That was supposed to be clever. I remember there was a day when women members of parliament were likened to dogs and when it was acceptable to call other members of parliament gin jockeys.

Today we still have interjections that are childish, but they are certainly not sexist or racist, as they once were. In those days there was much media interest in the new women members of parliament because we were a novelty. There was much that was good and much that was bad in that particular media interest.

I clearly remember a day in 1995 when I stood in the parliament and made a speech in which I objected to being wolf whistled at in the corridor leading from the Annexe to this chamber. I felt that that was not appropriate workplace behaviour. I objected to the fact that a male member of parliament said to a female member of parliament that 'she was leaving the chamber like a deprived love bug'. Because I dared to object about this as unsatisfactory workplace behaviour, I was on the front page of the *Courier-Mail* the next day.

It was also the day when women members of parliament were incredibly divided against each other. I remember that the female National Party member for Callide, Di McCauley, said that I should just put up with wolf whistling and that kind of behaviour and that I should be grateful for it.

Things have changed and improved in this chamber. Although we were all a bit excited about the events this morning, things are certainly much more civilised than they were a decade ago.

A government member: Are you sorry you don't get wolf whistled at anymore?

Ms SPENCE: I am not sorry that that behaviour has gone, frankly. I am pleased that that behaviour is in the past.

I also remember being on a parliamentary committee and going on a workplace tour with a minister. While we were on this workplace tour I asked the business owner how many people worked at the establishment and he said to me, 'About half, little darlin'.' To his credit, the former minister, Bob Gibbs, took offence on my behalf and promptly the whole party left that establishment. We did not even partake in the very expensive prepared lunch that was ready for us. To his credit, Bob Gibbs did that.

A lot has changed in the last decade or so. Being the first female member for Mount Gravatt, the first Labor member for Mount Gravatt in 32 years and the first pregnant Labor female member for Mount Gravatt whom my constituents had ever seen was a huge challenge. I am pleased to see that the two new mums-to-be are going to be accommodated a lot better than was the case 16 years ago. When I had baby Jack the only accommodation that was made for me was the provision of a room in the Annexe that did not have a bathroom or anything like that. It was a converted lounge. They put a lounge suite in it and said, 'There you go.' I took one week off work and was expected back in parliament the following week. I did not miss a day in parliament. I do not think in 16 years I have ever missed a day in parliament because of my children. So I am not surprised that it has taken another 16 years for anyone else to face up to the challenge of having a child while an elected member of parliament.

Mr Johnson: He turned out all right, too.

Ms SPENCE: The baby has turned out all right so far. It was a novelty then and I think now we are much more accommodating and accepting of working mothers, particularly in this parliament, and that is certainly a positive.

I have listened to the contributions of many members of parliament who have participated in this suffrage debate this year. There have been many wonderful contributions made by both male and female members of parliament. They have displayed an appreciation of the significance of this anniversary and the difficulties of the struggle. Some have expressed concern that women have not advanced further in this quest for equality and, of course, there are still many challenges. Women are still disproportionately victims of violence; they are still treated unfairly in many workplaces; and they are still underrepresented in positions of power. However, in this year of celebration it is worth reflecting on how far we have come in a short time.

The parliament has changed. I think there is no longer the racist, sexist or abusive behaviour there once was. The debate has changed. When I was the minister responsible for domestic violence I was very pleased to see that a third of the members of parliament, both male and female, spoke about domestic and family violence with passion and understanding. That simply would not have happened a decade ago. The fact that we have women in greater numbers in this parliament has changed the nature of the debate not only for women but also for men. It has given men the licence to talk about things such as domestic violence, child care and other social issues about which they certainly would not have put up their hands and felt it was acceptable to talk about in previous eras. I thought it was a hallmark when the member for Mount Coot-tha recently stood up and talked about the quality of disposable nappies, for example. I do not think anyone in the seventies or eighties or any other era would have thought that that was an acceptable thing for a man to stand up and talk about.

The electorate has certainly changed. My booth workers tell me that years ago they often got abusive asides on election day about how they would not vote for this woman because she should be at home looking after her children; she should not be putting herself up as a member of parliament. That kind of attitude has changed. When I was first elected and I would go as a member of parliament to functions like Lions or Rotary Club meetings, people would be horrified that my husband was not accompanying me and that was I going out alone. They no longer think that I need a man by my side to operate as a member of parliament and that I can actually do this job by myself. Women are now as electorally appealing as men for any political party.

The media has changed. We are not the novelty that we once were and I think that is a positive because we are being judged on our performance rather than our agenda. Society has changed. When I was a high school teacher in the 1970s and 1980s we ran 'girls can do anything' campaigns to encourage girls to finish senior and to consider university and alternative blue-collar careers. Today young women know that they can do anything. They are out-achieving their male counterparts in academic endeavours and they are incredibly optimistic about their expectations for their futures.

Mr Mickel: Clerks of the parliament.

Ms SPENCE: They are project managers on construction sites, clerks of the parliament, magistrates and judges. Girls believe, quite rightly, that they can take their place in any part of society. I have a great learning experience. My son is studying veterinary science at Queensland University—traditionally a male occupation. Today veterinary science students are 85 per cent female, and the males are greatly outnumbered in that particular faculty.

Mr Reeves: He is happy about that, too.

Ms SPENCE: He is very happy about that. He could not be happier.

Predictably, on being named as the police and corrections minister, a journalist asked me how the police would accept having a woman as their minister for the first time in this state. I replied that I thought police would be accepting of a woman minister because today over 20 per cent of the Police Service is female, over 30 per cent of the new recruits are female and male police officers are very used to working alongside women. I am pleased to report that my optimism has been rewarded and I have been well accepted by the Queensland police officers. I guess when I address a Police Union conference and see over a hundred delegates and only one of them is a female the cold reality hits me that we still have many hurdles to come in the Police Service as in other walks of life.

I note, finally, that in this debate many members have drawn attention to the significant women in their lives and they have talked about their mothers, their grandmothers and their daughters, as they should. Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the significant males in my life, particularly my husband, Heinz, and my sons, Lucas and Jack, who have been with me through this long career, who encourage me, who love me, who put up with me have been wonderful partners in my political career.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (8.07 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to support the motion before the House. The right of women to vote is a right that should be afforded to all citizens. It was interesting to hear people referring to ancient Athens as the home of democracy. They portrayed it as a great icon to follow, yet in Athens a person had to be male, over 18 and not a slave or a foreigner in order to vote. In fact, what was seen as the great icon of democracy was, in fact, an extremely limited democracy.

We still have a limitation in terms of voting in that people must be over 18 and certain people, such as those in prison, cannot vote. However, we give those who are foreigners a chance to gain citizenship so that they can then be a full part of our society.

The right to participate equally is a human right that is as much a right as any other. It also fits in very well with the Australian notion of the fair go. In common with the previous speaker, I can recall a number of changes. I am thinking about growing up in the 1950s and seeing how my mother and my older sisters were treated and how women in society were regarded at the time compared with what I see now with respect to my wife and daughter. I believe the changes have been for the better.

If there are to be barriers to someone achieving something in their life, they should be on the basis of ability, not on the basis of sex, religious belief, sexuality, cultural background, political persuasion or any other irrelevant factor. Any barrier in our society should simply be based on a person's inability to do a job. If a man can or cannot do a job then select him or reject him. If a woman can or cannot do a job then, similarly, select her or reject her.

In many areas women still suffer adversely compared to men. In the workplace there are still barriers to women getting to certain executive levels. Examples exist of financial institutions, including large banks, writing to the male in a household even though accounts are in both a husband's and wife's names. The fact that banks have not come into even the 1980s is cause for concern.

I wonder if some of what might be called the old-fashioned regard for women is based on the key difference between men and women—that is, women giving birth. Childbirth is an absolute miracle and we give the proper deference and respect to a woman who carries another human being and gives birth to that child. I think that in the past some men regarded that as the only area of expertise in which they should hold women in high regard. Men should have realised that that is one area that is unique to women but that in so many other areas of society women can be equally expert.

Opening up opportunities for women in other areas of society is important. That is where the right to vote comes into it. I agree with what was said to one of my female colleagues here who is expecting a child. They are certain that God must be male, because women give birth. I also agree that if men were to carry children there would be a very high percentage of one-child families.

Mr Schwarten: There would be zero population growth!

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: Absolutely. While we should respect women because they are mothers, we should also respect women in all others in which they are expert, whether that is politics, business, education or whatever. That is what equality should be.

I want to talk about one area in which there is inequality. It concerns an institution that I love and at times hate: the Catholic Church. As a body that is—as one of my colleagues refers to it—the world's largest non-incorporated institution, the Catholic Church rightly preaches the equality of sons and daughters under the one creator God and yet in its practice it does not give that equality to half of its population. The fact that women cannot participate equally in priesthood is a blot on the Catholic Church's current practice. Separately, the fact that it does not have married clergy is an artificial barrier that was introduced in the 5th or 6th century and should be removed.

Mr Johnson: I do not agree with you in everything, Terry, but I agree with you on that.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: I take that interjection from the member for Gregory and thank him for that.

I do not believe that the church will change in my lifetime. When I attend functions at Anglican, Uniting and other churches I tell them that I admire the moves that have been made and that are continuing to occur within their churches. It makes no sense to me to exclude half of the population and the expertise of half of the population when choosing leaders. I do not think it will happen in my lifetime, but it is something that I think and pray about.

Mr Johnson: Do you want to send a copy of this speech to Benedict?

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: The member for Gregory has suggested that I write to the Pope. It is unfortunate that when someone is elected by a group of 100 per cent males, generally over the age of 60, radical change will probably not happen quickly. The real miracle is that the Catholic Church has continued to survive despite those human frailties.

Another relevant example within that institution relates to girls schools. Although in the past there were some practices for which nuns were not highly regarded, one thing that came through in many of the Catholic schools run by the nuns was the equality of educational choice. Schools such as All Hallows, which my mum and sisters attended, taught maths and physics and encouraged girls to go to university. They competed with other schools to get into university. However, in many of the co-ed schools, girls were not allowed to take Shop A and Shop B and had to do the commercial or home economics subjects and vice versa. Boys could not take some of those subjects. At some of the schools run by the nuns the girls were encouraged to strive for the utmost achievements in whatever field they chose. One of the ironies of life is that, when a number of those schools lost their religious leaders and laypeople became principals, a large percentage of those girls schools had male principals. I find that an ironic situation. Although we now question some of the cultural practices of those religious orders, I think a lot of them go back to the period in which those customs occurred.

In closing, I am proud that my wife and daughter are living and working in a society that has moved a long way towards equality for women. I think the real change has to occur in the hearts and minds of men. While some women may face barriers to achieving their full potential, I believe that the main barriers lie in structures that have largely been established by men. As we support each other, we will have a better society in which we all have equal opportunity based on our ability, not on any other factor. I support the motion before the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Terry Sullivan, adjourned.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (8.18 pm): I move—
That government business order of the day No. 4 be postponed.

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS ORGANISATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 3674.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (8.18 pm): At the outset, might I say that I very much appreciated the speech of the honourable member for Stafford. The difficulty for him and his call for change in the church, of course, is that Christ, as I understand it, had 12 apostles, all of whom were male. It is perhaps a difficulty that he will have to work on.

Earlier tonight, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition spoke on a number of quite wide-ranging matters with respect to this debate. One of those was the Nathan Dam, which he spoke about at quite some length.

I had the pleasure of being in the member for Callide's electorate in the vicinity of Taroom and Theodore last week partly in my role as adviser to the Premier on western Queensland. It is true that there is a great expectation for the building of that dam in that part of Queensland. As I understand it, however, there is no reluctance in terms of cooperation from the Queensland government in that project and the honourable member's attentions really should be directed to the federal government for the actions or inactions for which it has been responsible in the past and to ensure that whatever impediments exist in the Federal Court are overcome. I would encourage him, therefore, to make appropriate representations to the right quarter—that is, to the federal government of which his party of course is a coalition partner.

The honourable member also said that there was a lack of action in the state so far as development projects were concerned. He conveniently ignored of course the huge dam being built at Bundaberg—namely, the Paradise Dam. It is a very major development which will have significant economic benefits for the Burnett region. Also, only this week reference was made in the mini budget to a range of matters dealing with development in the state. First of all, an amount of \$350 million has been allocated towards replacing more than 100 old and obsolete road bridges in regional Queensland over the next five years. The honourable member referred to the figure of three bridges, but obviously he was not listening at all because that is an extraordinary commitment to development. In my area of Toowoomba the possible usage of fibre composites in the construction of those bridges will be looked at, along with of course concrete. The firm of Wagners, for example, and also the University of Southern Queensland have done remarkable work in that area and will be interested in that significant figure of over \$300 million mentioned in the mini budget.

Also mentioned in the mini budget was the commitment to the identification of a new multimillion-dollar generation project for north Queensland by mid next year, the commitment to fast-tracking the assessment of the \$250 million investment in the southern regional water pipeline linking the Gold

Coast and Brisbane regions, and the \$27 million towards the cost of upgrading the Wivenhoe Dam spillway. On top of that, of course, reference was made to the Aurukun bauxite resource which will attract international and national investment in new alumina refining in Queensland, the cruise ship terminals at the Gold Coast and Townsville, and the Wiggins Island coal terminal and associated rail infrastructure at the port of Gladstone. This \$1.8 billion project will make the port of Gladstone the world's biggest coal facility and strengthen the possibility of further coalmine expansions in the Bowen and Surat basins. Far from the government ignoring the development of Queensland, the contrary is the case. The events of this week, if the honourable member had bothered to listen to the mini budget, would bear out my contention in that regard.

In my own neck of the woods, the Department of State Development has been proactive, particularly in the establishment of the Charlton-Wellcamp Industrial Estate. Well over \$300,000 has been spent on acquiring the 68.65 hectare subdivision which could prove to be the catalyst for further development within the 1,600-hectare Charlton-Wellcamp industrial area. Sites accommodating businesses requiring larger blocks, particularly those specialising in transport, warehousing, distribution and other associated support industries, are expected to be available by next year. The subdivision is located on the northern side of the Warrego Highway at Charlton North. It is in a prime position to operate as a distribution centre for south-east Queensland, particularly if the inland rail project gets under way. However, it will play a key role in distribution in warehousing terms once the second range crossing is finally developed. I will say a little bit more about that later on. The Charlton-Wellcamp project is a great example of the state government working to boost industry and create more jobs in the Darling Downs region. I am pleased to say that, largely because of the activities of the state government, the unemployment rate in Toowoomba and the Darling Downs is one of the lowest in the country.

Let us contrast that major activity of the state development department with another, and I take the example of the Mansell Neocot. I recently had the pleasure of inspecting the Mansell neonatal transport equipment, a portable humidicrib designed and developed in Toowoomba attracting world attention. The device is used to transport premature and critically ill babies and 14 have already been sold to hospitals around Australia. There has also been interest from overseas—the USA, UK, Singapore, Norway and Germany. The state government assisted with a \$28,000 grant under the Queensland Industry Development Scheme from the Department of State Development. Without this money, the system may not have been developed at all. I want to mention the work done by Toowoomba professor of biomedical engineering at USQ Professor John Grant-Thomson, who was approached about a serious problem with baby transportation devices. This humidicrib has proved to be a great innovation. Not only will it be of great use to babies needing transport in this regard; it will also be a great boost to the economic activity of Toowoomba.

As I said before, the second range crossing is an example where a public-private partnership has been suggested as being appropriate. Tonight's bill is primarily concerned about the tunnel under Brisbane in terms of a PPP. That call has been made. The Minister for Transport and Main Roads again this week made a statement in the House setting out the difficulties that he is having with the federal government's commitment to a measly \$10 million to carry out the business case for a PPP. One would think that that would not be a problem, and the way forward was set out by the minister to help the federal government manage the AusLink situation. So far the response has been negative. I wrote to Warren Truss when he became the minister congratulating him on his appointment. He is a regional Queensland member. Surely Queensland would benefit as a result of that. Finally he replied, indicating much the same as what the minister has indicated to the House today. That remains a disappointment, but it would be an area where a PPP may well be the way to go.

I want to mention in closing that there has been recent disgruntlement in relation to the PPP dealing with the construction of the tunnel in Sydney. I think it would be wise for us in Queensland—the government and private enterprise and others—to take note of the experience in Sydney and what went wrong to ensure that we do not repeat that mistake. To have a tunnel built down there which nobody uses because it is too expensive or to have the government down there directing that other roads be closed off to ensure that people use the tunnel is not a situation that we want to see develop in Brisbane when these tunnels that have been talked about so much are finally built. So I would urge caution on behalf of the government and the Brisbane City Council in terms of what they are doing to ensure that the Sydney mistakes are not repeated. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (8.28 pm): In rising to speak to the State Development and Public Works Organisation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2005, I have to acknowledge that the powers vested in this piece of legislation and the original piece of legislation have been exercised in my electorate on quite a number of occasions, and sections of the community have developed a finely tuned ability to be able to respond to proposals that face the community in terms of large-scale development.

In his second reading speech, the minister stated rightly that high-quality, cost-effective and efficient infrastructure is fundamental to the continued economic growth and development of the state, and to maintaining Queenslanders' high standard of living. In areas where there is development, such

as Gladstone and Townsville, and outside of Rockhampton is a developing area as well, those interested in seeing development happen in a coordinated manner can sometimes be frustrated at the slow response in terms of strategic infrastructure like the availability of water, electricity, and transportation corridors. Sometimes that slowness is because of a debate about jurisdictional responsibility. At other times it is political decision making.

A number of years ago the Office of the Coordinator-General operated very effectively. For a short period it ceased to operate and it has now been re-established. If the position and powers of that office are used properly, it very effectively coordinates across all government departments to ensure that development applications proceed in a timely and concise manner.

One element of this bill recognises that the proponents of major projects tend to want to conduct their EIS processes very early in the developmental stages. That is not a problem, providing that the EIS remains relevant to the finally developed site. That may sound strange, but there can be a period of years between when the EIS is put in place and when the actual plant is built. In almost every project, modifications to the proposed plant are made. On some occasions, those alterations are significant.

This bill gives the Coordinator-General the ability to evaluate any changes to a significant project and determine whether the changed project should be subject to further EIS processes or public consultation. That power is a significant one and one that needs to be exercised very judiciously by the Coordinator-General, because the community has a very limited opportunity to comment on proposals. Predominantly that occurs during the environmental assessment stage. They do not have too many bites of the cherry. Where projects have the possibility of significantly impacting on someone's quality of life and the quiet enjoyment of their property, their rights should not be overruled.

One significant example of this, and I have referred to it in the chamber before, is the proposal by Southern Pacific Petroleum. That company's proposal and EIS document stated that there would be no environmental impacts, including odour, external to the plant. It did not leave much on which residents surrounding the plant could base complaints or concerns. A number of submissions were made during the EIS process, but all that the residents had was the documentation that was contained in the environmental impact statement.

Between the EIS period and the first trials of the SPP plant, in an effort to cut costs significant parts of the plant were eliminated. It may have been that the proponents decided that they would present to government those aspects of the plant in a staged manner. I am not privy to that information. However, a number of the omitted components were environmental components.

Members of the Targinie community were significantly affected by the odour and chemical pollutants emitted from that plant. Subsequently, the minister for state development made a decision to purchase properties from Targinie and the process is ongoing. That community has almost ceased to exist as a result of the flow-on effects. Targinie and Yarwun are based in a predominantly fruit- and vegetable-growing area. The availability of supplies to those communities has diminished. Carriers, the cooperative and even the school and small shops have been affected by a reduction in the number of people living in the area. As far as the community was concerned, it had its opportunity to comment on the project at the stage of the EIS, but the proposed plant and the real constructed plant are significantly different. Therefore, in exercising the evaluation power, the Coordinator-General needs to be very mindful of the potential impact on the community if he or she decides that there is no need for the public to have a further opportunity to comment on a changed proposal.

Obviously, a proponent will lobby hard not to restart or modify the EIS process. The minister has referred to the north-south bypass tunnel project where Brisbane City Council sought assistance from the Coordinator-General in relation to changes to that project which it wanted to make without recommencing the EIS process, which is a lengthy process and takes a lot of work. However, if the change has the potential to affect residents in or around the project site, the community deserves an opportunity to comment on those changes.

The Papua New Guinea pipeline has been a potential project since the mid-1990s. It has been in abeyance since 1998. Only in the past couple of months we had a group through from Papua New Guinea with a revitalised interest in seeing that project proceed. Quite a lot of work has been done already, not only on the EIS—

Mr COPELAND: I rise to a point of order. Madam Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Barry): Order! There is no point of order.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: This legislation also proposes to establish time lines on the EIS process. The bill provides that proponents must provide their EIS to the Coordinator-General within two years from the date that the terms of reference for the EIS are completed. Two years may sound like a long time but, believe me, with some projects it is not. It is a fairly short time line. However, it does put some constraints on proponents of projects to keep the ball rolling.

There have been one or two incidents involving smaller commercial projects, although this has occurred with larger projects as well, where a proponent has lodged the beginning of the paperwork and then sat on the project, holding the approvals in place. That has been done for no other reason than to control part of the market—that is, using it as an economic tool. That is wrong. Either the project needs to go ahead or it does not. That would not be such a problem when the proposed project is to be on a state development site where the government already holds ownership of the land. However, if a project is in proximity to privately owned land or is on the books for freehold land and part of the approval process is for the entire project to have preliminary investigation, including financial investigation, people's lives are put on hold till the process is completed. If projects are not given some discrete periods in which to comply with the various stages, the landowners' lives are upset for a protracted period.

It is of little concern to the proponent, particularly if the delays are for market purposes. However, there is no incentive for landowners whose land is blighted because of a potential project. I mean 'blighted' in terms of their quiet enjoyment of their properties, their ability to do farm planning or their ability to sell in the open market. Those opportunities are impeded if there is a project hanging over their heads. So the proponents do need to have time lines within which they must comply not only for their benefit and that of the government but also, importantly, for the benefit of landowners.

I think the private-public partnerships in terms of shared infrastructure have worked well. There is always a little bit of disquiet about disproportionate access to shared infrastructure but that can be worked out amongst the major companies over time with access protocols. Certainly the most efficient way to use land and the best way not to impede and impeach excessively on freehold title land and people's lifestyles, and their living if they are rural farmers, is to have a single infrastructure corridor within which things like water, conveyors, rail and road can all be contained. There are one or two infrastructure areas that are not compatible. The government and the proponents get a bit nervous if there is a suggestion of putting water and electricity close together. In the main, quite a significant mix of infrastructure necessary for large-scale projects can be contained within a single corridor, and it is certainly an efficient use of land.

The Coordinator-General is currently investigating a corridor for a water pipe between Gladstone and Rockhampton. The support for that is a matter for another debate—there are mixed feelings. However, there are a number of shared facility corridors between the Aldoga industrial estate and the Fishermans Island wharf. There are allocations for additional corridors in my electorate. I certainly believe that that approach to infrastructure provision is sound, defensible and very efficient.

The consideration for major projects in any area of the state brings welcome economic injections. However, governments must always be vigilant when they are considering major projects not only to look at the bottom line in terms of the economic value to the state and the economic investment that is necessary for the strategic infrastructure for those particular projects but also to always factor in the necessary infrastructure for the community already existing in the area and for those who will come to the area as a result of that project development.

I do not know about Townsville and Rockhampton, but we have had a number of cycles of large industry development in the electorate of Gladstone where the community has carried a significant disadvantage because insufficient infrastructure in terms of social infrastructure was put in place before the population boom. It happened with the car industry. I think the impact across-the-board was less, but certainly the impact in terms of affordable housing was significant and detrimental to fixed income families and families on low incomes. All of those matters need to be the purview of the Coordinator-General. He or she might be making the big decisions in terms of the projects, but wrapped up in those considerations has to be consideration for the necessary infrastructure for not only commercial water or industrial water but also domestic water.

Consideration should be given to the major electricity corridors for the projects but there also needs to be an assurance given that there will be sufficient infrastructure for development and that those infrastructure facilities will be put in place in a timely manner. Consideration needs to be given to rail and road corridors, particularly the ability to keep the heavy transportation out of the city centre, away from where domestic vehicles are commuting and away from schools. That is essential. Those safety factors are easily overlooked, and it is critical that they be considered at the front end of a project not at the back end.

I commend the officers in the Calliope Shire Council and the Gladstone City Council and officers in our infrastructure areas such as transport and electricity. They have become very attuned to the needs of a community in terms of infrastructure development because of their experience locally. That experience, knowledge and awareness have to be there right throughout the department of state development and it needs to be particularly firm in the person appointed to be the Coordinator-General.

Other areas of social infrastructure that must be addressed at the time these major projects are first considered are educational facilities, disability services and hospital services—because we have a growing community and shrinking access to various hospital services, specialists and other facilities. As I said, the transportation links with both rail and road have to be considered, as does child safety. Young

families come into the region for construction money. Mum or dad goes out to work. They have no supporting family. The grandparents are left in other parts of the state or interstate, and these young families are left to try to cope with sometimes a very stressful situation. That carries costs for the family.

Other areas of infrastructure that must be considered are emergency services; employment and training, where skill shortages have already been acknowledged; and police services, particularly when there is an increase in the number of young families and young people who go out of an afternoon or evening and at times do not always control themselves well. Another area is obviously affordable housing, not just for the new people who come in but also for the people who are already there who have to absorb into their fixed income the fluctuations of housing prices and commodity pricing.

Major development is not just state development. It is not just the Coordinator-General. It has to consider all of those social imposts at the front end because the lead time for a major project is significant. Unless the government considers those and other elements of need at the front end and puts them in place in time to shield the community from negative impacts that can occur with major developments, communities like mine that are now very accepting of major industries—indeed, they welcome major industries—will become less receptive, particularly if they have to carry the pain of development when there is insufficient preparation made across all sectors of government in terms of social infrastructure, social services and supports.

This legislation is sound, and I believe that it will streamline the application and development process for major projects. But, as I said, it also has to be carried hand in glove with consideration of the community in terms of their economic and social needs to ensure that all areas of economic development are catered for and that nobody in the community is left behind or disadvantaged.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (8.48 pm): It is pleasing to see that the state government has adopted National Party policy with regard to the Coordinator-General's role, particularly the need to beef up the powers of this very important position and placing it, as has happened in recent times, under the Premier's department. We support the policy for this important role to come under the Premier's department not just because it was our idea but also because it is good for Queensland as there is a real need to see infrastructure delivered much faster than what we have seen over the last eight years. There was a lot of catch-up to do with capital works in Queensland because of what has been seven to eight years of inaction under the state Labor government.

The backlog in infrastructure in Queensland means that south-east Queensland will face gridlock over the next few years, worse than what we already see. The threatened costs to the average household are between \$3,000 and \$4,000, and with soaring petrol prices those figures will grow far beyond what the current estimates are. It is a huge impost on people's budgets but it is also a huge impost upon their quality of life and the environment with increased emissions. Buses and rail networks are an important part of the overall transport solutions, and they also need to have appropriate investment and a coordinated program of delivery.

But we must not forget roads, because there is already a network of roads which is failing to meet today's needs let alone the next 10 to 20 years. In many cases much of the arterial road network still has only two lanes. That is the case with many main roads throughout Queensland and even in the south-east. This means that we not only have gridlock issues but also real potential for an escalation of a threat in an emergency. Emergency vehicles do not have access to these sites and there is not an alternative network that dovetails with the arterial network.

The population growth in Queensland should not surprise anyone who has studied the figures. Over the last 30 years population growth has been high but it has also been highly predictable. Population growth alone cannot be used by the Beattie Labor government in Queensland as an excuse for infrastructure failure. The failure in infrastructure delivery in the last seven years of this ALP government has been because of bad planning, not because of any surprises about population growth. We only have to consider the capital works figures to see that, despite the continuing growth in population, the Beattie Labor government was in fact reducing in real terms road funding and reducing in percentage terms the amount of money available for roads and capital spending overall.

About a billion dollars was not invested by the Beattie Labor government. It was clawed back by the Beattie government over its term of government. Now we see that there has been funding put into the forward allocations with a 20-year plan. I certainly welcome the concept of 20-year infrastructure plans, but the reason there has to be such a balloon, particularly over the next four to eight years, is that the baseline infrastructure has not been delivered in the last eight years. Most of the infrastructure that the Coordinator-General is now in a position to have to crack the whip about is infrastructure that is needed today, not in 10 or 20 years time. The real needs for the next 10 to 20 years are not even a glimmer in the eye of the Treasurer at this stage.

We have seen record taxes brought in by this government. We have high growth, a high-growth tax environment, but a fall-off in infrastructure delivery. The government cannot blame population growth and it cannot blame the tax environment. We have seen an extraordinary situation regarding what is probably a fairly centralised federal administration. We have had GST dollars handed back to the states—a growth tax handed back to the states—in order to fund the growth that they experienced. We

have seen \$700 million over and above what was anticipated flowing back into the coffers here in Queensland. We have also seen record coal and other mineral royalties. Add to this stamp duty from the booming property market and this government has been flush with cash. Yet still it has been incapable of delivering in key social infrastructure areas and in the hard infrastructure areas.

It was interesting when the Premier announced that the program for the infrastructure plan was to be rolled out. Trust him; it was always going to happen. Then only a couple of months later the small print of that announcement was whispered: 'We might just have a difficulty in delivering this program on time and on budget because we have just found out that there is a difficulty accessing people to do the work.' It should not be rocket science to realise that, if we are not delivering on a baseline infrastructure capital works program over seven to eight years, and then suddenly we want to ramp up into a more substantial program, we are not going to have apprentices, we are not going to have people in industry who are in a position to take that up to the level it needs to be taken up to. The challenges that will be delivered with the higher cost of delivering that are very much the fault of government—this government. It has no-one else to blame but itself.

Unfortunately, that is true in many areas of capital infrastructure. I want to quote the road funding figures as a percentage of the capital budget. We have seen a situation where capital funding as a percentage of the overall budget used to be nearly 30 per cent under a National-Liberal coalition government in this state. In this financial year it is 24 per cent. Over the last few years it has dipped down to 24 per cent and 23 per cent. It was 20 per cent in 2002-03. It bumped along at that same figure until the budget just past where the government allocated 24 per cent of the budget.

This is significant in real terms, because if we are going to invest in the growth of our state we need to invest in our infrastructure in order to have a sustainable environment economically and socially. In 2003 what we saw with roads as a proportion of funding was that the capital budget as a proportion of the overall budget had fallen off under the Beattie Labor government. But for the roads on which we are experiencing gridlock today, and which will cost the average household \$4,000 to \$6,000 over the next 10 years due to increasing petrol costs, this government was investing only 14 per cent of the capital budget. It is not rocket science; it is predictable. If we do not build the infrastructure, we have failed infrastructure, and then we have to suddenly deliver the infrastructure in a time frame with increased costs and the pressures of having a work force available to do it.

I want to address some key aspects of this legislation. It is interesting that the legislation has been brought on for debate tonight. We know that the department was not expecting it, and we know that a lot of Labor members of parliament were not expecting it. It is probably typical of the way that this government manages most things. There was a big rush of Labor members racing around trying to fill the speaking list when they realised they had to address a bill that was not due to come on tonight. This legislation, as I said, addresses the issue of beefing up some of the Coordinator-General's powers. We certainly support the role of having a strong Coordinator-General's position to ensure more seamless delivery of key projects across the many areas of government.

With regard to this particular piece of legislation, the main impetus has been the agreement reached between the Premier and the Brisbane Lord Mayor on the process for the north-south bypass tunnel, the NSBT. The memorandum of understanding for this project was signed on 28 February. One of the issues that was raised was the need for legislative change to facilitate that process, particularly to enable the Coordinator-General to evaluate changes made to a project by a proponent of a significant project following the completion of the Coordinator-General's report evaluating the environmental impact statement but before the project commences. This legislation also needed to provide that certain works approved by the Governor in Council can be carried out by an approved person who has entered into an agreement with a local body to carry out those works.

In simple terms, working up public-private partnerships and entering these agreements to deliver infrastructure with new funding mechanisms is complex. One of the challenges is that the tenderers involved may go through the process of environmental considerations but when it comes to the delivery stage of the process some of those components may have changed. We need to provide reasonable powers to the Coordinator-General so as to not have to go right back through that process and start again. It is a reasonable amendment and it is one that we are happy to support.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! Member for Maroochydore, I presume you have another 10 minutes. If you would like to adjourn the debate then you can have another opportunity to speak if you would like.

Debate, on motion of Miss Simpson, adjourned.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (8.59 pm): I move—
That the House, at its rising, do adjourn until 9.30 am on Tuesday, 8 November 2005.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (8.59 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Public Hospital System

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (9.00 pm): Thank God that big Bill Ludwig is still in control of the Queensland Labor Party and the Queensland government. At least a good old Labor member is still in control. If Terry Mackenroth had been here during the week, Mr Deputy Speaker, I can assure you that you would not have seen the government vote against the opposition's motion on Wednesday night. The other situation today is to do with the self-righteous Socialist Left. Where are those members now? Some of them were not even here on Wednesday night to vote, and they talk about looking after free hospitals in Queensland. We are going to lose free hospitals in Queensland because of these self-righteous people who cannot manage the economy of this state. The real issue here is social justice. They do not believe in social justice. They did not vote with this side of the House on Wednesday night, so social justice is no longer an issue with the Labor Party.

Under the mini budget delivered on Tuesday, the government is now asking if the private enterprise and the non-profit sector can deliver aged care services. This is an absolute travesty of justice. The government wants to transfer home care services currently offered under Home and Community Care or HACC arrangements to the community sector, commencing from 1 July 2006 transitioning through to 2007.

There will be means testing of copayments for non-concession card holders for non-urgent surgery, means testing of copayments for non-concession card holders for specialist outpatient services and copayment means testing for non-concession card holders for the spectacle subsidy scheme. Ninety thousand people are affected by this. Those 90,000 people would probably traditionally be good Labor supporters.

It is a slur on this government to turn its back on the free hospital system in Queensland. The people who cannot pay their own way are the ones who are going to be affected. Talk about a \$33,000 demarcation! There are a lot of people who are only earning a couple of dollars more than \$33,000. I know people in my electorate and right around the whole 89 electorates who cannot afford it, and they are on \$40,000 or \$45,000 with three or four kids.

This is the situation I hope Bill Ludwig wins on. I can see Robbie Schwarten sitting over there. He is one of the old Labor blokes. There are not too many more left. Terry Mackenroth would not have copped it. Tom Burns would not have copped it. I can assure members that there are a whole lot of others who would not have copped it. At the end of the day, we can talk about health issues—

Mr Schwarten: Can I respond?

Mr JOHNSON: No, sit down, because I only have a minute left, and I am not going to take an interjection. This is a sad day for Queensland because we are going to lose something that was sacred to all Queenslanders.

Time expired.

Gold Coast Youth Orchestra

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (9.03 pm): I recently had the pleasure of attending a performance by the Gold Coast Youth Orchestra. Since that wonderful performance I have become one of their greatest fans. These young people are dedicated, skilled and incredibly talented. It is a real treat to attend one of their performances.

The orchestra was formed in 1969 with Frank Schieblich as the first conductor. He had retired to the Gold Coast from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He lent his support to a group of 40 enthusiastic but musically inexperienced children, little imagining that almost 40 years later the 200-plus strong Gold Coast Youth Orchestra would become a prominent part of the city's cultural life.

The orchestra is made up of six groups—youth symphony, wind ensemble, chamber orchestra, string orchestra, big band and concert band. The six groups, each with its own conductor holding a tertiary musical qualification, cater for all levels of ability. It is a far cry from the early days when most children had little musical training except for the ubiquitous school recorder.

The orchestra started with no instruments and, as most of the founding children looked to the new orchestra as their source of musical experience, nearly all instruments had to be purchased and were lent out to members. During the early years adults would sit beside young players who had literally just begun learning their instrument, sometimes even helping during concert performances. There was one memorable occasion when Sir Bruce Small, a former mayor of the Gold Coast, accompanied a youthful Roland Adeney, who plays the violin, and Mark Vickers, who plays the timpani, on his didgeridoo. Both

Roland and Mark are now highly respected musicians. The Gold Coast Youth Orchestra can be proud of the number of former members who have used the grounding gained in orchestra training to forge a musical career.

Before 1992 rehearsals were held in school or community halls. A lot of time was spent searching for appropriate performance venues. This changed when the orchestra was able to open a dedicated building. The Gold Coast Youth Orchestra had a home. Membership doubled overnight. A sense of purpose was bestowed on the Gold Coast Youth Orchestra. There was recognition that all achievements up to that time had been accomplished despite great adversity. The Gold Coast Youth Orchestra can truly feel that it has contributed, and continues to contribute, to the cultural development of the Gold Coast.

It is wonderful to see young people so involved in such a wonderful art form. We hear so often that young people are troublemakers, drug takers and have no purpose in life. These young people prove that to be a lie. I am very proud that the Gold Coast can boast such a wonderful youth orchestra. I congratulate the performers and all the people who put so much effort into all making it all come together. I thoroughly recommend a night out at the orchestra to everyone. Their next concert is at the Gold Coast Arts Centre on 12 November. I encourage all members to attend. I guarantee they will not be disappointed.

Public Hospital System

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (9.06 pm): 'Big Bill' Ludwig was right when he said that Premier Beattie got it wrong with regard to proposing to abolish the free public health system. How dare a Labor Premier of this state put on the table a proposal to remove free access to our public hospital system? What we see is a government that does not understand the fundamental right of access by Queenslanders to our free public hospital system—a system that is based on clinical access, not on whether people roll up with their tax return or whether someone is a casual worker and has to prove their income in order to access the free public hospital system. It is something that is going to be not just a thorn in the government's side; it is going to be a knife at its neck because people will not wear a government that was so incompetent that it broke the once proud public health system which has been a hallmark of health services in Queensland. Our public health system, which has been proudly upheld, is a system that has been supported by doctors, nurses, the public and people from across the political spectrum.

Today we have the big leader of the union movement saying that Premier Beattie got it wrong, yet the Labor members of this House are still willing to vote with the government to keep this proposal on the table. They refuse to understand that this is not only undermining our health system; it is also undermining the confidence of the public in the ability of this government to really understand what is wrong with the delivery of health services in this state.

Never have we seen so much money in the coffers of government. As a growth tax, the GST alone is delivering at least an additional \$700 million this year. Never have we seen so much money, but still this government wants to break the health system in Queensland and make people prove their income in order to have access to it. One day it will be elective surgery; the next day it will be the emergency departments. Where does it stop? That is the heart of a real Labor government—tell people one thing and do another.

We saw it with the aged care policy, with the flogging off of aged care beds. This state government said that it was not its policy to do that, and then it went ahead and did it. The government says that it is going to have aged care beds evaluated by a health economist. However, we know that it passed a cabinet submission in 1998 regarding that policy. It proceeded to do it with Hervey Bay and now it is moving on with Yeppoon and, hey-presto, the rest of the state is on the plate and being considered as well in regard to public aged care beds. That is why I just do not believe the government when it says that it is going to get it right with regard to access to the hospital system.

Brisbane North Community Cabinet

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (9.09 pm): This Sunday the electorate of Aspley will host the 88th community cabinet. It will be the second time that Aspley has hosted a Brisbane north community cabinet and, as with the case in 2003, my community is buzzing with a fair degree of excitement and anticipation about this 2005 event.

The Sunday community meeting will be held in the assembly hall at Craigslea State High School and the Monday meeting of cabinet will take place at the City Christian Church in Bridgeman Downs. The community meeting will allow the opportunity for my communities and those of the members of Kurwongbah and Stafford to meet face to face with the Premier and members of his cabinet. I am confident that it will be well attended. Those people will be there to raise whatever issues they want with the Premier and his cabinet.

It is often the case, unfortunately, that in this place urban communities such as those of Brisbane north are represented unfairly by those opposite as large homogeneous populations with no real community connectiveness, and there is indifference to and sometimes ignorance of what is outside south-east Queensland. I find the opposite to be the case. I am quite confident that on Sunday we will demonstrate that my community is deeply concerned and interested to talk to the Premier and the cabinet across a whole range of issues that affect all Queenslanders. They are deeply interested in their own community. I have over 150 local groups just in my electorate alone. I am sure that my constituents and those in Kurwongbah and Stafford will be talking about a whole range of issues such as the environment, country racing, water, health and industrial relations. There will be a considerable number of formal deputations. As over 1,000 people attended the first Aspley community cabinet, I anticipate an equally successful day this Sunday.

However, these meetings do not happen without significant assistance. First of all, I would like to thank the Premier for agreeing to come, once again, to Aspley and Brisbane north. This followed my request as a result of a number of my constituents asking the Premier to come back. I would also like to thank ministers and the departmental staff for their 88th tour of duty. I am looking forward to seeing them on Sunday and Monday.

I would like to thank the communities of Craigslea State High School and Craigslea State School. I am very proud of the commitment that they have made for the Sunday community meeting. I would also like to thank the communities of Aspley State High School, which will host an education breakfast; Aspley Leagues Club, which will host a businesswomen's breakfast; and the community of City Christian Church, who were the ones who offered first assistance and who will be hosting the cabinet meeting and the luncheon. I know that in common with me, the member for Kurwongbah, Linda Lavarch, and the member for Stafford, Terry Sullivan, are keenly anticipating the opportunities afforded to our community at the coming cabinet on Sunday.

Benowa State High School; Meals on Wheels

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (9.12 pm): I rise to applaud the great ongoing work of Benowa State High School students and, in particular, the arts in which they have continued to excel this year. At the 2005 Gold Coast Eisteddfod held in August this year, Benowa State High School took out the most outstanding secondary school trophy which is awarded to the school with the highest aggregate score across all categories at the eisteddfod. Congratulations also go to Benowa Primary School for winning best Gold Coast primary school.

This achievement is put into perspective when we realise that the Gold Coast Eisteddfod is the largest of its kind in Australia. The disappointing point is that in spite of all the hard work being done by the enthusiastic staff of Benowa State High School and all of the great performances being turned in by the students, they are yet to receive recognition in the form of funding from the state government to assist in building a new performing arts centre. On 5 October the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing made a point of mentioning during the Rockhampton regional parliament that the state government has financed two \$5 million projects in the last four years to build a performing arts centre at the Rockhampton State High School and a fine arts centre at the Rockhampton North State High School.

Mr Lawlor: You're the one who didn't want to go.

Mr LANGBROEK: I had a great time in Rockhampton. I love everything about the place.

Mr Lawlor: And you enjoyed yourself.

Mr LANGBROEK: I did. I had a wonderful time.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr LANGBROEK: I am happy about Rocky getting it. I would just like some on the Gold Coast. While I do not harbour any intentions of a regional parliament ever being held on the Gold Coast, I see no reason why a regional parliament would need to come to town in order for the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts to look at the great record of the Benowa State High School in the area of the arts. Benowa State High School is crying out for a performing arts centre. It seems only fair that if Rockhampton can have two arts centres Benowa, with its track record of excellence in the arts, can have one for the Gold Coast.

I would also like to briefly make mention of the pleasure I had in assisting Broadbeach Meals on Wheels with its food delivery run recently. This great community service is provided by local volunteers. I went on a run with Brian and Helen throughout Surfers Paradise. It was very interesting. I met a lot of old friends who were being assisted by the Meals on Wheels program. It ensures that elderly members of the community get good food at a reasonable price. For just \$5.60 recipients of Meals on Wheels get a meal, dessert and some fruit juice. The state government gives recipients a \$1.80 subsidy towards their meals—a subsidy which, while only small, provides great assistance to elderly Queenslanders.

Meals on Wheels was introduced in Victoria in 1952 to enable people to be independent and remain in their own homes for longer. Community services such as Meals on Wheels offer support in conjunction with Home and Community Care, the largest government program supporting clients in their own homes. It was a very worthy day and a worthy group of volunteers. I commend all their efforts and I enjoyed the day.

Keebra Park State High School

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (9.15 pm): Recently I had the pleasure to again present the science awards at the Keebra Park State High School. Principal Fran Jones, deputy Gary Brown and all teaching staff, particularly head of science department Robyn Zipt, have instilled in the Keebra Park students a great sense of pride and determination to succeed. With the 2005 CSIRO Crest Awards, the school achieved 23 bronze awards and Brenton Kirkbride received a silver award for his research project titled 'The effect of diffused light on plant growth'. He also gained third place in the Macquarie University Eureka Schools prize for Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences and a merit award in the BHP Billiton Science Awards. Xin Fang won a gold award for her research project titled 'Chitin from crustaceans—a wasted resource?', which means do prawn shells break down in nitrogen deficient soil to help beans grow? The answer, which I am sure all members are wanting to know is, yes, they do.

The CSIRO Gold Crest Award is an extremely prestigious honour and only a couple are presented nationwide each year. Only four Gold Crest Awards have been presented to Queensland students in its history, and three of those have gone to the Keebra Park State High School students—a remarkable effort. Xin also achieved first place in the Gold Coast Schools Science Competition; second place in the Macquarie University Eureka Schools Prize for Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences; and first place in the BHP Billiton Science Award for Chemistry and Biochemistry.

In the 2005 Rio Tinto Science Competition, 20,000 students entered from all Australian states and territories as well as New Zealand and Singapore. A total of 53 Keebra Park students participated and 21 achieved credits and Jack Reichelt, Lisa Seeley, Samantha Milton, Jacob Brennan and Reece Clark received distinctions. The 2005 Royal Australian Chemical Institute National Chemistry Quiz attracted 114,973 applicants from 1,357 students from all Australian states and territories, New Zealand, PNG, Fiji, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia and various other countries. A total of 73 Keebra Park students participated. Of them 14 achieved credits, 15 achieved distinctions and Jack Reichelt, Stephanie Parsons, Alex Zipt and Xin Fang achieved high distinctions.

Just to show how versatile the Keebra Park State High School is, in the Rock Eisteddfod they achieved third for their performance in Queensland. They also achieved first place in the video clip contest and they can now contest the Australian finals. In Rugby League they achieved first place in the Arrive Alive Cup for Queensland, beating Kirwan State High School, and second in the Arrive Alive final, beaten by Endeavour High. Ben Teo won the Peter Sterling Medal—the first time a player on the losing side has won this medal. It has been another successful year for the Keebra Park State High School. I say congratulations also to all the parents for the strong support they give to their children.

Time expired.

Patel, Dr J

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (9.18 pm): Yesterday and today I had a number of disturbing conversations with one of Dr Patel's victims, Mrs Vicki Lester, whose story is featured in today's *Courier-Mail* and written by journalist Jason Gregory. I was alerted to Vicki's recent plight in a letter from Bundaberg victims patients support group spokesperson Ian Fleming, whom I commend for his diligent work. Ian's letter was also copied and sent to a number of people, including the Premier and the health minister.

Mr Fleming has also as recently as today sent me another letter describing the plight and shabby treatment of another of Patel's victims, Nelson Cox, and I will table both these letters. I hope that these letters start ringing a few alarm bells for this government. In the words of Patel victim Vicki Lester, 'The culture is not changing.' The culture Vicki is referring to is the arrogant culture within Queensland Health administration, specifically at Bundaberg.

Patients, victims of Patel, who have legitimate requests are once again being ignored by this Labor government's bureaucracy and, once again, it takes the threat of parliamentary action and media attention—as witnessed by this morning's *Courier-Mail* front-page article—to shame this Labor government into action. I and the victims of Dr Patel would prefer not to revert to that course of action because it should not be necessary. Surely this government has learnt its lesson. After everything that we have been through, surely it has learnt its lesson.

Last night in this chamber I hand delivered a letter to the health minister that I wrote after I spoke with Vicki, which I now table. The letter details Vicki's experiences with Queensland Health and urgently calls on the health minister to act to ensure that her health needs are justly and sensitively managed. This morning, the health minister tried to make a virtue of the basic assistance that he is being forced to

offer Vicki and her family—and still did not get right. His department is still ignoring her GP's advice. She is too sick to travel by train to Brisbane. All of her other visits to Brisbane for operations have been by air. This coming trip should be no different. She is still being offered only \$300 for eight days' worth of meals. All they can look forward to are sausage rolls and two minute noodles while they are down here.

I remind the health minister of what his bureaucrats told Mrs Lester when she queried these substandard Queensland Health arrangements. She was told, 'What do you think? You're not going on a holiday.' The minister needs to carefully read Mr Fleming's letters, which I have tabled, and to act. I have lost all confidence in the current patient liaison bureaucracy in Bundaberg. The minister needs to take measures to make sure that they do their job and look after Dr Death's victims.

The Premier's \$6.3 billion health plan is already failing my families, in a practical sense. It is a matter of life and death that he and his ministers fix this up.

Time expired.

Griffith University, Student Council Election

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (9.21 pm): We have heard some wonderful speeches in this House tonight about the nature of democracy, the beginnings of democracy and our strong democracy in Queensland. I believe that human beings are, by nature, social. We are made fully human and fully whole when we are engaged with our community and when we are engaged with other human beings. That democratic nature is what makes us fully human. We know that human beings are at their healthiest when they are engaged in community activity and involved with family and friends. There is a lot of talk in the media about young people being disengaged from the political process. I want to put to rest that complete furphy.

I have spoken in this place before about the important role of student unions, student representative councils and student guilds in our universities. I want to speak tonight about the wonderful work that has been done at Griffith University. It held its student representative council elections in the week beginning Monday, 17 October through until Thursday, 20 October. Elections were held at all campuses of Griffith University—Nathan, Mount Gravatt, Logan, the Conservatorium of Music and the College of Arts. Election week was a fine example of young people being involved in the democratic process by campaigning and convincing their fellow students that one election candidate over another was the better person to vote for.

That week, I made a number of visits to Griffith University. It was an absolute delight to see our strong democracy in action and to see young people involved in the democratic process on their university campuses. I table for the benefit of the parliament the results of those student elections.

I congratulate the successful presidential candidate, Glen Chatterton, from the Student Unity team, who received 1,035 votes. I commend John-Matthew Jones from Keep Left, who received 35 votes, and Robert Nicholas from Turn Left, who received 173 votes. While those two candidates were not successful, their involvement in the process made the Griffith University student representative council's democracy even stronger.

It is activities such as these that John Howard wants to ban. It is activities such as these that members of the opposition—who come in here and talk about what our state government should be doing—have done nothing to keep alive. The opposition should be beating down Barnaby Joyce's door and telling him to vote against John Howard's regressive, anti student organisation legislation. It is bad for students and it is bad for democracy.

I congratulate Brenton Hill, who was elected as finance director, Paul Catchlove, who was elected as education director and Anika Wells, who was elected as activities director, and Candice Barrett and Dane Falvo, who were elected as media officers for the student representative council.

What is important is not who was elected; what is important is that students got involved in the process and had their say.

Cooloola Human Services Network

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (9.24 pm): Yesterday I spoke in this House about the situation facing the Making a Difference program in my electorate. At the time, I was disappointed in the way the federal government had handled the true status of funding for this program.

Since then, not only has the federal government let down the people of my electorate who want to get out of the illicit drug cycle, but so too has the Cooloola Human Services Network, known as CHSN, which was responsible for auspicing the project. After all of the work done by me and the MAD coordinator, Mari Toner, along with the valuable assistance from the local ATODS worker to prevent the immediate cessation of the drug program, CHSN has directed Ms Toner not to come to Brisbane to meet with the health minister's staff. That meeting was organised by my office so that we could obtain advice from Queensland Health regarding our options in order to keep some form of drug prevention strategy active in the region. Ms Toner was not only banned from the meeting by the Cooloola Human

Services Network manager but also advised that no matter what happens, CHSN will not auspice the MAD program again and will look for alternative projects to sponsor.

The CHSN management committee advised Ms Toner that they would be deleting any negative references to their management skills from the annual report, which was written by Ms Toner last week. This report outlined some of the limitations of CHSN, as the grantee of federal government funding, so that lessons could be learnt in order that this type of problem not recur and so that future programs would not be without funding eight months before their contract finishes. This is one of the primary purposes of an annual report. People have to be responsible and accountable, particularly when they are handling over people's money. I am not aware whether annual reports can legally be rewritten and I am appalled that people who are employed to assist the community can be allowed to alter reality to suit themselves.

To coincide with this negative behaviour, CHSN wants to keep the \$8,000 provided by the Minister for Health specifically for MAD to continue. I cannot believe the hide of these people. I am very disappointed in the management committee of CHSN and felt compelled to bring this to the attention of the House tonight.

Lifeline, Toowoomba

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (9.27 pm): Tonight I want to speak about the 30th anniversary of the presence of Lifeline in Toowoomba. An event was held last week and earlier in the year to celebrate this auspicious occasion.

Last week, Mrs Glad Ponting received recognition for her work. She has volunteered her time to Lifeline for the past three decades. However, the sprightly 93-year-old said that she 'ain't finished yet'. Her service was recognised last week at the 30th birthday reunion and AGM of Lifeline. Mrs Ponting has worked in each of the Lifeline stores during her 30-year stint and still dedicates half of each Monday to the Ruthven Street Emporium outlet.

Although Mrs Ponting feels a little embarrassed about receiving accolades for her volunteer service, plenty have come her way over the years. She has received the Lifeline Australia Golden Wattle Award, the Commonwealth Recognition Award for Senior Australians, the Centenary Medal and the Chronicle Volunteer of the Year Award. I am pleased to advise the House that there were other recipients of special awards last week. These included Alice Cahill, Marion Dent, Gerry Turner, Alan and Marylyn Meade, Ruth Ford, George Fox and Claire Mellick.

Earlier this year at a special dinner in July others were mentioned for the service that they have contributed to Lifeline in Toowoomba over the last 30 years. They included the late Vic Davis, a bank manager who saw the need for a 24-hour telephone counselling centre in the early 1970s and worked tirelessly to see the service open on 20 July 1975; Miss Ethel Fick AOM, who dedicated over 20 years of voluntary service to Lifeline and over 55 years of volunteer service to the Toowoomba community; and Reverend Noel Park AOM, who was the managing director of the organisation from 1980 to 2000. There were countless volunteer telephone counsellors who, for the past 30 years, have ensured that people are able to take calls 24 hours a day, 365 days a year from those in distress and who need to talk. There were also volunteers in the business division with the Bookfests, volunteers like Gerry Turner who at the age of 85 is still actively involved. There were volunteers not only in Toowoomba but also in Charleville, St George and Dalby. Past chairperson and Treasurer Jennifer Grummitt and past board member Norm Devine both completed 10 years of service. The Lifeline story in Toowoomba, as it is throughout Australia, is a marvellous story of selfless giving by a dedicated band of people. I commend the efforts of Lifeline in Toowoomba and throughout Australia.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 9.30 pm.