



RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

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Subject **FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT** Page
Tuesday, 6 March 2007

ABSENCE OF MR SPEAKER	573
ASSENT TO BILLS	573
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Letter, dated 1 March 2007, from Her Excellency the Governor to Mr Speaker advising of assent to Bills.	573
OMBUDSMAN	573
Report	573
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report of the Queensland Ombudsman, dated March 2007, titled 'The Pacific Motorway Report—an investigation into the actions of the Department of Main Roads relating to noise and safety issues concerning the Pacific Motorway'.	573
OFFICE OF MR SPEAKER	573
Statement of Recurrent Expenditure	573
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Statement of Public Disclosure titled 'Expenditure of the Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the period 1 July 2006 to 9 October 2006'.	573
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Statement of Public Disclosure titled 'Expenditure of the Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the period 10 October 2006 to 31 December 2006'.	574
SPEAKER'S STATEMENT	574
Clerk Assistant and Sergeant-at-Arms	574
PETITIONS	574
TABLED PAPERS	574
NOTICE OF MOTION	576
South East Queensland Regional Plan	576
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS	576
Green Thumbs Competition	576
Project Vista	577
Wesley Research Institute, Tissue Bank and Clinical Trials Centre	577
Tank Street Bridge	577
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Folder by the Department of Public Works, Queensland Government containing DVDs and leaflets relating to the Tank Street Bridge Project.	578
Rugby League World Cup	578
Queensland's Future	578

Table of Contents — Tuesday, 6 March 2007

Future Directions Division	579
Death of Mr B Thorpe	579
Year of the Surf-Lifesaver	580
Ideas Festival	580
Launch of <i>mX</i> Newspaper	580
Queensland Liberal Party, Electoral Allowances	581
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copies of brochures issued by Federal Members of Parliament representing Queensland electorates.....	581
Water Supply	582
Public Hospitals Performance Report 2005-06	582
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report by Queensland Health titled 'An Investment in Health—Queensland Public Hospitals Performance Report 2005-06'.....	582
Ipswich Motorway	583
Mine Inspections	584
Queensland Police Service, Midyear Crime Statistics	584
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report, dated 16 February 2007, by the Queensland Police Service titled 'Crime Statistics Report—July 2006 to December 2006'.....	584
Comcare	585
Local Councils, Funding	585
Smart State Academies	585
Brisbane Housing Company	586
Scams	586
Rural and Remote Paramedics Program	587
Rainman	587
Binary Industries, Narangba	588
CHILDREN'S COURT OF QUEENSLAND	588
Annual Report	588
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Childrens Court of Queensland 13th Annual Report 2005-06.	588
SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION COMMITTEE	588
Report	588
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Scrutiny of Legislation Committee Alert Digest No. 3 of 2007.	588
PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	588
Beattie Government	588
Ipswich Motorway	589
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	589
Water Restrictions, Level 5	589
Water Supply, Tankers	590
Willprint	591
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Election leaflet issued by Dr Bruce Flegg.	591
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of particulars relating to payments to Willprint Designer Printers Pty Ltd between 21 October 2003 and 21 December 2006.....	591
Recycled Water Pipeline	592
Ipswich Motorway	592
Water Restrictions	593
Water Supply	594
Queensland Health	594
Goodna Bypass	595
Electricity Industry	596
Federal Member for Moreton, Police Resources	596
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of article from the City South News, dated 22 February 2007, titled 'MP cops blast for "support".....	596
Ambulance Service, Response Times	597
Heritage Places, Survey	597
Departmental Staff, Court Case	597
Rental Prices	598
Local Government, Size, Shape and Sustainability Review	598
Energy Industry	599
Tully Millstream Hydro-electric Project	599
Surf-Lifesaving Clubs	600
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS	600
Townsville Hospital	600
Ambulance Emergencies	601
MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST	601
Water Restrictions	601
Mount Crosby State School	602
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Photographs of school classrooms.....	602
Water Infrastructure; Ipswich Motorway	602
Mooloolaba Spit	603
Ipswich Motorway	604

Table of Contents — Tuesday, 6 March 2007

International Women's Day	605
Child Safety	606
Redcliffe Electorate	607
Department of Child Safety	608
Welfare to Work Initiative	609
Hit-and-Run Legislation, Statute of Limitations	610
Riverlink Shopping Centre, Pedestrian Bridge	611
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of a letter dated 29 November 2007 from Mr Allan Keast, Director of Leda Holdings Pty Ltd to Ms Nolan concerning the Ipswich Riverlink pedestrian bridge.	611
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Copy of an article from The Queensland Times, dated 28 February 2007, titled 'Riverlink may open without city link'.	611
PLANT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL	612
Second Reading	612
Consideration in Detail	633
Clause 1, as read, agreed to.	634
Clause 2, as read, agreed to.	634
Clause 3, as read, agreed to.	636
Third Reading	636
Long Title	636
BODY CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL	636
Second Reading	636
ORDER OF BUSINESS	651
ADDRESS-IN-REPLY	652
<i>Tabled paper:</i> During his speech, Mr Messenger tabled a copy of a brochure titled 'Interlock—The Professional Choice—Wallet Card'.	654
ADJOURNMENT	670
Health System	670
Great Sandy Straits Marina Resort	671
Puttaburra, Ms I	672
<i>Tabled paper:</i> During her speech, Mrs Menkens tabled a bundle of documents relating to legal costs associated with a Criminal Compensation Claim by Iris Puttaburra.	672
Dysart, Baby Change Facilities	672
Special Circumstances Court; Domestic Violence	673
Public Housing	673
Vegetation Management	674
Springwood Electorate, Schools	674
Currumbin Electorate, Schools	675
Fire Ants	676
ATTENDANCE	676

TUESDAY, 6 MARCH 2007

The House met at 9.30 am.

ABSENCE OF MR SPEAKER

THE CLERK: Honourable members, I have to inform the House of the absence of Mr Speaker, who is currently attending the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's 56th Westminster Seminar on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure, and wish to advise that the Deputy Speaker, Mr John English, will take the chair as Mr Acting Speaker. The honourable member for Keppel has been nominated by Mr Acting Speaker as Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr J English, Redlands) read prayers and took the chair as Acting Speaker.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have to report that Mr Speaker has received from Her Excellency the Governor a letter in respect of assent to certain bills, the contents of which will be incorporated in the records of the parliament. I table the letter for the information of members.

1 March 2007

The Honourable M.F. Reynolds, AM, MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

I hereby acquaint the Legislative Assembly that the following Bills, having been passed by the Legislative Assembly and having been presented for the Royal Assent, were assented to in the name of Her Majesty The Queen on the date shown:

Date of Assent: 28 February 2007

"A Bill for An Act to amend particular Acts administered by the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads, and for other purposes."

"A Bill for An Act to amend the Superannuation (State Public Sector) Act 1990 and other Acts and to repeal the Parliamentary Contributory Superannuation Act 1970."

"A Bill for An Act to prohibit in Queensland particular nuclear facilities, and for other purposes."

"A Bill for An Act to amend the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001."

"A Bill for An Act to amend the Wild Rivers Act 2005, and for other purposes."

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

Yours sincerely

Governor

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 1 March 2007, from Her Excellency the Governor to Mr Speaker advising of assent to Bills.

OMBUDSMAN

Report

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Today I have received a report from the Queensland Ombudsman titled the *Pacific Motorway Report: an investigation into the actions of the Department of Main Roads in relation to noise and safety issues concerning the Pacific Motorway*. I table the report for the information of members.

Tabled paper: Report of the Queensland Ombudsman, dated March 2007, titled 'The Pacific Motorway Report—an investigation into the actions of the Department of Main Roads relating to noise and safety issues concerning the Pacific Motorway'.

OFFICE OF SPEAKER

Statement of Recurrent Expenditure

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: I lay upon the table of the House the statement for public disclosure of recurrent expenditure for former Speaker McGrady for the period 1 July 2006 to 9 October 2006.

Tabled paper: Statement of Public Disclosure titled 'Expenditure of the Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the period 1 July 2006 to 9 October 2006'.

I lay upon the table of the House the statement for public disclosure of recurrent expenditure for Speaker Reynolds for the period 10 October 2006 to 31 December 2006.

Tabled paper: Statement of Public Disclosure titled 'Expenditure of the Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the period 10 October 2006 to 31 December 2006'.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Clerk Assistant and Sergeant-at-Arms

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: I advise of temporary arrangements for the duties of Clerk Assistant (Table) and Sergeant-at-Arms, following the retirement of Mr Ian Thompson.

Ms Leanne Clare, from the Public Accounts Committee secretariat, will fill the position of Clerk Assistant (Table) and will be the Manager of Chamber Services. Leanne will also act as Assistant Honorary Secretary to the Queensland branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Mr Kevin Jones will take on the duties of Sergeant-at-Arms, in addition to his existing role as Manager of Security and Attendant Services.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Kitchener Road Children's Centre

Mr Nicholls, from 136 petitioners, requesting the House to transfer the title of the Kitchener Road Children's Centre to the Brisbane City Council.

Pinkenba, Waste Transfer Station

Mr Nicholls, from 7 petitioners, requesting the House to acquire the lease of land at 127 Eagle Farm Road Pinkenba; to refuse expansion of the leased area for a Waste Transfer Station; and for the EPA to direct the Transfer Station to cease any activity that generates dust.

Caloundra, Bus Service

Mr McArdle, from 193 petitioners, requesting the House to provide a bus service on Mark Road to the Kookaburra Retirement Village, Caloundra.

TABLED PAPERS

PAPERS TABLED DURING THE RECESS

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

23 February 2007—

- Australian Crime Commission Annual Report 2005-06
- Response from the Acting Minister for Health (Ms Boyle) to a paper petition (778-07) presented by Mr Cripps from 287 petitioners regarding the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

26 February 2007—

- Response from the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (Ms Spence) to a paper petition (720-06) presented by Mr English from 70 petitioners regarding the stationing of police on the Southern Moreton Bay Islands

27 February 2007—

- Response by the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (Ms Spence) to a question without notice asked by Mr Messenger on 8 February 2007

28 February 2007—

- Response from the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport (Mr Fraser) to an e-petition (688-06) sponsored by Ms Stone from 83 petitioners regarding the Logan North Library in the Springwood area
- Response from the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology to a paper petition (774-07) presented by Mrs Stuckey from 142 petitioners regarding a proposed public housing development at Palm Beach
- Letter, dated 26 February 2007, from the Premier and Minister for Trade (Mr Beattie) to the Clerk of the Parliament enclosing a copy of a letter from the Commonwealth Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Treaties listing proposed international treaty actions tabled in both houses of the Federal Parliament on 6 and 7 February 2007 and the National Interest Analyses for the proposed treaty actions listed

1 March 2007—

- Response from the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland (Mr Shine) to a paper petition (748-06) presented by Mr Gibson from 1 petitioner regarding the Queensland Supreme Court Registry

2 March 2007—

- Response from the Premier and Minister for Trade (Mr Beattie) to an E-petition (660-06) sponsored by Mr Lee from 1,090 petitioners regarding bringing the Australian Soccer team to Queensland

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

The following statutory instruments were tabled by the Clerk—

Gaming Machine Act 1991—

- Gaming Machine Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007, No. 14

Electricity and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2006—

- Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 15

Energy Ombudsman Act 2006—

- Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 16

Food Act 2006—

- Food (Postponement) Regulation 2007, No. 17

Chiropractors Registration Act 2001, Dental Practitioners Registration Act 2001, Dental Technicians and Dental Prosthetists Registration Act 2001, Health Act 1937, Medical Practitioners Registration Act 2001, Medical Radiation Technologists Registration Act 2001, Occupational Therapists Registration Act 2001, Optometrists Registration Act 2001, Osteopaths Registration Act 2001, Pharmacists Registration Act 2001, Physiotherapists Registration Act 2001, Podiatrists Registration Act 2001, Psychologists Registration Act 2001, Speech Pathologists Registration Act 2001—

- Health Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007, No. 18

Plant Protection Act 1989—

- Plant Protection Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007, No. 19

Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994—

- Rural and Regional Adjustment Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007, No. 20

Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994—

- Rural and Regional Adjustment Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 2007, No. 21

Fisheries Act 1994—

- Fisheries Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007, No. 22

Recording of Evidence Act 1962—

- Recording of Evidence Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007, No. 23

Nature Conservation Act 1992—

- Nature Conservation (Protected Areas) Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007, No. 24

Water Act 2000—

- Water Resource (Logan Basin) Plan 2007, No 25 and Explanatory Notes for No. 25

Nature Conservation Act 1992—

- Nature Conservation (Protected Plants Harvest Period) Notice 2007, No. 26

REPORT TABLED BY THE CLERK

The following report was tabled by The Clerk—

Report pursuant to Standing Order 158 (Clerical errors or formal changes to any bill) detailing amendments to certain Bills, made by the Clerk, prior to assent by Her Excellency the Governor, viz—

Nuclear Facilities Prohibition Bill 2006

Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—

Omit—

'Nuclear Facilities Prohibition Act 2006'

Insert—

'Nuclear Facilities Prohibition Act 2007'.

Transport Legislation and Another Act Amendment Bill 2006

Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—

Omit—

'Transport Legislation and Another Act Amendment Act 2006'

Insert—

'Transport Legislation and Another Act Amendment Act 2007'.

Clause 60 (Amendment of s 87 (Issue of restricted licence to disqualified person)—

At page 56, line 18, before 'Section'

Insert—

'(1)'.

Superannuation (State Public Sector) Amendment Bill 2006

Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—*Omit—**'Superannuation (State Public Sector) Amendment Act 2006'**Insert—**'Superannuation (State Public Sector) Amendment Act 2007'.***NOTICE OF MOTION****South East Queensland Regional Plan**

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (9.34 am): I give notice that I shall move—

That this House:

1. Notes the regulatory provisions of the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005-2026 Amendment 1 (the amendment) that were tabled in the Legislative Assembly as part of the amendment on 31 October 2006; and
2. Ratifies the regulatory provisions of the amendment as required under section 2.5A.17 of the Integrated Planning Act 1997.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**Green Thumbs Competition**

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.35 am): As part of our ongoing efforts to reduce the consumption of water, today I am pleased to announce a new competition to reward creative green thumbs in the south-east corner of Queensland. The competition will target drought-proof gardens that feature Australian natives and other water-saving features. It will be run in conjunction with the *Courier-Mail* and the Queensland Water Commission.

As you know, Mr Acting Speaker, gardening is one of our most popular pursuits. Unfortunately, the worst drought on record has severely limited our ability to water and enjoy our gardens. However, many Queenslanders are rising to the challenge and are coming up with creative ways to diversify and maintain their gardens.

Simple things such as using composting materials and planting Australian natives can save litres of water but still maintain a great-looking garden. Australian natives are hardier and not as thirsty as many of the plants introduced from England and Europe. They are unique, look great and can fight off the drought.

Application forms for the competition will appear in the *Courier-Mail* shortly and I encourage all keen gardeners to enter. Gardeners will have until 30 April to get their entries in and there will be a number of categories, including small space gardens and group gardens for people who look after a garden in a common area such as a unit block.

Every entrant will receive a participation certificate and prizes of \$5,000, \$3,000 and \$1,000 will be awarded to the best entries. There will also be a special Premier's prize for creativity, a prize for retirees and one for young people.

I urge all members to encourage nomination to this competition. It is part of an education campaign to get people in the south-east corner to think about planting natives. I seek leave to incorporate further details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The competition will be free to enter and judging would be based on effort and creativity rather than the size or cost of the garden.

Our Government is tackling the drought by investing more money in new water infrastructure than any other Government in the history of Australia.

We are playing our part and the residents of South East Queensland are playing their part as well.

They have accepted and adhered to tough water restrictions.

There is no doubt that different ways to be waterwise and tackle climate change are now a hot topic of conversation in most families.

This garden competition is one way simple way we can help recognise their efforts.

We are encouraging Smart State thinking to help maintain our lifestyle and help battle the worst drought on record.

Project Vista

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.36 am): Last November, the government called for expressions of interest from the private sector to roll out an open-access, ultra high speed broadband network across Brisbane. Submissions for the project, known as Project Vista, closed last Wednesday and I am pleased to report to the House that we have received 12 expressions of interest, including responses from all major market players, to build and manage this project in conjunction with the Queensland government. My government is currently evaluating those responses and I hope to announce a short list of bidders in coming weeks.

Project Vista is a leading Smart State project that has the potential to boost the Queensland economy by \$5 billion and create more than 15,000 jobs. I seek leave to incorporate further details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

If implemented, Vista will make Brisbane a global leader in telecommunication infrastructure and services.

The proposed network would operate at 100 megabytes per second—at least 100 times faster than regular broadband. It would eliminate frustrating download times for householders and offer businesses, industry and service providers the ability to transfer large files with ease, including engineering design files, x-rays and large medical files.

If the project proves successful in Brisbane, there may be future opportunities to roll out similar solutions across the rest of Queensland.

Wesley Research Institute, Tissue Bank and Clinical Trials Centre

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 am): Today the Smart State becomes a little smarter when I officially open the Wesley Research Institute's new Tissue Bank and Clinical Trials Centre at the Wesley Hospital precinct at Auchenflower. There is every possibility that findings from this institute could lead to another big breakthrough in the fight against cancer. The state government has contributed \$1.42 million towards the capital costs of building and equipping the tissue bank and a further \$800,000 towards the cost of the clinical trials centre. I seek leave to incorporate further details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

This investment has provided a dedicated laboratory with high-precision equipment for preparation and study of tissue samples.

It has also funded a digital platform for scanning microscope slides, which will link leading researchers nationally and internationally through virtual microscopy.

And there is more to come. The State Government is also providing the institute with a \$10 million grant to help build an \$18 million world-class Health and Medical Research Centre.

We strongly support the work the researchers are doing at the Wesley Institute and look forward to the new centre opening in 2009 when the institute will be able to further expand its research capabilities.

I congratulate Professor Julie Campbell and her colleagues on their world class research and I look forward to joining them later today for the official opening of the Tissue Bank and Clinical Trials Centre.

Tank Street Bridge

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.38 am): Yesterday, I was delighted to join the Minister for Public Works and Housing, Robert Swarten, to unveil the design for the new Tank Street bridge. I think it looks fantastic and I hope that members agree. I predict that this inspired design will catch the attention of architects, engineers and civic leaders around the world. The multiple mast, cable-stay design is a work of great imagination, including an artistic array of cables and flying struts similar to the ropes and spars of sailing ships and boats. The minister concerned thought that it looked a little like a prawn trawler, but I am prepared to accept that because I think prawn trawlers provide a very good image for Queensland.

Boulderstone Hornibrook Queensland has been chosen as the preferred tenderer to design and construct the bridge. Local design engineering consultants Cox Rayner/Arup will form part of the company's design team. The new bridge will link Brisbane city to the new Millennium Arts Precinct at the Queensland Cultural Centre, completing a pedestrian and cycle loop between the city and South Bank via the Goodwill Bridge.

Offering expansive views of the river, the bridge will feature viewing and relaxation platforms, two rest areas and continuous all-weather canopy for the entire length of the bridge. Subject to satisfactory final negotiations, construction work on the new bridge is expected to start in mid-2007 and be completed in 2009. Therefore, it should be completed just in time for Queensland's 150th birthday celebrations.

Tank Street bridge is only the working name for the bridge. During the early stages of the project and after contract negotiations are finalised, it is intended to conduct a public naming competition for the bridge. Judging by the entries when we held a similar competition for the Goodwill Bridge I am sure that this will prove very popular. I am also sure that the new bridge will be just as popular as the Goodwill

Bridge. It will enhance Brisbane's reputation as a dynamic and thriving metropolis for both residents and interstate or overseas visitors. I table for the House details relating to the Tank Street bridge for the information of all members.

Tabled paper: Folder by the Department of Public Works, Queensland Government containing DVDs and leaflets relating to the Tank Street Bridge Project.

I make the point that some time ago I announced that there would in fact be three pedestrian bridges in Brisbane to enhance the quality of the city—something very similar to some of the great cities of Europe—Florence and others—that have pedestrian bridges which are family friendly. The Goodwill Bridge was the first, Tank Street bridge is the second. The department of the minister for public works, Robert Schwarten, is currently looking at a third bridge—this will be a long-term project—in the area of Kangaroo Point and when details are finalised they will be released publicly.

Rugby League World Cup

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.40 am): On Friday I visited the Phillip Street headquarters of the Australian Rugby League in Sydney. I went into enemy territory, if you like, for a specific purpose: I wanted to put forward Queensland's case to host the 2008 Rugby League World Cup. As we know, we have the best venues and the best players so it makes sense to invite the rest of the best to compete in Queensland. We have a proven track record in hosting major events and Queensland sports fans are among the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic in the world.

Suncorp Stadium has been recognised internationally as the best rectangular football stadium in the world, plus we have Dairy Farmers Stadium in Townsville and the new magnificent new Skilled Park under construction on the Gold Coast. The 13th Rugby League World Cup will be held in Australia in October and November 2008. It will be part of the celebrations for the 100th birthday of the game in the Southern Hemisphere and we want it in Queensland. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Obviously it has to stack up but I wanted to make sure Colin Love and his team at the ARL know what Queensland has to offer. Hosting the Rugby League World Cup will attract fans from all around the world and provide a terrific boost to the economy especially in tourism related industries. Mr Speaker, we are the home of the National Rugby League Premiers and home of the current State of Origin champions so it makes sense for us to host the Rugby League World Cup. Next week another big season of footy will kick off and I can't wait. The Broncos will take on the Cowboys in a local derby at Suncorp Stadium next Friday night. On Sunday the Titans will make their debut against St George. I congratulate the Titans and I am sure all members will join me in cheering yet another Queensland team to victory over the southerners.

Queensland's Future

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.42 am): On other planning matters, as I have signalled before, cabinet is planning for tomorrow's Queensland today. My government is taking a proactive approach to planning Queensland's future. At an all-day meeting on 26 February the cabinet systematically reviewed every area of government to identify potential challenges and opportunities for each portfolio. We are devising a five-year plan in this regard. Currently Queensland is experiencing unprecedented population growth and increasing demands for its services and infrastructure. In this environment it is more important than ever to look forward, anticipate what is on the horizon and stay abreast of the latest developments. This government will tackle the big issues. Our record speaks for itself. It is a government that has taken on difficult tasks that have been underdone or simply forgotten by previous governments.

This term our approach will be no different. With my ministerial colleagues I have identified six priority areas for my government in its fourth term. Firstly, we will continue planning for prosperity. This means managing our land, resources and capital program and building better communities for our every expanding population. This includes ensuring housing is affordable for all. Secondly, we need to create a modern Federation. I have repeatedly voiced my concerns about the erosion of state rights and have led the call for a constitutional convention in 2008. We need an intelligent debate about how we can make the federation work better for Queensland in the 21st century. The third big issue is about creating strong Indigenous communities. We need to continue working with Indigenous leaders and communities to turn around the enormous levels of disadvantage they face.

The fourth issue is about creating a more progressive and productive economy. Although we are leading the nation in economic growth and job creation, we need to continually improve our productivity, invest in research, diversify the economy and explore new economic frontiers such as those emerging across the top of Australia. The fifth issue is we need to create a safer and fairer Queensland. We need to tackle issues like social exclusion, justice and the optimal provision of social services like education, health and child protection.

The final issue, and undoubtedly the biggest, is managing climate change. I have already established the Queensland Climate Change Centre of Excellence, the first of its kind in Australia. We are leading the nation on clean coal technology and reducing greenhouse gases through vegetation management. There is much more to be done in adapting to climate change and preparing communities for more extreme weather conditions. I am working with the ministry to devise five-year plans across these key issues. Progress in these areas will ensure my government delivers on its commitment to make Queensland the Smart State now and for the future.

Future Directions Division

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.44 am): As part of this strategy we have also created a new future directions division in my department to look at things like climate change, clean coal technology, effective emissions trading schemes and so on. I seek leave to have further details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Mr Speaker, as I highlighted at the recent Committee for the Economic Development of Australia luncheon on 28 February 2007, a new Future Directions Strategy division has taken charge of setting priorities and driving innovative responses to climate change and other big challenges facing Queensland.

The new Division in my Department will ensure that Queensland is at the forefront on these priority issues.

The Division will drive an ambitious program on issues of national importance and develop innovative strategies and policies based on latest thinking and research.

As well as climate change, this will include a focus on the development blueprint for the Northern Economic Triangle of Townsville, Mount Isa, and Bowen and key social services such as Indigenous policy.

The Division will drive the development of clean coal technology and an effective emissions trading scheme.

This will build on the Government's commitment to date in addressing the challenges of climate change, including commitments to provide up to \$350 million to clean coal technology research and development, and the establishment of a Climate Change Centre of Excellence to assist Queensland to better understand and prepare for climate change.

The new Future Strategies Division and other initiatives of the Government will ensure that Queensland continues to develop as the nation's Smart State.

Queensland is experiencing unprecedented economic expansion with a forecast economic growth to June 2007 of 4.75 percent, up on last year and way ahead of forecast national growth of 2.5 percent.

We are also leading the nation in job creation, and our exports more than doubled in the past eight years.

We are spending \$1 billion over four years on the Queensland Skills Plan, and since 1998 have invested or committed more than \$3 billion in research and development.

The Government is determined to ensure the long term prosperity of Queenslanders by meeting challenges and providing national leadership now and into the future.

Death of Mr B Thorpe

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.44 am): I pay tribute to noted Australian musician Billy Thorpe, who sadly died last Wednesday. The Queensland, as many members would know, went to Moorooka State School. To ensure the spirit of this talented Queensland continues, the state government will establish a legacy in Billy Thorpe's name that pays tribute to his contribution to Australian music. This will be the Billy Thorpe scholarship for an aspiring musician. The details will be announced after consultation with Billy's family and members of the Brisbane music community. I seek leave to have further details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

I would like to say a few words to honour this great Australian who spent his formative years in Brisbane.

Billy Thorpe had a great love for the Australian music industry and for its musicians. He actively championed the welfare of musicians and was involved with the organisation Support Act Ltd—a body that helps musicians in distress.

Billy Thorpe's commitment and contribution to the Australian music scene is enormous, spanning more than four decades.

Starting as a child performer on Brisbane television, he achieved national and international success, and continued to play and tour actively right up until his death.

Indeed Billy was due to perform in Brisbane and the Gold Coast late last week. While he didn't make it in person, his memory lives on and it is timely to reflect on some of his achievements.

Billy Thorpe moved to Australia with his family from England in the 1950s. They soon established themselves in Brisbane where Billy attended Moorooka State School and then Salisbury High.

Billy was discovered as a 10-year-old playing guitar in the back of his parents shop in Moorooka. At 12, he was headlining his own band and appearing around Brisbane, including the iconic Cloudland.

Mr Speaker, at 17 Billy moved to Sydney and auditioned for a local surf band. Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs were to become a huge success.

They had their first number 1 hit in 1964 with Poison Ivy.

Not only was this was the first time a Brisbane performer reached number 1 in the charts, but they turned out hit after hit and, in 1964, had 4 singles in the top 20 all at the same time.

Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs won every major entertainment award in the country, achieved enormous sales success, and became one of the most popular Australian bands ever.

In the '70s, Billy moved to the US where he achieved popular success. From the '80s he worked in business and TV and, when he returned to Australia, continued to make a strong contribution to the music industry.

He was involved in the recent live tour and TV documentary *Long Way to the Top* which traced the golden age of Australian rock; and in 2005 performed for the Tsunami Benefit Concert in Melbourne which raised over \$500,000.

His concert appearances were legendary. They were energetic, they were vital, and by all accounts they were extremely loud. I am advised a recent appearance at the Wynnum-Manly Leagues Club drew a noise complaint.

Mr Speaker, Billy Thorpe has made an enormous contribution to Australian music.

I would like to pass on my condolences to his wife of 35 years, Lynne, and their daughters Rusty and Lauren.

To ensure the spirit of this talented Queenslander continues, the State Government will establish a legacy in Billy Thorpe's name that pays tribute to his contribution to Australian music.

This will be the Billy Thorpe Scholarship for an aspiring musician.

The details will be announced after consultation with Billy's family and members of the Brisbane music community.

Year of the Surf-Lifesaver

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 am): The year 2007 has been designated as the year of the surf-lifesaver. It is a great honour for this voluntary organisation that has contributed so much to Australia. To mark the year and the 100th anniversary of the surf-lifesaving movement in Australia I will host a state reception for our surf-lifesavers here at Parliament House tonight. I seek leave to incorporate further details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Last weekend, rips and wild seas threatened the lives of swimmers all along Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast beaches.

As always our voluntary surf life savers were on duty to protect the public.

They performed 127 rescues—87 on the Gold Coast and 40 on the Sunshine Coast—That's eight times more than on an average weekend.

Since July 1 last year our surf lifesavers have performed 1,312 rescues.

It's a fantastic record of achievement and I am delighted to host this evening's reception and acknowledge the dedication and community spirit that underpins the work of Surf Lifesaving Australia.

Ideas Festival

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.46 am): Members will be aware that in recent years we have held an Ideas Festival. Last year the state government's Ideas Festival was a resounding success. With new venues at South Bank, new major sponsors in Griffith University and Brisbane Airport Corporation and a broader program which resulted in attendances rising to 22,000 over four days of open public lectures, debates and special events, we are now planning our fourth Ideas Festival for 28 March to 31 March 2008 again at South Bank. I seek leave to incorporate details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The biennial Festival presents diverse ideas, innovations and inventions to promote the Smart State and to celebrate the achievements of Queenslanders and Australians.

I am delighted that major sponsors Brisbane Airport Corporation and Griffith University were so impressed by last year's festival that they are going to be our major sponsors again in 2008.

I want to thank these sponsors for their involvement in this important initiative which demonstrates their commitment to the further development of the Smart State, to the exchange of ideas, and to engaging the community in discussion of ideas for our future.

The ongoing relationship with Griffith University and Brisbane Airport Corporation will allow the Festival to present an impressive program of leading speakers with most of the sessions being free to the public.

The Ideas Festival has gained a strong audience and a local, national and international reputation as a highly respected innovative, challenging and accessible event.

It is a truly a Smart State initiative and I look forward to keeping you up to date with details of the next Festival.

Launch of *mX* Newspaper

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.46 am): I acknowledge the launch yesterday of the new *mX* newspaper. I seek leave to have further details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Mr Speaker, yesterday the 5th of March, I welcomed the arrival of a new afternoon weekday newspaper in Brisbane.

On many occasions I've called for an increase in the number of media outlets in this State, so I am delighted by this development. *mX* adds to the diversity of Brisbane's media mix and will be a valuable way to communicate with the demographic who are the future of the Smart State.

mX is Brisbane's first daily afternoon paper since *The Sun* ceased in December 1991.

mX is a free newspaper produced by Queensland Newspapers and is aimed primarily at commuters aged between 18 to 35, presenting news with a youth-oriented focus.

mX was first launched in Melbourne in 2001 and then Sydney in 2005.

The arrival of *mX* here is another sign that Brisbane is taking its place with the great cities of the world.

More than 30 major cities have switched on to this bright and dynamic news format, from Prague to New York, to London, to Buenos Aires.

mX will also have a distinct Brisbane flavour with its own local editorial team led by Neil Melloy.

Ten new jobs have been created, seven in editorial and three in advertising, and I am pleased to see the newspaper is printed on 100% recycled paper.

mX will be distributed at South Brisbane, Roma Street, Central and Brunswick Street railway stations, as well as key bus terminals and selected high traffic pedestrian areas throughout the CBD.

Queensland Liberal Party, Electoral Allowances

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.46 am): Today is a sad day for the Queensland Liberal Party. There is a stench of corruption and sleaze wafting across the river from Liberal Party headquarters. The allegations of abuse of taxpayers' money revealed in today's *Courier-Mail* are shocking and, if true, reveal a blatant abuse of voters' trust. The allegations so far relate to the member for Bonner, Ross Vasta, the member for Bowman, Andrew Laming, and the member for Moreton, Gary Hardgrave.

It appears that the printing company in question does a lot of work for the Liberal Party. For example, I table for the information of the House brochures from the member for Moncrieff, Steven Ciobo, the member for Dickson, Peter Dutton, and the member for Petrie, Teresa Gambaro, all printed by Willprint. How far does it go and how many Liberal Party members are involved? That is the question Queenslanders have a right to know.

Tabled paper: Copies of brochures issued by Federal Members of Parliament representing Queensland electorates.

Dr Flegg: If it was your side you'd be saying it was a matter under investigation.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Liberal Party.

Mr BEATTIE: The revelations this morning represent a significant challenge to the member for Moggill. I suggest that he needs to confront the state president—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Those opposite will not be running away from this one. I suggest that the Leader of the Liberal Party needs to confront the state president, Warwick Parer, and the state director, Geoff Greene, about these allegations. I notice on Madonna King that the Leader of the Liberal Party tried to ring the director. Madonna King asks him, 'Have you tried to call?' He replied, 'I have rung the state director, obviously'. 'And he is not returning your call either?' Madonna King says, 'I feel better'. Mr Flegg says, 'I think he is having a fairly busy morning'. I bet he is. At least when I ring my party secretary he rings me back!

In relation to two of our former ministers, as soon as I became aware of the allegations I referred the issues to the Crime and Misconduct Commission. The real issue is: what will the member for Moggill do? Will he follow the high standard that I set or will he run around in circles? He cannot even get the director of the Liberal Party to ring him back. This is a test of integrity and leadership. For a start the Leader of the Liberal Party should ask every Liberal Party member in this House about any involvement with this printing company. Every Liberal member in this House should be asked the question of their business with this company. He should table their responses, receipts and any supporting documents so that members of the public can be assured that their state Liberal Party members have not been corrupted by this sleazy and messy affair. If the work was not done, where did the extra money go?

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: They want to bleat about it. There is a one question you have to ask.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I am about to come to that. Do not worry, I am about to come to that. I would not get too excited if I were you. If I were you, I would stay right out of it. It is a very simple question: if the work was not done, where did the extra money go? It is not a hard question. Where did the extra money go? If the money has come in from the federal members and there is some left over, where did it go? The Leader of the Liberal Party should come clean—

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Liberal Party. Premier, please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr BEATTIE: Indeed. Through you, Mr Acting Speaker, let me pose this question to the Leader of the Liberal Party. There is a stench of corruption over the Liberal Party. So where did the money go? Was it used to prop up spending on the Liberal Party state election campaign? Come on, was it? Come in here and tell Queenslanders the truth. The whole affair stinks and the member for Moggill must act immediately to find the source of the smell.

Mrs Stuckey: Over there. You're looking at it.

Mr BEATTIE: You can bay and carry on, that is all right. They do not like it when they get caught with their fingers in the till, which is exactly what happened. You had your fingers in the till, the lot of you.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No, you probably had many millions. The point about this is very simple: when these matters came to my—

Mr Copeland: Corruption charges.

Mr BEATTIE: You do not know that yet. Let me be really clear: when these matters involving my party were drawn to my attention I sent two former ministers to the CMC. What is the Leader of the Liberal Party going to do today? What are you going to do to clean up the Liberal Party? The real test of leadership is what you do when these things happen. I cleaned out my show. I send these sorts of matters to the CMC and sort them all out. It might end up before the courts. Here is the Leader of the Liberal Party who wants to run away and try to hide. Let me tell you: you have an obligation to come clean because there is a stench of corruption over the Liberal Party.

Water Supply

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (9.51 am): Members will be aware that last week I released the January water infrastructure progress reports. In doing so, I advised the public that January inflows to south-east Queensland's dams were 83 per cent lower than in January 2004-05, which until now has been our worst year of rainfall on record. Unfortunately these very low inflows were not offset by high inflows in February. In fact, February inflows to our dams were just 5,900 megalitres, amounting to 97 per cent of the inflows in February 2004-05.

A number of months of well below average rainfall this year means that dam inflows for the year to date are tracking at only 52 per cent of average inflows in 2004-05. These figures show that there can be no doubt we are experiencing serious and prolonged drought conditions. I can assure south-east Queenslanders that, despite these extremely disappointing inflows, the government will ensure that the region's water security is protected. Indeed, new measures are currently under consideration to achieve this.

As of yesterday, dam levels in the combined Wivenhoe-Somerset-North Pine system are 21.46 per cent of capacity. Based on the average rate of decline over the past six weeks, the dams will reach the 20 per cent trigger for level 5 restrictions in mid-April. This week, the Queensland Water Commission will finalise its draft package of measures for level 5 restrictions. These proposed restrictions will then be released for one month's consultation this Friday.

The current level 4 restrictions have been directed at maintaining a minimum dam level above five per cent at the end of 2008 to ensure security of water supply. Based on previous Queensland Water Commission advice using 2004-05 inflows and effective demand strategies, our dam level was forecast to be 6.6 per cent in December 2008. I am advised by the commission that, with the assistance of level 5 restrictions, we will have five per cent dam levels in December 2008 even if inflows remain the same as this year.

I take the opportunity this morning to congratulate south-east Queensland residents and businesses on the significant effort they have already made to conserve water. For instance, last week's average water consumption across the region was 682 megalitres per day compared to the level 4 target of 750 megalitres per day. Consumption is actually well below target and people deserve recognition for that.

The target under level 4 restrictions has been 200 litres per person per day. This has been exceeded with residents winding back their use to as low as 170 litres per day. December 2008 is when the major water projects come on line with water from the desalination plant at Tugun, purified recycled water from the western corridor project and the south-east Queensland grid adding 574 megalitres a day to our supplies. With the majority of projects on target, on current reports 574 megalitres a day will be available by December 2008 which amounts to 96 per cent of the regulation target.

The water-saving effort to date from residents of south-east Queensland has been inspirational. It is convincing evidence that, despite the challenge we face to secure our water supply, the next stage of savings can be achieved. Despite the scaremongering of some, this government is executing the most comprehensive urban drought response in Australia and we will not permit the country's fastest growing region to run out of water.

Public Hospitals Performance Report 2005-06

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Acting Minister for Health) (9.55 am): I rise to table for the information of the House Queensland public hospitals performance report 2005-06.

Tabled paper: Report by Queensland Health titled 'An Investment in Health—Queensland Public Hospitals Performance Report 2005-06'.

The Beattie government is committed to keeping Queenslanders fully informed about the performance of their health system. Last year we began publishing quarterly performance reports on how our hospitals are meeting the increasing demands of Queensland's growing and ageing population.

The annual report I am presenting today contains more detailed analysis of how our hospitals are functioning across a range of 31 clinical indicators. This report will provide hospitals with valuable information to identify areas where they are doing well and where they need to do better.

Some 42 public hospitals having 2,000 or more inpatients per year are included in this first annual report. They are grouped with other hospitals of similar size and range of services to compare performance. Overall, the report shows our hospitals are busier than ever before and treating more patients than ever before. Demand for hospital services continues to grow by an average 2.3 per cent a year and the number of admitted patients treated per year has grown from 694,264 in 2001-02 to 781,652 last year.

The report shows our public hospitals performed well across all clinical indicators. This tallies with the latest national data showing Queensland's public hospitals are performing as good as, if not better than, comparable hospitals throughout Australia. However, the annual report highlights areas in need of improvement. For example, Cairns Base Hospital, in my electorate, performed favourably in 29 of the 31 categories in comparison with other hospitals in its peer group. Its performance was rated unfavourable compared with the peer group in only two clinical categories. These were the rate of women experiencing third or fourth degree perineal tears while having their first babies and the rate of long stay high-risk mental health patients being kept in the hospital. In every case where a hospital recorded an unfavourable result, a management action plan was immediately put in place to improve performance in that category.

Today's hospital performance report is a landmark document. We will continue to publish it annually in the interests of openness and transparency. I take the opportunity to encourage the private hospital sector to publish similar reports on their performance.

Ipswich Motorway

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (9.58 am): Yesterday the Prime Minister flew into Queensland to announce he would fund construction of a half northern bypass of the Ipswich Motorway, costing at least \$2.3 billion. Mr Howard said he thought this was the biggest road project announcement he had ever made and, given this, will be the most expensive highway per kilometre in Australia. I imagine it is. But the truth is that this is the Ipswich Motorway bypass Mr Howard had to have. Mr Howard was forced to fund a second-best option that no one wants because the state's roads are littered with the evidence of the federal government's decade long neglect and it has only just realised that infrastructure actually matters. It is that irresponsibility and neglect that has left taxpayers with a bill of at least \$2.3 billion for only a partial fix of Mr Howard's Queensland infrastructure blind spot.

The preferred option of the state government, the state opposition, the RACQ and the mayors of Brisbane and Ipswich would have delivered an upgraded road sooner and cost \$1.2 billion less. It would have provided a six-lane highway and service roads between Dinmore and Goodna and opened sooner. But, as I said yesterday, even though this is the second-best option, Canberra will get full cooperation from Main Roads on its construction. It is the wrong decision, but at least it has made one, and it is time to get on with the job. However, there are still some aspects of Mr Howard's announcement that do not quite add up.

Mr Howard probably did not realise it, but the bypass option he announced yesterday does not include a connection to the major feeder roads for traffic south of the motorway in suburbs like Dinmore, Bundamba, Booval and East Ipswich. So locals have every right to ask why Canberra has chosen an Ipswich Motorway bypass that bypasses Ipswich motorists. Both the members for Bundamba and Ipswich have every right to be disgusted with the fact that people cannot get on it from the southern side, and indeed from Brisbane Road in Ipswich people will not be able to get on it without going through River Road without a properly funded connection. The half northern bypass will impact on 100 properties including 60 houses. It is likely that notices of intention to resume would be issued within three months and, depending on objections, property should be acquired by the end of 2007.

As I said, we will cooperate with the federal government in relation to this. The people of south-east Queensland expect us to do it. It is not the right option, though. There are also questions that motorists right across Queensland are asking. Given the federal government chose to spend \$1.2 billion more on an option that no-one wants, people across the state have every right to know. People on the Gold Coast, on the Sunshine Coast, in Brisbane, in central and western Queensland and in the north have a right to know what projects they are missing out on because Canberra chose the multibillion-dollar Ipswich Motorway option. This second-best option is costing \$2.3 billion—more than six times what Canberra is spending on all Queensland roads this year. That should be a lesson to the federal government. The lesson is simple: if it delays decisions on vital upgrades like the Ipswich Motorway, the Pacific Motorway and the upgrading of the Bruce Highway, costs will skyrocket and planning will become more difficult. Queenslanders have every right to know why, when they pay \$2.7 billion in fuel tax to Canberra each year, they only get around 17c in the dollar back in roads funding.

The state government will continue to invest billions of dollars in road projects—it is \$1.98 billion for us this year, \$1.5 billion for New South Wales and \$1.14 billion for Victoria. The state government will continue to invest these billions of dollars in road projects and will continue to press the federal government to fund the much-needed road projects on the National Highway around the state in whatever area—whether they be along the coast, in the south or inland, central, western and far-northern Queensland.

Mine Inspections

Hon. GJ WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Mines and Energy) (10.01 am): The resources boom has helped build our hospitals, put teachers in our classrooms and police on the beat. While we reap the benefits, we should never lose sight of the fact that there is nothing more important than the safety and health of mine workers. That is why I have requested mines inspectors to undertake a series of targeted safety audits at a range of coal and metalliferous mines across the state. Today the inspectors will arrive unannounced to carry out audits at several mines that were selected on their recent incident record and potential high-risk areas. These are the first of a number that will be conducted over the next three to six months. Mines inspectors will include those who are familiar with the sites and others who are not normally inspectors of those particular mines. External mining specialists will also assist the audit teams.

The audits will help these mines improve their safety record. They will target safety systems and include extensive site inspections. Key areas to be examined include strata control, ventilation, fire prevention, fatigue management and electrical safety. Mine operators, employers and workers are responsible for health and safety on the job. But I am determined that the Mines Inspectorate continue to support the industry operating safely. At an industry-wide level, we have one of the best mine safety records in the world, and I commend the Queensland Resources Council and senior industry leaders for their vigorous support of mine safety. We have the best legislation on mine safety in Australia, but it must continue to be strongly enforced on the ground—mine by mine, employer by employer, worker by worker. Vigilance must be the highest priority on every shift at every mine. All those responsible for safety must fully play their part to ensure they never lose focus. Nothing is more important than the safety of the men and women who work in our mining industry.

Queensland Police Service, Midyear Crime Statistics

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (10.03 am): Today I am tabling the latest crime statistics for Queensland. Each year there are two public releases of crime statistics. In November I tabled the annual statistical review, which drills down to district and regional level. In the first quarter of the year I tabled the midyear review, which is a six-monthly snapshot of crime statistics. Today I am tabling that midyear review for the period of July to December last year.

Tabled paper: Report, dated 16 February 2007, by the Queensland Police Service titled 'Crime Statistics Report—July 2006 to December 2006'.

It shows decreases in some major offences and an increase in clear-up rates. In this period, there were drops in robbery, fraud and handling stolen goods. Property crime dropped by four per cent. Crimes against the person dropped by two per cent. Statewide, there was a one per cent drop in the rate of sexual offences. This is encouraging, considering that in the previous 12 months there was a spike in sexual offences. The *Courier-Mail* has this morning accessed three-monthly figures from July to September last year, concluding that the number of reported sex offences in one district—north Brisbane—increased by 19 per cent in that time. However, as the midyear review shows, over six months the rate of sex offences statewide dropped by one per cent.

I thank police for their efforts in tackling these crimes, and in particular in northern Brisbane with many officers working on Operation Echo Shine. Seasonally, these crime reports go up and down and offences that occurred even decades ago are still being reported to police. So that these fluctuations are taken into account, the best indicator we have is the long-term 12-monthly annual statistical review. This midyear review shows that Queensland's police are continuing to reduce crime. Between July and December last year, the rate of reported offences per 100,000 people in Queensland showed a three per cent decrease in drug offences, a nine per cent drop in robbery, a nine per cent reduction in the unlawful use of a motor vehicle, a seven per cent decrease in arson, a two per cent drop in assaults, a one per cent decrease in sexual offences, a 27 per cent drop in drug trafficking and a 29 per cent drop in prostitution offences. Some 70 per cent of sexual offences were solved while 64 per cent of fraud cases were solved, and these clear-up rates have improved on the previous period. Meanwhile, good order offences increased by 19 per cent and liquor offences increased by 36 per cent, both the result of more proactive policing.

The Queensland Police Service works closely with the community to prevent, detect and combat crime. I want to thank our police for their good work. I also want to stress the important part that crime prevention initiatives and education programs are continuing to play in encouraging people to report offences.

Comcare

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations) (10.06 am): The Howard government has moved unilaterally to allow certain employers to self-insure for workers compensation nationally under the auspices of Comcare and extend to those employers coverage under the Commonwealth's occupational health and safety legislation. The amendments to Commonwealth laws, which will come into effect on 15 March, specifically exclude national self-insurers and their workers from the application of state and territory occupational health and safety laws. This decision to regulate occupational health and safety for all national self-insurers will result in more complex, fragmented and confusing safety laws. This means that, if a national self-insurer covered by the Commonwealth's occupational health and safety legislation were to engage a contractor covered by state laws, the workplace would be subject to two separate regulation systems, including enforcement and levels of penalties for breaches of the legislation. In such a case, the contractor would be stuck with more red tape, as they would have an obligation to conduct certain aspects of their work safely under the Commonwealth laws but also have an obligation under Queensland's laws to provide a safe workplace.

This complexity is not good for Queensland business and it is no good for Queensland workers. Of real concern is the potential to create a safety gap. The Queensland government, through Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, employs around 240 highly trained inspectors to provide inspection, advisory and enforcement services to industry and to promote compliance with workplace health and safety laws. I am advised that Comcare, by contrast, employs around 40 inspectors nationally—so that is 240 in Queensland alone versus 40 nationally for Comcare—which will not be sufficient to provide any meaningful inspection, advisory and enforcement services.

While on paper the occupational health and safety laws may be similar between the Commonwealth and states, there will in effect be two different standards or a safety gap due to their inability to resource these vital services. It is Queensland contractors and their workers who will lose out if safety standards drop in workplaces operated by national self-insurers. To minimise the impact of this federal intrusion into areas traditionally covered by states and territories, I have asked my department to work cooperatively with regulatory authorities at state and Commonwealth levels to identify strategies to mitigate the adverse impacts these amendments will create.

Local Councils, Funding

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (10.09 am): The Beattie government does more for local councils in a financial sense than any other state. On a per person average, Queensland provides 50 per cent more in funding than the national average and in real terms we provide the equivalent of \$88.50 for each person compared with other states that contribute as low as \$34.30 per capita. Today, this unequalled financial commitment continues.

Most of our local governments often operate on budgets that do not allow them to take on by themselves the kinds of projects that give a boost to cultural and community infrastructure. They get a significant financial boost today from two of the government's more unique funding rounds: the Rural Living Infrastructure Program and the Regional Centres Program.

Under the Rural Living Infrastructure Program, 42 councils will share in \$15 million for myriad projects at a grassroots level. The projects that will receive funding today include a north Queensland airport link—critical to the Royal Flying Doctor Service—a medical centre, upgrading of community halls, and improved facilities for tourism and recreation. Our regional councils across the state will also receive \$26 million in funding under the Regional Centres Program, a scheme which improves the social, cultural, environmental and economic fabric of communities. This funding will help build vital community projects like parklands, community centres, libraries, town centre revitalisations and tourism facilities from Coolumb to Cairns.

What we are seeing today is a multitude of very significant projects—very worthwhile projects—that will make a true difference in regional communities throughout the state. These projects will make a significant contribution to the cultural and recreational opportunities in these areas. They will contribute to town economies, providing jobs during development and beyond. They will keep these communities vibrant with the types of facilities that ratepayers and visitors to these towns require and deserve.

Smart State Academies

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (10.11 am): Providing opportunities for our best and brightest students to accelerate their learning opportunities is a cornerstone of our Smart State philosophy. At the start of this school year, I was extremely proud to open the first of our Smart State academies with the Premier, Peter Beattie. This academy, the Queensland Academy for Science, Mathematics and Technology, along with the Queensland Academy for Creative Industries at Kelvin Grove, is providing our top students with the opportunity to be part of a new era in education in our state.

Last week, the Premier and I called for students interested in attending the third of our Smart State academies to put their names forward. This academy is for talented secondary students interested in pursuing careers in the health and allied health industries and it will be based on the Gold Coast. Tonight, at the Robina Community Centre, interested students and parents have the chance to learn more about the opportunities available to them at this new academy, which opens next year for year 10 and 11 students. This \$43.5 million academy is a partnership with Griffith University and aligns with the university's Medical, Dental and Allied Health Faculty. Like the two Brisbane based academies, the new academy will provide students with the opportunity to combine their senior schooling with tertiary studies, fast-track their qualifications and gain invaluable work experience.

The new academy will be based at Griffith University's Smith Street campus on the northern end of the Gold Coast and so students at the new health sciences academy will have access to resources and facilities, involvement with university staff and course credit arrangements with Griffith University. Students interested in attending this academy have until 19 April to register to sit the selection test, which will be held in May. Expressions of interest can be made at the Queensland Academies web site. Applications are also now open for secondary students wishing to enter the two Brisbane based academies that I mentioned earlier for the 2008 school year. These academies are a wonderful opportunity for our state's most gifted and talented students. The enthusiasm and determination already exhibited by this year's intake of students in the Academy for Science, Mathematics and Technology and the Academy for Creative Industries demonstrates just how successful these academies can be in nurturing our best and brightest.

Brisbane Housing Company

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (10.13 am): I am delighted to advise that tomorrow the Brisbane Housing Company will reach a milestone of 500 units of affordable accommodation. In an environment of escalating property prices, a shrinking low-cost rental market and a lack of support for public housing from the Commonwealth government, this is a remarkable achievement.

In 2002, through a partnership between the Department of Housing and the Brisbane City Council, I established the Brisbane Housing Company as an independent, not-for-profit charitable company with the objective of increasing the supply of affordable housing in Brisbane. Tomorrow I will open the new development of 56 units at Musk Avenue in Kelvin Grove. These, along with 27 units at School Street in Kelvin Grove and 67 units at Danby Lane in Nundah, will soon bring the total to 580.

The Brisbane Housing Company represents an innovative approach to social housing in Queensland. The company provides a mix of boarding houses and unit accommodation at or below 74.9 per cent of market rent to households on low incomes. Our government has provided \$99 million to the Brisbane Housing Company between its establishment in 2002 and 30 June 2006. A further \$10 million in state funds has also been committed up to June 2008, bringing our government's total investment to \$109 million. These funds have been supplemented with \$12 million from the Brisbane City Council to June 2006, with a further commitment of \$4 million from council to June 2008. I thank council for its support for this venture. With these funding commitments, the Brisbane Housing Company is expected to achieve approximately 870 units of accommodation by June 2009.

To further increase the supply of affordable housing in Brisbane, the company is exploring other sources of funding in partnership with a range of financial institutions, including super fund managers and banking organisations. The results of a survey of Brisbane Housing Company tenants undertaken in November 2005 indicated that 90 per cent of tenants were satisfied or very satisfied with their homes and 92 per cent agreed the rent was value for money. This company is a smart way of increasing the supply of affordable housing in Queensland.

Scams

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading, Wine Industry Development and Women) (10.16 am): The Beattie government is committed to protecting Queensland consumers. That is why we have in place one of the strongest consumer protection regimes in Australia. And that is why the Office of Fair Trading will play a lead role in the National Scam Campaign, which I launched yesterday. The focus for this year's campaign is money and identity theft through phone and internet scams.

Sadly, Queenslanders continue to fall victim to crooks, fraudsters and scammers. The government wants to help Queenslanders become 'scam smart' and this national campaign provides the ideal opportunity to get our message across. The top scams in Queensland during 2006 were chain letters, with 351 reports to the Office of Fair Trading; invoice fraud, with 267 complaints; fake lotteries and competitions, with 263 complaints; and computerised gambling programs, with 243 complaints. My department will be working closely with police on information and education programs on how to avoid being scammed.

Scams can turn up anywhere, anytime—in the mail, in the letterbox, over the telephone, on the street, at a seminar or in an advertisement. Because scams are becoming more sophisticated and professional, people continue to fall into the trap as they can appear to be the real thing. Scammers often target the most vulnerable people in the marketplace, including seniors, people looking for work and people who have a low level of financial literacy. Each year scams become harder to spot. There seems to be a scam created to trap just about everyone from dodgy emails and text messages, to lottery scams, fake investment schemes, medical cons, fake employment and money laundering schemes and identity theft. We even have a new twist on the long-running Nigerian scam, which targets people looking for long-lost relatives.

So what can Queenslanders do to protect themselves against scams? The best thing they can do is to maintain good computer security since scams rely more heavily on email and the internet than ever before. The Office of Fair Trading will continue to work hard to protect Queenslanders, but people have a responsibility to educate themselves. Consumers need to remember the golden rule: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If people are approached and they think someone is trying to scam them, hang up, rip up the letter and delete the email.

Rural and Remote Paramedics Program

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.19 am): As members of this House are aware, Queensland's paramedics are some of the best trained and equipped in the world. They are also some of the most innovative in service delivery. Last year, I had the honour of officially launching the Graduate Certificate of Rural and Remote Paramedic Practice at James Cook University, Cairns. I am pleased to advise the House that a further 18 paramedics have now enrolled in this milestone course. They come from communities across Queensland—from Thursday Island to Texas.

The establishment of this course is part of the Beattie government's election commitment to explore an expanded scope of practice for Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics working in rural and remote locations. It is a key plank in looking for better ways to maximise the clinical expertise of our highly trained paramedics who do such a fine job in rural and remote communities across Queensland. Already the feedback from the first batch of students who began the course in November has been positive.

This qualification will enable 60 paramedics to provide an expanded scope of practice to isolated communities, with the first group of students to graduate at the end of 2007. The Beattie government is committed to providing a world-class ambulance service to all Queenslanders, regardless of where they live. This important initiative will help provide greater assistance to rural doctors and remote area nurses in the isolated Queensland communities where they live and work.

Historically, the Queensland Ambulance Service has provided an acute service to Queensland communities, responding to prehospital emergencies. But there are communities in Queensland who could benefit further from our paramedics and their clinical skills. The strength of this new qualification lies in the interdisciplinary collaboration between doctors, nurses, allied health staff and other community members to develop strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of people in rural and remote communities. I look forward to seeing our graduate isolated practice paramedics in their communities. I am sure that they will provide great assistance to the rural and remote health workforce.

Rainman

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (10.21 am): It will come as no surprise to members of this House that the department of primary industries is often at the cutting edge of science and research. In the worst drought in recorded history, DPIF technology is paying dividends for our resilient primary producers. Demand for a climate management software program developed by the DPIF has never been greater. Rainman is a CD-based software package of rainfall information designed to assist in the management of rainfall variability. Rainman contains historical monthly and daily rainfall data for about 3,800 locations and monthly and daily stream flows for 400 locations throughout Australia, plus monthly rainfall records for 9,500 locations throughout the world. What that means for farmers is that they can calculate chances of monthly and seasonal rain, display historical data as tables or graphs, and forecast seasonal rain, dry periods and effective rain for their own location.

This software is the first of its kind anywhere in the world and can help primary producers develop their own profitable and sustainable enterprise management systems. Rainman, now in its fourth edition, sells nationally to farmers, graziers, bankers, consultants, insurance companies, schools, universities and other government departments. The DPIF team of agriculturalists who developed Rainman realised that there was an abundance of data from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, but farmers had no way of interpreting what it meant for them on their property. An international version of Rainman with additional special data is used by all national meteorological services in the 10 ASEAN countries.

Rainman can forecast seasonal rainfall based on the southern oscillation index, can group locations for spatial analysis, import monthly and daily rainfall and stream flow data, and print results as tables, graphs or maps. It enables farmers and graziers to take ownership of their climate related decisions by having access to all the relevant local information rather than a broadbrush regional forecast. Producers can see what chances they have of getting the rainfall they need in the coming season and so make appropriate management decisions. Rainman is an invaluable tool in extremely difficult times and it shows that DPIF is meeting the challenges head-on.

Binary Industries, Narangba

Hon. LH NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism) (10.24 am): I would like to update the House on the work being undertaken by the EPA on state and local government lands that were impacted by the fire at the Binary Industries site in Narangba in August 2005. The EPA is determined to do everything possible to minimise the risk to the local community, the environment, and local waterways.

The removal of the soil is an important part of this project. More than 5,900 tonnes of contaminated soil has been removed from two of the containment ponds by the contractor, Quantum Environmental Services—QES—and taken to the Collex Ti Tree landfill facility for bioremediation prior to disposal. The soil is being transported in sealed and covered trucks, and measures are in place to ensure that the trucks are cleaned of excess soil and are inspected before leaving the site. The EPA is monitoring these works with scientists supervising at all times, and dust and air quality monitoring equipment is installed on site. The level of dust has been consistently below environmental guidelines.

The EPA is currently in the process of validating the excavated containment ponds to ensure the remaining soil in these ponds meets soil remediation criteria. Once validated, the QES will start backfilling ponds with clean fill as part of the rehabilitation works to reinstate the tributary. The next stage will be to start remediation work in the two remaining containment ponds—ponds 1 and 2.

It is important to keep the community informed of our work at the estate. I have asked that a weekly summary be placed on the EPA web site outlining what is happening. I also encourage local residents or businesses who have concerns or questions on the works to call the EPA pollution hotline on 1300130372. Officers are more than happy to assist. I would also like to thank the hardworking officers of the EPA who have been doing a great job on this very large and difficult project.

CHILDREN'S COURT OF QUEENSLAND

Annual Report

Hon. KG SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (10.26 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Children's Court of Queensland annual report 2005-06, which I commend to the House.

Tabled paper: Childrens Court of Queensland 13th Annual Report 2005-06.

SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Report

Mrs SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (10.26 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's *Alert Digest No. 3 of 2007*.

Tabled paper: Scrutiny of Legislation Committee Alert Digest No. 3 of 2007.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Beattie Government

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.26 am): A week or so ago the member for Rockhampton took hypocrisy in this House to a new level. This morning he was magnificently upstaged by the Premier, whose hypocrisy defies description. This Premier has spent three months trying to escape the stench of corruption that surrounds his government. This Premier has spent three months avoiding answering the questions that the people of Queensland want answered. This Premier has no right to pose questions to other people.

There have been no answers given in this place. In fact, we have not been allowed to ask the questions that the people of Queensland want the answers to. The Premier has had plenty of opportunities to answer the questions about the corruption that surrounds his government. He has had plenty of opportunities to provide those answers. Until those answers are provided, the stench of corruption will continue to surround the Beattie government and those issues will remain unresolved.

But it is not just corruption that surrounds the Beattie government, because hand in hand with corruption goes incompetence. Corruption and incompetence are natural partners and they have found a natural home in Peter Beattie's government. The results of that incompetence are being felt by people right across south-east Queensland as they face level 5 water restrictions. That is a direct result of the incompetence of people such as the member for Rockhampton. It is their incompetence that saw no new infrastructure built in nine years. Although there is now a frenzy of panicked activity—everything from the Bradfield Scheme to gardening competitions—for nine years, as the population of south-east Queensland increased, nothing was done. That is the greatest indicator of the level of incompetence that surrounds this corrupt government.

Ipswich Motorway

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (10.28 am): Next month it will be six years since I stood in this place and, in my maiden speech, called on the federal government to upgrade what was even then the long overdue improvements to the Ipswich Motorway. At the time I said that the motorway was a disgrace. I described it as a potholed, ugly, dangerous, congested and slow road. With the exception of some temporary measures to fill in the potholes that existed at that time, since I made that speech the Ipswich Motorway has only become worse.

For six years the people of Ipswich have waited for the Howard government to stop ignoring them. For six years accidents have happened, the speed limits have been reduced, commuting times have blown out and lives have been lost. For six years the people of Ipswich have waited. Imagine their shock then when after years of patiently waiting the people of Ipswich found that the road proposed yesterday by the Howard government does not even connect the new bypass to Ipswich's main feeder, the Ipswich-Brisbane road.

Time expired.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Water Restrictions, Level 5

Mr SEENEY (10.30 am): My first question without notice is to the Premier. The Premier continues to play cute political games with the introduction of level 5 water restrictions. Can the Premier answer the simple question that everyone in south-east Queensland wants to know? What will level 5 involve and in what council areas will it be imposed?

Mr BEATTIE: Everyone will know the answer to this Friday morning. The Water Commission has, as members know, an independent role and was set up by an act of this parliament.

Dr Flegg: You know the answer.

Mr BEATTIE: Can you please stop being rude? I will come to you a little bit later on. You should not get too excited.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Premier.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Liberal Party.

Mr BEATTIE: Through you, Mr Acting Speaker, I am just worried about his health. In terms of the level 5 restrictions, we established a Water Commission, and the role of the Water Commission was to examine these issues in a clinical and non-political way. We appointed Elizabeth Nosworthy, who is a non-political person, and two other commissioners to run this effectively.

Mr Seeney: They have already told you.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, you have asked a question. The Premier is answering it.

Mr Seeney: He is not. That is the problem.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: That is a reflection on the chair.

Mr Seeney: I withdraw, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr BEATTIE: I understand that in this hurly-burly of politics there would be a little bit of nonsense said by those opposite. The facts here are really clear. We established a Water Commission to do a job. On Friday morning the commission is going to get all the mayors in and continue the consultation on this matter. Since local government, by and large, runs water at the moment, local government is entitled to be briefed on these matters before the details are released publicly. As we all know, water is largely controlled by local authorities. They are entitled to be consulted. On Friday morning the Water Commission will get the mayors in, they will be consulted and then the details will be released.

What those opposite are trying to do is usurp the role of the independent commission. It was set up to take the political nonsense out of this. Those opposite want to continue to play games. We are interested in providing water. Their silly political games are all that those opposite are interested in. This Friday morning the Water Commission will release the details of level 5 water restrictions. We all know that during December last year and January and February this year we had very low rainfall. In fact, if we compare January this year—2007—to January 2005, which was previously the lowest month of rainfall on record, the rainfall was down 83 per cent. That is what has happened.

We are in the worst drought on record. You would think that when we are confronted with the worst drought on record we would at least get some bipartisan support for a process to deal with it, instead of getting stupid naive politics—no leadership; just empty vessels. Australians normally pull together when there is a problem. Australians, whether in wartime or drought, normally pull together. Why doesn't the Leader of the Opposition make a constructive and positive contribution and let the independent Water Commission do its job?

In terms of what we have been briefed on, which seems to be the point the Leader of the Opposition is making, I have only had a general briefing. The final details are yet to be determined by the Water Commission, and they will be released on Friday. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that instead of going home on Friday he should work on Friday and then he will understand what the details are.

Water Supply, Tankers

Mr SEENEY: My second question without notice is also to the Premier. The Premier's statements last week about supplying Brisbane with water by tanker reveal an increasing level of panic at the dire situation that he himself has created. Has the Premier done any planning at all for this scenario or is he making it up as he goes along? Specifically, does he know how many tankers would be needed to deliver water to Brisbane and where would he get them from?

Mr BEATTIE: I just note for the record before I answer the question that the Leader of the Opposition and his team, if you could call them that, have voted against any measure we have ever had to provide water. Queenslanders understand that. They voted against recycled water. They voted the against the Traveston Dam. They opposed the water grid. They opposed our regulations. They have opposed any constructive measure that we have put up to deal with this drought. They have fought tooth and nail. Those opposite are not interested in water; they are only interested in politics.

To answer the Leader of the Opposition's question specifically, last Friday I was launching a particular program at the New Farm State School. I want to put on record my appreciation for that school because, as the education minister knows, a number of things are being done in our schools to conserve water. Every one of the schools in the south-east corner will need to have a plan by 30 June this year to save water. New Farm State School has provided some leadership. It happens to be a school in my electorate. I want to thank the P&C, the principal and that school for the brilliant job they are doing.

While I was there I was appropriately asked by a number of journalists a range of questions. I gave an answer in relation to the situation if there were a terrorist attack or an earthquake that affected pipelines in any way. As we have signalled, the water grid, because it is a staged introduction, will deliver the water that Queenslanders need. Notwithstanding the worst drought on record, which has got even worse, we believe that we will still make it. We believe that the water grid will deliver. But I answered a question and I said that in the circumstances of an earthquake or a terrorist attack we would clearly need to use tankers, as you would in any crisis like that.

What I should have added was that in those circumstances any federal government, regardless of its political persuasion, would also come to our aid if we were the victims of a terrorist attack or an earthquake. I was ridiculed in one of the stories for using the term 'Armageddon'. I made it absolutely clear that it was a worst-case scenario. Anybody would do that—Sydney would do that; Melbourne would do that. If you were confronted with an earthquake, you would use whatever means were available—you would use ships, you would use tankers, you would use whatever was available. So the Leader of the Opposition should not try to turn it into something that it is not.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition: you and your team are on record for voting in this parliament against recycled water. You are against any measure that we have brought in to provide people with water. I say to Queenslanders: if you listen to what those opposite are saying, just remember that they are against it. They are against everything. They are against any positive and constructive idea.

Mr Seeney: You were against the pipeline for six years.

Mr BEATTIE: The Leader of the Opposition is against everything. I reckon you are against Christmas. I reckon you are so negative that you are against Christmas.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Premier, please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr BEATTIE: Through you, Mr Acting Speaker—I reckon you are against Santa Claus.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition.

Mr BEATTIE: I reckon you are against the Easter bunny. You are against Christmas and you are against Easter.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Premier, please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr BEATTIE: I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition: are you in favour of anything? That is my question through you, Mr Acting Speaker. Tell us one thing you are in favour of.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Prior to calling the member for Yeerongpilly, I acknowledge in the public gallery students, teachers and staff from the Ferny Grove State School in the electorate of Ferny Grove, which is represented in this House by the Hon. Geoff Wilson.

Willprint

Mr FINN: My question without notice is to the Premier. Is the Premier aware of any state members of parliament who have had work done by Willprint?

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, I am. We seem to have a bit of a problem here. I think we could effectively call this 'Printgate'. Do members know what happened here? This is what the Leader of the Liberal Party needs to explain. The Leader of the Liberal Party can correct me on this, but what I understand happened was this. Federal members who were given a significant amount of money turned up to Willprint and were overcharged for the amount of work that was done. What happens then? The amount of money is then left for what purpose? It is left for the state Liberal Party to spend as it sees fit. Let us look at some of the brochures produced in the state campaign. I am happy to be corrected. Here is one from the Leader of the Liberal Party, Dr Bruce Flegg. Was this printed by Willprint?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: Through you, Mr Acting Speaker—was this printed by Willprint? He does not even know who prints it. He has no idea. I table that brochure. Maybe the Leader of the Liberal Party can tell everyone later. Look at these, Mr Acting Speaker—one by Michael Caltabiano, another one by Bruce Flegg, one by Tim Nicholls. Mr Acting Speaker, let me tell you a little bit about who did get work done by Willprint.

Tabled paper: Election leaflet issued by Dr Bruce Flegg.

I have here extracts from the weekly check report presented to the Brisbane City Council finance committee. Let us look at who had work done by Willprint: Councillor Adrian Schrinner, \$947.10; another one from Councillor Schrinner, \$2,377; Graham Quirk, \$947; and then it gets really interesting with Tim Nicholls—

Dr Flegg: Is Gordon Nuttall's name there?

Mr Seeney: Or Merri Rose?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BEATTIE: It is all right; we will come to that. Tim Nicholls, \$165; Tim Nicholls, \$2,244.40; and then he got really excited, Tim Nicholls \$5,366.90; and then another one for Tim Nicholls, \$2,719; and then Tim Nicholls again, \$215.90. It goes on, and members may have heard of this gentleman, Michael Caltabiano, \$2,772. Then he got fridge magnets, because he is a magnetic character, for \$5,453.50; and Michael Caltabiano again, \$1,169.30. The Leader of the Liberal Party should have the courage to do what I did. I sent my former ministers to the CMC. What will he do?

Tabled paper: Copy of particulars relating to payments to Willprint Designer Printers Pty Ltd between 21 October 2003 and 21 December 2006.

Opposition members: Ha, ha!

Mr BEATTIE: Members opposite can laugh, but what will he do about it? On the information that I have been provided with, and he can correct it, the Leader of the Liberal Party was corruptly elected to this parliament.

Dr FLEGG: I rise to a point of order.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Premier, that is unparliamentary.

Mr BEATTIE: It is true.

Dr FLEGG: It is offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Acting Speaker, I will withdraw if you are asking me to. The point simply is this: can he explain his printing bill?

Time expired.

Recycled Water Pipeline

Dr FLEGG: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier. Late on Friday it was revealed in the media that the delivery of the recycled water pipeline in world record time is now further in doubt because of a labour dispute. When did the minister first know about this impending action?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am advised that yesterday afternoon there was a meeting of staff at Tyco, one of the companies that has been contracted to build the pipes. They voted in favour of the new shift arrangements and those new shift arrangements will apply from 11 March. Has there been any disruption to the pipeline? No. Has a single pipe been delayed as a result of it? No, it has not. Has there been any threat to the progress of this project? No, not one.

What an extraordinary question from the Leader of the Liberal Party. Why do members think that this dispute started? The dispute started because the company is seeking to use WorkChoices legislation to put in place new shift arrangements. I well remember the many warnings given from this side of the House that we would see industrial disharmony and workplace disputes as a result, and this is just the beginning.

Mr Mickel: We've known since the legislation was introduced.

Ms BLIGH: We have known since the legislation was introduced that there were going to be industrial disputes.

I am very pleased—and it is a credit to both the parties—that the dispute has been resolved, and resolved not only in the interests of the parties but also in the public interest. However, I am very pessimistic that we will continue to see the smooth and quick resolution of past industrial disputes.

The workers at this plant are entitled to adequate remuneration for increased shifts and to the penalties that would normally accrue to those shifts. There seems to be some weird and wild conspiracy theory coming from the other side of the chamber about when I knew. I was advised late last week. If those on the other side are harbouring any conspiracy theories, they can just let it rest.

Workers on this project are entitled to adequate remuneration and to the penalties that would normally accrue in shift work. Equally, the employer is entitled to work with the work force to get an outcome that will see the contract secured.

Members should make no mistake: we have a contract with this company, as we do with others, and that contract has enforceable penalty provisions. We will not hesitate to enforce those penalty provisions. Despite all the scaremongering and doom mongering from those opposite, the project is going full steam ahead.

Ipswich Motorway

Ms NOLAN: My question is directed to the Premier, and I ask: can the Premier explain to the House why the Queensland government does not support the Prime Minister's decision to spend \$2 billion on the Ipswich Motorway bypass?

Mr BEATTIE: I acknowledge the role played by members from the Ipswich area to get a fair road outcome from the Commonwealth. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that the Commonwealth had decided that it would spend over \$2 billion on an Ipswich Motorway bypass, which is \$1 billion more than necessary, just to satisfy the federal members of Blair and Moreton. Of course, in doing that the Prime Minister ignored the strong advice of both the state and council Liberals. Of course no-one does listen to them, but they were clearly ignored here.

The Liberal Lord Mayor of Brisbane has vigorously opposed the Prime Minister's preferred option, and he said so yesterday. Yesterday he said that this decision would inevitably lead to massive traffic flows through Moggill and Riverview. The federal member for Ryan, Liberal Michael Johnson, also had the courage to stand up to the Prime Minister. He said, 'I certainly share the anger and frustration of local Ryan residents who will be directly affected'.

What did the state member representing the electorate worst affected have to say? The Lord Mayor and the federal member have both voiced their concerns and discontent, but what did the member for Moggill say? What did we hear from the man who remains the Leader of the Liberal Party? Just the usual backdown! He ran up the white flag. Instead of describing it as an option that will devastate his electorate, suddenly he says that it is the second best option. It is not the second best option for the people of Moggill who have discovered that the federal government is going to build a major highway through their homes. Where is the implacably hardened opposition? Where do we see the local member for Moggill standing up for his constituents? He is nowhere to be seen. He is probably over at Willprint getting his latest printing bill.

Prior to the 2004 state election, when he was just the candidate for Moggill, he called protest meetings against this bypass proposal. He pulled the same stunt prior to the last state election. On the way home from Willprint where he picked up his printing, he drove down to the protest meeting. He was even quoted in the *Courier-Mail* on 8 February this year as saying that he was writing to the federal government demanding that it ditch the proposal and build the bypass. They really listen to him in Canberra!

Mr Schwarten: He put out a brochure on it.

Mr BEATTIE: I do not know whether he had a brochure on this printed, but I will check whether Willprint printed one for him.

Yesterday, he accepted the decision with a whimper and he also gave up the fight. Just as he will not fight for the rights of members here, he will not fight for the rights of his own electorate. The people of Moggill, whose lives are being disrupted by this extravagance, deserve a local member who will fight for them. When the election was looming, he whipped up protest rallies, but yesterday he just rolled over like a beautiful old labrador dog, begging for his tummy to be scratched.

Instead of making excuses for this piece of very expensive political pork-barrelling, the member for Moggill should be standing up and fighting for the people of his electorate. Yesterday, instead of running around, he should have been out there with members protesting against the Prime Minister's announcement. I have to say that if ever I have seen a wimpish performance by a local member of parliament, this is it. Does the member stand for anything?

Water Restrictions

Miss SIMPSON: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. I refer to past statements made by her last year in this House, and I quote.

Level 4 water restrictions began today. I can confirm to the people of Queensland that there is no suggestion—none whatsoever—that we need to go beyond that at this stage.

She also said—

... there is not only no such thing as level 8, but also there is no such thing as level 7 or level 6.

Will she now apologise for misleading the House and tell the people of south-east Queensland what level 6 and 7 restrictions will be so that they can sensibly plan for them?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I stand by every comment I have made on the issue of water restrictions in this parliament as accurate. The reality is that we are experiencing the worst drought on record and the conditions are now prolonged. When it does not rain, this is what happens. One has to continually plan and upgrade the activities that are put in place to match the circumstances that are faced.

Last year, I accurately informed the House that there was no such thing as level 6, level 7 or level 8 water restrictions. Not only was that right then; it continues to be right today. The Water Commission has indicated, in the public arena, that in the discussion paper it publishes on Friday it will outline for public discussion the possible—possible—further measures that could be contemplated by the community if, further down the track, we need to go to level 6 or level 7 restrictions.

That will be the subject of public discussion and I look forward to that. What is the plan put forward by the member for Maroochydore to supply water to this drought-stricken part of the state? The member for Maroochydore is out busily running a campaign against the northern connector. The northern connector is the pipeline that will bring water from the Sunshine Coast, when it has a surplus, to Brisbane, when it has a deficit. Is that the policy supported by the Leader of the Liberal Party? Does the Leader of the Liberal Party support keeping surplus water away from a drought-stricken area? Is that the way that he would run it under the circumstances? We are building a two-way pipeline between Brisbane and the North Coast that will allow water to be moved—

Miss SIMPSON: I rise to a point of order. The minister is misleading the House. Her department has advised that the pipeline will have one-way capacity; it will not be making it two-way when initially constructed.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: There is no point of order, resume your seat.

Ms BLIGH: It is no wonder that the infrastructure portfolio was taken off the member opposite. It is a complete and utter mistruth. There is a two-way pipe being built. Will it be used both ways on day one? No, because Brisbane is in a drought.

Miss SIMPSON: I rise to a point of order. The Deputy Premier's comments are misleading and also offensive. Her department has advised that the pipeline is only capable of one-way capacity at the time of construction.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I warn all honourable members that rising to make continuous frivolous points of order is considered disorder.

Ms BLIGH: I make it absolutely clear to the members of this House that represent electorates in the south-east corner that the coalition is actively campaigning to stop water being brought in drought circumstances to relieve a critical situation. This is its infrastructure plan. This is what it means by a water plan: 'Keep it in your own backyard, keep it in surplus and do not let anybody else use it'.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the public gallery the second group from Ferny Grove State School, which is represented in the House by the Hon. Geoff Wilson.

Water Supply

Mr GRAY: My question is also to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure. The state government has a serious, multifaceted response to deliver south-east Queensland's water needs. Last week the Deputy Premier visited the desalination plant at Tugun. Can she outline progress on this and other projects?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I thank the member for not only his interest in but also his support for the desalination plant. I also thank other members from his region for their support. I am pleased to advise the House that the desalination plant is on track to deliver water into the grid from late 2008.

At its peak in November this year there will be about 900 people working on this project. When I was there this week it was already a hive of activity. Work is proceeding 24 hours on constructing the shafts and ultimately the tunnels that will take the pipeline out into the ocean off the coast of Tugun.

Other projects are progressing well. We have secured a total of 305 kilometres of pipe and fitting for the projects. On the western corridor project at Bundamba more than 3,500 cubic metres of concrete have been poured to date and at its peak there will be 2,650 employed on the whole project. In fact, in total we will see 4,000 workers employed across the western corridor project, the desalination plant and the southern pipeline as these projects progress.

This government is undertaking the plans that we have put in place to ensure that the people of south-east Queensland have the water they need today, tomorrow and in the future. A critical component of our plan was the water regulation that we put to this parliament last year. Those on this side of the House voted for that regulation. Those opposite voted against it; they voted against every component within it.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Ms BLIGH: They claim that they did not mean to vote against all of it but let us see what they have done since to support any part of it. We took the tough decision on purified recycled water. What did they do?

Mr Mickel: Opposed it.

Ms BLIGH: They voted against it. They opposed it. We have committed to building two new dams. We have supported that, and what have they done?

Mr Mickel: Opposed it.

Ms BLIGH: They have opposed it. They voted against it. As I have outlined, the member for Maroochydore is busy running a campaign against the northern connector, the member for Currumbin is busy running a campaign against the desalination plant—

Mrs STUCKEY: I rise to a point of order. I find the Deputy Premier's comments offensive and I ask her to withdraw.

Ms BLIGH: I withdraw and I will be delighted to inform the protest group of the member's new-found support for the desalination plant. As the Premier outlined earlier this morning, those opposite are incapable of bipartisan support. This is a serious drought. In Australia's history that has always seen a bipartisan response, but not from those opposite. I do note that the new shadow minister for infrastructure, however, has found some infrastructure that he can support, and that is Howard's highway right through his electorate.

Queensland Health

Mr LANGBROEK: My question without notice is to the Acting Minister for Health, and I ask: can the minister advise whether the Director-General of Queensland Health is withholding two secret reports: one from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons into surgical outcomes at Rockhampton Hospital that were supposed to be finalised by last October and another on bullying in Townsville Hospital that led to cardiac services being withdrawn over the Christmas-New Year period? I ask: when will these reports be released?

Ms BOYLE: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am aware of the report to which he is referring that relates to complaints made about services at the Rockhampton Hospital. I am pleased to have the opportunity to correct the record. There are allegations in the media and I think by the member opposite that the report has somehow gone missing. In fact, the review that was undertaken within the hospital in relation to complaints went wider than those complaints and is in draft form.

A number of staff, particularly associated with the complaints, are personally mentioned and it is the right and proper process of natural justice that the staff are given a chance to look at that draft report and to comment on it. That is where that report is up to at this time. The complainant will, of course, be informed of the findings of the report and I am able to say on behalf of the health minister that when the recommendations are finalised these will be published and, of course, they will be implemented.

I do not know about the report to which the honourable member is referring in relation to Townsville, but I will, of course, obtain some more information in that regard. This is a great day, in fact, to discuss with the people of Queensland the increased transparency and accountability of the system that is the new Queensland Health. On this very day I have, in fact, just released the Queensland *Public hospitals performance report*. It is a warts and all report. It shows that the government is very serious about transparency. The 42 hospitals that are reported on, our biggest and busiest ones, are compared with each other. Of course, when a cohort is compared there will be those that will rate highest and those that will rate lowest. We have published for all to see the detailed benchmarking system, 31 different benchmark categories, and that demonstrates where some hospitals have performed less well than others.

There is also evidence in the report of the tremendous improvements being made by the minister and Queensland Health. The growth is in bed numbers, for example, particularly in the critical care area despite the skyrocketing demand on services right across the state. I commend the report and its details to all honourable members. I suggest that they do study it for its information and also in recognition of the new transparency and accountability standards in Queensland Health.

Goodna Bypass

Mrs REILLY: My question is to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. With the federal government lavishing \$2.3 billion on the Goodna bypass, a bypass that nobody except the federal member for Blair wants—he could share some of his lobbying skills with the federal members for Moncrieff and McPherson because they cannot attract a cent for a road that everybody wants—can the minister tell the House when the long-suffering commuters on the M1 can expect some relief?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for her question. Before I give the answer I will mention for the benefit of the member for Moggill that there is one way that they can stop the half-northern bypass going ahead—that is voting Labor at the next federal election, that is getting rid of Michael Johnson, the member for Ryan, and that is getting rid of Cameron Thompson, the member for Blair. I suggest that those on the other side of the House, regardless of the next federal election, would be better off if they got rid of them anyway.

The simple fact of the matter is that the timing of this project is such that I will have the land acquired by the end of this year. The Prime Minister indicated that he did not think that construction would start until Christmas 2008. Therefore contracts will not logically be entered into until after the next federal election. Therefore it will be a real live issue at the federal election. We will give them full cooperation in terms of what they want to do, but the timing is such that it will be an issue in the federal election. That is how we can stop it. That is what the people in the member's area should understand.

The people of the Gold Coast have every reason to be frustrated and concerned by yesterday's announcement because time after time after time people like Steven Ciobo and Ros Bates, that dud of a candidate in the state election, obfuscated, ducked and weaved when it came to the necessity to put money where their mouths were in terms of the M1 and the Pacific Motorway. Why is it that in New South Wales there was an allocation of \$160 million a year over 10 years? Why is it they consistently defended the federal government when there has been no major road announcement for the Gold Coast since April 2003? It is coming up to its fourth anniversary. They were struck dumb. In fact what they did was put it on the state government.

On the road to Damascus all of a sudden the member for Moncrieff, Steven Ciobo, thinks the Gold Coast has a bit of a good argument. I reckon it has a bit of a good argument too—a \$330 million worth of federal fuel tax a year good argument. Now it has a second string to that argument—\$1.2 billion wasted on an opportunity that not even those opposite want.

I say to the federal Liberal Party that this will be a live issue in the next federal election. Every road in Queensland that needs federal government funding whether it be the Cardwell Range, whether it be the Roma to Mitchell Warrego Highway, whether it be roads on the Gold Coast, whether it be roads on the Sunshine Coast, whether it be continued upgrading of north and far-north Queensland will be real issues for people. They will say, 'What sort of a federal government is it that allows \$1.2 billion to be blown on a road that nobody wants but will not put similar funding into our roads?' The Prime Minister will wear it like a crown of thorns. It is about time that more people stood up to Canberra when it comes to road issues, because we will even if those opposite will not.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Prior to calling the member for Gladstone I would like to acknowledge and welcome to the public gallery members from the Sunshine 60 and Better Group from the electorate represented in the chamber by the honourable Peter Wellington. I would also like to acknowledge in the public gallery students and teachers from Clairvaux MacKillop College in the electorate of Mount Gravatt represented in the chamber by the Hon. Judy Spence.

Electricity Industry

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: My question without notice is to the Minister for Mines and Energy. In a press release from the minister's office in late February he states, 'Ergon Energy will continue to supply electricity to regional customers at the government subsidised standard electricity price.' Given the sale of the retail arm to Origin, will the minister guarantee that tariff equalisation will continue to apply across all of Queensland as has been the case in the past when energy was wholly owned?

Mr WILSON: I thank the member for the question. The short answer is yes. The uniform tariff will continue to apply to all of the customers of Ergon in regional Queensland. It will also apply to customers in south-east Queensland who are customers of the new electricity retailers. They will also have the opportunity of undertaking new contracts after 1 July this year. If they can find in the marketplace—and it is anticipated that they will—contracts for the sale of electricity that are cheaper than the uniform tariff in the south-east corner, then they will save money. But if they cannot then they are entitled to stay on the uniform tariff.

So the short answer is that the uniform tariff will remain available to all Queenslanders who are currently on the uniform tariff. In the case of south-east Queensland customers, if they find that the contract for the purchase of electricity that they thought was going to save them money over the term of the contract in actual fact does not transpire, then they have what has been described as the right of reversion. That is, they have a right at the expiry of that contract to go back on to the uniform tariff. That is the short answer.

Federal Member for Moreton, Police Resources

Mr REEVES: I would like to welcome students from Clairvaux MacKillop. I am a past student of Clairvaux MacKillop and so is the member for Cleveland. My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. In an extraordinary outburst in federal parliament last week, the member for Moreton, Gary Hardgrave, called for more police to deal with the tens of thousands of African faces in the community. I know that since last Friday Mr Hardgrave has gained an understanding of federal policing, but can the minister tell the House about Mr Hardgrave's understanding of policing and multicultural issues?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for Mansfield for the question. It was an extraordinary outburst by Mr Hardgrave on a number of levels. Firstly, Mr Hardgrave purports to understand something about policing in the Moorooka area. He talked about the parlous state of policing in the Moorooka area. I visited the Moorooka Police Station last year. It is a terrific police station. I thought morale was very high. The officer in charge, Senior Sergeant Greg Wilson, leads a good group of police officers. It was one of the most memorable visits to a police station I have ever had because Constable Paul Donaldson played his bagpipes for us.

The police there last year told me that Mr Hardgrave had never visited the Moorooka Police Station. Even today I have heard that he has never visited Moorooka Police Station. It gets worse. The Police Union tried twice last year to speak to Mr Hardgrave about WorkChoices, the federal government's IR legislation, and he gave it the run-around because he was too busy. I table a newspaper article from the *South City News* of two weeks ago in which the Police Union expressed its absolute abhorrence of Mr Hardgrave. Mr Hardgrave does not visit police but, as the member for Mansfield said, it is likely that police visit him, and with a search warrant. It may be that the member for Moreton finally gets to see the inside of the Moorooka Police Station in the not-too-distant future.

Tabled paper: Copy of article from the City South News, dated 22 February 2007, titled 'MP cops blast for "support"'.

On a multicultural level, this is what Mr Hardgrave had to say in parliament last week. It is no wonder he was dumped from being the multicultural minister and dumped as a minister in the Howard government! This is what he said—

There is a special issue around Moorooka. There is a variety of African faces and this presents its own challenges. They are sitting around in public places—on railway stations throughout the course of the day and into the night, in bus stops and outside Woolworths at Beaudesert and Moorooka. People are actually frightened and confronted by large groups of these kids in the main who are hanging around.

How disgraceful this is from a former multicultural minister in the Howard government. No wonder he was dumped. I say to Mr Hardgrave that if he does not like the Howard government's immigration policy then he has only got himself to blame. I think what we are seeing from Mr Hardgrave is what we will see from a lot of desperate Liberal federal members this year. They will not be out there talking about federal government issues. They do not want to talk about IR. They do not want to talk about WorkChoices. They do not want to talk about the shortage of doctors. Mr Hardgrave particularly does not want to talk about his government's failure to fund adequate resettlement programs for migrants in this state. What they will try desperately to do is campaign on the law and order issue. But in this particular case Mr Hardgrave has absolutely no credibility at all.

Ambulance Service, Response Times

Mr MALONE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Emergency Services. On 14 February, Peter Crane of Bribie Island bled to death on his bedroom floor surrounded by firemen in full kit who arrived in a fire engine. His wife phoned 000 and even though she told the operator her husband was haemorrhaging she was told a fire engine was only a couple of minutes away and the crew were trained to deal with emergencies. In Mrs Crane's words—

By the time the ambulance arrived, Peter was unconscious and may have been dead already, or very close to it. He was taken in the ambulance and declared dead on arrival at Caboolture Hospital.

Why has the minister not bothered to reply to Mrs Crane's letter? When will he admit that his policy of sending ill-equipped fire crews to what are clearly ambulance emergencies is failing?

Mr PURCELL: I thank the member for the question. I do not know whether that person has written to me or not. I have not received any correspondence at this stage, but I have seen some reports in the press. I would like to give my condolences to her and her son for the loss of her husband. I think that was most unfortunate.

The Queensland Ambulance Service received a call to a male patient on Bribie Island at 12.08 am on 14 February who was quite ill but conscious and breathing. At the time of the 000 call the Bribie Island crew was treating another patient whose condition was not stable enough to stand by on the scene. For this reason another vehicle—the closest ambulance—was dispatched. At the time of this request there was a heavy workload in the region. In accordance with the agreement between the QAS and the QFRS, a fire crew was also dispatched. The QAS arrived seven minutes later and treated the patient. The patient was fully conscious when the QAS arrived at the Caboolture Hospital.

Like most other contemporary fire services, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service can provide medical assistance to injured persons in support of or prior to the arrival of the Ambulance Service. The QFRS is called to ambulance jobs in less than one per cent of all emergency cases. Firefighters are trained in senior first aid and advanced resuscitation. Staff from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service are expected to provide medical assistance up to the level of their training. I would like to reassure Queenslanders that emergency services work together at peak periods, as they have always done, for the benefit of all Queenslanders. I would also like to congratulate the Bribie Island firefighters and their unit. They respond very quickly. They are an auxiliary brigade but are very keen in their training and respond well for their community.

Heritage Places, Survey

Mr WENDT: My question is to the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism. Minister, there are a number of historical and culturally significant sites around the state that should be preserved. What is the minister's department doing to ensure that they are maintained for generations to come?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I thank the member for Ipswich West for his question. The next few years will be landmark ones for Queensland's heritage. The demand for new infrastructure and the speed at which it needs to be built only underlines the need for more strategic heritage planning—and sooner rather than later. Recently I launched the EPA's \$2.7 million statewide survey of heritage places which will identify many new and unheralded historic sites. With a pilot study in the Mackay-Whitsunday region nearly finished and a half dozen new heritage staff, other parts of the state soon will be surveyed. Queensland has been divided into 17 parts for the project and these will be progressively surveyed over the next three years.

With Queensland's 150th celebrations only a couple of years away, it is an excellent time to draw attention to the role our heritage plays in shaping us as a society. We have come a long way since heritage legislation was first introduced in 1992 as a response to the public outcry over the midnight demolition of the iconic Cloudland Ballroom. However, one of the problems with the current heritage legislation is that it is too reactive, with places often being considered after they have been threatened by development. Since early 2006 the Beattie government has committed more than \$10 million to adopt a more systemic and proactive approach which will ensure that the state's key heritage places are better protected. Amendments to the Queensland Heritage Act are being prepared and recent initiatives clearly show that we are prepared to back up our talk with financial commitment. Together with the recently announced \$5 million Living Buildings and Places program and the \$5 million Markers and Monuments program, no government in this state's history has allocated more resources to preserving our heritage for future generations.

Departmental Staff, Court Case

Mr HOPPER: My question is to the Minister for Natural Resources and Water. Minister, I refer to the recent court case of Ashley McKay whose appeal was upheld because staff in the minister's department gave false evidence against him and conducted a biased investigation which included fabricated evidence. I ask the minister: are the staff who are under investigation being stood aside? What measures will the minister take to ensure that a disgraceful episode like this, where a landholder is victimised, does not happen again?

Mr WALLACE: These matters are being investigated and it would not be appropriate for me to comment in this chamber and I would request—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WALLACE:—and I would request that those opposite accord the persons natural justice.

Rental Prices

Mr LAWLOR: My question is to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology. Is the minister aware of rent beating occurring in the Queensland private rental market? What can be done about this practice?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for the question, because if ever there was an insidious thing creeping into Queensland then here it is—this idea of real estate agents advertising rental homes without a price attached to them or the idea that when people go and look at a rental premises they are told that somebody else has offered \$10, \$50 or whatever amount of money more than they have and they are asked to match that deal. It is un-Australian, it is unethical and it is, in some cases, a breach of the Trade Practices Act. In any case, anybody who wants to promulgate that view out loud like a real estate agent from Beenleigh did last week can expect that I will not sit back and this government will not sit back and allow them to just stand over people who are being exploited because of a failure of the federal government's private rental policy.

I am meeting today with the REIQ, and I hold the REIQ in very high regard. We have an excellent working relationship with the REIQ. However, I want it to take a leaf out of the Real Estate Institute of Victoria's book and come out and tell its members not to do this, because that would be the simplest way to fix this problem. If it does not fix it, I will fix it for it, and it can be fixed very simply. I will instruct the Residential Tenancies Authority not to take a bond from any real estate agent who wants to behave in this manner. That will effectively mean that their rent roll will be worth nothing. I am prepared to go to that extent if that practice continues, because it is hurting the most vulnerable people—the sort of people that people on this side of the parliament got into parliament to support. It is immoral as far as I am concerned for people to be exploiting what John Howard's legacy will be—an overheated rental market that is collapsing around our ears with him simply saying that he is going to offer a few more dollars to try to prop up the rent assistance program.

This is an un-Australian practice, as I said. I would hope that both sides of the parliament would support this view that this is something that needs to be stamped out. I know that honest and decent real estate agents whom I spoke to in my own electorate told me that they would under no circumstances support such a view. It is quite simple: if a landlord wants a certain return on their property, then they should advertise the rent accordingly and not a penny more by any other dubious method. I would encourage honourable members who have any real estate agents doing it in their area to come and see me, because I am quite prepared to act upon that. But, as I say, I prefer to go down the path of having the Real Estate Institute of Queensland discipline its members in that regard.

Local Government, Size, Shape and Sustainability Review

Mr HOBBS: My question is to the minister for local government. Minister, I refer to the Size, Shape and Sustainability review and the genuine effort that Queensland local governments are making in this process. Can the minister give a commitment that, where local governments decide not to amalgamate, he will not override that decision?

Mr FRASER: I thank the shadow minister for his question. The issue about the future structure and sustainability of local government is not one that is uniquely confined to Queensland at the moment and it is not one that this government has put on the agenda. It is in fact a nationwide issue and one which local government in this state and through the Australian Local Government Association has been advancing.

Other states have been investigating this matter. States such as South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia have also looked at, in concert with their local governments, the issue of ongoing financial sustainability of councils. Those reports, which are public reports—and the PricewaterhouseCoopers one that the Australian Local Government Association itself did—point to a range of financial unsustainability of between 25 per cent to 40 per cent for local government. What we have done—and what that report also acknowledges—is provide councils in Queensland with the resources and the opportunity to be the masters of their own destiny in the first instance. What we have done is provide that money for councils to join together to undertake this process seriously and genuinely.

I am concerned—and I know local government is concerned—that this process is undertaken genuinely and fulsomely. If it is not, the broader issue that we all have to confront is this: if it is not and those issues are not addressed in the first place by councils working together as masters of their own destiny, the issue does not go away. These issues have been put on the table by local government, and

since becoming the minister I have consistently said that where councils are not involved in this process or where they are not operating in this process in a way that is genuine, where they are not involved in a process with their best endeavours and the long-term interests of their community at heart, that does not make the issue go away. In that context it is not open to me, nor would it be responsible for me or this government or any other person doing this job at any point in time, to rule out any other policy instrument or legislative response that is required to make sure that local government in the longer term in this state can provide a financially sustainable basis for servicing those local communities.

Local government in this state and indeed around the nation is the level of government closest to its communities. It is a vital aspect of providing services to all of our constituents, and what the councils have put on the table and what they are advancing and what local governments generally around the state and the nation are saying is that this issue needs to be addressed, and we could not agree more.

Energy Industry

Mr ROBERTS: My question is to the Minister for Mines and Energy. Much has been said in recent times about the exodus of skilled workers from the energy sector to the mining industry, largely driven by demands arising out of the resources boom. While the resources boom is great news for the Queensland economy, could the minister please inform the House what steps the government is taking to attract, recruit and retain skilled workers in the energy sector?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Queensland energy industry is the second largest energy industry within Australia and the fastest growing, so there are a number of challenges that are coming forward in this industry. Queensland is leading the nation in training within this sector. Last week I launched the Power Generation Skills Development Program. It is Australia's first university program specifically designed for power industry professionals. It is a world-class postgraduate program. It has been designed by industry for industry. I want to congratulate Tarong Energy, CS Energy and Stanwell, three government owned corporations, for forging a successful partnership with the Central Queensland University, the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology.

Students are able to enrol in a masters program, a graduate diploma or a graduate certificate and the programs have been designed to allow professionals to undertake intensive learning sessions on campus or at generation sites. This means that engineers and power professionals can be flexible about how they accelerate their skills and fast-track their careers in the energy sector. Already there has been strong interest and students have started enrolling in their courses this month. This is a unique educational opportunity reinforcing Queensland's position as one of the most forward-thinking states and will help address the nationwide skills shortage. Of course the more expertise we have in the power generation area the better placed we will be to tackle important issues like greenhouse gas emissions, water use, the demands of our stationary energy sector and new energy opportunities. Boosting numbers and training in the sector generally is also taking place. Ergon Energy has just recently inducted 100 new apprentices and Energex has inducted 80 new apprentices. That is commendable. It is also continuing the practice and the trend that Energex and Ergon have established over the last few years. We are committed to supporting our government owned corporations and the energy sector generally to ensure that we keep pace with the training needs of the sector, which is so vital to the future growth and prosperity of Queensland.

Tully Millstream Hydro-electric Project

Ms LEE LONG: My question without notice is to the Minister for Mines and Energy. Now that the Beattie government supports the Bradfield Scheme and is prepared to look at innovative answers to our water and power generation problems and given Canberra's threat of nuclear power, I ask: will the minister now commit to a review of the clean green Tully Millstream hydro-electric generation project?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The short answer is no. The Queensland government has a very clear focus on a clean energy future for Queensland. An important part of that energy future is clean coal technology, but there are many other important elements of our clean energy future policy. One is the need to address demand side management in a more creative way. A second is to look at how we improve the uptake of the energy efficient appliances that are used throughout industry and in residential circumstances. A third area is where we need to focus upon renewables and the opportunity to explore increased energy generation out of renewables including biomass, geothermal, solar and a number of others to add to the total energy generation within Queensland.

Another area is to continue addressing the use and increasing uptake of gas as a transition fuel into the future. This is going to be based upon the groundbreaking initiative commenced in the year 2000 where we established the 13 per cent gas policy which requires 13 per cent of electricity generated in Queensland to be generated by the use of gas. This policy, which has made a singular strike in favour of this transition fuel, has been the key instrument, I believe, whereby coal seam gas, which 10 years ago was just vented across the coal industry in Queensland, is now actually seen as a commercial product that can be used for electricity generation.

Ms Nelson-Carr interjected.

Mr WILSON: That is right. We have led the way with the use of gas as a transition fuel in Queensland—50 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions—and, as I say, it has helped open up the coal seam methane gas industry.

The other area which we are continuing to work on and which the Premier and the government are putting a great deal of effort into is clean coal technology. Members would be familiar with the \$350 million that has been contributed to the Clean Coal Technology Fund and that will principally be targeting the ZeroGen project at the Stanwell Power Station. However, we should not forget the other projects that the Queensland government is supporting through the GOCs. One is the Oxyfuel project at CS Energy's Callide C Power Station. I expect that the Leader of the Opposition will be wholeheartedly supporting it.

Time expired.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Before calling the honourable member for Burleigh I would like to acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of students, staff and parents from the Ferny Grove State School in the electorate Ferny Grove.

Surf-Lifesaving Clubs

Mrs SMITH: My question without notice is to the Minister for Emergency Services. This year is an important year for the surf-lifesavers not only in my electorate, where there are seven surf-lifesaving clubs and one royal lifesaving club, but across the country. Can the minister advise how the government is supporting their vital work?

Mr PURCELL: I would like to thank the member for Burleigh for the question. I acknowledge her strong support not only for the surf-lifesavers in her electorate but all Emergency Services personnel in her electorate. Last weekend I had the opportunity to inspect surf-lifesaving operations on the Gold Coast. I have to say I was very impressed by their operations. The men and women on the Gold Coast were doing a marvellous job.

Last week I sent letters to Queensland's 65 surf-lifesaving clubs and branches inviting them to apply for funding under the government's volunteer marine rescue grants. Each club and branch has received over \$11,000 and the surf-lifesaving state centre also received \$725,000. All up, there was a contribution of nearly \$1.5 million. There is no doubt that that is money well spent. Every Queensland—indeed, every Australian—is well aware of the tremendous work of our surf-lifesavers.

Like many of the personnel in Emergency Services, including the SES, the Rural Fire Service, ambulance first responders, the coast guard and the Volunteer Marine Rescue, the vast majority of Queensland's surf-lifesavers are volunteers. Our surf-lifesavers are extraordinary people. Their commitment to the service that they provide is second to none and their dedication to the community is outstanding.

The year 2007 marks a particularly special milestone for surf-lifesaving throughout Australia. It is not only the Year of the Surf Lifesaver but also the centenary of life saving in Australia. Over that time surf-lifesaving has evolved to incorporate sophisticated rescue equipment as well as advanced communications and resuscitation equipment.

This government has a strong history of supporting our surf-lifesavers. During the election we committed additional funding of \$6.4 million over four years for additional beach patrols and equipment. I am making sure that the surf-lifesavers can continue doing their vital work.

I would like to thank the Premier and the Treasurer for their continued support of surf-lifesaving in Queensland as well as to the Royal Life Saving Society. The year 2007 provides a perfect opportunity for all of us to acknowledge the efforts of those who work tirelessly to keep our beaches safe. Our surf-lifesavers offer peace of mind to millions of Queensland residents and visitors every year. They allow us to enjoy our state's great beaches and to surf in safety. They deserve our sincere thanks and ongoing support.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Question time has expired.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Townsville Hospital

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Acting Minister for Health) (11.31 am), by leave: This morning an honourable member asked me a question in relation to a supposedly secret report into matters relating to Townsville Hospital. I am pleased to inform that member and all other members of this House that there is no such report. A review is being carried out into a number of issues regarding cardiac services at Townsville Hospital. This review is not yet completed. Such operational reviews are not uncommon in our busy public hospitals and inform future service provision.

Ambulance Emergencies

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (11.31 am), by leave: I would like to correct the record this morning. I received a letter from Ms Carryn Sullivan, the member for Pumicestone, which she had passed on to my office. I would like to clarify that for the record. I have received correspondence and I am in the process of answering it.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Water Restrictions

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.32 am): Queenslanders still do not know what is in store for them with level 5 water restrictions. Despite the most direct questions imaginable, the Premier is still not prepared to let Queenslanders know what will be the end result of his incompetence. But there is one thing that Queenslanders do know, and that is that when they finally find out what level 5 water restrictions mean and when they have to deal with the impact of those restrictions the responsibility for that will rest clearly with Peter Beattie and his incompetent government. For nine years the government has provided no infrastructure at all. For nine years it has ignored the warnings and it has ignored the population growth. This government thought that it could live forever on the legacy of the previous coalition government. Now we see a panic approach.

This morning in parliament we saw an attempt to try to rewrite history. But that will not fool anybody. Even the most casual observer of Queensland politics knows that there has been one constant in this place for those nine years, and that is members on this side of the House in the coalition parties have advocated the construction of water infrastructure. We have stood, argued and proposed the construction of a whole range of water infrastructure. We have been ridiculed and criticised for doing so. Coalition members have been the subject of scorn and ridicule, because they pointed out what should have been obvious to the government and what has proven to have been the right course of action for the government.

The coalition members supported the western corridor pipeline seven years ago. For years, the then Leader of the Opposition, the member for Toowoomba South, championed that project. There are countless *Hansard* records of debates to support that. Seven years ago the coalition was advocating the construction of that pipeline. I well remember some of the spurious arguments that were advanced against it by members of the government. Those members suggested that somehow or other the pipeline was going to contribute to global warming. There were a whole range of nonsense arguments. Now, this government has to build the pipeline in a world record pipe-laying attempt to try to prevent Brisbane from running out of water.

There is a whole range of other examples. For a long period the coalition members in this place have supported the Wyaralong Dam. Once again, there are any number of *Hansard* records to show that. We supported the Glendower Dam. We supported the raising of the Borumba Dam. We supported the Amamoor Creek Dam. I have been a long-time supporter of the Nathan Dam. Nine years ago I stood in this place and gave my maiden speech and in it referred to the necessity to build the Nathan Dam. The coalition members have also supported options for Toowoomba, such as the Emu Creek Dam and using the gas fields water west of Toowoomba, which is currently and scandalously being evaporated.

All of those options were rejected and criticised by government members who would not take any notice of the obvious. Now that the obvious has become apparent to them, they are not only running around in a mad panic but also seeking to rewrite history and criticise those of us who tried to get the message across.

Unfortunately, the people of Brisbane and the people of south-east Queensland will be left with the legacy of this incompetent government. There is now a panic situation, because there are too many options to avoid the Armageddon to which the Premier refers. That Armageddon will see this city run right out of water unless we can do something in terms of bringing water in tankers or provide some other Armageddon solution.

There has been a complete panic response. There has been a complete lack of planning all the way. The Premier is obviously making up the government's response as he goes along. Last year we heard that there were going to be no plans for level 6 or level 7 restrictions. This morning we heard that there are. We were going to have a referendum. Then we were not. We were going to have some sort of half-baked version of the Bradfield Scheme—and that was not a Bradfield Scheme at all; it was the Beattie scheme. We have had a series of knee-jerk reactions to a problem that the government has made for itself.

If this government had adopted a sensible approach to water infrastructure, this problem would never have arisen. Water infrastructure is a core government responsibility, but while this government languished and wallowed in the corruption that is now becoming evident, its incompetence has meant that the people of south-east Queensland and the people of Brisbane face the very real prospect of running out of water altogether. That will be Peter Beattie's responsibility. That will be Anna Bligh's responsibility. No-one should forget that.

Mount Crosby State School

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (11.37 am): I rise to speak about the unacceptable state of the Mount Crosby State School in my electorate of Moggill. This school has grown rapidly from around 313 students last year to 564 students this year and a projected 645 students in 2008. Despite that considerable increase in the number of students, the Beattie government has not accepted recommendations to provide this school with the additional classrooms that it desperately needs.

The state of the school is unacceptable. The department has required this school to utilise an old demountable building that is in excess of 20 years old and which does not meet current specifications. The building is expected to house two classes—some 53 students in one tiny room. I table photos of the room in which this government expects to house 53 students to get their primary school education.

Tabled paper: Photographs of school classrooms.

To make matters worse, the building has minimal veranda area and is not even connected to water. We have 53 students who are expected to use a tiny little room that is over 20 years old and which does not even have water connected to it. Parents have had to provide water containers for their children in the hot weather. The room is not connected to any computer cabling. It has no withdrawal area. If those 53 students were in this building at one time, they are effectively chained to their desks, because there is no floor area left. These are predominantly year 1 students who are chained to their desks.

The principal and staff at Mount Crosby have done everything they can to minimise the impact on students and should be congratulated. However, in order to avoid the unacceptable scenario of 53 young students in one tiny room, after-school care and music facilities have had to be cannibalised to provide classroom space. This school, which is now one of the state's big primary schools, is functioning on effectively half a library and has limited ability to provide modern education such as computers.

The sad reality is that this school is in a similar condition to schools in some Third World countries. In fact, one parent from an emerging Asian country who was very distressed came up to me and said, 'The school conditions in my Third World country are better than what my child is expected to live with at Mount Crosby.' We now have a situation where the P&C of this school is contemplating going into the school-building business to build its own school and its own after-school care area because there is inadequate accommodation for one of our big and growing schools.

This school also services the electorate of Ipswich West. I know that the member for Ipswich West may be a new member in this place, but he will not be in this place very long if he does not find the courage to stand up for his constituents and say that he will not tolerate these sorts of conditions for the education of students in his electorate. This school is on the border of our two electorates, and I have not heard a peep from the member for Ipswich West.

Obviously buildings and resources are only part of a child's education. Mount Crosby has clearly provided high-quality education with a very dedicated team of teachers. The Premier constantly talks about the Smart State, yet here we are neglecting the basics of education. Parents in the Mount Crosby area are so fed up that they have come to me and asked for help because they are getting absolutely nothing out of the government. This government has ignored this area so badly that land at Chuwar that was owned by the education department and could potentially have been used to build a high school was sold to developers, leaving no plan for a state high school between Ipswich and Kenmore.

Then to add insult to injury to parents in the Karalee, Mount Crosby and Karana Downs area, this school has been traditionally the largest feeder school to Kenmore State High School and yet this education minister has confirmed that he is not even going to allow students from that school automatic entry to Kenmore High. Not only do they have to put up with atrocious conditions; they get discriminated against in other areas of education.

Time expired.

Water Infrastructure; Ipswich Motorway

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (11.42 am): The Beattie government is responding quickly to the demand for water infrastructure in Queensland. Water infrastructure in south-east Queensland is moving ahead due to the commitment of a local company in the Inala electorate employing approximately 200 people. Tyco Water, based at Carole Park, is playing a significant role in the creation of the south-east Queensland water grid. Tyco Water manufactures the Sintakote pipe. The Sintakote steel pipeline system is considered to be one of the world's best water supply pipelines and is supplied in sizes up to 1.8 metres in diameter. It is recognised by the water industry as the 'premium corrosion protection system for steel water pipelines'. This company is also a Smart State showcase considering it is looking to expand its pipeline technology into the US market. Not only is Tyco Water delivering in Queensland; it has a history of satisfying the needs of the water industry in Australia.

I am proud that a company based in my electorate is providing pipes for four significant stages of the water grid. It will manufacture more than 17,000 tonnes of steel pipes to meet the demands of south-east Queensland. Most importantly, with growth comes jobs, and I am proud to report that Tyco is

currently in the process of employing an additional 80 local people at Carole Park and upgrading its plant to operate its factory 24 hours a day. The pipeline is on track and the company is more than confident that the pipes will be delivered on time. Indeed, last year Tyco Water completed the 218-kilometre Burdekin to Moranbah pipeline in just 10 months.

A second issue that I would like to refer members to is the announcement that the Prime Minister made yesterday in relation to the proposed bypass of the Ipswich Motorway. This eight-kilometre stretch of proposed new road is to cost the federal government \$2.3 billion. For this kind of expenditure we would expect that all of the residents in the Ipswich corridor would benefit from this massive commitment. The proposed route will cross the Brisbane River not once, not twice, but four times. In fact, I am very surprised that the member for Moggill has left the chamber and has not even bothered to discuss this issue today in this debate on the matters of public interest as this significantly impacts upon his electorate.

I am concerned about the impact of the southern end of the bypass on two historic golf courses in my electorate—one at Wolston and the other at Gailles. Both courses are heavily utilised by working men and women around Brisbane and Ipswich. The Wolston Park golf course continues to be one of the most affordable golf courses in south-east Queensland. This morning I was able to speak with the vice-president of the Wolston Park Golf Club, Ms Mary Byrne, who stated that players were bitterly disappointed with the federal government's decision. She said that the federal government never approached her golf club about any impacts—she had to pick up the phone and contact them. So much for consultation!

The club was established in the early 1950s to respond to the needs of working people and their families who are not catered for at any other golf club. The hospital employees started the club, and they received a lot of help from the Queensland Department of Health. Founding members intended to keep the club affordable. The Wolston Park golf course provides discounts to seniors and juniors, buggy rates to seniors at half price, and free ladies golf clinics are available to encourage women to take up the sport. I undertook my first lesson last month and will undertake my second lesson at Wolston this Sunday. Following this lesson, I will be available to discuss with other members of the golf club their reaction to the federal government's proposal. Perhaps the member for Moggill might want to do the same in his electorate.

In relation to the Gailles golf course, it too has a very interesting history. Founded by Dr Byam Ellerton in the early 1920s, a history of the golf course on its web site states that he was—

Forthright and dominant ... He did not tolerate opposition and any that arose was quickly annihilated. In this respect, no one was exempt, not even Premiers and Cabinet Ministers.

Perhaps he should have been in parliament. Dr Ellerton was determined to open a golf course at Gailles. His desire to do so was based on his interest in occupational therapy. And remember that this was a very new science at the time. He was determined that the golf course would be at Gailles and he pulled out all stops to ensure that it would open. The Gailles golf course was opened by Premier Theodore on 9 August 1924. The Gailles golf course hosted the prestigious Australian Open in 1955.

In conclusion, as the Minister for Transport, the Hon. Paul Lucas, said yesterday on radio, the federal government 'will get our full cooperation in relation to this but, as the Prime Minister indicated, that is unlikely that he could turn a sod until 2008'. Ipswich and Brisbane motorists will not see any improvements in the near future to the Ipswich Motorway. I would urge the federal government to show some compassion in relation to the two historic golf courses and ensure that the impact is minimal on the two sites and that working men and women can continue to enjoy their golf courses.

Time expired.

Mooloolaba Spit

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.47 am): The future of Mooloolaba is under threat from government and council plans to double the footprint of prime commercial property in this beautiful resort town by building up to 12-storey high-rises on crown land on Mooloolaba Spit. This move could destroy the future of this town as the area is already under tremendous strain, with traffic at near gridlock most weekends, not just during peak holiday season. The main beneficiary, though, will be the state government, which would stand to make a windfall from selling the redevelopment rights. That must be tempting given the fact that prime land in Mooloolaba is selling for values equivalent to land in Bondi in Sydney.

Announced by the Premier in parliament the other week, the master plan and specifically its proposal to radically increase the density upon the wharf site with no accompanying traffic study to justify this decision and no support from the community has been met with widespread alarm. It was developed under the Mooloolaba Spit Futures Study, a joint project between the state government and the Maroochy Shire Council and to which a large number of community members and stakeholders contributed. They contributed in good faith but they currently feel betrayed.

Since the release of the plan, the feedback has been amazing. People are angry that what they put forward in their contributions has been totally ignored. I agreed with the Premier's statement when he said in this House, 'Without a more effective management approach to the spit, the pressures on this area are not sustainable'. That is correct. But this plan is one of the worst that could possibly be devised. It is disastrous for the future of this area and it is unsustainable.

For this to be proposed upon crown land in a confined area with no traffic studies is appalling. This plan would result in a nightmare vision for Mooloolaba, an extreme makeover that would be far from pretty but that would be akin to putting a scalpel in the hands of a dodgy surgeon for the sake of a quick buck.

However, until the Premier has met with a deputation of concerned citizens, I would like to give him the benefit of the doubt. I suggest that he is not aware of how just how disastrous this plan is, as he may not have been advised of how it flies in the face of community consultation and what it actually means. Given that he is a frequent holiday-maker at Mooloolaba, we are appealing to him to listen to the people and protect the public interest.

I request the Premier to meet with me and a deputation of concerned citizens representing the community, which would include road engineers and people from the community reference group. They want to see common-sense planning that protects Mooloolaba's future and that takes into account the road network leading to the spit, and a more balanced approach to the need to revitalise the wharf complex. We agree that this area needs revitalising, but it must be done in the right way and not by selling off the birthright of future generations.

Let us look at the facts. The footprint of the redeveloped wharf and surrounding crown land car parks next to Underwater World would be equivalent to the whole of the esplanade commercial strip in Mooloolaba. I am advised by a government briefing that the site would carry an additional 500 public car parks over and above those required by the redeveloped site, making this the major car parking facility in Mooloolaba and channelling thousands of extra cars into a very restricted part of town.

When I asked about the traffic studies that have been undertaken, I was told that a study was underway. I believe that I was told that council was undertaking the studies, but this alone rings loud warning bells because nothing has accompanied the plan that has been released. Members of the community reference groups were also told that a traffic analysis was underway.

On Monday 15 August at the CRG meeting, a handout titled 'Summary Of Technical Investigations to Date, Discussion Paper, August 2005' was circulated. The handout stated that—

Recent transport modelling for the Mooloolaba area indicates that the intersections accessing the Spit are able to be upgraded to accommodate additional traffic volumes and/or improve current traffic management.

Some of these upgrades would involve the widening of Brisbane Road and the signalization of the Brisbane Road/Hancock Street intersection—

Which is already signalised—

and the Hancock Street/River Esplanade/Underwater World access.

The consultants were supposed to undertake a traffic study that pulled together all previous studies.

However, when we go back to look at the so-called recent transport modelling studies, they are not in fact at all recent. They say that traffic modelling indicates that even with the widening of Walan Street and improvements to the intersection of Walan Street, Hancock Lane and Brisbane Road, the capacity of the road system will be exceeded by 2011. This means that delays will be more frequent and occur for longer periods of time.

In other words, no road network modelling has been carried out based upon this new plan with significant desertification of crown land at Mooloolaba Spit. We are calling on the Premier to reject this plan and meet the people, and let us get the planning right.

Time expired.

Ipswich Motorway

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (11.53 am): At last the federal government has accepted responsibility to fund the National Highway. The Ipswich Motorway is long overdue for an upgrade. It is a pity that the federal government is only doing this because it is an election year, and that it is building a new road instead of upgrading existing infrastructure.

The new eight-kilometre road will cost at least \$2.3 billion and will not be completed until at least 2012. Like the member for Inala, I believe that the new road will be the ruination of two iconic and historic Queensland golf courses, cause major resumptions of battlers' homes and is the second best option that does not even have the support of the Queensland Liberals. The preferred option of an Ipswich Motorway upgrade would cost \$1.1 billion, and members should consider what the Queensland Department of Main Roads could do with the other \$1.2 billion to improve federal roads in their electorates.

I am appalled by the federal coalition's lack of commitment over the past decade to contribute to Queensland's future growth. The Queensland government is endeavouring to ensure that our road infrastructure keeps up with this growth by investing in a number of projects, particularly in south-east Queensland.

Residents of the Mount Ommaney electorate are eagerly awaiting the completion in late 2007 of a high-standard motorway link between the Centenary Highway at Darra and Brisbane's south-western suburbs. The link will include a new bridge at Boundary Road over a four-lane extension of the Centenary Highway. Once finished, the link will relieve traffic congestion at the Boundary Road-Kelliher Road intersection at Richlands and provide commuters with more reliable access to and from the rapidly growing communities of Forest Lake and Springfield. Main Roads decided that it could no longer wait to coordinate this project with the federal government, as the congestion and the safety problems at the end of the Centenary Highway and from the Logan Motorway quickly worsened. When the project is completed and congestion on the Centenary Highway interchange is relieved, the proposed federal government's new road will again put pressure on the Centenary Highway as it links up with the Ipswich Motorway.

An investment in transport infrastructure is essential to ensure that south-east Queensland does not suffer socially and economically as our population continues to grow. Alleviation of congestion at the Toowong roundabout end of the Centenary Highway requires both state and local governments working together to find a joint solution. The Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation is a major transport planning project being undertaken by Queensland Transport to develop a strategy to address future transport needs, including road, rail, public transport, freight, pedestrian and cycle access in western Brisbane.

In recent years transit lanes and bus priority lanes on the Centenary Highway between the Ipswich Motorway and the Toowong roundabout have been identified in a number of strategic planning documents. This will improve the flow of buses in peak periods by providing more bus lanes and bus queue jump lanes, and allow high-occupancy vehicle or transit lanes.

The Queensland government is planning for the future of all Queenslanders not only by investing in road infrastructure but also by ensuring that our public transport system meets the needs of our growing population. A third, six-kilometre railway track from Corinda to Darra stations servicing commuters in the Mount Ommaney electorate will also be constructed and is expected to be completed by mid-2009. The project also includes upgrades to Oxley and Darra stations and will create a new freight bypass at Corinda. The building of a new railway line between Darra and Springfield will also improve access to newer growing suburbs.

In order to cater for Queensland's future economic growth and its ever-increasing popularity as a great place to live, governments at all levels have a responsibility to work together to meet those changing needs and to improve our national identity.

International Women's Day

Ms STRUTHERS (Alger—ALP) (11.57 am): Thursday, 8 March is International Women's Day, and what a great day that is. Today I acknowledge the many resourceful women who are working in non-traditional trades and industries throughout Queensland. In Queensland and around Australia we face a critical skills shortage, and more and more organisations and governments are relying on women to take up the challenge and get involved in non-traditional industries such as construction and building and mining. I am sure that my good friend the member for Fitzroy would love to see more women in the mining industry.

It is very important that women and young girls who are still at school see that there are magnificent opportunities in the non-traditional areas. So far, the gains have been fairly slow, although the trend is positive. As at 1 July 2004, there were about 1,700 females training in non-traditional areas in Queensland. That was up from 1,200 or so as at 1 July 1999. That is not a great gain in a five-year period.

Fifteen per cent of Queensland's apprentices are female and those women mostly work in areas such as hairdressing. Although those areas offer great career opportunities, sadly, for women the pay differentials are quite significant. We must do something about pay in those areas. Great numbers of women go into traditional trades like hairdressing and child care, where the average pay is about \$15 an hour. However, we all know that some blokes in the construction industry can pull in big money, particularly if they work in regional areas.

Ms Jones: One hundred thousand.

Ms STRUTHERS: I take that interjection from the member for Ashgrove. Some of those guys can earn \$100,000 a year. I am not saying that they do not deserve it; I am sure that they do. However, in the lead-up to International Women's Day, I say, go girls! My plea to women is to consider looking into some of the non-traditional areas and find out what they are all about.

I commend young women like Sarah Henry, a 24-year-old women who has taken up an opportunity at SkillsTech, the new world-class training centre at Acacia Ridge in my local area. Sarah is a talented and accomplished soprano singer who holds a Bachelor of Education but has decided to take up an apprenticeship in carpentry. Good on her; that is the sort of role model we want.

Mr Pearce: She can sing while she works.

Ms STRUTHERS: That is right. She can sing while she works. She will be singing from the rooftops of Brisbane sometime soon. We will all hear her. Good on you, Sarah, you are a great role model. We need to see more women take advantage of those wonderful opportunities that SkillsTech at Acacia Ridge are providing.

Lisa Finch is another wonderful woman who is one of the lead apprentices on the Be Constructive campaign. I commend the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund for that very, very good campaign. It is encouraging young men and women to get involved in the building industry trades. Lisa is certainly a great role model as an apprentice carpenter; she is doing great stuff. Another great organisation, the Queensland Plumbers Union, is sponsoring, with the Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 20 women into plumbing apprenticeships in the coming years. That is a great initiative. Plumbing is an area where we have skills shortages and where people can make pretty good money. Again I say: go girls, have a look at these trades and see what wonderful opportunities are there.

The Queensland government is to be commended for the very good initiatives that are being taken under the Queensland Skills Plan and the education and training reform agenda for the future. It is encouraging young women to take up trade opportunities and certainly providing opportunities whilst they are at school to have a go. Again I say to young women to try the trade facility at the SkillsTech institute at Acacia Ridge; they will certainly find some wonderful opportunities there.

The Queensland Resources Council is keen to lift the current percentage of women in the resources industry from six per cent. That is a pretty low number of women who are engineers, truck drivers, geologists and others in the mining industry. There are very few CEOs, I would imagine, too. The QRC is to be commended for putting out the call for more resourceful women in the mining and other industries. Good on them as well.

I make a very, very important call today for young women to consider these opportunities. There have been gains but there is more to do. In the lead-up to International Women's Day let me put a few challenges for women on the record. This morning we heard speeches from the ministers that violence against women still continues to be at intolerably high levels and we have to deal with that. Women and housing is a big issue. Women make up 70 per cent of the homeless. Single mothers are overrepresented amongst homeless families, comprising 85 per cent of those assisted through the SAAP program. We are seeing a lot of women and kids being duded by their former partners not paying maintenance; we need to see improvements there. There is an amount of \$460 million outstanding in support payments. That is \$460 million that is not going to kids.

Time expired.

Child Safety

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (12.02 pm): I rise to illuminate ongoing concerns in regard to Child Safety in Queensland in my capacity as shadow minister for this critical portfolio. Even though the government is throwing money at this department like never before, and I congratulate it for that, there are unacceptable backlogs and high rates of staff burnout due to work overloads. These can lead to poor judgements being made that further place the life of a child in danger.

Stories of children having as many as five caseworkers in one month do not auger well for any child. The alarming number of child deaths in care shed a very sorry light on the Department of Child Safety. My office frequently receives calls highlighting avoidable deficiencies in some of the processes which have been applied by the Department of Child Safety. Anyone who has worked in this field knows too well the heartbreaking stories that are part and parcel of child abuse and neglect.

It is not my intention to identify any names related to specific cases or any particular departmental worker because that is not appropriate, nor would it progress the ultimate goal of protecting children. Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge departmental workers for the dedication they bring to their difficult jobs. However, there are many workers within the department today who were not part of it under its previous banner and therefore lack extensive knowledge of the Child Protection Act and all of its interpretations.

Families have expressed concern about babies who are days old being moved from their mothers at the determination of someone who is not long out of university and who has never been a parent. Similarly, child safety workers state that there still remains an internal culture of intimidation against workers who speak out to protect children from returning to a detrimental situation. It is appalling to know that a child safety worker who spoke out to protect a child not only was hung out to dry by the

department but also had to endure her husband being falsely accused. A decade after the Ombudsman's recommendation, the family is still being subjected to a settlement run-around by this state government despite promises by the Deputy Premier, who was families minister, to resolve this matter. What encouragement does this give to anyone who wants to speak out to protect the innocent and vulnerable victims of child abuse?

A more determined effort to get the right staff in the right positions and the provision of support systems to keep them must be a priority. I note that there has been a massive recruitment drive, yet some entrenched problems are still continuing as a result of good staff leaving and poor practices continuing. Is it any wonder the QPSU describes the staff turnover as horrifically high.

Outcomes for children could be vastly improved with better communication between parties. Parents often say that Child Safety staff do not understand what they are telling them and will not explain why they are undertaking certain actions. One family was placed in fear of their lives because, despite being given assurances that the location of a subject child would remain completely confidential, it was revealed to the very person the family was to be protected from. A combination of inexperience and lack of thoroughness by certain officers has understandably caused a great deal of grief for the family concerned.

On 25 September 2006 the minister wrote an article for the *Courier-Mail* in response to a public outcry over the death of a three-year-old girl. Along with her three older sisters, aged five, seven and eight, this little girl was returned by the department to her mother who was a prostitute and a drug addict. In this article the minister stated—

'Whenever a child dies who is known to the department an internal review by an independent expert is completed. The outcomes of such reviews have not previously been made public but they should be'.

Yet on 23 February 2007 this case once again hit the pages of the *Courier-Mail* because the police are still awaiting vital evidence. Our police need close cooperation from the department to ensure that prosecutions can occur. I ask the minister if she intends to make the review of this case and others public once they have been finalised.

As we approach the third anniversary of the blueprint for reform, it is vital that we address issues relating to child safety as a matter of urgency and focus our determined attention on protecting children and, where possible, family units in an equitable, impartial and compassionate way. There have been eight and a half months of excuses and delays and we still have not seen the full introduction of the integrated client management system. Children are too precious and vulnerable to use for political gain, yet here we have a Premier who pats himself on the back and grandstands on this issue by announcing further spending while thousands of Queensland children are still suffering in miserable circumstances. At every level we must be committed to developing a better system which will proactively protect children in need in Queensland and restore some public confidence in a once-neglected department.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): I welcome to the gallery students and teachers from Ferny Grove State School in the electorate of Ferny Grove which is represented in this House by the Hon. Geoff Wilson.

Redcliffe Electorate

Ms van LITSENBURG (Redcliffe—ALP) (12.07 pm): Redcliffe is a town coming of age. It was not long ago that young people had difficulty gaining employment and some businesses were not having the success experienced by many other businesses in the state. This is an issue I am committed to changing. The Beattie Labor government is a strong supporter of business and I am working for better outcomes for the businesses and the people of Redcliffe.

Last week I attended the 80th anniversary celebrations of Fibre King, a family owned and run company that started as an engineering and smithy enterprise in 1927. The company has continually redefined itself to stay at the cutting edge of technology. With a \$103,000 grant from the department of state development Fibre King won a \$7 billion contract with Coles to develop a returnable plastic crate erector machine. This is the first of its kind to be designed and manufactured in Australia. In all of this the only thing that has not changed is the fourth and fifth generation of the family still working in the company and the way it looks after its employees which encourages loyalty and long service.

This is not the only distinguished company on the Redcliffe Peninsula. With Queensland government grants, AI Scientific, among others, has been just as successful and it is also at the cutting edge of their field. While companies like this account for about 10 per cent of Queensland's economy, they are the state's single largest providers of full-time jobs. It is these companies that will provide jobs for our children and their children into the future. Jobs are what we need for people in Redcliffe.

The Queensland government has been working towards skilling young people and unemployed people to empower them to gain the vital skills they need to take their places in the workforce. I have had the pleasure, since my election in September, of representing the minister for state development, John Mickel, at the graduation of several Skilling Queenslanders for Work programs. These include: the Arts for the Future project run by the Redcliffe Area Youth Space for 13 young people developing

design, organisation, administration and events management skills; the Redcliffe Showgrounds refurbishment project run by the Kurbingui Youth Development Association for nine Indigenous graduates developing basic carpentry, painting, odd-job skills and resume writing; the Red Shed project run by the Neighbourhood Centre and Help Enterprises for at-risk graduates developing organisation, marketing and tool-making and maintenance skills; and the Colour Me Multicultural project run by Redcliffe City Council for 24 graduates from non-English speaking backgrounds developing promotion, organisation and administration skills. These programs attracted grants of around three quarters of a million dollars. On each occasion a high number of the graduates were not able to be present because they had already started a job, training or an apprenticeship. That is the true mark of success.

There is no price on people making a successful start to their lives and the positive results from better relationships, more positive role modelling for their children in the future and people being able to be self-reliant and contribute to the community. The cornerstone of the Beattie Labor government's goal for Queensland is to improve the lives of ordinary people through better access to employment opportunities and supporting businesses to become not only industry leaders but also good employers.

Department of Child Safety

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (12.12 pm): I refer to an article in today's *Australian* newspaper that outlines where the Department of Child Safety allowed allegations of abuse at a children's home to go unreported. In February 2002 a child at the Station, a home for boys who are in the care of the Department of Child Safety in Townsville, rang his mother extremely distressed making allegations that he had been assaulted and sexually interfered with by a youth worker. The police officer in charge of the Station interviewed the boy and then reported that the child said that he had made the story up. From revelations made by the child to his mother, to a child safety officer and also to his teacher, he claims that the police officer had forced him to say that he made it up. The mother knows her son very well and does not accept this version but nobody will listen. The department accepted the police officer's version despite the mother's continual lobbying.

The mother has FOI'd a large number of documents which show that it was six months later that he was finally interviewed by a Child Safety Officer and these documents state that the CSO believed the child was telling the truth in his allegation. The mother was also threatened with legal action if she did not stop her persistence with the department for answers. At all stages she claims there were blocks in place from the child safety department and the JAB.

Files that later came to light through FOI showed that there were claims that it was another child and not the youth worker who had molested the child in question. This was on the official file within the Station. Yet when she asked for these files she was told they were exempt or she assumed they had probably gone through the shredder.

A Child Safety manager had described the mother as having an undiagnosed mental illness, which, of course, caused her a great deal of distress and anger. This magnificent mother did not give up on this case because she genuinely believes her son to be the victim in this situation and the department to be covering up.

Finally, then child safety minister Mr Reynolds commissioned an external review in 2005. Two years later the mother was finally last week given FOI access to the Station review. The report states that the departmental officers failed to comply with policies in relation to the recording, assessment and response to several incidents that occurred at the Station or involved harm to children residing at the Station.

The assessment of disclosures made by this lad was very poorly handled by the department and a notification should have been raised. A formal show cause process was commenced by the department in 2005; however, the policeman in charge of the Station withdrew his services and the care licence was relinquished. The specific findings also state that the mother had legitimate concerns about the department's investigation of her son's alleged sexual assault and these concerns were minimised by the northern region at the time.

Recommendations state that the department should provide an acknowledgement to the mother that the assessment was not handled correctly and that the Child Safety manager should be counselled about her reference to the mother having an undiagnosed mental illness and she should be directed to provide her with an apology. Two years on and neither of these things have occurred. Why has no apology or acknowledgement been given to this lady? All she has received is vilification and threats.

The report also concludes that the disclosures made by the child clearly indicated harm or risk of harm and therefore should have been raised as notifications and properly assessed. It also notes that it is extraordinary that the child was able to describe in detail to a child safety officer how the sexual assault actually felt and then this matter was treated as a retraction. The appropriateness of a carer doing this was not even questioned.

The child's initial interview with the CSO took place in the very environment where the abuse is alleged to have occurred. It can be assumed that he was at the Station before and after the interview and presumably still under the care of the alleged perpetrator. Proof that the Station may have been an intimidating environment for the child and would therefore inhibit his responses is in the written account prepared by the police officer. The threatening tone and closed nature of the questions should have been of great concern to the department. Instead this report was used as the basis for the department to take this matter no further. There is no evidence that the department made any attempt to conduct an interview with the alleged perpetrator or to identify and interview witnesses.

Recommendations on page 75 of the report states that the disclosure made by this child should be formally recorded as a notification by the department. I ask the minister: has that been done? If true, this act constitutes a criminal offence. I know the minister has a heart and I know she is doing her best to effect improvement within the department. Please consider the child in this case.

At the end of the day, has any person in the department thought about this child? His words to his mother continually are, 'Why will no-one believe me?' He has lost all trust in people in authority through this and he has a long road of life before him. I know this mother. I have worked with her on this issue for some years. She has genuine love and concern for her child's future. She deserves recognition. This has been an appalling situation. I specifically ask the minister to immediately address and resolve the lies and cover-ups that have been evidenced in this case.

Welfare to Work Initiative

Ms DARLING (Sandgate—ALP) (12.17 pm): I rise to speak on a topic of utmost importance to the people of Queensland. The Commonwealth government's new Welfare to Work initiative has already been identified as unworkable welfare. But it is having a devastating snowball effect on families and communities and the Beattie Labor government and small not-for-profit organisations are being left to pick up the pieces.

In June 2006, just before the federal government's Welfare to Work changes came into place, the National Association of Community Legal Centres forecast the impact this historic change in social security laws would have on the most vulnerable members of our community, labelling it the most significant downgrading of income support in the social security system since the Social Security Act was introduced in 1947. They say that the core of the new system involves cuts in payments, increased obligations on parents and people with disabilities, a harsh penalty regime and the removal of important protections and safeguards that were in the previous act. The association's report concluded that many of the changes are unbalanced, go too far and are likely to have unintended consequences that will cause significant hardship rather than provide much needed assistance to thousands of Australians.

I first became aware of some of the side effects of the Welfare to Work changes last year when I was the president of the Parents and Citizens Association at the local primary school. Many of our most active and involved parents putting in many unpaid hours in the school tuckshop, reading to children in class, providing extra supervision on excursions, helping out in the uniform shop, organising major fundraising events and taking leadership roles on the P&C were single parents, particularly mums in receipt of a federal government pension.

Now that they must work 15 hours paid work each week, there is not much time left to volunteer. In fact, the changes have slashed the pool of volunteers at many schools and P&Cs are considering, if they have not already, outsourcing many of these functions. This in turn adds an extra cost burden to each and every family with a child at school. Let me give another example. There is a local organisation in my electorate that has volunteer staff—mostly women—who provide counselling and support to victims of domestic violence. These women are very special women. Many have beaten the odds and turned their lives around, making the transition from victim to mentor. Similarly, people with disabilities often volunteer to support people in similar situations. What better support than someone who has experienced the trauma themselves. Perhaps I have identified the crux of the matter: John Howard cannot fathom the trauma of feeling so desperate, although I have noticed a little look of despair in his eye recently. Senator Ian Campbell understands desperation a little more, I think.

What will happen to these community organisations as the impact of the Welfare to Work rules kick in and their volunteers disappear? The delicate support structure of family, friends and volunteers is beginning to crumble and will hurt the most vulnerable. What sort of cost-saving measure is it when no value is placed on volunteers? Volunteer work contributes \$16 billion per annum to the Queensland economy. The Howard government thinks that it has stumbled upon a goldmine of cheap labour by forcing people back into the workforce instead of creating an accommodating work environment and helping people find suitable work. It is up to the vulnerable individual to prove that they cannot cope with 15 hours paid work or that the conditions are not fair or suitable to their family situation, and these people will become an obvious target for an unscrupulous employer.

Charitable organisations such as Catholic Social Services Australia and the Salvation Army are pulling out of the Welfare to Work scheme and are refusing to provide financial case management because of their concerns. I call on federal members to listen carefully to the stories coming out of their communities. Elected representatives must stand up for the vulnerable. Senator Ian Campbell has let them down. Let us hope that the new human services minister does a better job, although I doubt it. It is important that we not forget the volunteer—the quiet worker and the backbone of our communities. This is not a cost-cutting exercise by the lazy Howard government; it is a cost-shifting exercise because John Howard knows that it is the Labor states and the not-for-profit organisations that deliver the essential services to the needy of Australia. The Beattie Labor government is becoming all too accustomed to providing the safety net, but we will not stand silently and watch this cowardly attack on families and the community.

Hit-and-Run Legislation, Statute of Limitations

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (12.22 pm): Today I want to raise the concerns of some in the Queensland community in relation to our current laws relating to tragic incidents of hit and run in this state. Currently the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act sets out the duties and liabilities of drivers involved in road incidents. Overwhelmingly, those drivers who are involved act responsibly and not only do they show remorse but their families see a change in the driver which may never be reversed. However, in a small number of instances the driver acts callously and indifferently to the victim, the victim's family and the laws as they apply today. Under this same act, there is a limitation to the time within which proceedings can take place. The act states—

Proceedings for offences

- (1) A proceeding for an offence against a transport Act is a summary proceeding under the *Justices Act 1886*.
- (2) The proceeding must start—
 - (a) within 1 year after the offence was committed; or
 - (b) within 6 months after the offence comes to the complainant's knowledge, but within 2 years after the offence was committed.

That is the act as it currently stands.

In 1998 Encemoa Nowie died as a result of injuries sustained on 22 September while crossing Reservoir Road in Manunda in Cairns. While interviews were done at the time, as a result of the information passed on to them police searched for a particular vehicle. Sadly, the information was inaccurate and no perpetrator was identified. In 2003, as a result of anonymous information provided to police, witnesses were re-interviewed and new information was placed before the coroner. This information included a statement by the alleged perpetrator at a party where he bragged that he had killed a child—although he did not have the decency or respect for the little boy to speak about him with respect—and also stated that 'the coppers will never find out'.

Currently our legislation is directed at timely prosecution of this offence. If I remember correctly, when the amendments went through it was drafted at a time when concerns were held at delays in bringing cases to the court for finalisation. The time constraints were intended to require more care in preparing cases for early presentation to the courts. However, I believe an unintended consequence of the drafting is that, as in this case where there are genuine reasons for action not being commenced, the ability for police and the judiciary to prepare, present and adjudicate on such a tragic situation is lost. In this instance this is not double jeopardy, which I know the current Attorney-General is reviewing; it is a statute of limitations on such tragic circumstances and should be reviewed.

The police in these situations are frustrated and I know in this case the family is devastated. In the sad death of this little boy, Encemoa Nowie, the perpetrator showed no remorse, no respect for the child or his family, and no regard for the law. The coroner's report stated—

The vehicle that struck the child was not seen to take any evasive action nor slow either before or after the collision. There is nothing in the observations of the witnesses to suggest that there was any adverse weather conditions prevailing that contributed to the cause of the accident. Investigators found no contributing defects in the road surface. As the vehicle left the scene, there is no evidence of its mechanical state. However, it appears the headlights of the vehicle were operational.

Whilst the finding in this particular coronial inquiry did not include sufficient evidence for a case to be mounted, the statute of limitations would have knocked that out at any rate. I believe the Attorney-General would share the concerns of the community. In these types of situations—for the sake of the victim, for their family and friends, for investigating police and indeed for the sake of justice—this limitation should be reviewed to allow action to be commenced after the two-year period of limitation to ensure that such callous perpetrators are made to answer for their actions. I believe that for all affected the situation should be rectified and I look forward to the Attorney's support for change.

Riverlink Shopping Centre, Pedestrian Bridge

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.26 pm): The Riverlink Shopping Centre development at North Ipswich is the most substantial development to have happened in central Ipswich since the now moribund Ipswich City Square opened 20 years ago. The development has the potential to reignite the centre of town. It also carries the risk that it could do substantial damage to the Ipswich CBD. For all of the six years that I have been in parliament the people of Ipswich—the retailers, the council and the state MPs—have considered the issue of finding the appropriate balance in that equation and the consensus reached has been that Riverlink can go ahead on the condition that it links—hence the name—with the existing CBD. The link is vital and the link is to be provided through a pedestrian bridge.

The Riverlink development received its final approval from council and subsequently the state government in mid-2004 and construction on the centre commenced soon afterwards. On 28 November 2006 I stood in this place and vocalised the concern held by many traders and residents that we had not yet seen any action on the bridge. Three months later I am disappointed to report to the House that, while the developers are making a lot of noise about opening their big box centre, today there continues to be no progress on the bridge. Indeed, the developer has argued in a letter to me, which I table for members, and in media reports, which I also table, that the bridge is being held up because of procrastination from government agencies—namely Queensland Rail and the EPA.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter dated 29 November 2007 from Mr Allan Keast, Director of Leda Holdings Pty Ltd to Ms Nolan concerning the Ipswich Riverlink pedestrian bridge.

Tabled paper: Copy of an article from *The Queensland Times*, dated 28 February 2007, titled 'Riverlink may open without city link'.

Concerned about this allegation, I sought a full briefing from Queensland Rail. Is it true, I asked, that it is QR that is holding up the bridge? I want to share with the House just what it was that I found out. The advice that has come from QR is as follows. On 5 October 2006—that is when the shopping centre had been being built for two full years—QR said this—

Out of concern that QR was yet to receive engineering design and supporting details of the proposed pedestrian bridge, and with the scheduled opening of Riverlink rapidly approaching, QR on its own initiative convened a meeting of representatives from Ipswich City Council, Leda and QR engineers.

So when the centre had been being built for two years, QR on its initiative contacted Leda about the bridge. It continues—

30 October 2006

Leda's consultants submit engineering drawings to QR

1 November 2006

QR approves engineering drawings—

that is, QR having initiated this process then gave Leda a two-day turnaround on its engineering designs. It continues—

7 December 2006

Leda requests QR certification that existing bridge will support proposed bridge.

5 February 2007—

two months later—

QR locates original bridge design drawings—

from an 1893 bridge. That is, there was a two-month delay, but QR should be commended for having drawings from an 1893 bridge. The facts speak for themselves.

While since late 2004 Leda has rushed full steam ahead at the money-making task of building its shopping centre, QR's written advice establishes that it made no effort on the bridge until QR approached it in October 2006. In addition to falsely claiming that it cannot build the bridge because of QR's delay, Leda has claimed that it is building it off site—I do not quite know how it can have this both ways—for it to be lifted into place by a crane when it is ready. I do not know about the accuracy of that claim, but in order to end any uncertainty I invite Leda to prove the claim by taking local media in coming days to show them the bridge under construction. The photographs—or the absence of them—will allow Ipswich people to decide for themselves whether this claim is true.

Leda's claim that the government is holding up the construction of the bridge has about as much credibility as the position it put forward last year when, with its shopping centre clearly not completed, it claimed in a letter posted to many proposed tenants that it could not open because there were hold-ups from Main Roads and Energex. This company is not demonstrating goodwill to the people of Ipswich in relation to all of these matters. The development approval establishes a series of clear conditions: a bridge, some traffic lights, some landscaping. These conditions are important to the people of Ipswich, and I urge Leda to comply with those conditions—that is, to comply with the rule of law.

PLANT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 20 February (see p. 324).

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.32 pm): The bill that we are debating now has the support of the opposition. We are prepared to see it pass through the parliament today because it has very important and urgent implications for the cane growers of the Isis and Bundaberg areas, particularly as they have a window of opportunity now for their autumn plantings—and in some cases they should have perhaps planted a bit earlier. As I will explain as we go through this bill, there is a real urgency in passing this legislation to allow them to plant the only varieties that are available to them in some cases. Also, as the minister explains, this legislation is required to give some legal protection to the government itself.

At the outset I want to say how important sugar is for Queensland. Ninety-five per cent of Australia's raw sugar is produced in this state. The balance is produced in northern New South Wales and in the Ord River district of Western Australia. Eighty per cent of Queensland's raw sugar production is sold on the world market and the major importing countries of Australian sugar include Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Saudi Arabia, USA and Taiwan. The sugar industry is the cornerstone of many Queensland regional communities. In fact, all up and down the coast of Queensland, sugar is so important in our decentralised system providing employment and the livelihood for many Queensland families.

Some 74 farms have been confirmed with smut in the Bundaberg-Childers area. All infected properties in the Childers area have been inspected and a sizeable area has now been reinspected. In the Bundaberg area 1,600 hectares of cane have been inspected. Inspections have been spread throughout the district and so far findings have been reported as minor.

This scourge of sugarcane smut, which is the subject of the Plant Protection Amendment Bill that we are debating today, spread to Mackay in November last year. So far 12 farms have been identified in that area. Infestations have been found at Victoria Plains, Flaggy Rock, Napri, Seaforth, Pleystowe, Mount Martin and Devereux Creek. In the Herbert River area near Ingham 19 farms have now been confirmed with the sugarcane smut disease. The sightings have been concentrated in Lannercost, Lannercost Extension, Upper Stone, Middle Stone River, Macknade and the Wharps area.

When sugarcane smut was first detected in the Childers area in June of last year there was a very swift response from the DPI and from industry. I think the general consensus was that the response was swift; everybody got stuck into trying to eradicate and contain it. We in the opposition supported that because we knew the importance of this outbreak and the importance of endeavouring to contain the disease. On the ground amongst practical farmers—and I was up there talking to some people and I know colleagues who live in and represent the area—there were a number of canefarmers not only there but throughout Queensland who felt some concern about eradication because to their knowledge it has never been able to be eradicated or contained throughout the rest of the world. That is made extremely difficult because of the nature of transference of sugarcane smut by airborne spores and also in plant material. It has turned out to be fact that a large number of the infestations that have been found, particularly in the Isis and Childers areas, have been from infected stools. As I said—and I am giving credit here—there was a swift response. We supported it and all sections of the industry supported it.

The real issue came about with the unsuccessful application by the Queensland government through the minister and the department to obtain federal and state support through the national management group under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed arrangements. That agreement and the whole principle of getting support from the other states of Australia and the federal government is to be able to prove that there is a reasonable chance of eradication. That happened in the case of fire ants where considerable funding came from the Commonwealth government and other states because the proposal put forward by the then primary industries minister and the department was convincing enough to say that they thought they could eradicate fire ants. Similarly, with the issue of citrus canker, there was support there from the federal government because they were able to put forward a proposal that it could be eradicated and the other states and the rest of Australia would therefore be saved from it. Whilst giving credit for the initial prompt response, I think we have to say that the proposal and the arguments put forward by the minister to his state Labor primary industries minister colleagues and to the federal coalition minister were not convincing enough or scientific enough to be successful. As a result, they were not able to obtain funds through the national management group from the other states and the federal government to go with funds from the Queensland government and industry to endeavour to eradicate sugarcane smut.

As it turned out, once sugarcane smut was again found in another district—in Mackay—had they even been successful in obtaining the approval of the other states and the Commonwealth government for those funds, those funds would have dried up because smut would have been seen to be not able to

be eradicated. I think that is where the problems arose, because an enormous amount of time and energy was lost in the politics of the issue. The minister blamed the federal government and people ran around on the issue of the federal government not giving money when not only was the federal government involved but also the other states were involved. As a result, a lot of time was lost. When you talk to people in the industry you realise that it is that period—some time after the initial early prompt response—when things started to go around in circles and some real problems and issues arose.

Subsequently, management plans were put in place. A large number of farms had to plough out crops. As cane is a crop where there is a year of fallow and four years of ratoon, in many cases farmers were ploughing out crops that may have been in only their first, second or third year. Those farmers whose crops were placed under those management plants suffered a large economic cost and disadvantage.

Compensation of \$2,000 per hectare was promised by the state government. I have talked to people in the area about this matter and they have told me that the amount of compensation was fair. Nothing is perfect, because farmers had to go through all the rigour and drama and the disruption to their whole farming process to plough out crops way outside their normal farming program. Despite that, those farmers have said that, yes, the \$2,000 per hectare in compensation that was paid was fair.

Since then, owing to further outbreaks of smut in the north and the urgency to plant, it was seen that the only way to manage this outbreak of smut was to live with it and manage it in the best possible way in accordance with the different soils, topography and climate that exists in the cane-growing areas of Queensland. Of course, as well as ploughing out crops owing to the detection of so many outbreaks of smut, affected farms were also in their normal cycle of replanting. Consequently, there has been a huge demand for smut-resistant varieties of cane. The problem is that there is a limited amount of smut-resistant varieties of cane. That cane also does not have the production potential of normal smut-susceptible varieties of cane, which are high producing. I am referring not just to the volume of cane harvested but the c.c.s. levels of the cane. Therefore, there are two problems: firstly, the shortage of cane varieties that are resistant to smut; and, secondly, the material that could be obtained from that cane does not have the same production levels as the normal, high-producing varieties that were planted in those areas.

So there are some real issues for the canegrowers in the Isis and the Bundaberg areas. This legislation specifically provides them with a system whereby they will be able to at least get some planting material. In saying that, I should explain that, because of the smut outbreak in Isis and Childers, a number of regulations were put in place under the Plant Protection Act. One of those regulations was that the allowed varieties list—that is the list of varieties of cane that can be planted—was severely restricted to smut-resistant cane. As I have explained, there is just simply not enough of that material. People have suffered serious economic disadvantage by disrupting their cycle of cane growing on their farms. They have had to plough out their crops and plant new material.

The cane farms in the Isis and Bundaberg areas are under a different approved planting list from the rest of the state. Once smut broke out in the rest of the state, it was seen that it could not be eradicated and that the only way to manage it was to contain it within specific plans in specific districts and to manage it according to climate and conditions. But the farmers in the Bundaberg and Isis areas were left at a severe disadvantage. They were forced by the regulations brought in under the Plant Protection Act to plant only smut-resistant varieties of cane. That meant that many of those farmers in those areas would not be able to plant at all, because there was not the material available; whereas in the north, farmers were able to operate as they had in the past. Those farmers did not come under the orders that were placed on the farmers in the Isis and Bundaberg areas.

Hence there was a need to have a look at what could be done and the recommendations arising out of the review, conducted by Dr David Watson, were put in place. The review team worked with a number of organisations, such as Canegrowers, BSES, local cane farmers, the millers council, and other organisations and groups. The review was set up to examine the economic impact of sugarcane smut on the sugar industry, particularly in the Isis and Bundaberg areas. The review team conducted a large amount of economic modelling in terms of what would happen to a number of these farms in different circumstances, such as what would happen if those farmers did not have the plant material, what would happen if they planted smut-susceptible varieties of cane, and what would happen if they experienced smut incursions on their farms at year 1, year 2, year 3 or in the normal year of ploughing out at year 4. The review came up with a number of recommendations. I will get to the recommendations of the Watson review shortly. A number of commentators have said that when the report was released, it was underwhelming—a lot of it stated the obvious and that by walking down the streets of Childers and talking to farmers they all would have all said the same things that the economic modelling revealed.

Regardless, I am concerned that the DPIF has been emasculated through continual budget cuts and continual VERs. Since the Beattie government came into power in 1998, some 300 VERs have been offered and almost all of those have been taken up—the last lot is going through the process now. As well, the department has suffered staff cutbacks. Currently, 121 VERs are being offered and the people who accept them will be replaced by 100 people. Certainly, we agree that all organisations need

continual renewal and young talent should be brought in. But the worst thing we can do is throw out all the corporate knowledge—all the experience, particularly in an area such as DPI where people have worked in particular sectors of agriculture, such as sugar, grain or biosecurity, and have developed particular expertise and experience over many, many years. Those people are accepting these VERs. All of the experience, corporate talent and training systems and seminars that have been in place for years is lost and, *carte blanche*, a massive number of new people are brought in who will have to spend a large amount of time gaining that level of experience.

To get back to the Watson report, why wouldn't the DPIF itself be capable of producing a report such as this? Why did it have to spend money getting people from outside of the department to do it? Is it just that we have lost the capacity and capability within our own DPIF? Have we lost too many people through VERs who knew and understood the sugar industry or who would have had the capability to produce this type of report? As I said, I have worked with David Watson in this parliament and in government and I hold him in high regard. But my concern is for the DPIF and the gradual erosion of talent to the point that we should have had expertise within the department that could have produced this report, particularly when so much of it was staring us in the face and particularly when so much of it was actually looked at, examined and researched through some of the DPIF's own computer modelling systems and programs it has under the FutureCane arrangement.

I think it is important that we all look at this situation and the major biosecurity outbreaks like citrus canker and realise the importance of retaining experienced, loyal staff. In any organisation the greatest asset you can have is talented loyal, long-serving employees. I think that one of the problems we are seeing with the Beattie government is the continual handing out of VERs and the continual gradual reduction of the DPIF. The loss of corporate knowledge and loss of experience certainly showed in this circumstance.

A couple of times already in my speech I have given credit where it is due. I have given credit for the prompt response, and that has been recognised by many other organisations, in the initial stages of this outbreak. I have given credit for the payment of the compensation. I also give credit to the DPIF for the success it has had in previous years—for example, with the papaya fruit fly incursion and the black sigatoka in north Queensland. It had success in both of those cases and that should be recognised and given due credit. In this case, whilst everybody went along in the initial stages with the idea of eradication, there were a lot of people scratching their heads saying, 'This hasn't been done anywhere else in the world. This is spread by spores. How can this be done?'

When there was an outbreak in Mackay, the logic and principles that were applied to endeavour to eradicate smut in Childers could have just as easily applied to the first isolated outbreak in Mackay. But we saw more outbreaks in Mackay and then that made people look at what happened in Childers, Isis and Bundaberg in a different way. As I have said, the finding of the sugarcane smut on a property north of Mackay meant that attitudes had to change, that it was potentially established throughout the cane areas of Queensland, that it could be widespread and that any further sightings would be communicated as soon as possible to the growers, industry and media outlets by the industry bodies Canegrowers and BSES Ltd.

The confirmed finding of smut in Mackay took the incursion from a single- to a multi-point entry incursion. There is no evidence to suggest that smut had escaped from the Bundaberg-Childers quarantined area; rather, the Mackay incursion most probably occurred separately. A definitive identification of the source of the Mackay incursion is being attempted using DNA fingerprinting. However, it is unlikely that we will fully understand how both incursions started in the first place. The Mackay finding, as I said, changed the focus of the response from one of containment under stringent biosecurity guidelines to one focused on management of the disease, with varietal replacement high on the list of priorities to be considered by regional strategies that link in with the broader state strategy.

The sugarcane industry is now in a transition from a biosecurity strategy based on control and containment to one of industry management and economic recovery. As I said, the review undertaken by Dr Watson has investigated the economic impact of the disease and has endeavoured to identify measures to facilitate economic recovery. The review included cost-benefit analysis work on different varieties of cane and identifying the most effective use of resources to support the economic recovery process.

I think it is important in this particular debate to look at and assess some of recommendations from the Watson review. I also want to read into the record later some of the matters raised in consultation with Canegrowers which I think show the real concerns that they have about this issue that we are debating today—the issue of what varieties can be planted and what are the risks of moving to a system of planting smut-susceptible varieties. The Watson report states—

The recommendations are premised on four observations, namely:

- in an economic sense, the smut incursion is manageable by the sugar industry in the normal course of business—

That is what I meant about the practical observation of most cane farmers and people involved in the industry. They always felt that that was ultimately what would have to happen. The observations continue—

- government should not be directing how local areas are to manage the incursion, but rather should adopt a facilitating role in the management process;

- there is considerable uncertainty with respect to the epidemiology of smut in Queensland and the practical aspects of farm management of the disease—

I think that is very important and something I want to address later on. If you are going to address an issue like this, you have to understand the epidemiology of it—how it is transferred and how it develops. Some of the observations have been quite interesting. People have tended to think that the smut is going to come mostly from the wind borne transfer of the spores from the whip tails of the disease on the cane. Inspectors doing a lot of foot slogging through the paddocks are finding that many of the outbreaks are coming now from infected plant root material. The final observation is that—

- there is considerable urgency to increase the number of smut-resistant varieties of cane available, both to improve the yield and the CCS characteristics of the cane and to ameliorate the risk to the industry of a reliance on too few varieties of cane.

The last thing we would want to see is a varietal collapse in the industry because of too few varieties. The recommendations are—

1. Each PQA, or plant quarantine area—

and the plant quarantine area that this bill is mostly about is PQA5—

should prepare a regional smut response plan to be developed prior to planting in spring 2007. The plan should be based on, and address local factors, but should address at a minimum, the following issues:

- An assessment of the risk of smut infestation on the region
- A proposed course of action when smut is detected in each farm in the region
- A program for reducing smut-susceptibility in the region and for reducing the rate of spread of smut in the region (that is, minimising the inoculum pressure), including—
 - Surveillance
 - The propagation and distribution of clean (smut-free) planting material
 - Planting of smut-resistant varieties
 - Mechanisms for reducing the probability of the spread of smut by mechanical means (eg through the movement of people or equipment from smut-infested to otherwise clean areas, eg through burning of cane prior to harvesting)
 - The destruction and removal of infected plants or blocks
 - Recommendations for changing the approved variety lists for planting and ratooning.

That is very much the crux of this bill that is before the House today. The second recommendation states—

2. Because of the considerable uncertainty with respect to the epidemiology of smut and the actual rate of spread of smut, decisions relating to the approved variety lists for planting and ratooning should be made on the basis of consultation with and advice from BSES Ltd. and industry in each PQA.

Sitting suspended from 1 pm to 2.30 pm.

Mr HORAN: Recommendation 3 states—

The government should consider mechanisms for permitting PQA5 growers to plant up to 2,000 hectares of susceptible cane for Autumn 2007. In order to respond to the concerns of Isis growers, this planting must minimise the spread of smut by ensuring the planting of disease-free plants, increased surveillance and the 'roguing out' of diseased plants.

Recommendation 4 states—

The broader implications of Recommendations 2 and 3 should be addressed by the government. This includes: in particular whether any mechanisms designed to accommodate additional plantings of smut-susceptible cane in PQA5 should also be made available to other PQAs; and in general, whether there should be any economic criteria for judging consequences of action taken under the Plant Protection Act.

Recommendation 5 states—

The collection, organisation and dissemination of smut management information to farmers are essential. While Canegrowers and BSES Ltd. are producing material for farmers on the disease, the collection and dissemination of practical advice from growers who have experienced smut infestation could be highly valuable for on farm management. The government should consider augmenting funding for such a program.

Recommendation 6 states—

The FutureCane Farm Economic Analysis Tool (FEAT) model should be made available to all growers and be backed by sufficient technical support to implement this decision tool effectively. The FEAT model will also assist in the broader on-farm agronomic decisions required to maintain economic viability as growers transition to resistant varieties.

Recommendation 7 states—

In the short term, perhaps two years, the government should consider ways to augment industry surveillance activities to both ensure planting material is disease-free and to obtain reliable epidemiological data on smut. This should be accomplished through consultation with industry in each PQA.

The next recommendation is important—

The government should consider augmenting industry research and plant breeding activities in order to increase the variety and availability of smut-resistant canes. The augmentation could incur through expanding current BSES Ltd. programs and/or funding research activities at organisations, such as the CSIRO, private research organisations or universities, particularly in the biological and agricultural sciences areas.

The Smart-Sett program and genetic modification technology programs could benefit from increased research activity. Government funding in these areas could produce long term benefits for the industry and the state.

Recommendation 9 states—

The above recommendations (particularly 7 and 8) could be funded by the government, in consultation with the industry, by reallocating the residual of the \$15.6m as part of its previous commitment.

I understand that \$8 million of that \$15.6 million is still unspent. That is approximately half. It is important that that funding is used for this purpose.

The most important thing to come out of this situation is the need for research. It is of extreme concern to think that when this smut outbreak occurred there were limited amounts of planting material available. That has been the subject of some criticism from within the industry. It was felt that at least there could have been a modest amount of smut-resistant variety available and there could have been greater preparation for an event like this, which had a high likelihood of happening at some stage.

Recommendation 9 of the Watson report states—

Since there are most likely positive economic externalities arising from Recommendations 7 and 8, it would be reasonable to fund these activities from any uncommitted residual.

Recommendation 10 states—

If it is determined that abandoned cane becomes a significant smut-infection risk, the government should ensure that any threat posed by abandoned cane is addressed.

I have commended a number of times the initial early response. However, there have been a number of issues that have occurred that should be addressed in this debate so that if something like this happens in the future everybody can learn from experience. Bundaberg Sugar Services Ltd, which involves Bundaberg Sugar, Canegrowers from Bundaberg and the old productivity board, detailed a number of these problems. It is important that they be addressed. Once it became quite clear that eradication was not possible and that the government had failed in its attempt to get the other Labor states and the coalition federal government to agree to an eradication plan under the national management group, a number of problems occurred. Bundaberg Sugar Services stated in a media release—

The QDPI imposed control program consulted little with the local industry, was rushed and therefore badly managed, wasting many millions of dollars.

Those dollars could be used now for research and assistance in dealing with this in a normal on-farm management situation. The release further stated—

The lack of communication between QDPI officers hell-bent on imposing regulatory control on uninformed and confused growers caused many difficulties.

It went on—

Industry leaders very quickly determined that to make informed decisions about disease control without government funding required a better understanding of how quickly the disease might spread and the yield losses it could expect until susceptible varieties were removed from farms. After a considerable delay, BSES finally commenced an epidemiology study.

Some seven months after the disease was detected no useful information was yet available on the epidemiology. The media release continues—

in spite of QDPI and BSES's dire predictions about the rate of smut spread, local growers and the Bundaberg Sugar Services Ltd. inspectors are finding very little smut during their field inspections. This suggests spread via winds is slow. There is no argument that spread via infected planting material is much faster.

They go on to say that everybody agrees that the local industry will have to change eventually to resistant varieties. The question is at what pace. With slow spread growers may be able to extract a few more years from their current high producing varieties. This would allow BSES more time to release better yielding resistant varieties. They go on to say that there is now a major difference between plant quarantine area 5, Bundaberg-Isis, where planting of susceptible varieties is not allowed and the two smut-infested areas further north where their approved planting lists remain unchanged. When this bill is passed, PQA5 will be in the same situation as those northern plant quarantine areas.

The media release states that the autumn planting has started. Growers still cannot make decisions about planting because the return of susceptible varieties to the planting list has not been resolved by QDPI. Bundaberg Sugar made a formal request for this to be resolved on 6 December. On 29 January the minister replied that he had referred the issue to the Watson working group. Its report was due on 18 February. They questioned whether this was a timely response because here we are now, some three months after the initial request on 6 December, putting through this bill that will finally allow this to happen.

Once the Watson report was released Bundaberg Sugar Services put out another press release and expressed their pleasure that the government was considering mechanisms to permit Bundaberg and Isis growers to plant up to 2,000 hectares of smut-susceptible cane and the chairman, Kelvin Griffin, said it was a common sense approach. The deputy chairman, Mike Smith, said that the Watson report had found out what we knew all along: that the cure which had originally been proposed had the potential to be worse than the disease. The Canegrowers chairman, Alwyn Heidke, was pleased with the outcome and commended DPIF Minister Tim Mulherin for the speed with which the state

government had acted. As I said, it took some three months to get to this stage. The minister acted quickly once he got the Watson report, but the decision making was needed earlier than that. There should be enough expertise in the department to make decisions of that nature without having to wait for an external report, particularly when planting times for the particular region are nearing.

Mr Gary Longden, group development manager of Bundaberg Sugar, said that the Watson report was well balanced and contained logical recommendations that were consistent with views which have been expressed over recent months by the Bundaberg industry. He said that the Watson report's priority on achieving an economic basis for establishing ongoing management of the disease and its impact as measured under local conditions has always been and remains the outcome sought by Bundaberg Sugar.

We are debating this bill now due to the change in strategy for dealing with sugarcane smut and the fact that other outbreaks were found in central Queensland and north Queensland. The initial eradication strategy meant that the state government had already taken to ban non-resistant varieties of sugar cane being grown in the Bundaberg area. With the strategy changing to one of control rather than eradication it means that the growers in the Bundaberg area do not have access to the same number of non-resistant varieties as those in other areas affected by the disease. Smut resistant sugarcane varieties have a lower sugarcane content than non-resistant varieties. By placing a ban on particular varieties it means an immediate loss of production to the industry. This could therefore cause hardship to producers.

The independent report which encourages the planting of susceptible varieties in the absence of stock resistant varieties means that we can ensure that the sugarcane producing areas around Bundaberg can recover economically from the effects of smut. However, allowing sugarcane smut susceptible varieties to be planted in Queensland could also leave the Queensland government at risk of legal liability for spreading the pest in the state.

One of the reasons for the bill before the House is the issue of legal protection for the government. The most important and overriding issue is to allow Bundaberg farmers to get on with the business which is their livelihood—that is, growing sugar cane—and enable them to have access to varieties that they can plant and develop risk management scenarios and systems for so that if they plant cane that is susceptible to smut they can manage that risk within their farm management system.

There are a couple of other matters that I wanted to put before the House. It is important to look at the submission made by Canegrowers to the Watson review. It covers many of the things that I have already talked about. They talk about the debilitating disease that it is. They say that it is a fungus spread by spores in the air or in infected plant material or in soil. In their submission it says—

... there are no physical control measures that can apply to prevent the spread of this disease; fungicides, soil fumigation et cetera would not be effective. The former policy of containment within a single PQA will no longer apply, however, the main strategy will now be to limit the spread of the disease as far as possible within a region, and to replace susceptible with resistant ones over as short a time as possible.

Further in its submission—

CANEGROWERS is committed to reliance on sound, science-based response plans developed at regional level ... It is at this level also, that decisions can be made about the resourcing of a variety replacement program. These district response plans will then inform, through comprehensive communications programs, individual farm plans. These farm level plans will require input on the optimum rate of removal of susceptible varieties and programs for plough out and fallow to ensure minimisation of the disease. Clearly a different approach to planning will be required on farms and regions where smut has been detected than in other areas.

It says that the main strategy for dealing with sugarcane smut will be to limit the spread within a region and replace susceptible varieties as soon as possible. It says—

Thus CANEGROWERS supports the use of the Approved Varieties List in each region and, in consultation with the regions, the removal of susceptible varieties from these lists as soon as possible. The assessment of which varieties should remain on this list in each region should be based on disease management criteria based on the biosecurity risk each variety poses to individual farmers, their neighbours and the region as a whole. It should not be based on perceived economic impacts of the removal of a variety.

It has been noted that, in some areas, there are concerns that removal of susceptible varieties may have substantial and avoidable economic impact. For instance, there is a view that, in the Bundaberg region, there is insufficient planting material for the 2007 autumn plant. CANEGROWERS does not believe that this should result in the reinstatement of susceptible varieties on the replanting list. Rather, it suggests that applications to plant material not on the approved list should be handled through a permit or exemption system. Permits to allow for such planting should be authorised through DPI&F and should be based on an assessment of the potential economic loss if the planting does not proceed and the potential cost of such planting in terms of losses to the farmer, neighbours and region as a whole.

I would like to hear from the minister how the new list of plant material will be managed and dealt with, how decisions will be made on what varieties can be planted and how those approvals will flow through. Is the minister looking at a permit system or will it be done on a regional basis? Canegrowers also recommended in their submission—

... DPI&F will have an important role in the response in terms of provision of suitable planting material. This could include ... assistance to BSES to ramp up its plant breeding, assessment of smut resistance on varieties and propagation ... assistance to regions to propagate and distribute plant material ... provision of advice and farm economic models to allow individuals to assess various pathways for variety replacement.

I call on the minister to use every single available dollar of the \$15.6 million remaining—approximately 50 per cent of it has not been spent—to address this important issue of plant material, be it spent on BSES, which is the logical and first port of call, for research and the propagation of material or be it on, as the Watson report suggests, some other organisation. There is not the time for too much ramping up or development of programs. Rather, we really need a ramping up of the existing programs that BSES has here and has access to overseas.

They need to look at the issue of gene transfer. They need to look at the one eye system for greater propagation. This is so important for an industry as large as this and for an area like Bundaberg-Isis. It is also important for the Mackay and Herbert areas where they will have to do on-farm management more or less exactly the same as the Isis and Childers areas. The only exception is that they were not forced to plough out areas. They will be doing any ploughing out as a result of their own decision making.

The Queensland growers are experienced in handling many other types of diseases within their farming systems, but this is their first real experience with sugarcane smut. Every support should be given to enable farmers to use the FEAT model, and this will assist in their decision making. They are going to find particular incursions of smut on their property and they need that modelling to work out whether they take the risk of planting a susceptible variety or whether they plant a resistant variety, how they manage the ongoing ratoon system and the forced new plantings that they will have to do because of the discovery of smut.

I want to summarise some of the things that I have said. I have given credit where it is due for the initial quick response. There is no doubt in my mind that, had there been a 100 per cent focus on what was best, most practical and most workable for the farmers themselves, it would have put the politics out of this equation. It was the politics of trying to show that the federal government had not supported the national management plan under the emergency plant protection arrangements that got in the way. This quick, initial, early response stumbled around in the mid-months with a number of problems and issues, whereas the on-the-ground, practical opinions of most farmers was that this could not be eradicated.

All of those farmers were prepared to go with the DPI and industry leaders who said that the first issue was to endeavour to contain and eradicate it. That was quite a reasonable decision, because anyone would in the first place endeavour to get out there to try to cut something off at the legs straightaway because of the seriousness of this pest. Once it became obvious that it was found elsewhere, obviously the case that was put to the other states and the federal government—because they are all in this; it is not just the federal government but the state governments as well—was not strong enough to prove that it could be eradicated, and that has proved to be correct. It is not a matter of kicking someone down because they have made the wrong decision in hindsight. As I have said, the initial decision to endeavour to eradicate it was the best starting point and probably the logical starting point. Once that was proved to be not correct, then there needed to be far faster management of a number of these issues.

There has been enormous hardship for farming families of the Isis area in particular. Many of them have gone through long waits. Many of them were in very difficult circumstances ploughing the paddocks that had to be ploughed out. They had people crawling all over their farms all of the time which disrupted their normal farming life. As I have said, they did receive fair compensation, and that should be recognised. They now need and the industry now needs very substantial support of research and development of smut-resistant varieties—varieties that are not just smut resistant but varieties that can provide a comparable yield to the smut-susceptible varieties. There is not much point of going to the expense of replanting a whole farm with a resistant variety if the entire production is down by significant levels and any benefit from the sugar price reaching a reasonable level would be lost. We only have to go back two or three years when the cane industry was virtually on its knees with a massive package required from the federal government. Those cane communities and cane families suffered for a number of years because of prices that just simply meant that they were losing every year. The modest lift in cane prices has meant that they are able to make a living again, but if they have to revert to varieties that reduce not only their tonnage but reduce the sugar production through the c.c.s. then really they are back in a similar position to when prices were low, because whilst there might be a reasonable price their production is not high enough to overcome the very substantial costs of planting cane.

The other lesson learnt from this is that we have lost so much expertise from the DPI. There have been too many cutbacks, too many staff redundancies offered and too much pushing out of the strong corporate knowledge. We need a DPI where there is a culture of developing people to become experts with new young graduates while at the same time having experienced people who know and understand the aspects of Primary Industries or Fisheries to teach them. In this case, for example, how important would be some of those 300 people who have taken redundancies over the years of the Beattie government since 1998?

When sugarcane smut was first discovered, the opposition supported what was happening because we believed that the disease was that bad. We believed that there needed to be cooperation from all sections of the industry and that we should be a part of that cooperation. We were disappointed as time went by to see the practical knowledge of canefarmers not listened to and disregarded. We have also been disappointed about the long period of time—some three months—since this matter was brought up as a matter of urgency at the beginning of December to today. Some three months later we are finally going to give approval to Bundaberg growers to at least plant material as their colleagues in north Queensland can. One might say that the minister's response has been prompt since the release of the Watson report, but the Watson report did not come out until mid-February. During the last 2½ months there has been disquiet with the cane-growing industry in Bundaberg-Isis in limbo—it had country ploughed out, it had normal country that they had to plant as part of their four- or five-year rotation process and they did not have cane to plant.

They were faced with the quandary: what do we do? Where do we go to from here? They did not have adequate resistant varieties to replant. They did not know what was going to happen with the approved list. It was only mid-February after the Watson report and after the bill was actually brought into the parliament that any direction finally came. They have been wallowing around in limbo for that period of time. We need faster decision making in situations like this, because, after all, everybody knew after the beginning of November when it was discovered in other parts of Queensland that it would have to be a system of managing it within normal farm management systems. Eradication was out of the question. It was a matter of control and endeavouring to live with the disease, as do so many other sugarcane-producing areas in other parts of the world and in the north-west of Australia in the Ord River area. I indicated to the minister when the bill first came into the parliament that we would be happy for this bill to come into the parliament as soon as it could—and it has come here in a reasonably quick time—and that we would support this bill in the interests of supporting the people in the Bundaberg-Isis area. I sincerely hope that the new arrangements that this legislation puts in place enable those people to endeavour to bring back a degree of normality into their farming life and to enable them to recover from this incursion of smut which has been so devastating to them.

My final comment is that when we get this urgent bill out of the way there is one other major urgent matter, and that is the urgent research, development and production of plant material—not just the availability of plant material but the development of material that has some similar production capabilities to the smut-susceptible varieties so that people can regain some financial stability into their farming operations. We should use every possible means at our disposal. If there is some overseas work that can be used in conjunction with the work of the BSES, then that should happen. We need an urgent transfer of funds to BSES in particular so that these varieties can be provided.

At the end of the day, that is the clear-cut resolution of this major issue. Cities like Bundaberg, Childers, Mackay, Ingham and all the other cane-growing areas of Queensland rely heavily upon it. It is very urgent that that funding goes into research and development.

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (2.59 pm): The purpose of the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007 is twofold: to put in place an amendment to allow the chief executive of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to amend declarations of approved sugar cane varieties as required and, secondly—and this will be the nature of much of the debate here today—to allow Bundaberg growers to plant sugarcane smut-susceptible varieties this March.

Dr David Watson, whom most of us in this parliament know, presented his report, titled *Economic Impact of Sugarcane Smut on the Queensland Sugarcane Industry* to the minister on 18 February 2007. Through the minister the Queensland government will now consider the Watson report's recommendations in full. It is important to understand that the minister said that scientific opinion is that it is no longer possible to prevent or control the spread of smut. It is important to understand that the government's policy position has changed from disease eradication—and I will come back to that with regard to the Watson report—to economic recovery and biosecurity safeguards. Of course, the government is broadly supportive of the Watson report and will consult with industry stakeholders in determining future government financial investment for the management of smut.

As the Watson report stated—and I think clearly recognised—by allowing growers to plant the non-resistant variety in the coming weeks there is a window of opportunity in March which will provide them with some economic advantage. Dr Watson recommended that the government urgently consider augmenting industry research and plant breeding activities to increase the variety and availability of smut-resistant cane.

The department is consulting with industry and research providers to explore options to effectively invest funds to introduce the recommendations of Dr Watson. The important thing about those recommendations is to facilitate industry recovery. Importantly, the department will engage industry to ensure self-determination processes are in place regionally to realise industry's and government's long-term plans for smut management. Again, that recognises what the minister has previously said when it comes to scientific opinion on the spread of smut.

In the longer term, the department will work with industry to undertake a comprehensive review of key biosecurity legislation over the next 12 to 18 months. The department clearly recognises, as I think the shadow minister was saying, the urgency of the situation and the circumstances. By amending the act the sugar industry can have planning certainty. Regions will be able to plan and plant the best options for their climate and soil types given limitations of supply of smut-resistant varieties. The Watson report recommends that each production region develop a regional smut management plan. These plans will be the best approach to the management of smut at a regional level. From my understanding, most growers reported to Dr Watson that they were in favour of planting smut-resistant varieties over the next few years. Through that, the Queensland government is enabling the regional sugar industry in pest quarantine area 5 to get on with the business and minimise the financial impacts of this disease, again as recommended by Dr Watson. The industry must increase the range and availability of smut-resistant cane varieties and improve smut management information with appropriate decision support tools for epidemiology, on-farm surveillance and farming systems practices. I support the bill.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (3.04 pm): The Plant Protection Amendment Bill is before this House to enable the government to have the legal flexibility to respond to the smut crisis that now faces the sugar industry in Queensland. By passing this legislation, the House will allow the chief executive officer or the director-general of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to vary the declaration to 'allow for smut-susceptible varieties to be planted in the Bundaberg region to ensure economic recovery for the region and to reduce legal liability for the Queensland government in relation to that decision'.

I grew up in the middle of sugarcane fields. When I was a young fellow, the clothes on my back, the food in my belly and the roof over my head were put there by the wealth and prosperity of the sugar industry, not to mention the backbreaking hard work of my father who was a canecutter in the early days—who at the age of 69 is still a navvy and a sugar cane driver—and my mum who prepared the cane for planting by stripping the leaves. I earned my pocket money working for the farmers of the South Kolan district. I learnt that, while the sugar industry had periods of great prosperity, it also suffered many hardships and hard times.

As soon as sugar smut was discovered, the Childers sugar industry knew it was in for a hard time for a number of reasons. First of all, it is a fungus or a disease that is capable of wiping out 100 per cent of a crop. There are some estimates of between 30 per cent and 100 per cent, but basically it is capable of wiping out 100 per cent of the crop. It is one of the biggest threats that the sugar industry has ever faced. This disease has never been eradicated anywhere else in the world because of its ability to be transferred via invisible microscopic spores that can be easily blown on the wind, attached to machinery or clothing or transferred within soil spores. The only way to control this disease is to breed it out: grow varieties of sugar cane that have their own inbuilt resistance to this fungus.

Of the varieties of cane that display smut resistance, many do not yield as much sugar or are not as productive. A significant proportion of cane that was being grown in the Isis and Bundaberg districts was and is susceptible to sugar smut. The sugar industry knew it was in for a hard time for all those reasons. However, it did not expect to be in for a hard time because of the mismanagement of this government. As the shadow minister for primary industries has already stated, the initial response from this government was swift, but then it became bogged down and inflexible because the department did not listen or pay enough attention to the wisdom of local growers. This government has made a political decision on smut rather than a scientific decision.

On Friday, 9 June 2006—almost nine months ago—sugarcane smut was confirmed in a crop on the Russo farm at Childers. It was discovered by Isis productivity board employee Bruce Quinn. It was the equivalent to finding a needle in a haystack. Bruce displayed extraordinary diligence and skill in identifying a single shoot of infected cane plant and deserves to be commended and recognised. His dedication to duty and his skill has saved the industry tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars and thousands of workers' jobs.

As we know, the sugar industry is one of the state's biggest rural industries and has been the economic backbone of many Queensland regional areas for more than a century. With the flow-on effects, it employs approximately 35,000 people—of course, mainly made up of Queenslanders. Queensland alone grows 95 per cent of Australia's sugar cane. It was devastating news that our farmers' crops were infected with the smut disease. At least 70—I think the latest figure is 74—properties have been infected in the Isis district and the Bundaberg region. In the Isis district about 60 properties have been infected and in the Bundaberg region about 10 properties have been infected.

The Watson report recommends giving the Bundaberg and Isis growers permission to plant up to 2,000 hectares of smut-susceptible cane. I believe that this figure represents a little bit greater than 10 per cent of the total amount of cane planted. Although I intend to support this legislation, which will allow canegrowers to plant smut-susceptible cane, I strongly advise against doing that. I understand that some growers may have no other option, because of the limited supply of smut-resistant plants and the very narrow time in which they have to plant during the autumn—in the coming month. But after talking recently to the Isis growers, I would say that you would have to have rocks in your head if you planted smut-susceptible cane, particularly the Q205 variety. It is a gamble that growers are taking with their own financial security and that of their fellow growers.

Sugarcane smut will infect the whole of the sugar industry if the wrong varieties of cane are grown. At the most, growers who insist on planting smut-susceptible varieties have only one year before serious declines in productivity occur. That may be. I would be interested to hear from the minister about his long-range forecast and the expert advice that he has received. All the indications that I have are that it is about one year.

In many ways, some canegrowers have been lulled into a false sense of security, because this disease, when compared with the experiences overseas and in the Ord River, is still in its early stages. Many canegrowers do not have the visible signs—those black whips and the plants being under stress—and it is easy to say that the disease is not present. However, in the past two weeks Isis canegrowers have told me that there has been an explosion in the disease. The transition into autumn weather, which is accompanied by hot, dry and windy conditions—there has not been very much rain in the area—will mean that crops that have had only a small number of infected plants or stools of cane, and I was talking to one farmer who had about 70 infected stools, now have thousands of examples of infected stools of cane. We are now looking in the region of a couple of thousand. That has occurred in a two-week period. On 28 February this year Scott Lamond, a reporter for the ABC's *Rural* radio show, stated that in the last two weeks smut has taken off.

The Bundaberg-Burnett area is a unique cane production area. There are two distinct growing cultures. There are the Bundaberg canegrowers who grow their cane and then sell it to Bundaberg Sugar and then there are the Isis growers, who own their own mill as a cooperative. They share in the profits of their mill. The 2006 season statistics show that the tonnes of cane cut in Isis was about 1,249,000 whereas in the Bundaberg combined district the amount of cane cut was 1,822,000 tonnes. In Isis, 176,420 tonnes of sugar was produced. In Bundaberg, 291,000 tonnes of sugar was produced. In Isis, 14,000 hectares of cane was harvested. In Bundaberg, 35,000 hectares of cane was harvested. The value of the crop to the area at \$370 per tonne—and it will not attract that figure this year because of the fall in the price of sugar; I believe it is around 10c or 11c—represents \$65 million to the millers and the growers at Isis. I have not been supplied with official figures from the Bundaberg area but, going on those figures, members could guess that the value of the crop to the Bundaberg growers is around \$107 million. In the Isis district there are 234 growers. In the Bundaberg district there are 445 growers.

In terms of the number of horticultural growers versus the number of sugar growers in the Bundaberg-Burnett district, the revolution has well and truly taken place. I read in a report on underground salinity that approximately 10 years ago the combined value of sugar in the area was about \$220 million. In 2006, the combined value of sugar is roughly \$170 million. So when we compare the value of the sugar industry to what it was 10 years ago, we see that the industry has gone backwards. Approximately 10 years ago the horticultural industry in the area was worth around \$100 million. This year, the value of the industry in that area will peak at around \$300 million. So certainly, in monetary terms, the horticultural growers—the small crop growers—have overtaken the sugar growers.

In relation to the availability of smut-resistant cane, very soon after the smut outbreak I attended a number of meetings. I note that the minister was present at them. I made some notes in relation to the replacement of non-susceptible varieties of cane. Farmers in the Bundaberg region wanted to know if they were able to access any non-susceptible varieties of cane. At the moment, there is some confusion around this issue. A list of resistant varieties was shown to growers, and they ranged from Q146 to Q151. Approximately 14 varieties of cane grown in the Bundaberg-Burnett-Isis regions are highly susceptible to the disease. Other varieties of cane resistant to smut are being grown in areas in north Queensland: Q200, Q171, Q177 and Q223. But the BSES does not know if these varieties of cane will be suitable for the Bundaberg-Isis regions. For example, they may be susceptible to orange rust and other diseases.

I wrote down that a disconcerted murmur went through the assembled Bundaberg cane farmers when they heard from the BSES staff that they had a five to 10-year plan to breed new varieties. The BSES staff admitted that the breeding program was not as advanced as they would have preferred. Once again, that is another indication that this government, through the DPIF, may not have allocated sufficient resources to combat the threat that smut poses to our sugar industry. We knew about this threat. It had been found in Indonesia and it had come down to the Ord River. Many people were saying that it was just a matter of time before smut came further south. We really do not know how smut came to be in these areas.

I made another note to the effect that after 10 days the BSES and DPIF failed to identify the variety of cane smut found in Childers because there are four or five different varieties of smut in the world. The Indonesian variety was identified in the Ord River area in 1998. It is suspected that the disease was blown to that area. The reason researchers gave for the delay in identifying the variety of smut in the cane was that the researcher who was responsible for identifying the smut went on leave to Kakadu and no-one else had the skill to do the job. Once again, that indicates that the BSES is underfunded.

I agree wholeheartedly with our shadow minister that there be more money channelled towards the BSES and research and development. I acknowledge that there is good work going on in the BSES. Very dedicated people work there. The smart set technology is fantastic. It looks as though it will speed up response times and the time in which smut-resistant cane can be planted. But once again, I would have to agree wholeheartedly with the shadow minister that we need more research funding for this vital industry.

In order to get a balanced and complete picture of how the smut crisis has affected the Burnett and Bundaberg growing regions, a number of voices deserve to be heard in this chamber. I would like to put before this House comments made by Ross Walker, the chairman of the Australian Cane Farmers Association, who recently spoke on the ABC's *Country Hour* program about the release of the report and the government's handling of the whole crisis. Ross said that the report is—

... basically underscoring what farmers have been thinking and saying for quite a long time ... There's nothing new in the report. We all knew right from the beginning that we had to put out smut resistant varieties and this report has basically come out and said that ... it's taken three months to put this report together, and in that time it's harmed farmers in a number of areas in the state, particularly Bundaberg, Isis area.

The eradication procedure was the name of the game in the first place. The whole idea was to try to eradicate this disease ... now its never been eradicated anywhere else in the world so it wouldn't have been real cool to do that but the point here I'm making is that the eradication process should have been acknowledged that it was a failure a lot earlier and we should have got on with the commonsense things.

Instead there was a lot of politicking going on between the canegrowers organisation, the Qld government and the federal government and that politicking has cost the industry a lot of time and a lot of money as I said specifically in one area.

Eradication initially was probably the way to go. But I think we should have acknowledged a lot earlier on what the industry did and government for that matter that it wasn't going to work and we needed to bring some commonsense into the process.

Now under the emergency plant and pest response, it says that the emergency plant and pests must be capable of being eradicated or contained.

Now very early in the process the eradication clearly wasn't going to happen and as I said it was just politicking then between the state and federal governments...it just delayed the whole process.

And this report has really come out with nothing new at all.

This report has taken a long time to come out and in that time farmers in that area haven't been able to plant varieties that they would have normally been able to plant because there's been a ban on planting susceptible varieties.

That's now going to be changed and farmers will be able to do it on an individual basis and will be able to plant susceptible varieties if they want to.

Mr Walker continued—

I think minister Mulherin has handled this very, very badly. It's been a undemocratic and discriminatory process right from the start. Basically what we're seeing that on these government committees we're getting yes people put on these committees.

Now if anyone disagrees with the government or has a different view, it doesn't very well for them being put on these committees. And I believe that because ACFA has in the past criticised some government actions, that ACFA is then excluded from these committees. It's been an undemocratic process, a discriminatory process and if they're going to consult the industry and get an industry view, that's what they must do.

I urge the minister to make sure that when he consults with the industry he consults far and wide and considers all the peak bodies that represent my growers. I note that Bundaberg Canegrowers is extremely pleased with the outcomes of the Watson report. Bundaberg Canegrowers Chairman, Alwyn Heidke, acknowledged the importance of replacing susceptible varieties but at present this report offered the best option for growers 'to minimise the economic impact on the industry'.

Bundaberg Sugar Group Development Manager, Gary Longden, is also in support of the Watson report, believing it to be 'well balanced and contain logical recommendations which were consistent with views which had been expressed over recent months by the Bundaberg industry'. Despite strong support to plant the susceptible variety in our region by the Bundaberg Canegrowers, concerns have also been raised by Canegrowers Isis Chairman, Joe Russo, which should also be acknowledged. Mr Russo believes that 'planting susceptible varieties might be good in the short term, but in the long run the only way we can move forward is to get resistant varieties into the ground as soon as possible'.

There are a number of dedicated cane growers in Bundaberg-Burnett. I attended the 2006 season sugar industry awards, which was held last month. There are a number of awards. I would like to mention that the district champion was awarded to MP Richter. The highest tonnes per cane production areas average over the past three seasons per mill area went to JH and RJ Chambers of Bingera and also to MP Richter of Millaquin.

While discussing the importance of our local sugar industry, I would like to reiterate the need to guarantee the supply of water to approximately 200 farmers in the Burnett and Bargara areas which contribute significantly to the economic wellbeing of my community. I would also like to remind the minister that the Beattie government needs to acknowledge the importance of the sugarcane industry to the economy and growth of Queensland and its commitment to the Isis sugar industry. In doing so, it can start by ensuring that the Forestry Plantations Queensland land formerly known as 'State Forest 779 at Gregory' is made available to the Isis district for sugar production and the Isis district mill. While I intend to support this legislation, which will allow cane growers to plant smut-susceptible cane, I would strongly advise against it.

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (3.24 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007. This bill has been introduced to provide for a number of recommendations that have emerged from the recently released report titled *The economic impact of sugarcane smut on the Queensland sugarcane industry*. Dr David Watson was engaged by the government to investigate the economic impact of the disease and consider possible responses to facilitate economic recovery. Dr Watson provided a final report on 18 February 2007 to the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries and the Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations.

Sugarcane smut was first found in Australia in 1998 in the Ord River district in Western Australia. Sugarcane smut was first found in Queensland on a farm near Childers in early June 2006 by a cane productivity officer from the local productivity services group. The sample was diagnosed and confirmed by BSES Ltd and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

Following further confirmed instances of sugarcane smut in the Mackay and Herbert River districts, the disease is now regarded as established and widespread. The Queensland sugar industry is now, necessarily, pursuing an industry management and economic recovery strategy as opposed to quarantine or eradication strategy. Sugarcane smut is a serious disease affecting sugar cane which can significantly reduce crop yields. It is highly infectious and can be spread by wind or carried on clothing and machinery.

Across Queensland, sugar industry organisations are working to develop and implement local recovery plans to respond to the existing outbreak of smut or planning for a potential future outbreak in their region. Surveillance efforts to identify the spread of the disease in areas where an infestation has already been identified and in other areas where sugarcane smut is yet to manifest itself are being coordinated by the BSES in conjunction with the assistance of local productivity services groups and sugarcane growers.

As sugarcane smut is now deemed to be an established disease, no quarantine or movement control measures apply within individual sugarcane pest quarantine areas, although movement of planting material and machinery within those quarantine areas should still be in line with industry best practice. Movement of sugarcane planting material and machinery between sugarcane quarantine areas is still restricted and requires the approval of an inspector.

Developing resistant cane varieties is now considered to be the principal tool to be used to combat the effects of the disease on industry returns. The reduction in returns to all sectors of the sugar industry—growers, harvesters and millers—has the potential to be very significant. A number of smut-resistant sugar cane varieties are now being developed.

On the topic of plant breeding programs, this is an issue that the opposition has been consistently urging the government to invest in for many years. Regrettably, the government has not been listening. The government has not properly funded sugar industry research bodies like the BSES to pursue plant breeding programs that were focused on pre-empting events like an outbreak of smut in Queensland by developing smut-resistant varieties.

BSES officers on the ground in my electorate have been telling me that the trials that they are undertaking are several years behind schedule due to the funding restrictions that have been an ongoing issue for BSES since the government chose to remove its position as a statutory industry organisation and require it to undertake its activities on a commercial basis. Unfortunately, this has meant that the BSES has been required to keep one eye on commercial returns for its services and important programs like plant breeding have suffered. The BSES officers undertaking plant breeding programs have said to me that they would like to be far more advanced than they currently are in terms of their sugarcane smut-resistant varieties.

The member for Toowoomba South and the member for Mirani are long-serving members in this place and they have been here to witness many of the debates in this House as successive Labor governments have consistently whittled away the sugar industry. They both would be aware of the fact that the opposition has consistently warned the government to be proactive on the issue of plant breeding and increase support to the BSES to pursue programs to develop a range of disease-resistant varieties.

My predecessor in this place made many contributions to that effect so the government cannot say that it has not been put on notice that this type of event could compromise the sugar industry should a disease outbreak occur that we have not prepared for.

I would like to put on the record the consistent and concerted efforts of the former member for Hinchinbrook in raising this matter. The contributions are numerous and worth detailing. All the way back in July 1998 the former member for Hinchinbrook, in relation to the outbreak of sugarcane smut in Western Australia at the time, said—

Mention was made of the exotic disease, smut, from the Ord. That will require leadership from the state government in Queensland. This dreaded disease has the ability to devastate considerable areas of country. It can very often go unnoticed for some period of time. We believe that that is what may have happened in the Ord River. The disease can be carried by wind. It can be carried by contact through insects or equipment, or even by humans. One of the best prospects we have for combating this disease is breeding resistant varieties. As time progresses, I believe we will need government support to do that. We have to emphasise the need to crank up the breeding program over time.

In November 1999 there were already questions beginning to develop about the commitment of the government to the BSES. During debate on the Sugar Industry Bill the former member for Hinchinbrook said—

What is going to happen regarding the funding for the BSES is not very clear. That is of particular concern to the growers but more so the millers.

This acknowledged that the implications of disease outbreaks were an industry-wide concern. In May 2000 during debate on the Sugar Industry Bill my predecessor lamented the need for BSES to be commercially rather than research orientated. He stated—

The BSES was also forced out on the campaign trail to justify its position and collect funds to carry out the vital work with varieties and a wide range of other industry issues.

It is important that this demonstrated and consistent concern for the sugar industry on the part of the coalition be put on the record when issues such as the management of disease outbreaks is discussed in this place. In June 2001, during debate on the budget for that year, Mr Rowell again raised the issue of the government not providing appropriate support to the BSES. He said—

A proposal was put to the state government by the BSES for assistance relating to additional staff and subsidies. While it might have appeared from press statements released by the minister that the BSES was given additional staff that did not occur.

In April 2002 the former member for Hinchinbrook detailed the limitations that were being faced by the BSES trying to operate on a commercial basis. On that occasion he said this—

I turn now to the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations which is no longer a statutory body. It will now have to seek its funding through voluntary contributions. During February and May 2000, instead of attending to a whole range of pests and diseases invading the industry such as greyback cane grubs, orange rust in Q124 and widespread rat damage, this organisation's field officers were roaming around the state's sugar areas collecting money to ensure its survival. It was totally inappropriate for the government to bring in the legislation dealing with the issue at that time. Without the support of the BSES and the necessary assistance it provides to many growers we would be at a great loss.

My predecessor was a vigilant and dedicated advocate for the sugar industry imploring the government to take plant breeding seriously. During debate on the Sugar Industry and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, Mr Rowell was forthright in his criticism of the government for not providing active support. Mr Rowell said—

It appears that the government wants to wipe its hands of any support, and turning the BSES out to fend for itself at this time is just another example of its attitude to primary industries. One of the BSES's primary roles is breeding plant varieties, and over a period of time it has come up with some excellent varieties. What we have seen happening in recent times, because of a number of outbreaks of grubs, orange rust and so on, is that it really has not had a backup of a variety or a range of varieties that have been suitable to deal with that situation.

As late as May 2003 during the debate on the Sugar Industry and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) Mr Rowell said—

In terms of plant breeding, increased funding must be made available—probably to the extent of some \$15 million over five years—to have an impact on the propagation of a range of varieties that would suit a range of conditions to increase productivity in the sugar industry. A strong emphasis needs to be placed on diseases such as smut and orange rust, for example. These fungal problems, which could have been prevented, have reduced the capacity of certain varieties by at least 50 per cent.

In October 2004, during debate on the Primary Industry Bodies Reform Amendment Bill, the former member for Hinchinbrook maintained his campaign to have the government increase support to the BSES for plant breeding programs. He said—

I want to speak a little about the BSES, because it was probably very inopportune at the time that it was done. The industry was facing a whole range of difficulties. We had poor crops. We had orange rust. We had a need to breed varieties. Unfortunately, what happened at that time was that we saw the likes of the BSES people running around trying to drum up support. They were successful in getting support. I have to commend them for their great effort that they carried out in ensuring that the BSES kept on track because it would have been so easy for that organisation to have dropped the ball at a very critical time for the industry.

Members can see that the coalition has been actively advocating for better preparation for this very event over a long period of time but the response has been limited. Certainly since sugarcane smut was identified in Queensland in June last year I have been speaking with growers and representatives of industry organisations in my electorate who have expressed concerns about the progress of plant-breeding programs and expressed to me their strong view that funding to the BSES be significantly increased to address this area of need.

State government funding for the BSES has been hovering between \$3 million to \$4 million annually for some time. I understand at the moment it is approximately \$3.8 million. The former member for Hinchinbrook said in one of his contributions that funding for plant-breeding specific programs alone needs to be in the order of about \$3 million year or an appropriation of \$15 million over five years which would give the BSES much better security to pursue a concerted plant-breeding program.

I encourage the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries to recognise the significant need for a much better funded BSES, especially for plant-breeding programs, in light of the serious matters now facing the Queensland sugar industry in the form of sugarcane smut. This is recommended in the Watson report which proposes the augmentation of industry research and plant-breeding activities in order to increase the number and availability of varieties of smut-resistant sugarcane. Such an increase in support from the government will be long overdue for the BSES.

I recognise that since the Watson report has been completed the minister has certainly expedited the progress of this bill with some haste to provide a framework to allow non-resistant varieties to be planted in the absence of enough plant material from smut-resistant varieties being able to be sourced. This is a pragmatic and a responsible course of action, and I think the minister should be given credit for his efforts to that end. However, I think it is particularly regrettable that the minister sought to extract some sort of political advantage by trying to muddy the waters with respect to the unsuccessful application he and his department made to the Commonwealth and the other state governments for assistance for the initial smut-eradication effort.

The minister knows that that agreement is required from both the Commonwealth and the other Labor state governments, including the New South Wales Labor government and the Western Australian Labor government which are both sugar growing states. The states did not choose to support the application so the political manoeuvres undertaken by the minister to try to blame the federal government alone is not an accurate reflection of what occurred and it is inappropriate for the minister to continue to pursue those accusations.

Lastly, I would like to talk about some issues with respect to the list of allowable varieties. Current smut-resistant varieties have lower sugar content than non-resistant varieties due to the delays and funding shortfalls for plant-breeding programs. A ban on particular varieties that are not resistant to smut will result in some immediate production losses. The plant characteristics of non-smut-resistant varieties are in some instances just as important as smut immunity. So we have to be careful about how we remove varieties from the list of permitted sugarcane varieties. For example, sugarcane smut has been identified in the Herbert River district at Lannercost and Lannercost extension, Upper Stone and Macknade in my electorate of Hinchinbrook. However, because the Tully and Innisfail districts—also in my electorate—are located in the same pest quarantine area, variety restrictions responding to the smut outbreak in the Herbert River district has the potential to impact on other sugar-growing areas.

The Tully and Innisfail districts are well known for very high levels of rainfall. Certain varieties of sugar cane known as swimmers—various varieties in the Q series—are used widely in this area and have been developed to survive longer in wet conditions where the cane may be submerged under floodwaters for extended periods of time without significant c.c.s. losses. However, swimmers are not smut resistant.

As such, the government needs to be aware that it is not only the growers in pest quarantine area No. 5 but also all pest quarantine areas that grow sugar cane that will experience ramifications as a result of the smut outbreak in the sugarcane regions of Queensland. If certain areas can no longer use cane that variously is resilient in wet weather, resistant to orange rust or resistant to cane grubs, for example, productivity levels will be reduced even if the spread of smut is not rapid.

Members can see the dilemma for some growers—to suffer production losses from smut or to suffer production losses from other existing problems associated with cane growing. This underlines the need for the government to provide a significant increase in funding to industry organisations to pursue an expedited plant breeding program focused on addressing the current sugarcane smut outbreak facing the sugarcane industry.

The opposition intends to support this bill because it is important to provide an appropriate framework for the sugar industry to move forward from this point. I sincerely hope that there will be a clear adjustment in the attitude of the government to properly funding plant breeding programs in recognition of the enormous contribution the sugar industry makes to the Queensland economy and to the communities in regional and rural areas of the state.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (3.41 pm): Each step taken by this government in response to sugarcane smut was taken with careful consideration. The outbreak of this potentially devastating disease in Queensland first occurred in June 2006. As soon as sugarcane smut was detected, the Queensland government mounted a full emergency pest response and committed very significant resources to the process. A thorough biosecurity containment program was pursued based on scientific evidence that the spread of the disease could be contained.

In close collaboration with BSES Ltd and Canegrowers, the state government undertook an extensive program of surveillance, quarantine and movement control to ensure the best possible chance of containing and eradicating sugarcane smut.

During the five-month period from June to October 2006 over 200 people were employed and dedicated to this program. The evidence is that it was successful in its aims to contain the sugarcane smut that was present in the Bundaberg-Isis region. The subsequent detections of sugarcane smut in the Mackay and Herbert regions have been shown to have resulted from a shower of smut spores that hit the Queensland coast some time ago. There is no evidence to support any theory of smut having spread to other regions from the Bundaberg-Isis region.

However, on 10 November, when the disease was confirmed in Mackay, the decision by industry and government was made that smut was widespread and established and that it was no longer possible to prevent or control its spread. Consequently, on that day the government announced the

cessation of the containment and eradication strategy and the start of the focus on economic recovery. Also on that day, Dr David Watson was appointed to advise the government on the economic impact of sugarcane smut on the Queensland sugar industry and identify measures to facilitate economic recovery. Dr Watson produced a preliminary report on 18 December 2006. He was given until 18 February 2007 to model the impacts, provide a thorough independent assessment of the impact of the disease and make a number of recommendations to facilitate economic recovery. Dr Watson completed a thorough job on this difficult task in a tight time frame. I commend him for the work that he did under those circumstances.

Dr Watson consulted widely with industry in coming up with his recommendations. Not only did he hold meetings up and down the coast of Queensland but also he took the advice of a senior level industry and government steering committee.

It would have been inappropriate for the government to come out with any recovery strategy without proper analysis and consultation with industry. Dr Watson provided both the consultation and detailed independent analysis. I stress it is important to note that the report provided by Dr Watson was an independent report.

Part of what Dr Watson found was that the impact of sugarcane smut was not as great as was initially expected by some industry commentators. The report did necessitate legislative changes, and today I am supporting those amendments.

The proposed changes to the act are not related to the previous eradication program but are a consequence of quickly implementing the recommendations of the Watson report. The changes represent a continuation of the very specific steps that have been taken by this government to ensure that Queensland growers are able to continue contributing to a billion-dollar export industry. It is an industry that underpins many communities up the coast of Queensland and specifically in the electorate of Whitsunday. Most of the landscape in my electorate is covered by sugar cane. We cannot underestimate the importance of this crop to the local economy. Dr Watson's report, supported by the Queensland government, stressed a need for urgent as well as carefully considered action.

There is a small window of opportunity for growers in the Bundaberg area to undertake an autumn plant. A failure to urgently facilitate this planting would put them at a distinct disadvantage to the rest of the sugarcane production regions in Queensland.

During the initial biosecurity response to sugarcane smut in the Bundaberg-Childers region, or PQA5, amendments were made to the approved varieties declaration to remove susceptible varieties from the planting list. The objective of this amendment was to reduce the risk of disease spread. Quite rightly, under the circumstances, that decision was taken at the time.

On 10 November 2006, when the focus turned to industry's long-term management of the disease and economic recovery, the restrictions in the PQA5 on planting smut-susceptible varieties were no longer relevant. All other areas of Queensland were free to plant susceptible varieties, leaving Bundaberg-Childers at a commercial and comparative disadvantage. The Queensland government is enabling the regional sugar industry in PQA5 to get on with its business and minimise the financial impacts of this disease as recommended by the Watson report.

The Watson report recommended that each PQA develop a regional smut management program. These plans will be the best approach to the management of smut at a regional level. Furthermore, by amending the act the entire Queensland sugarcane industry can have planning certainty about what varieties can be grown. It will be able to plan and plant the best options for its climate and soil types given the limited supply of smut-resistant varieties. That is what this amendment is about: allowing industry, with the support of government, to help itself.

In conclusion, I want to commend the minister, Hon. Tim Mulherin, for his careful steering of government policy through this difficult time for the sugar industry. He has been most thoughtful at all stages of the impacts on individual growers as well as the broader industry. I commend him for those efforts in support of the industry.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.47 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to support the Plant Protection Amendment Bill. I commend the shadow minister for his thoughtful and very detailed explanation of the bill and the issues around it. Other colleagues have also spoken in the debate. For an old dairy farmer he did a pretty good job as a canefarmer.

The reality is that this amendment bill basically takes us back to the situation that was in Bundaberg before the outbreak of smut. It puts the onus back on the growers, millers and research staff in each region to determine what varieties are planted in each district. Right now in Bundaberg there will be farmers who are currently planting varieties that are not very highly smut resistant. Members cannot blame them for that because the reality is that the farmers need to plant at this time of year to get a significant crop for the following year. In actual fact, we are legalising what is currently happening. That is good common sense.

If we look back over the last 10 years—and I do not mean to dwell on it too much—we see that the industry has faced some horrific issues in terms of its productivity and prosperity. The first big issue that hit the sugar industry was the Fiji disease which emanated from the Bundaberg region. That had a huge effect on our most common and productive variety, NCO. It would basically grow anywhere. Many farmers would say that when they cut the cane by hand and topped it and left it on the ground for any length of time the top would grow. It was a magnificent variety but we lost that due to the Fiji disease more than 15 years ago.

Next we had orange rust. It was one of the worst diseases we have seen in Queensland. It instantly took 30 per cent of the whole paddock, not just isolated areas of it. It was particularly devastating to a crop called Q124. That was a variety that was grown extensively throughout Queensland. The central region crop would have been almost 100 per cent Q124. In one year 30 per cent of the crop disappeared. The only alternative was to replant varieties that were resistant to orange rust. Over that period there were low sugarcane prices and droughts and the industry went through some terrible times. The industry has survived and the last couple of years have been quite good for the sugar industry. It has been an opportunity to put some dollars in the bank and pay some money off the huge debts that arose over that time.

I will turn to the smut incursion in the Ord River 12 years ago. Some 12 years ago smut arrived in the Ord River area. It was only a matter of time before it spread to the eastern seaboard. Obviously we will never know whether the spores that we are currently seeing in Queensland came from the Ord River but we could almost bet that that is how it happened. The supposition is that the smut in the Ord River was blown in by a cyclone from Indonesia to the Ord River. It can travel huge distances in upper level air streams. There is probably good reason to suspect that the smut that has arrived in Queensland came from the Ord River.

I was actually fortunate enough to see smut disease varieties in Louisiana. Smut is prevalent in almost every cane-growing area in the world. There has never been an instance of being able to eradicate smut. Even though I supported the initial response in Bundaberg to try to eliminate and contain the smut disease, in realistic terms we were fighting with one hand behind our backs and we were never going to win. When the disease was then found in Mackay and later in the Herbert regions the cat was out of the bag.

It is important to understand that the control of smut disease is not nearly as bad in terms of loss of production as orange rust. Good common-sense farmers will work through it even though we do not have smut-resistant varieties that have the production levels of the varieties that are not smut resistant. We have to understand that resistance varieties have a level of one to 10. There are varieties at the level of six or seven that will actually resist smut to a certain extent except if it is a very bad infestation. There are varieties on the approved list that farmers can use in the interim until we have varieties that are highly smut resistant. Hopefully by just maintaining a level of resistance we will be able to restrict the spread of smut throughout the farming community. We can do that over time. It is not as if we have to replant all of our crops in one year as we almost had to do with Q124. We can spread our planting operation out over a number of years. Hopefully we can keep the smut levels down to the extent that they are not excessively reducing production.

I will not go over a lot of what has been said in parliament today. David Watson is a good mate of the parliament and we know and respect David's views. The reality is that the report he wrote is a common-sense report. The only thing that we can hang our hat on is that it is independent. It could have been done by an officer of the BSES or DPI because the reality is that what he has written in that report is basic common sense.

We need to make sure that we are able to breed varieties that are smut resistant. Even though BSES has, over a number of years, been breeding varieties and trialling them in Indonesia, more than 10 years after we had smut in the Ord we do not really have an effective smut-resistant variety that has the production levels of the current varieties we have in Queensland.

The real challenge is to quickly develop smut-resistant varieties. Most people in the cane-growing industry know that it takes up to 10 years to develop a variety of cane. We have some tricks that we are currently using to reduce that period but it certainly does take time to deliver new varieties. We have had 10 years notice and we still do not have a highly resistant variety with high production levels. We need to do the single eye set propagation. We need to do gene transfers. We probably even need GM to make sure that we have varieties that produce into the future.

The most important thing is to put the onus back on the farmers and the millers to make sure that all the conditions that are necessary to have a variety approved are left in the hands of those people who actually make the decisions to plant the cane. They have to make sure that the issues of millability, returnability, high sugar content and harvestability are maintained for the varieties on the approved list. They have to ensure that they are not impacted by regulation more than is necessary. With those few words, we will support the bill. I support the shadow minister in terms of any other discussion we might have.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (3.57 pm): I rise to make a contribution in the debate on the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007. This bill partially repeals section 11A of the Plant Protection Act 1989. The bill is aimed directly at the Bundaberg region where sugarcane smut is a considerable pest. Under the current legislation smut-susceptible varieties cannot be planted in the Bundaberg region. However, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has been advised that there is not sufficient stock of sugarcane smut-resistant plant stock available for planting this year. As planting begins early this year—and certainly in quite a few areas it has started—there is an urgency attached to this bill.

As we know, sugar cane is one of Australia's most important primary industries with it contributing \$1.75 billion a year to the Australian economy. Bearing this in mind, Queensland contributes 95 per cent of the total sugarcane production in Australia. There are over 4,000 cane-farming businesses in Queensland that employ thousands of workers. Australian producers are renowned for having some of the highest productivity in the world. Sugar cane is processed up and down the coast of Queensland. I understand there are 28 sugar mills across Australia.

These mills own over 4,000 kilometres of tramways for the transport of cane. As we know, Australia is second only to Brazil in raw sugarcane production. Only about 20 per cent of our sugar is consumed locally, with the remainder exported to countries such as Asia, the Middle East and North America. Sugar is one of Queensland's most important industries and any disease such as smut which could have high damaging effects must be looked at quickly and seriously. Smut has been evident in the Ord River cane-growing region for some years. For quite a few years the east coast of Australia was the only area in Australia that was smut free, something that farmers in Queensland were very happy about. Sugarcane smut was first found at Childers in June 2006 which certainly created a shockwave throughout the farming industry from cane growers to farmers alike. However, shortly afterwards smut was then found at Mackay and Ingham. There is a massive distance between those places—in fact, it is an enormous distance—which shows just how widespread the pest has become and it has not been proven how smut has travelled. Currently there are 74 infected farms in the Bundaberg-Childers area. Some 1,600 hectares of cane have been inspected in this area, and at this stage the findings have been reported as reasonably minor. However, there are a further 12 infected farms in Mackay and 19 in Ingham.

Sugarcane smut is a type of fungus which causes disease of sugar cane and lowers the yields ranging from about 30 per cent to 100 per cent. The disease spreads by forcing the cane plant to produce a smut whip which is infested with the spore. I have not actually seen it, but from photographs I have seen it does stand out quite well. That is how it is detected—that is, to visually see the whips. Smut does this by entering the germinating buds in the soil. One of the problems is that smut spores can live in soil for up to 12 months if the soil is dry but only up to three months if the soil is damp. When these infected buds begin to grow, the smut alters the normal growth to produce a smut whip. The smut whip replaces the flower that naturally grows on the cane and contains spores. Smut spore is highly infectious to sugar cane and can spread in all sorts of ways—with wind, clothing or machinery. These tiny spores are detected in the air and, as I understand it, there are many smut detectors in these areas that are picking up the fact that the spores are right across the sugar industry area.

Smut does not survive processing and the fungus is harmless to humans and to animals. The smut problem is being tackled by farmers and the DPIF with great diligence. There is active inspection of the cane in the affected areas in an effort to keep the problem as minimal as possible. The finding of smut north of Mackay really established it as a widespread problem. Smut sightings are reported as soon as possible to the involved parties such as the growers, the industry and the media by cane-growing industry bodies such as Canegrowers and BSES Ltd. It is unknown how smut originally entered Queensland. There is also some evidence that perhaps smut did not affect Mackay from Bundaberg and it is possible it was a separate infiltration.

Now the industry is changing from a process of eradication and aggressive biosecurity to a strategy of economic recovery based on control and containment of smut. This is only common sense due to the fact that there simply is not enough smut-resistant cane to go around. Not enough of it has been bred and there is just not enough plant stock. On top of that, smut-resistant cane has a lower yield than conventional cane in some areas, and I will talk more about that later. Bundaberg farmers were being unfairly treated, especially when farmers in other areas like Mackay and Ingham, where smut has been sighted, were not restricted to the varieties of sugar cane that Bundaberg farmers had to endure. The practical reality of this is that smut-susceptible cane must be planted so that farmers in the Bundaberg region can start to recover economically. This bill requires urgency as planting is due to begin in autumn 2007.

It is time to listen to the experts and face reality. The original legislation was not drafted in a way that took into account ground level practicalities. The legislation cannot really stand up to even legal scrutiny. The government could be easily found liable of spreading a plant pest with the legislation in its current form. Allowing the chief executive to make decisions is a way around this to allow the government to greatly reduce its legal liabilities regarding sugarcane smut. I do support this bill, as it changes the focus from complete eradication of smut to control of the pest and encourages revitalisation

of the sugarcane economy in the affected areas. I also support the bill on the notion that it allows the Bundaberg sugar industry to have the same access to sugarcane varieties as the other affected areas of Mackay and Ingham. Sugarcane smut-resistant varieties have a lower sugar yield than more conventional types of sugar cane, so an immediate economic loss presents itself, which could cause further hardship to farmers.

This legislation also seeks to protect from possible future legal challenges by giving the chief executive the power to make decisions which could potentially spread a pest. This is necessary legislation due to the fact that the DPIF report encourages the planting of susceptible varieties in the absence of resistant varieties due to the obvious massive financial loss that would be needlessly worn by the Bundaberg regional growers. The *Economic impact of sugarcane smut on the Queensland sugarcane industry* report was produced as an independent report by Dr David Watson, an independent economist. The basis of this was a steering committee which was chaired by Dr Watson, and a set of principles was laid out and from that the major recommendations were made. The committee also had wide consultation throughout all of the cane-growing areas in Queensland.

The major recommendation from Dr Watson's report is that local pest quarantine areas should prepare a regional response plan to be developed prior to planting this year, but, as I said, in certain areas this has already commenced. In the Burdekin there are farmers already planting. It was outlined that in an economic sense the smut incursions are manageable by the sugar industry on a local level in their normal course of business. The regional plan should address issues such as an assessment of the risks of smut infestation on the region; a proposed course of action where smut is detected in each region; a program for reducing smut susceptibility in the region and for reducing the rate of spread of smut; a program of surveillance, propagation and distribution of clean, smut-free plant material; and encouragement of maximum planting of smut-free varieties.

There is an urgency to develop, grow and produce more smut-resistant varieties of sugar cane. Those varieties that are available are not necessarily the varieties that perform best in every area. Varieties of cane are developed to produce maximum yields according to the varying conditions of the climate, the water and, most importantly, the soil type. As these conditions vary enormously across all of the growing areas, there could be a significant downturn for many growers after planting some of the current smut-resistant varieties because they have not actually been developed for those specific soils. I certainly know that in the Burdekin area some of those smut-resistant varieties grow very well in the Upper Burdekin River irrigation area because there are heavy clay soils. However, once they come into the lower river soil areas they certainly do not produce as well. I have no doubt in time that the BSES scientists will have significant success in these different areas. Prior to that, there will be a decrease in yields in some areas from the tried and well-tested cane varieties that of course have been previously used for many years by cane growers. In my area of the Burdekin delta, so far there seems to be no identification of any incursions of smut.

Mr Mulherin: Touch wood.

Mrs MENKENS: I accept that, Minister. Let us just say touch wood. I do have to really commend the office of the BSES and the other agencies—the DPIF—for their hard work and vigilance in working long hours across the area in their efforts to detect any signs of smut.

The Burdekin area has quite a significant proportion of smut-resistant cane already planted. I understand that this area has the highest proportion. Growers in this area were aware that they may be needed to share some of their available planting material with other areas that do not have the same amount, and I understand that that has been happening. The Burdekin has encouraged the development of a seed planting scheme to ensure that heavy demand on planting material could be met.

The concern from all areas in the sugar industry is that plant cane stocks are clean and that controls are in place to ensure that growers do not plant infected stock. Growers have also expressed concerns about abandoned and feral cane. Growers were concerned that this cane could cause what could be called hot spots for smut. They needed to have confidence that such cane could be destroyed immediately. This also raises another problem in that it would be very unfortunate if this placed significant imposts on growers who may have had to walk off their lands, if the cost of eradication of that rogue cane was put on some of those ex-growers. I wish to particularly recognise the excellent work of officers and scientists from the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations and what they have achieved in this area. As soon as the first smut incursions were detected, the BSES officers sprang straight into action and have worked alongside the DPIF, and their initial and ongoing efforts must be sincerely acknowledged.

This bill is before the House for the simple reason that the government did make a rather uninformed decision in the recent past and now the ramifications have quickly presented themselves. The government has now realised, to its credit, that control and management is a more realistic option than eradication. It just took it a little longer than the other states to figure this out. The inherent risk in this bill is that it transfers the problem of risk management from the government to the cane growers. It has been acknowledged though that affected farmers have been incredibly helpful as it is only logical

that they would take necessary steps to protect their own livelihood. It is important to acknowledge that every effort that is being made to control and, hopefully, contain this disease. It does impact upon the economic viability of farmers and it will impact right across Queensland. To that extent, I have pleasure in supporting this bill.

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (4.12 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007 in the interests of the sugar industry and the people of Bundaberg. I thank the shadow minister, Mr Horan, for his extensive interest and his concern for the constituents of Bundaberg and for his extensive investigation into this matter.

This bill has and will continue to have a significant impact on the community of Bundaberg. The sugar industry is vital to the employment of many Bundaberg families. Bundaberg was built on sugar and it is still in the lifeblood that flows through the veins of industry, small business and the social fabric that makes Bundaberg such a great place to live and raise a family. The sugar industry has had some dramatic changes over the years and it is only due to the hard work and resilience of the people in this industry that they have survived. This is no more evident than in the closures of the Fairymead mill and the cane harvester production at Austoft in the past few years.

Over the years we have seen government departments bicker to the detriment of the people in the industry. On this occasion we saw local Bundaberg families being put through unneeded stress in relation to sugarcane smut that could have been alleviated by a common-sense approach. I further voice the words of Bundaberg Sugar when it stated that the Bundaberg industry will now be able to proceed with an economically effective transition program to achieve a variety based resistance on the same basis as other stakeholders in the Queensland industry.

I commend the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries for his expedience in having the recommendations of the Watson report fast-tracked through this House. This has alleviated a number of unnecessary and drawn-out concerns from members of the Bundaberg community as to the outbreak of smut and their future growing requirements. I further ask that, when important issues arise regarding smut in the future, decisions are made on scientific, not political, grounds. Risk management processes should be in the hands of growers and people involved in the sugar industry. I also commend the great work of the BSES Ltd and in particular the Bundaberg branch.

Bundaberg is the sugar city and this is encapsulated in the production of our famous Bundaberg Rum. It is the birthplace of the modern cane harvester and it is the home of Bundaberg Foundry Engineers Ltd, which continues to build for the biggest sugar mills in the world, for which I sincerely thank its Manager, Ray Hatt, and all its valued employees. Sugar is embedded in the minds and hearts of the people of Bundaberg by living and breathing this industry. Examples of this are the sugar museum at Fairymead and the Australian Sugarcane Railway Museum under the guiding hands of Wendy Driver, Peter Lamond and the team at the Botanical Gardens. Sugar is the largest industry in the district and is set in time with infrastructure such as the remaining three mills, refinery, distillery and the port sugar terminal.

In conclusion, I support this bill to allow the Bundaberg sugar industry to have the same access to cane varieties as other smut affected sugar-growing areas and to provide for a positive future for the families and the sugar industry in the Bundaberg and surrounding districts.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (4.16 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007. This bill is a response to the outbreak of sugarcane smut disease in and around the Childers area which was detected in June last year. Unfortunately, it has spread to other sugar-growing areas of Queensland and is now as far north as the Herbert district centred around Ingham in north Queensland. Thankfully, sugar cane on the Atherton Tablelands has so far escaped infection from this disease. It can only be hoped that this will remain the case.

The recent outbreak of black sigatoka on banana farms on the coast was kept out of the tablelands paddocks and there is some basis from that experience to hope that smut will also fail to make it up over the coastal ranges. Whether it does reach local growers or not, it is a sad fact that it is now a permanent part of the Queensland sugarcane industry. As the minister said in his second reading speech, the only option now is management as it is too late for containment and eradication.

Cane smut has struck at a bad time for the sugar industry. It has been battling harsh conditions both environmentally and economically for more than a decade. The industry saw perverted world markets, drought and other pest problems which delivered unsustainable returns for years. Just as those prices began to improve, Cyclone Larry devastated huge areas of cane lands in the far north, particularly on the coast. Thankfully, on the tablelands the sugar crop has recovered fairly quickly, unlike the tree crops such as avocados, lychees and macadamias. Now it is faced with the cane smut which reduces productivity markedly. The general solution is to move to smut-resistant varieties. However, these two are also less productive than normal varieties and so inevitably farmers are faced with reduced incomes of one severity or another.

The bill today allows for a number of strategies to minimise as far as possible the impact of smut. They include permitting for very specific reasons the continued planting of smut-susceptible varieties of cane for a specific period of time and in specific areas. Other provisions allow for the chief executive to make, amend or even repeal plant declarations in certain circumstances. That is mainly when the restrictions made under those declarations are no longer justifiable, especially when they relate to an inability to control the spread of pests. While it is understandable in this context, it is important to remember that there are on average 20 new pests, plants, animals and diseases being introduced into Queensland every year. Our rural industries underpin our economy. They support countless towns and cities across the state and employ huge numbers of Queenslanders. We need to do much better at keeping these kinds of problems outside our borders and outside Australian borders. I support the bill.

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (4.19 pm), in reply: I would like to thank all the members who contributed to the debate on the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007. Today, the government is reinforcing its commitment to a national billion-dollar industry. Since June last year, when sugarcane smut was first discovered at Childers, the Queensland government has acted on the best available information for the benefit of the industry. From a science based, industry approved, containment and eradication approach to a long-term economic management approach supported by Canegrowers, BSES and the Australian Sugar Milling Council, this government's support for Queensland growers has not wavered.

This commitment was further shown by the commissioning and later the adoption of the independent report, titled *Economic impact of sugarcane smut on the Queensland sugarcane industry*, by Dr David Watson. It was a report commissioned in November last year, again based on the best available scientific advice, immediately when it became clear that sugarcane smut was widespread and established and that it was no longer possible to prevent or control its spread. Dr Watson, in consultation with industry and after travelling to the affected areas in Childers, Bundaberg, Mackay and Ingham, produced a thorough and independent assessment of the impact of the disease on the sugar industry.

Dr Watson's appointment, questioned by the member for Toowoomba South during this debate, was strongly supported by the industry. I also note that Dr Watson's appointment and independence was strongly supported by the member for Mirani. At the same time, the member implied that, if either the department of primary industries or the BSES were given the task of conducting this independent review, they would also have been impartial. The criticism by the member for Toowoomba South is based on a flawed premise and one that he repeats ad nauseum—that this government has continually slashed the DPIF budget and staff. As a result, the member for Toowoomba South has suggested that DPIF did not possess the experience or expertise to conduct such a review.

At the risk of repeating myself—again—the DPIF is undergoing a period of renewal and reinvigoration and is appointing new staff. It is no secret that the DPIF is offering VERs, with the key word being 'voluntary'. At the same time, we have been very conscious of the expertise we have in the department and we aim to continue to tap into that knowledge through an alumni. But there are times, and this was such a time—supported by stakeholders—that a totally independent report was needed to point the way forward. So not only was there strong support for Dr Watson's appointment but also there has been overwhelming support for his report and recommendations.

The recommendations included that normal planting should continue uninterrupted, that the industry should replace smut-susceptible varieties with smut-resistant varieties during their normal cycle, that decisions relating to the approved variety lists for planting should be made on the basis of consultation with and advice from BSES and industry in each of Queensland's six pest quarantine areas, and that the government should increase its input into research and the breeding of smut-resistant varieties of cane. This legislation, which amends the Plant Protection Act, will ensure that the recommendations contained within the Watson report can be implemented.

The current operation of the Plant Protection Act 1989 does not allow for the relisting of smut-susceptible varieties for planting. This has resulted in an inconsistency whereby only Bundaberg growers are not allowed to plant smut-susceptible varieties of cane. This amendment will provide the chief executive with the power to amend the approved varieties declaration. This is not a *carte blanche* return to the planting of susceptible varieties. As Dr Watson said in his recommendations, the course to follow remains that the industry should replace smut-susceptible varieties with smut-resistant varieties during their normal cycle.

This amendment will allow the Plant Protection (Approved Sugarcane Varieties) Declaration 2003 to be changed so that growers may be able to lawfully plant highly productive, smut-susceptible varieties. It will mean that growers and millers will have more certainty. It will also mean that growers in the Bundaberg-Childers region—PQA5—will be treated like those in other PQAs.

In August 2006, when the industry and government were aiming to contain smut, varieties susceptible to smut were removed from the schedule of approved varieties that could be planted within PQA5. Already requests have been received from a number of growers in the Bundaberg area for approval to plant varieties that were removed and that are currently not on the approved varieties list. These requests will be considered in light of an agreed regional industry smut management plan, as

recommended by Dr Watson, in making changes to the approved varieties declaration. A change to the act would mean that DPIF's chief executive will be able to change the approved varieties declaration. In making his decision on changes to the approved varieties declaration, the chief executive will take into account independent scientific advice on sugarcane pest management, as well as advice provided through the regional industry smut management plans.

The independent scientific advice will be in two areas: firstly, it will be evidence of levels of pest resistance and whether the variety is a host of the range of pests for that PQA and, secondly, it will be dependent on the regional industry smut management plan for each PQA. So in the case of PQA5, where some growers are keen to plant susceptible varieties, the steps for a change in the approved variety declaration are that the legislation is passed and receives royal assent, that the regional industry smut management plan for PQA5 is submitted and considered, that the chief executive receives the two parcels of independent scientific advice, that the chief executive then determines any changes required to the declaration and that the new declaration is then gazetted. The government is aiming to have all steps completed in time for the autumn planting of cane in PQA5 and prior to the main planting periods for all other PQAs.

The member for Burnett asked whether Dr Watson's recommendation regarding the planting of 2,000 hectares of smut-susceptible cane had a one-year benefit. In answer to that question, Dr Watson's modelling shows a slight economic benefit in terms of net present value over seven years for PQA5 if up to 2,000 hectares of susceptible varieties are planted this year. Dr Watson noted that this is only a net benefit for 2007 and not in subsequent years.

Meanwhile, work on smut-resistant varieties will continue. BSES Ltd, the company owned and funded by the sugar industry, has the sole responsibility for the breeding and release of new sugarcane varieties to the Queensland industry. It began breeding and selecting for smut resistance as soon as smut was first detected in Australia in the Ord River area in Western Australia in 1998. Usually, it takes between 12 and 15 years to breed, select, evaluate and release a variety. BSES is currently releasing some new smut-resistant varieties. So it has done extremely well to achieve this outcome in just under nine years.

Once a variety is released, it then needs to be multiplied to provide commercial levels of planting material. That is currently being undertaken by BSES and other parties using new technologies to achieve the rapid multiplication of suitable varieties. This work supports the proposals made in the Watson report and it is supported by the decision of both the Queensland government and the industry to move to smut-resistant varieties as soon as they are available. The government is continuing to examine Dr Watson's recommendations to determine further government financial investment for the management of smut.

Dr Watson has recommended that the government should deliver smut management information and decision support tools for epidemiology, on-farm surveillance and farming systems practices. He also recommended that the government urgently consider augmenting industry research and plant breeding activities to increase the variety and availability of smut-resistant cane. DPIF is consulting with industry and research providers to explore options to effectively invest funds to introduce Dr Watson's recommendations and facilitate industry recovery.

While support from the majority of industry has been strong throughout the battle against sugarcane smut, it is rarely possible to make everyone happy all of the time. The government does not profess to have done every little thing right during the battle against the disease, but what we have done is act on the best available information in consultation with industry.

Throughout, the Australian Sugar Milling Council, Canegrowers and BSES have worked with the Queensland government. Their support has been evident since the Sugar Milling Council and Canegrowers signed a 'Heads of Agreement' with the Premier for in-principle support for legislative reform in the sugar industry in 2004. That agreement remains the basis for ongoing engagement on all sugar legislative reform matters.

Canegrowers is the nationally recognised industry representative body under the plant health deed, and as such was asked to represent growers on Dr Watson's Smut Steering Committee. Canegrowers also had the nominated industry liaison coordinator during the biosecurity response for smut. Canegrowers also had the capacity to distribute information about smut and its management through a range of information channels which are not exclusive to its members. This was vital throughout the campaign.

This has brought some criticism, specifically from the Australian Cane Farmers Association, and not surprisingly repeated by the member for Burnett, despite ACFA members having been informed of the report and having access to departmental briefings. All members of the sugarcane industry have had access to Canegrowers information throughout the smut response, regardless of whether they are members or not.

On release of the Watson report, Canegrowers released a statement stating that they welcomed the changes proposed in the report and in this legislation. The General Manager of Canegrowers, Ian Ballantyne, stated that the legislation 'would allow greater flexibility whilst ensuring industry's thrust is still firmly fixed on introducing resistant varieties as soon as possible'. The Chairman of the ACFA, Ross Walker, on the other hand publicly commented that the Watson report 'came out with information members already knew' and instead was critical of the strategy, the role played by his organisation's rival, Canegrowers, and of the government.

In the face of criticism, I once again should reiterate that this government has worked extremely closely with industry stakeholders. I should also stress that the majority of the sugarcane industry has generally maintained a positive attitude since midway through last year and I thank them for that. It also would be remiss of me not to mention the role the federal coalition government has played in support of Queensland's cane growers. It has done nothing other than turn its back.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Palaszczuk): Honourable members, I note that there is currently an evacuation of the Annexe occurring. I am advised that it is likely not a false alarm and is a possible fire, so please do not leave the House for the Annexe.

Mr MULHERIN: The federal government has not contributed financially, while the Queensland government committed more than \$15 million. What is more, the federal government could not even be bothered taking part in Dr Watson's working party.

At this junction I should mention criticism from the member for Toowoomba South over the approach to the federal government on cost sharing, although I also should acknowledge the opposition's support for what we are doing today. The member for Toowoomba South has suggested that the government wasted considerable time in a political exercise attempting to gain financial support from the federal government for eradication or containment.

Firstly, I should point out that at no time, while the Queensland government was attempting to gain federal government support through the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, did the state government stop working with industry against smut. The Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed is a nationally agreed cost-sharing arrangement for emergency plant pest responses. It applies in situations where it is possible to eradicate or contain the pest.

In the instance of sugarcane smut, the Queensland government and the sugar industry, based on scientific knowledge, put forward a response plan for cost sharing. The other parties under the deed, including the federal government, did not agree that smut could be contained and therefore no cost sharing was forthcoming. Queensland continued to unilaterally implement the biosecurity response to sugarcane smut in the Bundaberg-Childers area until November 2006, when it became apparent that there was a multi-point incursion of the disease across the state.

Following the national decision in August 2006 not to cost share the sugarcane smut biosecurity response, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries initiated a dispute resolution process under the national cost-sharing deed. This process is ongoing and does not affect the legislative amendments being proposed. Queensland has resubmitted a response plan to the National Management Group so that further consideration can be given to cost sharing the initial biosecurity response to sugarcane smut that Queensland undertook in good faith. But today is about what is being done, not about what is not being done and petty politically motivated nitpicking.

The Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007 will ensure certainty for growers. It will allow them, following Dr Watson's report and in conjunction with a regional smut management plan, to make an informed choice on their future in this very valuable industry. Throughout this whole sugarcane smut battle it has been the Queensland government that has stood up for Queensland growers. The Queensland government has been prepared to put its money where its mouth is to support our primary producers. At this time I would like to thank the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries staff who have worked tirelessly on this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Question put—That the bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in Detail

Clause 1—

Mr HORAN (4.36 pm): It is quite rare to talk on the short title. But under the heading 'Reasons for the Bill' in the explanatory notes there is a comment about crown law advice. The explanatory notes state—

Crown Law advised DPI&F that an amendment to the Act is necessary to enable the chief executive of DPI&F to add sugarcane smut susceptible varieties to the Declaration to enable replanting to occur. In the process of investigating the legislative options to enable Bundaberg planting to take place in autumn 2007, Crown Law advised that the Act as it stands exposes the Queensland Government to legal risk due to inconsistency between different areas of the State in that only the Bundaberg/Childers growers are not permitted to plant susceptible varieties. The Department considers that this risk is significant. The proposed urgent amendment would remove the inconsistency between areas.

This next sentence is the important part of this explanation that I wanted to ask about. It continues—
Crown Law advised that subordinate legislation amendments alone will not be sufficient to achieve the purposes of the Bill.

I ask the minister: what did crown law mean by that? What are the shortcomings that mean that these legislative changes we are making will not achieve the purposes of the bill?

Mr MULHERIN: The advice I have been given is that we did not have the capacity to amend the declaration without amending the act.

Mr HORAN: Could the minister explain that? The minister said the advice was that we did not have the capacity to amend the—

Mr MULHERIN: The department of primary industries has received advice that the chief executive officer, as the accountable officer, does not currently have the powers to reinstate the susceptible varieties to the declaration. What it requires is, firstly, that there be an amendment to this act to enable the chief executive officer to make these amendments to the declaration.

Mr HORAN: I understand that. The point I make is that it is the legislative changes that we are making here that allow the chief executive to make those changes to the approved varieties list. We are doing it further on in clause 3. Crown law has said that subordinate legislation amendments alone will not be sufficient to achieve the purposes of the bill. The purpose of the bill is twofold: one, to provide legal cover to the state government and, two, to allow the CEO to amend or change the approved varieties list. Here we have crown law saying that the subordinate legislation amendments alone will not be sufficient to achieve those two purposes. What, then, is the shortcoming? What is it that this legislative amendment we are looking at today is not doing?

Mr MULHERIN: To enact the change, first one has to change the act and change the subordinate legislation. That is precisely what we are doing. Some growers have requested that the department provide inspector's approval to plant smut-susceptible varieties. However, the issuing of inspectors' approvals or permits for this purpose is not legally possible as it is contrary to the intent of the Plant Protection Act. We are changing the act so that we can change the subordinate legislation.

The current provisions of an inspector's approval is to permit use of non-approved varieties for research purposes only and not for commercial production. The proposed amendments to the act would enable the chief executive officer of the DPIF to allow smut-susceptible varieties to be approved for the Bundaberg-Childers area and other regional PQAs if he is satisfied that this is warranted, and I will speak about the process that will be required for that to occur. This will allow growers to make a business decision about what varieties they could plant for the best economic return. That is in line with Dr Watson's recommendations.

Clause 1, as read, agreed to.

Clause 2, as read, agreed to.

Clause 3—

Mr HORAN (4.42 pm): I understand what the minister is saying in relation to crown law. The subordinate legislation that the minister referred to that would allow the inspectors to do particular things would not be adequate without this legislation. It is looking at things in a back-to-front sort of way.

The latter part of this clause provides that legal protection of the department. It also provides in (4A)—

... the requirement to consider relevant circumstances under subsection (4)(c), do not apply if the chief executive is satisfied it is no longer possible to prevent or control the spread of the quarantine area pest in Queensland.

We are really down to the nuts and bolts of it. I ask the minister for some detail of this. In my speech I referred to the Canegrowers' submission where it talked about a permit system. In the application of this legislation we need to know how we are going to go about the whole process of rescinding the current approved list, which is a restricted list, and bringing on new varieties. Will there be consultation with the industry and productivity groups—BSES and so forth—to determine which varieties can be planted in the particular districts. My first question is: how will that be gone about? Will all the varieties that growers had pre-June last year come back on as a matter of fact, or will there be various groups within the plant quarantine area that will determine which of those smut-susceptible varieties can come back on? Will there be an ability within that list to introduce, as needed, other varieties that become available? There might be smut-resistant varieties that are bred or able to be brought in from some other area. What is the process to get them quickly on to the list?

Mr MULHERIN: I outlined that in my response to the second reading. When this act is changed, the chief executive officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries will be able to change the approved varieties declaration. As I said, requests have already been received from growers in the Bundaberg area for approval to plant varieties which were removed last August from the approved varieties list for that PQA. These requests to amend the approved varieties list will be considered in the light of the agreed regional industry smut management plan for each PQA as recommended by Dr Watson.

In completing his decision on changes to the approved varieties declaration, the chief executive officer will take into account independent scientific advice on sugarcane pest management as well as advice through the regional industry smut management plans. The independent scientific advice will be on two areas: firstly, it will be evidence on levels of pest resistance and on whether the variety is a host to a range of pests for that PQA; and, secondly, it will be independent advice on the regional industry smut management plan for each PQA.

In the case of PQA5 where some growers are keen to plant the susceptible varieties, the steps for a change in approved varieties declarations are as follows: the act is passed and receives royal assent; the regional industry smut management plan for PQA5 is to be submitted and considered; the chief executive is to receive the two parcels of independent scientific advice; the chief executive will then determine any changes required to the declaration. The new declaration will then be gazetted. The government is aiming to have all of those steps completed in time for the autumn planting of PQA5 and prior to the main planting periods for all other PQAs.

The Watson report recommended regional management plans, so there will be consultation at that level. The BSES will be involved along with the mills. There will be an independent scientific panel that will give advice to the chief executive. I have outlined the steps that he has to take in considering whether to relist a variety on the approvals list.

Mr HORAN: I thank the minister for that. The hope is that that process can be fairly swift because people virtually have to start planting as of today, if not before.

Crucial to the economic survival of the cane area around Isis and Bundaberg is the amount of plant material that is smut resistant. Does the minister have an estimate from the department of how much plant material is required in that area for the areas that had to be ploughed out and for the areas that would just be in their normal rotation and need replanting? If the department has those figures, what is the shortfall of smut-resistant material? In other words if, for argument's sake, a thousand tonnes was needed, how many tonnes of the resistant variety is available, if at all?

Mr MULHERIN: The regional smut management plans will have the information that will be submitted by each of the PQA5s. We have acted swiftly on the Watson recommendations because of the limited opportunity growers in the Bundaberg area were afforded to plant a variety in 2007. There will be just that one window of opportunity for this season only. We have urgently brought this legislation before the House to enable that to happen. The reason is that there is not enough plant material available in the Bundaberg-Childers area that has a high resistance to smut.

Mr HORAN: Thank you, Minister. I think it would be good if there was an estimate from the department about what the shortfall is and what needs to be provided. If it cannot be provided because the smut-resistant material is simply not available, as the minister has indicated—and that is the reason for this legislation—will 100 per cent of the plantings have to be smut-susceptible varieties or is it going to be 90 per cent? I think that is important because that leads us to the very urgent need for government funding of BSES and any other ways that BSES can urgently produce some new material that is resistant to smut. We have heard that smut can cause anywhere between 30 per cent and 100 per cent damage.

There is going to be an enormous amount of work involved in trying to root out the smut plants that are found. Farmers will have to walk the rows, and whether they spray it out or dig it out, it will require a massive amount of physical work. I think the solution is to get these smut-resistant varieties and, at the same time, for those smut-resistant varieties to have some level of production that is equivalent to or somewhere near the other varieties. There is going to be a huge drop in production if people are planting resistant varieties that have only about 70 per cent of the production capacity of other varieties.

We need to know how much cane is needed for this planting. Obviously, the situation with planting next year is a bit of an unknown. We do not know how much has to be ploughed out or how much needs to be replanted every four or five years. I think it is important to know that. We need to know what amount of money is needed and what other added sources have to be found to get this smut-resistant planting material.

Mr MULHERIN: As I said earlier, all of this will be identified in the smut management plans for each of the PQA5 areas. In his recommendations Dr Watson indicated that normal planting should continue uninterrupted. At the end of the day, farmers will make a commercial decision on what they have in their areas.

In relation to having more smut-resistant varieties available for planting, the BSES started research immediately after the outbreak occurred in autumn 1998. As the member knows, it normally takes anywhere between 12 and 15 years to bring on a variety to a commercial level. The BSES has been able to bring on smut-resistant varieties within a nine-year period. The BSES and its scientists are to be commended for the work that they have done to ensure that that process was fast-tracked. As more of the smut-resistant varieties come on the market and multiply, farmers will have a choice and be able to make a decision based on what they think is best for their farming operation.

Mr MALONE: Minister, in relation to the emergency transportation and planting of varieties such as Q200 and Q208 that were brought down from north Queensland last year, without any understanding whether those crops would be agronomically suitable for Bundaberg, does the minister's department or departmental staff know whether they will automatically stay on the approved list or will they have to be reassessed? Are the varieties in Bundaberg that are currently being planted agronomically suitable? Do any of those varieties have any smut resistance that can be propagated?

Mr MULHERIN: I thank the member for Mirani for the question. It will be a recommendation from the PQA area, through its smut management plan, that will determine the varieties that will be needed to be relisted on the approved varieties list.

Clause 3, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Question put—That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Long Title

Question put—That the long title of the bill be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

BODY CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 11 October 2006 (see p. 71).

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—Lib) (4.56 pm): I am happy to speak on the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill introduced in 2006. The bill seeks primarily to amend the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 and incidentally seeks to amend the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal Act 2003, the Inala Shopping Centre Freeholding Act 2006 and the Liquor Act 1992.

Let me say at the outset that the coalition supports the thrust and overall outcomes of the bill and will be supporting its passage through the House. However, during the course of debate we will be outlining ways that we believe the bill can be enhanced and improved that will benefit the BCCM industry and its stakeholders.

At the outset, I thank the minister for her willingness to arrange a briefing for me and my staff about this bill from departmental officers and staff. I would also like to thank those officers and staff. I would also particularly like to acknowledge the time, information and assistance provided to me and my staff by many of the stakeholders involved in the industry. These include Mr John Anderson, President of the Queensland Resident Accommodation Managers Association; Mr Gary Maynard, President of the Unit Owners Association of Queensland; the indefatigable Colin Lamont, Chairman of the Unit Owners and Body Corporate Alliance; Miss Sue Ekert, an executive member of the Unit Owners Association of Queensland; Ms Helga Kolbe, an executive member of the Unit Owners association of Queensland; Warren Millist, a Hope Island resident; Mr Brian Rankin, a Pacific Pines resident; and the Property Council of Australia, which provided a submission. These groups, together with various other individuals, have written to me in quite substantial numbers. They have relayed their various and wide-ranging concerns, comments, issues and suggestions, and I thank them for their help.

I well recall the introduction of the original version of the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 by the then minister for natural resources and mines, the honourable Howard Hobbs. I was, in fact, a solicitor practising in the field of body corporate developments at that time. I would like to thank the honourable member for Warrego for the many late nights that his new legislation caused both me and, I am sure, many others back in those days!

Having said that, it should be made clear that the 1997 act was a major innovation in legislation dealing with community titles and community living. Its introduction at the time was forward looking and provided a significant impetus for the advancement of the community titles industry in Queensland. I commend the honourable member for Warrego for his introduction of such groundbreaking legislation.

Significant amendments were made to the act in 2003 to provide for an enhanced dispute resolution service. These amendments included provisions for rules regarding service contractors and letting agents, provisions for the delegation of powers to body corporate managers, provisions relating

to the setting and adjustment of lot entitlements—always a contentious matter—provision for more information to be disclosed by sellers, provisions prohibiting the use of proxy votes on motions to change the regulation modules applicable to a scheme, provision for the clarification of the responsibility of the repair or maintenance of utility structures and provision for the types of resolutions required for the body corporate to initiate different types of proceedings. Mr Deputy Speaker, as you can see, there was quite a substantial raft of amendments to the act after six years.

Changes were also made to the four regulation modules that contain the various requirements and rules for different types of bodies corporate. Following those changes, in July 2004 the minister released a discussion paper titled 'Body Corporate and community management: into the 21st century—a discussion paper on community living issues in Queensland'. In the foreword to the discussion paper the minister pointed out that 'the existing body corporate and community management legislation may not address significant emerging issues and may need to be better attuned to the perceived future needs of the industry'.

The minister went on to say that, if Queensland is to keep pace with other destinations, the community living sector must be able to deliver the accommodation tourists demand. It is equally vital to provide a climate conducive to continuing sustainable development and the investor confidence on which property development and construction industries depend. Indeed, they are true words. The discussion paper itself stated that the primary aim was to encourage continued growth in the body corporate and community management industry in the next decade through a forward looking policy agenda.

These are all laudable aims and objectives. The only problem is that this bill does not fulfil them all. When one considers that these were the outcomes that were sought over two years ago one can only conclude that the bill currently before the House is a reaction to past problems and not in fact a recipe for future prosperity.

In many of my consultations with industry groups the common comment made was that this current bill provides too little too late. Issues which the minister described as emerging in 2004 are now becoming fully fledged problems. This is particularly so with the pace of change in south-east Queensland, the increase in our population, the issue of the South East Queensland Regional Plan and the plans of the Office of Urban Management to increase densities in urban areas and to maintain the urban footprint. We are now in fact dealing with a very high level of growth in these areas. We are seeing the impacts not only in Brisbane but at the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and other areas.

This bill fails to address issues such as the need for a properly regulated body corporate management industry, particularly for those managers who handle body corporate funds. If there was one issue that stood out during all the consultations with people involved in the industry, it was the necessity for a regulatory scheme to be put in place. Many options were suggested and I will touch on some of those later. The need and desire, particularly amongst unit owners and their associations, was very high.

Consumer protection issues to ensure that unit owners are not unfairly taken advantage of by the small but inevitably increasing number of shonky body corporate managers have not been adequately addressed. This includes issues like the requirement for annual audits of the financial affairs of the body corporate. It is a requirement of many organisations—P&C associations, scout groups, sporting bodies—for audits to be undertaken, yet under the current legislation an annual audit is not mandated but is an option.

Another issue is perceived competency and independence of departmental adjudicators. These are issues raised by people who have had dealings, and not all of them unsuccessful dealings, with the department. Of particular significance to the stakeholders was the extent of the apparent conflicts of interests and motivations, particularly of body corporate managers, and the lack of transparency of information and timeliness of information given to their bodies corporate, to the owners who pay the bills.

It would seem, then, that this bill is a wasted opportunity to achieve what the discussion paper sought—namely, a forward looking policy agenda. On behalf of the coalition I would like to endorse those aspects of the bill that improve the dispute resolution process for community titles schemes, particularly those which speed up the process and reduce the complexity and cost.

The requirement for people to initially attempt to resolve a dispute internally before proceeding to make an application is worthwhile. The only concern that arises in respect of that requirement would be instances where there is a disproportionate degree of power able to be exercised by one of the parties to the dispute who may otherwise threaten or intimidate the weaker party. Many instances come to mind including those where the weaker party is elderly, frail, in financial difficulty or similarly burdened and who cannot, for those reasons, effectively use the dispute resolution process or even afford to be seen in a dispute despite having a valid and often substantial claim.

This sort of power imbalance has been described to me by the unit owners as common. I would like to record one example that has been reported to me. I will remove the names. A few years ago a lady and her husband, both in their 70s, bought into a unit title complex at Labrador. It is a six-pack and the five other ladies in the building had not been aware of the act and had not complied with requirements for a body corporate for some time.

They went to a body corporate manager near their home. They spoke to that body corporate manager and he told them that he could solve all their problems and to trust him. This manager was a member of the Community Titles Institute of Queensland. By the time this particular lady had bought in, the manager was in full control. The new owner saw that she was not receiving proper accounting for her levies. She asked for accounts and was ignored. She eventually went to the manager's office where, according to her, he stood over her and abused her and browbeat her until she left his office.

The owner then applied to the commission for an order that the body corporate manager be required to provide properly prepared financial statements on behalf of the body corporate for a number of years from the information in the body corporate manager's possession, that the manager be required to provide a proper account of all fees debited to the body corporate account, that an alternative administrator be appointed until an AGM occurred, that a bank account be opened solely in the name of the body corporate in accordance with section 100(5) of the standard module regulations and that funds currently held in the general pool of funds managed by that manager be transferred. According to the report, the adjudicator knew the manager, was familiar with the manager, called him by his first name and made jokes at the expense of the unit owners who, according to that adjudicator, caused trouble. The application was rejected and I will give the reasons for the rejection in a little while. Subsequently, the manager offered to get his books audited at his expense and supply the owners with the audit before the next annual general meeting. This did not occur until at least seven months later.

Having had the application dismissed, the manager sought to vilify the owner and charge an extra \$1,000 for time spent on the matter. He then informed the other unit owners that this expense, which would be charged to them, was as a result of the applicant failing to properly conduct the matter and it was her responsibility that that cost had been incurred and that they would be burdened for that extra expense. He then proposed a solution to stop this waste for unit owners. He proposed that the body corporate pass a motion that the body corporate would not pick up the fee but the individual owner responsible for challenging him would pick up the fee. According to my advice, this is contrary to the act and another means of bullying the owner.

In determining the original application, which I referred to earlier, the adjudicator made the following point: the applicant had failed to show a legislative basis for the orders she was seeking against the manager and she had failed to relate her expectations to legislative obligations. He then proceeded to comment about the failure of the act, 'To the extent that the application refers to the body corporate, I conclude that the applicant's expectations are not referenced to requirements of the legislation. I have no doubt that some concerns raised by the applicant would, if able to be investigated, have had a valid basis.'

Many of the allegations of the applicant relate to specific actions of the manager. As I have indicated, the basis of the manager's responsibility to the body corporate is contractual not legislative. Legislative provisions relating to the performance issues of managers are all but nonexistent. Rather the legislation deals with how the manager might be appointed or terminated. There are a number of other cases I can relay.

The essence of the complaint is this: the body corporate manager is appointed under legislation and the legislation covers how the body corporate manager ought to be appointed, matters relating to the term of the appointment and how that appointment can be reviewed by the body corporate. It does not govern how disputes between owners and their managers—the people who control their funds—can be resolved. In fact, in that case there was no legislative basis for an owner to seek redress for actions that she believed were wrong under the legislation. That was the finding of the adjudicator in that particular case.

Many people perceive the complexity and cost of dispute resolution to be brought about by the actions of lawyers. I must say in defence of my former colleagues that costs are often driven not by the lawyer's desire to deliver billable hours but by the inherent complexity of the legislation and the often emotive nature of body corporate disputes involving, as they do, people's homes and significant investments.

The extension of the jurisdiction of the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal to hear complex matters and appeals on non-complex matters from adjudicators is in fact welcomed and supported by the coalition. We congratulate the government for introducing this part of the legislation. However, there is a real and legitimate concern about the experience and understanding of community titles matters of members of that tribunal—that is, the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal. It is incumbent on the minister to ensure that the tribunal has sufficiently well-regarded and appropriately credentialled members to hear body corporate disputes to allay those concerns. I would ask the minister to outline the qualifications of members she proposes as suitable to hear body corporate disputes. Additionally, will the minister be appointing further members to the tribunal to address this new area of jurisdiction?

Significantly, many concerns were raised about the qualification of adjudicators. In this respect I would like to draw the House's attention to the somewhat circuitous and subjective provisions of clause 23 of the bill which inserts a new section 236 in the act, in particular the definition of what is 'appropriately qualified'. The definition reads—

appropriately qualified, for appointment to conduct a dispute resolution process, means having the qualifications, experience or standing appropriate for conducting the dispute resolution process.

I would suggest to the minister that it would be far more preferable to clearly establish an objective set of qualifications so that those seeking dispute resolution can be confident of the expertise of the departmental conciliators and adjudicators. This would lead to a greater confidence in the system and better understanding of the outcomes. At the moment there is no understanding by those people who are often not legally represented of the qualifications of those conciliators and adjudicators, no matter their experience or qualifications. In its current form, this amendment lacks the certainty and transparency that those affected by the act would require.

The bill also refines the current provisions about dispute exclusivity by making the distinction between what is deemed a complex and a non-complex dispute. This definition and distinction subsequently has implications regarding the dispute resolution process and for appeals. The bill states that the only actions available for non-complex disputes are, firstly, adjudication and the sole appeal body is the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal. This distinction of jurisdiction therefore implies that only complex disputes are allowed to proceed via appeal to the District Court. The act should in our view continue to allow appeals on non-complex matters from decisions of the CCT to the District Court. So at first instance on non-complex matters the matters can be dealt with by the departmental adjudicators or the CCT, but if there is a party that is still aggrieved with that outcome it is not unreasonable to still allow a final dispute to a properly constituted District Court exercising that court's powers. Enhancing a party's appeal rights to the District Court would not in our view lead to a significant increase in cost nor would it detrimentally affect the parties to the dispute. Moreover, taking away this right of appeal interferes with a party's basic right to justice. I have highlighted a number of issues that we have with these parts of the legislation. However, subject to those comments I have mentioned, the coalition supports the changes to the dispute resolution process.

In considering this legislation, I think it is fair to say that almost every association of unit owners and all of those individuals, of which there were many, who contacted me or my office were primarily concerned with the conduct of body corporate managers and service contractors, and the bill does go some way to making some inroads into addressing this problem. Many stakeholders have expressed to me that they feel body corporate managers are often in a greater position of power than unit owners themselves—and I have highlighted how that might be—and may therefore be in a position, in some manner, to unfairly influence the outcome on an election for a body corporate committee. This is in fact a very important issue as the committee controls most aspects of the operations of the body corporate, including the expenditure of unit owners' money.

The bill proposes an amendment to the body corporate managers code of conduct to prohibit managers from attempting to unfairly influence the outcomes of elections for a body corporate committee. It is fair to say that, although this sounds good, the amendment is in fact a toothless tiger because of the way in which the code of conduct works—that is, the code of conduct is not immediately something that is actionable other than as a breach of contract. I will touch on this again when I discuss the owners code of conduct by way of comparison. Some years ago, as I indicated, I worked with many of the largest body corporate managers in this state on developments from Coolangatta to Cairns and even as far west as Roma. I have to say that in my experience most body corporate management companies realise that their best interests are served if the interests of the unit owners of the complexes they manage are well served.

Most managers work hard to achieve this outcome and deplore the action of the irresponsible few. Nevertheless, there is a significant and very real perception that body corporate managers need to be licensed and undergo some form of objective testing for competency either through obtaining a qualification or carrying out a prescribed course of education and training. Currently, there is no restriction on any person setting up their shingle and operating as a body corporate manager in Queensland. Many body corporates and their staff handle large sums of money on a daily basis. They are responsible for the collection of money from levies from owners and they are responsible for the financial wellbeing of the body corporate on a day-to-day basis as well as for ensuring compliance with the regulation modules governing the expenditure of the funds.

Body corporate managers are the people that the owners and their executive committees turn to for advice about the appropriate conduct of the affairs of the body corporate and compliance with the legislation—in fact, the people they turn to when they need to know what they ought to do. Society today requires real estate agents and motor dealers and members of various other industries to both be licensed and qualified. Indeed, the minister herself has indicated that the mortgage-broking industry requires a review and may well need regulation of some type. It is the coalition's view that body corporate managers should be similarly licensed and qualified and should have an appropriate light-

touch regulatory control. This would encourage the stakeholders to have confidence in their managers and will also encourage what other stakeholders have identified as lacking, and that is professionalism in the body corporate management industry.

Again this bill was the opportunity to address this issue. It is not a new issue. Complaints are not new. It has been ongoing for over 2½ years and in fact goes back many, many years. Again, this bill has failed to deliver for both the unit owners and the body corporate managers. Competent and honest body corporate managers would have nothing to fear from a light-touch regulatory system. Indeed, a body corporate manager who has a licence and who has all of the appropriate qualifications can only be at a competitive advantage when compared to one who does not. The body corporate management industry as a whole would benefit from such a system as the image and reputation of the industry, which can and in fact in some areas is badly and sadly tarnished, would be enhanced and strengthened for the benefit of the consumers of its services. Employees of larger body corporate management companies would also benefit as they would have a recognised industry qualification giving them a career path and some certainty in their chosen profession.

The introduction of the system would, to a large extent, reassure consumers that the people charged with managing their homes and significant investments are trained and qualified to undertake their duties to an appropriate standard. This would, in the coalition's view, fulfil both the primary and secondary objectives of the bill and would certainly provide a climate conducive to continuing sustainable development and the investor confidence on which the property development and construction industries depend, as the minister has stated. It would certainly enhance the confidence of investors to the particular product governed by the act and supply substantial accommodation support to the Queensland tourism industry. Investors could have confidence in the product. They would know that the product was well governed. They would know that those charged with managing their investment have appropriate qualifications. When one thinks of the investments that many people make and the value of those investments to the tourism industry on the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, that has to be a benefit for all involved.

Previously I talked about the code of conduct for body corporate managers. I now want to turn to the code of conduct for committee members. The bill introduces a code of conduct for voting members of a body corporate as schedule 1A. I think it is important to note that the code inserted, as it is as a schedule to the act, may override the provisions of any or all of the regulation modules. In this respect, I draw the House's attention to paragraph 6 of the proposed code of conduct for committee-voting members. That provision appears to conflict with the provisions of the regulations for each module. The conflict of interest provision of section 34 of the standard module regulation at page 43 states that a member of the committee must disclose to a meeting of the committee the member's direct or indirect interest in an issue being considered or about to be considered by the committee if the interest could conflict with the appropriate performance of the member's duties about the consideration of the issue. It goes on in subparagraphs 2, 3 and 4.

It is the coalition's view that, if the code of conduct is to stand, then paragraph 6 of the proposed code of conduct as I have referred to must provide that in addition to disclosing the conflict of interest the voting member must not participate in any discussion or vote about the matter involving the conflict and must not attempt to influence the outcome of the vote of the committee on that matter. I have previously spoken about power imbalances and about how some people can exercise influence on the outcomes of meetings and particularly elections. We regard this prohibition on voting or attempting to influence the outcome as essential to ensuring free and fair elections for the members of bodies corporate and a change that no reasonable person could object to. It is in line with normal community expectations about resolving conflicts of interest and one need only look at the requirements of directors of companies, members of local councils and indeed members of parliament under our own standing orders. In many instances, large amounts of money may be involved for those people exercising the vote and unit owners are entitled to a clarity that such an amendment would give the code of conduct.

Additional concerns were raised with me about the impact this code of conduct may have on the willingness of members of the body corporate to seek election to office as committee members. Primarily this comes about as a result of the introduction of section 101 which had the immunity provisions—and I do acknowledge that the minister has circulated amendments which I know we will be discussing in the committee stages to clarify the apparent conflict there between the provisions as originally inserted and the provisions of the standard regulations under section 45 of the standard module. This was also an issue that was raised in the *Alert Digest*. I note that and I acknowledge that resolves that particular issue for potential committee members.

The coalition is also concerned about the provisions of proposed new section 101(B)(3). That provision sets out the penalty for a committee member's breach of the code of conduct—namely, removal from office in a way to be prescribed by regulation, of which none has been tabled. This is an ongoing concern with the drafting of legislation—not only this legislation but also other legislation. One has to ask why, after all this time, there is no regulation in place. It is not as if this is a rushed piece of work; it has been coming for over 2½ years now. It may be that there are regulations that we can expect to see very shortly, but it would certainly assist an understanding, particularly for people concerned

about removal from office, if that a regulation is in place. There really is no good reason at this stage, with the knowledge that the government has about this bill, for there to be no regulations currently prepared, drafted or ready to go.

This particular remedy brings me back to my earlier point, and a significant concern raised by stakeholders, that being that the Body Corporate and Community Management Act is geared in favour of body corporate managers. Section 118 of the act explains how the body corporate managers' code of conduct is to apply—and I raised this earlier. Proposed new section 118(2) provides that the manager's code of conduct is included in the manager's or service contractor's contract. The logical extension to this is that a breach of the code is a breach of the contract. So if a manager breaches the code of conduct it is a breach of their contract. This provides neither a simple nor cheap process for dealing with such a code of conduct breach. If a manager were alleged to have breached the code of conduct it would require an action under this act, probably of the nature of a complex dispute, involving contract law with all the time, cost, uncertainty and complexity that is involved. It is neither a simple nor straightforward procedure—even under the new dispute resolution procedures—for dealing with a breach of a code of conduct by a body corporate manager. This is largely in contrast to the new section which incorporates a code for volunteer body corporate members—volunteer, mind you, not paid supposed professionals—which clearly provides for removal from the committee in the manner prescribed by regulation.

So if a manager breaches the code of conduct there would be the opportunity of a complex dispute before a court for a finding that they have breached their contract. If a volunteer member of a committee breaches the code of conduct, a regulation may prescribe that they may be turfed out, but we have not seen that regulation. That is the example of the bias in favour of managers and not in favour of the unit owners—the people who pay the freight. This is largely a contrast, as I say, to the new section which incorporates the code. It would appear that what is sauce for the goose is most definitely not sauce for the gander.

Removal from office of an elected committee member is a significant step as it removes the voice of the democratically elected representative of at least a certain number of unit owners in the scheme. It would also appear to be an absolute remedy with no room for discretion. As there has been a delay in the regulations which the code refers to, I ask if the minister can give any indication as to how she envisages a regulation made under this amending section will work? Will she guarantee that such a regulation will not enable a committee member to be removed from the committee either arbitrarily or capriciously? Will such action be subject to review by the District Court?

Concern has been raised with me about the policy behind paragraph 5 of the code of conduct which deals with nuisance. I would therefore ask the minister to explain perhaps the reasons behind paragraph 5 in the code of conduct. This provision is unclear and imprecise. Neither the bill nor the act provides for a definition of the term 'nuisance'. What does this government mean when it says nuisance? Does it mean nuisance like Gordon Nuttall is a nuisance or nuisance like Merri Rose is a nuisance? Does it mean legal nuisance as understood by lawyers or nuisance as—

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: I knew they were too quiet up there. I knew they were falling asleep. I was going to ask if they meant nuisance like Jim Elder was a nuisance, like Grant Musgrove was a nuisance or former ALP state secretary Mike Kaiser was a nuisance or perhaps more like that real nuisance, Brian Burke? Do they mean nuisance as commonly understood in everyday usage and perhaps defined in the *Macquarie Dictionary*?

Due to this lack of definition, a number of interpretations may be used. In the absence of a legislative definition, a standard dictionary is consulted, which defines a nuisance as a person who is annoying or disagreeable. If that were the definition used, it could apply to many members in this chamber if one were a less charitable person than me. Conceivably this clause may be enforced when a non-aligned committee member, who asks challenging questions about the operation of the body corporate, could be considered to be a nuisance and potentially excluded from engaging in his democratic right to represent those owners who elected him to that position. In effect, this would be a means of impeding on independent inquiry by an independent or non-aligned member of the body corporate.

Given that the penalty for a breach of the code is removal from the committee, I believe it is incumbent on the minister to clarify the intent behind paragraph 5 of the code of conduct and to assure the House, unit owners and their elected representatives on committees that it will not be used in the way I have described to the House and will, if necessary, be amended by means of a dictionary insertion to ensure that is the case. The coalition would of course look favourably on any such amendment or clarification of the term 'nuisance'. I wish to foreshadow that I will be suggesting amendments to the bill to address some of the issues of concern that I have raised.

Before this bill moves through the House I would like to reiterate some of my questions. Firstly, the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal will now consist of new and specialised adjudicators who ought to be knowledgeable and qualified in body corporate and community management legislation. Can the

minister explain how that is to occur? I ask the minister to enlighten the House on the proposed regulation relating to proposed new section 101B(3) which provides for the removal of committee members who do not adhere to the code of conduct. Additionally, will the regulation include District Court review of committee dismissal? Finally, will the minister clarify the reasons for the inclusion of the fifth paragraph in the code of conduct with regards to nuisance?

The Body Corporate and Community Management Act was described as groundbreaking legislation when introduced by the coalition government in 1997, as indeed it was. As is nearly always the case in this dynamic industry, the legislation requires periodic reviews to adapt to changing circumstances and to foreshadow future developments. Unfortunately, the current bill before the House does not carry on the original forward thinking and innovation that led to the original act. It falls far short and the opportunity was there; the problems were known. The government should and could have done better with this bill. Although this act does improve dispute resolution processes and provides some answers to some problems in the BCCM industry, to echo the sentiments of stakeholders, the bill simply does not go far enough.

The discussion paper asked over 66 questions. It received 177 responses, including responses from reputable industry groups and associations as well as individuals. The bill does not in any forward thinking way address the major concerns of an industry that currently comprises over 33,000 community title schemes with over 303,000 individual units.

I would have preferred to finish on a much more positive note. The coalition supports the thrust of the bill, but it really is a missed opportunity. It will only require the coalition to work harder to address the shortcomings when we return to office after 2009.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (5.29 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. It is a pleasure to be part of a government that is in a position to introduce such legislation before the House for the betterment of our community right across the length and breadth of Queensland.

The main objective of the bill is to improve dispute resolution processes for community titles schemes and to promote communication between parties to body corporate disputes, allowing them to reach agreeable outcomes rather than having decisions imposed upon them. The bill achieves this in a number of ways. Firstly, most persons intending to seek formal government intervention in a body corporate dispute must initially make a reasonable attempt to resolve the problem internally within their body corporate. The proper use of internal dispute resolution processes will reduce disputation in a body corporate and limit the need for formal intervention. Secondly, the bill provides for departmental conciliation to be conducted by the Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management. Departmental conciliation will facilitate the prompt and informal resolution of disputes, encourage parties to disputes to arrive at their own resolutions and agreements in line with the self-management focus of the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997, and improve communication between parties, their understanding of rights and responsibilities under legislation and, in turn, minimise future disputes. That sounds a bit like the recipe to any happy relationship—a little bit of give and take and some hard work at genuine compromise and dispute resolution.

For most body corporate disputes, conciliation will be compulsory before an application is made for adjudication. This bill enhances the sector's focus on self-management and encourages parties to resolve issues before they escalate into a full-blown dispute requiring government intervention. To tackle this issue with confidence, I believe that the community and body corporate participants must be able to access information about their rights and responsibilities under this legislation. I understand that the commissioner's officers have developed and implemented new information services to complement the bill. These new information products include a general guide to community living aimed at people considering investing or living in a community titles scheme, an information brochure on enforcing an adjudicator's orders in the Magistrates Court and free online training material on body corporate legislation in Queensland, targeting voluntary committee members. I commend the officers for doing that.

When I first went into a community titles scheme I really did not know anything about my rights or responsibilities as part of that community titles scheme. I have to say that, at that time, it would have been easier for me if I had been able to go online or get a brochure that easily and in plain English explained all of those rights and responsibilities. Fortunately, I have to say that I have always got along very well with the members of my body corporate committee. They do a fine job. I congratulate them on the many hours that they put into the smooth running of my particular interest.

Ms Keech: As volunteers.

Ms JARRATT: They are volunteers and that needs to be recognised. Like all of our other wonderful volunteers right across the spectrum in the state, they do an amazing job. We simply could not afford to pay them if it came down to having to do that.

The information that I have just outlined is available on the department's web site, which is www.dttfwd.qld.gov.au. The online training course has been designed for committee members. However, any person with an interest in a community titles scheme in Queensland can participate. The

training course provides user-friendly information on key aspects of body corporate management in Queensland and assessment tools that participants can complete in their own time. The course is divided into units. Each unit includes an overview and learning outcomes as well as important information on rights and obligations under the legislation.

The first unit that is available is on the key topic of body corporate committees. It is a fairly fundamental unit and a good place to start. It covers a broad range of issues from the role of the committee and the conduct of the committee meeting to committee elections. Once again, how I wish that information was available to me some years ago.

The second unit, which will be about general meetings, is expected to be online in the very near future, if not already. I have not checked to see if that course is available at this time. The third unit intends to cover the important issue of financial management in bodies corporate. That unit will also be available online.

In Queensland there are 33,000 community titles schemes involving over 305,000 lot owners. Clearly, community living is an increasingly popular lifestyle and investment choice. Indeed, in areas such as Airlie Beach and Cannonvale, it has become a way of life for most people. As the space that is available for the traditional house and backyard becomes more and more scarce, developers are building unit style developments. I think people are taking to those with a lot of zest. If we are to retain some of our natural environment in places that are fairly compact, such as Airlie Beach and Cannonvale, we need to live in more dense forms of accommodation.

Community living brings with it a unique set of circumstances. Many new owners and potential purchasers are unclear about their responsibilities as body corporate members. The new brochure, titled *A quick guide to community living in Queensland*, provides valuable guidance about community titles schemes, bodies corporate and the obligations and rights of people as owners and body corporate members. The information on enforcing an adjudicator's orders was developed in consultation with the Chief Magistrate, the Department of Justice and the registry of the Magistrates Court to ensure that the information is accurate, well balanced and useful. The initiatives were developed with input from key stakeholder groups, including the Unit Owners Association of Queensland, the Queensland Resident Accommodation Managers Association and the Community Titles Institute of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms van LITSENBURG (Redcliffe—ALP) (5.36 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. This is important legislation because, owing to the increasing growth in the density of urban centres and the rising cost of housing, particularly in south-east Queensland, a far greater percentage of Queensland's population live in units. It is vital that those people have access to effective and affordable dispute resolution processes. This bill gives unit owners a low-cost, effective option that they have not had access to before.

This bill is a cogent response to concerns raised during a recent review of body corporate legislation. It promotes the viability of the sector as a housing and investment option without diminishing the existing rights of unit holders. One very important aspect of this bill is the expansion of the jurisdiction of the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal to resolve complex body corporate disputes, such as lot entitlements. The review acknowledged that stakeholders were particularly concerned that the only process by which to resolve disputes over the adjustment of lot entitlements is either by specialist adjudication or the District Court and the high costs and formality that those tribunals can involve. The Commercial and Consumer Tribunal already deals with a range of complex commercial and consumer matters. It is a viable and accessible means of resolving complex body corporate and community management disputes. The jurisdictional change that is proposed in this bill will alleviate stakeholder's concerns regarding the current costs of specialist adjudication and the costs of and formality of the District Court proceedings. It now puts justice within the reach of parties who previously had to pursue their dispute through specialist adjudication or the District Court. Additionally, the jurisdiction of hearing appeals of orders made by adjudicators will be vested in the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal rather than the District Court.

For some time, stakeholders have contended that the District Court is too formal and costly. Appeals will continue to be limited to those raising a question of law. Adjudicators' orders warrant a reasonable degree of certainty for those people who have the benefit of the order. Questions of law are broad enough to ensure that unsuccessful parties have reasonable access to appeal, if they consider the adjudicator has misapplied legal principles or failed to afford the party natural justice.

In most instances, the Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management has exclusive jurisdiction to resolve body corporate disputes. There will be exceptional circumstances where the parties to a dispute prefer to have the matter dealt with in another jurisdiction such as a court. This exclusivity has proven to be obstructive. As a result, this bill will allow parties by agreement to refer the dispute to a court, tribunal or dispute resolution process with appropriate jurisdiction rather than having the matter determined under the dispute resolution provisions of the Body Corporate and Community Management Act. However, the flexibility to refer the dispute to another jurisdiction will be subject to the agreement of the commissioner to prevent parties from 'forum

shopping' for favourable decisions. These are important changes that will give body corporate members better outcomes for resolving disputes. I congratulate the minister on the detail and the extent of this bill. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr GRAY (Gaven—ALP) (5.41 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006, which is before the House. The bill seeks to amend the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 with the intention of clarifying a number of things—namely, the application of immunity from liability in section 101A proposed to be inserted in the BCCM Act by clause 10 and the existing immunity from liability for defamation in the body corporate legislation, as well as extending the immunity from liability for defamation to bodies corporate and committees for all community titles schemes under the BCCM Act. The new section 101A proposes to provide a committee member with immunity for an act done or omission made in good faith and without negligence in performing the person's role as a committee member.

It is noted that there is potential for uncertainty in the application of the conditional immunity in the proposed new section 101A of the BCCM Act and the absolute immunity of Standard Module and Accommodation Module that could result in the body corporate and committee being held liable for defamation in circumstances never intended by the legislation. This is because liability for defamation can arise even though a person has acted in good faith and without negligence. The body corporate has the ability to adopt the module under the act which best suits its needs, subject to the scheme meeting the criteria for the module. As all modules impose a statutory duty on committees to circulate certain material provided by lot owners for a general meeting, it is therefore appropriate for the immunity from liability for defamation to apply to the body corporate and committee for a scheme under any of the four regulation modules.

This legislation not only addresses the issue of defamation in body corporate proceedings but also sets about bringing better dispute resolution processes for community titles schemes, which is vitally important. These processes will accelerate the resolution of disputes, as other members have mentioned, and also minimise any likelihood of future problems. As we are only too aware, disputes arise in organisations as a result of poor communication processes. This bill sets about establishing better communication processes between people in dispute and thus allowing agreed outcomes to prevail rather than the imposed outcomes of the past. It is this section of the bill that I wish to direct further remarks.

Most bodies corporate are required to elect a committee with the responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the body corporate. It is clear that a committee has a significant and important role in the ongoing management of a body corporate. Of great interest to me is the good governance of such committees and sound meeting practices essential to sound decision making. I often leave meetings frustrated by the lack of skill and training of presidents chairing meetings that consume large amounts of time for little outcomes largely because the chair lacks all but the rudimentary understanding of meeting process. As the current chair of a number of community organisations and the past chair of an equal number, I apply meeting procedure fairly and without favour—and the bill has that in its intent. Meetings are short and productive because all have undertaken the vital work of the organisation beforehand. Decisions are made on the basis of fact and not favour, as is often the case when groups are in dispute.

I note with interest that one of the key outcomes of the review into corporate legislation related to the concern expressed by shareholders about the conduct of committees. In particular, it is claimed that many committee members do not understand their roles and do not act in the best interests of the body corporate. Specific problems include committees exceeding the legislated spending limits and chairpersons making unilateral decisions. This is a recipe for disaster and it is apparent that these issues contribute to the cause and escalation of body corporate disputes.

The bill then addresses the specific issues introducing a code of conduct for voting members of a body corporate committee. The code provides guidelines for voting committee members of a body corporate committee without increasing their existing obligations. It is proposed that the regulation modules will be amended to empower bodies corporate to enforce the code against a voting committee member through the removal of the member from the office where so appropriate. Sanctions are rightly provided within the regulations. I acknowledge the points that have been made by previous speakers.

Allow me to turn my attention to the role of the body corporate manager, another matter which has raised much interest in speaking to this bill. In the act a body corporate manager is a person engaged by a body corporate to provide administrative services, such as secretarial or financial management services. The definition is clear so that no misunderstanding can prevail.

The legislation rightly includes a number of consumer protection provisions regarding the relationship between such body corporate managers and bodies corporate, including a code of conduct for body corporate managers. Shareholders also expressed concern about the competence, performance and conduct of body corporate managers. At present a body corporate manager is not subject to any specific regulatory or licensing regime. While the minister's department is currently conducting a separate analysis of possible regulatory options, the bill rightly proposes to enhance the

existing statutory code of conduct for body corporate managers by including a requirement that body corporate managers must not attempt to unfairly influence the outcome of body corporate elections. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (5.48 pm): I rise to speak on the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006, which seeks to amend the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 and the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal Act 2003. Before I go any further I wish to declare to honourable members that I am a unit owner on the Gold Coast and therefore I am part of a body corporate and have firsthand experience of how they operate.

The bill aims to improve the dispute resolution functions of the BCCM Act by way of focusing on informal processes such as self-resolution and improving access to justice by expanding the jurisdiction of the CCT. Further, this bill seeks to introduce guidelines for body corporate committee members through the introduction of a code of conduct for voting members. In my former role of shadow minister for tourism, fair trading and wine industry development, I became abundantly aware of many issues which were being encountered in respect of body corporate matters.

As we have heard from other members, there are over 33,000 community title schemes in Queensland, with over 303,000 individual lots. It is important to recognise the necessity of detailed rules for the ongoing administration and operation of community title schemes. This relates to committees, general meetings and financial and property management, which includes duplexes, home unit blocks, townhouse complexes, high rise apartment buildings and some commercial premises.

I note that the key policy objective of the bill is to improve dispute resolution processes through the following steps: self-resolution, departmental conciliation, the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal, parties to a dispute, exclusivity of the dispute resolution process and adjudicator powers. The bill also enhances the statutory code of conduct for body corporate managers and introduces a code of conduct for voting members of a body corporate committee to provide guidelines for voting committee members without increasing their existing obligations.

The last two clauses of this bill introduce the opportunity for new evidence to be submitted in respect of liquor licence applications in particular circumstances. I note that these clauses replicate the intent of the Liquor (Evidence on Appeals) Amendment Bill 2006.

As we have already heard from the shadow minister, the honourable member for Clayfield, the coalition will be supporting the intent of this bill. The amendments foreshadowed by the member for Clayfield intend to further enhance the bill, particularly in the areas of code of conduct and registration of managers. Whilst I genuinely welcome these amendments to the BCCM act that have finally found their way before us and purport to balance the rights and responsibilities of individuals with the responsibility for self-management as an inherent aspect of community title schemes, it is appropriate to mention issues raised by unit owners in this regard.

The minister and both her predecessors, Stephen Robertson and Merri Rose, have maintained the myth that the Community Titles Institute of Queensland, which is the new name for the Body Corporate Managers Association, is able to impose self-regulation on its managers. They have also maintained some comfort from the false assumption that because the number of appeals against judgments have been few, a general satisfaction exists regarding judgments. However, it was the enormous expense and time-consuming appeal process to the District Court that was the key to that result.

A few years ago, the then secretary of the Gold Coast unit owners association decided to appeal a flawed decision by adjudicator Richard Meek. She won, but it took almost a year and cost her in excess of \$14,000 to overturn just 10 votes. At meetings of unit owners far and wide, this story is repeated and obviously is a deterrent to going to the District Court. It illustrates just how discouraging the former process was to the clients.

Notwithstanding that unit owners want a simpler and less expensive appeal process than they have at present and that, therefore, this move in the bill away from the District Court in the first instance is a step in the right direction, it is of little use to reform the appeal process if you do not reform that which will cause a flood of appeals, namely, the competence and bias of adjudicators or, to be fair, I should say the widespread perception of incompetence and bias of adjudicators.

The commission is meant to be a place where owners can go to obtain justice, yet it has been the subject of intense criticism by owners. The Gold Coast, which is a premier tourism destination and fast growing city, has a particularly high proportion of units and that equates to a high number of community title schemes. Last year on the Gold Coast at a meeting of 200 unit owners there was a unanimous vote of no confidence in the commission and a 100 per cent demand for the registration of body corporate managers. I understand that the shadow minister has outlined changes to this effect in his amendments.

When a previous minister, the Hon. Stephen Robertson, introduced amendments to the body corporate act in December, he promised that the review would be ongoing. Back then, he was aware that the two matters that most affected unit owners and which drew most criticism from unit owners were

the failure of his government to register body corporate managers, which Mr Robertson himself threw into the too-hard basket, and the incompetence and perception of bias of the body corporate commission. Dissatisfaction extended even to the case management of the commissioner herself at the time. I note that despite massive dissatisfaction with her services and that of the commission under her leadership, the same person was promoted to the position of Acting Commissioner for Fair Trade.

I have read some of the unit owners' submissions to this government over the years and the majority condemn the failure to register managers and the failure to reform the commission, in which it seems most unit owners have little or no confidence at all. I understand that some whole bodies corporate have passed motions of no confidence in the commission after the commission has handled disputes in their resorts.

The primary focus of body corporate reform has to be transparency and guarantees of honest dealings with unit owners. This is where it all begins. Decent people buy home units, either to live in or for investment purposes. From the moment they consider this move, they are shelling out of their own pockets. They start with a real estate agent who takes a commission from the vendor for the sale. Then they have to employ a lawyer for conveyancing. Often they pay a valuer to ensure that they are paying the right price. Once they become an owner, they pay levies to the body corporate. Part of the levy may go to a building manager who acts as their caretaker and the rest goes to a body corporate manager who takes his or her fee to act as a secretariat and banker for the body corporate. If they are investors, they pay further for the building manager to rent their units for them. Banks usually have a piece of them, as well as insurance companies. In short, unit owners just keep paying.

One of the few areas where unit owners can control their spending is with the management of their body corporate, although they may have some control over their letting agreement also. However, it is in the body corporate management area that they are most vulnerable if they are not vigilant. For the benefit of members who are not aware of this, the body corporate manager is not the person who lives on site in the building manager's unit and who is usually the letting agent for investor owners as well. The body corporate manager provides a secretariat for the work of the elected committee of owners and also usually collects levies, manages the bank account and pays the bills.

Given that the large body corporate management companies have dozens of bodies corporate that they manage, it is easy to see that they have millions of other people's dollars under their control. This is why it is imperative that they be registered and that standards be set to protect unit owners against bad managers. Astonishingly, this was an area pigeon-holed by the minister during the review that began in 2001, took two years to see the light of day in this parliament and then, reprehensibly, omitted to regulate this most important area of money management. Here we are today with another minister and another set of amendments to this act, and we still have no indication of when the government will move to register these managers, whether they will set a bar that managers will have to reach or whether they intend to merely register all operators currently in business.

As I move around my electorate, which is one of the largest body corporate communities in Queensland along with that of the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, I hear appalling stories of mismanagement by some managers. I hasten to add that, as in all things, not all managers are bad and not all of them are rogues. I do not want to give the impression that I think so. However, it is a fact that, as in all matters of corrupt and/or dishonest practice, there are a few who give the entire industry a bad name.

The managers' own association must be more diligent in disciplining the worst offenders amongst its own ranks, rather than avoiding this course of events when it is aware of the complaints raised by unit owners about certain of their members. Of particular concern are people who have been struck off professional rolls in other states, and who come to Queensland and can set up as body corporate managers because this government has failed to enact registration laws and set standards for registration. I ask the minister: where is the protection for unit owners in those circumstances? Why has the government done nothing about this disturbing anomaly?

The most common way managers can dishonestly draw money from accounts without the units owners' control is when they maintain the body corporate's bank accounts. Managers quote to handle the tasks of collecting and managing levies, finding the best insurance and often other services for the body corporate, and taking care of the secretarial work. Without strict controls by the committee, it is a simple matter for the manager to determine to send out information to all owners at whim and thus create an over service.

The Community Titles Institute of Queensland, which is the new name for the Body Corporate Managers Association, tells the minister that it has its own ethics committee which imposes standards upon members and that it can self-regulate if only it is given the chance. However, it has been alleged to me by more than one person that in this case the manager was a member of that very ethics committee. What chance of self-regulation is there if the association cannot even clean up a fiasco of that obvious dimension? I repeat: not all managers should be tarred with the same brush, but this is a very important point that I wish to raise. The government should have moved long before now to make registration compulsory and, in doing so, it should have set a standard that all managers have to reach.

Let me now address self-resolution. The bill requires that a person must take reasonable steps and make a demonstrated attempt to resolve the dispute with that person's body corporate prior to making an application to the commissioner. From the wide consultation I have undertaken, many individuals have explained that they have tried to attempt to resolve their issues directly with their body corporate. However, they often feel their concerns are not being acknowledged and have often complained of feeling manipulated by managers. I am disappointed to say that this is happening on a much more regular basis in my electorate. A lot of people come in on regular occasions to make these complaints.

With respect to departmental conciliation, I applaud the initiatives that improve the communication between parties to a dispute and bring about conciliation rather than forcing people through extensive legal processes that clog our court system. A regular complaint that I heard as shadow minister was that individuals felt that dispute resolution was a process that dragged on and on, often deliberately by one of the parties to a dispute, in order to wear down the other party. With these thoughts in mind, I ask the minister to confirm if she intends to revise the time line targets of the BCCM office from finalising 80 per cent of applications within 60 days from the close of time of applicant's reply to submissions. It would appear that this figure is unattainable.

Clause 37 establishes part 5A in chapter 6 which outlines the structure for departmental conciliation. Yet once again we do not have before us clear requirements of qualification criteria to be fulfilled by departmental conciliators. Clarification of parties to a dispute is welcome because this is what is needed to ensure explicit determination of who is in a position to enter into the dispute resolution process, and it will serve to eliminate misconceptions in this regard. The bill allows parties to a body corporate dispute to agree to not have the matter determined under the dispute resolution provisions of the BCCM Act but, rather, to refer the dispute to a court, tribunal or dispute resolution process with appropriate jurisdiction.

I must, in all conscience, raise my concerns over the changes proposed to extend the jurisdiction of the CCT to determine complex BCCM disputes through clauses 71 to 74 and to extend adjudicator powers. Of note is the intent of clauses 14 and 16 of the bill which insert new sections 149A, 149B and 178 that extends the jurisdiction of the CCT to determine complex BCCM disputes currently resolved compulsorily by specialist adjudication. I invite the minister in her summation to clarify how the same level of specialist level of determination can be provided by the CCT with the extension of its powers.

Adjudicator powers are also addressed in this bill. They will be extended to permit an order for costs in favour of an affected person or the body corporate who have incurred costs with respect to the application, access body corporate records in the investigation of disputes and have the power to consider an application for an interim order.

The minister will no doubt recall the concerns I raised in July 2006 during estimates hearings regarding the classification of positions of adjudicators within the BCCM office and the issues surrounding the enforceability of orders on managers. Clause 23 specifies appointment of appropriately qualified persons as departmental conciliators and adjudicators, yet confirmation of what appropriate qualifications are fails to be clearly defined. One of the most common complaints is that the commission ignores commonsense and follows the letter of the law so literally that, even when utterly ridiculous outcomes portend, they continue along their way regardless.

Clause 53 of this bill neglects to address adequately the enforceability of orders in section 287. It is only when orders are complied with that thorough closure resolution of the process occurs.

Clause 10 introduces new sections 101A and 101B. It clarifies expectations and roles of body corporate committee members as well as initiating statutory protection from liability. I support the introduction of section 101B, which clearly defines the expectations on voting members of body corporates. Recognising that it is much easier to remove a volunteer for breach of a code of conduct than a body corporate manager, it is a shame that there is not more detail regarding the execution of this provision.

I note the concerns raised in the Scrutiny of Legislation *Alert Digest* in that there appears to be a potential for conflict between proposed section 101A, which confers a conditional immunity, and existing section 45(4) of the Body Corporate and Community Management (Standard Module) Regulation 1997, which purports to confer absolute immunity upon body corporate committee members. I would ask that the minister confirm if she intends to review this proposed section for the purpose of eliminating potential conflict.

Concerns were raised with me initially by stakeholders about possible civil liability that could deter unit owners from agreeing to be members of their body corporate committee at all. I note the minister's amendments to clarify immunity from liability in the new section 101A.

In closing, it should be noted, nevertheless, that in August the current minister told parliament of her concerns that unethical practices by managers were still rife. The minister acknowledged people's fears and flagged an intention to introduce legislation and probity checks during the ongoing review that is currently taking place. Considering the minister knows there are fears of manipulation, it can only be seen as remiss of her not to bring some change in with this act. It is not good having legislation that is

continually playing catch-up and not keeping pace with a rapidly expanding Queensland. Legislation that responds slowly and reluctantly to pressure and legitimate arguments from stakeholders is not only insincere but also ineffectual and virtually out of date before it is in place.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (6.05 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak to the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. This bill seeks to make a number of important changes to legislation regarding body corporate and community management groups in Queensland. As the chamber has already heard from my coalition colleagues, the honourable member for Clayfield and shadow minister for fair trading, I will be supporting this bill before the parliament with amendments that I commend the shadow minister for bringing to the House.

I want to begin my contribution by quoting from an email that I received last week from a constituent Jeff Suskova. He wrote to me, and he sent it to the minister as well. He said—

I understand Body Corporate matters will be raised in Parliament in the next few weeks and would like to bring to your attention that there are considerable problems in this industry that need urgent attention to protect unit owners.

The current government for some reason does not appear to want to protect unit owners while appearing to have sympathy for corrupt Body Corporate Managers and Caretakers ...

As someone who has spent the last 18 months battling with scurrilous body corporate managers who thumb their noses at Codes of Conduct—

This seems to be a recurring theme, Mr Deputy Speaker—

and a CTIQ that does not nothing to enforce the code on its members, I can ensure you that there are major problems within the industry, with some of the largest body corporate companies the worst offenders.

From my observations most Body Corporate Managers are appearing to be favouring Caretakers over owners. I have personally spent at least 400-500 hours researching, investigating and inspecting Body Corporate Records. What I have found is disturbing to say the least. There are many examples of covert fraud, dishonesty and improper conduct from BCM's and Caretakers, these are currently being addressed, however due to the lack of knowledge—

I acknowledge that many owners obviously are not aware of all the things that are going on—

most owners do not bother pursuing any matters like this further. Also owners have no confidence in the Commissioners office to deliver a fair and just order to an owner in dispute. Many owners believe the commissioner's office is for the benefit of BCM's and caretakers not owners, some go further and suggest outright corruption within the commissioner's office, as these owners have seen continual stupid decisions that certainly are not fair to owners but very fair to BCM's and Caretakers always at owners expense.

You do not have to be a rocket scientist to work out if BCM's and Caretakers are not properly licensed why would they worry about the worthless code of conduct provisions in the Act, when if brought before the equally worthless Body Corporate Commission for any misconduct actions, they will most probably get off without penalty. They know—

Ms KEECH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I find the words of the honourable member offensive. If he does have allegations of corruption in the body corporate office he should provide those to the appropriate channels immediately. I ask him to withdraw his comments and to temper his comments. I know he is reporting on behalf of a constituent, but I believe he should temper the comments he is making. Otherwise he should report them immediately to the appropriate channels.

Mr LANGBROEK: Your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): In terms of your language, it has been said that it is offensive, and you have been asked to withdraw your comments.

Mr LANGBROEK: I will withdraw whatever it is that you ask me to withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. I just want to point out that I am quoting from an email about matters that are the subject of this legislation, but I am happy to withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Very well.

Mr LANGBROEK: I continue to quote from this email. It says—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I draw your attention to the request of the minister in relation to any specific allegations which may be disclosed in the email.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will keep that in mind as I continue to read from this email. It reads—

They cannot lose their licence because they don't have one to lose. Why is it that every other business in Queensland has to be licensed yet BCMs and caretakers are exempt? How hard would it be to licence them? Then they may step into line as they have their businesses at risk. At the moment there is no deterrent to make them act honestly.

As my investigations at my own body corporate, where there has been a dishonest BCM who was in league with an equally dishonest caretaker, I found what appears to be at least \$20,000 a year of misappropriated funds. With 300,000 units obviously if this is endemic then it could be over \$60 million of owners' funds that are being misappropriated. At what point does this become a major crime forcing a government to take some serious action?

This industry needs major changes to the BCCM Act to protect owners against dishonest BCMs and corrupt caretakers. The 300,000 unit owners in Queensland need to be the people who have a voice to these changes as they are the major stakeholders and not the leaches that feed off them.

They are certainly emotive words. He is a constituent of mine. He has sent that email to me and the minister. I am happy to quote what he has had to say. When anecdotal evidence comes from enough people it certainly carries some weight. He has concerns about QRAMA, CTIQ and other affiliated bodies which, as he points out, are for the benefit of BCMs and caretakers only. He concludes by saying—

It will probably take a large media campaign close to an election to force action to fix these problems. One would hope owners will not have to wait that long for action. If owners are forced to wait that long for relief I am sure the evidence will be substantially multiplied with many owners suffering greatly. The problems are there for anyone to see, but I guess it is the same old story: there is none so blind as those that do not want to see.

He has raised some very serious issues. They are ones that I think have a lot of merit. I now want to deal with some of the specifics of what he had to say. I point out that the Gold Coast has the largest number of community title schemes in Queensland. Many of these are based in my Surfers Paradise electorate. The coastal part of Surfers Paradise largely comprises high-density living, with high-rise hotel and apartment buildings lining the coastline. Since being elected I have had dealings with many of my constituents who are dissatisfied with the current body corporate law and procedures. I have heard many appalling stories of allegedly corrupt body corporate managers and caretakers.

Just like the honourable member for Currumbin before me, I do not want to denounce the entire body corporate industry because the majority of community title schemes operate effectively and with integrity. However, the law as it currently stands does not offer those residing or trading under community title schemes adequate recourse to challenge body corporate managers, caretakers and committees and in fact tends to favour the institution rather than the some half a million individuals that it affects.

As my colleagues have mentioned previously, this legislation will affect about 300,000 lots or units as well as some commercial premises. These legislative changes come at a time when medium- and high-density living is growing at an exponential rate spurred on by retiring baby boomers joining the sea change trend. One only has to flick through the pages of the voluminous *Gold Coast Bulletin* real estate liftout to see that the face of suburbia is changing.

As the stock of medium- to high-density housing increases under the South East Queensland Regional Plan more and more unit owners will come to rely on the Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management, the BCCM, for information and consumer protection against the minority of rogue body corporates operating in the community. The state government has a duty to ensure that unit owners' rights and interests are protected whilst balancing these with the needs of administrators for certain powers and responsibilities to effectively manage a community title scheme.

The bill currently before parliament partly achieves this but nonetheless I believe this legislation falls short of effecting real change within the troubled industry. Firstly, the enhanced dispute resolution process should be commended as it goes a long way to improving the procedure for settling disputes between residents and bodies corporate. However, having consulted with many of my constituents and having attended a public meeting of the Unit Owners Body Corporate Alliance in my electorate at which 300 people turned up, I saw that a lack of confidence in the body corporate commission is rife among stakeholders who see little value in the process which they hold to favour body corporate managers and caretakers.

Unit owners feel there is little consumer protection and believe that adjudicators are underresourced and unqualified to deal with the wide range of problems which come before them leading to a lack of common sense in decisions. Appropriate investigations and examinations of the issues are unable to be undertaken due to a lack of resources and powers to seek justice. The commission's terms of reference are so narrow and restrictive that often adjudication results in impractical legalistic decisions which defy common logic. A common criticism is that adjudicators do not have the expertise or legal know-how to rule in matters when they only have written submissions to base these judgements upon. Some of the matters need investigation and police, not adjudicators.

This legislation will promote informal dispute resolution, a process which must be satisfied before any further action can result. The bill requires that a person make a reasonable attempt to resolve the issue within the body corporate before an application is made to the commissioner. The bill sets out what reasonable measures of internal informal dispute are. They include communication, writing to the committee for the body corporate and presenting a motion for consideration at a general meeting of the body corporate. It also defines who may seek action from the commissioner.

Promoting enhanced communication between unit owners and body corporates when problems arise is beneficial as it is expected that some non-complex disputes can be dealt with at this level rather than seeking further adjudication. Whilst it sounds like a good provision, and overall I believe it is, many of those with whom I have consulted are concerned that the self-resolution process will be unfruitful and in some ways counterproductive to their cause. But in the majority of cases I believe this process will have a positive effect on reducing the number of complaints that are heard for adjudication.

After self-resolution has been tried—and obviously in some cases self-resolution will fail—the next stage is departmental conciliation through the BCCM office. The conciliation process will again attempt to resolve conflicts via informal means and by encouraging parties to resolve the issue by increasing communication between the parties and improving their understanding of rights and responsibilities. If a matter is still unable to be resolved, the next stage is taking the complaint to the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal which will have its powers extended under the act to sufficiently adjudicate non-complex disputes as defined by the legislation. Only complex disputes may finally be dealt with at the District Court level. While this will have the effect of alleviating the workload of the courts, it is important that judicial settlement of disputes is not replaced with a watered-down version which will not allow arguments to be properly heard.

Hence I suggest an amendment to the bill which provides for appeals of BCCM conciliation and CCT rulings to be heard by the court regardless of whether they are complex or non-complex disputes. In my view, this will not jeopardise the efficacy of the informal adjudication processes but rather give people with a genuine case the opportunity to have their day in court, thus instilling added confidence in the BCCM and CCT processes. Appealing to the courts will also ensure that rulings are conclusive.

As an aside, I understand that the commissioner attends and speaks at education seminars that are often blatant marketing exercises for body corporate management companies. This is completely inappropriate. The commissioner is not accountable to anyone.

Ms KEECH: Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. On behalf of the department I find that absolutely outrageous and offensive. I ask you to withdraw.

Mr LANGBROEK: Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek your ruling as to whether I have to withdraw when I am speaking about a third person.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order, Minister.

Mr LANGBROEK: The bill currently before parliament also introduces a code of conduct which must be observed by body corporate committee members. This is a positive move in instilling added professionalism in bodies corporate and leaves committee members and unit owners with no uncertainty as to the rights and the responsibilities of their body corporate. It is important, however, that this code of conduct is seen to be enforceable rather than there being voluntary guidelines with no consequence in instances where the code is breached. To this end, the bill amends regulation modules to empower the BCCM and CCT to remove a committee member from office where they have been found to be carrying out conduct contrary to that which is expected of a voting committee member. It should be noted here that the coalition proposes that the code of conduct include a provision requiring the compulsory exclusion of a committee member from voting on an issue where a conflict of interest is seen to exist. This will ensure that the unit owners' interests rather than the commercial interests of body corporate managers and caretakers are always observed.

Perhaps the greatest shortfall of this legislation is that it does not go far enough in regulating the troubled body corporate industry. There are two elements to this—licensing and auditing. I will deal with the latter first. As I mentioned earlier, many of my constituents who are fighting unjust body corporates and who have had dealings with the BCCM body corporate managers and who have had dealings with the BCCM feel disenfranchised because of the current law's tendency to favour the institution over individuals. In bringing this legislation forward we must not forget who we are seeking to protect. Body corporates are a powerful entity. There is no form of quality control over who can buy management rights. Once in body corporate, managers and caretakers have unrestricted access to group bank accounts which are often administered under their own name. Furthermore, body corporate managements are not required to be audited by law. As a result, the opportunity for mismanagement is rife.

Body corporates need to be held to account. Requiring body corporates to undergo semiregular audits, or at least body corporates that are bigger than sixpacks or duplexes, would enhance the professionalism of the organisation and deter misuse of body corporate power. The other important point to note here is the fact that body corporate managers are not required to be registered. Body corporate managers do not need a minimum education qualification and they are not required to pass a probity check. Anyone can purchase management rights over a community title scheme without any kind of input by the residents affected. Once they have taken rights, residents have few options for action against managers and caretakers. Because most body corporate managers have invested financial interest in the community title, it is extremely difficult to remove them from office, even where they have been found to have acted against the interests of unit owners.

It seems passing strange that the only penalty attached to the codes of conduct is against owners, and that was pointed out by my colleague the honourable member for Clayfield. What is needed is a licensing scheme whereby body corporate managers and caretakers must obtain registration before buying into a community title scheme. A controlled licensing system could lay down certain requirements of body corporate managers and caretakers which would be particularly beneficial where it pertains to financial arrangements. A body corporate manager licensing scheme could involve education and training as a necessity for holding a licence and could provide a forum where bad body corporates can be reported and investigated.

One of my constituents made a good point about licensing with regard to the code of conduct that this legislation constructs. If body corporate managers are not required to be licensed, what incentive will they have to uphold a code of conduct when they cannot be excluded from the organisation due to their vested financial interest in the body corporate? It seems bizarre that the persons involved in aiding managers in purchasing a community title scheme, such as lawyers and real estate agents, must be licensed yet managers do not. Given that the number of community title schemes and therefore the number of body corporate managers and caretakers is only going to increase, I believe we need to implement tougher controls on managers, and now is the opportunity to do it. The Unit Owners and Body Corporate Alliance has been advocating for a licensing system and would like to see all current body corporate managers and caretakers registered immediately. Whilst this would prevent current managers from having to undergo the same processes and scrutiny—new managers would—it is preferable to the situation where there is no licensing and therefore no checks and balances at all.

While some of these measures seem excessive, as the Unit Owners and Body Corporate Alliance pointed out, good managers have nothing to fear from these reforms. Reforms to this effect would instil a sense of professionalism in the body corporate industry and might go some of the way to restoring people's faith in a system which for far too long has been underregulated and unaccountable. I support the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, with amendments, and I call on the minister to enact these necessary enhancements to dispute resolution procedures. I would ask that the minister give credence to the coalition's call for a licensing scheme and consider it in her reply, as it is widely supported within the industry and will only enhance the industry in the long term.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (6.23 pm): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to participate in the debate on the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. I want to start by taking members to the amendments proposed to the Liquor Act 1992 where the minister has led by introducing a significant amendment to the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal. During the debate this evening a number of members have spoken about the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal. My experience and my dealing with the members on this tribunal is that the members are genuine, caring and very competent. I can assure members that they certainly know the law. They certainly have ability and they certainly have experience. I want to put on the record that I think our current tribunal members are very competent and apt to deal with the matters before them.

In relation to the amendment that will allow the submission of new evidence involving liquor licensing matters before the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal, I think this is a great move and I thank the minister for taking on board the matter I raised in my private member's bill last year, because I believe it is a genuine request and certainly necessary. I draw members' attention to the fact that the fresh evidence that can be produced can also be required when the tribunal considers that the applicant for the liquor licence has failed in their responsibility in following through all of the issues they are required to present to the chief executive officer in their application. I think that is very important. The key things are that it allows new evidence to be produced to the tribunal and it gives tribunal members greater powers to ask for information to refer matters back to the chief executive for further consideration. I urge members to read the minister's second reading speech and, perhaps if they are interested, read my private member's bill that was introduced earlier, because I think it is a great initiative for Queenslanders and for the people who have concerns that they would like to take to the tribunal.

I want to take members to the other part of the bill dealing with the body corporate component. I have been in contact with Colin Lamont, Chairman of the Unit Owners and Body Corporate Alliance. He has raised with me some concerns, and I know that he has spoken with the minister and departmental staff and they are aware of his concerns. Without being over the top, I say to the minister that I hope there continues to be an ongoing review of the legislation. I certainly believe that there is perhaps room to greater police our body corporate management entities. I look forward to the shadow minister's amendments being discussed in the consideration in detail stage and listening to the minister's response and seeing where that will go. I have some concerns about the operation of some of our body corporate management entities. I believe that there is room for licensing in the future. Some of the submissions that have been brought to my attention by two people in particular raise some real concerns that perhaps mirror the comments made by the member for Surfers Paradise, but I do not intend to raise those on the floor of the chamber.

Debate, on motion of Mr Wellington, adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 6.27 pm to 7.30 pm.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (7.30 pm): I move—

That orders of the day Nos 2 to 4 be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Resumed from 6 February (see p. 78).

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (7.30 pm): Like many of my conservative colleagues, I have been waiting for months to deliver my address-in-reply. It is an example of the arrogance and mismanagement of this government that we have only now been given the opportunity to reply to our state Governor's speech.

I thank the Governor for her opening address to the 52nd Parliament and her exemplary service to the people of Queensland and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. It is an honour and a great joy to be re-elected to this place as member for Burnett. I dedicate the election victory once again to the memory of my mum, Irene Messenger. Being the member for Burnett is a duty which I have and I will continue to take seriously. I am privileged to find myself in this position for a number of reasons, the first being that I am here by God's grace and I offer all the glory to his son and my saviour, Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that I am given the courage to follow his will. The second reason I was re-elected to this place is that the majority of the people of Burnett have decided to trust me to be their representative in this, the 52nd Parliament of Queensland. I will do everything in my power to work hard for, honour, advocate for and repay that trust of the majority of voters. I will also work hard for, honour, advocate for and try to win the trust of those who did not vote for me. The third reason that I find myself standing in this place is because of the hard work, dedication and professionalism of a great team starting with my electorate officers, Bronwen Stewart and Melinda Bradford. Most members would have difficulty arguing against the proposition that in reality it is their electorate officers and staff members who do 99 per cent of the hard work. I offer my gratitude and humble thanks to Bronny and Mel.

Thanks must also be given to my campaign director, Noel Bowman; election committee members David and Patricia Hayward, Ernie and Elaine Jobson and also the many National Party members who stuffed envelopes, answered phones and handed out how-to-vote cards.

On Wednesday, 11 October last year I had the privilege to hear Jack Dempsey deliver to this place his maiden speech as the new member for Bundaberg and I would like to congratulate him on his tenacious, historic victory and thank him for his fellowship, good humour and courage. The people of Bundaberg truly have a champion who will listen to their cries of help during a time of need and also their words of wisdom when the time for action is at hand.

I am very fortunate to have the love and support of my family. Without the encouragement and backing of my cousin, Matthew; my brothers, Dan and Greg; nephew, Corey; and niece, Kira, and my tirelessly hardworking father, Des Messenger, and not forgetting my sister-in-law, Dawn, I would not be standing in this place. Nor would I be standing in this place if I did not have the love of my beautiful fiancée, Tarni, and my adopted second family, the Egberts, Lyn, Rennie and Grandad.

For me, the re-election of the Beattie Labor government has taught me a couple of valuable lessons: firstly, Queenslanders will punish the conservative political parties if we do not have a rock solid conservative coalition and, secondly, Queenslanders have a great capacity to forgive. They have forgiven this government's eight years of mismanagement and inaction, eight years of excuses, scandals and cover-ups. They have forgiven this government for eight years of increasing hospital waiting lists, declining work standards, increasing traffic jams and declining standards of justice. They have forgiven a Premier who explained away these significant failings by essentially saying, 'Don't judge us by our record or the fruits of our labour; judge us by what we are promising. We're gonna.' It is sad to think that after eight years of being in charge of this state we have a Premier who has turned into a 'gonna'. This magnificent capital city, Brisbane, that we gather in and our great regional and rural communities would never have prospered if our predecessors and leaders had been a bunch of 'gonnas'.

Recently I attended the funeral of one of the iconic pioneers and founders of the South Kolan community, Mr Reg Jensen. Through backbreaking hard work, sweat and determination, Reg brought into being a farm, raised a family and created physical, moral and spiritual wealth for our community. The highest praise Reg could bestow on his fellow man or woman was to describe that person as a doer. If we as a community are to continue to prosper then we need a lot more doers; we need a lot more Reg Jensens whose actions speak far louder than any words. We need a Premier who is able to make the transition from a gonna into a doer. It is very difficult for former patients of Jayant Patel to speak out because of the secrecy provisions. They risk losing every cent of compensation if they disclose to anyone the amount of money that they have received from the government. Can the Attorney-General guarantee that each Patel victim who goes through mediation received or will receive at least equal, if not more, compensation than what the lawyers are getting? The Premier must live up to his promise to pay the Medicare payment and not deduct it from the patients' compensation.

Widows at the moment are not being compensated fairly. Is it fair that they only receive funeral costs at a maximum of about \$10,000? If Jayant Patel were found guilty widows and widowers would then officially be victims of crime and then able to claim up to \$75,000 in compensation under state laws. Special mediation processes should be extended to all victims of Queensland Heath who were mentioned in the royal commission hearings in Hervey Bay, Charters Towers, Rockhampton and Townsville.

Once again I warn Patel victims not to be bullied in the mediation process. The Attorney-General has indicated that about 20 former Patel victims will be going through the state's special mediation process. Patel victims have the right to a cooling-off period; they do not have to sign right there and then. They should take some time to think about the first offer. Lawyers should be telling Patel victims that they have at least 24 hours before accepting a government offer of compensation. If victims are confused about their legal rights, they should get a second opinion.

I also raise concerns tonight over medico-legal reports commissioned by the Beattie government that I have sighted which basically give the doctor—Patel—the benefit of the doubt. I would like to remind people that if they have suffered health complications after treatment at the Bundaberg Base Hospital between April 2003 and March 2005 it is up to the government to prove that Patel did not cause those complications, not the other way round. Patel was fraudulently registered and has a comprehensive history of misconduct, dishonesty and incompetence. He should be on trial, not the victims. Victims should ensure that their medico-legal reports are accurate and fair and do not give Patel the benefit of the doubt.

I would like victims to remember that Dr De Lacy gave evidence during the inquiry that Patel's surgery techniques were defective and that the magnitude of his errors—the number of problems that he has had, the number of deaths he had—were not 10 times what we might expect; they were more like 100 times worse. When expert doctors were asked if they would let Patel operate on them they said no. Once again I call on the Attorney-General to guarantee that Patel victims are given a reasonable amount of time to consider the government's compensation offer and that the compensation process continues in a just and fair manner. On the subject of compensation payments, I would like to remind the government that it cannot hide behind changes to the civil liability and personal injuries legislation and use it as an excuse for low payouts. The special compensation process is to be guided by the civil liability and personal injuries legislation, not governed by it.

The record population growth in the Burnett is also of concern to me. I call on the government to share vital health information and statistics with the mums and dads of Bundaberg-Burnett so that realistic solutions can be found for the future healthcare needs of the area. It is up to the government to release its master facility plan for the Bundaberg Base Hospital to ensure that there are enough doctors, nurses, specialists and hospital beds to look after not only this generation but also future generations. There needs to be an informed, open and honest debate within the community about short-term and long-term plans, which the area desperately needs in order to provide for future healthcare needs.

Beattie made an election promise to spend \$418 million to fix up the health crisis in Bundaberg, but it is evident that he has made the promises without a proper plan. It is silly to throw money at a healthcare plan without having a proper plan. The latest population growth figures from the Bureau of Statistics are a wake-up call that we need proper plans in place. The Wide Bay-Burnett area is experiencing record growth. If that continues, Bundaberg Base Hospital will service a population of approximately 200,000 people in 10 years time. The current service area is about 120,000 people, which now includes at least four new outlying hospitals, including those at Monto, Biggenden, Mundubbera and Eidsvold. Will Bundaberg's existing hospital be able to cope with the increased demand?

I am very encouraged by the progress at the Bundaberg Base Hospital, but the reality is that the hospital is still experiencing bed shortages. In 1989, the hospital had 216 beds. Now there are 120 full-time care beds. Adult patients are still being mixed with kids in paediatrics. Medical and surgical wards are operating at near 100 per cent capacity. There is significant access block. There are lengthy waiting times in the accident and emergency section. There is a six-year dental waiting list. There is a record number of births—over 1,200 a year—with only four birthing suites. Despite government promises for over a year and a half, mental health patients are still being transferred to other regions—Rockhampton and the Sunshine Coast. The rehabilitation section is still being used for overnight care for mental health services. Structural deficiencies are still evident in the hospital's design.

Recently I met with the CEO of Bundaberg Base Hospital, Pattie Scott. I was very happy with that meeting. Because they have experienced the worst health disaster in Australia's history, Bundaberg and Burnett residents deserve the best public health care in Australia. I look forward to working in a cooperative and close manner with Pattie and her outstanding professional team to achieve that goal.

I have been approached by a prison officer and the Prisoner Officers Association of Queensland, which represents him. I have been asked to draw to the attention of this House that, against their wishes and obviously against their knowledge, files—now secret files—are being kept by this government on its public servants, namely, prison officers. These files are created through using confidential information obtained during employee psychological counselling sessions. This government, through the Department of Corrective Services, is now trying to bully, intimidate and harass an employee who has an outstanding and heroic work record and who is now trying to claim whistleblower status. Instead of thanking this employee for exposing an absolute betrayal of trust and serious breach of civil rights, this government is determined to ruin his career by suggesting that he has breached his employment code of conduct by contacting me, the appropriate shadow minister and a member of this parliament, and his industrial association.

Prison officers are our unsung heroes. They go about their work quietly and courageously. Their professionalism and dedication to duty allows us to sleep soundly and safely in our beds while they ensure that justice is visited on those who would do us and our loved ones harm. Often in the line of duty prison officers experience extraordinary physical and psychological hardships. They are punched, spat at, kicked, stabbed, shot and verbally abused. Their families and relationships are placed under extreme pressure. Prison officers, witness and experience events that are the stuff of our worst nightmares. Their job ensures that they will come into contact with the worst kind of depravities known to humankind.

In order to cope with such experiences or critical incidents, prison officers, just like every other public servant employed by this government, have been told that they are able to obtain counselling through private companies, such as Interlock. I table a document from its web site which states in bold print—

Don't delay, make a counselling appointment today ... It's free and confidential—interlock does not tell your employer.

Tabled paper: During his speech, Mr Messenger tabled a copy of a brochure titled 'Interlock—The Professional Choice—Wallet Card'.

Nowhere in Interlock's advertising is the truth revealed. Prison officers and state public servants discovered the truth in a written reply by the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to a question on notice during the last sitting of this House in which she confirmed the existence of secret employee files containing confidential information obtained during government approved counselling sessions. She states—

Such reports are held confidentially on local file by the management unit and are not placed on personnel files or workers compensation files.

The minister's answer, tabled last week, proves beyond doubt that Interlock and this Labor government have misled the prison officers of Queensland. How many more state government public servants, who have used the government's confidential counselling services, have secret files following them around which are now being kept at the discretion of local department managers? If that is not bad enough, the minister then adds insult to injury by disclosing and detailing in her reply an extraordinary situation in which she states—

It is at the discretion of the manager as to when that document is destroyed.

The minister has now disclosed that she is quite happy for these secret public records to be destroyed on the whim of a local manager. This government has established a secret reporting system which has no checks and balances, is open to rorting and increases the opportunity for corruption.

The prison officers have long suspected the existence of these secret files but have never had the proof. The minister's reply is proof, as are her actions. The minister, through her director-general, Mr Frank Rocket, is threatening the prison officer who has blown the whistle on this situation with misconduct and disciplinary action because he gave a document that detailed his confidential psychological counselling to his industrial association and the relevant shadow minister. Those are exactly the same tactics that the government used to try to silence nurse whistleblower Toni Hoffman. This arrogant, sleazy Labor government has not learned a thing in the past three years and two royal commissions. You do not shoot the messenger and then try to cover up the message. It is disgraceful that this government is keeping secret files on its public servants.

I am very proud to be the coalition's police and corrective services shadow minister for Queensland. I would like to thank the police and corrective service officers for the magnificent and professional manner in which they do their job. All members know that police and corrective service officers work very, very hard to protect and keep our families safe. I am going to do my utmost to work with those officers to help them do their job.

As I travel around the state—I have been to Townsville, Ayr and Palm Island—I am starting to build up a better picture of the portfolio. I am going to try to improve the resourcing and training that those officers need to do their job. Quite frankly, I think the portfolio is too big for the current minister. We have secret files, an unprecedented vote of no confidence in the Premier by the police and there are no telephone-tapping powers in Queensland. We are the only state in mainland Australia that does not have those powers. Yet the Premier is still coming out and making these shonky excuses. We do not have any police helicopter. We are the amphetamine capital of Australia—the Premier admitted that a couple of years ago. We are the organised crime capital of Australia.

Government members interjected.

Mr MESSENGER: There are 42 unsolved sex attacks in Brisbane. Yet the members opposite still carp on and try to interject. They have no respect for the families who would like to use the walkways and cycleways in Brisbane without being assaulted.

The latest Parliamentary Library research has provided me with some figures which cause me alarm and would indicate that this government has not really kept pace with the amount of funding spent per head of population for police services when compared with all of the other states. In 2004-05, Queensland spent the least—\$265.

Mr Schwarten: Table that.

Mr MESSENGER: I have already tabled it. Compare that figure with, for example, Tasmania, \$312; South Australia, \$311; and New South Wales, \$286. These statistics show that Queensland when compared with all other states spends the least per head of population on policing. I know that we have the promise from this government of a new \$450 million police academy at Wacol, which is planned for completion by 2012. But a close examination of the recruitment and training figures reveals that there has been a steady decline under this government since 1998.

On the subject of local policing, the Moore Park community needs a police beat. It has experienced slow response times, and the closest law enforcement is 30 minutes away.

Time expired.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Darling): Order! Before I call the member for Mansfield, I remind members to keep their conversation to an absolute minimum. The volume is too high in this chamber.

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (7.50 pm): It is great to rise to make a positive contribution to the address-in-reply debate. If we ever want to hear an example of why we were re-elected to government on 9 September, we have just heard why. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which parliament stands and which the Mansfield electorate covers. I would like to dedicate this speech—and this is appropriate with Thursday being International Women's Day—to those four vital and important women in my life—my wife, Megan, and my three gorgeous girls: Brianna, my big girl, who is 4½ and just started kindy; Ashleigh, my little terror, who is 2¾; and the media tart herself, six-month-old Jemma.

While many have said to me the timing of the birth during the election campaign was great—and I think the member for Cunningham will agree with what I am about to say—I think we made the most of a very anxious and difficult period. My wife is an amazing woman. She not only had to endure the late stages of pregnancy and the birth but an election campaign. Prior to going into hospital, Megan wanted to make sure that every one of our staff and volunteers were looked after. Nothing could stop this remarkable lady. I reckon that if you talk to any of our volunteers they will tell you that they were the most well looked after campaign team in Queensland.

I love her dearly for her effort above and beyond the call of duty before, during and after the campaign. I said in my first speech that I was not a traditional politician, with the wife and 2½ kids. Well, I have gone past that. I now have three kids, but I do not regret that at all. To have someone as loyal and supportive as Megan, and the kids just keep it real, completes the feeling of accomplishment. When I am tired and young Ashleigh wakes up at five in the morning and says, 'Daddy, I want my Vita bickies,' I know what is important and it is not the trivial matter I may be worried about, that is for sure. I should add though that I still do not think I am a traditional politician, but I do not think there are too many left.

It is with great pride that I stand before you today as the representative of the Mansfield electorate. It is a humbling experience to be returned to this position for a fourth term. It is even more humbling when my first election win was by only 83 votes. Since my first election win in 1998 I have thoroughly enjoyed working hard for the people of Mansfield. To be able to listen, act and get results for the people of my electorate provides me with great joy. It is a great honour to represent the people of the area in which I was born and bred and am now raising a family.

The result of the election on 9 September was great for the Australian Labor Party in Queensland and it was due to many factors. Across the state, strong leadership, sound policy and exceptional candidates were surely the catalyst for our win. In my little corner of Queensland the 2006 Phil Reeves team was fantastic. I am thankful for the countless number of volunteers in the ALP who supported me. Volunteers are the lifeblood of Australia's greatest political party, the Australian Labor Party.

It is an inspiration seeing that there are people in our community willing to give up their time, whether it be to staff street stalls, fold and stuff envelopes, put signs in their yards, drop leaflets into letterboxes, give out how-to-vote cards on election day or sit on street corners with big signs featuring my ugly mug. With a face for radio, I know I did not get where I am today based on my looks. I am here today thanks in very large part to the ALP members and supporters' hard work, support and commitment to the Labor movement.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise some outstanding members of the Labor team in Mansfield. I particularly thank my electorate officers, Sarah Harvey, Ravi Chandra and Jo Briskey. I truly appreciate their commitment, hard work and loyalty prior to and during the election campaign. I would like to commend them for their selflessness and for their commitment to me and the Labor Party. Sarah's ability to look after the finest details, particularly constituent matters, is outstanding, and I thank her for that. My campaign director, Steve Gay, was the man behind the wheel for the campaign, and I thank him for his tireless efforts to ensure Labor remained the only choice for the people of Mansfield.

Local ALP members, Keith Brinnin, Natalie Lobb and Peter Wood, were always there for me, and I thank them for their efforts and their ability to rally the troops, ensuring many hands on deck for the campaign. Labor members from the Mansfield and Garden City branches and throughout Brisbane and the members of the Missos—the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union—were

there when the hard work needed to be done. I need to make special mention of Shirley and Len Fallows, Ian McFarlane, Keith Mackenzie, Dugald Reid, Hazel Shields, Ashley Spendlove, the Bennett family and my great mate John Coakley.

To the many volunteers, both family and friends, who helped during the campaign: I am indebted to you for all your faith in me and your everlasting friendship. You have helped me become who I am today, and I hope to one day be able to give to you what you have given to me. I specifically want to thank my good friend, the real John Howard, for once again heeding the call and coming down from Blackbutt for the campaign. His assistance, help and calming influence were vital ingredients once again for our success.

To our special friends, particularly Mark Eaves, Reuben Carlos, Steve Axe, Jo Perry and their respective families, I thank them for not only helping out but also being our friends who keep me real. To each and every member of my family: I cannot thank you enough for always being there for me—from when I was just a little nipper in my own nappies to now as a father who changes my daughter's nappies. To my dad and big brother Kevin and to my brother Tony, sisters Donna and Anne and their families, I say thank you. A particularly big thank you goes to my nephew Daniel who was so valuable in the last few weeks. Thanks for your love and support. I would not be able to achieve what I have without the support of my family.

To my extended family, Megan's mum, Rita—she is presently at the Mater hospital after having had an operation yesterday, and I hope she has a speedy recovery—sister Anissa and her husband Mick Trevitt: thanks for not only accepting me as part of your family but for your unconditional support and efforts that have contributed to my success. I met Megan through her late father, Bob, who was a great Labor Party branch member before his untimely death.

Time has delivered many changes in my life and I must make special mention, as I did before, of the quite timely birth of my third daughter, Jemma Kate Reeves. Jemma came into this world in the final weeks of the election campaign and, although I was unable to get her on to the roll in time, her presence gave me a huge boost in motivation so that I could make it through the campaign.

In 1998, the support of 83 additional voters helped me to beat the Liberal candidate. In 2001, the support of 4,060 additional voters helped me to beat the same Liberal candidate. In 2004, the support of another 4,112 additional voters helped me to beat another Liberal candidate. And this time around the support of 3,601 additional voters helped me to once again beat my Liberal counterpart. However, I cannot and do not take all the credit for these results. The leadership the Beattie Labor government has provided for our great state is the major reason I and every other Labor member remain in this chamber.

I am proud to be an active member of and contributor to the Beattie Labor government, and I am extremely proud to be part of a state government that has delivered so much for the community and the residents of the Mansfield electorate. I believe that in the history of the state of Queensland no other government has provided more results for the residents of the Mansfield electorate than the Beattie Labor government. While Mansfield residents can expect many more initiatives to be delivered within the next few years, now might be a good time to acknowledge and recognise just how well the Beattie Labor government has provided for the Mansfield electorate in the areas of education, health, job creation and training, police and transport.

One thing that has not changed since I was first elected in 1998 is my passionate belief in the importance of strong community and the valuable role that community groups play in our communities. Since 1998 it has been my privilege to work with the many and varied community groups in my electorate. Here and now I thank each and every one of them for all the work that they have done and continue to do. The people involved form a very varied bunch, but what they have in common is a desire to help people and make a contribution to their communities, and they are selfless in that pursuit. I thank them.

I am pleased that the Beattie Labor government recognises the contribution of those groups. Since coming to office, the Beattie government has provided over \$600,000 to local sporting and community groups in the Mansfield electorate. It has also funded—and the member for Mount Gravatt will like this one—the completion of the PCYC centre in Upper Mount Gravatt, which was completed in 2004 to the tune of almost \$650,000.

The Beattie Labor government knows and understands the importance of education and has provided more funds for education than any other government in Queensland history. The Beattie Labor government has ensured that Queensland children will have the best possible education in this nation.

Mr Copeland: Are your kids in prep?

Mr REEVES: No, my child is not in prep actually.

I am proud of the relationship that I have with the 13 government and non-government schools in my local area. One of the highlights of representing the electorate of Mansfield is the opportunity I have to meet the amazing young people of my local area. If the students of the Mansfield electorate are anything to go by, the generation that will succeed us as leaders of the state will be well equipped to keep Queensland moving in the right direction. Schools in the Mansfield electorate boast a wide range

of high achievers, from future scientists to current Olympians. The schools of the Mansfield electorate have a culture of success. The Beattie Labor government has recognised and rewarded the culture of success in those Smart State schools.

I was extremely pleased to hear the announcement that Mansfield electorate state schools would share in a total of \$487,300, which is part of the \$50 million commitment by the Beattie government to improve facilities for students. I was pleased to see that each school community will decide how the school's grant will be spent. Schools in the Mansfield electorate will continue to benefit under the Beattie Labor government. I am also very excited about the commencement of prep classes, which are now available in all schools. This Beattie government initiative will equip our children with the best possible learning advantages.

During and leading up to the election campaign, health was identified as a leading concern for many Queenslanders. Although the Queensland health system is one of the best in the world, it is definitely not without its limitations and problems. Over the past year we have seen the emergence of some serious problems that have affected the health care available to our communities. However, I am extremely proud to be a member of a government that does not try to shift blame or hide from its mistakes. I am proud to be a member of a Labor government that faces its mistakes and acts to rectify them quickly and efficiently.

The Health Action Plan is already providing results for all Queenslanders with more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals taking up positions in our local hospitals and healthcare facilities. I am extremely pleased that since 2004 members of my electorate have benefited from the unprecedented funding that the Beattie Labor government has given to the Queensland health system. Since 2004 the Beattie Labor government has provided close to \$8 million of the total \$111 million for the redevelopment of the Mater Hospital. A sum of \$3.94 million was provided for the Princess Alexandra Hospital Service District for medical equipment including electrocardiographic machines, transmitters, medical and video cameras, patient monitors and vital sign monitors. A sum of \$1.04 million has been allocated to manage the demand for services in the QEII Health Service District, as well as an additional \$768,000 for medical equipment including autoclaves, dental chairs, dental units and dental lights. Over five years, the QEII Hospital has received an additional \$4.75 million for in-patient palliative care services.

The Beattie government remains committed to improving traffic and road infrastructure in the Mansfield electorate. I am proud to be a local member of parliament who travels on the very roads and catches the very public transport that is of concern to the residents of the electorate of Mansfield. I have lived in the electorate and understand the everyday traffic problems that are experienced by local residents, perhaps unlike my federal counterpart, the member for Moreton, who appears to lack action. Rather than just talk about positive change, I am proud—

Ms Jones: He sent out a brochure about it.

Mr REEVES: He did send out brochures about it and more will be revealed shortly.

I am proud that the Beattie Labor government listens, acts and gets results for the residents of the Mansfield electorate. Rather than whine and complain about the recommendations of the Brisbane urban corridor study, the Beattie government has funded and implemented the obligations that were recommended by the study. Historically, that should come as no surprise to those familiar with the traffic problems outlined by the Brisbane urban corridor study. I am proud to be a strong voice in the Beattie Labor government, which has called for the removal of the dangerous goods route along the Brisbane urban corridor. I am proud to be the voice that represents the people of the Mansfield electorate in the Beattie Labor government. I am proud of the fact that this voice has been heard and acted upon, with the dangerous goods route being removed.

I will continue to fight for the residents of the Mansfield electorate to help keep the Howard government accountable for its promises to implement the findings of the Brisbane urban corridor. Let us see if it actually does anything other than a planning study for the Mains and Kessels roads project. Let us see the federal government put the money up for that project as it did yesterday for the Ipswich Motorway. However, I am concerned that because the federal government has taken the wrong option for the Ipswich Motorway it will pass on the project for Mains and Kessels roads, probably because it thinks that Mr Hargraves has no chance. It is probably right, too.

The Beattie Labor government has also delivered on public transport and, more than anyone else, the residents of the Mansfield electorate have benefited from our world-class public transport system. I am very pleased that in my new position as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport I will be able to work further to ensure that the constituents of Mansfield have access to the best possible transport system, as will many other people from throughout south-east Queensland and Queensland as a whole. It is anticipated that south-east Queensland will experience a large increase in traffic, so I am excited and eager to be working alongside the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, the Hon. Paul Lucas, to ensure that Queensland public transport will become the ideal mode of transport for all those who work in and around the city centre.

As members may be aware, I am the No. 1 paying ticket holder on the South East Busway. The \$350 million South East Busway is going from strength to strength, as evidenced by skyrocketing patronage levels. Just the other day, my assistant electorate officer Jo started working in the city as the administration officer in my parliamentary secretary office. She has raved about using the South East Busway, and said she feels no envy for those stuck in the banked up traffic on the South East Freeway. The busway's popularity is so immense that in the space of an hour between 7 am and 8 am the hundreds and hundreds of existing car park spaces get snapped up by eager commuters at the Eight Mile Plains bus station. The Beattie Labor government has delivered on the commitment to provide 300 extra car park spaces at Eight Mile Plains, which was greatly appreciated by the busway patrons.

The Beattie government has also delivered on transport for those in our community who need a little extra assistance, providing \$10 million per year for a taxi subsidy scheme for people with disabilities and \$120 million per year for the school transport assistance scheme to help more than 140,000 Queensland school students get to primary, secondary and special education facilities.

It is not just in health, education and transport that the Beattie Labor government has delivered for the people of Queensland and the residents of the Mansfield electorate. In public housing, Labor delivered \$1.05 million for the renewal of 32 public rental houses at Rochedale South. The Beattie Labor government continues to provide the Mansfield people with improved policing and community safety with extra police on the beat. That has resulted in the reduction of crime. I thank the minister for police, who is the member for the neighbouring electorate of Mount Gravatt. She knows exactly what is required for our local community.

The Beattie Labor government's strong economic leadership has meant that Queensland leads the nation. I was so pleased to hear that during the past couple of months the unemployment rate has continued to drop to a record low. Peter Beattie's promise of jobs, jobs, jobs has been delivered. Members on the other side of the chamber laughed, but it has been delivered. The opposition thought it was never possible.

I also believe one of my best achievements in the last election campaign was actually getting the person who is sitting beside me here into parliament. It was 1998 when the member for Mount Gravatt introduced me to the member for Chatsworth at a function a week after I was elected. In fact, it was the now member for Chatsworth who informed me that the then beaten member for Mansfield was going to challenge me in a court case. I was happy to develop that friendship and now call 'Bomba' a great mate. It was great to have him join my local branch in 2000. It was the best kept secret in south Brisbane. It is great to have him here now. Well done, 'Bomba'.

In closing, I recall that my campaign slogan in 1998 was a 'local through and through'. I recall that in my first speech in this place I said that I was not your traditional politician with a wife and 2½ kids. Obviously I am well past being a traditional politician now. However, my 'local through and through' saying remains as true today as it was then. I am proud to be raising a family in the area I was raised in.

I would like to state again that it is a privilege and an honour to represent the people of the Mansfield electorate where I have lived my entire life. I thank the Peter Beattie Labor government for its contribution to the Mansfield electorate. I look forward to working hard for the people of the Mansfield electorate over the next three years. I will let them be the judge of my performance.

Time expired.

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (8.10 pm): I am very proud and honoured to be standing here tonight as the re-elected member for Burleigh and part of the fourth Beattie government. On 9 September the Queensland people gave this government the opportunity to form a government and deliver commitments made during the campaign.

In Burleigh the swing towards the government was more than three per cent. It was an improvement consistent with the previous election. A margin of over eight per cent is a great deal better than the one per cent margin I lived with for my first term in office. I must say that living on that sort of knife edge is excellent training as a grassroots MP. Knowing your hold on the job is so slender commits you to a lot of hard but very enjoyable work.

The Gold Coast took the issue of water very seriously during the election campaign. We have been enduring water restrictions for many years, and the residents of the Gold Coast are well educated on the subject. They knew that a plan was needed to effectively provide for the future. The government's water plan has provided that and has given the city the reassurance it was seeking that this problem will be managed in a responsible and cohesive way.

The other issue that dominated the election campaign was health. We all know and accept that the Queensland health system requires some major work. The Health Action Plan provides funding, organisation and a workable plan for the future. I make the point of saying that the system required improvement, not the workers of Queensland Health. The doctors, nurses and allied health professionals do an amazing job under sometimes very difficult circumstances. Scarcely a week goes

by that I do not hear from a constituent how wonderful their treatment was at the Gold Coast Hospital. I hope that the Health Action Plan will allow the workers of Queensland Health to continue their work with improved satisfaction and rewards and provide a better outcome for the people of Queensland.

It is no secret to the members of this House that one of the causes closest to my heart is mental health care. This government has listened to me, to the parents and friends of the mentally ill and to the people of Queensland. A much greater emphasis is being placed on this essential healthcare service. This government has more than doubled mental health spending since first coming to office. In addition to our record \$472 million package already being spent on mental health, an extra \$200 million over five years has been committed to mental health. This is not to say that I intend to leave either the Premier or the health minister in peace. I will continue to pursue this issue, and I thank the minister and the Premier for their willingness to listen and to act.

I could not continue to represent the people of Burleigh without the dedicated and enthusiastic support of my electorate officers—Marion, Liza and Jan. They make sure the office runs smoothly, they deal with constituents with empathy and professionalism and make sure I am where I am supposed to be at any time of the day or night. I accept the thanks from the constituents but often it is my electorate officers who deserve the credit!

I cannot let this moment pass without thanking those wonderful volunteers who helped during the campaign. I could not have got by without Noela and George Carrett, Tom and Jan Mole, Susan Mason, Shirley and Len Fallows, John Dwyer, Dan Byron and all other members of the Burleigh branch. It still amazes me that 61,500 letters were printed, folded and enveloped by this dedicated band of helpers in just two weeks!

My husband is my source of strength. 2006 was a very difficult year for our family but, with his unfailing support, I was able to continue to represent the people of Burleigh to the best of my ability. I thank the people of Burleigh for putting their trust in me and hope that I never let them down.

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (8.14 pm): It is an honour to represent the people of Mount Gravatt in this House. I was first elected to the Queensland parliament in 1989. Since that time I have been re-elected another six times. It is a privilege to be the longest-serving member for Mount Gravatt and also the longest-serving female member in this House. For this continued support I have to thank the 27,000 electors who live in my electorate. That the people of Mount Gravatt continue to re-elect me to the Queensland parliament gives me cause to reflect upon the achievements of the government and the faith that the people have placed in me as their representative.

Mount Gravatt is one of the state's most culturally diverse electorates. I regularly meet with representatives of the various ethnic communities as I attend functions throughout the year. These communities bring richness and diversity to schools, local businesses, the local economy and our everyday life. The 2001 census found that 32 per cent of the people who live in the Mount Gravatt area were born overseas, and I am sure this number has increased in recent years. Late last year I hosted a multicultural seniors morning tea with the member for Mansfield to celebrate our area's cultural diversity. The response was overwhelming with more than 400 people attending the event. These communities have all been very proactive in seeking government support to introduce new initiatives and programs that encourage a better understanding of the diversity in our community as well as helping them to access new skills training and education.

The new Muslim Business Network, led by Dr Mahomed Khatree, is doing some great work in helping provide the fundamental support systems that are important to all businesses. Muslims have called the Mount Gravatt area home for over a century. I am very pleased that the community is continuing to thrive.

I recently met with the newly-elected President of the Islamic Council of Queensland, Mr Suliman Sabdia, and I look forward to building a sound relationship with this council. I also have a great relationship with the Somalia Women's Association. Led by Mumina Isse, they are wonderful ambassadors for their culture and beliefs. I meet regularly with Mumina. I was happy to help launch the new program the association is running at Mount Gravatt State School to promote better understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim families.

Herrick Wong is a leader within our local Chinese community and heads the Happy Seniors Club, Sunnybank. This group runs social and community events for people in its community. I have been happy to assist it to apply for funding to continue its good work. I cannot talk about the Chinese community without mentioning the wonderful work that Mr Michael Yau does in so many fields of endeavour.

Mount Gravatt is also home to a very active Greek community. I have worked with community members such as Irene Cayas over the years to represent their interests and assist them with funding to undertake various local projects. I also have very strong links with many Taiwanese and Chinese organisations in my electorate, and I value their friendship and strong support.

My re-election with an increased margin in 2006 was in part due to the forward-looking policies of the Beattie government but also due to the efforts of my many supporters whose efforts I would like to recognise today. My campaign was strongly supported by members of the local branch. My thanks go to John and Margaret O'Donnell, Brian and Mary Dutton, Hazel Shields, Marcos DeOrleans, Chris Jeppesen, Ron and Shirley Wimott, Bernie Dawson, Robbie Williams, Geoff Coakley, Pat Miller, Rex Bowen, Grace Lagos and Ian Lang, just to name a few members of the branch. These people gave up hours of their time to prepare and distribute election material, staff booths and erect signs. For this I sincerely thank them. In addition, my campaign was ably supported by many community groups such as the Happy Seniors and First Contact as well as local businesses in the Mount Gravatt area.

There are 22 schools in the Mount Gravatt electorate. As a parent and a former teacher I know how important it is to give our young people every possible advantage in their education. The people I represent are motivated by the desire for their children to have a good education. Generally I think the students in our local schools value education and are achieving very good results.

Our schools are delivering a world-class education which focuses on academic, cultural and sporting achievements as well as good citizenship. Locally, the Beattie government has invested more than \$1.65 million to refurbish new prep facilities at McGregor, Runcorn, Warrigal Road, Robertson, Sunnybank, Mount Gravatt and Upper Mount Gravatt state schools. I was very pleased to open each of these classrooms which are designed to make schooling enjoyable for our youngest students. Congratulations to all the schools for the very successful completion of these new classrooms. I wish them all the best for the 2007 school year. As well, all the asbestos roofs in my state schools are being replaced. We are the first government in this state's history to comprehensively address this issue.

QEII Hospital is the primary emergency and healthcare provider for residents in my electorate. I regularly meet with local residents and the feedback about the hospital and its staff is generally positive. This is always pleasing to hear. It is a testament to the skill and dedication of the healthcare professionals who work at the hospital. I also visit the QEII Hospital regularly to talk to management and staff and keep abreast of any issues of concern.

The QEII is doing an excellent job, particularly in the area of elective surgery. I suspect not many people appreciate how many operations are performed there every year. In the last six months alone there have been in excess of 3,000 operations performed. For 25 years the QEII Hospital has provided a valuable and quality health service to our local community. I have always been keen to see the maximum number of health services delivered at QEII. That is why I am pleased that the Beattie government will invest over \$95 million to build and operate a new 30-bed elective surgery centre on the fifth floor of QEII, allowing more long-wait patients to get the operations they need more quickly.

For the first time in its history all five floors of the QEII will be dedicated to medical purposes. These additional beds will be exclusively for patients requiring elective surgery. This means their availability will not be compromised by competing demands for the emergency department. They will be used for the treatment of elective orthopaedic patients. There will be one additional operating theatre to support the new in-patient beds, additional facilities for rehabilitation services and specialist outpatient clinics.

I have made the delivery of more police officers to Mount Gravatt as well as better police infrastructure and resources to help them protect our community a priority. The number of police on our streets is increasing and our crime rates are continuing to fall. In terms of police infrastructure I have helped deliver the new Mount Gravatt Police Citizens Youth Club, a \$3 million two-year upgrade of the Upper Mount Gravatt Police Station, a CSI Upper Mount Gravatt—Queensland's largest regional forensic facility—and the Sunnybank Plaza Police Beat.

We went to the election with a promise to rebuild the Holland Park Police Station. We have committed \$7 million to building a new police station at Holland Park. I am particularly looking forward to this project as my father first started his police career as a young policeman at the Holland Park Police Station in the 1960s.

From talking to people in my electorate their priorities when it comes to community safety are their own personal safety and protecting their two greatest assets—their home and their car. Since 1998 we have put 85 more police officers on our streets in the South Brisbane district as well as more police liaison officers, school based police officers and volunteers in policing. In that time there have been some considerable reductions in the local crime rate, including a massive 35½ per cent drop in home break and enters, a 24 per cent drop in motor vehicle thefts and a 16½ per cent drop in assaults. I want to thank the police in my local district for these excellent results. We will continue to increase police numbers. This year alone we are putting 774 new recruits through the police academy—a record number in this state's history.

The population growth on Brisbane's south side has increased public pressure on our public transport system. I have taken to the government feedback from residents which has seen extra services provided on routes 133, 566, 571 and 573. With a growing and ageing population I have also lobbied hard for improved rail services. I have been happy to inform residents at my regular series of local morning teas that the Sunnybank, Banoon, Altandi, Runcorn and Fruitgrove railway stations will all

be undergoing major upgrades to provide new modern facilities, disabled access and expanded car parking. That is part of the \$184 million upgrade to railway infrastructure on the Robina line which will also see the development of a third track between Salisbury and Kuraby to carry express trains to the Gold Coast.

The Mains Road bridge will be upgraded to make room for this additional track. However, six lanes of traffic will be operating at all times during peak periods to ensure the impact on local traffic is limited. Queensland Rail has given me a commitment that it will plant more trees than it will be forced to remove. A budget has already been set aside for revegetation. Environmental groups and local residents will also have the chance to have input into the revegetation plan.

I recently visited the construction sites at the first stage of Banoon to Fruitgrove. At Sunnybank station the existing heritage building will be preserved with a new modern interior. Banoon station will be completely rebuilt. Altandi, Runcorn and Fruitgrove stations will be completely renovated. Construction is also underway at Sunnybank to provide a new island platform, waiting shelters, a new car park with 66 more car parking spaces and a new passenger set-down zone. For each of the stations in the first stage the upgrade will include a new lift and foot bridge providing better access to the station, four extra disability car parks—two on each side of the line—a new on-demand train advice system, CCTV cameras and extra lighting on platforms and in car parks. The station upgrades will be completed this year and the whole project, which includes a much-needed upgrade of the Stones Road level crossing, will be completed by early 2008.

Recently we had a major win for residents with the government's decision to ban trucks on the Brisbane urban corridor. Under this decision, which the member for Mansfield and I lobbied hard for, trucks unnecessarily using the Brisbane urban corridor will be restricted from 1 April this year. The restrictions will apply to all trucks rat-running through the Brisbane urban corridor when travelling either way from the Ipswich Motorway at Goodna to the Gateway Arterial Road at Wishart. This ban is good news for residents, especially those in the immediate vicinity, who will notice a significant improvement in their quality of life.

It will mean trucks weighing 4½ tonnes or more will be restricted from using the BUC as a through-route 24 hours a day seven days a week. Truck drivers will be fined if they do not comply. This will reduce the number of trucks using the BUC, cut noise pollution and fumes, reduce congestion and improve safety. From 1 July digital camera technology will be used to enforce this restriction.

I am a strong supporter of our local business community and the benefits it delivers. In the 1990s I helped bring them all together at the Mount Gravatt Traders to establish the main street program. This partnership resulted in securing funding from the city council of over a million dollars to go towards landscaping and improving the strip shopping centre at Mount Gravatt. I hope to reharass that energy and enthusiasm today. That is why in June last year I announced the reformation of this group to achieve even better results.

Business, particularly small business, has a lot to offer our community. It helps to build a strong local economy and provide valuable employment and training opportunities. Queensland's unemployment rate is the lowest in 30 years thanks to the success of small business that employs more than 50 per cent of all our private sector employees. That is why I am actively involved in a number of local business projects, including the development of a kiosk on the top of Mount Gravatt. I have worked very closely with the managing director of First Contact, Robbie Williams, to help it secure \$105,000 in funding to establish this venture which will help rival Mount Coot-tha and attract more jobs and tourist dollars to our area. This is a project very close to my heart because it was my great-grandfather Jack Johnston-Spence who was the president of the Mount Gravatt Trust and who, with other local residents, built the first road on to the top of Mount Gravatt mountain.

With a new year well underway, so too are many local projects designed to improve and expand services in my electorate. As I mentioned before, work has commenced on the major upgrade to the Mains Road bridge which will create the third railway track between Salisbury and Kuraby. Some other projects to look forward to include the development of a new park-and-ride facility on Klumpp Road, the development of new hydrotherapy facilities at QEII Stadium, the upgrade of the Mount Gravatt campus of the Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE, and maintenance work on the South East Busway. This year there will also be many opportunities for local schools, community groups and not-for-profit organisations to apply for funding grants through state government programs. We are very fortunate in the Mount Gravatt electorate to have service clubs, sporting clubs, seniors groups, churches and welfare organisations that meet the needs of our community. The volunteers who are the backbone of these organisations provide the real fabric of our society, and I encourage these groups to contact me if they need any help in applying for funding assistance.

To have been a member of parliament for 17 years would not have been possible without the support of family and friends. Tonight I would like to express my thanks to my husband, Heinz, and my two sons, Lucas and Jack, for their unqualified support throughout my term as the member for Mount Gravatt. As a few members in this parliament would remember, I was pregnant when I was elected 17 years ago and young Jack is now in year 12 and my other son, Lucas, is in his fifth year of university.

They have known nothing other than having their mum as a member of parliament. I do thank them for all of their support over the years. As well, my mother, Gwen, my sisters, Kate, Sue and Kerryn, and their partners, Shaun and Chris, are also great supporters. The people in my electorate have shown faith in me over many years and I look forward to honouring my commitment to them over the coming years.

Mr FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (8.31 pm): Firstly, let me commence my address-in-reply by paying testament to our Governor, Quentin Bryce, who does a wonderful job in leading the state in that role. And what a stylish person she is! When she comes to Maryborough show days and so forth she always represents Queensland very well. I would also like to pass on my congratulations to Speaker Mike Reynolds, Premier Peter Beattie and his deputy, Anna Bligh, Jeff Seeney and his deputy, Fiona Simpson, and Bruce Flegg and his deputy, Mark McArdle. With regard to being re-elected to the parliament of Queensland, I could give everyone the heebie-jeebies by saying that I have faced three elections in 3½ years and I am very, very honoured to have seen the seat of Maryborough in 3½ years go from the most marginal seat in Queensland to the safest seat in Queensland. I am proud to be an independent and to represent my electorate without fear or favour. I am extremely humbled always. I think it is a tremendous honour to be a member of this parliament. It is an honour that not many people in their lifetime enjoy, and it is a great privilege indeed.

There were so many workers who helped out on my campaign, so much so that bringing the list down to even a reasonable limit was a hard task. I particularly thank Kevin and Gloria Banting, Nesta Nightingale, Bill Woods, Peter Daetz, Frank and Del McClintock and Don Cattle. These were people who did a lot of prepoll work and putting up signs and so forth around the place. I must also thank my electorate officers who do a brilliant job—Barbara, who has been with me from the beginning and was in fact already there. I inherited Barbara and she just does a marvellous job in keeping the wheels on the tram when I am away. In addition to that, Paul Truscott, my assistant electorate officer, has been a great friend to me. In fact, he was my PA in my accountancy business. He has come across with me and brought a wealth of experience and knowledge. Our electorate officers in some respects not only run our diaries but just about run our lives. So I want to pay a great tribute to those people.

Anyone who has heard me speak knows how passionate I am about Maryborough. I am a Brisbane boy who lived in Sydney for 10 years and went to college down there. I wanted to move home to Queensland so I could truly barrack for the mighty Maroons. After moving back to Maryborough through a long and unusual set of circumstances and now having lived in the area for nearly 24 years, I just love the place. It is a wonderful place to work and raise a family.

Mr Hayward interjected.

Mr FOLEY: Yes, I am almost a local. I have had six kids who are locals, but I am almost a local. I take that interjection from the member for Kallangur. I am extremely pleased with what Maryborough has got over the last couple of years. The electric locomotive contracts have just continued to roll into what we used to call Walkers or EDI Rail, and that certainly has underpinned in tremendous strength the economic activity in Maryborough. Aldridge State High School also received a special upgrade. I guess one of the areas that is the key to our society is providing a first-class education to young people.

On the other side of things, I certainly would like to see an expansion of funding for the mentally ill folk in our area. We have a very stretched-to-the-limit mental health unit which serves our district which does an absolutely sterling job under some pretty torturous circumstances. If we think this is a tough job, I would hate to be running a mental health unit. The need particularly for counselling for men is becoming more and more an increasing area. In my other life as a pastor I see a lot of people getting out of jail and finding themselves completely at a loose end not knowing where to go. I would really like to see an expansion of those things brought to light. At the moment Maryborough Airport is developing a master plan and has some fantastic things on the boil. We recently met with a delegation of people from China who are looking at perhaps locating a flight school in Maryborough as well. As a pilot, that is pretty exciting to me. I do not speak too much Chinese, but I know the member for Capalaba so he can be my interpreter.

Weeds, in particular hyacinth, continue to be a problem not only in our electorate but in the whole state. I have called on the water minister to discuss this issue, and he has given me a very good hearing and is coming to my electorate at my invitation to look at what we are doing in terms of the hyacinth problem. I am encouraging him to look at a statewide task force in this particular area. I am very worried about the Mary River marine industry precinct being made less possible by the Traveston Crossing Dam and siltation of the Mary River, but again that is something that I have covered at great length. Obviously we always need more funds for public housing. We need a CT scanner for the hospital and transport costs for people who have to travel out of the district, which I have talked about as well.

I again want to thank my absolutely wonderful family and staff. Not only do my electorate officers look after me; my family does as well. My wife, Glenys, is just a marvel. She is a human wonder. My eldest daughter, Chelsea, Jessica, Jared and our two little girls, Caitlyn and Brittany, tend to provide me with the ongoing inspiration to keep forging ahead in trying to make the world a better place. I also want to pay tribute to my 94-year-old dad, Jack Foley, who passed away at the end of last year. He fought on the Kokoda Trail. He was a great old digger and a real inspiration in my life.

Some of the people in our schools that do some fantastic stuff are the chaplains. In our area we have chaplains Glen Wilson and Jill Duncan. We have had a number of functions over the last year to raise funds for chaplaincy in high schools. We had SCAT Jazz come and do a concert. We had the inaugural Octobeard of which I was the patron and of course the natural choice being a rather hirsutely faced one. I also want to acknowledge the fantastic work that the chaplains do. They are at the front line of intervening with people who are struggling and tempered towards suicide and alcohol and drug abuse. Often kids who are from very difficult families come to school hungry. The chaplains get them some breakfast and look after them and provide that really practical day-to-day care. Maryborough is rich with events such as the Technology Challenge, and we are going to have a display in the Parliamentary Annexe on the Technology Challenge from 21 May to 25 May. I would certainly encourage all members to see the incredible human powered vehicles. They are just amazing. My son Jared was one of the people in the St Mary's College team as they wheeled it around for 24 hours during this massive human powered vehicle race. Some of the vehicles they have created look like they are straight out of a science magazine—extremely high tech.

Some of the highlights of the year include the TESS organisation, which does a wonderful job caring for people who have really done it tough in their life. That organisation tries to get them employment and upskill them so they can take better advantage of things that are available in the workplace. For years we have called for a youth shelter in Maryborough. Now the TESS farm has opened up and has a long-awaited youth shelter—and I was very privileged to be at its opening recently. It is marvellous to see that kids who are on the street have a place where they can go and people will care for them. They have also opened a zoo as part of the farm out there and that is becoming an instant hit—a tourist attraction. It is drawing great numbers and the kids very proudly display the animals. There is something quite remedial about kids in trouble working with animals.

It would not be a good electorate without a good working relationship with the four mayors within my state seat: Barbara Hovard for Maryborough, Ted Sorensen at Hervey Bay, Linda Harris at Tiaro and Councillor Iain Lewis, the acting mayor of Woocoo. I also want to pay tribute to Councillor Kev Mahoney who was the mayor of Woocoo who passed away. I went to his funeral last Friday. It was very sad. He literally just resigned from being mayor and then passed away. Kev was a really great guy, a real genuine fellow. Councillor Alan Brown, the former mayor of Maryborough, was a great friend of mine and my family to this day. Last year I was very privileged but saddened to conduct Alan Brown's funeral in the Brolga Theatre which we affectionately call Brownie's tin shed.

We have also done a lot of work with the Burrum River Task Force in this last 12 months in our electorate looking at the issues of siltation, boat ramps and also erosion. So many people who have helped out on the task force such as Councillor Bob Campbell from Hervey Bay City Council, Doug Schofield from Isis, Kerry Evans from the Burrum Heads Amateur Fishing Club, Councillor David Dalglish from Hervey Bay City Council, George Martin from the EPA, Bill Gosewisch from the Burrum Chamber of Commerce, Scott McKinnon from DPI, Martin Bellert from Sunfish, Ross Quinn from the department of primary industries, Peter Griffin from Howard Progress Association, Mel Simpson from the community, Robert Zigterman from the EPA, Moyra McRae from the MPA, Sharyn French, Peter Pearson and Ken Fox. Honourable members can see from that somewhat exhaustive list that so many people have contributed to the work of the Burrum River Task Force which I have been very privileged to lead.

Finally, I want to wind up by paying tribute to the wonderful community organisations run by volunteers who are the heart and soul of our community. I am privileged to be a patron of the Maryborough Excelsior City Band, the Maryborough Kennel Club, the Maryborough Smallbore Rifle Club, the Granville Soccer Club, and the Fraser Coast Rugby League—and I am going to do the kick-off next Friday night. I am even going to sacrifice going to a Broncos game in Brisbane to be there in my electorate to launch the season. I am also a patron of the Tinana Soccer Club, the Point Lookout Croquet Club, the Maryborough Caledonian Society and Pipe Band and the Maryborough and District Soccer Association.

One of the jewels in the crown of the Maryborough electorate is at the Maryborough showgrounds. We have an equestrian centre of an absolute world-class standard that has been going off this year, to use a modern colloquialism. We have recently finished what was called 07 Quest, which was a 16-day knowledge sharing symposium by world leaders in their equestrian field. That was held in January. Seminars and training were presented by elite horsepeople for a dozen different horse disciplines and equine care specialists. We even had horse chiropractors there. The equestrian centre has been booked for over 600 students for a three-day qualifying event for the national titles the same weekend as the Masters Games in Maryborough. It is a great year. Let me say if members have not been to Maryborough, we would love to welcome them. They can come and visit anytime. If they bring their chequebook we will look forward to seeing them.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (8.44 pm): It is an absolute pleasure and a privilege to rise to participate in this address-in-reply debate to the Governor's speech to the 52nd Parliament of Queensland. I would like to pay tribute to the Governor, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce, and the excellent role she has performed in the office of Governor. I pay particular tribute to the many visits she has made to communities of all sizes right across the state of Queensland.

I would like to formally extend my congratulations to all members of parliament whether they were returned or elected for the first time at the election held on 9 September 2006. Those congratulations seem somewhat belated now given that it has been six months since the election and we are only just now participating in the address-in-reply debate. The role of an MP carries with it much responsibility and a sincere dedication to represent the people of their electorate. I know that, regardless of whether members were elected as representatives of one of the political parties or as an Independent, all of us have come here to achieve much for our constituents, our electorates and our state. We will disagree from time to time on the best way forward but in our democracy we are able to do that without resorting to guns and wars—something for which we should all be thankful.

Last year I was truly humbled to be re-elected for a third term to the seat of Cunningham in the Queensland parliament. It is a great honour to represent this diverse electorate which is split almost in half between residents of a major city encompassing the southern suburbs of the Toowoomba City Council area and residents of the rural areas covered by the Pittsworth, Clifton, Cambooya and Millmerran shires and part of the Warwick shire. Being able to represent both metropolitan and rural interests provides a wonderful opportunity to interact and work with people of varied backgrounds, careers and lifestyles. The Cunningham electorate in many ways represents the diversity of the state of Queensland as a whole.

When I was first elected back in 2001 I believed I had a very real and positive contribution to make to Cunningham and I am grateful that I can continue to build on that further in this next term of parliament. My wife, Rae, and I have made many friends throughout the electorate and it has been a pleasure to work with everyone over that time. I know that we will continue to work with our community to serve the Cunningham electorate to the best of our ability.

I consider myself fortunate to have had a varied background and to have worked and contributed in the areas of business—both big and small—agriculture, government, not-for-profit organisations, community groups and politics. I believe this has stood me in good stead for becoming a member of the Queensland parliament. However, becoming an MP and being re-elected as an MP is not a task that we can do alone. There are many people who have helped me in my journey and without them I would not be standing here today.

The Nationals' Cunningham electorate council has been unwavering in its support over the years and unified in its purpose to see success at election time. I would like to pay tribute to the electorate council chairman, Laurie Black, and his wife, Helen, for the invaluable time and effort that they put into the campaign. While Laurie has been at the helm since my election to politics, he has just retired from his role as chairman. Laurie has been an excellent chairman and it has truly been a delight to work with him and take advantage of his wisdom and advice. I would like to welcome Pat Weir, who is stepping into the chairman's role. I am confident that his passion for conservative politics will be a valuable asset and I am looking forward to continuing to work with him now in a new role. I would also like to thank the other very loyal and dedicated members of the Nationals in my electorate. I am sure all MPs are aware just how much work party members put into making sure that we do get elected. It is a big commitment and it is done voluntarily.

In addition, I really appreciated the assistance of my campaign team who backed us all the way. There are a lot of people involved in our campaign and on the campaign committee. I would like to thank every single one of those from family to friends, party members, volunteers, those who gave us moral support and financial support and those who worked tirelessly throughout the campaign and on election day. I thank the National Party secretariat staff and the opposition office staff who put in a lot of long hours and provided endless support to candidates and members right across the state.

I would also like to thank my electorate office staff, Mary and Lesley, who are wonderful staff members and go well beyond what could realistically be expected of them every single day—not just at election time. Anyone who has had anything to do with politics knows the demands put on the families of those involved. I am incredibly lucky to have a very supportive family.

My wife, Rae, has been a pillar of strength, going well beyond the call of duty. Right throughout the campaign she toiled on as campaign director and her political experience and expertise were indeed priceless. To have such an astute campaign director is one thing, but to have Rae by my side as my wife, I am a very, very lucky man. This is evidenced by the fact that she did all of this while pregnant with our second child, Jonty, who was born on 8 September—the day before the election. What a wonderful omen that was—as well as being impeccable timing—for the election. To my wife, Rae, our daughter, Oriel, who was also born during the last parliamentary term, and our son, Jonty, I thank them for their love, support and understanding that a politician's job is not nine to five; rather, it is a 24-hour job, seven days a week.

I would especially like to congratulate the new and re-elected members of the National Party and the Liberal Party. I look forward to building on the future of the Queensland coalition team with every single one of them. I thank those MPs, both state and federal, as well as the candidates for all of their support and friendship throughout the campaign. I am just very, very sorry that many of those excellent candidates were not elected to this parliament on 9 September.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the other candidates who contested the election for the seat of Cunningham for the good spirit in which the campaign was conducted. At every election I have contested, every candidate has conducted a professional and fair campaign in very good spirit. It goes to prove that elections can be held positively and with respect regardless of our differences in opinion and policy or party background.

We live in a great state, but there are certainly many challenges confronting us. Queenslanders deserve quality services and infrastructure no matter where they live. After all, we are only standing in this parliamentary chamber because people have entrusted us to do the right thing by them and to give our electorates the opportunity to grow and prosper. At the same time, we have the responsibility of playing an important role in the overall direction of Queensland.

Although there is a need to highlight statewide issues, there is also a need to outline issues that are specific to electorates and the regions in which we live. A number of projects and issues have a major impact on the Cunningham electorate and the Darling Downs region. I would like to address a few of those issues now. Although there are other issues, I do not have time to address them tonight. As we all know, in this day and age, water is an invaluable commodity, particularly given the current drought situation. I commend the efforts that encourage Queenslanders to become more water wise. I am happy that the government came good with its election promise to extend water-saving rebates across the state, copying the coalition's policy platform.

Back in 2001 during my maiden speech to parliament, I made mention of a recycled water pipeline from Brisbane to the west—to the Darling Downs and the Lockyer Valley. It may as well be said now that this pipeline is merely just a pipedream. Sadly, we are still talking about this issue as the government has not taken the necessary steps to make this project a reality. It is an all-too-frequent scenario that Labor is all talk and no action. That is why there has been no significant water infrastructure, including dams, built during the over 8½ years of this Beattie Labor government.

When it comes to ensuring reliable water supplies, Queensland needs short-, medium- and long-term solutions. Government inaction has held us back and now we are faced with adding recycled effluent into our drinking water systems. The coalition has a vision of recycling 100 per cent of our water in Queensland, zero ocean outflows and for that recycled water to be used for industrial and agricultural purposes, freeing up fresh water supplies for domestic consumption. Residents should not be forced to drink recycled water as a direct result of the failure of this government to provide basic infrastructure and essential services in this state.

As everyone knows, last year Toowoomba went through a very, very divisive water recycling debate. As a community, we need to work hard to put that division behind us and move forward. I look forward to working with those members who represent my neighbouring electorates—the members for Toowoomba South, Darling Downs, Lockyer, Southern Downs and Warrego—to address issues of local and regional importance to all of us. The Nationals have a very long and successful history of representing the communities of the Darling Downs.

I know from personal experience the ongoing struggle of living on the land. We must continue to support and promote the value of primary industries in the wider community—something that is often lost on members sitting opposite in this chamber. The livelihoods of businesses in all the towns in the electorate of Cunningham, including Toowoomba, are directly linked to the prosperity of primary industries right across the Darling Downs area. The rural sector provides a sound base for the health of our regional economy and contributes enormously to the health of the state and national economies. Why, then, have we seen a depletion of the primary industries and natural resources budgets under this Beattie Labor government? For far too long the primary industries and natural resources portfolios have been sadly neglected by Labor. An issue that has heavily impacted on my electorate has been the removal of stock inspectors and extension officers from the departments of primary industries and natural resources. This government has withdrawn extension officers, withdrawn the advice that is provided at on-farm level, and withdrawn the expertise from towns such as Pittsworth, Clifton, Millmerran and Warwick. Consequently, that means that that kind of expertise simply does not now exist within those departments.

There is a desperate need to take the politics out of managing soil, water and vegetation conservation. Bureaucrats sitting in a city high-rise should not have the final say over what a farmer can and cannot do, especially if they have no idea of what it is like to live on the land.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr COPELAND: I think it is typical that the Minister for Public Works and Housing has reacted in such a way in response to that statement. That shows the arrogance with which this government treats our farmers and primary producers.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I rise to a point of order. I take offence at those remarks. I ask the member to withdraw. They were out of context. I was not referring to the member. He ought to be less self-centred in this place. I was not even referring to him; I was talking to somebody else. The member ought not to think—like most Tories—that we are always talking about them.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jones): Order! I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr COPELAND: I withdraw. Obviously, I have hit a raw nerve with the government and that minister. That is simply typical of this government's arrogance towards primary producers. Over the past few days we have seen the truth come out about the Ashley McKay case and how this government treats primary producers. There will be much more to come. The minister is a member of a government that has treated primary producers with absolute contempt, arrogance and disdain. Everyone in my electorate and everyone who deals with this government knows that that is how they treat them.

After that interruption, I would like to continue. We need to use the best science available to actively work with landholders to achieve sustainable outcomes. We also need to ensure that there is adequate on-property support and expertise to assist landholders with natural resource decisions and support for primary industries. Many of the most tangible and successful environmental gains on the Darling Downs have been achieved directly by these extension officers working in partnership with landholders. This government likes to trumpet its alleged environmental credentials, but when it comes to real, achievable environmental measures, it has failed miserably.

Another significant issue for my electorate is the long-term future of the cypress pine industry. The economies of Cecil Plains and Millmerran in particular rely on this industry. Cypress is very much a sustainable and renewable resource in this area. I strongly believe that it is an industry that needs to be secured for the future. It seems ridiculous to me that there should be any threat to a successful and sustainable cypress industry and any restriction of access to cypress by having to substitute it with other timbers that are harvested in countries that have little or no sound environmental management.

Electricity problems have caused many headaches in areas across the Cunningham electorate, particularly for those who live in the outlying areas of the Cunningham electorate. It is not only a problem for residents but also a huge concern for businesses. There are problems with connection times as well as with the reliability of supply. I have spoken regularly in this parliament about these issues. I have a good working relationship with the regional Ergon office. I appreciate Ergon's hardworking staff who help out in emergency and non-emergency situations. But despite their best efforts it is a shame that their hands are often tied by government cost cutting.

Improvements to road infrastructure is another issue that I would like to see increased rapidly in our electorates. I commend the upgrades to Ruthven Street in Toowoomba, including the southern end, which is located in my electorate. I hope that improvements can be made to the intersection of Ruthven Street and Donahue Street in order to minimise traffic flow problems and increase the safety for pedestrians.

The Gore Highway is a major interstate highway carrying large numbers of heavy vehicles and one which unfortunately has seen too many accidents and too many fatalities in recent years, including another death at Millmerran just a couple of weeks ago. We need to upgrade that highway to ensure the safety of motorists. A particular concern of mine is the intersection of the Gore Highway and Drayton Connection Road, which has been the scene of many accidents, including fatalities, since I have been elected. I do not, however, want to highlight just one section of that road because there are many, many intersections and stretches that need upgrading. I would like to thank the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Paul Lucas, for accepting my invitation to come and inspect that road a couple of weeks ago. Likewise, the New England Highway has areas of concern and there are many other state and local roads across the electorate that need further attention.

The second range crossing is another major project affecting my electorate. My colleagues the member for Toowoomba South and the member for Darling Downs and I have continually lobbied for this project because we know how important it is for our city. We need to get the literally thousands of trucks that travel that road daily out of the centre of Toowoomba for the safety of our roads, the amenity of our city and the viability of our businesses. We need that Toowoomba bypass to be built.

The federal government has begun to take steps in the right direction to make this a reality thanks to the lobbying from Ian Macfarlane, the federal member for Groom. There is a need, however, for the state government to step in by putting it high on the list of priorities for the Department of Main Roads. We need urgent cooperation between the two levels of government to see this road become a reality soon. I do acknowledge that the federal government has provided the state with funds to undertake a business case for the bypass that is due for completion late this year, but we really must expedite this process.

Small business is another area that needs our protection so that they are not swamped by the big conglomerates. I personally believe that the only way to limit growth in market share of the major chains is to limit any further expansion in trading hours. During my last two terms of parliament I have supported the stance of the Queensland Retail Traders and Shopkeepers Association in opposing the extended trading hours applications, which would have seen the big grocery chains take even more of the market share, effectively cutting out smaller family-run grocery stores. I have now appeared twice as a witness for the small traders in Queensland Industrial Relations Commission hearings and was again pleased that the commission ruled against that application. Small businesses play a vital role in our community in terms of job creation and their general support for local communities.

We need to ensure that the fuel subsidy in our state is streamlined so that Queenslanders are receiving those benefits. It is important to remain vigilant to ensure that the 8.5c a litre subsidy flows through to the public. It is perhaps misleading to say 'subsidy' because it is simply that portion of the excise that Queenslanders have not had to pay because we have not had a state based fuel tax—a legacy of the good economic management of previous coalition governments.

Health is still a major issue in our state and I am sure that all members agree that Queenslanders deserve to be able to access quality services no matter where they live. Real action must be taken to cut waiting lists and we desperately need more doctors and nurses employed, not bureaucrats.

I value the role local government plays in our communities, and I will continue to support their place in our system of government. The government's move towards forced amalgamations should the Size, Shape and Sustainability process not deliver the model it wants is of huge concern to the local governments in my area. I can assure those local councils and their communities that I will support their role and value their contribution to our communities.

We have great educational facilities in the Cunningham electorate—numerous state and private schools and a wonderful tertiary institution, the University of Southern Queensland. I understand the importance of supporting our teaching professionals, addressing behaviour management problems, improving facilities and ensuring the highest possible educational standards are met. There are still ongoing concerns with regard to the prep year and I will continue to fight for flexibility with the starting age, better resources and full-time teacher aides.

It is my very great privilege to again serve in the coalition's shadow cabinet—this term as shadow minister for education and training and shadow minister for the arts. I have held those roles previously and look forward to working with those sectors to improve services, facilities and policies in those portfolios over this term. As in the past, I will continue to support government policy where it is a good and worthwhile policy but I will certainly highlight any deficiencies.

There are many issues across my portfolios that are and will be of concern in Queensland. I, as part of the alternative government in Queensland, will play my part constructively, vigorously and proactively to ensure the best possible outcomes for our state.

Time expired.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (9.04 pm): I rise to contribute to the address-in-reply debate. Having to do so so late is a perfect example of this government's total arrogance and absolute endorsement of the way it thinks it can run roughshod over everything and everyone. It is ridiculous to be making an address-in-reply speech—

Mr Schwarten: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. This is the second National Party member who has made this comment. There have been ample opportunities for him to be on the speaking list earlier than now. He has chosen to speak when he has.

Mr HOPPER: There is no point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Would the member reserve that right to himself. There is no point of order.

Mr HOPPER: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, it is absolutely ridiculous to be making an address-in-reply speech when it is nearly time to make the next one. That shows the absolute arrogance of this government. I can give more examples of this government's arrogance, but before I do I would like to thank a few people.

My staff have been with me for probably six years now and they are some of the most magnificent people God ever put breath into. I personally fund my electorate office in Oakey to get down that end of the electorate. Donna from Oakey has been a magnificent support. Julie and Lisa look after the Dalby office on a shared staff basis. I take my hat off to those girls. They run the show there. To my family who support me: it is very hard for politicians at times because your wife is at home raising your children, and every member of this House would realise exactly what it is like because we are away from home so much. To the National Party that has supported me since I joined in late 2001, I take my hat off to the party as an elected member.

As the elected member for Darling Downs, this is my third term in state parliament, and never once have I discounted the honour that it is to be a member of this institution. It is a magnificent institution. It is an institution where we make the laws of Queensland. I have finally got the position of shadow minister for natural resources and water. It is a portfolio that I really get my teeth into and really enjoy. I shadowed the Leader of the House for a number of years in public works and housing. It is a quite an honour to stand here and be the shadow minister for natural resources and water.

We all know as politicians how hard it is at times to represent all areas concerning our constituents. However, we are still in the most horrific drought that the people of Queensland have ever faced. But what have we seen from the government in the last eight years to help with this drought? What have we seen happen at DPIF? The destruction of staff numbers. Even financial counsellors have

been withdrawn and the federal government is now trying to pick up the pieces. We lost our financial counsellor at Goondiwindi. I was at the drought bus at Oakey the other day, and the number of people who came there seeking financial assistance due to the drought was unbelievable. We met with financial advisers. We ask this government to seriously open its heart to those people because those financial advisers do a magnificent job.

My electorate and many others have suffered immensely during these times. We must at all times be extremely aware of the impact that this drought has had not just in rural areas but also in urban areas. When rural producers suffer, the whole economy suffers. I would certainly like to thank the federal government for the awareness it has shown to the productive sector of Queensland. Its drought aid has been immense, to say the least. The one thing I have noticed is that when the federal government promises something the promise is always kept.

Compare that to this state government. At this very moment we are still waiting for our rates rebate. I rang the hotline today and what happened? They do not know when it is going to be implemented. They still do not know. We heard the Premier squawking about the implementation of the rebate two to three months ago. We are going to get our second rates notice before we can apply for the rebate. This government makes the promises, it puts them out there and gets everyone behind them, but what happens? There are no fruits. That is exactly where we are at with the rates rebate.

At this very moment, those receiving exceptional circumstances payments are the ones who can get the rate rebates. I say to the government that it should cough up now. It is easy to announce something or make lots of promises to get people on side and then put those people on waiting lists. It is a bit like the clean coal announcement, which was a wonderful announcement, but the project has since been put on the backburner and they will worry about it in 10 years time. Similarly, instead of the much-awaited water infrastructure to be provided by the Nullinga Dam in far-north Queensland, we are going to end up with a swamp at Gympie and a pipeline carrying recycled sewerage.

The infrastructure record of this government is nothing short of appalling. The Beattie Labor government has had eight years to put in place infrastructure to counteract the problems that the people of this city will face. The government has built a footbridge, a football stadium and one dam, which was a dam that we announced. That project could not be stopped, unlike every other water infrastructure project that we had in place. We have built every dam in Queensland.

Let us look at the Wolffdene dam that was to be built near Mount Tamborine. That dam would have held an amount of water equal to the Wivenhoe Dam. However, as this government has been quoted as saying, dams are a blokes' thing and Minister Palaszczuk said that no new dams were needed until 2050—their attitude has been disgusting to say the least—and so the government sold the Wolffdene dam site. Had that dam been built, it would currently hold over 80 per cent of its water capacity. The Hinze dam is approximately 10 kilometres and is in the same catchment area, and it is overflowing.

Let us be realistic about this, because it is true to say that if the Wolffdene dam had been built the people of Brisbane would have a 10-year water supply. However, Wayne Goss and his chief advisor, Kevin Rudd, sold the site that had been purchased for the Wolffdene dam, as well as four other dam sites in the Brisbane area. If the Wolffdene dam had been built, there is no way in the world that the people of Brisbane would be forced to drink toilet to tap, which is exactly what will be put in front of them.

This attitude is terrible. Government members should hang their heads in shame, because they are going to force people to drink recycled sewage. Nowhere in the world does recycled sewage go into still water storage such as a dam site. In no other country in the world is recycled sewage pumped back into a dam site. It is always pumped into a flowing source of water where nature can take its course. Can members name one mechanical object that has not failed, whether it be a jet engine, a motorcar or a recycled sewage facility? For the past eight years the Premier has done nothing for infrastructure. Now, he is crying out that there is a drought and his answer is to force the people of Brisbane to drink recycled sewage. If recycled sewage water is so good, why not pipe it straight back into the system? Why does it have to go into another water source? Because elements do get through.

The other day I met with representatives of the Australian Water Association. If government members want to get fair dinkum, they should talk to that association. I also talked with Mrs Nosworthy. The Australian Water Association knows about water and it is fair dinkum. I have been told that there are elements that are smaller than the water molecules, and those elements will get through a processing system. We do not know enough about those elements, which makes this a dangerous situation. Our policy is to 100 per cent recycle water for parks, gardens and industry, but do not force the people of Brisbane to drink it. Under this government, that is exactly what the people of Brisbane will be forced to do.

The government is trying to sell recycled sewage as purified water and the people of Brisbane simply must not accept that. There are alternatives. The cost involved in this project is unbelievable. Why should the taxpayers of Queensland be faced with this unacceptable project when alternatives such as desalination plants can be put in place? Just over the border in New South Wales, the northern

rivers region has available many good dam sites, and it is raining there now. Once again I point out that the Hinze Dam is overflowing. Those dam sites have been built to hold water and fight the forces of evaporation, and the water supply does not rely on pumping water over unnecessarily long distances.

We need a commonsense policy, instead of the perception politics that we have seen over the past eight years. In the past, conservative governments provided that commonsense and Queensland is living off the back of the conservatives' legacy. As examples, I point to the Bowen Basin and the electric train system. We are living off the fruits of the coal export industry, because Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen had the intestinal fortitude to borrow money from the Japanese and establish that industry. That is why Queensland is the place it is today. The Labor government has moved in and is simply living off the fruits of our good conservative governments.

There is no doubt that the Queensland Water Commission has a massive job to sell this fruitless idea. The people of Queensland deserve much better than what the government is forcing upon them. Forty years ago they told us that asbestos was safe and would not harm anyone, but we now know about the problems the world is facing due to the lack of knowledge about that product and the harm that it can cause. Forty years ago, asbestos was thought to be a good thing and people shovelled it around without a second thought, but look at the problems that they are facing now.

The people of Queensland must wake up and realise that they have been sold a con. No-one knows what future health problems the project will bring to our children and grandchildren. There has been talk of piping water from the north, but before that can occur we need adequate infrastructure to cater for the forgotten half of the state, that is, north Queensland. Cairns and the Burdekin have a large population, but the people can do nothing because they know that the vote that keeps this government in power comes from the south-east corner. The government believes that all it has to do is look after south-east Queensland and it will be right.

In his maiden speech, the Minister for Natural Resources spoke about Burdekin stage 2. Why don't we see him do something for his own electorate? Two weeks ago I was at the Burdekin Dam and I was told that prior to my arrival every five hours enough water flowed over the dam to fill the Sydney Harbour. Stage 2 of the Burdekin project would add another five or six metres to the dam wall, which would allow that water to be stored, and then we could look at taking water from the north. However, before that happens we need to look after the people of the north.

The people of Toowoomba have made clear their attitude towards recycled water for human consumption. The opposition is very much in favour of toilet to tap, so long as it is to an outside tap. It is as simple as that. The recycled water should be used for industry, parks and gardens. If this project goes ahead, Brisbane businesses will be threatened immensely. I have heard people say that they will drink only New South Wales beer. Our abattoir exports will be threatened. Carcasses for the Asian markets have to be washed down with water.

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Mr HOPPER: The truth is starting to hurt. I can hear members opposite interjecting. Those members are part of the government that is going to force this onto the people of Brisbane. They should hang their heads in shame.

All food companies will be under threat, but this scenario does not have to occur. How dare this government force the people into this situation when there are alternatives, even though it has failed miserably in providing the necessary infrastructure. A dictatorship does not have to be one person. It can be a form of government that takes away the rights and freedoms of individuals. I would point to the compensation for tree clearing, wild rivers legislation and general property rights. When you take something that someone owns without compensation, it is dictatorial communism.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr HOPPER: Rights are being taken away from the forgotten people of Queensland, those who live outside the south-east corner. The member for Rockhampton might laugh, but he knows that what I am saying is right. He is taking away the rights of Queenslanders without compensation. Last year and this year wild rivers legislation was passed, and it is nothing but a gimmick to try to attract the green vote.

Mr Schwarten: You're mad. You want to go and get your head read.

Mr HOPPER: I find that offensive and I ask the member for Rockhampton to withdraw that immediately.

Mr Schwarten: So long as I can get it on the record, I will withdraw it.

Mr HOPPER: Good, you get it on the record. This is the very same Leader of the House—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr HOPPER: The Leader of the House is the very same man who accused us of slurring people in the very last sitting of parliament. Right now, the pot is calling the kettle black. He is in his element. As we stir him up, he gets up again.

Mr Schwarten: I am not being stirred up. I urge the honourable member to regain his composure. I am very worried about him and I make my comments in that regard.

Mr HOPPER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will continue with my speech. I have just visited the people of north Queensland. From their feedback we have not heard the last of this ludicrous legislation. I call on the minister for natural resources and water to get out of his leather seat and go and meet the people that I have met with in the last few weeks. The minister comes from north Queensland. He obviously lacks the intestinal fortitude to stand up to his dictatorial leader. How could we expect anything else when the Premier told the people of Queensland that AgForce had signed off on wild rivers? That is simply untrue. It had not done that, yet the Premier put it out there and the media grabbed it. We know that AgForce was working closely with all those involved to try to better the situation. It is a facade typical of this government in an attempt at convincing the people of Queensland that they now have wild rivers flowing freely, cleansing the north, with the environmental vandalism once and for all coming to an end. I met with a property owner today who owns 250,000 head of cattle. The impact this has on that fellow and the people he employs is simply unbelievable.

I would like to touch a bit on NLIS. For the benefit of those opposite, NLIS means National Livestock Identification Scheme. NLIS means cattle cannot be moved without having an identification ear tag placed in their ear. These ear tags have to be electronically read in moving stocks. We have rodeos and campdrafts now where farmers donate their cattle and bring their cattle in, and the ear tags have to be read. It is simply an impost on them. We have called on the primary industries minister to put an exemption in place. That simply must happen. We have the St Lawrence draft. All the heifers are supplied. Heifers have to have an ear tag put in but they could be going to get their heads chopped off later in life. They have to put an ear tag in those heifers. It is simply an unreasonable impost.

I turn now to the roads in my electorate. There have been 14 crashes on the Warra Road in the last few years. It is an absolutely horrific crash site. A young mother, Vanessa Kingston, lost her life there. She left two children behind. I believe that accident was due to the state of the road. I have met with Bruce Scott and a lot of people about this road. Paul Lucas says that the road is federally funded. It is the state that hands out the money. I call on both governments to fix that road.

I will move on to local government. Our small councils are under extreme threat at the moment. They are under pressure with talk of amalgamations by the previous minister, Desley Boyle, and the continual threat hanging over their heads from the new minister, Andrew Fraser. Here is a scenario that our local governments do not need. The Queensland coalition policy is that there will be no forced amalgamation. Eventually we will have super shires and people will have very little representation. Take, for instance, the Wambo shire that surrounds the town of Dalby. I notice Councillor Glenn Jackson in the gallery tonight. He is a member of the Wambo Shire Council. It is people like Glenn who make our shires what they are.

Wambo shire is totally debt free. It has been debt free for years. If the situation is not broken, why fix it? Why would someone fix a situation that is not broken? The government has said that these shires have to get it together and get it together themselves or the state government will move in. What happens when shires cannot get it together and it does not work? The government says, 'You chose to go that way'. It is another flick pass. It is simply another impost on the people of rural Queensland.

The future looks very grim for these shires under this government's plan. The government's plan is for councils to work it out themselves, and the government will be wielding the heavy stick. It is another perfect example of the absolute bullying culture that exists in the government when something goes wrong. Councils will get the blame because it will be classed as their decision. It is another flick pass. If the government was fair dinkum about size, shape and sustainability it would force the councils to make decisions that communities do not necessarily want. Rosalie and Crows Nest have tried to amalgamate. What will happen? Toowoomba will swoop down and take a fair part of that shire. The shires are trying to survive. It is going to be a terrible scenario for that whole electorate.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (9.24 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Health System

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (9.24 pm): Despite promises of \$9.7 billion and record budgets, people continue to die needlessly under this government's health system. A young mother in my electorate is one of them. Her husband and family are devastated, and her five children—all aged 10 years and under with a baby just two-months-old at the time of her death—now have to grow up without her love and care.

On Sunday, 7 January this year this normally healthy 29-year-old mum presented at the Mareeba Hospital because she was very, very ill. When she was finally seen about three hours later the doctor took blood for testing and sent her home. He told her to come back on Wednesday for the results and advised her to take some Panadol or Panadeine Forte if she had them.

On Tuesday, 9 January she was gravely ill and was again taken to the hospital with the assistance of her husband. She was so sure she would be admitted that she took a packed bag with her. This time she saw a different doctor who said that her liver appeared damaged as if she drank a lot of alcohol. He repeatedly inquired if she was a drinker despite being told over and over again that she never drank alcohol. Once again she was turned away from the hospital, sent home and told to take Panadol or Panadeine Forte.

By Wednesday, 10 January she could no longer walk. She was so ill and in pain that she was again taken to the Mareeba Hospital. She had to be carried in. A wheelchair was found to give her mobility. After again waiting for about three hours she was seen by the same doctor as the day before. He sent a staff member to take her off to the X-ray department. After waiting for some time her husband, who was minding the baby, went looking for her. He found her alone and crying, slumped in the wheelchair, extremely ill and in pain. There was no-one at X-ray. Instead there was a sign on the door saying 'X-ray closed between 1 and 2 pm'. Her husband wheeled her back to the doctors' rooms. By this time it was mid-afternoon, and the hospital superintendent appeared. The husband could hear discussion and indecision about what form of transport should be used to take his wife to Cairns. An ambulance would have got her there in less than an hour. Eventually a decision was taken to use the helicopter. It takes about 15 minutes to do the trip. It got her there about four hours later, around 7 pm.

Barely two hours later her husband, who was attending the other four children, received a call from the Cairns Base Hospital advising that he needed to get there quickly as they had already nearly lost her a couple of times. On arrival at the Cairns Base Hospital he found his wife in the intensive care unit on life support. She passed away shortly after 6 o'clock the next morning. The cause of death, the family was told, was septicaemia—blood poisoning.

This is a shocking failure by a system that is proving over and over again to be lethal to Queenslanders who rely on it. A full investigation is necessary with the results to be made public. The shameful disgraceful farce that is Queensland Health continues unchanged under this Beattie government, which now has this mother's blood on its hands.

Great Sandy Straits Marina Resort

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (9.27 pm): Tonight I rise to draw to the attention of the House the difficult position in which residents in the Great Sandy Straits Marina Resort find themselves due to the slightly unusual land tenure arrangements that operate in that development.

The development was commenced in stages in 1992 and was largely completed in about 2004. The development includes five major parts—a 180-berth marina, a 100-unit outrigger precinct, a terminal precinct and a shopping arcade that services ferries to Fraser Island and whale watching and a residential precinct of 13 buildings containing 183 units. The total current value of the development is about \$150 million. The concept for the harbour expansion was conceived during the Bjelke-Petersen era. It was ultimately undertaken by the Forrester Parker Group, now trading as FKP Ltd. After 15 years FKP sold its interest to another company called S8 Ltd in December last year for the sum of \$660,000.

The land was developed under head leases issued by the state of Queensland. The original onshore lease was for a 75-year term. Apparently that was not attractive to the real estate market. In 1977 the 75-year lease was replaced with a perpetual lease allowing the developer to offer 999-year subleases to all the unit holders. The difficulty with this arrangement is that it leaves the residents who are owners of long-term—999-year—subleases without the normal protections that any tenant would have because of the operation of long-term perpetual leases not having in legislation the sorts of tenancy protections that we are used to—access to tribunals, automatic requirements for bodies corporate and that sort of thing.

There are three particular problems I would like to identify. The first is that there was no exit or hand over strategy for the developer. The head lease did not mandate that anything had to be done for the developer to hand over control of the property to the 300 sublessees who effectively funded the development by the purchase of their interests at market real estate rates. Secondly, there was no provision for hand over of the public infrastructure. The head lease provided for the development of a number of public areas which surround the development. But there was no provision that at a certain point in time these public area leases would cease being the responsibility of either the sublessee or the head lessee. That has led to great difficulty and legal tension between the various parties. Thirdly, and most importantly, the sublessees have no direct control over the property. Because of that they effectively operate as no more than tenants in shopping centres. It is an unacceptable situation and I hope that we can fix it.

Time expired.

Puttaburra, Ms I

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (9.30 pm): I wish to bring to the attention of the House a very serious case involving an innocent Palm Island woman who was not only the victim of a severe crime but also the victim of the legal profession and a member of this profession who seems to make a habit of preying on some of the most vulnerable people in the Indigenous community.

Iris Puttaburra of Palm Island was the victim of a number of very serious assaults. As a result of court appearances she was awarded a criminal compensation payout of \$15,000 by the Queensland court. She was represented by solicitor Tony Bailey. I table in the House this document which includes the details and tax invoices supplied by her solicitor to her.

Tabled paper: During her speech, Mrs Menkens tabled a bundle of documents relating to legal costs associated with a Criminal Compensation Claim by Iris Puttaburra.

Iris Puttaburra was awarded \$15,000 in compensation. How much did she herself actually receive? Some \$2,031.54. Where did the rest of it go? It went into the hands of her solicitor. I ask: is this moral, is it legal and is it the correct use of public money that has been awarded to a victim of serious crime? Had Ms Puttaburra been represented by Legal Aid Queensland, the legal costs would have been no more than \$4,400 and she would have received \$10,600 instead of just over \$2,000. There is no moral argument to suggest that a private solicitor should receive nearly \$12,000 for the same services. Some 80 per cent of the payout went to the solicitor, not the victim. I understand this practice is technically within the current law but I suggest the practice raises serious allegations of professional misconduct.

I question whether this lady was briefed on what her options would be. Was she placed in a position where it could be said that she was in a position of inequality when negotiating costs with her legal adviser? I understand free enterprise. I believe in free enterprise. A private solicitor, of course, has the right to charge various fees. However, this lady was quite horrified to see that her money had seemingly gone. I have no doubt that this is not an isolated case. The vulnerable people in our community need protection. They should not be preyed upon. I believe this matter should be the subject of an urgent investigation by both the Attorney-General and the Legal Services Commission. This solicitor is a parasite preying on the most vulnerable people in our community.

Dysart, Baby Change Facilities

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (9.32 pm): When a parent heads off to the local shopping centre with a baby or young child they expect to be able to take that baby or toddler to a clean and private room for the purposes of changing soiled nappies or for feeding. It is an expectation that the big shopping centres and department stores make some effort to meet. Baby change rooms should be a place where a parent can feel comfortable when they have to change their baby's nappy. It is not unreasonable for a parent to expect that every effort has been made by the responsible business to provide a place of privacy that is clean and safe for this important interaction with their child.

For the parents of Dysart there is no such place. In fact, the baby changing facilities on offer at the town's Garden Plaza Shopping Centre are on the nose. Despite the huge amount of revenue collected at the centre through rents on small business, the bubs of Dysart are being forced to carry their deposits with them until they get home. The owners of the complex, Mackay Business Brokers, fail to acknowledge the inadequacies of the baby changing needs of parents coming to the complex to shop. In fact, they seemed quite proud to tell me in a response to my representations on behalf of the parents of Dysart that the facilities 'have been in place for years'—meaning, I suggest, that they have served the purpose for a long, long time so what is the problem.

One parent who has lived in Dysart for 28 years recalls the same change tables when she was a child. Well I say poo, poo to the Mackay Business Brokers because what they offer Dysart parents is no longer good enough. What we have is two 70 centimetre square tables slotted into the corners of the toilets beside the wash basins. They are anchored by only a couple of screws on two sides. These tables are made of a very old style green laminate, are extremely wobbly and are on a lean. They are unsafe and unhealthy. Their limited size, shape and lack of support means they are completely unsuitable for use in changing a baby, especially any child beyond the age of six months. Parents have said they would never risk placing their babies on these benches for fear they would collapse.

After further contact with Mackay Business Brokers I was advised just prior to Christmas that they would 'endeavour to ensure that adequate provisions for baby changing needs are provided promptly.' Prompt action was indeed taken. A couple of extra support brackets were whacked up under the tables. It is quite clear that Dysart parents are not being given the respect and consideration they deserve by Mackay Business Brokers. Mackay Business Brokers is failing in its duty of care by not doing everything it can to protect the health and safety of Dysart's babies. I call on Mackay Business Brokers to act immediately and upgrade these facilities to a standard that meets the expectations of Dysart parents.

Special Circumstances Court; Domestic Violence

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (9.35 pm): I want to talk tonight about the special circumstances court, Court No. 3, in the Magistrates Court in Brisbane. As I understand it, the court has been operating since May 2006. It deals with people who are homeless, alcoholics or drug addicted. As most people know, the traditional courts simply do not have the time and their case load is so heavy that they cannot provide the services that these people need on a regular basis.

This court deals with those people who really should not be in the judicial system. They are caught by their own circumstances. To qualify for the court a person needs to plead guilty to a public order offence and have an impaired capacity at the time that offence was committed. The court itself offers support and understanding. I will quote from an article that appeared in the 'Focus' segment of the *Courier-Mail* on the weekend of 24 and 25 February. The defendant Dave appears before the court. The article states—

'I had my shoes stolen and I had blisters and couldn't walk,' he tells the court, his voice breaking with emotion. 'I went to the police for help but they couldn't help me. I got angry. I have been divorced. I have had my antidepressant medication stolen. I have had my mobile phone stolen, my socks stolen. It's been rough for the past four months. I'm trying to get into rehab for alcohol abuse but I can't get in because I have a court matter before me. People don't understand.'

This court is trying to find the reasons that people such as Dave are committing these offences. This court with a team of experts is trying to assist these people so their lives get back on track. I am not quite certain when the evaluation of this court is to occur. In my opinion this government needs to be commended for what it has done. It has put in place a court that is assisting the most vulnerable people in this state. For that, it needs to be commended.

I now move to the issue of domestic violence—a topic I have spoken on many times in this House. I would like to see a domestic violence diversion court established in a similar vein to the drug diversion court and the special circumstances court. This would be a court that actually looks at the issues and why domestic violence occurs and assists perpetrators to work through those issues. There are many perpetrators and also victims who do want to reconcile. The courts at this point in time do not allow for that to occur. If we could have a system in place that assists couples to get back together with the appropriate help, it may well do a lot of good for the family, for the children and also society as a whole. One could certainly see Legal Aid, Queensland Health, the Department of Housing and the police department being heavily involved in assisting these perpetrators deal with their issues so that they can get on with their lives under court supervision and perhaps, at the end of day, the husband and wife or the partners could re-form their relationship and live together with their children. I would ask the government to consider establishing a domestic violence diversion court.

Time expired.

Public Housing

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (9.39 pm): In August last year I was delighted to acknowledge the government's continuing investment in the current and future public housing needs on the Gold Coast. An announcement was made that the Department of Housing had purchased a development site on the Gold Coast Highway at Palm Beach on which it was planned to build accommodation specifically for single people. Properties acquired under the social housing program are chosen to be strategically placed to ensure tenants have access to support networks and services. The target locations are based on identified areas of need and areas affected by closures of caravan parks and other affordable accommodation. Palm Beach is one such area on the Gold Coast. Instead of acknowledging this important investment in public housing, I am appalled that the member for Currumbin, Jann Stuckey, has seen fit to sponsor a petition opposing the construction of studio apartments in Palm Beach.

Mrs STUCKEY: I rise to a point of order. I find it offensive that the member would accuse another member of merely representing her constituents by sponsoring a petition. Every member in this House puts forward petitions.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): There is no point of order.

Mrs SMITH: According to Mrs Stuckey—

... this plum site, close to local private development, could be better used for government offices.

One can only assume she thought it too good a site to house homeless people or those in insecure accommodation.

Mrs STUCKEY: I rise to a point of order. The member is speculating here. I ask her to withdraw. I find that offensive.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Speculation is not a matter for withdrawal. There is no point of order.

Mrs SMITH: The Gold Coast region's continued growth means more and more reliance is placed on traditionally low-paid workers in hospitality and retail being able to service the tourism industry. These workers and their families need to be housed and, while private rents continue to rise beyond what these workers can afford, more people are being forced to apply for public housing. While public housing waiting lists grow, the federal government continues to pour billions of dollars of taxpayers'

money into the rental assistance scheme. No thought is given as to how these funds could be directed to boost public housing stocks on the Gold Coast. Often the recipients of rental assistance are not the most needy within the community.

I am sure that, like me, the member for Currumbin receives continued requests from constituents for housing assistance. I would invite her to join me in raising a petition to present to the federal government requesting it to redirect taxpayers' money away from the rent assistance scheme and towards the purchase of property for public housing—property that would be owned by the people of Queensland for the benefit of fellow Queenslanders. While housing costs in the Gold Coast region continue to rise, so too will the demand for public housing. The issue of public housing is one that I will continue to pursue with a passion—

Time expired.

Vegetation Management

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (9.42 pm): I think a petition to stop the minister selling off the public housing assets might be a good start in that area. However, I rise this evening to tell the House about—

Mr SCHWARTEN: I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House. I have sold no public housing off in the honourable member's electorate.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr HOPPER: Sit down.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would remind the member for Darling Downs that a ruling on a point of order is made by the chair. That is the second time that you have presumed. Would you please continue.

Mr HOPPER: Thanks, Mr Deputy Speaker. He got me on that one.

I rise this evening to tell members about the landowners who have been adversely affected by vegetation management, and in particular the case of Geoff and Sharon Elliot of Verona of Inglewood. Geoff comes from an area that is very progressive. If there are ever any workshops organised by government, they are always one of the first to run one. The area started running workshops on vegetation management long before the legislation even existed. In fact, during a meeting he was attending information came through that vegetation management had been proclaimed. Geoff was the person who was designated to keep up with the legislation on behalf of the group. When the government announced that compensation would be provided, Geoff immediately applied. Geoff went to QRAA and filled out an application before DNR had even worked out its application form. He was one of the very first to fill out the form, and it even invented a form for him to fill out.

The rules at this point stated that if there was 30 per cent remnant vegetation in an area then people could apply. Geoff was able to apply. He got a letter back to say that they were not eligible because of the slope of the country and that they were in a high recharge area, meaning there was a possibility of high salinity. Geoff organised a workshop to look at salinity. DNR scientists came out to talk about salinity. Geoff got scientists from DNR for a field day and they suggested that Geoff could use an electronic conductivity meter to determine if there was any salinity. He spoke to the minister's office and they said that they did not have to go that far because there was something in the wind. It was announced soon after that the rules had been changed again saying that salinity was not an issue. However, the rules also changed so that people were only eligible if they had 30 per cent of remnant vegetation on their property.

Geoff found that he had 20 per cent remnant vegetation and was not eligible. The minister's office said that they would put Geoff on the end of the queue and if there was any money left over he would be eligible. Unfortunately, the application period closed and Geoff had not received any word of a change in direction. This legislation affects Geoff every day. His land is divided into two by a large amount of timber that makes stock handling nearly impossible. His application for enterprise assistance would have assisted to help the viability of his property that was so greatly affected by this legislation, but alas it seems that it is not to be.

Springwood Electorate, Schools

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (9.45 pm): It is that time of year again when we meet the leaders of the future in our schools, and I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all school leaders in my electorate. It never ceases to amaze me the high calibre of all students coming through our schools. Our future is certainly in good hands. It is also the time of year that many P&C and P&Fs have their AGM, and I take this opportunity to congratulate the new executive members and thank the retiring committee members for the hard work that they have done. I wish all school communities in the Springwood electorate a successful and enjoyable school year. I want to also take the opportunity to inform the House of a number of great initiatives in schools in the Springwood electorate.

Shailer Park State High School's project GLEAM Team won the Media Monitors Showcase Award for Excellence in Inclusive Education. Special needs are celebrated in an inspirational program creating real-life learning opportunities. GLEAM—short for Guided Learning Educationally Adjusted Mentoring—teams students from the special education unit with mentors from years 9 to 12 to run Sapphires Training Restaurant and Conference Centre. The GLEAM Team program recognises and values the diversity of students' talents. As a result of the program, students have achieved numerous work placements with support from six local businesses and community organisations.

I congratulate the school community members behind this program that is making a real difference to the outcomes of students. Sapphires Training Restaurant and Conference Centre is staffed by students from the special education unit and those studying hospitality practices gain practical experience by planning menus, setting the restaurant to preparing and serving food. Hospitality staff work with students developing prefunction or table layout, back of house such as preparing, cooking and cleaning, front of house such as serving and interacting with customers, and postfunction skills. The students are gaining practical experience in a real-life situation. I look forward to attending more functions at Sapphires. I particularly look forward to taking the Premier to Sapphires when he comes to Shailer Park State High School later in the year to officially open its middle schools building.

I now turn to Springwood State High School. It is a leading school in aerospace industry studies and this is having a real impact on opportunities for students. Already I have met two students from the Springwood electorate who are participating in this industry through their studies and work experience placements. Recently I had a tour around the Brisbane Airport and surrounding area and was amazed at the facilities and the success of the Queensland aviation industry. I do not have time tonight to go into the many companies that are training pilots or building helicopters or doing heavy maintenance on large aircraft such as 767s or 737s, but all of these companies are creating jobs, creating opportunities for young people and demonstrating that Queensland is definitely on the map when it comes to competing in the global market. As I said, the aviation industry is translating into jobs for young people in the Springwood electorate. I want to congratulate Springwood State High School on its initiative to recognise these opportunities.

Time expired.

Currumbin Electorate, Schools

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (9.48 pm): I am pleased to inform honourable members of some of the memorable celebrations I have attended in Currumbin in recent times and I wish to convey my heartfelt congratulations to all of these deserving recipients. With schools back in full swing, it was indeed a genuine pleasure to take part in two school leaders' induction ceremonies held at Elanora High and Elanora State School respectively. At the full school assembly at Elanora High School, captains Vanessa Bath and Jacob Reid were presented with their badges. School vice-captains Thirushka Naidoo and Kyle Dunlop, plus a throng of student leaders from house captains to peer mediators, were duly recognised and it was enlightening to see such senior students taking on leadership and mentoring roles.

At Elanora State School the induction ceremony acknowledge new school captains Brittany Hodgkinson and Reid Price, with Madison Hoffman and Brad Cook appointed as vice captains. House captains, student councillors and performing arts representatives were also formally presented. I take a moment to congratulate Mrs Roslyn Wilson upon her recent appointment as principal at Elanora State High School. After serving several years as deputy, this is welcome news as Mrs Wilson is a stabilising influence in this large school.

On 23 February it was a pleasure to join emergency services minister, Pat Purcell, at Bilinga Fire Station for the official commissioning of a new fire truck, a Mercedes Atego type 3, worth around \$490,000. Later in the afternoon I attended the presentation of national medals to long-serving members of the Currumbin Valley Rural Fire Brigade. Clyde Holst, the fire warden at Upper Currumbin Creek; Bill Griffiths, from Piggabeen Road area; and Peter Old, deputy fire warden and first officer have 75 years of volunteer service between them. The National Medal is awarded after 15 years service in organisations that protect life and property at some risk to their members. A clasp is awarded to the holder of a National Medal after each additional 10 years of service. The medal is individually inscribed and is a fine recognition of an individual's dedication to their community. Unlike many government ministers, Pat Purcell acknowledges members when he is visiting the electorate, regardless of their party status. Perhaps other ministers could take a leaf out of Pat's book and show some manners under similar circumstances.

Tonight, Volunteer Marine Rescue members were presented with their National Medals at Currumbin. They were Peter Saunders, who began his service in the Brisbane floods in 1974; Robert Craig, who joined Currumbin Air Sea Rescue as a volunteer in May 1980; and John Nolan, who joined the Currumbin Air Sea Rescue Volunteer Service in May 1990.

I would now like to correct some misinformation put forward by the member for Burleigh. I am on record as supporting low-cost housing in my electorate. It is the government that sold the parcel of land at Elanora, which would have been far more appropriate for this sort of housing than spending big bucks on the Gold Coast Highway. I would welcome more public housing in my electorate. That was a very cheap shot by the member for Burleigh.

Fire Ants

Mr WETTENHALL (Barron River—ALP) (9.51 pm): In May 2006, the DPIF confirmed the presence of electric ants in the northern Cairns suburb of Smithfield in my electorate of Barron River. The identification was made from specimens collected by residents who had suffered numerous painful stings. Subsequent surveys of neighbouring properties found electric ants on 18 properties in close proximity to the original site. These properties adjoin forested areas connected to national park and the Kuranda Range section of the Wet Tropics World Heritage area.

The electric ant, also known as the little fire ant, is native to central and South America. They have a significant invasive history in Africa, North America and six Pacific island groups. They are included as one of the world's worst 100 invasive species by the World Conservation Union. Electric ants can cause declines in the numbers of invertebrates and small vertebrates such as lizards and ground-nesting birds. They compete with other ant species, and on Christmas Island they have devastated the forest structure.

The ant injects powerful venom when it stings, resulting in painful, itchy and persistent pimples sometimes lasting up to three days. People are often stung from contact in gardens and swimming pools. Foraging trails may enter houses and nests can be made in beds, furniture and food. Nests may be moved into buildings or trees during heavy rain to escape flooding. Sometimes a severe allergic reaction may result. In rare cases, the sting can even blind domestic pets such as cats and dogs.

Ants are spread by people and, once established, colonies can spread by budding at 170 metres per year. Elsewhere, the ants have been known to affect horticultural industries, mainly from the effects of stings on workers in the field. Because of their small size, they are unlikely to be seen before the sting is inflicted.

Electric ants have been declared as a pest under the Plant Protection Act 1989. The declaration establishes a pest quarantine area so that movement of high-risk items which may spread the ant can be controlled. High-risk materials include green waste and plant material and disturbed soil. Properties in the declared areas must dispose in special areas set aside for building materials, construction and demolition waste, and garden waste. Potted plants must be chemically treated before being moved and inspected, and prior to the disturbance of soil or earthworks a site inspection must be carried out.

The treatment and surveillance program is being administered by the Electric Ant Control Centre, jointly implemented by DPIF, DNRW and EPA. There are currently 13 staff. So far two rounds of a baiting program have been completed. The team has conducted door-to-door surveys, held 19 public displays and issued direct mail to over 250 residents. A shopping centre display at Smithfield recently attracted over 200 inquiries.

From the original 18 properties first detected, some 110 at Smithfield have now been identified. Just some days ago, the tiny ants turned up in a new northern beaches suburb of Kewarra Beach. In one yard the infestation was virtually blanket. Treatment is by broadcast baiting of corn grit soaked in soya bean and the growth inhibitor hydramethylnon.

Time expired.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 9.55 pm.

ATTENDANCE

Attwood, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Darling, Dempsey, Dickson, Elmes, English, Fenlon, Finn, Flegg, Foley, Fraser, Gibson, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hobbs, Hoolihan, Hopper, Horan, Jarratt, Johnson, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Knuth, Langbroek, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee Long, Lee, Lingard, Lucas, McArdle, McNamara, Male, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nicholls, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Pratt, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Rickuss, Roberts, Schwarten, Scott, Seeney, Shine, Simpson, Smith, Spence, Springborg, Stevens, Stone, Struthers, Stuckey, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson