PROOF ISSN 1322-0330

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Subject **FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT** Page

Wednesday, 18 April 2007

L J OSMOND
CHIEF HANSARD REPORTER

N J LAURIE
CLERK OF THE PARLIAMENT

WEDNESDAY, 18 APRIL 2007

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. MF Reynolds, Townsville) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 am.

PRIVILEGE

Alleged Intimidation of Member

Mr SPEAKER: I refer to the matter of privilege raised by the Leader of the Liberal Party yesterday morning regarding correspondence from a legal firm received by the member on account of his activities in the House. The member also wrote to me on the matter yesterday and I have considered the member's correspondence. I have also discussed this matter with the Clerk who also had correspondence with the legal firm prior to the legal firm writing to the member. For the information of the House I table that correspondence.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 20 March 2007, from Mr M O'Connor of Gabriel Ruddy & Garrett solicitors to the Clerk of the Parliament relating to a tabled paper.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 20 March 2007, from the Clerk of the Parliament to Mr M O'Connor of Gabriel Ruddy & Garrett solicitors relating to a tabled paper.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 26 March 2007, from Mr M O'Connor of Gabriel Ruddy & Garrett solicitors to the Clerk of the Parliament relating to a tabled paper.

I note that in a letter from the Clerk to the legal firm dated 20 March 2007, six days before the correspondence from the legal firm to the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Clerk warned the legal firm about the parliamentary privilege applying to members' activities in the House, the privilege status of tabled documents and the possible contempt that could apply to any interference in proceedings or the rights of members.

There could be an argument that the letter to the Leader of the Liberal Party is reasonably carefully worded so as not to offend any privilege, possibly as a result of the warning that had been already issued. Nonetheless, members, I am deeply concerned about the ignorance of the privilege of proceedings of this House demonstrated in the original correspondence to the Clerk and how the requests in that correspondence were inappropriate. That the letter to the Leader of the Liberal Party followed without any express recognition of the member's rights compounds that matter. I am also more generally concerned about letters from lawyers to members regarding members' activities in the House. Those in the legal profession may not realise how inherently intimidating an action a legal letter in itself is, especially if the tone is not moderated or rights recognised. I appreciate that private legal rights are involved and that solicitors act in their clients' interest and the approach should be balanced.

In short, this is a matter that does raise issues of privilege and is best examined in detail with an opportunity for full detailed consideration and submission. I have therefore decided to refer the matter to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee for its consideration, not just of this particular matter but any wider issues involved that the committee believes should be considered and reported upon.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Serious and Violent Offences, Bail Laws

Mrs Lee Long from 3,694 petitioners requesting the House to reconsider laws under which those charged with serious, violent offences are able to obtain bail.

Kulangoor, Landfill

Mr Wellington, two petitions, from 95 petitioners in total, requesting the House to reject the application by Maroochy Shire Council for a proposed landfill site at Ferntree Creek Road, Kulangoor.

Nambour Heights, Pedestrian Crossing

Mr Wellington from 237 petitioners requesting the House to provide a pedestrian crossing on Mapleton Road at Nambour Heights.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Safer Roads Sooner Program

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.34 am): My government takes road safety very seriously and today, with the minister for transport, Paul Lucas, I am pleased to announce a $46 million boost in our road safety program.

There have been 77 new road safety projects approved under our Safer Roads Sooner program. These projects will save lives—it is that simple. It will be funded through almost $34 million of fines paid by speeding motorists and those who have run red lights, traffic camera fines, plus another $12 million direct from Main Roads. I make no apologies for using speed and red light cameras to catch people doing the wrong thing. It is a voluntary charge—an avoidable charge.

Speedsters and red-light runners should rest assured that their fines will be going to safety projects right around the state. From guardrails and traffic lights to overtaking lanes and new bitumen, these are the critical works we believe will make a real difference to the state's road toll. The new projects are in addition to the existing 184 projects which have, in previous years, been funded under the program. The program targets areas where people have died or been seriously injured in motor vehicle accidents. This strategy will help save lives and lower the number of people ending up in hospital with serious, life-changing injuries.

The funding for this Queensland government project is around five times the size of the federal government's funding for its national Black Spot program, which I discussed briefly with the Prime Minister last Friday at COAG. The Howard government's $8.9 million program is spread across nearly 177,000 kilometres of road. By way of comparison, the $46 million program I am announcing today will fix black spots across 29,000 kilometres of Queensland roads.

The Safer Roads Sooner advisory committee has chosen the roads to be fixed as part of this program which will rollout over the next three years. The advisory committee includes representatives from the RACQ, Queensland Police Service, Queensland University of Technology's Accident Research and Road Safety Group, the Queensland Trucking Association and Bicycle Queensland.

I want to thank them for working with us to help save lives on Queensland roads.

Local Government Reform

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.37 am): I have been heartened by the strong response to our proposed reforms to the local government system. Many mayors and councillors have put parochial interests aside and have indicated that they are prepared to work with us. I encourage all mayors to put Queensland and its ratepayers first and work with the independent commissioners. Let us look at who has been supportive so far: the lord mayor has been supportive, and I thank him for that; the mayor of Gladstone; the mayor of Rockhampton; the mayor of Cairns; the mayor of Dalby; the mayor of Logan; the mayor of Ipswich; and the mayor of Gold Coast. We can also add to the list the mayor of Maryborough; the mayor of Hervey Bay; the mayor of Caloundra; the mayor of Maroochy; the mayor of Mount Isa; and the mayor of Redcliffe.

Mr Pearce: The mayor of Mount Morgan.

Mr BEATTIE: I take that interjection. Later this morning the minister for local government, Andrew Fraser, and I will meet with six of the seven Local Government Reform Commission members. Unfortunately, Tom Pyne cannot make it down from Cairns in time but he will be fully briefed after the meeting. The minister and I will discuss the terms of reference for the commission and the broader issues faced with such a major reform to our system of local government.

A core component of the Size, Shape and Sustainability review was 10-year financial sustainability forecasts prepared by the Queensland Treasury Corporation. The reviews assessed the capacity of each local government to meet its community commitments in the short, medium and long term.

The reviews provided local government with insight into the financial health of each individual council in the present and over a 10-year horizon. Alarmingly, the QTC reviews rated 43 per cent of Queensland councils as having a weak or worse financial outlook. While these findings do not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils, on page 22 of the report I tabled yesterday it notes that the Auditor-General has found that these councils have an 'unacceptable level of audit qualification' and 'over time 50 per cent of all councils' annual financial statements have been qualified'.

These findings are simply not sustainable—not for good governance and certainly not for ratepayers. I am not blaming councils. They are operating in a system that is more than 100 years old. Many are faced with shrinking rate bases and a limited capacity to deliver proper services. The reality is that larger councils have the financial and resource foundations to deliver more and better services for communities. Stronger councils are better placed to ensure council revenues are returned to the community in the form of services and infrastructure, rather than absorbed by costly administration which is duplicated from council to council.

That is why we are undertaking this reform process. I am under no illusions and neither is the minister nor my government—it will not be easy. It will involve amalgamations and boundary changes. It will be politically difficult, but it is the right thing to do. That is why we have chosen an experienced and balanced team to undertake this difficult process. Combined they have more than 100 years experience in government. I am confident they can help us deliver a more modern and efficient system of local government to better serve the ratepayers of Queensland.

The minister produced a report which I tabled in the House yesterday and which all members should have had an opportunity to look at it. It is titled *Local government reform: a new chapter for local government in Queensland*. I draw the attention of the House to a number of graphs in that report, including the one on page 5 entitled 'Grants from all states to local governments: analysis of grants paid in 2003-04'. Members will see that, with the exception of the Northern Territory, Queensland has the highest funding per capita to local government of any state in Australia. Why is that? Because we are committed—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: It is 'funding per capita'. That means funding per head. Let us go through it.

Mr Hobbs: Have a look at Victoria, you dill.

Mr SPEAKER: I did not hear that remark, I am sorry.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, I did, but he is hardly worthy of consideration. Let us deal with this issue. Let us deal with the councils. Let us deal with the issues, not the politics being played here.

Let us look at grants from all states to local governments, which is an important analysis. Let us look at how much they contribute. This is funding per capita. I think most people understand what that means, and I will ask for the opposition spokesman to be briefed later on what it means. If we go through each one of these, we see that funding per capita for New South Wales is $34.30; Victoria, $65.20; Western Australia, $83.90; South Australia, $31; Tasmania, $25.30. I have provided the figures for the other large states. Ours is $88.50. We are the highest in Australia. In terms of other states, you need to be aware, Mr Speaker, as I am sure you are, that Western Australia is restructuring at the present time and so is the Northern Territory. So these restructures are being done but, with the exception of the Northern Territory, we have the highest funding per capita in Australia.

It is not unreasonable for us to simply indicate that ratepayers are entitled to get value for money. When we have 43 per cent of councils in the category I indicated before, that shows that the state government is funding and doing more than our fair share, but we also expect that to result in better services for councils and better opportunities for the community to benefit from the services provided.

If we then go to page 25 of the minister's report, which is 'Grants from all states to local governments: analysis of the grants paid in 2003-04', we will again see how we compare and we will see that we have the highest funding. I draw the attention of members to page 34 of that document which lists the benefits of reform to Queenslanders. These are the benefits, and I acknowledge the succinct way this has been put by the minister and his department.

Here are the benefits: financially strong councils, better roads and infrastructure, better planning outcomes, more capability and capacity, a focus on communities, better business practices, a bigger picture approach to local government and reduced duplication. The list includes more detail than that, but I urge those members who are serious about this reform area to read the document because I think it puts forward a compelling case for the major reforms that were outlined by the government yesterday and which we will be implementing.

I say to all local governments that I understand this is not easy. I understand that people will have their concerns but this is the way forward. I urge everybody to put aside their partisan considerations or self-interest and think about Queensland.

Mr SPEAKER: Premier, some members have asked me whether that report you quoted from today and that the minister quoted from yesterday is available to members.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, Mr Speaker. I tabled it—

Mr SPEAKER: It has not been tabled as yet.

Mr BEATTIE: I tabled it yesterday. I will ask the minister to ensure that copies are provided to every member, but I tabled it yesterday.

Queensland Economy, Property Sector Benefits

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 am): Later today I will be addressing the Queensland Division luncheon of the Property Council of Australia where I will be talking about these local government reforms that the government has announced. I acknowledge their support for the reforms. The Property Council is an important business body that is presently experiencing an unprecedented boom in activity here in Queensland. Its members are major

benefactors from the population shift to Queensland that is both a result of our strong economic activity and a driver of that activity. My government supports business and we support development in a balanced way.

Today I can confirm that, although South Korea was successful in its bid to host the 2011 World Athletics Championships, we intend to press ahead with plans to develop the proposed athletics village site at Woolloongabba which was an integral part of our bid. It is located in the electorate of the Deputy Premier. The site was originally intended to house 3,200 athletes and officials during the 2011 World Athletics Championships. We are determined to press ahead with this project, which will be a modified version of the original plan to build 530 apartments and an athletics training track for the use of athletes.

It is not only an excellent opportunity for further urban renewal in Brisbane, but it will also give Queensland the option to bid for the 2015 World Athletics Championships if we choose to. The Woolloongabba site is part of our ongoing drive for urban renewal in inner Brisbane. Other projects presently on the urban renewal agenda include the $120 million mixed use development at the Petrie Terrace police barracks site and a $50 million urban village project at Boggo Road, which the minister for public works announced the other day. It is an exciting time to be involved in the property sector in Queensland.

Anniversary of Queensland's Separation from New South Wales

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.47 am): Mr Speaker, 2009 marks the 150th anniversary of Queensland's separation from New South Wales. The anniversary of this significant milestone is an opportunity to celebrate. A key component will be the exclusive commissioning of a commemorative numberplate. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The anniversary of this significant milestone is an opportunity to celebrate all that is unique and significant about Queensland.

The Celebrations are designed to engage Queenslanders and inspire them to recognise our past achievements, current opportunities and future directions.

The vision for the celebrations—'*Reflect on our past, imagine our future*'—will drive a year-long program shaped around four themes—history, people, places and future.

It has already captured extensive public interest with more than 300 community leaders across the State already engaged in briefing sessions about the celebrations.

A key component of this program involves the exclusive commissioning of a commemorative number plate for Queensland's local councils.

With this in mind, I have unveiled the specially designed, limited-edition number plates, which will range from QLD 001 to QLD 150.

Featuring the message '2009—Celebrating 150 Years', the plates offer local councils the opportunity to publicly showcase their involvement with the program from now until 2008.

In 2009, councils will auction the commemorative plates and all funds raised will be invested in Queensland's 150th celebrations, activities and events in each community.

To apply for a plate, councils will be asked to complete an expression of interest form.

Following purchase, ownership of the plates will be transferred to the local councils at a cost of $1,000.

In addition individual plates will be provided to the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, the Queensland Cancer Fund, Smith Family and the Wesley Mission to raffle or auction at fundraising events.

The activities and events that shape the year-long celebration offer a unique opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a Queenslander and I invite every community in Queensland to join in.

Trade Mission to Africa

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.47 am): I reported yesterday on my recent overseas trip. From 19 to 31 March this year I had the privilege of leading this delegation. I will be tabling later today the full details of that trip. I seek leave to have some material incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

From 19-31 March this year I had the privilege of leading a Queensland trade mission to South Africa, Kenya and the United Kingdom.

Such trade missions are one part of a comprehensive strategy to drive export growth in Queensland.

It is a simple equation: More exports mean more jobs for Queenslanders.

I have kept the House well informed about this trade mission, both prior to departure, and again yesterday when I made a preliminary report on our efforts.

Today I am pleased to table a comprehensive report for the information of the House along with supporting documents and additional information about the trip.

I thank the large delegation who accompanied me, on the mission.

Once again they have demonstrated that Queensland businesses have developed a strong export culture. They are innovative and often world leaders in their field.

Premier's Literary Awards

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.48 am): The Queensland literary awards are now open again. These awards, which offer $225,000 in prize money over 14 categories, are one of the leading literary award programs in Australia. I seek leave to have details incorporated in *Hansard*, as part of our Smart State approach.

Leave granted.

I'd like to urge authors across the country to put pen to paper and enter the prestigious 2007 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards.

The awards, which offer $225 000 in prize money over 14 categories, are one of the leading literary awards programs in Australia, and are held in high esteem for their richness, diversity and generosity in rewards for authors.

The Awards recognise and reward talent—be it a budding writer or an established author with published work.

They also offer authors the chance to gain exposure in the national literary community, as well as providing financial assistance to support the development of high quality writing.

Mr Speaker, the Queensland Government is proud to support the literary community through these awards, and to recognise the talent that brings stories of Australia's people, places, culture, history and politics to life in various literary forms.

Entries close on Friday 25 May and I encourage Australian, and particularly Queensland authors to enter.

Water Research

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.48 am): The Queensland government's continuing work to secure a sustainable water supply for south-east Queensland was strengthened with the launch of a $50 million research alliance earlier this month, which could more than double the water recycling capacity of Australia's capital cities. I was part of that signing. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Queensland Government, the CSIRO, the University of Queensland and Griffith University created the Urban Water Security Research Alliance.

Mr Speaker, the Government will invest $25 million in this five year alliance, which will be the largest urban water research program in Australia.

These highly reputable institutions will share ideas and information and work with agencies such as the International WaterCentre, Healthy Waterways and the Queensland Water Commission's expert panel to get smarter outcomes for Queensland's water future.

Mr Speaker, the Alliance will take Queensland to a world-class level in this field of research and is a clear indication of our determination to address the growing challenge of water supply.

Gallery of Modern Art

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.49 am): I recently reported to the House that we had a cabinet meeting at the Gallery of Modern Art. The other night I attended, along with the minister for arts, a farewell function for Doug Hall AM. He is leaving after 20 years. I want to publicly thank him for his vision and drive and the role that he played. As the public works minister would know, he was an active participant in the consultation involved in GoMA. I thank him and wish him well. I wish to include a tribute in *Hansard*. I seek leave to incorporate the details.

Leave granted.

The creation of GoMA, together with the State Library Redevelopment known collectively as the Millennium Arts Project, has been Queensland's largest cultural infrastructure project in 30 years and my Government is proud to have delivered it to the Smart State.

The $291 million investment has given Brisbane a riverside cultural and leisure precinct, which is arguably the best in the world.

Currently home to our fifth Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, GoMA continues to draw a large number of Queenslanders and tourists, and Cabinet Ministers had the opportunity to see first-hand just how popular this arts venue is within our community.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to put on record the Government's thanks to the retiring Director of the Queensland Art Gallery, Doug Hall AM, for his vision and drive for the past 20 years.

Doug was instrumental in the development of GoMA, and on behalf of Queenslanders I would like to thank him for his wonderful work with the Queensland Art Gallery and wish him every success in the future.

Power, Mr W

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.49 am): I want to pay tribute to Queenslander Will Power who at just 26 years of age has done what no other Australian has done. On 8 April Will won the 2007 Las Vegas Grand Prix in Navada, making him the first Australian to ever win a Champ Car world series race. Having won the first race of the series this young man from Toowoomba is now touted as a genuine contender for the overall title.

Mr English interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, he did finish third on the weekend. He is a very presentable and decent young man. I wish him well. I seek leave to incorporate more details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

However, we shouldn't be surprised by Will's success.

Last year he was the first Australian ever to be named Champ Car Rookie of the Year following an excellent season including a champ car race podium finish.

This is yet another example of a young Queenslander heading to the top in their chosen field.

I know everyone will join me in wishing Will the best of luck for the remainder of the Champ Car Series and we look forward to hearing more about his successes in the future.

Noosa Hinterland, Development

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (9.50 am): South-east Queensland is the fastest growing region in Australia and by 2026 will be home to an extra million people. Planning to meet the needs of our growing population is an issue that this government takes very seriously. The SEQ Regional Plan is clear evidence of this. That is why our government has taken an interest in a significant development proposed for the Noosa hinterland at Kin Kin.

The Edge Noosa development application was lodged by Titanium Enterprises to Noosa Shire Council on 10 November 2005 for preliminary approval for a tourist resort. This application is for a large-scale tourism resort that includes 219 detached accommodation units, a 100-room hotel, golf course, equestrian centre, restaurant and function facilities and indoor and outdoor recreational facilities. Its scale far exceeds what is allowed in the SEQ Regional Plan's regional landscape and rural production area.

The proposed location is in a regional landscape and rural production area that includes good quality agricultural land and areas of significant biodiversity value. These are the very areas the SEQ Regional Plan was established to protect. The size and location of the proposed development is not consistent with the intent of the SEQ Regional Plan and I have used my reserve powers under the Integrated Planning Act to call in the application.

I believe it is a matter of state interest that the application be called in so I can undertake further investigation of it and uphold the intent of the SEQ Regional Plan, which is sustainable growth. I want to assure the House that all approvals processes were carefully followed before I made this decision.

On 6 October last year the Coordinator-General issued a concurrence agency response to the Noosa Shire Council directing that preliminary approval be refused because the development did not comply with the SEQ Regional Plan. On 27 February Noosa Shire Council refused both the preliminary approval and the development permit application. Its report outlined inconsistencies with the SEQ Regional Plan and the council's own planning scheme. The council formally notified Titanium Enterprises of its decision and on 7 March the applicant appealed to the Planning and Environment Court.

By calling in this application I take on the role of assessment manager under the Integrated Planning Act. The Department of Infrastructure will be coordinating the assessment of the application and provide a recommendation for my consideration. I expect to be able to make a final decision in the coming weeks.

Local Government Reform

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (9.52 am): Yesterday the Beattie government made the difficult but necessary decision to move ahead with a program of reform for Queensland's local government. It was reform instigated by local government and it is reform that will be completed by the state government through the appointment of the independent Local Government Reform Commission. With 43 per cent of councils assessed by the Queensland Treasury Corporation as either financially weak, very weak or distressed the government had to act. To do nothing was not an option; to do nothing would have been recklessly irresponsible.

If we did not act then both in the short and medium term we would have been confronting local governments facing financial collapse. When councils teeter on the brink of financial collapse it is ratepayers who fund the bailout and the council workforce is in peril. The government has embarked upon this reform course for one reason and one reason only. Queenslanders, ratepayers, residents and council employees deserve a sustainable system of local government. They deserve to know that their council will be a viable, continuing operation, a secure employer and able to continue to service their local community.

Let us be clear about the situation. On 16 March 2008, the day after the next local government elections, the same number of bins will need to be collected, the same number of parks will need to be mowed, the same number of libraries will need to be staffed, the same number of dog registrations will

need to be issued and the same number of development application will need to be assessed. There will not, however, be the same level of overlaid administration duplicated across 157 individual local governments. The focus will be on service delivery and on the community—efficient service delivery with councils and their workforce able to focus on their true task, the task that councils and council workers want to focus on: better serving their local communities. This reform will secure a system of local government that means councils will be sustainable well into the future and that is in the long-term interests of every single employee of local government across Queensland.

Road Safety

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (9.54 am): Overtaking lanes, intersection upgrades, wider shoulders, guardrails and new road markings are the small cost-effective projects making a big impact on road safety across Queensland. As outlined by the Premier the Queensland government's Safer Roads Sooner strategy will invest more than $46 million in a wide-reaching road infrastructure safety blitz. The lion's share of it has come from the pockets of motorists who have put their own lives and the lives of others at risk and those who have been photographed speeding by red light and speed cameras.

Their recklessness is paying for a $10.7 million road safety blitz on the Sunshine Coast. We are taking affirmative action to reduce the road toll with 15 projects, including $2 million on the Tin Can Bay Road. It means widening the road shoulder, removing roadside hazards and fixing the Rainbow Beach Road intersection.

In Brisbane we will spend $9.3 million: $3.8 million on the Darling Downs and more than $3 million delivering eight simple but effective life-saving road projects on the Gold Coast. The decision about what is to be spent where has been made by a panel of independent road safety experts and interest groups chaired by the parliamentary secretary for main roads, Andrew McNamara. I thank him for the job that he and his committee have done.

They have decided that more than half of the $46 million for the Safer Roads Sooner strategy will focus on areas outside the south-east. This means a $4.3 million investment injection for Warwick and the border region, including heavy vehicle rest stops, more fatigue management signs and highly visible road markings. There is $2.5 million worth of projects on the drawing board for the Roma region.

It is a rock solid multimillion-dollar commitment to driving down the road toll in regional and metropolitan areas. It is proof that we are not revenue raising but reinvesting fines to deliver safer roads for the benefit of all Queenslanders. In the grand scheme of things they are small projects—77 mostly simple common-sense measures that will make a big difference to road safety. If they save just one life or prevent just one person from spending the rest of their life in a wheelchair then it is a worthwhile investment.

Public Housing, Water Usage

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (9.56 am): Members of the House are well aware that south-east Queensland is in the midst of the worst drought on record. All property owners need to curb water use and reduce water consumption. The Department of Housing is one of the largest property owners in Queensland with 8,424 properties and 16,345 tenancies in Brisbane. These properties include units, townhouses, and detached houses.

For around two years we have been seeking from the Brisbane City Council a breakdown of kilolitre water usage for our properties. We finally received some of this information from Brisbane City Council on 5 April 2007. The council data shows that 78 per cent of the department's rateable properties in the Brisbane area have reduced their water consumption since 2004. It also shows that more than 3,000 of these properties used less than 400 litres per day.

On the other hand, 1,495 departmental properties have increased consumption since 2004. We have begun analysing this data and it is clear that there are a range of reasons behind this increase. Some properties were vacant at the first reading. Some smaller households have been replaced with large households. A total of 18 households were identified as having very high water usage and inspections were carried out on those properties as soon as we received the data. The inspections found eight major water leaks which have now been rectified. The tenants of these properties have been advised of the need to immediately report maintenance issues and to reduce water consumption.

The Department of Housing takes its responsibility as a property owner very seriously. All new property constructions, major modifications and upgrades are fitted with AAA-rated shower roses, taps and dual-flush toilets. Some 30,000 of the 55,000 social housing properties already have dual-flush toilets. All properties in south-east Queensland are being fitted with water efficient shower roses and water flow restrictors to taps in kitchens, laundries and bathrooms as part of a $5.2 million program. As at 30 March 2007 more than 16,300 installations had been completed since this program started in September 2006. All 34,000 properties in south-east Queensland will be completed by July 2007.

Pups in Prison Program

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.59 am): Last year I visited a number of correctional centres in the United States and saw a very successful program that used dogs in prisons to improve prisoner self-esteem and assist with rehabilitation. As a result of that trip, I asked Corrective Services to investigate introducing a similar scheme into Queensland's prisons. Last week I launched Pups in Prisons—a Queensland first. This is a partnership between Queensland Corrective Services and Assistance Dogs Australia and has seen six dogs—three black labradors and three golden retrievers—take up residence at the Darling Downs Correctional Centre. The pups arrived in February when they were only eight weeks old. A group of eight carefully selected prisoners took over responsibility of caring and socialising the dogs and conducting basic training. They will look after the dogs until they are 16 months old. Once the program is finished, the dogs will return to Assistance Dogs Australia's national training centre for six months of intensive training before they are matched with people with physical disabilities.

Caring for the dogs will provide prisoners with new levels of responsibility, self-esteem and communication skills while also teaching compassion, patience and cooperation—attributes which will help the prisoners when they are released. I spoke to many of the inmates who are looking after the dogs and they expressed surprise at how much work bringing up a puppy and training a puppy is. One prisoner said to me that it was the only thing that had made his long stay in prison seem to make any sense at all.

As well as this particular program, in September last year the Numinbah Correctional Centre in the Gold Coast hinterland introduced a program where prisoners in the women's unit began fostering dogs and pups from the local animal shelter. In many instances these dogs have been found abandoned or have been mistreated by their owners. To date, eight dogs and 55 puppies have been through the program. The puppies are cared for and trained before being returned to the Animal Welfare League, which then finds suitable homes for them. As well, prisoners at Woodford Correctional Centre are making possum-nesting boxes out of scrap materials from the workshop. They then donate the boxes to wildlife carer groups and schools that care for injured wildlife, and many of these possum boxes are now in use. Prisoners gain much from being given the opportunity to give something back to society and groups like Assistance Dogs, Animal Welfare League and wildlife carer groups are benefiting as well.

Careers Week

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (10.01 am): This week is Careers Week—bringing together business, government and training providers to showcase the careers and employment opportunities available throughout the state. Careers Week provides an important means of engaging with the community on the vital issue of skills development. Our government has demonstrated its strong commitment to overcoming skills shortages through a range of initiatives under the $1 billion Queensland Skills Plan. Careers Week supports those initiatives and encourages private training providers, employers and the community to become partners with us in developing a highly skilled workforce for the future.

The recent release of the 2006 year 12 outcomes data shows Queensland schools are doing a great job in supporting this goal. There is now tremendous diversity in our schools. Some schools are producing strong academic outcomes while others have VET programs or school based apprenticeships or traineeships with direct employment outcomes. I want to particularly congratulate Miles State High School, Gin Gin State High School, Malanda State High School and Ayr State High School for their strong academic outcomes. I also want to congratulate Pine Rivers State High School, Helensvale State High School and Calamvale Community College, to name just a few, for their tremendous vocational education results.

Careers Week activities this week include TAFE open days, professional development seminars for small business and a free careers and employment expo at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Members may have noticed a major advertorial in today's paper in relation to that expo. For those not in Brisbane, there will also be careers expos in Townsville on 24 April and on the Gold Coast on 27 and 28 April. In addition, ABC Radio has joined forces with TAFE Queensland to promote vocational careers with a series of events in Brisbane and regional Queensland over the next six weeks.

Today the ABC is hosting a debate at the Southbank Institute of Technology tackling the topic 'carpentry is the new medicine' and conducting live broadcasts from the Brisbane North TAFE Grovely campus between one o'clock and three o'clock this afternoon and from the Metropolitan South TAFE Loganlea campus between three o'clock and six o'clock this evening. I would like to thank the ABC and all those involved in Careers Week. It is indeed another important avenue to enable us to focus on the vital issue of skills development—an issue crucial to Queensland's future.

Health, Funding

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (10.04 am): It is time the Commonwealth got fair dinkum about restoring the balance to health funding in Australia. Funding for public health under the Australian Health Care Agreement between Canberra and the states is supposed to be a straight fifty-fifty split. Unfortunately, Queensland public hospitals are being short-changed by Tony Abbott to the tune of some $2.6 billion under the current agreement. That is because Commonwealth health funding has not kept pace with the extra $10 billion we in Queensland are investing in health. In fact, Queensland will have contributed 65 per cent of health funding and the Commonwealth only 35 per cent over the life of the current five-year Australian Health Care Agreement. The extra $2.6 billion we are owed by Canberra would pay for a lot more doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, beds and surgery in our public hospitals.

Instead of negotiating a fairer funding deal, Tony Abbott is too busy lining the pockets of the private health funds. In the past eight years private health insurance premiums have risen 47 per cent under the Howard government. At the same time, Commonwealth funding for Queensland public hospitals has increased just 31.3 per cent. This imbalance can only place further pressure on our public hospitals in terms of staffing, beds and surgery waiting times. Increasingly, Queenslanders who can afford private health cover will opt instead to seek free treatment in public hospitals rather than go to the private sector. Already, nearly half of the patients admitted to Queensland public hospitals who have private health insurance do not actually use it. That is about 38,000 patients each and every year and that is unsustainable.

Mr Abbott must take action now to urgently restore the balance between funding for the public health system and the private sector. He cannot afford to wait until after the federal election to start negotiations with the states for a new Australian Health Care Agreement, and patients cannot afford to wait while Tony Abbott helps the private health funds get richer at the expense of public hospitals. We need a fairer funding deal now that restores the balance and ensures our public hospitals have the funding they need to meet the challenges of a growing and ageing population.

Mooloolaba Spit Master Plan

Hon. CA WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Water and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland) (10.06 am): The Queensland government and the Maroochy Shire Council released a draft master plan for the Mooloolaba Spit on 7 February this year for the final round of public consultation. Recently I was pleased to extend the public consultation period by a further month at the request of the community groups who asked for more time to comment. The community has until 30 April 2007 to have its say on the draft plan which addresses issues of future planning for a very important land area on the Sunshine Coast. Community groups also recently asked that technical reports done as part of the Mooloolaba Spit Futures Study be released. I am informed that final versions of these reports will be on the Maroochy Shire Council's web site later today. The technical reports covering issues including traffic, urban design and noise levels will help to ensure that the community is fully informed about the draft plan. There have been uninformed allegations that decisions have already been made about the draft master plan. That is incorrect. I reiterate that this is a draft plan, not a final plan. No decisions have been made nor deals done. I urge the community to have its say before 30 April.

Interruption.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Attendant Call Buttons

Mr SPEAKER: It has come to my attention that the attendant call buttons are not working. They will be attended to at the earliest possible time. In the meantime, attendants will remain vigilant to some signals by members.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Resumed.

Death of Mr R Dempsey; WorkChoices

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations) (10.09 am): Prior to delivering my ministerial statement, I would like to pass on my condolences to the family of former Industrial Commissioner Ray Dempsey, who passed away last week and whose funeral is being held today.

WorkChoices has created uncertainty in local government. In the recent High Court case Mr Bennett QC, the Solicitor-General for the Commonwealth, made the following submission—

... if the principal activity is concerned with the exercise of governmental authority, as in the case of a municipal council, in making this judgement one would give more weight to that activity. So one would not say because it collects the garbage and charges for it a municipal corporation becomes a trading corporation.

The confusion and employment uncertainty may well continue until the Federal Court and/or the High Court make a decision in the Etheridge Shire Council matter as to whether councils are constitutional corporations. The federal government appears to have changed its position into now supporting councils wishing to move to the federal system.

The Queensland position is that local governments, while given autonomy via the Local Government Act 1993, are nevertheless an instrumentality of state governments and as such are not trading or financial corporations. The Queensland government is fighting to protect local government workers' conditions and job security from the threat posed by WorkChoices. If we do not take this fight up on behalf of council workers they will not have the protection of a no-disadvantage test in the negotiation of agreements in their workplace. So we are standing with the council workers in their struggle to protect their conditions.

To this effect we are seeking a declaration in the Federal Court that the Etheridge Shire Council and all the other councils are not constitutional corporations. We are working with the Local Government Association of Queensland and unions to ensure that all parties continue to operate in a manner that engenders confidence and transparency in local government as a public sector employer. We are writing to councils urging them to delay any actions under WorkChoices until the Etheridge matter is decided. We are working with local government to maintain a fair and balanced industrial relations system.

National Youth Week

Hon. FW PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services Queensland, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth) (10.11 am): On the weekend I had the pleasure of launching Queensland's National Youth Week celebrations at the magnificent Riverway in Thuringowa. National Youth Week, which is a joint initiative of the Commonwealth, state and local governments, has become the nation's largest celebration of young people since it began in 2000. The objectives for National Youth Week are to give young people aged between 12 and 25 the chance to express their ideas and views, raise issues of concern to them and act on issues that affect their lives; to give the wider community the opportunity to listen to young people and acknowledge and celebrate the positive contributions that they make in their local communities; and to promote a community focus on issues of concern to young people.

This year, National Youth Week is being held from last Saturday, 14 April, to next Sunday, 22 April. The theme of National Youth Week is to celebrate and recognise the value of all young Australians to their communities. The Queensland government, through my Department of Communities, provides grants of up to $9,500 for Queensland community organisations, young people's groups and local government authorities to organise Youth Week events. These grants support the hosting of one main event in each region, resulting in 10 main events in total. This year's grants totalled $94,000—an increase of $24,000 from previous years' National Youth Week grants.

The state launch event, which I attended last Saturday, was held with the support of the Thuringowa City Council. Further National Youth Week events will include the presentation of the 2007 Queensland Young Volunteer Awards in Brisbane on Thursday, 19 April. This event highlights the positive contributions that young people make to our communities, and the Queensland government is proud to be supporting such events.

Dingoes, Fraser Island

Hon. LH NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism) (10.12 am): Late yesterday I was saddened to hear that a young girl was bitten by a dingo on Fraser Island. Fortunately, the girl sustained injuries that were able to be treated by ambulance officers at Eurong.

In response to this incident, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will be increasing patrols around the area in an attempt to identify the suspect animal. The animal has been identified and it will be trapped and humanely destroyed.

Dingoes are usually known to approach humans only when seeking food. Therefore, aggressive behaviour is often attributed to the illegal practice of feeding these animals. The current breeding season has also seen dingoes displaying higher levels of aggressive behaviour. The QPWS has a comprehensive Fraser Island dingo management strategy in place which strongly advocates against anyone feeding the animals.

Public safety remains the number one priority of the QPWS in relation to dingo management and QPWS rangers manage human/dingo interactions according to that strategy. The communication elements of this strategy have been independently assessed as world's best practice and have been very successful in reducing the risk to public safety whilst at the same time ensuring a sustainable population of wild dingoes on the island.

A wide range of management methods are used by the QPWS on the island to reduce the risks to humans from dingoes in line with the strategy. These include monitoring dingoes, public education, infrastructure deterrents including fencing, and enforcement of regulations related to feeding or deliberately making food available for dingoes.

Quarterly risk assessments have determined there has been a marked reduction in the level of risk across the island. But let me say that anyone caught deliberately feeding a dingo or making food available is issued with an on-the-spot infringement notice which carries a $225 fine or $3,000 if it goes to court. My thoughts are with the little girl and her family and I have asked the department to keep me fully informed on this matter.

2006 Queensland Election Statistical Returns

Hon. KG SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (10.14 am): I table the Electoral Commission of Queensland's report of statistical returns for the 2006 state election.

Tabled paper: Report by Electoral Commission Queensland titled 'Statistical Returns 2006 Queensland Election 2006'.

The state election, held on 9 September last year, was the 52nd general election of the members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. As honourable members know, the result of the election was the Australian Labor Party, 59 seats; the Nationals, 17 seats; the Liberal Party, eight seats; One Nation, one seat; and Independents, four seats. At that election, 2.24 million votes were cast—more votes than were cast in 2004.

However, despite these extra votes, voter turnout last year was slightly lower than the 2004 poll. There were 2.48 million people enrolled to vote at the time of the last election—1.29 million female electors and 1.19 million male electors. The Electoral Commission undertook a comprehensive electoral information and awareness campaign, including a mail-out of information personally addressed and posted to each voter on the roll. Votes were cast at 1,687 static polling booths, 239 prepoll centres and 570 declared institution mobile polling booths. There were 8,400 polling officials and three remote area mobile polling teams.

A concern I have is the disengagement of young Australians from our electoral processes. At the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General meeting in Canberra late last week, I sought and received support for a national summit aimed at increasing the civic involvement and voter enrolment of young Australians—and, of course, this is National Youth Week. Importantly, a representative group of youth ambassadors from across the country would be invited to attend and participate in the summit.

It is estimated that more than 300,000 young Australians eligible to be enrolled to vote do not appear on the electoral roll. I believe the 'Voices and votes' report, released by the Queensland parliament's Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee—LCARC—last year, and other studies will be very instructive for the summit. The committee's report found that only 49 per cent of 18-year-olds in Australia were enrolled to vote at the end of the last financial year. In Queensland, the rate was even lower at 42 per cent. An effective democracy must encourage its citizens of all ages to be informed and engaged.

State Emergency Service, Hand-held Radios

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.17 am): I am pleased to announce today that the Beattie government is delivering on another key election promise, with new hand-held radios for State Emergency Service volunteers currently being delivered to regions throughout Queensland. The new radios were promised as part of the $52 million Safeguarding Cyclone Communities commitment. The first 525 hand-held radios purchased under the program are worth over $600,000 and are currently being distributed to regions ahead of the rollout to local units.

The new handsets have been designed with volunteers in mind. They are easy to operate, compact in size and are weather proof, making them ideal for responding to any situation. By introducing these new standardised handsets, if a radio fails any other radio can be used to continue the operational response. Over the next five years $6.7 million will be spent on improving radio communications for volunteers to support them in their vital work.

The equipment continues the government's focus on interoperability within our emergency services. The new radios allow more flexibility at incident scenes by continuing to allow separate agency incident commanders to communicate without having to be in the same place. This is achieved by maintaining access to the common emergency channel, which allows SES controllers to talk with police, ambulance and fire commanders at the scene of any incident.

As part of the program 30 base station repeaters will also be purchased, allowing a wider area of radio coverage and ensuring that this vital equipment is kept serviceable and up to date. An extra eight field technicians will also be funded to provide training for volunteers across the state, maintain equipment, and improve radio communications for volunteers.

The purchase and distribution of these radios will also make the handsets standard across Queensland, meaning SES volunteers in areas like Mount Isa and Mount Morgan will be using the same technology as those in Brisbane. Having everyone use the same equipment means we will be able to streamline our volunteer training. This represents a significant investment in improving radio communications during responses to major incidents and shows this government's commitment to supporting our volunteers. I would like to thank the Premier and Deputy Premier for the great support of the volunteers in this program. As everybody knows, communications is the lifeblood of Emergency Services.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Transport Infrastructure

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.20 am): I give notice that I will move—

That this House recognises the emerging crises of traffic gridlock, overcrowded public transport, inferior road infrastructure, and unaffordable housing; and calls on the Premier to follow the example set by the Queensland Coalition and urgently refocus his government and ministers on resolving these serious problems that are challenging the liveability of south east Queensland.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Local Government Reform

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.21 am): This morning in the House we have been treated to one of the more absurd examples of ideological stupidity. The minister for industrial relations read a statement concerning the threats and uncertainty facing local government because of all things the WorkChoices legislation. My honourable friend must have written that speech before yesterday because local government in Queensland is facing threats and uncertainty on an unprecedented scale because of the betrayal and dishonesty of the government of which that minister is a part.

The betrayal of the process that local government had in place to voluntarily assess its own sustainability in the future will go down in the history of Queensland as one of the greatest acts of political opportunism and political betrayal that has ever been seen in this parliament. There has been a lot of nonsense here this morning from the Premier and the minister, but no evidence was put forward yesterday and no evidence has been put forward today that the process that was already in place would not have delivered an outcome that would have ensured the sustainability of local government. Nothing has been put forward to suggest that those communities could not decide for themselves how they could bring about a sustainable outcome to the challenges that face them.

Local government is about local people making local decisions, and it has been overridden this week by a dictator at the state government level beset on an ideological crusade that has nothing to do with ensuring the best interests of local people, especially those people in the small regional communities where local councils are an essential part of the fabric of the community.

Time expired.

Traveston Dam

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (10.23 am): Yesterday at Gympie 150 concerned local residents were duped into participating in the cruel hoax that is the federal government's Senate inquiry into the Traveston Dam. Warren Truss, Barnaby Joyce and Ron Boswell might run around and say that they are opposed to this dam.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! People cannot hear the speaker. This is a private member's statement and I ask you to respect that.

Mr McNAMARA: The dogs may bark but the caravan moves on. What does the Liberal Party really think about the Traveston Dam? I would like to read a couple of quotes from the then environment minister, Senator Ian Campbell, who said that he wanted to give the green light to the controversial Traveston Dam north of Brisbane. Senator Campbell told the *Australian* on 7 February 2006 that he would use his powers to enhance, not block, the dam. He said—

Crucial nation-building projects like the Mary Dam can be compatible with good environmental outcomes and this is the balance we will be seeking.

This is the truth of the Liberal Party's view. But it is not just Senator Campbell. As was reported in the *Financial Review* on 17 February—

Liberal senators argued long and hard in the Senate party room against setting up a Senate inquiry.

Julian McGauran, Ian Campbell, Bill Heffernan, Rod Kemp and Santo Santoro all railed against the idea, arguing that it would make the federal government look 'anti-dam'.

Mr Gibson: What's Peter Garrett's view? He doesn't have one.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Gympie, order!

Mr McNAMARA: The senators were told that in the end they had no choice but to let the inquiry go ahead since the Nationals had already told locals that there would be one. We should not look at what they say but look at what they do.

Mr Gibson: Just look at what Labor does.

Mr McNAMARA: As Lachlan Heywood reported in the *Courier-Mail*—

Mr Gibson: You bully people.

Mr SPEAKER: I warn the member for Gympie.

Mr McNAMARA: As Lachlan Heywood reported in the *Courier-Mail*—

The Federal Government is backing a $2 billion upgrade of the Bruce Highway at Gympie that assumes the controversial Traveston Crossing Dam will go ahead.

…

Acting PM Mark Vaile—

another National—

said the route between Cooroy and Curra was a "practical alignment."

And even Warren Truss said a route around the dam needed to be identified. The Nationals and Liberals are trying to speak out of both sides of their mouths at once.

Time expired.

Bioreactor Landfill Facility

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (10.25 am): I use this opportunity to read into the parliamentary record a letter I have recently received from one of my constituents. It states—

I request that you lobby the Minister of the Environment on my behalf, to change the guidelines for location and operation of Bioreactor Landfill dumps.

Maroochy Shire Council is proposing to build a Bioreactor Landfill Dump in a valley between the towns of Nambour and Yandina. They are using the current dry landfill EPA guidelines of 500 metres as their justification for locating this type of dump so close to thousands of homes; whereas, overseas this type of dump is located 5km from homes and 10 km from waterways.

The EPA needs to URGENTLY review the guidelines and create specific guidelines for Bioreactors.

These are some of the objections I have already raised with Maroochy Shire Council:

I strongly object to the location of a Bioreactor Dump within 5km of any residential homes.

I'm not prepared to accept the stench from this proposed dump, as it will impact on my family's lifestyle and health.

I am concerned that the already polluted river systems and water table will be further endangered by this project.

I don't believe we should destroy farmland that the Mayor has said is so important to preserve.

I can't believe the council is planning to build a road through a National Park just for Garbage trucks.

I am concerned that a beautiful valley and native animal's habitat will be destroyed, degrading the Bio-Diversity our council claims to care so much about.

If this is the best site council can find, then we shouldn't have a bioreactor in our shire. Ship the waste out as other councils do. I call upon you as a member of Parliament to represent my concerns to the minister as a matter of urgency.

A concerned Queenslander.

I table this letter for the benefit of the minister and all members.

Tabled paper: Copy of letter, undated, from T Biedrzycka to Mr Wellington MP relating to a bioreactor landfill dump proposal.

Members will recall that recently I have tabled a number of petitions in this House along similar lines, calling on the government to review and refine the current legislation which regulates bioreactors in Queensland.

Workers Compensation Insurance

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (10.27 am): Workers compensation insurance is not only compulsory but also employers can be liable for heavy fines if they have not paid their premium and a worker is injured. The good news for employees is that workers are covered regardless and will be paid compensation if their claim is accepted. The bad news for employers who fail to cover their workers is that WorkCover can legally recover from the employer the amount of the compensation paid, together with a penalty equal to 50 per cent of that payment. WorkCover could also recover the amount of unpaid premium, together with a penalty equal to 100 per cent of the unpaid premium.

Workers compensation can be a significant overhead for any business—although average premium rates are lower in Queensland than in other states—and that is why WorkCover has a number of payment options. Currently, if cash flow is an issue, employers can use a credit card or apply for an instalment plan in the case of financial hardship. In order to be eligible for an instalment plan the premium must be greater than $2,000 and the application supported by written advice on why the premium cannot be paid by the due date, the steps taken to obtain the funds to pay the premium and how the proposed instalment arrangement will be met. If accepted, instalment plans of up to four months can be offered.

However, from 1 July 2007 employers will have greater flexibility through the introduction of more payment options. They will be able to choose to pay their WorkCover premium monthly, quarterly or annually. A three per cent discount will be offered to employers who pay their premium annually. As I said, WorkCover Queensland's average premium rates are the lowest of any state in Australia and have been for some years. The Queensland government makes no apologies for protecting its workers and those in the private sector but is doing so taking into account the needs of employers.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Local Government Reform

Mr SEENEY (10.30 am): My first question without notice is to the Premier. As late as yesterday, local governments were still receiving approvals to proceed to the assessment stage of the Size, Shape and Sustainability process. For the information of the House, I table a letter that was received by the WESTROC group of councils, giving approval for $73,000-odd to do just that.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 30 March 2007, from the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport (Mr Fraser), to Councillor John Brent, Mayor, Boonah Shire Council, relating to approval of a funding application under the Regional Collaboration and Capacity Building Program.

While the councils were engaged in this process, and some of them were even having meetings to progress the Triple S process, the Premier stood in the parliament and overrode the work that they had done to decide their own futures. Can he tell us and, more importantly, can he tell those councils when he took the decision to unilaterally override the work that they were doing to decide their own futures? Was that decision triggered by their ongoing criticism of his performance in areas like water infrastructure?

Government Members: Ha, ha!

Mr BEATTIE: No, I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Indeed, we should give him credit because, unlike his predecessor, he has the courage to ask me questions. His predecessor did not. Let us give him credit for that.

The Leader of the Opposition asked two questions. The answer to the second one is, no, of course not! That is nonsense. The answer to the first question is basically this: any of the work that is done will be referred to the commissioners. That work will be considered by them and they will make recommendations. Therefore, has the effort made by local government been worthwhile? Of course it has and it will be taken on board by the commissioners.

The second part of the question asked whether this has anything to do with any criticism. The answer is no.

Mr Seeney: What was the trigger, then?

Mr BEATTIE: I will come to that.

Mr Seeney: What was the trigger?

Mr SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition has asked the question once. The Premier has said that he would come to that, so let us hear the Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: I have been nice to the Leader of the Opposition so he should give me a chance to answer the question.

Mr Seeney: You're only being nice so you don't have to answer the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition!

Mr BEATTIE: I am very happy to answer the question. There is a very good answer and I am very happy to give it if the Leader of the Opposition would stop taking up my time. I will be disappointed if he cheats me of the time to do it.

I do wish to complete my answer to the second question that was asked. Members have to remember that this view has been supported quite significantly. I refer members to the editorial in the *Fraser Coast Chronicle,* written by Nancy Bates who is one of my strongest critics. She states—

Local Government Minister Andrew Fraser deserves full credit for calling a halt to the miserable, torturous and doomed process they called Size, Shape and Sustainability.

It might have been conceived with good intentions. Queensland's councils have been sorely in need of reform for decades and the economies of the regions have been suffering because of it.

I have to say I agree with her.

On 26 February, we held a strategic cabinet meeting at which I asked ministers to come forward with issues that needed to be considered and long-term strategies for the future of the state. One of the issues identified by the minister for local government was the future of councils and their financial viability or lack thereof. As a result of the discussion that took place on 26 February, the minister wrote to all councils. He asked them to write back by 29 March, giving some idea about where they were in relation to the whole issue of amalgamations, how it was all going and so on.

As a result of that, it became very clear that the reform process that had been started was going nowhere. As a result of that, on Monday cabinet made a decision to do exactly what the minister and I announced yesterday. Let us be clear about the dates: on 26 February we held a strategic meeting. The minister then wrote to councils asking them where they were going. They replied and, with the exception of a few smaller ones, basically said, 'Nowhere.' Because of that response we knew that this was too important to ignore. The cabinet decision was made on Monday and I announced it yesterday.

Water Infrastructure

Mr SEENEY: My second question without notice is also to the Premier. During the election campaign, the Premier committed $3 million to look at building a pipeline from the Burdekin to Brisbane, a distance of over 1,000 kilometres. The option to bring water from the Clarence River or Tweed River involved pipelines of around 100 kilometres rather than 1,000 kilometres. Is the Premier's decision not to support this proposal that was put forward by the federal water minister more about playing politics rather than fixing the problem?

Mr BEATTIE: I am delighted with both questions that I have received morning, and this one in particular. I place it clearly on the record: I said that we had an open mind about this.

Opposition members: Oh!

Mr BEATTIE: Let us be really clear.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: If members opposite do not like the answer—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, could I at least answer the question. I am very happy to answer it, as both questions could have been Dorothy Dixers. I really want to answer this.

The Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure and I had a long discussion about this. Members may recall that I went to Canberra for a meeting with the Council of Australian Federation and then subsequently with COAG. As I said, the Deputy Premier and I had a long discussion about this. I know the Leader of the Opposition will find this hard to understand, but Queensland cannot build a dam in New South Wales. Frankly, I am a bit miffed that we cannot, because if we were in charge of New South Wales it would be a better-run state. I have no criticism of my good mate Morris Iemma, but if we had the chance to have northern New South Wales in Queensland we would take it like that. In terms of this proposal—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I am giving a serious answer, which is really simple. We said that we had an open mind. If the federal government wants to reach some understanding with the government of New South Wales to provide Queenslanders with water, of course we will take it. It will be a good thing.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, they do not like the answer. When I highlight our position, they do not like the answer. The truth is that we do not control New South Wales.

Ms Bligh: Yet.

Mr BEATTIE: Not yet. I am unhappy that we do not. Have we talked to Malcolm Turnbull? Yes, at different times both of us have talked to him. I have not talked to him since he made the announcement.

Mr Seeney: You should have been on the phone straightaway if you were serious about it.

Mr BEATTIE: I have to say that I enjoy the interjections of the member opposite. The next day I was at a COAG meeting with the Prime Minister, who is a little bit senior. Leaders tend to be more senior than ministers, although I know that that does not work on the opposite side but it does over here and I want to keep that trend.

On a number of occasions the Deputy Premier has met with Mr Turnbull on this issue and I have discussed this proposal. Members may recall that when we sat last if I recall rightly—and if I do not remember correctly I apologise—the Leader of the Liberal Party made reference to an ad that we ran in relation to providing water from this region to the Murray-Darling. I believe he asked me about that, if I am correct.

We have always identified this as an area for water, but we cannot deliver it. Only the federal government, with New South Wales, can deliver this. I wish to highlight some of the issues that we have had in the past. Who fixed the Tugun bypass, for example? We had to fix it on our side of the border, but we cannot do that in relation to water. If the Leader of the Oppositions is asking us whether we would do it, the answer is yes. However, if he asked whether that would stop Traveston stage 1, the answer is, no, it will not. It might stop stage 2, but not stage 1.

Lockhart River, Plane Crash

Mr O'BRIEN: My question is also directed to the Premier and Minister For Trade. Can the Premier inform the House of the government's reaction to reports that no charges will be laid against the airline responsible for the Lockhart River air crash?

Mr BEATTIE: I will do that. I know that the member for Cook is particularly concerned about this, because he has raised it with me. I thank him for his question.

I express this government's serious concern at yesterday's reports that Commonwealth authorities will not prosecute the airline involved in the Lockhart River crash in 2005. This was one of Australia's worst civilian aviation tragedies. Fifteen people were killed when a plane crashed into a hill in rugged terrain on its approach to the Iron Range airport at Lockhart River on the Cape York Peninsular. The plane was en route from Bamaga at the tip of the peninsular to Cairns, with a stopover at Lockhart River.

The wreckage of the 19-seat metroliner, operated in affiliation between Aero-Tropics and TransAir, was located on a hillside in tropical forest approximately 10 kilometres north-west of Lockhart River. All 13 passengers and two crew members—that is, 12 men and three women—were killed in the crash. On board was a renowned scientist just days away from retirement, a young police woman about to get married and the mother of six who was trying to make a new life for herself. Then there were the three footy mates headed to a carpentry course, a man on his way to celebrate his wedding anniversary and two young pilots. This tragedy scattered much further than the wreckage of the aircraft. Fifteen people died in what was Australia's worst air disaster in more than 40 years. Fifteen families have lost a son or daughter, brother or sister, a husband, wife or partner, or a parent. Those families deserve better and they deserve justice.

Despite the Australian Transport Safety Bureau investigation finding that TransAir failed to report 25 safety incidents in the two years leading up to the crash and pilot error and poor maintenance to blame for this tragedy, no action will be taken against the airline due to a 12-month statute of limitations that has expired.

I understand statute of limitations, and given years I think that it is not a bad principle, but 12 months? I have asked our Attorney-General, Kerry Shine, to write to his federal counterpart, Philip Ruddock, questioning how this could have been allowed to occur and what can be done to rectify the situation. He did that yesterday. A 12-month statute of limitations is clearly not practical when it is the Commonwealth's own investigation practices that have taken the time. The investigation took so long; how can there possibly be a 12-month statute of limitations?

The federal government should address this issue immediately. To not do so will compound the injustice to the families of the victims of the Lockhart River crash. I say to the local representative, the member for Cook, that we intend to continue to pursue this and I know that he will continue to pursue it with me.

Mr SPEAKER: I welcome to the parliament this morning teachers and students from St Thomas More Primary School in Toowoomba, which is in the electorate of Toowoomba South represented in this place by Mr Mike Horan.

Federal Industrial Relations

Dr FLEGG: My question without notice is to the Premier. Doesn't Kevin Rudd's commitment to a centralised federal IR system make a mockery of the Premier and his government's hysterical fear campaign against the Howard government?

Mr BEATTIE: The answer is no. This is a sensible question. We have had some sensible issues this morning. I am determined to give those opposite a sensible answer. Industrial relations is not just about justice in the workplace for workers to be given a fair go, it is also about the economy, growth,

jobs and opportunities. In a state that leads the nation in terms of economic growth, industrial relations is important. I do not have the statistics in front of me, but we have some of the lowest strike rates in Australia and I want to see it stay that way.

I have read most of Kevin Rudd's speech, although I have to confess that I have not read every part of it because we have been focused on other things, but the position he has spelt out, as I understand it, is the provision of a two-tier system. I use that to describe the fact that there will be a state system and a Commonwealth system. What he has determined is that the states will have responsibility for local authorities, which I think is important because they are set up under state legislation. We will also have responsibility for our workforce—state government employees—which, of course, we should. As I have indicated, there are some who are covered under federal awards such as nurses. Frankly, I would prefer them to be covered under a state award but that is the choice of the union and I respect that.

So will there be a dual system? The answer is yes. What Kevin Rudd is trying to do is give clarity to the dual system. One of the difficulties that exists under the Howard model, if I can use that broad term—forgetting about the workplaces issues which I am very happy to talk about—is that it is confusing. There is uncertainty about the application of the corporations power in relation to local authorities, for example.

Ms Bligh: And unincorporated bodies.

Mr BEATTIE: There is confusion, as the Treasurer just indicated, in relation to unincorporated bodies. There is an enormous amount of confusion at the moment about who fits under the federal system and who fits under the state system. What Kevin Rudd is trying to do is provide clarity. Do I welcome that? Yes, of course I do. Quite frankly, based on the history of this, I do not particularly like some of the other areas in the private sector necessarily going to the Commonwealth area. But the facts of life are that we lost the case in the High Court. We challenged it and we lost it and everybody has moved on. Do I like that? No, I do not, but I accept that the federal leader of the party has to make a decision to get clarity.

It is wrong to suggest that there will be only one system. There will not. There will be two. Kevin Rudd's system provides clarity. That is long overdue. We will work with the federal leader. I believe that he will be the Prime Minister by the end of the year. I intend to work with him. John Mickel, the minister for industrial relations, and I met about this yesterday. We had a long discussion about sections of the speech that applied specifically to us. The minister and I will be working with the federal leader to ensure that we get clarity and we have a clear delineation of who does what.

Local Government Reform

Ms JARRATT: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier please advise us as to what impact he believes the local government reform process will have on Queensland communities?

Mr BEATTIE: In my view the answer is, in one word, a 'positive' impact. As I outlined earlier, the local government reform process we are undertaking will not be easy. It will have significant impacts and we understand that, but they will be good impacts for Queensland. We believe that the impact will be positive and it will open up opportunities for residents of regional and rural Queensland.

The current system of local government is simply not working to the extent that it should be. Queensland is not unique in this situation. Let us look at who else has had reform. Reform has already occurred in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and, indeed, New Zealand. Reforms are underway in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. All states are bringing their system of local government into the 21st century. Those opposed to this are saying that we should have a second-rate system. We will never have a second-rate system while I am Premier. We want the best for Queensland and I make no apologies for that. Throughout Australia and internationally reform of the sector has been taking place to enable more responsive and professional local bodies.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: I call on the member for Darling Downs to take back that unparliamentary comment.

Mr Seeney: It was the member for Burnett.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. I call on the member for Burnett to withdraw that unparliamentary comment.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw that comment.

Mr BEATTIE: We need to create a better system. My government is determined to do just that. I know that the opposition is trying to run a scare campaign. That is how it sees its job and it can do that if it wants. I would hope that it would support something better for Queensland. The reality is that many of our councils have been hit hard by skills shortages. Local governments of all sizes are finding it difficult to attract and retain staff in competition with major businesses and industry. The problem has been

magnified for councils which have limited financial facilities and resources, as the minister and I have previously stated. This has caused skills shortages across the local government sector, in particular in the areas of planning, building, surveying, engineering, accounting, environmental health and information technology.

The reality is that larger councils with greater financial resources would be significantly better placed to establish robust, regionally focused employment opportunities. A number of the key mayors absolutely agree. Liberal Lord Mayor Campbell Newman stated—

There are very many small councils in the state of Queensland and arguably a better job would be done if some of them were rationalised.

The mayor of Gladstone, Peter Corones, stated—

The announcement is timely because our own review group of councils was at a crossroads determining the next step in the review process. This morning's announcement now makes a path clear.

The mayor of Rockhampton, Margaret Strelow, stated—

A gutsy and necessary move. I heartily applaud your initiative announced this morning. Well done.

The mayor of Cairns, Kevin Byrne, stated—

Courageous. Very few of those councils most in need of change responded positively to this self-assessment process.

Federal Industrial Relations

Miss SIMPSON: My question is to the Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations. After listening to the Premier's backflip to support Kevin Rudd's centralised federal IR system, I ask: has the minister also backed down on his previous opposition to a centralised federal system and will he now be backing the new Labor proposed system?

Mr MICKEL: Through you, Mr Speaker: Mr Premier, I honestly did not put her up to this. We have had two questions now about Kevin Rudd's policy. Have those opposite completely given up? John Howard is so behind that they are now talking about a new Rudd Labor government. Isn't that a great thing? Isn't that absolutely magnificent? The next few months will be absolute agony over there.

Mr Gibson: We'll have nothing to complain about.

Mr MICKEL: I take the interjection from the member for Gympie. The member for Gympie asked me the question—

In establishing a statutory authority to monitor the impact of WorkChoices, what guarantees will he be extracting from the new authority to not embrace the principles of WorkChoices on the employees?

That was the question from the member for Gympie. He supports our position on WorkChoices. He knows what a disaster it is. I congratulate the honourable gentleman on his courage for being alone over there in recognising what a piece of buffoonery WorkChoices is.

If the honourable member for Maroochydore honestly believes that WorkChoices is great, why, oh why, won't the Howard government put in a no disadvantage test? That is the flash point of the whole issue. It is as simple as that. Why won't the Howard government put in the no disadvantage test?

The other thing the member is deeply embarrassed about is the fact that the Howard government will never release the secret information it has. It took a leak to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and what a leak it was. As well as the fact that rights had been stripped away, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that statistics showed that a third—yes, one-third—of the individual employment contracts lodged during the first six months of WorkChoices provided no wage rises. They also showed that the staff of the Office of the Employment Advocate believe that 27.8 per cent of the agreements might have broken the law by undercutting one of the legislative minimum employment entitlements. So almost a third of them had broken the law. Do we represent that sort of thing? There is no way in the world we represent that.

Last year when the honourable member for Maroochydore and those opposite had the opportunity to vote for decency in the industrial relations system, what happened? It is worthwhile going over it and seeing what happened when the Premier moved that a certain number of conditions be enshrined. These are the sorts of things that were voted down.

Time expired.

Traveston Dam

Mr McNAMARA: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure. An issue raised at the Senate's Traveston Crossing Dam inquiry is the level of consultation that has taken place between the government, individuals and the wider communities of the Mary Valley and Gympie areas. Deputy Premier, apart from the fact that the Premier and yourself attended lengthy and very public meetings which thousands attended, can you detail what consultation has taken place?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question and for his ongoing interest in this important piece of infrastructure. As members may be aware, we established a task force to work with communities affected by the proposed dam, and that task force is headed by former Governor, Peter Arnison. In total, more than 530 meetings of that task force involving residents have been undertaken. We estimate that a total of 6,120 people have attended those meetings. There have been more than 8,100 phone call contacts outlining information about the dam, and there have been more than 7,100 items of correspondence.

Mr Gibson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Gympie, I have already warned you and I am about to implement the standing orders.

Ms BLIGH: In addition, flyers, letters and inserts into local newspapers have thus far totalled 106,700 plus. This does not include individual deputations with ministers and D-Gs, unlogged phone calls, media statements and advertising material of the publications with the inserted material. We have been very open and very up-front about this dam. We have been clear about why it is needed, and we have taken a number of very reasonable steps to protect the interests of the people in the area. The people in this area are entitled to as much information as they want, and we are doing everything in our power to deliver that to them.

Make no mistake, I have heard nothing from day one of the Senate inquiry that would cause this government to reconsider our position for one second. We are determined to build this dam. There are two million south-east Queenslanders who are counting on us to do it—and they can count on us. There is nothing in this Senate inquiry to make us reconsider our position.

The Senate inquiry, as outlined earlier, is nothing more than a political exercise. Senator Heffernan, as the chair of this committee, wrote to me asking for the state government's cooperation in ensuring that members of the Senate committee had a tour of the site. That was a very reasonable request. If they are going to look at this issue sensibly, they should go and look at it. I organised for an on-road tour as well as a plane so that the senators could have a flyover of the site and understand what they were looking at. Mr Speaker, which senators do you think failed to take up that offer? Which members of the Senate inquiry did not avail themselves of that offer? The people who were not on the plane were Senator Andrew Bartlett, Senator Ron Boswell and Senator Barnaby Joyce. Opposition members cannot come in here and pretend they are serious. We hear Senator Boswell talking about this, but he could not even be bothered having a flyover. He could not even be bothered driving around the site.

Time expired.

Local Government Reform

Mr HOBBS: My question is directed to the Premier. I refer to the Premier's ministerial statement on local government yesterday where he indicated that the reform process that replaced the Triple S—which incidentally should now be referred to as Screwed, Sidelined and Silenced—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Members, I am keen to hear what the member is saying about this.

Mr HOBBS: I am very keen for the Premier to hear this question as well.

Mr SPEAKER: I am sure he is keen as well.

Mr HOBBS: He knows exactly where local government is coming from. The Premier indicated that he would have an open and transparent process. Will the Premier table the Treasury advice and the individual financial sustainability reviews for all councils which indicate in many instances that smaller councils are in fact the most viable?

Mr BEATTIE: From our point of view, we are very happy to have that information published. In fact, the local government minister wrote to the councils yesterday. Since the councils own it, as the shadow minister would know, we have asked for their permission to publish it, or at least the minister has suggested they publish it on their web site. We actually want it out there. What the opposition spokesman needs to do now is get on to every one of those councils and all of his mates and tell them that we want it published. He needs to ask them to publish it on their web sites. We want every one of those journalists up in the gallery and elsewhere to publish it, because it highlights why we need to do this.

As I said, the minister wrote yesterday to the councils. The councils own the information, so it is their information. We are asking them to put it on their web sites. My challenge to all the councils is to put that information on their web sites by close of business today because we think people need to know it. We absolutely agree with the shadow minister. This is an historic moment. It is the first time I have agreed with the shadow minister for local government. We think that information should be made available.

Let us not trivialise this. The community is entitled to know this information. Members would be aware that in the report the minister prepared and which I tabled yesterday we gave a clear indication of the financial viability of councils. That is the QTC material. It sets out—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I am trying to answer the member's question. Normally, that is done with some degree of courtesy. I am happy to answer the question. In the report I tabled yesterday, we provided a snapshot that sets out the issues and the amount of funding, and I made reference to that this morning. In essence, what are the issues here? The issues are simple. The Queensland government is funding local councils at well above the national average. If we take the Northern Territory out of it, we are the state government providing the most funding per capita in Australia. That is the first point. The second point is that the QTC report indicates that 43 per cent have got financial issues. There is no argument about that.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Please, don't be rude.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Warrego!

Mr HOBBS: You're misreading it.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Warrego, I just asked you to deter from your behaviour. I call the Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: Let me make it very clear: no disruption from the opposition will stop reform of local government. It is very simple. We believe that the information the opposition spokesman sought should be released by the councils. That is the answer to his question. The point is very simple. Their financial viability is in question. I have highlighted the figure of 43 per cent. We want to make certain that there is a new era for local government in the 21st century. We are determined to do that. I know that this is tough. I know that there will be politics played by opposition members, who are only interested in politics and not interested in the future of local government. We are going to build a new local government that will be stronger than it has ever been before. It will be a strong local government that will provide services to the community.

As I pointed out before, the mayors have overwhelmingly supported this. What about the mayor of Cairns, Kevin Byrne? He said, 'Courageous. Very few of those councils most in need of change responded positively to this self-assessment process, despite being given the time and offers of assistance to do the job.' Kevin Byrne said that. The opposition can hardly say that Kevin is in our pocket; he is actually in one of your parties, not ours. He is a conservative.

Time expired.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Algester, I welcome a second group of teachers and students from St Thomas More Primary School in Toowoomba, which is in the electorate of Toowoomba South and represented in this House by Mr Mike Horan.

Comcare

Ms STRUTHERS: My question is directed to the Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations. Could the minister explain how workers' families could be worse off if their employer was to self-insure with Comcare, especially in the most tragic circumstance where a worker is killed on the job?

Mr MICKEL: WorkCover and Comcare show why there is a fundamental difference between our government and the Howard government and why we will continue to resist any takeover by Comcare of the WorkCover scheme. The changes undertaken at a federal level now mean that workers employed by national self-insurers will not have the same access to health and safety services as workers under Queensland safety laws. Comcare's benefits in the case of a fatality are less than those that would be received under the Queensland worker's compensation scheme.

Take for example an employee whose prefatality earnings were $1,000 gross per week and who was 35 years of age, had a dependent spouse and two children aged seven and eight. Under this case study, the older child enters the workforce and stops being dependent at 16 and the other remains in full-time education until age 25. The employee's spouse does not re-enter the workforce or remarry for 10 years. Under Comcare, this employee's family may receive in the vicinity of $312,439 in compensation. The family of an employee covered by the Queensland scheme in this situation would receive at least $423,763 in statutory benefits, over $100,000 more than under Comcare.

In 2005 Queensland significantly enhanced the benefits available to injured workers. Excluding current indexation the lump sum payment to the dependent family increased by approximately $60,000 to $374,625, an additional lump sum payment of $10,000 was introduced for dependent spouses, the lump sum payment to dependent children was increased by approximately $2,500 to $20,000 and the weekly payment to dependent children was increased from seven per cent to 10 per cent of Queensland ordinary time earnings.

In contrast—and this is the fundamental point—no changes have been made to Comcare's entitlements that could impact on the entitlements of a worker's family in this situation. In addition, the family would also have access to potential further benefits under common law in Queensland. We have in WorkCover the nation's best compensation scheme in Australia. It offers the cheapest premiums to business, both large and small, but it also offers a wide and extensive coverage to workers who are injured. That is why we will continue to stand up for Queensland and for what is, we think, the best WorkCover scheme in this nation. It is one that Comcare cannot emulate. That is why we will continue to defend it.

Kingaroy Shire, Water Infrastructure

Mrs PRATT: My question is to the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure. Kingaroy shire is on level 6 water restrictions and Kumbia has no water and water is being carted to residents from Kingaroy. Taking into consideration that Boondooma Dam currently supplies Tarong Energy with water and it is soon to carry water to the small towns of Blackbutt, Benarkin and Yarraman in stage 2, has any thought been given to permitting the Kingaroy and Kumbia townships to access water from Boondooma Dam to ensure their supply once Tarong receives the recycled water and no longer needs Boondooma water?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. She has asked other questions about these towns in her area. I understand that there was a briefing provided earlier this week in relation to Blackbutt and the western corridor recycled water pipeline which I hope the member found useful. Specifically in relation to the long-term use and future of Boondooma, I am not aware of any work that has been done on that but there is certainly work happening in a general sense concerning dams that are currently supplying large industrial users, mostly the power stations, like Moogerah Dam that supplies Swanbank. It is being considered what their future might be after the grid. That, for example, may well be a source of irrigator supply.

Mrs Pratt: I'm after town supply.

Ms BLIGH: No, I am talking about the other dams. In terms of Boondooma I am very happy to look at the future of that dam post the water grid. I would be very happy to talk to the member about how that water might be best used.

That dam was actually built to supply a power station. We might need to look at whether it would need any upgrading and whether there needs to be any specific treatment applied to it if it was going to be used for town water purposes. Obviously we would need to think about the costs as well as the connection costs. I am very happy to have a look at it.

We have little dams like that that are currently being used for power station use. If after the grid and after the western corridor recycled water pipeline is supplying them permanently we can put them to a better use then we will certainly look at doing that.

Further Answer to Question, Local Government Reform

Mr BEATTIE: In relation to a question asked earlier I made reference to a letter from the local government minister. I would like to table it and draw to the attention of the shadow spokesman for local government the top paragraph on the third page which states—

One of the key elements of identifying the need for local government reform has been the Queensland Treasurer Corporation's financial sustainability review findings. The government has today released top line analysis of the findings to ensure transparency for your community. I encourage you to release your individual SES group review findings if your council has not already done so.

I table that letter for the information of the House.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 17 April 2007, from the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport (Mr Fraser), to Councillor Allan Sutherland, Mayor, Redcliffe City Council, relating to local Government reforms.

North Queensland, Flood Works

Mr WETTENHALL: My question is to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. Could the minister inform the House about the implications of recent statements made by a federal member of parliament on proposed improvements to the Bruce Highway in north Queensland and, in particular, the vital flood works between Townsville and Cairns?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. He, like many people on both sides of this House, has a strong interest in improving flood immunity in north Queensland. People in southern states would not put up with what people in north and far-north Queensland have to put up with in respect of the Bruce Highway. That is why last year, when the Commonwealth government made an announcement of an additional $220 million for predominantly flood mitigation reduction works in the Townsville-Cairns corridor, I welcomed that money. At the time I said we would need more but I welcomed that amount of money that was funded. The total amount included $128 million for upgrading the Bruce Highway south of Tully. Of course, members would know that we recently announced the BMD consortium to build the Tully-Murray projects.

In June last year we signed an MOU with the federal government with respect to joint decision making on that process to allocate funding. That is the one where the money is apparently in the Queensland government's bank account, according to the Leader of the Opposition. It included funding for some other works, not flooding, such as a small amount for planning and design of what is known as the Mount Low Parkway intersection. At the end of January 2007 Main Roads made a separate funding submission to cover the cost of construction for that project. It was not to be taken out of the $220 million flood money. I have repeatedly said that in meetings with Commonwealth ministers, I wrote to the federal minister about that and no response has been received.

What did we see the other day? The federal member for Herbert, Peter Lindsay, announced that the $40 million for Mount Low is going to come out of the $220 million flood money. That is precisely the wrong way to do it. The federal government does not fund anywhere near enough in Queensland. To take the $40 million out of the flood money that is so desperately needed is wrong, wrong, wrong. It should be allocating far more than the 18 per cent of the fuel tax they give back to Queenslanders in roads. It just shows us that it gives with one hand and takes with the other. So it is going to take that out of our bank account, Leader of the Opposition.

I did a tour recently with the member for Hinchinbrook and the local mayors. I found it very helpful. The member for Hinchinbrook was quite thoughtful and incisive on the issues that need to be done up there. I say to the member for Hinchinbrook, 'We have $40 million less to deal with those flood issues. Thank you to the Commonwealth government for taking it out of that flood proofing package.'

That is what the federal government really thinks. That is how much it is interested, in this forthcoming federal election campaign, in actually defending seats in Queensland. Its priorities are all wrong. Whilst we spend between twice and 2½ times per capita what other states spend on roads—and I look forward to the debate tonight—it continues to short-change people in north and far-north Queensland. How many times have people up there loyally voted for National and Liberal Party members and how many times have they been dudded? I say this: I will spend every moment in this election campaign getting commitments out of both sides of federal politics, just as I did with Tully. Frankly, it is bigger than politics.

Noosa Shire

Mr ELMES: My question without notice is to the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport. All local authorities, but in particular the Noosa shire, have developed clear identities separate from their neighbours over generations. Why will the minister not give Noosa residents the opportunity to determine, via a plebiscite, whether or not they wish to be part of a larger regional local authority?

Mr FRASER: I thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to get to my feet this morning to talk about the local government reform package. In direct response to the member for Noosa in his request for special consideration for the Noosa shire, I think it is a relevant point to make. Members would be aware that presently the Local Government Act does contain provisions for referendums. But what does the Local Government Act say about those referendums and what did the Nationals and Liberals have in the Local Government Act under the Borbidge government? A reserve power for the minister for local government to overturn a referendum! That is what the National Party and Liberal Party had in the Local Government Act when they were in government, and now all of a sudden they come in here and say that the referendum is a sacrosanct exercise.

The point about the issue that the member for Noosa raises is this: no-one was going to get a referendum. This voluntary process was going to lead to nought, and the reason that the government has stepped in is that there is a compelling case for reform in this circumstance. The Queensland Treasury Corporation advice states that, as does the Australian Local Government Association. Local government says that they need it in a report commissioned by PricewaterhouseCoopers referring to reports done by Access Economics. Everyone across-the-board said that this was needed. And what was the voluntary process going to do? What was it going to deliver? At best it was going to deliver Crows Nest and Rosalie and Goondiwindi and Waggamba. But I would not want to bet more than $20 on either of them, because these are difficult decisions and difficult structural reform and at every point in time those councils, those individuals and those communities would of course, at the last minute when this got to the pointy end, have shirked back from that difficult decision.

But what we are doing here is saying that there is a compelling case. Someone needs to step in and step up, and that is what we are doing in these circumstances. In a couple of years time when councils were faced with collapse and rates were going through the roof as councils faced hitting the wall or council employees were subject to mass sackings as councils tried to sustain themselves, all of those opposite would have come in here and said, 'In 2007 this government and the minister knew that this was going to happen. Why didn't you act?' We have been confronted with the situation and government has two choices in difficult situations: confront the problem and stand up and be counted or put your head in the sand. This government is standing up and being counted. We are going to undertake this reform for the long-term benefit of the whole of Queensland, including the residents of Noosa shire. The independent commission will make these recommendations to the government and

there will be a public process where all residents from across Queensland, including Noosa, can make a submission. I encourage the member for Noosa to go out there and tell his constituents that they should make a recommendation to the independent commission, which I remind the member is being chaired by the former Electoral Commissioner and which contains representation from all sides of politics. This is a reform process that will be difficult, but it is one that absolutely must be undertaken. There is no other course of action.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Indooroopilly, I welcome to the public gallery teachers and students from St Anthony's School at Kedron which is in the electorate of Stafford, which is represented in this House by Mr Stirling Hinchliffe.

Rush, Mr S; Death Penalty

Mr LEE: My question without notice is directed to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. I refer the Attorney-General to the fact that Australia has abolished the death penalty. In light of the death penalty imposed on young Brisbane man Scott Rush, I ask: should the Australian government plea for clemency for Scott Rush and other Australians who face the sentence of death?

Mr SHINE: In answering the honourable member's question, might I acknowledge his strenuous, sincere and heartfelt efforts on behalf of his constituents, the Rush family. The answer of course to the honourable member's question is yes. As we know and as he said, Australia has abolished the death penalty—in 1922, 85 years ago, Queensland was the first state to do so. Australia has ratified the second optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. As a signatory to this protocol, Australia is convinced that all measures of abolition of the death penalty should be considered as progress in the enjoyment of the right to life. Article 1 of the protocol states—

1. No-one within the jurisdiction of a State Party to the present protocol shall be executed.
2. Each party shall take all necessary measures to abolish the death penalty within its jurisdiction.

I asked the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General in Canberra on Friday to reaffirm our nation's abolition of the death penalty after meeting with Lee and Christine Rush. Lee and Christine are the parents of Scott Rush. Scott Rush has been sentenced to death for his role as a part of the so-called Bali 9 in April 2005. I must say that the Queensland government deplores the activities of those who traffic in or benefit from the sale of illicit drugs. The Queensland government also respects the sovereignty of other nations. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has said countries like Australia which have abolished the death penalty have the obligation not to expose a person to the real risk of its application. I therefore sought a commitment from Australia's Attorneys-General that Australia honour that obligation. I also asked the Attorneys-General to reaffirm that our national government should seek clemency for any of our citizens under the sentence of death overseas. I am pleased that the Attorneys-General, including the federal Attorney-General, agreed to that resolution. Queensland showed leadership in abolishing the death penalty in our country at the start of the last century. Australia can show leadership in our region and elsewhere to encourage other nations to also abolish the penalty of death.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Robina, I welcome to the public gallery today teachers and school leaders from the Flagstone Community College which is in the electorate of Lockyer, which is represented in this place by Mr Ian Rickuss.

Housing Affordability

Mr STEVENS: My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure. The Housing Industry Association identified that an artificial scarcity of land invoked by the minister's planning regulation and zoning has propelled land prices upwards. Similarly, the Residential Development Council forecasts that land for housing in the Brisbane area will run out by 2011. Can the minister forget about blaming Canberra and tell us what she is doing to release more land so that housing is more affordable, especially for low income earners and young families?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to talk to the House about one of our election commitments made in the 2006 election campaign. Members will recall that affordability of housing was one of the key issues on which the Beattie government went to the election. I do not recall it being mentioned at all by the other side of politics, but we certainly dealt with a number of issues. One of the commitments we made was that we would bring together industry and local government within the first 100 days of government with a view to working through the issues that the state has an ability to control or influence and that make any contribution to housing costs and housing affordability.

I met with the industry and local government not long after the election to ensure that we implemented that election commitment. That resulted in a working summit that was held in December where the industry and local government representatives put forward a range of proposals. This obviously is an issue across government, and I thank the minister for housing for the contribution that he

and his staff made as well as the minister for local government. It is clear that at a state level there are a number of issues that we do have some control over—things like the rate and the way in which infrastructure charges are levied on developers. Make no mistake: there are some very concerning trends happening with infrastructure charging. We support infrastructure charging, and I have made that clear in this process. What we do not support is local governments seeking to use it in an exploitative way.

Mr Lucas: If they're unsustainable.

Ms BLIGH: When they are unsustainable; exactly. What I have seen across Brisbane is differences in infrastructure charging per lot of anywhere up to $20,000 or $30,000. I think there does need to be some process by which that can be assessed, because that is a cost that goes directly, as much as developers complain about it from time to time, on to the cost of the house and it is paid by consumers.

Equally, the availability and supply of land is one of the issues on that agenda. I gave a commitment to the industry and to local government that we would be coming back to them in the first half of this year with proposals about how we might take those issues forward, and that is exactly what we will do. But I would caution the member just a little from taking everything that the development industry tells him about supply of land. There are many facets to this argument. The South East Queensland Regional Plan is probably the single most important planning tool to contain housing affordability and to ensure that we have density where it needs to be and infrastructure to underpin it. But there are some people in the industry—not all by a long shot—who do not necessarily support that plan and who might have interests other than affordable housing when they come through the member's door asking to make more land available.

Housing Affordability

Mr HOOLIHAN: My question is to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology. As the minister knows, I have discussed with him on many occasions the issue of housing affordability and the concerns of the Housing Industry Association. Could the minister advise the House on options that he is putting forward to improve housing affordability?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for the question and I salute him for his stand against the Livingstone Shire Council, which has done everything that it mortally can to prevent affordable public housing being built in his electorate.

The thing that distinguishes this side of politics more than anything else from that lot over there is the guts that members on this side of the House have in standing up against the cheer squad for unsustainable councils, such as Livingstone Shire Council, with tin-pot mayors like Bill Ludwig leading the charge—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is unparliamentary and I would like you to withdraw.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I heard the interjection from the honourable member who yesterday said 'liar' four or five times.

Mr SPEAKER: I note what you are saying, but I am saying that it is unparliamentary and I would like you to withdraw.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I will withdraw it. The small-minded mayor of the small shire of Livingstone has stood in the way of very sensible development of public housing. Nothing quite gets that lot over there going more than when I start talking about battlers' housing. I congratulate the new shadow minister for affordable housing—whatever that might mean—but one thing is clear—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Whatever that might mean. I tell members what it does not mean—

Mr SPEAKER: I do not know what excited the members of the opposition but can we let the minister have his say. The member has asked a question.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I was about to say whatever that might mean to the honourable member opposite, but I know what it means to this side of the parliament. It means that the members opposite have jettisoned public housing once and for all. I know the members opposite want to laugh about that. I know they think that is a great big joke, because that is exactly the intention and the solution of Canberra. We can see that failing all over Queensland.

When the Deputy Premier was asked about housing affordability, the central thing that the HIA, which the member opposite wanted to quote before, says is that there is not enough affordable public housing. I notice that the member opposite did not refer to that. By jettisoning the title of 'housing' from the title of the member's shadow portfolio and putting in its place 'affordable housing' he got rid of public housing right away from the member's intention—absolutely right away. The members opposite thought that it was a great big joke. Yet again they have been caught out.

The fact is that we have a proposal called Homelink, which embraces the private sector and the federal government, the state government and local government. The fact is that we have never heard a peep about it from the members opposite. This proposal has now been with their mates in Canberra for 12 months. The self-interested member for Moggill has been out there barraging the federal government over the western bypass. The reality is that the honourable member will not take a leaf out of his book and call his mates in Canberra about Homelink.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Lockyer, can I take up the point that the housing minister has made. I want to say that I think I was perhaps too tolerant of the member for Warrego. I indicate to the member for Warrego that since then I have seen the clippings on the news last night, and I would ask him to refrain from using an unparliamentary term such as 'lying'. I thank the minister for bringing that to my attention.

Esk Shire, Water Pipeline

Mr RICKUSS: My question is to the Deputy Premier. The shire of Esk recently approached the state government to lay a pipeline from Lowood to Coominya at the same time as the construction of the Western Corridor Recycled Pipeline to save costs. The project was to cost approximately $1.6 million if the shire managed the project, yet the government's quote was $10 million. Does this difference in price demonstrate incompetence, profiteering or a sign of things to come in terms of massive water price increases if the state government takes over water management from local government?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I suggest to the member that what it reflects is the accurate cost of materials and labour to build a pipeline. There is no way that the state government would be putting forward a proposal to build if that were somehow secret from the council in terms of the cost of the materials and the cost of the labour. The shire of Esk is probably a very good example of some of the tough decisions that lie ahead for local government as we go through the reform process that was outlined by my colleagues the minister and the Premier yesterday and today.

Mr Rickuss: They could build it for $1.6 million when the western corridor went through.

Ms BLIGH: The member is interjecting and saying that the council can build it for $1.6 million but the state wants to build it for $10 million. Why does the council not just build for $1.6 million? That seems like a cracker of an idea to me and that is what I would suggest. They could probably build 10.

Mr Rickuss: They were trying to reduce the cost.

Ms BLIGH: They were trying to reduce the cost? I am always happy to speak to any local government about working with them on infrastructure, but the suggestion is that there is some way of building this pipeline to which the member refers for maybe one-fifth or one-sixth of the cost. When I have an opportunity to look at the documents, I really do not believe that there would be any veracity in the member's allegations.

There are some very important and serious issues for the irrigators in the member's area. To their credit, they are working very productively and constructively with the department of natural resources and the Queensland Water Commission. We intend to work in partnership with them to ensure that the federal government gives them what they deserve.

Mr Rickuss: This is town water for Coominya.

Ms BLIGH: I know. I am talking about a different issue. We can move along here. It is all water in the member's area. I am suggesting to the member that he take a much more constructive and useful approach.

This morning, like others I woke up and over my cereal I saw photos in all of the papers of the Prime Minister inspecting the Wivenhoe Dam. I noticed that there was a similarity in every single photo I saw. I did not see the Prime Minister with his hands in his pocket. I saw a man who had come to Queensland without his chequebook. The Prime Minister went up there to get a photo of himself grandstanding to shore up the failing Liberal vote up here. There was a photo of him at a very dry dam. Does the Prime Minister know what everybody else was looking at this morning? They were looking and wondering, 'Where, Prime Minister, is our $408 million to fund the western corridor pipeline?' I understand that the Prime Minister is bringing his cabinet here next week or the week after. This is a clear message: 'John, bring the chequebook. We are not interested in the photos of you on a dry dam; we are interested in hearing what you are going to do to work to make this pipeline a reality.' There will not be a pipeline to Esk if the Commonwealth just walks away from these sorts of opportunities. I suggest to the member opposite to talk to the Prime Minister and say, 'John, bring the chequebook. Stop grandstanding and put your hand in your pocket.'

Government Services

Ms DARLING: My question without notice is to the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services Queensland, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth. People are usually quick to blame governments for their failings but they forget to mention government services of a high standard. As a previous public servant, I know how hard most people who serve the public really do work. Can the minister provide any recent examples from his portfolio where the public has received top-quality services?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question and agree that bouquets are usually less common than brickbats when it comes to assessing government services. However, it is my pleasure to inform the House that in recent times the Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland have received independent assessments that show that they provide superior service to the Queensland public.

The first assessment relates to Disability Services Queensland, which took part in the inaugural review of the complaint management systems conducted by the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals. From October 2006 to February 2007, Susan Brooks, the former banking industry ombudsman, audited DSQ's complaint management system and its alignment with the international standard for complaints handling. DSQ's complaints management system was benchmarked against other organisations from various industry sectors such as banking, utilities, manufacturing and government. All participating organisations are members of the society and regarded as leaders in complaints management in Australia.

The audit indicated that Disability Services Queensland compared very favourably against the other organisations. DSQ's overall score was 80 per cent—the best overall for all participants. This result reflects a high degree of confidence in DSQ's ability to meet the requirements of the international standard and gives me confidence that Disability Services Queensland has an effective, objective, fair and respected approach to complaints and disputes management.

In another endorsement of the superior service offered within my portfolio, an independent survey of recent Smart Service Queensland customers showed that 99 per cent found the service they received met or exceeded their expectations. The independent research was conducted to gauge customer satisfaction with the 131304 call centre, which currently averages more than 5,200 calls each weekday. Respondents commented on the ease and speed with which they were able to access services and the friendly and helpful nature of the staff.

Smart Service Queensland provides access to more than 150 services on behalf of various government agencies through multiple contact channels, including in person, telephone, and the internet. I congratulate the management and staff working in these areas for their key role in providing exemplary service.

Mr SPEAKER: That completes question time.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

First Reading

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations) (11.30 am): I present a bill for an act to make further provision for industrial relations, and for other purposes. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Second Reading

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations) (11.30 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The federal government's WorkChoices legislation threatens to undo over 100 years of justice and fairness in Australia's industrial relations sphere by giving employers greater leverage in negotiations with their employees.

Until WorkChoices, Queensland employers were free to choose between the federal and state system. Overwhelmingly, some 70 per cent of businesses chose to use the Queensland industrial relations system to manage their workforce and set wages and conditions. The result has been strong economic growth and social justice for all employers and employees which has benefited all Queenslanders. As well, industrial disputation was at rock bottom levels and jobs growth attracted thousands of Australians each month into Queensland.

However, all this changed on 27 March 2006 with the introduction of WorkChoices. Overnight, more than half a million Queensland employees were moved into the federal jurisdiction—approximately 30 per cent of employees—on top of the 30 per cent of employees who were already in the federal system. These workers were no longer afforded the protections of the Queensland system such as unfair dismissal protections, a strong set of awards and the application of a 'no disadvantage test'.

That is why the Queensland government is presenting these amendments—to restore some balance for the state's workers and their families. The bill before us will establish an ombudsman to promote fair work practices, as well as enshrining the rights of child workers and setting up a low-cost common law jurisdiction for employees on low incomes who cannot afford the costs of litigation in the courts to enforce conditions outside of formal agreements.

In June 2006, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission was directed to hold an inquiry into the impact of WorkChoices on Queensland workplaces. Some of the issues raised were—

- concerns over changes in unfair dismissal provisions;
- literacy problems amongst employees resulting in a lack of understanding of the content in individual contracts or Australian workplace agreements, AWAs;
- the removal of choice for incorporated businesses which previously chose to operate in the state system;
- the complexities of WorkChoices was compounded for businesses that did not employ human resource personnel, leaving employers and employees confused;
- the federal Office of Workplace Services', OWS, failure to appropriately advise employees of their rights, despite having an obvious prima facie case for unlawful dismissal; and
- employees seeking advice from the Office of Workplace Services about unlawful dismissal cases being discouraged to pursue their case because of cost factors and the complexity of the WorkChoices legislation.

Overall, the inquiry found that the major areas of concern were the removal of unfair dismissal laws, confusion over what constitutes unlawful dismissal and unfair dismissal, and the reduction of wages and entitlements through the use of individual agreements.

As a result of its findings, the inquiry recommended the establishment of a Workplace Rights Office—a 'one-stop shop' service to assist employees and employers negotiate the unwieldy complexity that is WorkChoices.

The Queensland government remains committed to facilitating and encouraging the fair treatment of all workers in Queensland. So, despite over half a million workers being moved into the federal jurisdiction, the government believes these workers should still have access to full and frank information and advice which will be provided through the Queensland Workplace Rights Office.

The Industrial Relations Act and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007 changes the existing act to alleviate the hardship or potential hardship Queensland workers and their families face under WorkChoices. The bill before us amends the following acts—

- Industrial Relations Act 1999
- Magistrates Courts Act 1921
- Child Employment Act 2006
- Education (Work Experience) Act 1996
- Judicial Review Act 1991
- Public Service Act 1996
- Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003
- Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995.

If we turn to the changes to the Industrial Relations Act 1999, these amendments establish the Queensland Workplace Rights Office and Queensland Workplace Rights Ombudsman. As I mentioned earlier, the Queensland Workplace Rights Office will be a one-stop shop. It will utilise existing hotline and web site services and offer advice, information and promote fair industrial relations practices in Queensland.

The ombudsman will report on any findings and highlight these in the public arena to educate workers, as well as referring cases of unlawful workplace practices to the appropriate authorities. Importantly, one of the duties of the ombudsman will be to provide advice to the Queensland government on strategies to mitigate the negative effects of WorkChoices. This will be achieved by advising on ways to improve protections for vulnerable workers and promote 'best practice' in Queensland's industrial relations.

The ombudsman has two main functions: to facilitate and encourage the fair treatment of workers in Queensland and provide advice to the state government on strategies to mitigate the negative effects of WorkChoices.

Specifically, the bill spells out that the role of the Queensland Workplace Rights Office will be to—

(i) inform, educate and consult with any person the ombudsman considers is affected by industrial relations and other work related matters, utilising existing hotline services and web site services;

(ii) to facilitate and encourage fair industrial relations and work practices in Queensland including developing codes of practice;

(iii) promote informed decision making by persons affected by industrial relations legislation, including information on agreement making, and encouraging fair industrial relations and other work related matters;

(iv) investigate and publicise complaints and report on unlawful, unfair or otherwise inappropriate industrial relations and work practices, where appropriate referring people to the appropriate authority or services; and

(v) highlight cases of unfair treatment in the public arena to demonstrate the negative impact of WorkChoices and encourage employers to adopt fair employment practices.

The Queensland government will rely on data from the Queensland Workplace Rights Office which, as a result of its investigations, will be in a strong position to provide advice on strategies to promote fair and equitable industrial relations and work practices in Queensland.

Specifically, the bill proclaims that the Queensland Workplace Rights Office will—

(i) monitor and report to the minister and parliament on industrial relations and work practices in Queensland;

(ii) investigate and report to the minister on the impact of any aspect of industrial relations arrangements in Queensland; and

(iii) advise on strategies to mitigate the negative effects of any legislation relating to industrial relations and work related matters including improved protections for vulnerable workers and promote fair and equitable industrial relations and workplace practices.

This education function will be vital because the federal government is unwilling to provide a transparent assessment of the impact of WorkChoices on workers and their families. We know this because, when the Office of the Employment Advocate reported its findings of a survey of 250 Australian workplace agreements in May 2006, it embarrassed the federal government and consequently the Employment Advocate has decided against any further samplings.

That survey of 250 AWAs demonstrated that AWAs are a useful tool only in stripping away award conditions—

- 100 per cent excluded at least one protected award condition such as rest breaks, overtime and annual leave loading or allowances;
- 64 per cent removed leave loadings;
- 63 per cent removed penalty rates;
- 52 per cent removed shift work loadings; and
- 40 per cent removed payment for gazetted public holidays.

The amendments to the Magistrates Court Act 1921 establish a specialist, low-cost employment jurisdiction for breach of contract claims by employees on low incomes who would not normally be able to afford the costs of litigation in the courts. The amendments rely on the existing jurisdiction of the Magistrates Court but reduce the costs of proceedings.

Most employees' terms and conditions of employment are derived from a combination of statutory awards and agreements and common law contracts of employment. Many contracts of employment cover matters that are not included in standard awards or agreements, such as fringe benefit and salary packaging arrangements, telecommuting agreements or hours of work to suit an individual's family responsibilities. Many contracts of employment also provide for terms and conditions that are higher than those provided in standard awards and agreements, such as bonuses and incentives.

In Queensland, an estimated 35.5 per cent of employees rely either wholly or partly on their contract of employment to set wages and conditions. These contracts may be oral or in writing. The problem is that employees who are covered by the federal WorkChoices legislation can only seek relief for a breach of their contract of employment through the federal or state civil courts. These proceedings can be time consuming and costly, both for employers as well as employees, and often require the use of lawyers because technical rules of law and evidence apply.

Employees who are covered by the state industrial relations system can avoid these costs by seeking the assistance of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to resolve a dispute about the contract of employment. This option is not available in the federal industrial relations jurisdiction.

Obviously, it is desirable that disputes between employers and employees are resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible with minimum expense and downtime for the parties involved. These amendments will help achieve that objective by reducing costs for the parties and providing for a speedy conciliation process prior to any hearing.

The new, low-cost procedure will be available to employees earning up to $98,200 a year, consistent with the income threshold for employees in the state system seeking a remedy for unfair dismissal in the QIRC.

Court filing fees will be lower than those applicable in the Magistrates Court's general civil jurisdiction and will be consistent with the application fee for unfair dismissal claims in the QIRC. Costs will not be awarded against a party unless that party has unreasonably caused costs to be incurred or if the claim is frivolous or vexatious and employee organisations will be entitled to represent the parties. To help resolve claims with maximum efficiency for all concerned, a compulsory conciliation procedure will apply prior to any hearing at no cost to the parties.

These measures will help both employers and employees by keeping costs down when a dispute occurs and allowing the dispute to be resolved with a minimum of time and expense.

The amendments to the Child Employment Act 2006 make it clear what employment entitlements and protections are available to children working in Queensland who are employed under a federal agreement—be it collective or individual—entered into after the introduction of the federal WorkChoices legislation.

This bill has been made on the basis that a provision introduced through the WorkChoices amendment, that is, section 16(3)(e) of the Workplace Relations Act 1996, explicitly preserves a state's right to legislate in the area of child labour. Our legal advice indicates that legislation of the type in this bill falls within the area of child labour legislation and is therefore not overridden by the federal WorkChoices legislation.

The bill applies to children working who are under the age of 18 years and who are employed by a constitutional corporation under federal agreements or other common law arrangements entered into after 26 March 2006. The bill does not apply to children employed under 'notional agreements preserving state awards' or 'preserved state agreements' which commenced under WorkChoices.

The entitlements in these instruments are effectively those that applied in a state industrial instrument at that date which had already been tested against a 'no disadvantage' test or approved by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission before they came into operation. However, the bill does apply where a child was employed under a preserved collective state agreement that has since been terminated and not replaced by another agreement or arrangement.

The bill does not apply to child employees who are already covered by state awards or agreements, nor does the bill apply to child employees covered by federal awards or agreements made prior to the introduction of the federal WorkChoices legislation.

The rationale for the types of employment covered by the bill is that federal agreements or arrangements entered into after the commencement of WorkChoices are no longer subject to a no-disadvantage test to assess whether there has been a reduction in employment entitlements and protections.

The bill provides for Queensland's existing no-disadvantage test provisions under the Industrial Relations Act 1999 to be used in assessing whether there has been a reduction in employment entitlements or protections as a result of entering into the prescribed federal agreements or other arrangements.

This is the same test that would apply if an agreement was to be entered into under the state system of industrial relations.

In view of the length of this statement, I seek to have the rest of my statement incorporated in *Hansard*.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have reviewed the contents of the speech and I am happy to incorporate. Is leave of the parliament granted?

Leave granted.

Employment under a federal award or agreement whose provisions have previously been subject to a no disadvantage type test or approval process by an industrial tribunal will be unaffected by this Bill. It is only those employers seeking to reduce conditions of employment in a new Federal agreement or other arrangement who will feel any impact from these provisions.

The Bill empowers inspectors under the Industrial Relations Act 1999 to assess whether a child employee's entitlements or protections have been reduced under a Federal agreement or other arrangement. Inspectors may issue compliance notices. This will provide an employer with the opportunity to remedy the contravention without suffering a penalty.

However, failure to comply with a compliance notice will be an offence which may be subject to prosecution in the Industrial Magistrates Court. Compliance notices will provide valuable guidance to employers on how to ensure they do not contravene the requirements of this legislation.

The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission will be responsible for dealing with disputes over compliance notices and making decisions on whether an agreement or arrangement has reduced a child employee's entitlements and protections.
The Commission will be empowered to determine whether a compliance notice should be varied or revoked or whether an order should be made varying an agreement or arrangement to comply with the aims of the Bill.

Where the Commission decides that an agreement has reduced employment entitlements or protections they may also order payment of an amount that would have been payable under the Industrial Relations Act 1999 or a State award or order that would have applied to the child's employment if it had not become subject to the Federal agreement or other arrangement.

This system of enforcement allows for choice between prosecution and dispute resolution with legally enforceable orders, which is consistent with measures already in existence in relation to underpaid wages under the Industrial Relations Act 1999.

Another feature of the Bill is that it will be made clear that the dismissal provisions in the Industrial Relations Act 1999 continue to apply to children employed by a constitutional corporation.

A child worker will be able to seek remedies where they have been unfairly dismissed. These will be the same remedies as those available under the Industrial Relations Act 1999. All employers, regardless of size, will have to ensure that they exercise their power to dismiss child employees in a fair manner.

Finally, the Bill amends the Child Employment Act 2006 so that the existing prohibition on employers requiring or permitting children to work while nude or partially nude is extended to children working as apprentices or trainees or in work experience or vocational placements. This corrects an anomaly where these classes of work are currently excluded from the application of the Child Employment Act 2006. To allow this amendment to operate effectively, a minor consequential amendment has been made to the Education (Work Experience) Act 1996.

Mr Speaker, the Federal Government's Work Choices Protected By Law advertising blitz was a smoke and mirrors ploy which lulled Australian workers into thinking their conditions were protected.

The fact is that a John Howard Government cannot be relied upon to assist workers or report on the impact of Work Choices on workers. Nor has the Federal Government been willing to maintain vital research on the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS), thereby making it more difficult to gauge the impact of Work Choices.

For these reasons, the Queensland Government is establishing its own watchdog to ensure fair treatment for all Queenslanders.

Now, if I can turn to some of the specifics of the Bill.

1.1 Amendments to objects of the Act—Right for employees to collectively bargain

The right to collectively bargain is recognised and protected by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to which Australia is a signatory. The Queensland Government supports and encourages collective bargaining.

This amendment seeks to strengthen the principle of collective bargaining by adding to the objects of the Industrial Relations Act 1999 an object "to promote collective bargaining and to establish the primacy of collective agreements over individual agreements".

This statement of intention will not prevent employers and employees from making individual agreements.

1.2 Other Amendments to the IR Act

a. Proportionate long service leave

This amendment provides for proportionate long service leave to be paid to employees on rolling, fixed-term contracts that extend for more than seven years where they had a reasonable expectation that they would continue in employment and they have not refused a further contract. Currently, it cannot be paid if an employer does not renew the contract.

b. Long service leave and continuity of service

State long service leave provisions are preserved under Work Choices, however it is unclear if the same applies to continuity of service and employment provisions. This amendment clarifies that continuity of service and employment is part of the State long service leave provisions as contained in the IR Act and therefore would not be excluded by Work Choices.

c. Calculation of notice for transmitted employees

This amendment clarifies that the notice period will be based on the total period of employment. Currently there is confusion about whether the notice given to an employee by the new employer should be based on the period of time the transmitted employee has been employed by the new employer or the total period of employment including time with the old employer. The amendment clarifies that the total period of employment is to be used when determining the notice to be given.

e. Applying for certification of an agreement

This amendment enables an application to be made to certify an agreement although all the parties to the agreement have not signed the agreement, provided all the terms have been agreed and the agreement has been approved by a valid majority of the employees in a properly conducted ballot.

f. Signing of certified agreements

This amendment gives the QIRC discretion to certify agreements where the application to certify the agreement is lodged within a reasonable time, all the parties have agreed to the terms and conditions of the agreement and a valid majority of employees have approved the agreement in a properly conducted ballot, although all the parties haven't signed it. The amendment makes the signing of an agreement a technical rather than a mandatory requirement in the approval process of the QIRC which can be waived in appropriate circumstances.

g. Persons bound

This amendment enables an employer or employee organisation to be bound by an agreement regardless of the fact that one or more of those entities did not sign the agreement, provided the QIRC has decided that the agreement did not need to be signed, in all the circumstances.

h. When judge is appointed

This amendment provides for the appointment, by Governor in Council, of the President of the Industrial Court of Queensland who may be either a sitting Supreme Court judge or a lawyer of at least 5 years standing.

i. Commissioner may be appointed ombudsman

This amendment provides that a commissioner may be appointed as an ombudsman under the new Chapter 8A of the Act. Although the commissioner retains his/her appointment as commissioner, he/she may not undertake any duties as a commissioner during the appointment as ombudsman. The commissioner's service as ombudsman is taken to be service as a commissioner for all purposes.

j. Applications for Declarations

This amendment provides a mechanism for applications for declarations to be made to the QIRC. At the present time, no mechanism exists to make such declarations.

k. Unregistered industrial associations

This amendment extends the power of the QIRC to make orders to control the activities of unregistered employee associations. Previously, the QIRC had no jurisdiction over these associations because they were not registered.

l. Participation in alternative national body

This amendment allows for the result of a joint session with other Federal or State industrial tribunals to be given practical effect by a full bench of the QIRC by way of a general ruling or a statement of policy. The full bench must also decide if any further hearings are required in relation to the matter.

m. Appeals from Industrial Court for matters heard at first instance

This amendment provides an appeal process for offences that are heard by the Industrial Court at first instance (for offences against the IR Act for which jurisdiction is not expressly conferred on a magistrate). At present, no appeal is available.

n. Removal of double appeal process

This amendment clarifies and corrects an unintended consequence of the current provisions. The amendment confirms that a decision of the Full Bench of the QIRC on appeal from a single Commissioner is final.

o. Working time for employees

This amendment ensures that provisions about working time for employees (excluding public servants) under industrial instruments made before 1 September 2005 are similarly applied to instruments made after 1 September 2005.

1.3 Alternative Dispute Resolution with respect to Common Law Agreements

This amendment will allow the QIRC to exercise its dispute resolution functions if the parties to a dispute agree in writing to refer the dispute to the QIRC.

The amendments will help unions and employers to make and enforce agreements without the interference of the Federal Government, which does not trust employers and unions to make agreements to suit their own circumstances but tells them, through the Work Choices legislation, what they can and cannot make an agreement about.

The amendment allows parties to agree, in writing, to refer a dispute to the QIRC and for the QIRC to undertake any functions provided in the agreement. For example, the parties might agree for the QIRC to act as a mediator, or provide that the QIRC can make orders binding on the parties.

Mr Speaker, these amendments recognise the well-founded trust and confidence that employers and unions have in the QIRC, and the QIRC's ability and expertise to resolve disputes that occur in this State.

Amendments to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 and amendments to the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995

Mr Speaker, the amendments to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 strengthen the role that the security of employment provisions for injured workers play in achieving rehabilitation and return to work outcomes. In 2006, these provisions were moved from the IR Act to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act.

The Bill amends the Act to enable inspectors appointed under the IR Act to continue to monitor and enforce compliance with these provisions under the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act. It does this by extending the meaning of the "authorised persons" of Q-COMP under the WRC Act who are tasked with this role to include industrial inspectors for this purpose.

The Bill also aligns more closely the eligibility requirements to self-insurer under Queensland's workers' compensation scheme with other jurisdictions by removing the mandatory requirement that employers have $100M in net tangible assets.

The Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 gives authorised representatives of unions the authority to enter workplaces on prescribed health and safety grounds.

Since the introduction of these provisions, the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations has been working with unions and employers to resolve any issues arising out of a union right of entry.

While the vast majority of these issues are resolved quickly, some of these matters involve a number of complex issues between the parties. To ensure an independent, transparent and efficient approach for resolving these more complex issues, the Bill introduces an additional dispute resolution process using the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

Under this proposal the inspectorate will remain the first point of call; however, where an issue remains unresolved after this intervention, a conciliation and arbitration process can be entered into by either the representative, the employer or at the request of an inspector.

The Bill also contains an amendment to clarify beyond doubt the Act's application to certificates previously issued under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1989 and the Inspection of Machinery Act 1951 and which have been continued in force under the current legislation. These relate predominantly to certificates that allow people to work in certain prescribed occupations such as fork-lift and crane operations.

Finally, the Bill amends provisions of the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 relating to designers and project managers for construction work that have not yet commenced. After working with the design industry to develop appropriate compliance guidelines, it is considered that the reporting provisions in question, which will need to be improved with experience, are best dealt with in guidance material rather than legislative form.

Mr Speaker, there can be no doubt that Queensland workers and their families have suffered under Work Choices. The Beattie Government promised to fight these draconian laws and that's what it has done and will continue to do until they are overturned.

This legislation doesn't scrap the harsh laws but it goes a long way to ensuring some degree of fairness is maintained, at least until a future Federal Labor Government can abolish Work Choices and bring some sanity back into the national industrial arena.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Hopper, adjourned.

LAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Consideration in Detail

Resumed from 17 April (see p. 1262).

Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.

Clause 5—

Mr HOPPER (11.47 am): This clause amends section 12, effect of gazette resumption notice. It deals with what can happen to land that is taken on trust. It adds section (c), which states, 'be dealt with under another Act.'

This section seems to be very open-ended and allows the whole of government, not necessarily only the minister's department, to do whatever it wants with land that is resumed by a certain department. Can the minister clarify the purpose and effect of this change?

Mr WALLACE: At present, the land acquired from a deed of grant in trust under the Acquisition of Land Act 1967 becomes unallocated state land that may be granted in trust or dedicated to public use for the acquired purpose. However, this does not provide for those occasions where land is acquired for a public purpose, such as a police station site, which is not also a community purpose under the Land Act 1994. Under the Land Act 1994, land may be granted in trust or dedicated only for a community purpose listed under schedule 1 of the Land Act 1994.

This new clause ensures that the constructing authority will receive the appropriate tenure, be it the Police Service, the DPI or whatever, for the acquired land. For example, if the land is acquired for beach protection purposes, the acquired land would be dedicated as a reserve for beach protection purposes under the Land Act 1994. In line with government policy, if the land is acquired for a police station site, the acquired land will be granted in fee simple.

Clause 5, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 6 to 11, as read, agreed to.

Clause 12—

Mr HOPPER (11.48 am): This clause amends section 14 which provides that the Governor in Council may grant land dedicated as an operational reserve or rail land, and a grant of rail land under subsection (1)—unallocated state land, an operational reserve or rail land—may be made only to the state. This clause deals with the grant of rail land and suggests that it may be made only to the state. How does this affect private companies who are building rail lines? Are they unable to be granted rail land?

Mr WALLACE: Clause 12 amends section 14 of the Land Act 1994 by allowing the Governor in Council to grant a deed over an operational reserve or a rail reserve. An operational reserve is a reserve dedicated for public purpose under the Land Act 1962 and the dedicated purpose is not a community purpose under the Land Act 1994. Examples of an operational reserve include an ambulance reserve, an electrical works reserve and a school reserve. Rail land is rail corridor land held under a perpetual lease to the state for transport purposes, ancillary to transport and other commercial and community purposes. Currently, before the Governor in Council may grant the land in fee simple the land must be allocated state land.

As to the member's question about private companies building on rail land, the land granted to the state may be transferred by the state after the deed has issued, but subject to protecting the state's interest in the rail corridor.

Clause 12, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 13 to 22, as read, agreed to.

Clause 23—

Mr HOPPER (11.53 am): This clause replaces section 31(1), reserves generally, and allows the minister to dedicate unallocated state land as a reserve for one or more community purposes, to change the boundaries of a reserve, to change the community purpose for which the reserve is dedicated, to allow a person to apply to change boundaries, and it outlines the guidelines by which a minister can dedicate unallocated state land—for example, notice, submissions and notice of registration. New clause 31B deals with changing community purpose. Is it correct that the only community purpose that a reserve can be changed to is for the provision of services beneficial to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders?

Mr WALLACE: Under the new provisions, the process of dedicating or adjusting a reserve will be even more public. If the minister proposes to dedicate a reserve, written notice of the proposal must first be given to the proposed trustee of the reserve, each person with a registered interest in the land and any other person the minister considers should be given written notice will receive that notice. If the minister proposes to adjust the boundaries or purpose of a reserve, written notice of the proposal must first be given. Although the dedication or adjustment of the boundaries or purpose of a reserve will take effect upon registration of the document in the titling system, a person who received written notice of a proposed dedication or adjustment will be entitled to receive written notice of the particulars.

In addition, a person who received written notice is also entitled to receive written notice if it is decided not to dedicate or adjust the reserve. It also applies outside Aboriginal communities and to the wider communities at large.

Mr HOPPER: What are the implications to due process under the native title legislation of this clause?

Mr WALLACE: Native title legislation is a Commonwealth act which overrides any state act so there are no implications whatsoever on native title.

Clause 23, as read, agreed to.

Clause 24—

Mr HOPPER (11.55 am): This clause amends section 33, titled Revocation of reserves, by deleting mention of the need for revocation to be announced in the Government Gazette. A fair few of the clauses—24, 25, 26, 30 and 33—remove the need for revocation of reserves to be gazetted. The gazette is an official publication of government decisions and helps with accountability. How will the general public, apart from the few stakeholders mentioned in other amended sections, be made aware of the revocation of a reserve?

Mr WALLACE: Under the new provisions the process of revoking the reserve will be even more public. If the minister proposes to revoke all or part of a reserve, written notice of the proposal must first be given to the trustee of the reserve, each person with a registered interest in the land and any other person the minister considers should be given written notice. A person who receives written notice will be entitled to make a submission against the proposal. All properly made submissions must be considered before a decision to revoke the reserve is made.

In addition, before a reserve may be revoked, any interest granted by the state over the reserve must be resumed, surrendered or cancelled. Although the revocation of a reserve will take effect upon registration of a document in the titling system, a person who received written notice will be entitled to receive notice of the particulars. That means that we actually make this more public than when it appeared in the Government Gazette. Publishing notices in the Government Gazette was acceptable while there continued to be no central land repository for dealing with state lands. However, with the computerisation of dealings with freehold and state land this is no longer the case. The central repository for dealings with freehold and state land is now the automated title system. Any person interested in dealing in that land can simply find out through the titling system.

Mr HOPPER: I hope the minister realises where I am coming from with that last question. If the issue is that nobody reads the gazette, then will the minister commit to advertising the revocation in every newspaper in Queensland so that the public know when a reserve is revoked? I think that that is only fair to the people of Queensland.

Mr WALLACE: No, that would be a tedious process. As I said, anyone who is interested in dealing with that land could quite easily deal through the automated titles system.

Clause 24, as read, agreed to.

Clause 25—

Mr HOPPER (11.57 am): I will cover a number of clauses with this question. I will cover clauses 25, 30, 31, 68 and 92.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): You can certainly ask your question in relation to all those clauses. I cannot put them as such.

Mr HOPPER: I understand that. I will speak on clause 25 but the minister knows where I am coming from. I met with him earlier and said I would do this. This clause replaces section 34, 'Revocation of reserve cancels appointments, leases and permits'. It deletes mention of the need for the revocation to be announced in the Government Gazette. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee suggests that this clause denies some rights to compensation where a reserve is revoked. Many people carry out improvements on leasehold land. If by some means that lease is revoked or someone walks away from it, is the government willing to pay compensation? Will the government pay compensation for any hurt suffered by a lessee as a result of this legislation?

Mr WALLACE: I appreciate the question from the opposition spokesman and his interest in combining it with a number of clauses. I will make my reply quite broad so that it covers those other clauses. The questions raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee and the opposition focused on the provisions relevant to the revocation or cancellation of trust land, clauses 25 and 26; the cancellation or surrender of permits, clause 92; the issue of noncompliance with lease conditions, clauses 68 and 113; and the surrender of leases, clause 158. As they involve the opposition's concerns with compensation, I will deal with each of them in turn. All of these matters, except for the provisions relating to the state rural leasehold land strategy, have been included in earlier reprints of the Land Act. This includes the acts administered by the members for Warrego and Southern Downs when they were ministers for natural resources.

Firstly, I will look at trusts. When a reserve is revoked or a deed of grant in trust is cancelled under the Land Act 1994, no compensation is payable for the extinguishment of our registered interest in the land. However, the Land Act 1994 and the provisions introduced by the bill ensure the owner of improvements on the land is entitled to payments for those improvements if the land is sold or leased by the state after revocation or cancellation.

In addition, the minister may appoint a liquidator under chapter 9, part 1, division 9 of the Land Act 1994 to wind up the affairs of the trust. In accordance with section 76 of the act, the liquidator must sell all the trust property and apply the proceeds of the sale in accordance with instruction of subsection 1. If an amount remains, the liquidator must pay the amount to the state for disposal as the minister considers appropriate. This provides for payment of fair compensation if a reserve is revoked or a deed of grant in trust is cancelled. This is a fair and balanced approach to the management of trust land.

The bill provides for a person who owns improvements on a revoked reserve or a cancelled deed of grant in trust to make an application to remove those improvements. The decision to refuse an application must consider the act, the reason for the revocation or cancellation and the type of improvement. However, the owner of the improvement is still entitled for payment for the improvements if the land is leased or sold.

Permits to occupy are a minor interest designed for short-term and interim occupations not encompassing permanent occupation or major improvements. For such insecure interests, it is appropriate that the chief executive have control over what improvements can be constructed on the permit as well as the removal of improvements in the event it is cancelled. Surrender of a permit is a voluntary action by the permittee. In such voluntary surrender situations, there should be no issue with the chief executive's control over removal of improvements. Similarly, when a lease is surrendered, this is a voluntary action by the lessee. In such cases, there should be no issue over removal of improvements.

The bill introduces lease term extensions as incentives for lessees of certain agricultural, grazing and pastoral leases to bring land to good condition or support the achievement of another approved government objective, including Indigenous access and enhanced conservation. This is provided in addition to and after the original grant. The bill provides that the minister may reduce the term of the lease by a period up to that of which it was extended if the lessee fails to maintain the leased land in a good condition or in respect to an Indigenous access and use agreement. That agreement is no longer in effect. Removal of the additional term granted by the minister is triggered by the lessee not fulfilling the commitment for which the extension was provided. Lessees will be aware of the conditions of the scheme prior to application, and participation is entirely voluntary.

In the event that a lessee or licensee uses the leased land or licensed land in a way that is not fulfilling their duty of care or is likely to or has caused degradation, if they have breached a condition of their lease or licence or if they are in contravention of the act, then the minister may give a remedial action notice. That is contained in clause 113. A remedial action notice may only be given after the lessee or licensee is given a warning notice. In addition, a lessee or licensee may appeal against the giving of a notice and seek a stay of the decision from the court. Until the appeal process is completed, the minister would not pursue compliance with the notice. In the event the lessee or licensee undertook work during the period and the appeal was upheld, then the state would not pay compensation where the loss could easily be avoided by the lessee delaying compliance whilst utilising the appeal provisions provided by the legislation.

The provisions referred to—except for those relating to the state rural leasehold land strategy—have been included in earlier versions of the Land Act. As I have already mentioned, this includes the acts administered by the members for Warrego and Southern Downs when they were ministers for natural resources. Indeed, some of the provisions under the Land Act 1962 provided even less security for lessees. Last night, opposition members suggested that these provisions were acceptable at the time because they did not have a socialist government. I find it somewhat surprising that these provisions could be allowed to stand for so long under an agrarian, socialist, National Party government that now finds the provisions so offensive. If this had been an important issue for the National Party, why did it not take the opportunity between 1995 and 1998 to make the changes it is complaining about here today?

Mr Shine: What is the answer, Ray?

Mr WALLACE: The fact is that the opposition has seen the word 'compensation' and assumed that everyone is entitled to compensation all the time. This is not and has never been the case. There is no inherent right to get your snout in the trough. Let me give the House an example that might apply under the leasehold land strategy. Under the strategy, a lessee might fail to comply with conditions of a lease that has been extended on the expectation that those conditions would be met. It would be unreasonable for that person to expect compensation for the reduction of a term which was extended on the grounds that certain conditions would be complied with. It would be like expecting to be compensated for the impact of losing your drivers licence after repeated drink-driving convictions. That would be a ridiculous situation.

The opposition made some egregious comments about this state government in the debate last night. The suggestion that we have removed any rights from the lessees, trustees or permittees because of some kind of obsession with socialist ideology is untrue. The true socialists in this House—the agrarian socialists who cooked up the 1986 extensions for all leaseholders which 20 years later is resulting in issues to be addressed by a new generation—should have a look at themselves.

For generations, the state opposition has supported unsustainable development and use of Queensland's leasehold state to the disadvantage of rural people everywhere. This government recognises the hard work of all landholders throughout Queensland and encourages them to maximise their productivity with incentives and a cooperative approach. The concerns the opposition is raising about provisions that already exist in the current legislation are the kinds of criticism we would expect.

Mr HOPPER: I must respond. The Attorney-General asked me for the answer to the minister's question. As we have often heard Barnaby Joyce explain, if you own something and it is yours and you have paid for it and then someone comes and takes it away without compensation, that is communism. That is the word, and it is a very hard word to use. That is the answer to the question. When you move in and take something without compensation, it is blatant communism. That is exactly what communism is. That is exactly what we saw with the Vegetation Management Act and now we are starting to see a bit of it slip in here. The opposition will not be supporting this clause, and there is the answer.

Mr WALLACE: I should point out to the opposition spokesman that lessees do not own the land. They lease it from the state of Queensland.

Mr HOPPER: I hear what the minister is saying, but the lessees put the investments into that land. Whether they build sheds or whether they build anything, it is their money that goes into it. They do not own the actual land, but they pay for the lease and then they put improvements on it. That is the very thing I am talking about here and that is the way of the opposition.

Division: Question put—That clause 25, as read, stand part of the bill.

AYES, 52—Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Choi, Croft, Darling, Fenlon, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Finn

NOES, 28—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Elmes, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeney, Simpson, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Rickuss, Dickson

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Clauses 26 to 94, as read, agreed to.

Clause 95—

Mr HOPPER (12.15 pm): This clause deals with the formula for calculating the rental rate to provide protection against undue rental increases. How will the threshold be determined for undue rental increases?

Mr WALLACE: That is actually a very good question from the opposition spokesperson. It is one of the highlights of this bill, apart from the extension to leases. The clause enables an undue increase to be addressed by effectively capping the increase that would otherwise occur using a percentage prescribed in the land regulation. This could be specified to apply to a certain category or categories of lease, licence or permit and could be different percentages for specific categories. Where I consider there to be no undue increase there will be no cap amount specified in the regulation and section 183AA will not apply. This is the default situation.

Where a lease is renewed during the year and issued afresh then, strictly speaking, because it is a new lease it has no last year's rent. Section 183AA also makes provision for this specific situation by enabling a notional last year's rent to be calculated and therefore the cap and capped rent can also be calculated for renewed or reissued leases, licences or permits. The ability to cap does not apply to freeholding lease instalments or set rents or tenures that are completely new and with no corresponding tenure in the previous year.

The clause enables undue increases to be addressed by effectively capping the increase that would otherwise apply using a percentage prescribed in the land regulation. An undue increase decision is at the discretion of the minister—me. It could be described as an increase that is unreasonable or excessive and implies a departure from accepted standards. In making that decision I, as the minister, give a commitment to consult widely with groups such as AgForce. I had dinner with AgForce members on Monday night and discussed this very matter with them. For the first time ever it gives the minister some flexibility to do that. I can speak to the people out there who are affected. As the member for Darling Downs would know, the best way of getting the right information is to get it from the horse's mouth—that is, speak to the people involved. In that way it gives some leeway in making the decision.

Mr HOPPER: Thank you very much for the answer, Minister. The minister has quite often heard us talk about it being in line with the CPI. That is the opinion on this side of the House. It is a rise that the public accepts very readily. In my speech last night I talked about leasehold properties. We only have to buy a paper and we will find two freehold properties side by side worth $10 million each. These people

have to pay for their properties in the first place. We have had massive hikes in land valuations. We have to be very careful with increases in rents. I hear the minister say that it is at his discretion. Yes, if we have a good minister who does what this minister said, that is okay. I take heed of the minister's comments that he will liaise with industry and work with the likes of AgForce and get out and meet those property owners. If we had a minister who did not do that we could face serious problems. The opposition is very concerned about this. Will the minister tie the PP rate in the formula to ensure that the rents increase at the same rate as the CPI?

Mr WALLACE: I covered some of this in my response last night. The Queensland coalition's policy on leasehold land rents is for them to increase in line with CPI. AgForce Queensland has also lobbied the government for the past 12 month for a CPI increase from the 2004 valuation. My government is yet to make its decision on how to progress agricultural leases in 2007-08 and beyond. I am continuing that consultation process.

I should point out to the House that Queensland already has the lowest pastoral lease grazing rents in the country. On average, leasehold rents are low, particularly for grazing and agricultural leases where they are charged 0.8 per cent of the unimproved value as compared with other states where the general charge is two to three per cent of the unimproved value. This is also compared with commercial rents for freehold land where the cost of renting freehold farming land is generally five per cent or more of the market value.

I am aware that AgForce has sought to have rural leasehold land rents calculated using a base that is increased each year using the CPI as an escalator. The perceived benefit of this is a move away from valuations which can swing considerably over the years to a totally predictable quantity—that is, CPI. While this is a move away from valuations which can move considerably over years to a known quantity, there are a number of reasons as to why it is inappropriate to adopt increases by the CPI. Essentially, the CPI erodes the real return on the asset and rents do not increase in proportion to the value of the asset, and do not forget that that asset is owned by all of us—the state of Queensland.

The government on behalf of the people of Queensland manages the leasehold estate and the funds that are derived from it go back into consolidated revenue. It is incumbent upon the government to ensure that the community receives a fair return from this asset. While the CPI option is simple and reasonably predictable, it would not provide a return on the asset that reflects the value of that asset to the community. It also goes the other way. If the CPI is used and the market slumped—if the cattle market slumped or the beef market slumped and valuations went south and the CPI went north—it would not translate into decreases in rents. The proposed introduction of averaging and capping will provide a much fairer system from the perspective of both the lessees and the wider community.

Clause 95, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 96 to 102, as read, agreed to.

Clause 103—

Mr HOPPER (12.23 pm): This clause deals with the management principles of future conservation areas. I have a simple question for the minister: who will be on that panel that decides and determines the guidelines within these principles?

Mr WALLACE: There is no panel. The principles are established in legislation. There is no panel.

Clause 103, as read, agreed to.

Clause 104, as read, agreed to.

Clause 105—

Mr HOPPER (12.24 pm): This clause deals with duty of care conditions on leasehold land. I note that conserving water resources is mentioned in this clause. At the moment we are in the worst drought in history really and a lot of leasehold land will not have any water on it at this moment. As a matter of fact, I was at the Dalby cattle sale the other day and spoke to a young fellow who is a big cattle buyer who has three stations that are dormant. He has destocked them. Because there is no water he cannot put cattle on those properties. Those situations are occurring. If at the end of a lease this occurs, will this mean that the landholder will be in breach of their land management agreement?

Mr WALLACE: No.

Mr HOPPER: I thank the minister for that. I note that this clause also relates to maintaining pastures free from encroachment of woody vegetation. If the minister's officers deny permits to control woody vegetation on leasehold land and woody weeds get out of control as a result, will this mean that the landholder will be in breach of their land management agreement?

Mr WALLACE: Only if they refuse to clear that vegetation. We are not going to be out there unduly penalising people if they attempt to take reasonable action to keep pests off their property. If they have applied for a permit and it is a correct permit, we are not going to have police out there taking people on if they are working in good faith. If there is a drought, as the member said, and there is no water, we certainly are not going to be out there tackling landholders in that regard. We want to work with them.

As the member for Gregory pointed out last night, most leaseholders are absolutely decent folk who have been on that land sometimes for generations. The member for Gregory pointed out that his father was there before him and I dare say that he had an amount of pride in the land that he managed, as the member for Gregory would have when he was the leaseholder. We will not be out there unduly penalising people because of an act of God or because of some actions that they cannot undertake. We will be working with them. If there is some encroachment from woody weeds, as the member has mentioned, we expect our officers to be out there working with people where we can to overcome that problem.

Mr HOPPER: Thank you, Minister. I will not ask a further question but just want to make a statement. There have been cases, for example up in the cape, where rubber vine is just unbelievable. The cost to clean that up is beyond comprehension. I would ask the minister and his officers to be very aware of those situations. Just west of Dalby African lovegrass is in such proportions right through to the Nanango electorate that it is absolutely out of control and you could not clean it up because of the cost. It is just too bad now; it is too far gone. The minister's officers have to be very considerate in terms of the expenses that may be put on a leaseholder when there is a weed infestation or something of that nature.

Mr WALLACE: I totally concur with the spokesman's comments. With the new biosecurity department, the minister for primary industries has a very strong focus on tackling feral animals, pests and weeds in Queensland. I am sure he would join me today in saying that we are more than willing to work with leaseholders and landholders in tackling those problems right across Queensland.

Clause 105, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 106 to 112, as read, agreed to.

Clause 113—

Mr HOPPER (12.28 pm): Proposed sections 214C and F inserted by this clause deal with remedial action notices and reductions of terms of leases. Minister, the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee suggests that this clause denies rights to compensation where there is a condition requiring action and where the minister decides to reduce the term of or impose additional conditions on a lease. Within the regulations, will the minister ensure that landholders receive adequate compensation for decisions that are made by the chief executive officer?

Mr WALLACE: I refer to my earlier comments that I made in relation to clause 95.

Clause 113, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 114 to 150, as read, agreed to.

Clause 151—

Mr HOPPER (12.29 pm): This clause deals with amendments of standard terms documents. I understand clause 151 inserts mandatory standard terms documents into existing head leases which will provide for management arrangements that will assist tenants to protect their investments on their properties. Can the minister advise specifically if he intends to lodge these conditions? If so, what are they to include? Will they apply to leases that are already in existence?

Mr WALLACE: This amendment introduces a new section 318A, which will allow the minister to lodge a standard terms document containing terms that the minister considers are mandatory terms for an interest that may be created under the Land Act 1994. For example, the minister may consider the following as mandatory terms for a trustee lease: a clause requiring the lessee to comply with any approved management plan for the trust land if the trustee lease is for an inconsistent use; a clause requiring the lessee to seek the minister's approval to the building of any further improvements on the trust land; and a clause authorising termination of a trustee lease by the trustee if the lessee fails to comply with the terms of the mandatory standard terms document applicable to the trustee lease. This provision is in support of better administration of our state land.

Clause 151, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 152 to 205, as read, agreed to.

Clause 206—

Mr HOPPER (12.32 pm): This clause amends section 50, which is titled 'Requirements for registration of plan of subdivision'. It inserts that, if the plan of subdivision is to give effect to the surrender of land under the Land Act 1994 of all or part of land contained in a deed of grant in trust, the plan of subdivision must be endorsed by the minister and need not have been approved by the local government concerned.

This clause deals with the surrender of all or part of land contained in a deed of grant in trust. I note that local government does not have any approval processes. Has the Local Government Association been consulted on this clause? If so, what did it say about not being part of this process?

Mr WALLACE: The Local Government Association has been consulted and to my knowledge it had no concerns. This proposed amendment is required to support a more efficient administration of state land and to support the proposed amendments to the Land Act 1994.

Clause 206, as read, agreed to.

Clause 207—

Mr HOPPER (12.33 pm): This clause amends section 51, which is titled 'Dedication of public use land in plan', to allow for the endorsement of the dedication of land for public use other than a road with the approval of the minister, and no further consultation is required. This clause deals with the dedication of public use land in plan and a particular endorsement of land other than a road with the approval of the minister and, on registration of the plan, without anything further the lot is dedicated as a reserve for the community purpose. This clause does not seem to involve any community consultation. In the case of, say, a rubbish dump being the reason for a planned public use, will that still require public consultation?

Mr WALLACE: Yes, it would require public consultation for that use. Any public use in a subdivision—for a dump or other uses—would require local government approval which, under the Integrated Planning Act, necessitates an advertising and community consultation procedure.

Clause 207, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 208 to 219, as read, agreed to.

Clause 220—

Mr HOPPER (12.35 pm): This section deals with when a landowner makes a self-declaration that certain land is an area of high conservation or is vulnerable. I ask the minister: will there be any financial assistance given to the landowner to help that landowner gain expertise through consultants to help formulate this application for a declaration?

Mr WALLACE: There could be financial assistance if it is a land of high conservation value. As a state, we make funds available to assist landholders in that regard. I hope that this very groundbreaking clause and amendment to the act would indeed pave the way for Queensland leaseholders and landholders to become involved in a future carbon trading scheme or offset emissions scheme. I think that is essential in Queensland as we are a resource-rich state. We have large land reserves. A lot of our lessees are looking for innovative ways to not only look after their leases and land but also to get some income. A number of schemes would assist landholders in that regard. Once this legislation is passed and if the member has some land that he wants to preserve, I will get him some information on how we can work out the best path.

Clause 220, as read, agreed to.

Clause 221—

Mr HOPPER (12.37 pm): This clause amends section 20B, which is titled 'When a chief executive may make property map of assessable vegetation'. It omits the definition of 'unlawfully cleared' from this section. What is the purpose of omitting the definition of 'unlawfully cleared' from the section? Why did the minister do that?

Mr WALLACE: We are simplifying the act. We have put it in the definitions section rather than generally. It simplifies the act and makes it easier for not only my officers but also for landholders and leaseholders.

Clause 221, as read, agreed to.

Clause 222, as read, agreed to.

Clause 223—

Mr HOPPER (12.38 pm): This clause amends section 22A, titled 'Particular vegetation clearing applications may be assessed'. It changes the wording of the section from an application for clearing being on 'built infrastructure' to 'necessarily built infrastructure', which seems to be more restrictive in terms of the type of infrastructure that can be built. What is the purpose of this change? Can the minister give me some examples of where this amendment would be implemented?

Mr WALLACE: Some stakeholders have argued an interpretation of other built infrastructure as relating to narrow linear infrastructure only. This is contrary to the policy intent, and they believe it is limiting their ability to submit an application to clear for necessary infrastructure such as buildings. To remove doubt, the explanatory notes to the bill clarify the term 'built infrastructure' to include public and privately owned buildings, pipelines, dams and powerlines. The provision for built infrastructure has also been amended to allow applications to clear to construct infrastructure as opposed to the current situation which allows for establishing the infrastructure.

There are concerns that establishing built infrastructure may inadvertently allow broadscale clearing to occur in situations where after the infrastructure is constructed clearing would be required to operate the infrastructure, which is a different purpose. If currently not cleared, such an area could not lawfully be broadscale cleared. As the Queensland government is committed to ending broadscale land clearing, this amendment will ensure that clearing is limited to the purposes intended.

Mr HOPPER: We are a bit concerned about the infrastructure part of it—that the department might come in heavy-handedly. Will the department be easygoing towards someone? Or will a landholder have to fight the department to determine whether the infrastructure is necessary or not? Is there a big involved process here or is the department going to let them have a pretty free rein?

Mr WALLACE: The member for Darling Downs I think is concerned that my department will be unnecessarily obstructive.

Mr Hopper: Maybe. I am not necessarily saying that will happen. It is something that we are a bit concerned about.

Mr WALLACE: And it is a legitimate concern. This bill will make the job of deciding and being fair—and I think that is what you are trying to get at, getting a fair judgement for all concerned—much more easy because necessary built infrastructure is a relevant purpose under the act and can be applied for. So the person making that application has all the rights and reserves that any person making an application in this state has, and this bill helps to clarify that. It will make it easier for my department to make a quick decision, which is what people want, and a correct decision, and it will also help the lessee in making that application.

Clause 223, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 224 to 227, 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.

STATUTORY BODIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 20 February (see p. 323).

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.43 pm): The state coalition believes in an industrial regime that provides a fair balance of rights and responsibilities of workers and employees. We have supported the principles of reforms under federal WorkChoices laws and applaud the record low unemployment figures and the high full-time employment rate which has resulted from this more flexible industrial relations system.

Australians deserve to be paid a fair amount for their labour, and that is why there are still regulations for fair pay and protected mechanisms, and for having a safety net. But Australians also deserve to have governments make responsible choices to bolster their local economies and create an environment where the private sector will establish new jobs. We must remember that it is predominantly the private sector that creates new jobs that generate ongoing wealth in the community.

The latest labour force data released last week shows the national unemployment rate has dropped to 4.5 per cent, down 0.1 per cent since February. The unemployment rate at the introduction of WorkChoices was 5.1 per cent. Two hundred and seventy-six thousand new jobs were created in the year to March. Those 276,000 jobs comprise over 96 per cent of full-time jobs. This outstanding surge in full-time jobs demonstrates that both employers and workers want to move away from mass casualisation of the workforce.

With fairer industrial laws employers are more confident to put people in full-time positions, and workers have clearly demonstrated that they want that choice. Unemployment in Queensland is at four per cent and Western Australia's unemployment rate has plummeted to just 2.7 per cent. These are the lowest figures since 1976 showing that, contrary to the Labor Party's scaremongering about job losses, there has been a record number of new jobs created since the introduction of WorkChoices.

While the resources sector has boosted our economy, it alone does not account for the huge increase in new jobs in a range of sectors, including the hospitality sector. I believe that history will show that Labor Party scaremongering about WorkChoices causing job losses is going to rank with the Y2K computer bogey. In contrast, Labor has indicated that it wants to abolish WorkChoices, so its position is a little more muddy as of yesterday.

But there has been criticism of WorkChoices which would indicate that if Labor had its way it would prefer to move back to a highly casualised workforce in which workers have far less certainty and consequently do not feel secure to invest in house mortgages and other important lifestyle investments. We must remember that the difference between a casual workforce and a full-time workforce is that when there is a greater percentage of people working full time they are more likely to invest in things such as mortgages. We know that the levels of casualisation in some sectors, even within the Public Service here in Queensland, have certainly been a concern.

This next federal election is not about the unions fighting for workers' rights; it is about some fighting for unions' rights to interfere in people's private job negotiations even when the workers do not want their help. However, after Industrial Relations Minister Mickel's response to my question this morning about whether he supports Kevin Rudd's proposed centralised federal IR system—whether he will stand up and say that the government is going to back down from its previous position of supporting a state based system—it is becoming increasingly clear that the position of Queensland Labor is on a collision course with federal Labor unless we see a clear indication from this minister to the contrary.

Where was the minister this morning indicating that he endorsed Kevin Rudd's new centralised IR policy? He certainly did not come to the table today to indicate he would support that. The Premier was a bit more ambivalent. He indicated some soft support for federal Labor's new IR position of having a centralised IR system. So what do we have here now? Clearly Queensland Labor is either going to back down and follow the Premier or it will follow Minister Mickel who refused to endorse federal Labor. I would certainly seek the minister's clarification as to whether he is now supporting a centralised federal IR system.

In a democratic society it is vitally important for there to be a professional and ethical union movement fighting for a fair go for workers. I strongly support people's right to belong to a union. I used to be a member of a union myself and I appreciated the work that our representatives did. However, I also strongly support people's right not to belong to a union. Clearly, that is a view shared by the majority of Australians, as union membership in the private sector has fallen from 16.7 per cent in 2005 to only 15 per cent this year. Trade union membership has become the reserve of the public sector, where membership runs at 43 per cent.

Ironically, state public servants have not been under threat—as this Labor government claims—from federal WorkChoices laws. Certainly we have seen a considerable amount of scaremongering from some in the union movement who, before the last election, went to schools and told teachers and teacher aides that under a state coalition government they would have to shift to the federal system. That was a blatant lie. We have stated clearly that we believe that the state public sector should remain under a state based industrial system. That was our published policy and it continues to be.

I support the principles of the federal WorkChoices laws, particularly in regard to the private sector. What they have achieved with the move to new jobs and full-time participation has indicated certainly that those laws have had some positive net benefit. However, I also support the right of the state to maintain its public servants within the state based industrial system. That was the coalition's published policy and it continues to be. I believe that the unions also have an important role to play in state based negotiations of awards and conditions for public servants, particularly while they represent a sizeable part of that workforce.

I believe that the state coalition's view is a balanced one. We believe in a balance, firstly, between the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers and, secondly, with the need for the state to maintain a strong interest in how it undertakes its own industrial relations responsibilities. I will come back to that in a moment, because the score card in the Queensland Public Service is not too flash. This government has not handled itself particularly well, especially in relation to bullying in the Public Service, and problems of recruitment and retention which are aligned to the culture that is being perpetuated.

The bill before the House would have the effect of returning employees of certain statutory bodies to the state system by transferring their employment to a non-corporate employing office that would be created alongside each state corporate entity. In keeping with the state coalition's belief that state employees should have the choice of being under the state industrial system, we support this legislation because the affected staff were already de facto public servants anyway.

While creating a somewhat convoluted process, the bill only affects a relatively small number of workers. Thousands in government owned corporations such as Queensland Rail and the Queensland port authorities are not covered by this Beattie government legislation. It is an interesting situation when a state government which, up until this point, has claimed that it hated the WorkChoices legislation has moved to effectively shift a small number of public servants—as we have said, they were already de facto public servants who worked within statutory entities that were caught by federal laws—yet other major government owned corporations are continuing under the federal jurisdiction. I think that the government is engaging in a bit of doublespeak.

Under the arrangements in this bill, employees will continue to perform work for the state corporation under a work performance agreement negotiated between the employing office and the relevant state corporation. This is akin to a labour hire arrangement where the labour hire agency, that is, the corporate employing office, is covered by state industrial legislation. The bill would remove the employment powers of statutory corporations, but the management and structural basis of the statutory corporations would otherwise remain intact.

A small number of entities that are constituted by boards are treated differentially—the board of the Queensland State Library, the Queensland Art Gallery board of trustees and the board of the Queensland Museum—where the employer will be the relevant Queensland government department rather than a separate employing office. For example, the employer of the board of the Queensland Library would be the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts.

A similar model was used by the South Australian government in its Statutes Amendment (Public Sector Employment) Act 2006. I believe that the act has not yet commenced. The New South Wales government uses a slightly different model in its Public Sector Employment Legislation Amendment Act 2006, but to similar effect. The South Australian legislation will apply in relation to a range of employees, including urban and country firefighters, ambulance officers, TAFE teachers and employees at public hospitals.

The New South Wales Public Sector Employment Legislation Amendment Act, which commenced on 17 March 2006, uses a slightly different model but, as mentioned, with similar effect. The New South Wales legislation creates the government service of New South Wales and provides for the transfer of employees from certain statutory corporations to that new service. Affected corporations include the Roads and Traffic Authority, the State Transit Authority and the TAFE commission. The former employees of those entities are employed in divisions of the government service in the service of the Crown, and the power of the statutory corporations to employ staff is removed. Similarly, the New South Wales legislation removes the employment functions of public health organisations, such as the area health services, and provides for the transfer of employees of those authorities to the newly created New South Wales Health Service.

I seek from the minister clarification on a number of issues. Firstly, while it is uncertain whether any of the corporations' employees are employed under Australian workplace agreements, given the policy of the Queensland government and its opposition to the WorkChoices reforms, it is likely that another type of industrial instrument governs the employment relationship. I seek the minister's clarification on some of the industrial instruments that have been applied to the entities that we have been mentioning in the Queensland jurisdiction. Also, given that it has been less than a year since the WorkChoices reforms commenced, it is possible that the pre-reform state instrument continues to apply as a notional agreement preserving a state award or a preserved state agreement by virtue of the transitional arrangements in the WR act.

The issues that are particularly pertinent to the broader public sector, and which are not covered in this act, relate to the question of how the government will address major issues of workplace bullying and a failure to retain staff due to workplace culture. For example, in the emergency services sector there is growing concern about fatigue, stress and ambulance staff shortages. We have seen the systemic bullying and harassment of ambulance officers and paramedics, particularly those who have been leading the fight against the high rates of staff turnover, and staff turnover is really quite drastic. While some efforts have been made to address chronic staff shortages, as 1,200 additional paramedics will need to be recruited to the QAS over the next five years, the main government response has been to back those who want to ignore the problem. However, this goes to the heart of industrial relations within the state public sector.

It is not good enough to say that you have the laws and the policies in place. You have to look at the culture and what is actually happening within the workplace. From the failure of workplace relations in the Queensland public sector, we know that many people have been left scarred. They have been burnt out and have left occupations that they were highly committed to, but could no longer tolerate the culture that existed within those occupations. Currently nothing in the state legislation effectively addresses that issue. Issues such as bullying and retention rates are clear indicators of a workforce that has a sickness that needs a cure. The laws that we have seen to date do not address those issues.

I turn to Queensland Health. Medical staff continue to quit the health department in droves. According to the government's latest statistics for staff employment, the resignation rate is running extremely high. While the Premier and the Minister for Health continue to boast about staff increases of 530 doctors here and 100 nurses and allied staff there, the number of people who are leaving the system continues to mount. That number overwhelms the number of staff being recruited.

In fact, the figures are quite stunning, for example, with the Ambulance Service. I will table some of those figures, because the resignation rates for medical officers and VMOs, in the context of what we are talking about with recruitment, clearly show that the state public sector industrial relations climate is not a healthy one. If this government continues to pat itself on the back and say that it has the moral high ground in regard to how people are faring under its state based system, it is time that it came to the table and showed us how it will truly reform a culture that is failing to serve those who are at the coalface of providing public service to the community.

Sitting suspended from 1 pm to 2.30 pm.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): I acknowledge in the public gallery students, staff and parents from St Thomas More Primary School in Toowoomba in the electorate of Toowoomba South represented in the chamber by the honourable Mike Horan.

Debate, on motion of Miss Simpson, adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Trade Mission; South Africa, Kenya, United Kingdom

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (2.30 pm), by leave: Further to my reports to parliament yesterday and again this morning, I am pleased now to formally table my report to parliament on my recent trade mission to South Africa, Kenya and the United Kingdom. I also table the report by my wife, Associate Professor Heather Beattie, who accompanied me on the mission.

Tabled paper: Report on overseas visit to South Africa, Kenya and the United Kingdom from 19 March to 31 March 2007.

Tabled paper: Report on an overseas visit to South Africa, Kenya and the United Kingdom by Dr Heather Beattie from 19 March to 31 March 2007.

I make particular mention of the Young Australian of the Year, Tanya Major, who joined me in South Africa. She made a tremendous impression on everyone she met and was a fantastic ambassador for her state and country.

I seek leave to have details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The genesis of this Trade Mission was the visit to Queensland for the CHOGM meeting in 2001 by President Mbeki of South Africa.

During my discussions with President Mbeki he invited me to visit South Africa, and it is only now that I have had an opportunity to do so.

In part, this was precipitated by the fact that the IAAF had decided to meet in Mombasa, Kenya to settle on the locations for the World Athletics Championships in 2011 and 2013.

As I have previously reported to the House, Queensland was one of the four finalists in bids for those opportunities and, after having discussions to pursue our bid during my visit to Monaco last year, I decided it would be appropriate to personally lead the delegation to push our case for Brisbane.

I was delighted that the Lord Mayor of Brisbane Councillor Campbell Newman made the long trip to join me in that presentation.

As is now known, we unfortunately did not succeed on this occasion and, whilst there are issues we have with the bid process, our presentation and attendance did generate tremendous goodwill from delegates that I personally believe will translate into alternate opportunities for Brisbane and Queensland in the future.

Other cities present in Mombasa indicated that it is almost impossible to win on the first bid, and counselled that they have bid on several occasions before being successful.

Following the decision by the IAAF I publicly committed us to start work on a bid for the World Athletic Championships in 2015, but we were also given cause for cautious hope in obtaining other major world athletic opportunities because of the excellent bid put together by the bid team and Queensland Events.

The bid team led by Des Power is currently finalising its detailed report to the QEC Board and subsequently to me.

I take this opportunity again to congratulate Des Power and all his team for the magnificent effort put in over a long period of time to build our case, and to promote Brisbane's prospects for the future.

Whilst our promotion was not successful on this occasion, I am confident that our reputation as a major world player in events promotion and management has been further enhanced, and will bear fruit in the future.

Whilst Queensland mining companies and other Queensland business interests had been doing excellent work in South Africa, and have built an extraordinary business reputation, I believe my visit has paved the way for an excellent relationship with the Government and people of South Africa and wonderful opportunities for Queensland and South Africa in the future.

We were very well received, and had a range of meetings with Government and business leaders that will result in to significant outcomes for Queensland in the years to come.

My meeting with President Mbeki was very cordial and ranged over many issues of mutual concern to us.

I am pleased that both President Mbeki, and later in London the United Kingdom Minister for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Right Honourable David Miliband both committed to working with us on clean coal technology as did Anglo Coal in South Africa. I have already put in place work to ensure that we pursue those commitments to the benefit of Queensland and of course to the other countries concerned. In fact, I have written to President Mbeki today to follow up as part of our plan for the African region on that commitment and on other issues.

I am also very pleased that we have formally signed off on a close relationship with the South African province of Kwazulu-Natal. We were very warmly received by the Premier of Kwazulu-Natal and his Government, with commitments made to work on a raft of opportunities into the future. Premier Ndebele noted that both our regions feature a sizable mining sector, and share a desire to diversify their economies and create jobs.

We also built links with universities during the Trade Mission not only the University of Kwazulu-Natal, but also with the University of Reading in the United Kingdom, working on issues such as water and climate change.

I was particularly pleased that the Young Australian of the Year, Tanya Major, joined me in South Africa. She made a tremendous impression on all she met, and I believe she also gained a great deal personally from the trip.

A special chord was struck in South Africa by the announcement of our initiative to host the top South Africa team SuperSport United to play a pre-season match with Queensland Roar at Suncorp Stadium in July this year as a major feature of the "Queensland Roar Against Racism" campaign, which could herald further such initiatives down the track.

As always I found Queenslanders working assiduously in South Africa, Kenya, and in the United Kingdom with excellent prospects and achievements, and Queensland itself has a first class reputation for being willing to seek out new opportunities and delivering on them.

I will be ensuring that we follow up on the initiatives announced during my Mission, and the commitments made in areas such as clean coal technology, climate change, water, skills training, and infrastructure development.

I express my particular appreciation to our Agent-General in London Mr John Dawson and his staff, and to the Australian High Commissioner in South Africa His Excellency Philip Green and his officers, for the exceptional assistance they gave me in finalising my program for the mission, and travelling with me to provide advice and assistance.

I will continue to report to Parliament on opportunities and achievements derived from this Mission.

As an aside, when I was in Cape Town I had the pleasure of running into a local shop owner whose name was Vaughan Johnson. There was great similarity in appearance and attitude with the Queensland Vaughan Johnson. I told the Cape Town Vaughan Johnson that I would be sharing with the Vaughan Johnson from Queensland that he had a future business career in Cape Town after politics.

POLICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

First Reading

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (2.32 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004, the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 and the Police Service Administration Act 1990, and for other purposes. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Second Reading

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (2.32 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I introduce a bill today that reflects the Beattie government's commitment to continually address law and order issues in the best interests of the community. The bill makes amendments to the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000, PPRA; the Police Service Administration Act 1990, PSAA; and the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004, CPORA.

These amendments remove redundant provisions, correct deficiencies or omissions and implement agreed policy changes. Also, the bill will amend the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995, TORUM, for which the Minister for Transport and Main Roads is responsible, facilitating the enforcement of the proposed peer passenger restriction reforms to improve young driver safety in Queensland. Regulatory amendments will be required to fully implement this proposal following passage of the bill.

I will now address the specifics of this bill. In relation to remote service of notice to appear, section 382 of the PPRA provides that if a police officer reasonably suspects that a person has committed an offence the police officer may issue and serve a notice to appear on a person. Except in the case of offences against the Road Use Management Act, covered by subsection 382(4), a notice to appear must be served personally by the officer investigating the offence. Therefore, it cannot be served if the person to be served is in a different location to that of the investigating officer.

For example, a police officer in Brisbane may wish to institute proceedings against a person in Mount Isa. The existing legislation does not permit another police officer to issue and serve a notice to appear on behalf of the investigating police officer. The only alternatives are to obtain an arrest warrant or to proceed by complaint and summons. In many instances arrest is not a desirable option and the use of a complaint and summons is unnecessarily time consuming. This will save the community costs associated with court files and time spent by police officers in the administration of paperwork.

The bill will amend the PPRA to authorise a police officer to issue and serve a notice to appear if requested to do so by another police officer. However, a concurrent amendment is necessary to specify that the requesting police officer remains the complainant in the matter. Although this amendment will involve some redesign of the notice to appear form to accommodate the names of the complainant and serving officer, the amendment is necessary to require the particulars of the requesting police officer to be included on the notice to appear form.

Given the importance of the debate on the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill, I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Relevant offences for PPRA

Mr Speaker, the Cross-Border Law Enforcement Legislation Amendment Act 2005 (CBLEA) amended the PPRA and introduced national model laws to allow seamless cross-border investigations of serious offences by law enforcement agencies.

During the drafting of the CBLEA, a 12 month transitional regulation-making power was inserted into the PPRA, to allow 'relevant offences' for such investigations to be prescribed in the PPRR.

However, before the expiration of the provision, all offences contained in the regulation must be moved into the PPRA.

The regulation is to expire on 30 June 2007.

Consequently, the Bill will amend the PPRA to allow the current schedule of 'relevant offences' in the PPRR to be moved to the PPRA.

The amendment will not alter offences currently listed in the PPRR schedule of relevant offences.

Section 14 (When initial report must be made)

Mr Speaker, section 14 (When initial report must be made) of the CPORA imposes an obligation on a reportable offender to report their personal details to the commissioner within specified periods that are detailed in a table of the provision.

The section operates in conjunction with section 50 (Failure to comply with reporting obligations) of the CPORA, which creates an offence for failure to report in accordance with reporting conditions.

However, it is a defence in a proceeding under section 50 if the reportable offender does not receive notice and is unaware of any reporting obligations.

In some instances, reportable offenders have not been given notice at the time of sentencing or before their release from detention in compliance with section 54 (Notice to be given to reportable offender) of the CPORA.

Without a notice, there is no obligation for a reportable offender to report to a police station.

Although a notice may be issued under section 59 (Notices may be given by police commissioner) of the CPORA, it is arguable that such a notice is ineffective because the relevant time period detailed in section 14 of the CPORA commences from the time a person stops being in detention.

The Bill will amend the CPORA and clarify that a notice issued under section 59 is not limited by the expiry of a relevant time period prescribed in section 14 of the CPORA.

Mr Speaker, in practical terms, the commissioner will be able to effectively issue a notice to a reportable offender to report to a police station.

The intention of the amendment is to require offenders to make their initial report to a police station either according to timeframes detailed in the table of section 14 or, if served by the commissioner, the same time periods from the date an offender is served.

Section 70 (Confidentiality)

Mr Speaker, section 70 (Confidentiality) of the CPORA provides that a person authorised to have access to the register must not disclose any personal information in the register except in circumstances authorised by the commissioner or as otherwise required by or under any Act or law.

However, section 10.2 (Authorisation of disclosure) of the PSAA prevents the disclosure of information in possession of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) by allowing the commissioner to impose conditions on disclosure of information and an offence for contravening such conditions.

The Bill will amend section 70 and clarify the relationship between section 70 of the CPORA and 10.2 of the PSAA.

Section 74 (Review of decision to place person on register)

Mr Speaker, section 74 of the CPORA provides a mechanism for a person who has been incorrectly placed on the register or an error has been made in working out the length of the person's reporting period and that period has been provided in the register.

Under this provision, the person may apply to the commissioner for a review of these decisions.

During drafting of the Bill, an anomaly in the provision revealed that although the application of the process is meant to apply in both circumstances, the provision only allows a person to apply to the commissioner to review the decision to place the person on the register.

The Bill will amend the provision to allow the application of the section to apply to the length of the person's reporting period in the register.

Regulating young drivers

Mr Speaker, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads has indicated that from 1 July 2007, young driver initiatives will be introduced on Queensland roads.

One such initiative will create an offence in the Transport Operations (Road Use Management—Driver Licensing) Regulation 1999 which prevents a person who is the holder of a class C P1 provisional licence, aged less than 25 years, or the holder of a class C P1 probationary or P1 restricted licence, from driving a car on a road between the hours of 11pm on one day and 5am on the next day with more than one passenger under the age of 21 years in the car (Peer Passenger Restriction).

A legislative exemption will apply for immediate family members.

However, because of two critical elements of this offence, the regulatory amendment cannot be progressed until the following proposed Act changes are in place.

Amendment of section 42 (Power for age-related offences and for particular motor vehicle related purposes) of the PPRA

Mr Speaker, the first amendment will address the element of age in such an offence by amending section 42 (Power for age-related offences and for particular motor vehicle related purposes) of the PPRA.

Section 41 (Prescribed circumstances for requiring name and address) of the PPRA details a prescribed circumstance that allows a police officer to require a passenger of a vehicle to state his or her correct name and current place of residence.

However, section 42 of the PPRA does not afford police authority to require passengers in a vehicle, driven by a young driver, to state their date of birth.

Mr Speaker, without authority to require a passenger to state their date of birth, police may be unable to validate the identities of passengers and prove the element of age in a peer passenger offence.

The Bill will amend the PPRA to allow a police officer to require a passenger in a vehicle, driven by a young driver, to state his or her correct date of birth and to provide evidence of the correctness thereof.

The amendment will also include a safeguard that prevents a passenger being found guilty of an offence of contravene direction or requirement of police office if the driver is not found guilty of the contravention of the age-related restriction.

Amendment of section 150AA (Regulating young drivers) of the TORUM

Mr Speaker, the second amendment is in relation to the element of relationship between a young driver of a vehicle and a passenger of the vehicle.

The Bill will amend the TORUM. The most effective means of enforcing the element of family relationship of a peer passenger restriction is to place an onus on the driver to establish the relationship of an immediate family member.

An amendment the TORUM is necessary to provide adequate head of power to regulate this reverse onus of proof.

A driver and passenger of a vehicle may choose only to answer questions that they are statutorily required to answer, for example, name, address and date of birth.

With the reversal of onus, once a police officer forms a belief on reasonable grounds that the driver has additional passengers who are not immediate family members in the vehicle, the investigating officer, after conducting reasonable inquiries with the driver and passengers, may commence a proceeding.

If a proceeding is commenced against a person because the officer believes on reasonable grounds that an additional passenger in the vehicle is not an immediate family member and the driver subsequently produces evidence to the contrary, the proceeding will be withdrawn.

Mr Speaker, the Queensland Police Service Operational Procedures Manual (OPM) details that a police officer who, in the course of their duty, takes a person into custody has a duty of care to those persons while they are in custody.

This duty may also extend to persons who are being cared for and may include a child, elderly person or other persons who require care.

Under these circumstances, the officer is to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the care of any such person while the person is in police custody.

The OPM will be amended to ensure the safety of passengers who may be required to leave a vehicle driven by a young driver who contravenes a restriction.

Amendment to section 1.4 (Definitions) of the PSAA

The Queensland Police Records Information Management Exchange (QPRIME) system has been designed to provide QPS members and approved users with fast access to information relating to persons, locations, vehicles, custody and property.

QPRIME will replace over 200 current information management systems operated by the QPS including CRISP, the traffic incidents reports index and the drug index.

As a consequence of the impending start of QPRIME release 2.1 on Monday 18 June 2007, the definition of "QPS database" in section 1.4 "Definitions" and the Schedule "Relevant information" of the PSAA both require amendment to omit a number of database and index terms that will become redundant on that date and to replace them with the equivalent QPRIME information resource references.

The Bill will amend the PSAA to omit the redundant index names and replace them with equivalent QPRIME references.

The amendment will only apply to Part 5AA (Assessment of suitability of persons seeking to be engaged or engaged by the service) of the PSAA.

The 'relevant information' that must be provided or obtained in relation to future applicants of the QPS will not change.

Mr Speaker, there are many aspects to the Bill and I do not intend to address each and every part of the Bill as the explanation of them is provided in the Explanatory notes.

The Beattie Government has, and will continue to protect the safety and security of members of our community and punish those who break the laws of this State.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Miss Simpson, adjourned.

STATUTORY BODIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 1309.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (2.35 pm). In concluding my contribution on the bill I table some figures from Queensland Health which clearly show that all is not healthy in Queensland Health with regard to its industrial relations and its ability not just to recruit but to retain staff. These figures show the number of resignations of medical officers and VMOs, visiting medical officers, who are private sector specialists providing public sector assistance in the public system. They are vital throughout Queensland to maintain a functional health system.

From July 2005 to September 2006 there were 1,127 resignations of VMOs and medical officers. The number of nursing stream resignations in the same period was 2,644. The number of allied health professional and scientist resignations in that period was 1,421. The total number of health resignations over that period was 5,192. I previously alluded to some of the challenges within the ambulance sector. We know that a number of portfolios have a real issue with retention of qualified staff. Child Safety is another arena where there are issues in relation to retention of staff.

If we are to have a public sector in Queensland where people want to work and their skills are utilised there has to be a culture change. There have to be major changes beyond what we saw occur once the lid was lifted on some of the horrendous issues of bullying in the public sector. To date there has been no evidence of a commitment to that by this government. A state coalition government signals that we believe that this is an area that requires a major focus on a reform of the culture to create a workplace of choice rather than where, tragically, there have been workplace cultures that have been toxic and which have resulted in very good people burning out and getting out. It is time that there was a focus on creating a workplace of choice for public employees where they can bring their skills and professional abilities and have a fruitful and long career within the public sector in Queensland.

Once again, I reaffirm the coalition's support for a state based industrial system. The reason we are supporting this legislation is that essentially we believe that the affected employees who are to be brought back under the umbrella of the state system were, in effect, already de facto public sector employees. For that reason we support this legislation. I will table these figures that show the real story in relation to the current state of affairs in Queensland Health for the benefit of the House.

Tabled paper: Table detailing resignation numbers for medical nursing and allied health professionals in Queensland Health, July 2005 to December 2006.

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (2.38 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill, a bill which affirms this government's election promise to bring some of those employees currently weathering the conditions of the federal government's unfair WorkChoices back under the umbrella of this state's industrial system. I thank the Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations for introducing these amendments.

WorkChoices is hurting people—just like the federal government's HECS scheme and treatment of our universities is hurting our students, young and old alike, and damaging our ability as a nation to perform in the marketplace. Recent surveys show our university students are worse off now than just seven years ago—such a short time to take the impetus out of the Smart State initiatives. The robbing of Peter to pay Paul fiscal regime that has had to be implemented by universities to keep afloat is simply not working. Just like HECS, WorkChoices has not improved opportunities of current workplace practices. In fact, WorkChoices is taking our industrial relations backwards.

As usual, the federal government is saying, 'Everything's okay. It's working.' But can I say that it is not. WorkChoices is cutting the heart out of our industry through its shameful treatment of our most important asset—our labour force. The federal government simply does not understand the circumstances of people who spend their days worrying about how they can cover their bills, look after a sick child, attend a family funeral, pay for a school excursion or just put food on the table. When was the last time Mr Howard had to worry that if he stayed home to look after an ill family member today he may be welcomed with a termination notice upon his return to work?

Queenslanders work hard. They want to do the right thing by their families and partners, but they are constrained by the federal government's lack of support and utter contempt for basic values that this state and indeed this nation were built upon. Family comes first. This state government has never and will never support WorkChoices. This state government will not ignore the workers and their families who choose to live and work in this great state.

Life is about more than the profit margin of the company that we work for. Life is more than bottom lines. Life is more than career. Life is far more than just job security. That is not to say that profit for the company is not important. That is not to say that career is not important. That is also not to say that job security is not important. They are important but we want a good career and security so we can provide for the one thing we care most about—our families. It is simply obscene to trade our family for job security, and this is exactly what this federal government is asking us to do.

As promised in the 2006 election, the current situation has to change and improve. The protection of part of this state's labour force is the aim of this new bill. This bill means that the entitlement to overtime, leave loading, penalty rates and sick days will not be lost. This means that a worker employed by the new non-corporate entity can keep all existing and accruing entitlements. We all know that kids get sick, adults get sick and family and personal emergencies happen. It is just a part of our lives, but this federal government wants our workforce to sacrifice those dearest to them by putting work first. That is simply no choice to make for the family.

WorkChoices is not a package I can support. This is not a fair go. This is a 'profit at any cost' mindset in the disguise of flexibility, and it is destroying our basic way of life here in the Smart State. Because, after all, we all have a life outside work. We all need to have time away to refresh and recharge, and this federal government wants workers, including those employed by the statutory bodies, to just keep working with no recognition of the normal events of family life.

The Australian workforce is also becoming increasingly lower skilled. Why is that? Because our young people are opting to enter the labour market much earlier. They are forgoing the opportunity of a better education. Sometimes I ask myself why these young people are not opting to stay on and undertake further education. I want to quote one of those students. He said—

If you want to go to Uni you have to pay. If your family can't afford to help you, you have to work. If you work then you are at the mercy of employers who know they can now sack you without notice or make you work double shifts on public holidays because if you complain—you're out. If you can't pay your fees you can't finish your course. If you don't finish your course—you can't apply for employment in that industry you've been aiming for since high school.

WorkChoices affects everyone. As the honourable Premier said, the rights of ordinary men and women cannot be ignored. The federal government's WorkChoices program makes a mockery of decency and decent, hardworking Queenslanders—people who just want to do the right thing. Even our university students cannot get a fair deal, and they should be getting support. This bill shows that this state government is not afraid to stand up for our workers and that this state government is following through on its promises during the last election.

The federal government through its WorkChoices program says, 'Forget about improving yourself and your opportunities in the marketplace. Settle for second, third or even last. Go to work and don't complain. You're lucky to have a job.' Colleagues, I cannot support that arrogant attitude. I believe all Queenslanders deserve better, a fair go, a chance to improve themselves and follow their dream. As I said before, work is important but not as important as our families.

This week the *Australian* has follow-up reports on the bid by some local councils to move their employees to WorkChoices deals which could see council workers losing penalty rates, overtime and public holidays. As the honourable Premier remarked on that issue, this is ideology gone crazy. Such a literal interpretation of the statute is not in the best interests of the workers who will have to live and work within the confines of a system that has been put together by a federal government in order to challenge the state's merit in the industrial arena.

Mr Howard's system is a regime of subtracting—subtracting from education, subtracting from holiday pay, subtracting from leave entitlements and subtracting from the fairness of an industrial system. But we need a government that keeps adding—adding value to education, adding entitlements to struggling families, adding security to working mums and dads, adding decency to industrial relations and adding fairness to the Australian way of life. That is important to us. That can only be delivered by a Kevin Rudd-led Labor regime in Canberra. I support this bill.

Mr MOORHEAD (Waterford—ALP) (2.47 pm): I rise to speak in support of this important bill. As a member who was elected only six months ago, it is great to be speaking again to legislation that is implementing the Beattie government's election commitments. The Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill will protect many workers in our public sector from the harsh and extreme WorkChoices legislation. With the sweeping changes of WorkChoices, many employees of state government authorities have been forced into the federal industrial relations regime. Why have these employees been swept up? Because in his grab for the state industrial relations system, which had much lower levels of disputation and stronger conditions and protections for workers, John Howard has had to attach the legislation to the corporation rather than employees.

I listened to the contribution made by the Deputy Leader of the National Party when she tried to make some point about the proposals put forward by Kevin Rudd. Frankly, my view is that it is not a question of who runs the system but how workers are protected within that system.

The Beattie government has made it quite clear that it is opposed to the WorkChoices legislation and its effect on employees, particularly the vulnerable in our society. I am delighted to see that the government, and particularly the minister for industrial relations, is leaving no stone unturned to defend workers in Queensland. Without this government, I am sure that those who oppose us would have already handed these public sector workers and their conditions over to John Howard and his WorkChoices regime.

This bill will see employees of public sector statutory authorities return to the strong and effective state jurisdiction; giving these employees the benefit of state awards acting as a strong and relevant safety net, state agreements providing negotiated flexibility for both employees and employers; an Industrial Relations Commission that provides speedy, inexpensive and effective resolution of disputes, and a broad opportunity to agree on working conditions and what it is the parties want included in their industrial relations framework.

The great irony of the WorkChoices legislation is that, while the federal government says it promotes flexibility, the Howard government has narrowly prescribed what employees and employers are actually allowed to agree upon. The idea of prohibited content is actually anathema to the idea of flexibility. For example, if the Queensland Museum agrees, as the full bench of the AIRC has found, that the training of workplace union representatives promotes effective dispute and grievance resolution, they are not allowed to provide for employees to receive training from their union in grievance resolution. If they were to agree to such a matter they would be fined $33,000.

The public sector is leading the way in the employment of women, particularly in senior and management roles. What this legislation will do is provide comfort for women in these public sector agencies that they have access to effective pay equity remedies to address any structural inequities in public sector employment conditions. One of the harsh effects of the nobbling of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission is to take what little is left of the pay equity jurisdiction away from the AIRC.

This bill before the House will ensure that the Queensland public sector will continue to be an employer of choice for Queensland women. In the debate over the WorkChoices reforms there have been a lot of claims and counterclaims about the effect these changes have had on the working conditions of employees. But the federal government's own employment advocate, Peter McIllwain, told a Senate estimates committee in 2006 that when it came to Australian workplace agreements 64 per cent removed annual leave loading, 52 per cent removed shift allowances, 63 per cent removed all penalty rates, 40 per cent removed public holiday rates and 16 per cent did away with all award conditions altogether. These figures are a stark reminder that Queensland's vulnerable workers continue to suffer at the hands of the Howard government and these extreme WorkChoices changes.

But there are many other less known but equally as insidious and offensive changes in this package of reforms from which employees of public sector statutory authorities should be protected. I would like to consider but two of these in detail. The first is the unqualified and unchecked power of employers to terminate certified agreements that have protected hard fought and hard won working conditions. WorkChoices allows an employer to unilaterally issue a notice, wait for a specified period and then the employment conditions in the certified agreement disappear into thin air. In their place employees receive the fair pay and condition standard and a handful of protected award conditions.

What this means is that this legislation goes beyond the 'take it or leave it' approach to employment and allows the 'lose your conditions or leave' approach to industrial relations. While I would hope that no state government would use this power, its mere presence means that there is no balance in the negotiations for workplace conditions. Not only are employees made vulnerable in negotiations by WorkChoices; they are also restricted in their ability to access effective dispute resolution during the life of the workplace agreement.

Employment is an ongoing relationship of give and take. Workplace agreements and employment legislation cannot envisage every eventuality that may arise. But how do these issues, grievances and disputes get resolved under WorkChoices? Well, frankly, they do not unless the employer agrees. Effectively, the independent umpire has been nobbled. The changes in this bill will see that the flexible, efficient and speedy dispute resolution procedures of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and the Industrial Relations Act 1999 are available to public sector employees. In my experience in the Queensland industrial relations jurisdiction the QIRC would resolve most disputes with simple conciliation and generally within 48 hours of the commission being notified of a dispute.

This effective dispute resolution regime is what this bill provides to employees of the listed statutory authorities. But what would these employees face if they were left to the WorkChoices regime? What would happen if not for this bill? They would face a regime with no effective dispute resolution and an unfettered right to terminate workplace agreements.

The incapacity of the post WorkChoices Australian Industrial Relations Commission to resolve industrial disputes can be clearly seen in the ongoing Tristar case in New South Wales. The situation of Tristar employees should be clearly contrasted to the conditions which this bill provides to employees of statutory authorities in Queensland. Tristar, a car parts manufacturer based in Marrickville, New South Wales, has been winding down its operations since about 2005, taking their operations to China and India. All but a core group of 35 workers have been made redundant over this period.

The workers' previous certified agreement negotiated by the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Australian Workers Union provided severance payments of four weeks' pay per year of service. Some workers have been with Tristar for over 40 years, equating to a redundancy entitlement of more than three years' pay. This redundancy package was how Tristar had resolved an ongoing claim from employees who were worried about the security of their entitlements.

In January 2007 the Australian Industrial Relations Commission granted an application by Tristar to terminate a certified agreement. Until amendments were made to the WorkChoices regulations in December 2006 this would have meant that employees lost their redundancy entitlements under the certified agreements. But what employees were given is merely a stay of execution. Because of the amendments, which were partly in response to the Tristar controversy, the workers retained their redundancy entitlements for 12 months after the termination of the agreement. At the expiration of this period, which is 6 February 2008, WorkChoices provides that the redundancy entitlements are restricted to a maximum of 12 weeks' pay compared to the potential 160 weeks' pay under the other package.

WorkChoices and previous federal government workplace relations legislation has determined that over-award redundancy benefits are not a matter that can be resolved by arbitration involving the AIRC. So what is Tristar doing? Tristar has not provided its remaining workforce of largely long-serving mature age male workers with any meaningful work but it refuses to make the employees redundant. One can only assume that Tristar intends to maintain this arrangement until February 2008 when it will only be required to pay 12 weeks' salary rather than the current entitlement of four weeks' pay per year of service.

After political pressure was brought to bear the Office of Workplace Services has commenced an action in the Federal Court against Tristar seeking the payment of employees' redundancy entitlements. This is a lengthy and expensive legal process—one that would not be necessary in Queensland's state jurisdiction where the commission would be able to resolve this dispute quickly. By requiring workers to attend and go through the Federal Court process these claims for lawful entitlements have been put beyond the reach of the ordinary worker.

The Industrial Relations Act 1999 gives the QIRC the power to resolve these disputes, including disputes about redundancy payments without legal technicalities, delay or expense. If public sector employees were to remain in the WorkChoices regime, parties to negotiations or disputes could not be required to submit to conciliation and, if needed, arbitration. In resolving a dispute the Queensland commission can take the steps it considers appropriate for the prompt settlement of the dispute. This is in stark comparison to WorkChoices where the AIRC has no power to issue binding orders on either party to the dispute.

It is this lack of effective dispute resolution that only supports this move to protect workers in these statutory authorities from the WorkChoices regime. This bill will provide protection for both employees and employers through effective and inexpensive dispute resolution. I am proud to support this bill which supports balanced and fair employment conditions and balanced and fair industrial relations for employees of public sector authorities. I congratulate the minister on bringing this bill before the House in accordance with the government's election commitments. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (2.59 pm): It gives me pleasure to be able to speak about industrial relations with regard to the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill. Those on this side of the House made it consistently clear both before and after the last state election that public sector workers within Queensland would remain under a state based system. There was some good rationale for that and it is in every way consistent with the other comments that I have to make and that we have made over a period of time in relation to these matters. The public sector does not participate in the same way as corporations in industry in that corporations operate across state boundaries and corporations are in industries where there are huge amounts of capital investment. It is a natural fit for state public sector workers to have their industrial relations issues resolved on a state-by-state basis, and that is common sense and logic that I do not expect that anyone in this place would disagree with.

Under the Howard government we have seen substantial changes—reforms—to industrial relations in this country. We have seen things such as Australian workplace agreements. We have seen some protection for small business against unfair dismissal. We have seen a move away from the sorts of rigid awards that so threatened Australia's competitive standing in a rapidly changing, rapidly globalising and rapidly more competitive world. Despite the demonisation of these changes—and we have seen one of the most intense and highly funded scare campaigns in Australian history run against these changes which are part and parcel of economic reform and follow on from other economic reforms in Australia—what have we seen? We have seen, in particular, four changes in this country.

I go back a fairly long way in the workforce and as an employer myself in the past, and I can remember the bad old days. What have we seen in Australia in recent days, in substantial part due to the industrial relations changes and the other economic reforms by the Howard government? We have seen record low unemployment. It is ironic to be operating in a system in Australia where for the first time in my lifetime there is basically a job for everybody, yet we hear a Labor government on the other side arguing that we ought to change the system and that there is something wrong when there is a job for everybody. More important than all of these little anecdotes and so forth that are being brought up on the other side of the House, in reality and in the real world, is the fact that a job available for virtually every worker is a revolution in this country.

For many years we heard people in Australia talking about the casualisation of the workforce, and I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will remember quite clearly comments about the casualisation of the workforce. What that meant was that nobody was prepared to give people a full-time job because they could not manage their workforce under the system that existed here. Many times over the years I have met people who have been forced to do casual work without the certainty of full-time employment under what was the casualisation of the workforce, especially during the Hawke-Keating years when it was particularly prominent. What have we seen with the massive increase in the number of jobs in Australia that has driven unemployment down to 30-year lows? What have we seen? There are increases in full-time jobs—not increases in casual jobs, not increases in low-paid jobs but increases in full-time jobs which have brought with them an improvement in real wages and real conditions.

If we were to believe the scare campaign that we have heard for months now from the other side here, one might think that workers were unhappy about the situation of having more full-time jobs, record low unemployment and rising real wages. Yet what do we see? We see the lowest industrial disputation since the First World War—virtually the lowest level of disputes that this country has ever known because we now have a system where employees and employers can work out their differences rather than have the middlemen in trade unions given guaranteed power in a centralised system making jobs for themselves. The low level of disputation in this country—which for people of my generation is hard to imagine when we used to face the baggage handlers strike every Christmas and Easter and when we used to face the petrol tanker drivers strike every time there was demand for petrol—is a revolution for this country and it is a measure of the satisfaction that the workforce has with the improved arrangements under which we resolve our disputes.

The fourth change that we have seen under the reforms from the Howard government is rising real wages and better prosperity. We have not seen a whole bunch of very lowly paid, minimum wage casual jobs created in this country. We have seen hundreds of thousands of full-time jobs created—they are highly-paid jobs—and we have seen substantial increases in real wages. If one listens to those on the other side they would think that something was horribly wrong. They would think that something was horribly wrong in this country. In actual fact what do we have? We have a job for virtually everybody. We have the lowest unemployment. We have a dramatic increase in not casual jobs but full-time jobs. We have record low disputation and we have rising real wages.

It does not sound to me like there is very much wrong. In fact, it sounds to me like we have had a federal government for years in Canberra that has made some hard decisions, that has taken it on the chin when it comes to things like the GST and other sorts of reforms and industrial relations reforms. As a result, we have a prosperous country. We have a prosperous workforce. The screams of discontent that we hear about industrial relations do not come out of the workforce. We do not see it in dispute. Rather, they come out of a union movement which is becoming less and less relevant where the officials of that union fear for their own jobs.

We have seen the federal government reform the tax system, the waterfront and a range of other issues. Industrial relations had to be one of those reforms and those hard decisions had to be made, otherwise Australia's competitiveness would have fallen behind. Interestingly, when Mr Rudd announced his policies the other day he referred to the fact that the enormous advances in the workplace in this country—the enormous job creation, the low unemployment, the rising real wages, the low disputation—were all a result of the minerals boom in what he called the mineral boom states of Western Australia and Queensland. That brought a smile to my face, because I have spent a number of years here listening to the Premier on the other side trying to take the credit for himself and his government. Now Mr Rudd has pulled the carpet out from underneath him by saying that it is nothing to do with Mr Beattie; it is in fact the minerals boom.

Well, these improvements in Australia predated the present minerals boom. Without these reforms in place, we would have been in nowhere near the position to benefit by improving world conditions that we have. All we have seen now for months and months is a highly funded scare campaign designed to create discontent in a workforce that has otherwise not been better off in our lifetime. On any measure of employee confidence one can look at—we should have an employee confidence survey like we have business confidence and consumer confidence surveys—whether it is disputation, consumer confidence or the like, employees have a better deal now than they have had for generations.

Those on the other side of this chamber want to go back to the bad old days when small business was grabbed by the throat, when small business had to pay go-away money to employees who did not measure up or did not take their job seriously. In the past, how many small employers said, 'I am not employing anybody anymore; I am sick of it'? In the past, how many small employers have said, 'I am going to employ people only on a casual basis. If I don't and they are no good, I can't get rid of them'? How many times have small employers, who earn little more or no more than their employees earn, been dragged into the Industrial Relations Commission over vexatious unfair dismissal claims under a system that ignored any sort of natural justice to small employers? The most vexatious claims could never be won with costs being awarded. Employers were basically told that the industrial relations system existed to make them pay some money for somebody to simply go away and leave them alone. Hundreds and hundreds of hours of business management time was spent dealing with vexatious claims through a discredited and failed system that was of no use to small business.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead): Order! I have not heard the member refer this argument about business management to the statutory authorities to which the bill relates. Just make sure that your comments are relevant.

Dr FLEGG: Australian workplace agreements were introduced because of the need for business in the modern world to be able to cope with rostering arrangements. We live in an economy that is now dominated by tertiary industries, such as hospitality, medicine and education, and where rostering arrangements are important. The old system of centralised wage fixing—the one-size-fits-all approach—had failed dismally. Australian workplace agreements have also been of great benefit to the mining industry and other industries where there has been massive capital investment and workforce and rostering arrangements are needed to make those sorts of investments viable.

If we listen to those opposite, we simply hear the mouthing of the views of trade union officials, not of workers. It is interesting to note that when I looked in the pecuniary interests register I saw that many members opposite are members of trade unions. Yet I do not hear them declaring their vested interests, declaring the fact that when they stand in this place they themselves are members of trade unions.

Government members interjected.

Dr FLEGG: If one listened to those opposite, one would think that there had never been any industrial issues in this country before WorkChoices. Every issue that is raised—even though it may have been around for years—is suddenly the fault of WorkChoices. In fact, in recent times we have seen far fewer issues arise and far less disputation.

Government members interjected.

Dr FLEGG: With those few words, I will conclude. I hear clearly the interjections from the members opposite. They have been exposed for running a scare campaign on behalf of union bosses and for ignoring all the evidence and all the signs that workers have never been better off or more prosperous in this country because of the hard decisions that the federal government has made.

Ms DARLING (Sandgate—ALP) (3.14 pm): It is with much pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. The primary objective of the bill, which has been outlined already, is to implement the government's policy and major election commitment to return employees of certain statutory bodies affected by the federal WorkChoices legislation to the state industrial relations system. Since WorkChoices took effect in 2006, employees of these bodies have been subjected to federal industrial coverage. It is important that workers enjoy the security and protection of Queensland's state industrial jurisdiction, which is better balanced regarding employers' and employees' rights and obligations.

I note with interest that the Leader of the Liberal Party spoke so glowingly about WorkChoices, yet he has decided to support Labor's election policy to move these employees to the safer state industrial relations system.

A government member interjected.

Ms DARLING: It sounds a bit that way. I want to concentrate on the important right of entry. Traditionally, union officials have enjoyed the right to enter workplaces to communicate with their members and conduct inspections and interviews to ensure that awards are being observed. This right is supported by Australia's commitment to the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation covenants and conventions that support freedom of association and the right to organise. This is a basic right in Australia—or it has been in the past and it will be for the workers in these statutory bodies. Right of entry is a very important condition for workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, or people from culturally diverse backgrounds—people who are less secure in approaching employers and raising issue relating to conditions on their own behalf. They are more worried about taking that individual approach for a whole range of reasons. The right to have their union official enter premises, talk to them, check on their working conditions and represent them is a basic right to which all workers are entitled. The right of entry also plays an important role in ensuring that enforceable employees' rights, such as those provided in awards, agreements or statutory provisions, are enforced.

The right of entry provisions in the Queensland Industrial Relations Act 1999 are much less prescriptive than the WorkChoices provisions. That IR act allows an authorised union official to enter premises and inspect the time and wages books that the employer is required to keep. The union official may discuss matters with a member or eligible member during working time or non-working time, depending on the nature of the issue. This permits discussions between unions and their members on the full range of industrial matters. Provided that the union official has notified the employer on entering the workplace and has produced his or her authorisation, the employer cannot refuse entry and it is an offence to obstruct the union official in inspecting time and wage records or holding discussions with employees. However, it is also an offence for the union official to obstruct the employer or an employee during the employee's working time. The union official's authorisation can be revoked by the commission if the statutory right of entry is misused. The scheme in the Queensland act provides a balance between the right to organise and the enforcement of entitlements and the employer's right to conduct business without unreasonable interference.

The WorkChoices provisions are in stark contrast. They limit the right to organise and the enforcement role of unions. The union official may hold discussions with members or employees eligible to be members but only if those employees are covered by an award or collective agreement which binds the union. Such discussions can only be held in mealtimes or other breaks. As WorkChoices is designed to assist employers to shift employees from union agreements on to AWAs, over time the right to organise will become theoretically a right only.

Under WorkChoices, the union official must give 24 hours notice of entry and, if the purpose of the visit is to investigate breaches of the act, award or agreement, the union must specify the details of the suspected breach. This allows unscrupulous employers time to conceal evidence of breaches of enforceable entitlements or apply duress to employees. A suspected breach can be investigated only if it relates to one of the union's members.

The WorkChoices right of entry provisions are overly complex and prescriptive. That promotes protracted litigation, as was demonstrated by the recent Australian Tax Office case. Initially, in early November 2006 the Australian Services Union was successful in obtaining orders to circumvent the ATO's attempts to limit the union's access to employees. The ASU suspected breaches of the collective agreement in the Brisbane offices of the ATO, but the ATO wanted to impose limitations on the union access.

The ASU was successful in obtaining an order from the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, which allowed the official to approach employees at their workstations, but the ATO appealed and the workplace relations minister intervened. In mid-January 2007 the AIRC quashed the order but upheld the validity of the direction to order the ATO to notify employees that the union is visiting the workplace to investigate breaches.

The full bench emphasised that common sense should guide interpretation of the right of entry laws. The full bench did not make orders because the ATO and the ASU had agreed on access procedures thereby removing a significant obstacle to resolving the dispute. Ultimately the ATO dispute was resolved by the parties exercising common sense, but the several months of unnecessary litigation was encouraged by the prescriptive, complex provisions of the federal act which clearly signal to employers that the Howard government encourages employers to resist and limit a union's right of entry.

When the High Court upheld the validity of the WorkChoices legislation in November last year, our Queensland Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations, the Hon. John Mickel, said that the Queensland government would work 'to ensure the industrial rights of those Queensland government workers that are now under the WorkChoices regime are maintained'. He also said—

Where we can, we will act to amend legislation at the state level to return those employees to the state jurisdiction. Additional protections by other means will be put in place to protect those who will remain under Work Choices.

The minister also said—

Scrapping unfair dismissal and union right of entry laws and pushing unfair AWAs on to unsuspecting workers has scared employees into signing agreements which targeted existing entitlements and conditions such as overtime, penalty rates, and public holiday pay.

My final quote from the minister is that he said—

Voters will have the opportunity to show John Howard what they think at the next federal election.

In the meantime the Beattie government will continue to do all it can to protect Queensland workers. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GIBSON (Gympie—NPA) (3.21 pm): Today I rise to contribute to this debate on the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill. In the short time that I have been in this chamber this probably has to be the most ideologically driven piece of legislation that I have seen. The arguments that have been presented are very much along party lines—people have staked a position and they have tended to draw along those lines. I would like to step away from that a little bit and bring us back to what we are here to do, and that is to represent Queenslanders.

I do believe that this legislation has merit. I think it is important that we look at what brings about safe, proper and clear working conditions for individuals. But it is also clear that there is an element of this legislation being a bit of a stunt. I say that because I ask the question: when was the last time a minister of the government put out a media release for a backbencher of the opposition? Let me tell members that it happened on Thursday, 22 March 2007, and I thank the minister for that media release. I am happy to take his compliment on my interest in WorkChoices. It is also of interest that he has not issued any media releases complimenting any of the Labor backbenchers on this legislation. Perhaps that is a damning indictment of the Australian Labor Party, but I think not. It is more a realisation that this legislation is about a stunt and not about looking after Queensland workers.

I would like to put my personal position regarding the WorkChoices legislation clearly on the record because I think that this is a large part of what we are hearing today. I strongly support all legitimate mechanisms for ensuring that workers have access to high standards of workplace employment conditions.

Mr Lucas: Not like unfair dismissal remedies.

Mr GIBSON: I believe they can come from a variety of areas. Is the WorkChoices legislation perfect? No, I do not think it is, but it has been examined by the High Court and it has passed that critical test. Do I think the legislation that is presented before us today is perfect? No, I do not. I think it can go further. There are other individuals within the Queensland Public Service who are not being protected by this legislation who should be covered. The Queensland coalition's position was made quite clear during the election campaign when it said, 'A coalition government will retain industrial relations responsibilities for the public sector.'

Now let us look at this legislation. Does it provide legitimate mechanisms to ensure that workers have access to high standards of workplace employment conditions? In the large part it does. However, when I read this bill I felt that the minister must have taken some inspiration from the Robert Louis Stevenson classic *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Like the tormented Mr Hyde, the Labor government would have us believe that WorkChoices is 100 per cent evil but then somehow as that potion wears off they come to their senses and return to being Dr Jekyll and want to tell the workers in Queensland Rail that WorkChoices is not that bad and we will not bother to protect them. It is clearly incredible that they can take this position.

Mr LUCAS: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House. He indicated that Queensland Rail is supportive of WorkChoices. That is not the position and, indeed, is against directions of Queensland government owned corporations. It is untrue and I ask him to withdraw it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr GIBSON: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Why is it that the New South Wales government can look after its employees in its State Transit Authority but here in the Smart State ordinary Queenslanders who choose to work in that fine organisation of Queensland Rail are excluded under this legislation? Could it be that the minister is more concerned about shoring up his position for a leadership challenge in the Labor Party when the Premier retires? I do not know but you would have to ask the question: why are those workers who are to the left of the union movement being left out?

Mr Mickel: Fancy accusing me of protecting the Left!

Mr GIBSON: Someone needs to because clearly the Labor Party will not. I met with a life member of the Transport Workers Union on Sunday at church. After the service we took some time to speak about politics. I was interested to hear his views about WorkChoices, Kevin Rudd and our state Labor government. I would like to conclude by leaving this parliament with the advice he gave me. It was simply this: 'Make sure John Howard stays in power in Canberra.'

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.26 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill. In doing so it is worth looking at the historical background against which this piece of legislation has been introduced and is being debated. In the 1970s the world generally was facing an economic turnaround and economies throughout the world were going through a process of realigning and readjusting themselves in various ways, especially via micro- and macro-economic reform. A good point of reference is the period of the Fraser government which was really the starting point of those international trends. If we look at the period of the Fraser government, we find that the sort of economic reform that occurred then was practically nonexistent. If we simply compare Australia to New Zealand during that time, we can see that even New Zealand was well in front of Australia.

If we look at the period of the Hawke and Keating governments that then ensued, we can see that the level of micro-economic reform was astounding. If we catalogue the specific examples of micro-economic reform that swept Australia, especially in the industrial relations setting, it is astounding that it was achieved in that time and achieved with the relatively smooth implementation that occurred. For example, we saw mass amalgamations of trade unions in order to make workplaces more efficient, to avoid demarcation disputes et cetera. We saw various forms of new wage fixation introduced. I would have suspected that those reforms could not have been done even under a Labor government in this country. But it was a Labor government that was able to bring about the consensus, especially during the Hawke period, for the common good of the country in relation to all parts of the economy, especially where there might have otherwise been historically contradictory views. Employers and employees came together over the years to bring about significant economic reforms.

Then came the Howard years and what have we seen? The Howard government has relied upon the benefits of those micro-economic reforms. It has rested on its laurels and benefited politically from the Hawke-Keating years. We have been reaping the real economic benefits of the very significant micro- and macro-economic reforms that the Hawke and Keating governments put in place.

Until the WorkChoices legislation was introduced federally, the Howard government had made practically no attempt to keep up with micro-economic reform in this area. Indeed, we should recognise that industrial relations should not have stood still after the Hawke and Keating governments. We should have been progressively introducing further reforms.

Micro-economic reforms in industrial relations were not pursued by the Howard government until the WorkChoices legislation emerged. We were told—and I can recall the significant spending on advertising at that time—that the rationale for the legislation was that the system was too complicated and it had to be simplified. What did we get? Legislation that is unreadable and unworkable! Industrial relations practitioners on both sides, employees and employers all say that the telephone book size legislation is very difficult to work with. Even when employers act with the best of intentions, the legislation is very hard to comply with. It is difficult for employers to understand what their obligations are and to go about their businesses while complying with the legislation.

The WorkChoices legislation has been a dismal failure in the sense that it has no continuity with previous reforms, it has been introduced under false pretences and it has failed the fundamental tenets of Australian industrial relations laws, which aim to find a balance in employer and employee relations such as we in this state have relied on so successfully since federation. The legislation has failed to recognise its precedents and it has taken advantage of the goodwill that has been built up over previous years. WorkChoices is a disastrous piece of legislation that is simply unfair and is too complicated.

This week, Kevin Rudd made a speech in which he referred to the need for legislation to be fair and simple. Those two words will echo in the ears of all Australians for the rest of this year. I believe that that is essentially what a future federal Labor government will introduce.

The legislation before the House tries to redress some issues in terms of fairness. As a Labor government, we unashamedly reject the WorkChoices legislation and its unfairness. We will do anything we can to address that unfairness. This legislation goes some way to doing that to the best of our ability, apropos the application of that legislation to government employees, particularly those who fall under statutory bodies.

I wish to refer specifically to how that affects the issue of unfair dismissal. Under WorkChoices, employees in an organisation with fewer than 100 employees are unable to seek a remedy if they have been unfairly dismissed. Indeed, there are many examples, but one from my electorate stands out.

On 5 April 2006, an employee was dismissed after almost 10 years of service as an office manager in a southside Brisbane suburb. The employer cited misconduct as the reason for the dismissal and refused to pay long service leave. A few weeks prior to the dismissal, the employee's boss allegedly told staff that, under the new laws, he could sack people if he did not like them. Obviously, a little calculation would have come into play on that one in terms of avoidance of required payments to that employee.

A government member interjected.

Mr FENLON: I take that interjection. Such acts are disgusting and abhorrent to all Australians with a sense of fairness.

The fact is that employees working for employers who employ fewer than 100 workers have much reduced job security and are far more open to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. As many businesses in Queensland employ less than 100 employees, thousands of Queensland employees will now be exposed to these laws and will be left without an avenue of appeal if treated unfairly.

The Industrial Relations Act 1999 protects all Queensland employees who are paid less than a prescribed annual salary rate from potential unfair dismissals, regardless of the number of employees employed in an organisation. Unfair dismissal not only refers to termination for insufficient or no reason but also to procedural fairness in the dismissal process relating to being notified of the reasons for the dismissal and being given an opportunity to respond to any allegations made. This means that employees subject to WorkChoices could also be denied natural justice when unfairly dismissed. Returning employees of statutory bodies to the state jurisdiction will ensure that they will be protected from such harsh laws.

This is important legislation because it recognises this parliament's abhorrence of the federal laws. It recognises this parliament's desire to reflect the needs of the wider community, and its demand for a simple and fair industrial relations system in this country. Indeed, it recognises our desire to re-establish in our legislation the sense of a fair go. We want to build on the goodwill that has been growing since federation over 100 years ago, when industrial relations were practised at a federal level in this country and, indeed, that has been growing in state jurisdictions since before that time. We have a long way to go to reinstate that goodwill, given the abhorrent legislation that has been enacted federally. The legislation before the House goes some way to recognising our position in relation to those laws. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (3.38 pm): In speaking to the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill, I wish to address a couple of issues. The coalition's policy, which was released during the 2006 state election campaign, stated that the coalition government would retain industrial relations responsibility for Queensland's public sector.

The Beattie government promised to amend state legislation to ensure that the employees of statutory authorities caught by WorkChoices are transferred to a non-corporate entity so that the employer becomes the Crown. However, in the minister's second reading speech this promise was changed to return employees of certain statutory bodies affected by WorkChoices to the state industrial relations system. He added that this bill is designed to re-establish state industrial relations jurisdiction over employees of affected statutory bodies by taking their employment relations beyond the reach of federal workplace relations laws through their employment by a newly created employment office.

I raise concerns in relation to issues that have been brought to me by union representatives and rail workers in my electorate. I note that Queensland Rail employees are not included in this legislation. Queensland Rail, a government owned corporation, has been pushing for a stationmaster in Hughenden to carry out the work of two positions after the Q-Link freight terminal supervisor resigned. In other words, the stationmaster will be a stationmaster but also a Q-Link freight supervisor as well.

Another concern is that Queensland Rail is pushing for work reforms for train crews. It is pushing for 12-hour shifts, self-drive only, between Hughenden and Mount Isa which will see another 10 jobs removed from Hughenden. This coincides with the loss of many more jobs in the past two years.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): Member for Charters Towers, relevance, please. Stay on the bill.

Mr KNUTH: I would like to bring to the attention of the House that it is hypocritical of this government to pretend to care for workers and their families when in reality its own corporation continually ignores the plight of workers. WorkChoices is being used by Queensland Rail, a corporation owned by the Labor government, to justify its push for 12-hour driver-only shifts. I ask the minister to investigate that issue. This is not just coming from Shane Knuth. Members can access media alerts and see what the rail unions are saying. They are very unsettled about Queensland Rail pushing for driver-only 12-hour shifts which is an unsafe work practice. It is using work reforms to justify its position.

Both sides of the House claim to be the worker's friend. I started in the railway in 1983 when there were 25,000 railway employees. When the Goss government came to power it reduced it to 11,500. The Redbank and Banyo workshops closed down, railway stations and sidings were closed down and guards, shunters and porters were removed from their positions. The south-east corner has an infrastructure problem. The minister for communities and disabilities is encouraging groups from northern, western and rural Queensland to come to Brisbane to show and promote their—

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Charters Towers, you have been warned once.

Mr KNUTH: This is a short speech. I ask the minister to investigate this. Wayne Goss admitted that the worst decision he ever made was to treat railway employees the way he did. We all have skeletons in our closet; we all have regrets. Wayne Goss was brave enough to admit that he had made a bad decision in relation to rail employees. Those opposite have kicked the workers in the guts. Why are they pointing the finger at everyone else when they are the ones kicking the workers in the guts?

We support this legislation because our commitment is that state employees should remain under a state industrial award system. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (3.43 pm): I rise to support the Statutory Bodies Legislation Amendment Bill, which delivers on the Beattie Labor government's election commitment to return employees of certain statutory bodies affected by WorkChoices to the state industrial system. As we know, the state industrial relations system has a proven record of fairness and balance and one which saw very low levels of industrial disputes. It is one which we support, and I am pleased to be able to speak to this legislation.

I will predominantly confine my comments to the family leave conditions. Workers in statutory authorities who are returning to the Queensland industrial relations jurisdiction under this amendment bill will enjoy family leave entitlements superior to those available under the federal government's WorkChoices legislation. WorkChoices contains no provision for extending parental leave beyond the standard 52 weeks. Employees under the Queensland Industrial Relations Act 1999 are entitled to apply for up to 104 weeks of continuous parental leave in total. This generous entitlement also applies to employees who are adopting a child. This entitlement reflects the Queensland government's commitment to the importance of work-life balance and helping Queensland workers juggle the demands of work, family and the community.

Under the Queensland act an employee has the right to apply to return to work on a part-time basis until their child is required to be enrolled for compulsory schooling—that is, six years of age. This reinforces the Queensland government's commitment to the importance of a child's early years. In contrast, WorkChoices contains no provision which gives an employee on parental leave the right to request a return to work on a part-time basis. Employees covered by the Queensland act are also permitted to break their maternity leave by agreement with their employer and return to work for the employer for a period of time. The employee may then return on parental leave provided that leave does not extend beyond the statutory entitlement.

Once again it is the Beattie Labor government which continues to fight against these harsh federal laws and make sure that workers are more than just mere cogs in the workplace wheel. We are committed to working to help Queenslanders who would be done over by John Howard's draconian industrial relations regime, whose sole purpose is to rob workers of their pay and conditions and make sure that they are not the valued employees that we know them to be.

I find it interesting that the opposition is supporting this legislation. Every day in this House we hear them trumpeting about how great John Howard's dreadful workplace laws are, yet they come in here and support this bill. It just proves that Queensland does have a better industrial relations system. We have better pay and conditions and we have a fairer system. The opposition members are rising to support that. They need to stop being the hypocrites that we have seen them to be; they need to support the repeal of the John Howard legislation and come on board and support our system. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations) (3.46 pm), in reply: We have heard a very entertaining debate in so many respects. I will deal with the points raised by the member for Maroochydore last. The comments by the government members I appreciate; they understand what a statutory body is. The member for Moggill in his confusion did not address the bill at all but told us what a wonderful thing WorkChoices is because it gave us flexibility. Yet the member for Charters Towers bemoaned the fact that QR was flexible. There is a bit of coalition disunity between the member for Charters Towers and the member for Moggill.

The poor member for Gympie does not know whether he is for WorkChoices or against it. Let me take you back to a question the poor old thing asked me a few weeks ago. He asked—

In establishing a statutory authority to monitor the impact of WorkChoices, what guarantees will he be extracting from the new authority or what legislative mechanism will he be putting in place that ensures the new statutory authority and all existing statutory authorities and government owned corporations do not embrace the principles of WorkChoices for their employees?

To listen to him today, it seems he could not see the difference between his support for WorkChoices and his question where he was against WorkChoices. What we have is coalition disunity but we also have confusion from one member of the coalition.

Let us deal with the matters raised by the member for Maroochydore, because there are a couple that need commenting upon. The first one is that this bill returns employees of certain statutory bodies affected by WorkChoices to the state industrial system. As I have outlined previously, the Queensland government is opposed to the nature of WorkChoices and its impact on employees. This bill is part of the Queensland government's response to the WorkChoices laws. It will re-establish state industrial jurisdiction over workers of affected statutory authorities by taking their employment relationships beyond the reach of the federal workplace relations laws through their employment by the newly created employment office. As I detailed earlier in this place, in the case of the museum, library and art gallery, the employees will in fact be employed by the state Department of Education, Training and the Arts. We are doing this because WorkChoices is unfair.

In response to the confusion in the opposition about QR, I have to tell opposition members that QR is a government owned corporation. It was excluded from the bill because it is a reflection of the competitive commercial environment in which it operates and the complexity of untangling the operation of the Corporations Law. It is because they are trading corporations that they are captured by WorkChoices legislation. However, despite GOCs remaining under federal industrial laws, these entities will continue to operate in accordance with the government's industrial relations policies and practices to maintain fair treatment of employees.

The honourable member for Maroochydore asked me about the industrial instruments currently covering statutory body employees. It is correct that these employees continue to be covered by notional agreements or preserved state agreements. New collective agreements will be negotiated under the state system when these employees are returned to the state system.

The government has consulted extensively on this bill. I thank both sides of the House for their support. In thanking both sides, may I also commend my department officials who have worked tirelessly to make sure this bill was ready in its proper presentation to the parliament today. I thank them for their constant professionalism and dedication. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in Detail

Clauses 1 to 131, 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 28 November 2006 (see p. 623).

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (3.53 pm): I am pleased today to speak to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill that is before the House. I rise today representing the one team of Queensland coalition members to comment on this bill. Before commenting on the bill, I would like to pay tribute to the work of local governments throughout the state and express great concern at the government's attitude to our third tier of government here in this state.

If last Friday was Friday the 13th, black Friday, today is one of the blackest days in Queensland's local government history. We are in this parliament to consider the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill which seeks to support the Size, Shape and Sustainability reforms of Queensland local governments. Today I want to go through the issues in relation to that. A lot of members are aware of the issues, but a lot are not aware of them simply because they are metropolitan members and live under the Brisbane City Council. They do not face the issues relating to this bill. Some members do but a lot do not, and a lot of those who do not probably have not needed to get their minds around what we are trying to do and achieve.

The Triple S was originally marketed as a viagra concept, an exciting new chapter for sustainable local government in Queensland. I want to go through the history of the Triple S process to give members some idea of it. This will be a bit laborious—

Mr Lawlor: What's new?

Mr HOBBS:—but the reality is that members need to know about these issues, particularly the member for Southport. He should be very, very interested in these statistics, and I will listen to his comments when I am finished.

In September 2004, the LGAQ promoted discussion amongst members at the annual state conference on the need for change. In December 2004, the LGAQ executive resolved to initiate a major reform project. In March 2005, the Size, Shape and Sustainability discussion paper was released to councils for comment. In May-June 2005, the LGAQ special conference convened and Minister Boyle indicated state government support for the Triple S process. In May-June 2005, the special communique was adopted.

In June 2005, the LGAQ executive adopted an action plan to implement the communique. In August 2005, the inaugural Sustainability Process Reform Advisory Group meeting convened. In August 2005, Minister Boyle indicated support for the LGAQ action plan and the Triple S review process at the LGAQ conference where she spoke to over 1,000 delegates. In September 2005, the LGAQ Triple S team was appointed. This is 2005.

In October-November 2005, independent review facilitators were identified and appointed to the panel. The deputy director-general of the department of local government was involved in all of this process. In November 2005, Minister Boyle formally approved the LGAQ funding request of $415,000 to progress the Triple S agenda. In December 2005, there was another meeting.

In January 2006, the RCCPB funding became available for the Triple S reviews. In January 2006, the LGAQ started training the review facilitators. In February 2006, they continued with another meeting for training. In March 2006, the Triple S guidelines were released to councils. In April 2006, Minister Boyle and the president of LGAQ, Paul Bell, signed the Triple S memorandum of understanding to formalise the working relationships between both organisations. In April 2006—12 months ago—there was another training day on community engagement. In June 2006, there was another meeting. In June 2006 again, there was another information session which the deputy director-general of local government and planning attended. In June and July 2006, 20 review groups were formed with 90 councils participating. This is how it all slowly built up and people got involved in the process.

In August 2006, the department of local government and the LGAQ met and discussed the Triple S, the deferral of elections and referendum requirements. In July 2006, 24 review groups were formed with 105 councils participating. In September 2006, there was an information session which the deputy director-general again attended. In September 2006, the deputy director-general of local government and planning and LGAQ met to discuss the Triple S process and the deferral of elections.

In October 2006, there was another meeting where time lines for the Triple S review were broadly agreed. It was also agreed that the minister should write to all councils advising of timetables. In October 2006 Councillor Bell wrote to Minister Fraser seeking clarification on the state's position on the Triple S post election. In October 2006, there were 25 review groups formed with 109 councils now participating. In September-November 2006, the deputy director-general of local government and planning drafted the local government bill which contains special provisions for Triple S.

Speaker's Statement—Procedure—Principles for Second Reading Debate

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Can I ask the member for Warrego to take his seat for a moment. Thank you very much. I would like to make a statement pertaining to the bill which may give some clarification or edification for the parliament as a whole. The second reading debate is an opportunity to debate the general principles and objectives of a bill. The second reading debate should not be used to debate, in particular, matters which should be debated and decided on during the consideration in detail stage.

However, I am aware that the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport has foreshadowed substantial amendments to be moved to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and tabled copies of those amendments. Indeed, I think that the amendments are so significant that it would be unreasonable and almost impossible to not allow reference to the proposed amendments during the second reading debate. So I am ruling as permissible reference to the foreshadowed amendments. This does not mean that members can use the second reading debate to consider the proposed amendments to be moved at the consideration in detail stage, nor consider the bill clause by clause. The second reading debate should still be confined to general principles, including those contained in the foreshadowed amendments. I wanted to make that clear for everyone because I think that then allows the debate which is taking place to be carried out in the spirit it which it should be. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: In November 2006 Minister Fraser responded to Councillor Bell indicating a change in the state government's position but still strong support for the Triple S process to run its course. I repeat: there was strong support for the Triple S process to run its course. In November 2006 the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill was tabled in parliament and subsequently released to councils and the LGAQ for comment.

In December 2006 the Deputy Director of the Department of Local Government and Planning and the LGAQ met with the ECQ to discuss the Triple S process and the deferral of elections, referendum requirements and the local government bill. There were two meetings in December 2006. There were draft letters from the minister to the councils and a Triple S timetable but the minister did not send that out. By December 2006 there were 26 review groups formed with 111 councils participating.

In January 2007 there were 27 review groups formed with 116 councils participating. We can see that bit by bit the number is increasing and slowly growing across the whole of the state. In January 2007 the minister agreed to send a letter upon personal request from Councillor Bell. The letter was not sent. In February 2007 an IFR briefing was scheduled at the minister's request. He was unable to attend. IFR stressed the urgency for ministerial approval for funding applications and advice on election timetables.

In February 2007, after constant unsuccessful requests to the minister to send the letter in relation to the time lines, Councillor Bell writes to all councils to explain the situation. In February 2007 the deputy director of the department of local government released the council's showcase publication with a feature article on Triple S and ministerial endorsement for the process. The minister is still pumping it along. By February-March 2007 there were 27 review groups formed with 117 councils participating.

In March 2007 there was the SPRAG meeting. In March 2007 Minister Fraser writes to the LGAQ and all councils requesting advice about the schedule of elections around Easter. In March 2007 the Deputy Director of the Department of Local Government and Planning and the LGAQ meet to discuss the Triple S—deferral of elections, referendum requirements and the local government bill. During March-April 2007 there were numerous communications between Councillor Bell, the Premier and Minister Fraser and no indication of problems, no concerns raised in relation to timetables or lack of support for Triple S. On 5 April the LGAQ provided advice to the Deputy Director of the Department of Local Government and Planning with regard to the election date and Easter. On 12 April 2007 at the LGAQ executive meeting members raise concerns about rumours of government intervention. Councillor Bell advised members of the Premier's and minister's commitment to the process. On 17 April Triple S is finished and the Local Government Reform Commission announced.

So there we have it. We have a willing group of councils out there prepared to go through a process. They were led down the garden path by the nose by this government. That is what happened. They were prepared to go on. They had facilitators appointed for those particular groups. They formed groups of three, four or five councils. Depending on the size of the councils there could be more. They had a facilitator to work through with them how they can improve their region, how they can make it better, how they can become more efficient, how they can become more sustainable, how they can share resources across their region. They were working through all of those issues. This is still within the time frame. Do not shake your head because you are wrong. They were in the time frame.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! The member for Warrego will direct his comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: They had until October 2007 to put this in place. They were working to that time frame. From the beginning everyone knew that that was a tight time frame and there was a possibility that the local government elections may be pushed out six months if some councils had not finished that process.

There is something that is very important. This morning we heard the Premier talk about the fact that Treasury said that 43 per cent of councils are weak and probably unsustainable. The reality is that there are still 25 or 30 councils, particularly smaller ones, that have not yet been assessed. How can Treasury tell that they are unsustainable or weak? It cannot. It is basically all made up. None of the Indigenous councils have been assessed. As I said this morning, Triple S now stands for 'Scourged, Sidelined and Silenced' by the Beattie government. It is as simple as that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Warrego, your comments are unparliamentary. I ask you to withdraw them.

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw. The minister sent a letter to WESTROC dated 30 March which is very interesting. It was received by the council on 17 April. It obviously sat on the minister's desk, but it went out.

Mr FRASER: I rise to a point of order: I, in fact, was on leave between 29 March and 14 April, so it was signed and sent by 30 March. I clarify that for the member. The Leader of the Opposition tried to make a spurious claim about that this morning.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr HOBBS: I make the point again that the date on the letter is 30 March. The letter has been tabled. The Boonah Shire Council received it on 17 April. I rest my case. Somebody had the letter. I do not know who it was; somebody had it, but it was not WESTROC. The letter states—

Dear Councillor

I refer to the application for funding under the Regional Collaboration and Capacity Building program received from the Western Suburbs Regional Organisation of Councils, WESTROC, review group of council to undertake the initial review phase under the Size, Shape and Sustainability framework. I am very pleased to approve funding of $73,896, excluding GST. The choice of Dr Robin King Cullen of Brisbane City Enterprises Pty Ltd as the review facilitator is also supported.

Do not forget that this letter arrived on Tuesday of this week. It continues—

The state, through the $25 million RCCBP program, is encouraging all local governments to voluntarily review their governance and service delivery arrangements using the framework developed by the Local Government Association of Queensland. I would like to congratulate you and your fellow councillors for the leadership shown on this important issue. I have written to the mayors of the other participating councils in similar terms—

obviously glowing terms—

congratulating them as well. I have also written to Mr Robert Bain as chief executive officer of the banker council for the WESTROC group of councils to advise of the funding approval and the payment arrangements. Should you require any further information in relation to this matter please contact Mr Michael Dart, senior advisor, in my office ...

There we have it. The minister sent this letter out to the councils. They got their money to proceed. And guess what? It has all been thrown in the bin! The whole Triple S process has been thrown in the bin! The minister and the government have been less than honest with the councils in relation to this whole process. Not only that, this bill contains a raft of amendments which will make the original legislation into an absolute ass. Those amendments break every protocol that ever existed between local government and the state government. How many times do you have to break protocol? You are always doing it. You have an agreement—a protocol—with local government, the third tier of government, that you consult with them on any major legislative reforms or important issues that affect local government. They have not even seen your amendments at this stage. Why have they not seen your latest amendments, Minister? Is there some reason? Are you hiding something from them again? Why can you not bring them in and say that these are what our changes are?

Mr Fraser: I'm sure you faxed them to them.

Mr HOBBS: I have not faxed them to them but obviously you have not even spoken to them. You have got no ticker. It is as simple as that. Why did you not have the courage to go and talk—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! Member for Warrego, you will direct your comments through the chair, please.

Mr HOBBS: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, the minister does not have any ticker—it is as simple as that—in relation to this matter. He should have spoken to the Local Government Association, and everyone here knows that. Why would he not talk to the Local Government Association? It is a major player in the governance of this state. The protocols are there. Why can the government not follow those simple protocols? It was signed on the bottom line by all ministers in the past. Those opposite all know about it, but, no, this minister does not have the ticker to do it. He is too frightened. That is what this minister is.

I also point out that Queensland state peak bodies such as the LGAQ and the Urban Local Government Association—the government had to buy Tony Mooney—have also roundly condemned this proposal. This morning the Premier told the House about some statements made by a few mayors. However, many of those statements were taken out of context. We have received calls from those mayors saying, 'I didn't say it in that context. That wasn't what I meant.' Of course it was not when one understands what they are on about. Of course there are going to be a few who are going to support it, and there always will be, but the vast majority of people are totally opposed to this process and the way it occurred. This arrogant Beattie government never did have much respect for the protocols it has signed up to, but the least it could have done is try to adhere to them.

Today the Beattie government has effectively sacked mayors, councillors and council staff who are some of the most committed and dedicated people when it comes to providing services and assistance to communities in Queensland. Local governments and their staff are at the coalface and they deliver, which is more than this lazy, sleazy government does. The Premier got to his feet in here and ridiculed local government for not providing infrastructure. Who is the one who is meant to provide the infrastructure in the south-east corner? The state government! I started the western corridor pipeline in 1996. That could have been well underway, yet all the government did was stop it and create delays all of the time. There were dams to be built and things to be done. This government did not do that at all. This government cannot say that local government has not provided the infrastructure when in fact the fault has been laid quite clearly at the feet of this government.

These amendments do not seek to deliver better services, more efficient work teams, better roads, lower rates, better rubbish disposal or more economic development in any council in Queensland. These amendments do not once mention these core responsibilities of local government. These amendments are purely politically driven to bring about amalgamations, boundaries and a new

name for the amalgamated local governments. These amendments are bad legislation with all rights of appeal legislated out of existence from an impatient and arrogant government. I note that the Beattie government suggests that every state in Australia since 1910 has produced a number of local governments. This only gives us numbers on a page. It does not tell us if the areas have adequate representation, if the roads and the potholes are fixed in a timely manner and by how much the rates have risen. It does not tell us how many jobs have been lost in amalgamated areas and communities that cannot afford to lose those jobs, nor does it tell us if the community at large believes they are better off with the reduction in the number of councils.

One can be very selective when they use statistics, and this morning the Premier was very selective when he talked about the amount of grants provided based on population to local government in Australia. He mentioned that Queensland had a fairly high rate, higher in fact than, say, New South Wales and Victoria. How do we compare a decentralised state like Queensland with Victoria for a population base? My electorate alone is the same size as Victoria. He cannot do that, and it is stupid for him to do that—absolutely foolish. Yet he goes out there and says that these are the comparisons. What rubbish! The stupidity of that does not even bear thinking about when one considers the state as a whole, but obviously he does not get out too often.

The Beattie government would also have us believe that 43 per cent of councils in this process are rated as weak or, worse, financially stressed. The reality is that Queensland Treasury has indicated to councils that they can be in those various categories but it does not mean that they are unsustainable. They go through various processes. There have been many councils that have been in trouble over time. How many businesses get financially stretched for a while because they have to do some capital works or whatever and then they get ahead of it and away they go again? That is what it is all about. I am not saying there should not necessarily be amalgamations; this process we are going through was determining that. The process was going to work out what should have been done. If the government was not satisfied with that at the end of the day, there could have been more discussions held in relation to how we are going to resolve those issues. This is just not the way to do it.

What the government is not telling us is that the smaller councils are in fact travelling well, and this information has come to the councils in the various regions from Treasury—that is, the financial sustainability reviews conducted by Queensland Treasury. This data that the government is hiding behind closed doors clearly shows this. The Premier said this morning that the councils should put that detail on the web sites; I am sure they will. However, there are also some councils that have not even got their reports back from Treasury yet. We need to ensure that that actually happens.

The government and the minister have said that councils with populations of 5,000 and above are travelling okay. It is a fact that those slightly larger populations that act as regional centres are the ones that are actually feeling the pinch. I disagree with that particular formula. In many instances its really depends on many factors, and I refer to three councils in particular—two of them are in my area and one is a neighbour—and that is the Roma town council, the Goondiwindi town council and the Dalby town council. They are three very important regional centres that are not being funded properly out of the Grants Commission process simply because they do not have the road network—that is, they do not get that extra money for roadworks and therefore they cannot generate revenue—but they play a very important role. There is some consideration being given to Grants Commission findings in relation to what grants they do get, but it is not enough and it has not been enough for quite a long time to catch up the backlog those councils have.

All these amendments propose to do is to merger those sustainable smaller councils with not so sustainable larger councils which in turn create a larger, unsustainable council. In many instances the smaller councils are in fact doing quite well, particularly those in rural areas. Some of the ones out my way are going very well. In fact it is the larger town councils that are having financial trouble. If anything, some of them are perhaps keen to look over the fence and take over someone else's patch. However, it is only for a short-term gain at the end of the day if one council is stressed and one council is okay. None of them are making heaps of money because they cannot; they are meant to balance their books and they are meant to provide services.

If the government is going to combine those two councils, all it will end up doing is creating one weaker council overall, because the resources that originally would have gone to keep one council going would go to the areas covered by the weaker council. So we end up with a bigger problem. That combined council may get by for a couple of years but, of course, the level of the grants would be reduced once councils are combined. It is quite easy to work out that formula. It is not as simple as combining councils. Another consequence of combining councils is an increase in bureaucracy, as happened with the Gold Coast City Council. Big is not beautiful and nor is it necessarily better. You do not necessarily get a more sustainable council by amalgamating smaller councils.

Core services and infrastructure provided by councils cannot be hived off, such as occurs in the corporate sector. There is a misconception among many people that when takeovers occur in the corporate sector, entities become bigger and more sustainable. Yes, that can happen—and we see that occur in the corporate world all the time—but those entities hive off the bits of their businesses that are

unprofitable or the ones that they do not want. They either dispose of them or sell them as a whole. But local government cannot sell off the library, it cannot sell off the garbage collection process and it cannot sell off the sewerage system.

The corporate world and local government are operated by two different types of people. People in the corporate world are in there principally to make money for the company, to ensure that everything is done on time, that the products are made and the best deal is achieved for the shareholders. Although local government can have those objectives, the reality is that it is a service provider to the community. Different people are elected to local councils. If a hard-core economist with very firm views is elected to council, that person would stay for only one term. I have seen that happen. It does not work. That person would not get elected again. The operation of councils will not change if they are made bigger, because people who are elected to councils are elected to provide services to the community and not cut people's services. So although some people may think that the operations of councils can be modelled exactly on what happens in the corporate sector, that will not happen. That does not mean to say that councils cannot be more efficient and look at the operations in the corporate sector, but they cannot become exactly like the corporate sector.

These amendments do not build sufficiently on the work that has already been undertaken in this Triple S process. The Premier said that some of that would be used. Yes, some of it has been used, but it has been used falsely. I think the government has led the Local Government Association and the community up the garden path. The government has virtually taken all of the intellectual property away from local government under false pretences. But if that is what the Premier has decided to do, that is what he has decided to do.

Despite the commitments in the glossy publication in terms of local government reform to facilitate optimum service delivery and to better manage economic and environmental social planning consistent with regional communities et cetera, legislative amendments do not commit the Local Government Reform Commission to use any of the information about service delivery or better management of resources. The amendments only permit the reform commission to review the areas established under the Triple S review process. The government's glossy hopes for the future are just that: glossy hopes. The goals of achieving better service delivery and environmental and social planning are not prescribed in the legislative amendments at all.

The coalition is often accused of not having an alternative. Today I will outline clearly the coalition's alternative. The coalition believes that the Triple S process under its original terms of reference should be allowed to continue. Councils and their communities are best placed to make decisions about their future. This zealousness and failure of a state government should not interfere with the original process. Some of the Triple S groups are only one-third of the way through the process. Basically, they have been stopped in their tracks entirely. Under the coalition's proposal, it would be only when all the councils participating in the Triple S have completed the process that the state government could intervene.

Why the people of this state are not able to make decisions about their future, I do not know. It seems that all wisdom is vested in this arrogant state government, which has mismanaged everything that it has touched—health, water, infrastructure, transport, child safety to name a few. I can go on and on. The members opposite are not really glowing examples of good government. Yet they are running around saying that local government should be doing all of this. It just does not make sense at all.

While the state government wastes funds that are provided to it by the GST revenue and it enjoys an ever-increasing revenue stream from the GST and the property boom, local government funding in this state is going backwards. Yesterday and today the Premier and the minister talked about sustainability. The reality is that a federal review was undertaken of local government on the amount of cost shifting from federal to state governments on to local government without providing local government with the funding to carry out those duties. I think $25 million was racked up in one year alone. I am not sure whether that was for Queensland alone or whether that was the overall figure, but it was a large amount of money. That goes on. That is year after year after year after year. All of those things are being passed on.

Mrs Sullivan interjected.

Mr HOBBS: The member does not agree with me? It is happening. All the member has to do is look at the Productivity Commission's web site and she can get the report. Cost shifting is a big issue for local government. It is costing councils millions. The members opposite, in terms of public liability and low-cost housing, in one year shifted $10 million on to local government in one fell sweep through legislation. The government says that local government has to be sustainable, yet it does not provide local government with the funding.

About 12 years ago local government was getting 1.2 per cent of the federal tax pool. Local government is now getting 0.6 per cent. The amount of funds going into local government is reducing whereas funds from the federal government from taxation are going up. The state government's allocation of funding from the Commonwealth government through the GST is going up as well. Added to that is the fact that the state government is receiving an enormous amount of money from stamp duty,

sales tax and other taxes. So the government cannot blame councils for supposedly being a bit weak in their finances when it has screwed them to death. It is what the government has done. It is as simple as that. Over 12 years 1.2 per cent of the tax pool has been reduced to 0.6 per cent. Local government funding is going backwards. The government's funding is going upwards.

Mr Lawlor: It is a bit like the National Party.

Mr HOBBS: It is a bit like the member's intelligence, honestly and truly, if the member cannot see that. It is quite a simple explanation. I will say it again for the gentleman down the back, the member for Southport, who cannot hear very well: councils were getting 1.2 per cent of the federal tax bill and now they are getting 0.6 per cent. I hope the member has been able to take that on board, because it is a very important figure.

Local government needs a fixed percentage of taxation. I am pleased to see that this issue has been elevated to COAG level. I am a great supporter of the view that local government should have a fixed percentage. I reckon the government should be running down there and talking to the federal government about that. As well, the government should be prepared to give a fixed percentage of its GST to local government. I think that would certainly be a big help. It is better than what they are getting now anyway.

Yesterday, 17 April, the minister issued a press release stating that council groupings are to guide reform process. The press release stated further that councils have self-organised into groups based on their locations. We should be using those organisations. The press release states further that, at the instigation of those 118 councils that are already involved in the Triple S, they gave an indication where amalgamations may be possible.

I do not know whether the minister has been out to the western areas—he probably has not. Maybe he should take a drive one day. It is different when you drive around here or up to the north coast. Queensland is a huge place and sometimes it takes hours to drive between towns and shire boundaries. The minister is indicating that, where the groupings of councils are now, perhaps they could be the new boundaries. I will give the example of councils in my area. There is the Bulloo shire, the Murweh shire, the Paroo shire and the Quilpie shire. I suppose a lot of people would not even know where the Bulloo Shire Council is located. It is at Thargomindah at Cooper Creek. That is where Burke and Wills were. It is located in the South Australian corner. For those who do not know where the Murweh Shire Council is, it is located in Charleville. For those who do not know where the Paroo Shire Council is located—

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Mr HOBBS: I am helping you, Sir—it is in Cunnamulla. The Quilpie Shire Council is an easy one because it is self-explanatory—it is located in Quilpie. So those are the shires. I do not know how big they are but it would probably be the same size as Victoria. So the minister is proposing to have a shire the size of Victoria. If we read the minister's press release—an enthusiastic process—

Mr Fraser: I encourage you to—all the way down to the end.

Mr HOBBS: I have. I did read it with great interest. It just amazed me, particularly the lack of knowledge of the geography of the state. I do not know who wrote it for the minister, but he ought to go back and tell them to have a look at a map to see where things are. Then there is another shire. In the Maranoa shire there will be Balonne, Bendemere, Booringa, Bungil, Murilla, Roma and Warroo. That is another huge area. Then there are other amalgamated shires like Bundaberg, Burnett, Isis, Perry, Miriam Vale and Kolan. There are heaps of them there. When we look at that and see the—I probably should not say stupidity, but it is. It is silly. It is a foolish way to look at this.

The minister also said in his press release, 'There is no opportunity to delay lest we risk an unsustainable system of local government for another four years.' There are some councils that are probably in trouble, for sure. There is no great number of councils that have such serious problems that they cannot get by for four years. It is totally ridiculous when we consider the attitude of the government and the way it is handling this. The minister in another press release states—

> The case for change is compelling ... Analysis shows that 43% of councils in Queensland have either a weak, very weak or distressed financial status.

I have covered that. The minister also says—

> A single regional local government authority will be established in the Torres Strait as part of the Queensland-wide local government reform package.

I know there are issues in the Torres Strait and also with some of the Indigenous councils in relation to the Auditor-General's reports, but there is still no respect for the Islanders or their isolation. The member for Cook will certainly know how far apart they are. They currently have their own councils where they get things done. If the government thinks it is going to save money out of this, it is not. At present those councils are there and operating. They are doing their CDEP work and suchlike. They might not be all that efficient at the end of the day—

Mr O'Brien: Not even monthly accounts.

Mr HOBBS: Well, probably in some cases they are and some cases they are not, and the member would know that as well. It is directed in many instances through those groups. What will happen is that that resource will not continue. Eventually it will just break down entirely, so somebody will have to go in there and do it. At least with the councils there they are getting things done. Mark my words: it will cost the government more in the end. The government really needs to consider that before it throws them all out and has one big council. There will still have to be two councils that are very similar—the shire council and the regional council. There are also going to be community boards. How handy are community boards!

The other change in this legislation is that of the election date for councils from 29 March to 15 March. Obviously that is a sensible thing to do, but there is still no reason why they could not have waited another six months if some councils had not got their Triple S process in place.

I want to go to this glossy brochure—at least this is the photocopied version of the glossy brochure—titled *Local government reform: a new chapter for local government in Queensland*. The report states that the Queensland government is committed to ensuring all Queenslanders have strong, effective councils with local representation. This is what it says. I will read it again in case you did not know. Member for Southport, are you awake back there? It says that the Queensland government is committed to ensuring all Queenslanders have strong, effective councils with local representation.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! I will remind the honourable member to direct his comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: I will, Mr Deputy Speaker. You are talking about local representation. You are cutting them out, mate. You are cutting them back.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the honourable member to address his comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am saying that the government is in fact cutting representation out. So, first of all, it is wrong. The report says—

Local Transition Committees will be established in all new councils to manage the transition to the new local government.

It is going to be interesting to see how that goes. The next point states—

New councils will be able to appoint Community Boards, to provide advice and recommendations on local community issues.

That is a bit like the ministerial forums. It really is as handy as a pocket in a sock at the end of the day. Sure, the government is trying to get out there but at the end of the day what is really achieved? I have so many people involved with ministerial forums and those types of things saying, 'Why am I doing this? Why am I driving hundreds of kilometres at a time within a year to do this and what do I get? Nothing out of it.' All they are doing is helping the government to get through another few more months of criticism. So that is not working all that well.

The report says that a benefit of local government reform is financially strong councils. Let me tell the government that it will have stronger councils temporarily if it amalgamates them but then it will end up with a bigger problem unless it fixes the overall financial problems of local governments. I mentioned this before. Their federal taxation pool has gone from 1.2 per cent back to 0.6 per cent and the cost shifting that has gone one between the state and federal governments is costing the councils millions of dollars each year.

The report says that there will be better roads and infrastructure. How on earth are we going to have better roads and infrastructure by amalgamating councils? The federal and state highways are the federal and state responsibility. The councils are not going to have any more money to spend on their roads. In fact, they will probably have less in many instances because they will have more bureaucracy. If the councils get too big they will have to send graders out with a caravan on the back. A lot of people do not like camping out these days. They can be 400 or 500 kilometres from home. So they have to go off with their fuel tank, their grader and their caravan all hooked together. Sometimes they even tow a four-wheel drive vehicle as well so that they can come back into town for the weekend. How are those bigger councils going to do that, because that is how far the distances are out there?

The report also says there will be better planning outcomes. Better planning outcomes may be a possibility. The report says that there will be improved management of local infrastructure. I doubt that. There will be fewer councillors. Who is going to push the issues? If there are more councillors, I would have thought the issues would be hammered more strongly.

Mr Lawlor: Do you want to double them?

Mr HOBBS: No, I would not double them. I think that what is there now is fair. In fact, there might even be a few less councils. I do not mind if we head towards a few more amalgamations and some significant boundary redrawings. That was on the cards with the Triple S process and we would have had a much better outcome.

The government refers to councils focusing on servicing their communities. You fellows do not do that now, so how on earth do you expect a larger council to have any support? We will have councillors who do not even live anywhere near some of those communities or towns. They may never even visit those areas. If there are a few councillors in divisions or wards, as they are called down here, at least they will know what the roads are like or the issues that affect the towns. That will mean more efficient business practices.

One thing I will guarantee is that there will be a lot more bureaucracy in this process. The minister talks about having a bigger picture approach to local government, and he is dead right. He will have a bigger picture all right. It will be so big that he will not be able to get around it at all. That is probably two out of seven there.

Page 10 of the government's so-called blueprint talks about providing better services to all Queenslanders, but I doubt whether that will happen. If I thought that the legislation could achieve that, I would be happy to look at this. Obviously we want better services for our people, but how can they be provided through this process? They will not have any more money; they will have more bureaucracy. Nearly all of the employees of council areas will have to reapply for their jobs because of reclassifications and at the end of the day there will be more employees, so it will cost more.

The government says that it will deliver more efficient and financially viable councils, but I can tell the minister this: the ALGA report into Australian councils referred to the fact that Victoria reduced its number of councils from 240 to 76 or something like that. It was a significant drop. Can members guess what it found in Victoria? Under that process over 15 per cent of councils were classified as unsustainable. Here the real figures are probably 18 and we have not had that. The Triple S process could have fixed a lot of those areas. Some of those councils might have been amalgamated. That is the reality of it. I would be a bit surprised if the minister was not aware of that. He should get his staff to chase that up.

The government talked about service and infrastructure delivery that considers a regional approach. That could have happened through the Triple S process. It talked about reducing red tape and duplication in councils, allowing them to focus on servicing Queenslanders, but this legislation will create more red tape. I can see why the government wants to look at the bigger picture and maybe in some areas there will be a reduction, but at the end of the day I cannot see that happening across all areas.

The government says that it wants better planning outcomes, particularly in relation to more consistent regional land uses and infrastructure planning. The Triple S process would have done that. It says that it wants to bring together communities of interest to achieve outcomes. I would have thought that that would have been done better with smaller groups working together. The ALGA report found that local governments in Victoria were not all that efficient.

Mr Seeney: That would be the small councils.

Mr HOBBS: That is right. Councils are evolving, as is the nature of the business that they deal with. Long gone are the days when councils just dealt with roads, rubbish and rates. Today councils are a vital cog in areas ranging in diversity from information technology, water management, natural resource management, urban planning, the provision of housing, sporting and recreational facilities and cultural heritage matters. These days local governments get involved in a wide range of issues, many of which have been passed on to them on a cost-shifting basis from state and federal governments.

In a number of areas the council is the umbrella organisation that provides the framework for the social infrastructure of a region, with assistance measures for volunteer organisations in areas such as administrative expertise and public liability. It is interesting to note that there are 1,125 elected members in Queensland cities, towns and shires throughout the state. Figures from the 2004 local government census show that 30 per cent of councillors are female, 84 per cent of councillors hold a position on a part-time basis, 35 per cent—the largest age group—of councillors are aged between 45 and 54, and 33 per cent—the largest group—are in their first year of council.

Members of parliament ought to be aware that not all councillors are paid the same as their urban colleagues. Basically, they are paid a meeting fee, travelling expenses and so on. Usually it is not that much. Members must not think that councillors throughout the state are paid the same. They must not think that if we get rid of half the councils in this state we will save on salaries. In fact, the salaries that we will have to pay the new councillors will be probably 17 or 20 times more than the councillors are being paid now. Being a professional councillor will be a full-time job and employing people on such a basis will change the face of local government in some areas. I do not think that rural communities will like that.

This background emphasises the reason that the coalition team respects the role that the local government plays in the fabric of Queensland. The original bill before the House attempted to improve the governance of local government. Our coalition team was willing to support that bill because of the many measures that ensured that councils continued to uphold the distinguished role that they play in our communities.

However, we cannot support the bill now. There is no way in the world we could support legislation that will destroy the very fabric of local government, purely for political purposes. Indeed, one reason for this is to create a diversion from the Traveston Dam issue. We usually get a diversion a week. Indeed, we will get more than one a week if the government can find an issue to use. Therefore, there is no way in the world that we can support the legislation. Parts of the bill are common sense and they should be supported. However, the overall badness of the bill outweighs that.

The original bill sought to reform the Local Government Act as a response to the Crime and Misconduct Commission report into the independence, influence and integrity of local government, a CMC inquiry into the 2004 Gold Coast City Council election and a review of the 2004 local government elections by the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation. Our coalition team believes that local governments provide an autonomous, efficient and accountable system that responds to community needs to enhance the quality of life in our communities. At the same time, local governments must recognise that with the autonomy they enjoy comes a requirement to be responsible and accountable for their actions. The original legislation sought to provide some important steps in achieving the accountability procedures of local government. Our Queensland coalition team welcomed those recommendations.

The legislation deals with two main areas: making local government accountability measures consistent with parliamentary procedures and changing electoral laws to be consistent with those of the Queensland parliament. The first of those measures deals with accountability. It is ironic that in this parliament of Queensland the Beattie government is voting on accountability measures when the accountability record of the Beattie government is not a great one. Let us consider the performance of some of its former members such as Mike Kaiser, Jim Elder, Gordon Nuttall, Merri Rose, Liddy Clarke and other members yet to be publicly named.

This legislation brings the accountability procedures of local government a step closer to being in line with parliamentary standards, except for one difference. This difference is not a problem with local government standards; in fact, it is a problem with parliamentary standards.

The Beattie government that sits on the government benches has legalised lying in this parliament, and the members opposite know that. The members opposite know the government did that. I think quite a few of the members opposite are quite a bit hesitant about whether it was a good thing or a bad thing in hindsight.

The Criminal Code Amendment Act 2006 was passed by this government for a good mate, or at least he was a good mate at the time. The act repeals the following sections of the Criminal Code: section 56, which covers disturbing the legislature; section 57, which covers false evidence before parliament; and section 58, which covers a witness refusing to attend or give evidence before parliament or a parliamentary committee. The act provides that this repeal does not prevent a person being punished for contempt of parliament as defined in the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001. The effect of the act is that, where a person lies before a parliament or a parliamentary committee, the only punishment available is for contempt of the parliament. This applies whether the person who lies is a member of parliament, a public servant or an ordinary citizen.

These changes to the Criminal Code were an act by this government to degrade the institutions within this House. It is ironic, therefore, that today we come before the House to upgrade the institution of local government to make it, the third tier of government, more accountable. It is fortunate, though, that whilst bringing some consistency to the accountability procedures for local government lying in a council meeting is still frowned upon.

The new accountability measures that this bill seeks to introduce arise from the CMC inquiry into the 2004 Gold Coast election. The concern of the Queensland coalition team is whether the changes will be broad enough for other scenarios. For instance, the Gold Coast situation dealt with a group of candidates who took it upon themselves to formulate policy and gain funding from businesses for the campaign. This legislation would make the group of candidates subject to disclosure laws.

The question remains, though: what will be the trigger point for this? Is it a zero tolerance scenario or is there a certain action or amount of money that will trigger action for noncompliance? In many instances people may drift together in a campaign, as I think happened in some cases at the Gold Coast. It can happen again. People go out and suddenly they are on the right wavelength and they tend to go together. They suddenly become a campaign team. There are some problems that need to be worked out. This may be somewhat pedantic, but it is important that this legislation is not just focused towards one scenario but is instead all encompassing to cover situations that may arise in the future.

This bill substantially increases penalties for election offences and the number of disclosure requirements. This makes the bill consistent with parliamentary standards, and we welcome this measure because the Queensland coalition team believes that the public demands the same standards of transparency from public officers at all levels. Therefore, consistency in the act, with penalties for state parliamentarians in breach of the law, is a worthwhile outcome, and we welcome that change.

Similarly, there is a new-found consistency with the lodgement of how-to-vote cards, thus stopping the distribution of those with misleading information, as has occurred at many state elections. It is too late on polling day to unscramble the egg with illegal and misleading how-to-vote cards. With the section that deals with how-to-vote cards, I would question the necessity for public displays of how-to-vote cards, and I would ask what the logistics of this would be. Clause 25 states that—

On polling day, the returning officer must, to the extent that it is reasonably practicable to do so, make the how-to-vote card mentioned in subsection (4) available for public inspection for free at each polling booth for which the how-to-vote card is relevant.

The provision is not consistent with the state Electoral Act because how-to-vote cards are displayed at Electoral Commission of Queensland offices only and are not on display at each polling booth where they are relevant. It is, therefore, unnecessary to have this provision, which adds a condition not required at a state election, and therefore should not be forced on to local governments.

The act considers conflicts of interest when dealing with council decisions. The Queensland coalition team strongly believes that councillors should be responsible and accountable for the decisions they make. This includes the declaration of interests that may give some form of benefit to a councillor. It is quite appropriate for a member to leave the room when they have an interest. Currently, all that is required is that they have declared an interest. This legislation seems to lead towards a situation where the council must minute information about councillors' conflicts of interest. Surely this step is a cumbersome one that does not achieve anything more than merely noting that an interest was, in fact, declared.

Often a Queensland councillor will declare an interest if there is a perceived interest, and the interest is not necessarily a financial one, that benefits the individual. In smaller communities it may be a councillor's relation that benefits and so the councillor declares his interest when it is not technically necessary but the exception leads to a necessity.

The next step of noting down the interest seems to be a cumbersome one that achieves little. The following is an extract from the LGAQ's submission in response to the CMC Gold Coast inquiry recommendation No. 18—

The issue was not specifically raised in the stage 2 decision paper and, indeed, was only raised in passing in the development approval context by the chairman on the last day of the public meeting, on 7 February 2006.

Whilst acknowledging that recent amendments to the IPA require such a regime in relation to development assessment, the recommendation, nevertheless, has as its motivation circumstances surrounding its development decisions rather than the vast myriad decisions that local governments make outside the realms of the IPA.

Ms DARLING (Sandgate—ALP) (4.55 pm): Now for something completely different: I thought I would actually spend the bulk of my time talking about the bill that is on the table and make just one or two comments about the things to be considered in detail.

The main objective of the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 is to increase public trust and confidence in local government and election processes. The bill responds to issues identified in the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report titled *Independence, influence and integrity in local government: a CMC inquiry into the 2004 Gold Coast City Council election*. It also responds to a review of the 2004 local government elections by the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation and also the Size, Shape and Sustainability reviews. The bill seeks to improve accountability and transparency in local government elections and prevent a repeat of the circumstances that gave rise to the need for the CMC inquiry.

On 11 May 2006 the CMC tabled its report in parliament, which included 19 recommendations aimed at addressing issues arising from its inquiry into the conduct of the Gold Coast City Council candidates during the 2004 local government elections. All but two of the 19 recommendations have been accepted or accepted in amended form and are reflected in the bill. Specifically, the government has accepted nine of the 19 recommendations, accepted eight with modification and rejected two as redundant or inequitable.

The bill includes amendments that will further align local government elections with state elections. The bill will improve transparency and accountability in elections and in decision making. In particular, the bill demands greater standards of disclosure including third-party expenditure returns, donor returns, loans, gifts and fundraising; defines a group of candidates and calls for registration at nomination; prohibits local government candidates from undertaking activities together unless part of a registered group; increases penalties for electoral offences consistent with those in place for state elections; requires independent and group candidates to have specific accounts for election purposes; defines conflicts of interest and requires councillors to identify them and declare them; requires councils to minute information about councillor conflicts of interest; makes directing or attempting to direct local government staff by councillors in relation to the conduct of their duties an offence; establishes a statutory caretaker period and a candidate's code of conduct during local government elections; calls for the lodgement of how-to-vote cards with the returning officer for the local government prior to an election; provides that a councillor is disqualified on conviction for a breach of section 250, which is the

improper use of information by councillors; allows for the appointment of a financial controller to a local government in certain circumstances; and addresses minor and/or technical issues identified by the department during the review of local government electoral provisions following the 2004 local government elections.

I will give a couple of examples of how the improvement of transparency and accountability for local government will improve and restore the faith of the voting public in local government elections. I have two examples that bring local government elections more into line with state government standards and voter expectations. One example is that the caretaker conventions, which are currently observed by both state and federal governments, will now apply to local councils. These diminish the potential for public perceptions about councillors' abuse of decision-making processes in the lead-up to an election. The conventions place restrictions on councils making significant policy or expenditure decisions, making appointments of significance or entering into major contracts for up to 30 days prior to council elections. This is certainly needed in a lot of councils.

As is in place for state MPs, it will now be required that some information about councillors be publicly available. Information about councillors' membership of political parties and community organisations, travel and accommodation benefits received outside of that associated with official duties and details of gifts over $500 will be displayed on council web sites. Where there is no web site, the information will be available free of charge from council offices.

They are just two examples of the important changes this bill will enact. The people of Queensland deserve and expect transparent and accountable government at all levels in this country. This bill will help prevent a repeat of the shameful and shadowy practices of local government candidates hiding from the public their true allegiances and motivations.

I have read with interest the amendments circulated by the minister. While I will not talk about them in great detail, I do note that they provide for the most far-reaching reforms of local government in Queensland's history. I will let the minister talk about those amendments in the consideration in detail stage, but I do note that, in the amendments provided to members, the detailed terms of reference and the actual set-up of the reform commission have been very well put together. I think it will answer a lot of questions the public has about this process.

The member for Warrego mentioned that the Triple S process had been thrown in the bin, and that is certainly not the case either. While it has been frustrating and there has been a lot of talk and little action, all of the work done to date will obviously be sent to the reform commission and will inform all of their consideration as they put this together. I certainly commend the minister for his foresight, his leadership and this very efficient timetable of reform. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (5.05 pm): It is a pleasure to rise and support the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and particularly the amendments that the minister has foreshadowed. I would like to endorse the comments of my friend the member for Sandgate, who clearly set out some of the very necessary reforms to the existing legislation which were recommended. I will not repeat her comments.

I want to say a couple of general things about the process the minister announced he will be undertaking with the further amendments to the bill we will be considering. It is simply this: if it were not broke, it would not have to be fixed. While there are many good, well-run, strong, financial councils with good growing rate bases in Queensland, nevertheless in amongst the 157 there are a series which we all know are struggling. They are broke. They are not able to pay for a tiny percentage of the necessary expenditures in their area. They are simply too small.

There are councils in Queensland with well-meaning people running them who are creatures of another century, another time. There are shires that are smaller than some of my primary schools. There are shires with a couple of hundred people, maybe 600 people. Although it may be comfortable for the mayor to drive a Caprice, nevertheless the rates base cannot pay for the mayor's car let alone the millions of dollars worth of work which is required to provide the essential infrastructure such as roads.

It is effectively then a no-brainer. It is disappointing that the opposition is choosing to carry on like pork chops about what is essentially the reform that had to happen in local government. Everyone knows it. It needs to be remembered that local government is a creature of our statute. Local government is a creature of this parliament. This parliament bears the responsibility for effective, efficient and, ultimately, survivable local government. We have the duty of care here. This is not something that can be ducked. The mere fact that local governments have been around for a long time with many of them limping along does not mean we can look the other way.

The minister has done entirely the right thing. When confronted with the reality of the risk which is on the books of this state of councils which are simply unable to meet their obligations, it is essential that we look to mitigating those risks for the residents. That uncomfortable tension between the wants, desires, needs and interests of elected councillors and the needs of good governance for the people in

those council areas must always be resolved in favour of the people in those shires. It is simply unacceptable to consider that the needs of the elected representatives to their sinecures should be placed in front of good governance. Regretfully, with the best will in the world, it has become painfully apparent that that essential conflict is not able to be climbed over by so many local government areas. That essential conflict has now been properly resolved by the minister confirming that we will go ahead and do what needs to be done.

The simplest things are sometimes the hardest to grasp, like the wet soap in the bath, but in this case the process has been laid out very clearly. The members of the new commission who will look at the new boundaries are all people of high integrity and very experienced, particularly in local government matters and in the issue of making sure that people's democratic rights are respected. We will find that much of the information which has been produced will form part of the outcomes.

In many cases, councils have really given the game away. They have self-organised into the areas that they know are the natural communities of interest, the natural financial imperatives which will drive them together. But taking that final step was in many cases simply one step too far. Councils can sometimes be seen as the clearest exception to the Darwinian theory of survival of the fittest. There have been some out there who have hung in there for a very long time but it is now time to move on. This reform was not going to happen without clear, strong, decisive political leadership, and that is what the minister has provided. I support the bill before the House and the amendments.

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (5.06 pm): I rise in support of the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I suspect that many members speaking on this bill may focus on the minister's amendments which seek to establish a Local Government Reform Commission; that is what the opposition spokesperson did. While I will speak briefly in support of this decisive and long-overdue action, I will concentrate my remarks on an issue which was raised by the minister when he introduced the bill. I will focus on the importance of transparency and democracy in local government.

But, first, let there be no mistake about my position on the historic establishment of a Local Government Reform Commission. Efficient and effective delivery of local government services is vitally important to the economy of Queensland and the lifestyle of Queenslanders, and serious reform is long, long overdue. Reforming Labor governments in the 1920s began outstanding measures of local government reform. The City of Brisbane Act 1924 remains a beacon of far-sighted, city-wide government throughout Australia. I challenge members to reflect upon the way our capital might have developed in the intervening 83 years if the creation of greater Brisbane had not occurred.

In my own area, before being subsumed into greater Brisbane, the Kedron shire was largely a rural area and was politically dominated by a long-time shire chairman, Joe Gibson, who also happened to own the Stafford tannery. This was the largest local employer but also the largest local polluter. I would contend that Brisbane is a much better place because of the amalgamation that happened in 1925. Unfortunately, that was where the genuine reform of local government stopped. In 1927 a royal commission proposal to significantly reduce the number of local authorities from 152 to 86 came to nothing. When the Moore government was elected in 1929, it dropped those reforms—shelved them—along with a series of other social and political reforms. It is time for a return to this unfinished business.

Despite this neglect of systemic reform, Queensland has a proud tradition of local government—a tradition where, in comparison to other states, it has been very rare for a state government to intervene in locally elected administrations. Some recent examples which have come to the attention of this House and have given rise to the body of this amendment bill prove that rule. That is why systemic reform to ensure the ongoing viability of local government services is important. Services, including the proverbial rates, roads and rubbish, and the vitally important planning and development approval processes are important to the economy and the delivery of affordable housing.

So I reiterate my support for the proposed Local Government Reform Commission process. However, I note the provisions of this amendment bill address a broader range of matters for local government reform. Further, I note that the minister has flagged a review of the Local Government Act. It is in this context that I raise the need for democratic reform of the electoral systems used in Queensland's local authorities. This further reform is logical, needed and also overdue.

Most of the larger urban local authorities in Queensland are elected using single member divisions or wards in ballots using optional preferential voting. But they are a minority. Only 14 local government associations use this system. Therefore, the vast majority of local government associations are undivided councils and multimember divisions. Where they exist, first-past-the-post voting is applied across-the-board, including for mayoral elections. These undivided local government areas, especially for the urban councils—for example, Bundaberg, Redcliffe and Toowoomba—are patently undemocratic.

By way of example, let us consider Redcliffe city. Despite being a geographically small community it has been strongly suggested over time that not all areas of Redcliffe are evenly or equally represented in council decision making. As a consequence, some people have suggested that basic service delivery is poor in parts of the city while other areas enjoy premium facilities. This problem is exacerbated by the inherently unfair and undemocratic first-past-the-post multimember electoral system.

This system massively favours incumbents who have the council resources and publicity machines working to ensure their name is well known. Moreover, the multimember first-past-the-post system is poorly understood by electors. Indeed, the version of this system in operation in Queensland simply deceives electors by appearing to be a preferential system. The requirement for voters to mark candidates with the numbers one to seven, in the instance of Redcliffe city, implies that they are expressing preferences. The fact that one has exactly the same value as seven is not understood by electors. It is not sensible or, frankly, even honest.

Single member divisions dictate a clearer line of responsibility to electors than multimember divisions. A truly local councillor is identified with their division and can have a personal, individual relationship with electors. While the proposed Local Government Reform Commission may consider this issue in the context of its review it may, in the end, be impractical to have single member divisions throughout Queensland. Therefore, I would suggest a threshold of density could be established in legislation to ensure that single member divisions are in place where appropriate, especially for urban councils.

Equally, wherever multimember elections are held proportional representation should be used. Proportional representation translates the wishes of electors, who like all 21st century Australians are accustomed to preferential voting systems, more accurately. Alternatively, perhaps the legislation should be reviewed and the use of proportional representation should be considered across-the-board. Let us make sure that we give our communities the best, most responsive representation, not councils elected by warped, undemocratic electoral systems. I therefore ask the minister to consider these important democratic issues throughout the upcoming reform process and during the wider review of the act. I commend the amendment bill to the House.

Mr WEIGHTMAN (Cleveland—ALP) (5.13 pm): I rise to support the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill will increase public trust and confidence in the local government election process and local councils by legislating greater accountability and scrutiny of Queensland councils. This bill is good for government, good for communities and good for the people of Queensland. Further, this bill will be of enormous benefit to our local communities by ensuring that local governments are as transparent and accountable as their state counterparts. The people in my electorate of Cleveland appreciate accountability among their representatives and I am certainly happy to be able to support a bill which promotes that.

The bill will achieve a range of policy objectives by, for example, ensuring greater standards of disclosure; increasing penalties for electoral offences in line with those in place for state government elections; requiring that councillors identify, declare and have minuted conflicts of interest; and requiring councillors to provide reasons for deciding not to accept the recommendations of officers and consultants.

The bill is based on extensive community consultation. Seventy-four responses were received including responses from peak local government associations, 41 councils, the Electoral Commission of Queensland, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The clause 7 amendments which make it an offence if a councillor directs, purports to direct or attempts to direct a local government employee or service provider about the way to perform a duty are significant. A consultant should be free to do their work professionally and without direction from government members. Also important is the clause 9 insertion of new section 246A, providing councillors with a transparent system for recording conflicts of interest. By providing councillors with this system this bill ensures greater accountability for councillors and makes it easier for councillors to declare conflicts of interest and act in the best interests of the public.

In discussions with my constituents I am frequently reminded about the enormous potential of local government in developing our communities. This legislation will only serve to benefit the people of Queensland by enhancing transparency and accountability in local government elections and decision making. Furthermore, the legislation ensures greater efficiency and effectiveness for local councils and will help revive local governments and their ability to support our communities. Local government is an institution that has enormous community potential. I strongly support local government in my area through its initiatives to develop the community and improve the lives of people in my electorate. The Redland Shire Council works very hard to provide some fantastic services to the community.

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the Size, Shape and Sustainability program. This program was put in place with the best of intentions—that is, to encourage councils to review their long-term sustainability. The program has been running for almost two years and the state government is disappointed that it has not delivered any meaningful changes to local government in Queensland. The outcomes, direction and pace of Triple S were to be driven by the participating councils. This government actually empowered the councils to direct and decide their own future. Even though there were 118 councils involved in this process, it has now become clear that Triple S is not the best vehicle to deliver reform before the 2008 council elections. Because it has become evident that the process would not deliver any substantial outcomes before the agreed October 2007 date, Triple S will now cease and the state government will lead the reform in preparation for the 2008 elections.

If this was not done then some councils would have to continue in an unsustainable fashion right through the 2008 local council elections and up to the 2012 elections. This would not be in the best interest of many councils and indeed the people of Queensland who are supposed to be serviced by them. The state government will now establish the Local Government Reform Commission to draw up Queensland's new local government boundaries. This will be done in consultation with the Local Government Association of Queensland, councils and the community. All councils will be reviewed excluding Brisbane City Council, which was formed by the amalgamation of 17 local governments.

As I have stated before, the Redland Shire Council, I believe, has been relatively proactive in delivering some essential services to the community. That being the case, I also take this opportunity to encourage the Redland Shire Council to work with the Local Government Reform Commission to ensure that the constituents of Cleveland receive the best possible services from their local government. I am committed to ensuring that the local government can maintain this service provision and for that reason I commend this bill to the House.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (5.19 pm): The electorate of Darling Downs contains five local councils—Dalby, Wambo, Jondaryan, Crows Nest and Rosalie. The Dalby shire is actually surrounded by Wambo and is one of the few doughnut shires in the state. The people of—

Mr Fraser: And Dalby supports amalgamation.

Mr HOPPER: The minister says that Dalby supports amalgamation. Dalby may very well support amalgamation, but I would love to take the minister for a drive to meet with some of the residents of the Wambo Shire Council who know that when that shire is amalgamated their councillors will come out of the major towns simply because of the number of people who live in the town. I think Dalby has a population of 10,000 or 12,000 people while the Wambo Shire Council has 2,000 or 3,000 people. They know that their elected members will come from those bigger towns. When money needs to be spent, will those bigger towns get a palm tree or will a road 70 kilometres outside that bigger town be fixed? I know what will happen. The people of the Wambo shire have been very good ratepayers over many years. Wambo shire, as the minister should know, is one of the few shires in this state that is debt free and has been debt free since its inception. Its attitude is 'If it ain't broke, why fix it?' That shire has ratepayers who pay $30,000 or $40,000 in rates while the townspeople pay $900 in rates. Of course Dalby wants to amalgamate with Wambo! Of course it does! If this proposal goes ahead we will have mega supershires.

I believe that the minister knows now where the lines will be on the map and he knows what will happen. I believe that. He has known this for about 12 months now. He knew the plan before SSS was even mentioned. There has been deception by this government, and the announcement made yesterday in this chamber was a farce and it just disgusts me. The councils and mayors who put their trust and faith in what they were doing were let down yesterday, and the repercussions will be immense. They will be immense. I know a little bit about local government. My wife served on the Wambo shire for quite a while.

Government members interjected.

Mr HOPPER: She does not serve on that council anymore. We moved to Wyreema outside of the shire and Joanne had to quit her time on the council. I want to say that she thoroughly enjoyed her time on the council. Local government is about local representation from local people. She was the member for division 4 of the Wambo shire. She knew nearly everyone in that shire. We went through the list of voters and I think there were 400 and we knew 380 of them when she was elected. That is local representation. She knew every road and every person. Because supershires will be run by an organisation in a major centre, I wonder how the people on the outskirts will survive and if they will get the same representation and the same funding for the rates that they pay. It is a very interesting subject.

I turn now to Rosalie and Crows Nest. Members of the Rosalie and Crows Nest councils met with me and the now Attorney-General, the member for Toowoomba North, Kerry Shine. They brought to our attention the fact that they were told by this government that if they led the way to see what they could work out they would not be forced into amalgamation. What did they do? They agreed to amalgamate.

Mr Fraser interjected.

Mr HOPPER: The minister might sit there and smile, but he is destroying the lifeblood of the bush with this legislation. That is exactly what he is doing. We heard the minister talk about dog registrations and everything in this chamber this morning. There was no mention of gravel roads 80 kilometres out of a major centre. Those are the sorts of things that we are going to be faced with under this legislation. With regard to Rosalie and Crows Nest, the little township of Highfields happens to be in the Crows Nest shire. It will be very interesting to see how these maps are drawn up, because I know that the people of Highfields will simply object if they become part of Toowoomba. That is the last thing they want. If that happens, the repercussions for the Attorney-General will be immense. They will be immense if Highfields becomes part of the Toowoomba shire. We will win that seat; it is as simple as that. He will get kicked out over this amalgamation.

We saw what happened in Victoria, yet this government is doing the same thing in Queensland. The repercussions from this will be immense. How does the government think councillors feel now after putting all of their faith in the government and the SSS? The member for Warrego described it perfectly this morning. How does the government think they feel now when they know that in, say, September their shire will be dissolved? From the way I read it, they will probably be out of a job and after the March elections there will be a number of councillors and mayors who are not councillors anymore. There are five very good mayors in my electorate who know their shire, know their people and do a brilliant job.

There are many concerns if amalgamating these shires turns them into supershires. Will the town of Dalby be part of Roma? That is what it is going to amount to. There are 150-odd shires in this state that have been very progressive. Yes, some have been in trouble at times. But there has been no mention of the likes of Wambo shire which has been debt free since its inception—no mention of it. Imagine how those people will feel when the big stick is wielded by this Labor government. That is what I find extremely upsetting today. I am very concerned about the surrounding area of Toowoomba—Gowrie Junction, Highfields, Cambooya and Wyreema. Will they become part of Toowoomba—rural towns that had rural shires with rural representatives? Now they will probably be part of a city. No doubt Di Thorley will stand for mayor and she will be in charge of that whole area. Of course the mayors of the bigger cities want this; they want the rates. They will get the money and they will milk those little shires dry. Those shires will disappear. It is a very sad situation. We are very proud of our local institution—that is, local government. That will be destroyed under this government. It makes me very sad and it actually sickens me to my stomach.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.26 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. At the outset I recognise the ruling that the Speaker made earlier in the day in relation to the foreshadowed amendments that the minister has tabled in the parliament. I wanted to at the—

Mr Fraser interjected.

Mr SEENEY: No. I wanted to acknowledge the ruling that the Speaker made and congratulate him for making that ruling, because I think to do otherwise would have led to something of a farce in this debate. I wanted to acknowledge that at the outset.

Like so many other members in this parliament, I was previously a member of local government. I spent six or seven years on a local government and was deputy mayor of the Monto Shire Council for probably five of those years. I know full well the impact that this legislation and the amendments that the minister has foreshadowed will have on local government across the state. But they are going to impact very differently on very different local governments, and that unfortunately is the point that has been missed in the debate up until now. It has been missed by speakers whom I have heard speak in this parliament this afternoon and it has been missed by a number of people who have made contributions in the public debate.

Local government is not a one-size-fits-all creature. It is not the same across the state. Just as Queensland communities vary enormously across the state, so too do the local governments that represent them and that provide the local governance for them. When I sit in this chamber and listen to some of the stupidity that is offered by members who come from large urban areas, it only reinforces the fact that they have absolutely no idea of the impact that this legislation will have on those communities that are very different to the ones that they come from—that is, the small rural communities. While I accept the political reality of this place and the reform commission will do its work, I want at the outset to urge not just the government but those commissioners to very carefully consider the different needs of different communities—the different communities across Queensland and what they need and what they have traditionally got from the local governments that they have elected. It will be a situation where I think to achieve any sort of fairness and integrity there has to be a very real understanding of the different needs of those different communities.

Debate, on motion of Mr Seeney, adjourned.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House recognises the emerging crises of traffic gridlock, overcrowded public transport, inferior road infrastructure, and unaffordable housing; and calls on the Premier to follow the example set by the Queensland coalition and urgently refocus his government and ministers on resolving these serious problems that are challenging the liveability of south-east Queensland.

This motion before the House is a very genuine and serious attempt by the coalition to turn the government's attention to what we believe are the issues that it should be focusing on. It is a very genuine and serious attempt to avoid any further crises such as those that are currently impacting on Queenslanders, especially in the south-east corner. Unfortunately, it is a characteristic of the Beattie Labor government to not respond or take action until there is a crisis. Until the political heat comes on the government, it does not take the action that is necessary to avoid the problems.

We have seen the great trifecta of failure that will always be the legacy of the Beattie Labor government. It failed with water, it failed with health and it failed with electricity. Currently we have a water supply crisis that is threatening the lifestyle of everybody in south-east Queensland. We have seen a crisis in the delivery of health services that produced some horrendous outcomes for people right across Queensland and some terrible legacies for people and families who will never recover. We saw the crisis in electricity that is still being resolved, despite the millions of dollars that the government has thrown at it in an attempt to try to resolve it.

So with that legacy of failure in water, health and electricity we need now to turn our attention to other areas. We have tried to refocus the shadow cabinet—the alternative government—on those areas in an attempt to get the government to do likewise. We have looked at the areas where we believe the emerging problems exist. We have looked at the structure of our shadow cabinet and decided that we can better focus the attention of our shadow ministers on those areas. We have looked at the structure of the government and asked whether that is the most appropriate way in which to respond to these emerging issues.

There is no doubt that the emerging issues are clear, such as public transport. Coalition members who will follow me in this debate will detail the specifics of each of these areas. I refer to issues such as the overcrowding on our public transport and the difficulty that our public transport system is experiencing in coping. We know that that is an area where a crisis is developing quickly. I turn to the traffic management issues, especially here in the great metropolis of Brisbane. Traffic used to be an issue in Brisbane at peak hours—in the morning and in the afternoon and on Friday afternoon in particular. Now, traffic is a management issue for everybody all of the time and it is getting worse. Both of those issues—public transport and traffic management—are very similar to the water issue. It takes a long time to put in place the infrastructure that is needed. It is too late to wait until there is a crisis.

So we in the opposition have set about forming an alternative government. We have brought the opposition members together as a single team—one team that can be the alternative government.

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mr Beattie: We are very happy with your team.

Mr SEENEY: Now we are focusing that team on the issues that are important: public transport, traffic management and housing affordability as well as the other portfolios. Any member who wants to try to make fun of this debate, as the Premier and the Deputy Premier have just tried, and any member who wants to stand up in this place and speak negatively about what we have done needs to explain to this parliament and to the people of Queensland very clearly one thing: why does this government have a minister for wine industry development but no minister for public transport?

Government members interjected.

Mr SEENEY: Is any member prepared to suggest that wine industry development is a more pressing problem for the people of south-east Queensland or the people of Queensland than something as important as public transport? I say to any of those honourable members opposite who like to yell abuse and make fun that that is their challenge. They should stand up in this chamber in this debate and explain to the people of Queensland why it is more important for the government to focus on wine industry development than it is to focus on public transport or traffic management or housing affordability, because they are the issues that are important. They are the developing crises. I do not belittle the wine industry in any way when I say that.

Mr Beattie: You just did.

Mr SEENEY: I do not, because it, like any other industry, has a need to be supported by a government department, but it certainly does not need the focus that it has been given by the Beattie Labor government. In our structure, the wine industry will be well and truly accommodated by its inclusion in the portfolio of small business and tourism. The needs of that industry will be handled very adequately by that portfolio, like the needs of a large number of industries that Queensland is so proud of are handled.

We hope that in the months ahead the government will follow the example that we have set, that it will charge ministers within the cabinet with the responsibility of addressing these areas—of addressing public transport, of addressing the problems with traffic management and addressing the housing affordability crisis. If the government copies that example, just as it has copied so many other things that the coalition has put forward, then everyone in Queensland will be better off. Everyone in Queensland will be better off and we will avoid the crises that are rapidly developing.

In the arrangements that I have put in place we will have a shadow minister for public transport and traffic management, we will have a shadow minister for state development, employment and industrial relations and we will have a shadow minister for small business and tourism. That is where those particular responsibilities can be well accommodated. We will also adjust the title of the transport portfolio and Vaughan Johnson will become the shadow minister for main roads and transport infrastructure. We will adjust the title to allow Ray Stevens to become the shadow minister for housing affordability and public works.

The shadow minister for public transport and traffic management will be responsible for the development of policy and initiatives in relation to public transport and traffic management statewide, with particular reference to the greater metropolitan area. There is no doubt that the traffic issue is worse in the greater metropolitan area, but every major urban area—from Toowoomba to Cairns—faces the same issues of traffic management and public transport. I will be charging the member for Clayfield with the responsibility of finding policy solutions to those emerging problems to ensure that the lifestyle that people enjoy in those areas can be maintained and that we do not end up with that lifestyle being impacted because of a lack of action until there is an absolute crisis that the government has to deal with. All of those regions should have integrated transport plans. Each major provincial centre should have a public transport system that is accessible and offers a viable alternative to private motor vehicle use.

The other area that I believe is incredibly important and which the government has totally ignored is the area of housing affordability. It is a particular issue for our young people. It is a particular issue for people who are not yet in the housing market. Although the government and the member for Rockhampton in particular might like to wax lyrical about public housing and accuse us, as it did this morning, of ignoring public housing, in time it will be forced to come to the conclusion that public housing is only part of the policy answer. There needs to be a broader policy approach to ensure that as many people as possible can end up owning their own home and that we can have a public housing sector to take up the remainder. I commend the motion that has been moved to the House. I hope that the government can take due regard of the issues that we have raised.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (5.39 pm): It gives me great pleasure to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition because this is a motion about the serious issues that affect the everyday life of Queenslanders and the future of our young people. Every week we see around 1,200 to 1,500 more people move to Queensland. We have known about that for years. We have known about it since the seventies and eighties, yet what we have seen from the government is a series of plans—in particular, a series of plans backed up by very, very expensive glossy brochures. What we have not seen is any action. In fact we do not see any action on the issues associated with growth in south-east Queensland until the problem becomes a public scandal, and then it is too late. It is far too late.

The government has been collecting the revenue windfall from growth ever since it came to office. It has been collecting a bonanza associated with property taxes in particular. But where are the capital works to support this growth that generated that bonanza? What has been done to ease the effect of that growth on the lives of south-east Queenslanders and liveability in south-east Queensland?

The government sat idly by and allowed the burden of property costs, taxes and growth in infrastructure charges and the like to fall fairly and squarely on young first home buyers and on people who do not already have the benefit of being in the housing market—renters and people who live in public housing. There has been no systematic effort to relieve that burden on young Queenslanders in particular.

That is why the opposition has raised the importance of these issues by reflecting them in the shadow ministerial responsibilities. That is why experienced people like Ray Stevens, a former mayor of the Gold Coast, and Tim Nicholls, a former senior councillor on the Brisbane City Council, have been charged with addressing and dealing with the issues that are important in Queensland today—issues such as population growth that are affecting the lives of people in this state.

In the transport area, despite years in government, what we have seen is the Brisbane and the Gold Coast choked with overcrowded transport because we have put in no new rolling stock, we have built no new railways, we do not see new express trains. We see something I would never have imagined we would see: railway trains leaving Brisbane stations with passengers left behind because they cannot fit on them and buses driving past where they would normally stop because they cannot fit people on them. This is affecting everyday lives, our quality of life and liveability. That is why we have recognised the seriousness of this problem that the government has refused to recognise.

After Labor's years in government, where is the innovation? Where are the plans to look at a metro or some light rail or a monorail for Brisbane? Where is any sort of serious innovative approach in recognition of the fact that Brisbane has moved from being a small capital city to being a major international city? The planning and the ideas have not kept pace. It is not just ideas the government is devoid of; it is action. Where is the infrastructure, the roads, the rail, the rolling stock that are needed to accommodate the extra people moving to Queensland that the government has known about ever since the day it came into office?

Have a look at the Western Freeway. Have a look at Moggill Road. Have a look at any of the other major radial roads servicing Brisbane. Have a look at the traffic on the Gold Coast. People have stopped going to the Gold Coast because you cannot move down there. You cannot depend on arriving at your destination within a reasonable time. One of our young staff jogged to work this morning from Cannon Hill. She jogged to work quicker from Cannon Hill than the time it takes me to drive here from Brookfield on a busy day.

Time expired.

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (5.45 pm): I move the amendment circulated in my name—

That all words after "House" are deleted and the following words inserted—

- recognises the population and economic growth of Southeast Queensland and the Government's implementation of detailed plans to manage growth and build for the future;
- acknowledges the Beattie Government's substantial funding increase for roads, public transport services and public transport infrastructure;
- supports the Beattie Government's call on the Federal Government to match Queensland's unprecedented funding; and
- acknowledges the Beattie Government's programs to make housing affordability a reality.

Let me make a couple of general points before I start. It is all very well to come forward with changes in names for the shadow ministry—and I congratulate the shadow ministry on all of that—but anybody who has been around government for some time knows that the minister for transport is also the minister for public transport. You do not need a PhD or to be a rocket scientist to work that out. So let us deal with that issue.

We have had a very strong commitment to public transport to the extent that we have been building the eastern busway. And who has been out there opposing the eastern busway? The opposition. When Caltabiano was in here—and I can use that name now he is not here—he spent every waking minute trying to undermine the eastern busway we were building. So do not talk to us about public transport. What a lot of hypocrisy we have just heard. When it comes to building public transport, which we are doing with the eastern busway, who were the ones out there wrecking it? The current National-Liberal Party opposition, so let us just kick that one out into the grandstand.

Let me turn to the second issue. Let us talk about this business about wine industry development. The fact is that the wine industry is a very important industry in this state. I make no apology whatsoever for putting it in the area of an emerging industry.

Mr Seeney: What of other emerging industries?

Mr BEATTIE: I heard the Leader of the Opposition in silence. A bit of courtesy would not do any harm. The reality is that I know the Leader of the Opposition is under pressure from the member for Southern Downs. The member for Southern Downs, the former Leader of the Opposition, is making his move to come back. We understand all of that. We can read the tea-leaves. There is no point trying to undermine the wine industry in the member for Southern Downs's own electorate. We know what is going on here. Frankly, from our point of view we will ignore it.

I heard the Leader of the Liberal Party go through and extol the virtues of his team. They are decent people. He mentioned Tim Nicholls. Well, is Tim Nicholls running against the Leader of the Liberal Party this week or next week? Tim has not been out there giving any pledge of great loyalty to him. I have to say, to be perfectly honest, that I can understand where he is coming from. But to actually come in here and masquerade as some united team, they are kidding nobody. The truth is: if they cannot govern themselves, they cannot govern Queensland, and that remains. If they think people out there have changed their views—

Mr Seeney: That is not going to work for you next time, old mate. You're going to have to think of something else next time. You'll have to come up with a new one.

Mr BEATTIE: As I said this morning, at least the member has the courage to ask me questions. But I have to tell those opposite that if they think the community out there has changed its view about them being nothing more than a disunited rabble they are kidding themselves. What they need to do is get a sense of reality.

I am pleased to see that the National and Liberal parties in this state are finally turning their minds to the importance of maintaining the liveability of south-east Queensland because all they have ever done is knock and oppose what we have done. They oppose the eastern busway. We are building a dam at Traveston and they oppose it. We have a recycled pipeline and they oppose it. They oppose desalination. They are the greatest opposers since the beginning of time. I am not sure where the Leader of the Opposition has been in the past, but I am happy to talk about our strategies, our plans and what we have been doing. In terms of long-term plans—

Mr Seeney: Tell us how much water infrastructure you have built!

Mr BEATTIE: If the member wants to be an alternative Premier, one of the things he needs to learn is good manners. I do not mind an interjection but a constant babble is nothing. Queensland has experienced intense pressure from massive population growth. We understand that. We have somewhere in the vicinity of 1,500 new Queenslanders every week and about 1,000 of those are moving to south-east Queensland each week. National population figures show that seven of Australia's top 10 fastest-growing districts are in Queensland.

We have developed the South East Queensland Regional Plan and we are the first government to ever do that. It has been designed to manage growth and protect the region's vital green lungs. In addition, in 1995 we launched the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program. This is the most ambitious infrastructure plan since Federation. These plans are reviewed and updated regularly. That is why after last year's election I appointed Queensland's first ever infrastructure minister, the Deputy Premier. The Deputy Premier is driving this massive infrastructure program—an $80 billion investment in south-east Queensland for the people living here now and the people who will live here for the decades to come.

Let us talk about our record on roads. From 1 July 1998 to 31 March 2006 almost $8.5 billion was spent on the building, maintenance and operation of the road network across Queensland. Currently, our road building program sustains around 31,000 jobs a year and directly benefits industry and the travelling public by boosting transport efficiency and traffic safety and improving community access. The five-year Queensland roads program is worth $11.5 billion, which more than doubles the $5.2 billion five-year plan that was in place when my government came to power in 1998. It includes $9.7 billion in state funding and $1.7 billion from the Commonwealth government.

For the information of the House, I table evidence of what my government is doing and the appropriate plans. I hope that the opposition will read them.

Tabled paper: Report by the Office of Urban Management, dated May 2006, titled 'South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2006-2026'.

Tabled paper: Report by the Office of Urban Management, dated June 2005, titled 'South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005-2026'.

Tabled paper: Report by the Office of Urban Management, dated October 2006, titled 'South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005-2026 Amendment 1'.

Tabled paper: Document titled 'Housing Affordability'.

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (5.52 pm): I second the amendment circulated by the Premier and I do so for one simple reason. The motion that was moved this morning by the opposition '... calls on the Premier to follow the example set by the Queensland Coalition ...'. I could not possibly support anything that suggested to the member for Brisbane Central that he follow the coalition in just about any area of activity.

What is the example that has been set for us by the Queensland coalition? This week we have seen the opposition take an extraordinary great leap forward by changing the names of some of its portfolios. That is a great leap forward for infrastructure development in a busy, growing state! The opposition claims that this change has refocused its efforts on the things that matter. Have we not seen that refocused effort on brilliant display this week? What a stunning debut we have seen from the new, refocused, renamed, rebadged team!

Unlike the opposition, we know that getting projects like this happening takes real work, real policy work and real grunt. For example, with Airport Link we have to find the money in the budget, do the value for money assessment, work across different levels of government such as the Brisbane City Council and departments like Transport, Main Roads, Treasury and Infrastructure, and the Queensland Treasury Corporation. Then we have to work with the market and the industry.

Changing names does not equal action. Press releases do not equal policy. That is the example that the opposition gave us this week but, of course, when we talk about capital works and infrastructure we really have to look at the example set by the Queensland coalition when it was in government. What was the example that it set for us to follow when it had the chance to be on this side of the chamber?

Within weeks of coming into government in 1996, it imposed the infamous capital works freeze. It came into government and adopted an entirely new approach to infrastructure development that had never before been seen in this country. It was called, 'Just stop everything.' Its policy was not just to do nothing but to stop the things that were actually happening. It said, 'Don't sign the contracts. Don't let those cranes on site. Lock up the gates.'

Mr Johnson: We did not stop one roads project, and you know that.

Ms BLIGH: The member for Gregory was a part of the cabinet that decided to do that.

Mr Johnson: I am going to speak in a minute, Minister.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Gregory will have an opportunity in a moment.

Ms BLIGH: It brought the state's construction industry to its knees. Should we follow the coalition example? Only lemmings would do so. What is our example on these issues? We have a comprehensive infrastructure program. This year $4 billion has been spent on transport and roads infrastructure alone.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Ms BLIGH: The member for Moggill asks what the action is. I can tell him about some of the action: the Tugun bypass is under construction and is six months early, the extension of the Centenary Highway is under construction, the Gateway duplication is under construction, the Inner Northern Busway extension is under construction, the Boggo Road busway—which was also opposed by Mr Caltabiano—is under construction and Airport Link is out to the market with four leading consortia bidding to be part of that project. This morning I outlined in detail our progress on affordable housing. That list stands in stark contrast to the examples of the opposition that we are meant to be following so assiduously.

Of course, there is one other stunning example set by the coalition in recent times that we could follow. It relates to the mighty power of the deputy leader of the coalition when it comes to transport infrastructure. He is the parliamentary Leader of the Liberal Party in Queensland and the deputy leader of the Queensland coalition, but can he get the Liberal Prime Minister to fund a road in his own electorate? No! He is a complete failure in that regard. We actually supported him. He had the bipartisan support of this House, but in his own electorate he could not get a project up and running. That is not an example that we would seek to follow.

I am glad that the Premier is back in the House as this motion '... calls on the Premier to follow the example set by the Queensland Coalition'. I have to say: do not do it, Mr Premier! We have a comprehensive package. We are rolling it out. There is activity happening across all sectors the likes of which has never been seen in this state.

Mr STEVENS (Robina—Lib) (5.56 pm): I am very pleased to speak to the Premier's amendment to this motion, the last paragraph of which states '... acknowledges the Beattie Government's programs to make housing affordability a reality.' If, as this motion claims, there are programs in place, I have to say that they are not working. It is very expensive out there.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I rise to a point of order. The program is called Homelink.

Mr SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr STEVENS: This morning, the Minister for Public Works and Housing showed that he does not understand what affordable housing means. Housing is about much more than simply having a roof over one's head. Housing is integral to family stability and social assurance, and it impacts on one's hope for independence and security. Consequently, affordable housing is essential to the health, wellbeing and ongoing sustainability of the community and our state generally. Housing is about our sense of space, our sense of self and our connections with the broader community. Australians have always regarded their home as their castle.

The great Australian dream of owning one's own house is being eroded by the policies of the Beattie Labor government. The government has forgotten about young people and low income earners who cannot afford the very high prices that are found throughout south-east Queensland.

Presently, Queensland is experiencing demand pressure on housing stock, particularly in the south-east metropolitan region and many regional and coastal cities. Unfortunately, the Beattie government has not recognised the dilemma facing people. The Beattie government and its ministers are still captivated by the South East Queensland Regional Plan, which saw many brownfield areas become high-rise densities. That forced the prices up in main capital cities and heavily populated areas. As a result, land prices throughout city areas skyrocket and young people and low income earners can no longer afford those homes.

I will say this very simply so that the minister can understand the issues involved with affordable housing. If we have affordable houses that young people can buy, there will be fewer people in the rental market. If there are fewer people in the rental market, the price of rents is forced down. When the price of rents come down because of the oversupply of rental properties, more people can rent those properties and are not forced onto public housing waiting lists. Those lists are growing rapidly. Currently, 37,000 people are waiting five to seven years for a house. The government should not be proud of that record. Former minister Tom Burns would not be proud of such a record. He did a good job in this portfolio. He recognised the importance of public housing.

That explains to the minister what affordable housing means and why opposition members have taken it upon themselves to be proactive and take steps to make affordable housing an issue. The government completely overlooked some areas in its rapid response to the programs of urban consolidation that started with Brian Howe in the early nineties and led to the planning policies which reduced the pressure on the government to provide associated infrastructure.

In 2005 Mr Bob Day AO, the national president of the Housing Industry Association, outlined in his Tom McKenna memorial lecture on 'The quality of sprawl' the consequence of limiting urban growth or urban consolidation policy on land supply and the impact of land prices. Bob Day stated that over the past five years the price of residential land had doubled—

Where once land represented 25 per cent of the cost of a new house and land package, it is now sitting at 50 per cent.

This doubling in land prices is a disaster for a young family trying to build their first home. However, it is important to remember that land scarcity is the product of restrictions invoked through planning regulation and zoning. In Bob Day's words, 'Land shortage is a matter of political choice, not of fact.'

Earlier today the Deputy Premier cautioned me against listening to the industry, which was rather curious, particularly when the industry supports the government with large amounts from that Gold Coast development industry. It is particularly interesting that she—

Time expired.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (6.00 pm): The Beattie Labor government is spending more on roads, transport and transport infrastructure than any government in Queensland's history. For the next five years we will spend, on average, $44½ million each and every week for five years on our roads. In July 2004, the Beattie Labor government presided over a transport revolution, the introduction of TransLink. It introduced integrated ticketing, reduced fares and introduced a massive capital program. My colleague the Deputy Premier spoke about roads. I will not speak much about them. I will talk about public transport.

From 1 July 2004, in Queensland there was the largest integrated ticketing area in the world. There was one ticket for buses, trains and ferries. There were fare savings of, on average, 60 per cent for commuters. In Redcliffe 98 per cent of fares were cut. To travel from Redcliffe to the city went from $7.40 to $4.00, down 46 per cent. In Logan, 80 per cent of bus fares were cut. The cost of a trip from Eagleby to the city was cut by $2.50 a journey, the average commuter saving over $1,100 a year.

The members opposite can talk about transport disadvantage. All of the evidence indicates that it is those outer urban areas that transport disadvantages the greatest, and that is where we are really delivering to those people. Also, all full-time tertiary students receive a 50 per cent discount. There are also off-peak daily tickets for pensioners with a 33 per cent discount. I have shown this table to you, Mr Speaker. I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* a table of public transport services and infrastructure expenditure.

Leave granted.

Beattie Government Public Transport Revolution

Public Transport Services

Year	Expenditure	Patronage
1997/98 (National/Liberal)	$365 million	103 million journeys
2006/07 (projected) (Beattie Labor)	$733 million ($507 million net of revenue)	162 million journeys
Increase	$368 million 101% ($142 million net of revenue—39%)	59 million 57%

Public Transport Infrastructure

Year	Fixed Capital Expenditure*
1997/98	$44 million
2006/07 (projected)	$309 million
Increase	$265 million—602%

* note—does not include rail investment

Mr LUCAS: At the same time we were cutting fares we massively boosted services. For the first two years of TransLink, investment was up $92 million or 25 per cent. Patronage is up 27 per cent, which is 33 million extra journeys. The biggest investments and results have been in the outer urban areas. In the Brisbane northern region there has been $3.6 million extra spent for the last two years. Patronage is up 34 per cent from Redcliffe, 223 per cent from Caboolture and 54 per cent from Pine Rivers. For the Ipswich region, there was an extra $3 million for the last two years to boost services, and patronage was up 97 per cent. For Redland and the eastern area of Brisbane, there has been an investment of $4.4 million extra for the last two years, and patronage is up 28 per cent. There has been $7½ million for the last two years for Logan, and there has been a 71 per cent patronage increase. The Gold Coast has received an investment of $10.6 million extra for the last two years and has had a 27 per cent patronage increase. These extra funds will provide at least 75 new buses on routes with most demand.

It is not the Lord Mayor of Brisbane who buys these buses. The buses are financed by us, and that is why they are bought in other areas. That is why Clark's Buses have new services. We saw the cheek of the mayor recently when he went out and launched a St Lucia bus service to the University of Queensland where not one red cent of council money went into it.

What about our capital program? Almost $9 billion has been allocated to boost public transport infrastructure over the 20 years of SEQIPP. From 2004-05 to 2007-08, the state government has allocated $1.76 billion for infrastructure development including $1.09 for Citytrain upgrades and $673 million for bus infrastructure.

Since July 2004, TransLink has funded the purchase of 500 new buses, including 171 for the Brisbane City Council. The northern busway will cater for 47,000 trips per day in 2016. The northern busway and Airport Link are expected to reduce traffic on Lutwyche Road by up to 45 per cent. Who is putting in all the money for the Airport Link? The Brisbane City Council is putting in a few million dollars, but the rest of it comes from the state government.

The Inner Northern Busway is 40 per cent complete. It is six months ahead of schedule, and it is under King George Square up onto platforms 1 and 2 in Roma Street. What a revolution! There will be 760 Citytrain services meeting 2,000 bus services a day.

Construction has started on the Boggo Road Busway. It will cost $217 million, and it is working in with the council's green bridge. When it opens it will carry 512 buses a day carrying 13,000 people. Work commenced in 2006. It will integrate with the rail station and go on to the University of Queensland.

Who opposed the Eastern Busway? Michael Caltabiano. Some $600 million has been allocated in the SEQIPP plan for that. The Coorparoo to the city commute will be cut from 18 minutes to 10 minutes, saving commuters nearly 1½ hours in travel time per week. The commute from Capalaba to the city will be cut from 54 minutes to just 25 minutes. What did the former member for Chatsworth want to do? Oppose it. The members opposite have the cheek to lecture us about what we are doing in public transport.

This investment is not just occurring in Brisbane. I am very impressed with some other work, and the member for Robina agrees with me on this work—I hope you did not talk the mayor into the monorail solution, Mr Speaker—and this is the possibility of a guided busway light rail on the Gold Coast. We are now doing the planning with the Gold Coast City Council. That will be the best rapid public transport system in Australia in a regional city. We are prepared to put our money on the table when it comes to that.

What about our Citytrain rolling stock? Very shortly, 72 new carriages will be rolled out by 2009 costing $207 million. Some 48 carriages will have toilets for long-distance journeys, they will have improved lighting, electronic passenger information systems and better visibility for passengers. It is not just that rolling stock that will increase the size of the fleet by 33 per cent and around 10,000 additional seats. What about the rail lines?

Time expired.

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—Lib) (6.05 pm): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in favour of the motion proposed by the Leader of the Opposition and to say a few words about the amendments proposed by the Premier.

The motion deals with an issue of fundamental importance to residents of south-east Queensland. I noticed that the Premier spent the first three minutes of his five minutes playing politics. He did not want to address the issues. He would rather have a bit of fun and play a bit of politics. Similarly, the Deputy Premier had her go for the first two minutes of her speech. Half of their total time was spent playing politics rather than addressing the issues that are of importance to Queenslanders and, in particular, south-east Queenslanders. That is the way this government behaves. It spends half of its time playing politics and the other half thinking about how it is going to go about it.

While that has been happening, increasingly the liveability of the south-east corner and of many parts of Queensland has been destroyed by inaction by this Labor government. The failure to provide an adequate and secure water supply for residents and businesses of the south-east is the most current manifestation of this failure. It is only the latest in a long line of failures affecting liveability in south-east Queensland that includes health services, electricity supply, road network improvements and public transport.

I heard the Deputy Premier talk about having real grunt. The Deputy Premier's real grunt is taking away real rights from real people. That is how she goes about building it whether it is an advanced water treatment plant at Pinkenba—where there is no EIS, no development approval and no opportunity for opposition—or whether she is at Traveston Dam taking land off people because they have left it too late other than to do the same thing. The government is taking the people's rights away from them and

imposes the dead hand of government straight over the top without any consideration for local people. That is why this motion is so important for the people of Queensland. That is why one would hope that the government would take up the motion rather than move the facile amendments that the government has proposed here. It is a wake-up call to the government not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

The motion asked the Premier to focus on the real day-to-day issues that concern Queenslanders who are sitting in their cars going nowhere, who are being left behind at train stations and who are riding the 'Bombay express' from the Gold Coast to Brisbane and back again. These Queenslanders are sitting there wondering what their government is doing for them to improve their lot in life, and at the moment it is not a lot. Will that wake-up call be heard? Will the Premier do something about it? To paraphrase that old Fourex commercial, I feel an apology coming on.

What is the experience of the public transport shemozzle in Queensland? We have had a lot of discussion about money. I want to deal with money because it is interesting when people look at the money that this state has been getting from the GST. We know this Premier was the first or second to sign up to the intergovernmental agreement. What are the GST payments to the states? Let us look at them. In 2006-07, the estimated payments to the state of Queensland will be $7.968 billion—almost $8 billion—which is up from the first year's payment of $4.6 billion. That is a 71 per cent increase in four years. That is just GST. I am happy to table that report from the Commonwealth budget financial papers.

Tabled paper: Document by the Australian Government, dated 18 April 2007, titled 'Commonwealth-State Financial Relations'

How much is the government really receiving in total all the way through? It is receiving $13.4 billion this year, and I am happy to table that paper.

Tabled paper: Document by the Australian Government, dated 18 April 2007, titled 'GST Revenue Provision to the States'

The argument about money does not wash. It does not wash in Queensland, not only because we have no water but because the government's numbers are wrong. The government is making it up as it goes. So we have property taxes going through the roof, we have coalmining royalties going through the roof, we have GST going through the roof, and what is the government doing? It is ripping off local governments; it is amalgamating them out of the way and then crying poor to the Commonwealth government for more funding. It is a farce.

What is actually happening in relation to public transport? We have a lot of spin as usual and not a lot of work. We have something called the Draft TransLink Network Plan. I have here an extract from the web site today, which was updated on 10 April. The Draft TransLink Network Plan—and that title sounds good—went out for public consultation from 4 April to 13 May 2005. What year are we in now? April 2007? Public consultation on the plan officially closed on 13 May 2005. That is where the draft plan is at. That was two years ago.

Mr Reeves: We're implementing it.

Mr NICHOLLS: Well, where is it? I went to the 'frequently asked questions' on the site, thinking it might tell me when it will be a plan rather than a draft, when they will get the consultation out of the way. I have the draft here; it is a big plan with lots of paper, but there is no answer. It is still not there.

Time expired.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (6.11 pm): The member for Robina really led with his chin when he started talking about my very good old mate and former employer, Tom Burns. What a great job he did on public housing, and I cannot help but agree with the member. But we need to remember that we had a Labor federal government back then that cared about public housing and injected money into it. That was $400 million ago. That is how much this federal government has taken out since then. So when Tom did a great job, he had a federal Labor government that was actually pumping cash into public housing in Queensland.

Mr Purcell interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I take the interjection, and that is about to be revisited because we have a federal government that clearly believes in the private market. The member for Robina is to be congratulated for his spirited defence of home ownership in this country, but that is what the Liberals always talk about. For the last 10 years, that is all the Liberal Prime Minister has been able to talk about because he has forgotten about the people who will never, ever be able to afford to buy a house. They are the people I am in parliament to help as well. Yes, I want to help the young people get a home. I have two sons myself and I want to see them own a home, but I also want to help the people who will never be able to afford a home, the people who John Howard has pushed off the edge of the universe as far as the rest of the community is concerned. The truth is that a low income earner has no chance—and never, ever had any chance—of owning a home, and we should not be discriminating against those people accordingly.

It was interesting that we had this sermon on the mount about *The Castle* and all the rest of it. It was just rhetoric with nothing to fill it. Honourable members should remember that the Liberal Party has gone to every election since I have been a minister with no housing policy whatsoever, and tonight it

announced that its policy is to flood the rental market so that rents will come down and people will be able to rent. That is the policy tonight; I do not know what it will be tomorrow. The day I need a lecture from the member for Robina about housing affordability is the day I will jump astride a giraffe and ride in the Melbourne Cup. The truth is that the member for Robina has no comprehension about this, and his disgraceful record as mayor in the Albert shire when he did nothing at all about housing affordability stands in stark contrast to what we have done.

So what have we done as a government? The first thing we did was try to find an array of products out there to make this work. One example is Homelink. The federal government has been asked to bring forward 10 years of expenditure on rental assistance. We will then put in a capital grant, we will manage the property, we will ask councils to kick in their bit and then a private investor invests in it. That fits into a market that hitherto has been left behind of people who are not entitled to public housing; this is in places like Mackay and the rest of them. Where does the Liberal Party stand on Homelink? Nowhere. Not one word in the last 12 months has come from the opposition in support of that. We have our cash ready to go, but I cannot even get an answer from the federal minister on this. I cannot get an answer and it will not cost the federal government any money—not one cent.

The Brisbane Housing Company and the Gold Coast Housing Company, which is in the member for Robina's own backyard, are innovative means of providing people with affordable housing. There was no mention of that tonight. The member for Robina said we have not got any runs on the board, but in just the last couple of weeks we put some more runs into his own backyard. He does not know anything about it or care about it because they are not the group of people opposition members are targeting. They are targeting the people that they want to make buy a home. They are targeting only that group of people, and that is why they have only got the term 'housing affordability'. 'Housing affordability' to them means simply being able to afford to purchase a home. That was the exact point I made this morning, and he has given himself up on that tonight.

The Brisbane suburbs improvement scheme has been supported by the member for Stafford and he is doing wonderful things. He is getting affordability down by keeping communities together. He is doing great stuff. Remember what happened when that tory Caltabiano was out at Chatsworth. He was the previous member and he supported it. That was great. Off he was going, chugging along, getting it done well. But of course Caltabiano undermined it, and so did the Liberal Schrinner there, and we are back to tories over there with a scare and fear campaign portrayed by the Liberals.

That is what they do every time we try to build public housing, and members should remember that. Everywhere I have tried to build public housing on the Gold Coast a scare campaign has been started. When we tried to actually keep communities together and keep housing prices down by involving the private sector with home ownership programs in the Brisbane suburbs improvement scheme, what did we get from the Liberals? We got opposition all the way through.

I am delighted to state my record. There has been everything from community renewal, urban renewal, sales to tenant incentives, the upgrading of public housing, the building of new and innovative public housing and the introduction of new and innovative products on the market. The one big thing that is missing is a federal Labor government.

Time expired.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (6.16 pm): In rising to speak on this motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, I wish to say that I believe it is a very responsible motion. It talks about the crisis of gridlock—and when we talk about gridlock in south-east Queensland, we are principally talking about Brisbane—overcrowded public transport, inferior road infrastructure and unaffordable housing. The main issue I want to touch on this evening is road infrastructure, but I would like to take half a minute to talk about some of the issues the Deputy Premier raised this evening.

I put on notice here today that when the Borbidge-Sheldon government came to power it did not freeze capital infrastructure projects because there were no capital infrastructure projects to freeze. The government talks about the koala tunnel. What happened with the koala tunnel? Where are the Gold Coast seats that disintegrated and disappeared there? The reason that happened was the government's indecisiveness. It could not make a decision. The Premier at the time, Mr Goss, ummed and ahhed and wished to God he had never heard of the koala tunnel. When we put up an alternative policy of rebuilding the Gold Coast motorway under traffic, we took a leaf out of what happens in Europe where they follow the existing corridors and build under traffic. We did that but who took the kudos for it? The Labor government. Yes, it said that it built the Pacific Motorway, but we were the ones who built the Pacific Motorway.

What about the south-east transit? It was the Borbidge-Sheldon government that started the south-east transit, the busway, but it is those on the other side that take credit for it. It was the procrastination of the Goss government that created a lot of these problems in the south-east corner and created the turmoil; it was due to poor planning.

The Roads Implementation Program and the Integrated Regional Transport Plan are two documents—especially the IRTP—that are living, working documents in conjunction with the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005-2026. They are very important documents that the government needs to get right, but this government has not got it right.

I heard the member for Clayfield say tonight that $13 billion has come from the federal government. Thank you very much, Peter Costello. It is Peter Costello who has given the Queensland government the oxygen to keep going. If the Queensland government did not have Peter Costello in the federal government, it would not have any projects to keep going. We talk about the population explosion here in the south-east corner. In 2026 we are looking at having 3.71 million people, maybe 3.97 million. That is nearly double what is in Brisbane now. Most importantly, the building and maintenance of new and existing infrastructure is not happening.

While the coalition supports the government's proposal to upgrade the existing Ipswich Motorway why over the last 10 years did this government not take advantage of low interest rates and put in place PPPs or PFIs, private finance initiatives, and build some of this infrastructure? Look at what has happened in Toowoomba. There are 17 sets of lights to get through that city. Heavy transport cannot get through the place. That is an impost on heavy transport, an impost on industry and an impost on the livability of these places.

Look at the north coast. The government talks about the duplication of the Gateway Bridge but we have to get to and from the Gateway Bridge and we have to build the infrastructure up to the bridge. The same situation applies with respect to the duplication of the Hornibrook Highway. What has happened to that? We have heard nothing about that. Where is the member for Redcliffe? She is not in the House tonight. I bet she will ask some questions over the next three years.

There is a crisis in Queensland because of the non-active Labor government. This government does not have a forward plan for road infrastructure. We know precisely why it is procrastinating. All the dollars for capital works programs have gone into social programs to prop up the future initiatives and ideals of the Deputy Premier who those opposite will launch into the role as Premier of Queensland. God help Queensland if we get her as Premier because that will be the end of capital works programs—the real building of this state that we witnessed under coalition governments in the past. When we come back into government in a very short while we will again re-engage Queensland in the building of capital works programs. In conjunction with Campbell Newman we will rebuild south-east Queensland and get the traffic flowing, get the trains going and make this place livable.

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (6.21 pm): It gives me great pleasure to join the debate tonight and support the amendment moved by the Premier and seconded by the Deputy Premier. This debate is really about the massive population growth and economic growth that is occurring in the south-east corner—growth, for the sake of argument, which is also occurring right across the great state of Queensland.

This government has as one of its central planks, one of its strongest cards in the pack, the strong economic management that this government has had over the life of the Beattie Labor government. Over that time we have seen the Queensland economy move from strength to strength and lead the nation in terms of economic growth, lead the nation in terms of population growth. In no other part of the state has that been more evident over the time that the Beattie government has been in power than in the south-east corner. The state of Queensland has always been a regionally based economy. It has always had the strength of powerhouse regions. But it is true that in the south-east corner in recent times we have seen population growth exceed what we have seen before.

As the planning minister I recently released a population update for the state of Queensland that showed that during the last relevant year, 2005-06, 50,900 people moved into the south-east corner. That is the equivalent of the population of a city the size of Redcliffe moving into the south-east corner. Why are they coming here? They are coming here because of the buoyant economy that the Beattie government is presiding over. They are coming here because of the lifestyle that we are presiding over. Most particularly, they are coming here because they see that with the South East Queensland Regional Plan and the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan that underpins it, this government has taken the far-sighted decisions that will plan and chart the course of growth that will occur in the south-east corner for the next 20 years.

Late last year as planning minister I attended the Planning Institute awards, awards that gave national recognition to the South East Queensland Regional Plan and the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan that underpins it for the far-sighted way in which they deal with the challenges that come with being a fast-growing region. Brisbane and the Gold Coast remain the fastest growing cities in the state of Queensland. The regional plan and the infrastructure plan that underpins it are there to provide and guide that growth and provide the infrastructure that Queenslanders need.

Other members of the government set out the strong record that this government has in terms of investment in transport and other areas. As the sport minister I know that the public transport system operates brilliantly when it comes to a particular local sporting facility in my electorate. As the local

member and the sport minister I have seen patronage levels of up to 82 per cent for Suncorp Stadium and sometimes up to 90 per cent. That goes to prove the rigour of the public transport system that operates in Brisbane.

I want to make particular mention, given the nature of my electorate, of the NightLink initiative that this government put in place. Since 2005 more than 200,000 revellers have been transported home by the revolutionary NightLink public transport service that this government put in place. Those are real investments and real initiatives of this government.

I note that the member for Clayfield wanted to make great reference to the federal government in this debate. We would like a greater focus from the federal government. No-one understands why, when it comes to infrastructure and nation building, the federal government does not see the policy sense, indeed even the political sense, in providing investment in infrastructure and why it does not invest in things such as the water grid that we are trying to build here in Queensland. Why does the federal government not come to the party?

It was pointed out by the member for Gregory that we should be thankful to Peter Costello when it comes to the welfare of this state. When it comes to housing affordability there are not too many people since the re-election of the Howard government who are feeling particularly thankful to Peter Costello because there have been four interest rate rises since 2004. We all remember that the Howard government was re-elected promising to keep interest rates low. What has it added to the cost of a mortgage in Brisbane? It has added $58,000. There have been four interest rate rises since the Howard government was re-elected, re-elected on a platform of saying that interest rates would not go up. It has added $58,000 over the life of a mortgage to the cost of an average home in Brisbane.

What does that mean? When the Howard government was elected to government in 1996 the annual income needed to buy a house in Brisbane was $38,390. What does it cost now? What does the average young person need to buy a house in Brisbane thanks to the way that the Howard government has so brilliantly mismanaged the issue of housing affordable? It is $92,000. That is a fair way from $38,000. I support the amendment.

Division: Question put—That the amendment be agreed to.

AYES, 50—Attwood, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Choi, Croft, Darling, English, Fenlon, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, Miller, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, McNamara

NOES, 27—Copeland, Cripps, Dempsey, Elmes, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey. Tellers: Rickuss, Dickson

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Division: Question put—That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

AYES, 50—Attwood, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Choi, Croft, Darling, English, Fenlon, Fraser, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, Miller, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, McNamara

NOES, 27—Copeland, Cripps, Dempsey, Dickson, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey. Tellers: Rickuss, Elmes

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Sitting suspended from 6.40 pm to 7.40 pm.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 1339.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (7.40 pm): I wanted to pay due regard to the local governments in my electorate. My electorate is unique—not entirely unique but somewhat unique—in that I have 12 local authorities with whom I have worked very closely since I have been a state member, and of course my background in local government meant that I was very much aware of the work that local governments do. Within the Callide electorate there is the Banana shire, the Monto shire, the Eidsvold shire, Mundubbera, Gayndah, Biggenden, Kolan, Mount Perry, Murgon, Wondai and Kilkivan in the South Burnett and then there is the Taroom shire to the west. They are 12 shires that all represent their communities. While there is a degree of similarity, they are all very different. They are certainly all small shires. Banana shire is probably the biggest and Mount Perry is probably the smallest.

I am fairly well acquainted with the activities of those shire councils, and I am well enough acquainted certainly with the mayors and the councillors and the economic conditions of those shires. There is one thing that I want to make very clear tonight. I want to correct this assumption that I have already heard in this debate that somehow or other small shires are not economically viable. I can tell

the House that at least two of those shires in that list that I read out that I am personally acquainted with have millions of dollars in reserves—millions of dollars and considerable millions of dollars in reserves. They have provided for their communities. They have met the expectations of their communities over a period of time and they have been able to accumulate millions of dollars in reserves. It is simply not true to suggest that somehow bigger local governments are more economically viable. The shires that I represent prove beyond doubt that small shires can be economically viable. One of the challenges that will face the minister and the reform panel that he has put in place is how they are going to address that issue of the dichotomy between successful small shires and relatively less successful larger shires.

The Premier stood in the House today and reeled off a list of mayors who supported the government's move yesterday. When one knows and understands local government, as I and the member for Warrego do, it comes as no surprise that there are a list of mayors and councils who will support the sorts of massive amalgamations that are being touted, because shires in the bigger cities like the idea of extending their boundaries and extending their spheres of influence and extending their areas and gobbling up some of the smaller shires. I noticed—and it was patently obvious—that there has been no support from any of the small shires across the state for what the government has done. They feel betrayed. They feel betrayed because they have entered into the Size, Shape and Sustainability process with the best intentions. I know that the shires that I represent have entered into the Size, Shape and Sustainability process with the best of intentions. They were working through a process, and they were working through a process with the intention of trying to achieve a sustainable outcome and a sustainable future for them and their shires and to do so within the parameters that they wanted to achieve and within the parameters of representing their particular communities. Because they have had that process brought to such an abrupt end, it is certainly understandable that they feel betrayed and they feel that the government has been less than honest with them.

I believe that the government could have done it differently. It is always beholden on the opposition to say what we would have done. I believe the government could have done it differently. I believe that the government and the minister especially could have done it differently and maintained the faith with local government. I believe that there could have been a time limit drawn. There could have been a time frame imposed by which that voluntary process should have or could have or must have been brought to some conclusion so that that process could have been transparent and we all could have seen what the local governments could have brought forward from that process.

We are left in a situation now where the minister and the Premier have stood in the parliament and said that they have taken this particular action because there was nothing that was going to be achieved. Well, that is their opinion. That is an opinion that the minister and the Premier can express. We will never know whether that is an actuality or whether it is an opinion that has been arrived at because of certain political imperatives. I believe that local governments should have been given a chance. They should have been given a chance to bring that process to some finality. I acknowledge and understand the time limits that were involved in respect of the next local government elections, and local governments knew and understood that. There needed to be a decision made about how that process was going to interface with those time limits on the next elections, and local governments knew that. It was a subject of discussion everywhere I went in my electorate. Everywhere there were councillors it was a subject of discussion.

But I think that the decision that has been made to bring that process to an abrupt end and to override or to take away the opportunity that local government had to resolve this for themselves was unfair and unjust, but it has been done. It has been done and I know that it is irreversible. I know it is not going to be changed, so now we have to deal with it. We have to deal with the decision that has been made. We have to try—all of us—to ensure that we get an outcome that is best for the communities that we represent as state members and that provides a local government model that can be successful into the future.

There are big boots to fill, if you like, because in the area that I represent one cannot argue that the local government model that has been in place for the last 60 or 70 years has not been spectacularly successful. It has been spectacularly successful in building and growing the communities, building and growing the capacity of those communities, and building and growing the lifestyle opportunities for the people who are part of those communities. Anything that is put in place to replace the 12 councils—the 12 local governments that make up the Callide electorate—must pass what is usually referred to as the no disadvantage test. I would suggest that any proposition to amalgamate these councils and put in place any sort of a bigger regional council or some other model has first to establish that it can do a better job, that it can somehow do a better job than the local governments that have been in place for so long.

I was interested to see in the explanatory notes which accompanied the amendments the minister tabled that the objectives of the review panel are listed. I will refer to them, because I think it is critically important that we understand that they are legitimate objectives and that they have to be met. Any new model has to address the objectives exactly as they are listed. The explanatory notes state that the objectives of the review are to establish local governments that, firstly, facilitate optimum service delivery to Queensland communities; secondly, effectively contribute and participate in Queensland's

regional economies; thirdly, better manage economic, environmental and social planning consistent with regional communities of interest; and, fourthly, effectively partner with other levels of the government to ensure sustainable and viable communities.

I will address those objectives one at a time. The first objective suggests that a new model is going to be developed that can facilitate optimum service delivery to the communities. If I look at that objective from the perspective of the communities that I represent and ask myself whether any sort of amalgamated council or regional council can ensure optimum service delivery, or some form of better service delivery to my communities, I struggle to understand how. A feature of the local governments within my electorate is the closeness that they enjoy with their communities. They are an essential part of the fabric of their communities. It is a relationship which I think members who live in large urban areas will always struggle to understand. They will probably never understand the relationship between people in smaller communities and the councils that administer those smaller communities.

The second objective is that the new model will effectively contribute and participate in Queensland's regional economies. The contribution that councils make to their local economies is incredible. It is almost immeasurable. In some cases, councils are the biggest employers in their local economies. The challenge for those who would suggest that there is some sort of better model is to outline how that better model is, first of all, going to facilitate better service delivery and at the same time contribute and participate in the local economies to the same degree as do the existing councils. It is very difficult to understand how that is going to be achieved.

The third objective is to better manage economic, environmental and social planning consistent with regional communities of interest. This is one area where I think a broader regional view probably does produce a better outcome. But the councils involved have already been addressing that issue. They have been cooperating with each other across what have become known as ROCs—or regional organisations of councils. They have been sharing the expertise that is necessary to achieve those better environmental and social planning outcomes. They have done so at their own behest and they have done so across Queensland in a way that has produced some great outcomes. In my area, they have done so by sharing staff, by sharing expertise and by sharing planning schemes. As long ago as when I was in the local council—which is nine years ago now—we were sharing town planners to produce a consistent local town plan across the region. In the years since then there has been a lot more of that sort of shared activity across the areas.

The other objective that is listed is to effectively partner with other levels of government to ensure sustainable and viable communities. Once again, ensuring sustainable and viable communities has always been the first priority of the councils who represent those communities. I can readily understand how an effective partnering with other levels of government can be better achieved by bigger, more bureaucratic structures. But I cannot escape the conclusion that that has a heck of a lot to do with the decision that was announced yesterday and which has been forced on local councils. From a state government perspective, a large number of smaller, independent, often feisty mayors and councils is a lot harder to deal with. The idea that reducing the number of councils and replacing them with larger regional councils that are more bureaucratic and more like a regional government will make the state government interface easier to achieve is understandable.

Mr Fraser: There's the argument the other way—that they're stronger and a bigger thorn in the side of government.

Mr SEENEY: That that makes it more difficult for state governments to handle?

Mr Fraser: Certainly. That was the experience in Victoria.

Mr SEENEY: That is true, but I suggest to the minister that, if he had been to local government conferences and confronted 100-odd mayors all representing their own communities, he would know that they are a formidable force and difficult for any state government to control and direct. And so they should be, because that is an effective representation of the entire state. After all, local governments are often referred to as grassroots democracy. Having been in local government at that level, I know that it is. It is a very direct form of democracy. Everybody knows a councillor's phone number, everybody knows who their councillor is, everyone has a direct link with the decision maker and they are prepared to exercise that direct link. That produces an outcome that has a lot of positives.

I believe that the challenge for those members who seek to change this system is to demonstrate to the communities most affected that they are going to be better off. How that is going to be measured is also a challenge, because over the past couple of days we have heard much about protecting the ratepayers. Is the measure going to be the amount of rates that people pay? Can anybody legitimately assure the ratepayers in the shires contained within my electorate—in Monto, Eidsvold, Mundubbera, or Gayndah—that somehow a large regional council will produce for them a lower rate bill? If they can, that is a positive and it will go a long way towards engendering some support. Can the proponents of this change suggest that a large regional council will somehow add to the social fabric of those communities? I doubt it, but if they can then that, too, will be a positive.

I think there is an enormous challenge facing those who seek to change this tried and true system to demonstrate how another system is going to be better, because these councils have well and truly served the communities who have elected them for a long time. These councils are economically viable and, in some cases, almost embarrassingly so in terms of the amount of cash that some of them hold in reserve. They are an essential part of the fabric of the communities that have elected them. The communities will be incredibly poorer for their demise. The people who live in those communities will be poorer for their demise.

Time expired.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (7.58 pm): The Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 is certainly that—another legislation amendment bill. The date 17 April 2007 is going to go down in Queensland's history as the day the Beattie Labor government made a change that I hope is going to be advantageous to local government and the future of local government. This morning I heard the minister say in this House that 16 March 2008 is going to be a better day for people in local government in Queensland, or something to that effect. I hope those words are not going to echo in the minister's ears for the rest of his life.

I know that it is the prerogative of government to make change but, if something is not broken, why fix it? I know that a lot of issues relating to local government probably need addressing. But, as previous speakers have said—and I have heard other opinion makers in the media over recent days stating precisely this—local governments are important.

Local government is the most important bastion of government that we have in this country. I think it emphasises what democracy and the democratic process in a state like Queensland is all about. It would be impossible to manage this state with a regionalised government. We need local government to assist the state and federal government to give true and proper representation to the multitudes of people who live right across this great state.

I heard the member for Callide, the Leader of the Opposition, refer to the 12 local authorities that he represents. I represent 11. Some of those shires are certainly very big shires. The Diamantina shire out in the far south-west corner is a shire of 88,000 square kilometres with a population of probably fewer than 300. Let us look at that shire on the basis of not how many people there are but the productivity factor.

Let us look at the productivity factor—the huge expanses of roads that have to be maintained, the huge numbers of tourists who come through on an annual basis, the fact that that shire has to spend over $100,000 of its own money to uphold medical services in that remote corner of Queensland in Bedourie and Birdsville, the two centres in the shire. It is a very progressive shire, and I think the minister would agree that it is probably one of the most progressive remote shires in the state, if not in the country. It is a shire that has gone out of its way to be progressive, to be dynamic and to be understanding of the needs of its people. It is a shire that boasts an Indigenous and non-Indigenous population and it is a shire that I think is an illustration of all things good. That is applicable to all of those shires in western Queensland.

I would like to quote what Gary Peoples, the mayor of the Aramac shire, said this morning on ABC Radio. He spoke about the assets and the social impact that amalgamation is going to have on some of those people who live in those remote areas. I have always said that the important thing we should be doing in this state is looking at the United States model in relation to states like Nevada and Arizona, where they are mainly desert states. People live in those vast states in inland US. Inland Queensland is no exception.

We are interfaced with road and rail infrastructure. We have had a debate here tonight in relation to infrastructure issues confronting the south-east corner of Queensland. We talk about the population explosion due to the mass exodus of people from the southern states who are coming across our borders to live in our great state of Queensland. There are probably between 50,000 and 70,000 a year, and many of them want to settle in the south-east corner. We talk about the impost of that on government, particularly when it comes to infrastructure. We talk about the roads, water, electricity, schools, hospitals—the whole bit.

I believe that what the government should be looking at is diversification and taking advantage of decentralisation. We should look at centres outside of the south-east corner—places like Dalby, Charleville, Roma, Emerald, Longreach, Blackall, Barcaldine, Biloela, Kingaroy, Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Mount Isa and the list goes on—where the social infrastructure is in place, where kids can get a grade 12 education, where they do have good hospitals, where they do have people out there having a big go. They interface with those smaller shires.

The Isisford shire, which is in my electorate and is only an hour and a half drive from Longreach—about 120 kilometres—spends somewhere in the vicinity of half a million dollars a year in Longreach on services that they need for their little community and the money that is expended in the local business houses. It has a flow-on effect to the regions. All these sorts of dollars are going to be lost with amalgamation. That is what I am saying here tonight.

In relation to the commission that the government has established to conduct an appraisal of the boundaries, I salute all of the people on that commission. They are all very responsible people. Some of them are ex-members of this parliament and all three of them have been very good members of this parliament. I believe that those three people will have a very good understanding of what the social needs are of the people in those regions.

I think the important function of this group is to look at legitimate outcomes. The member for Callide touched on some tonight. He talked about social planning, regional economics and sustainable communities. We also have to look at economies of scale. I mentioned the Diamantina shire earlier. That is applicable to all of those shires. Winton shire is no different; neither is Isisford, Aramac, Longreach, Barcaldine, Blackall, Tambo, Jericho, Murweh, Quilpie nor Barcoo. They are all shires where there are not a lot of people—they all have populations of fewer than 5,000, I admit that. But look at the productivity of those regions.

They have just gone through probably the worst drought in living history but, still, there has been some handy rain in that country. I know their productivity will come back again with the return to normal seasons. People will go back into those regions and work there. There is tourism there—people who visit the region fall in love with the region. A lot of people do not even know the region exists. I am talking about not only the central west and south-west but also over the range.

We have the Emerald shire, which is another very important part of my electorate—it is a major shire in my electorate—and the Bauhinia shire. Both of these shires are now interfacing with the magnificent coal industry, the farming industry, the horticultural industry and all of the other industries associated with the dam at Emerald. It is the productivity factor again—the dollars generated by those industries. We all know what the coal industry has done for Queensland and the growth in Emerald itself. We have seen that growth passed on to the Bauhinia shire, Springsure and Rolleston. It has a multiplying effect that is going right across the region.

I spoke on ABC Radio this morning about the factor of four. Those members who have done economics would understand the factor of four—it has a multiplying effect as it goes along. The coal industry is helping the rail industry and the rail industry is helping the port industry. It explodes as it goes along. I quoted the beef industry this morning. For every bullock that is produced in the south west and killed at Dinmore, three jobs are produced at Dinmore, or whatever abattoir it is, each day. It is the multiplying effect. It is the generation and the compounding factor that is enhancing people's quality of life, giving them employment and seeing the gross national product of this country grow. It is growing through the blood, sweat and tears of people who do it hard and who work long hours to generate that productivity.

I also want to touch on the social aspect of this. I say to the minister here tonight that if any of us are in this House and do not have a social conscience I believe we should not be in the place for a start. The most important thing we can do as members of parliament is to understand the needs of our people and look out for the people we represent. If they have a problem we have to be able to address that problem or find them help wherever their area of concern can be addressed.

If the amalgamation of these shires does become reality, and we see some of those smaller shires pushed into oblivion because they will cease to have a base of operation, we will see the asset base of many of those people who live in those towns decrease. I always like to quote Senator Barnaby Joyce. I do not always agree with everything Barnaby says, but at the end of the day he says a lot of good things that do deserve credit and deserve to be brought to the fore. None of us are perfect. The one thing Barnaby has said is that if you live in a place like Cunnamulla your house might be worth $50,000 and if you live in St Lucia your house might be worth $500,000 or $600,000. At the end of the week in Cunnamulla you might bring home $500 and at the end of the week in St Lucia you might bring home $1,000. The value of your house in St Lucia is going up every week but the value of your house at Cunnamulla is not going up every week. Your asset in Cunnamulla is not increasing because of the region—the low economic return on investment out there, the jobs and economies of scale. There is a whole heap of factors that impact on the economies of those communities.

It is important to remember that people live in the regions because they were born and bred there, and because they love the place. I am a classic example. I have lived all my life in the back country. I was born and bred there, and I love it to bits. I would not be standing here today, representing the people of that region, if I did not love it. I would probably be living somewhere else.

It would be a strange old world if we all wanted to live in the same place. In Queensland a lot of people choose to live in remote western and northern communities such as yours, Mr Deputy Speaker, or in coastal areas. Regardless of where in the state people live, they are important. It is absolutely paramount that we recognise that, regardless of where they live, people should be given the opportunity to form a formidable and integral part of their communities, and that they should be allowed to represent those communities if they so wish.

My electorate covers some 380,000 square kilometres of Queensland, although there are only a little over 20,000 people on the roll. However, let us look at the productivity of the region. We have a multibillion-dollar coal industry and multibillion-dollar beef, wool and grain industries. The horticultural

industry has been destroyed by citrus canker, but it will come back again because the people of my electorate never give up. So members should consider exactly how much money my electorate generates. It is all about creating an environment where people want to be and it is about belonging. When talking about local government on that scale, the important thing to remember is that the people do want to belong.

Tonight I appeal to the minister and his government to show some compassion and understanding when the final analysis is done and the details emerge. I ask them to take into account the fact that a lot of people deserve to be heard. For many people, their own backyard is very important. They might not have a lot, so I believe that we have to do the best that we can to preserve what they do have. We have to show some understanding of those people, their lifestyles and the industries that they work in, whether or not they work with the local shires.

The local shires are very big employers, and the minister knows that as well as I do. He is an educated and intelligent man, and he does not need me to convince him of that. People who work in the shearing industry, the roo-shooting industry—although I suppose I should call it the macropod industry—who use a rifle to earn their living, the trucking industry and industries associated with the pastoral industry keep those towns operational and viable. The garage operators in the towns, the grocery stores and the tourist industry further complement communities in western Queensland.

It is important that we take into account the production in those regions and the contribution of those regions to the gross state product. I always use the old adage that the minority provides for the majority and by 'minority' I mean 20 per cent. Usually about 20 per cent of the population allows the other 80 per cent, that is, the people who live in the south-east corner and along the coastal strips, to enjoy a certain quality of life that is associated with the enjoyment of good agricultural products.

I enjoy living in Longreach, and I enjoyed living in Quilpie before that. Like many others, I chose to live in those towns. I hope that, when the commission brings down its findings in three months time, it will be understanding and compassionate and will be focused on a realistic outcome that will be advantageous to regions such as the one I live in.

The CMC has made 19 recommendations which the minister has addressed in this bill. It is worth touching on the issue of local governments being responsible for how local councils are managed and the role of councillors. Like members of parliament, councillors must declare any pecuniary interest, interest in businesses and so on. I compliment the government and the minister for that, because in this modern day and age government should be about transparency. It should be about honesty and decency, and making certain that the people whom we represent are not being hoodwinked or cheated by their local representatives. Today, local government is so important because it is at the front line of representation and interfacing with government. It is absolutely paramount that the best men and women represent our local communities.

In closing, I trust that the minister will be fair and reasonable in his analysis of the findings of the commission, and that we will not see too much bloodshed and hurt in relation to this matter. In real terms, we can achieve genuine outcomes through genuine and responsible negotiation. The people who work in local government are very honest, very open and very decent people. The minister would know that from his dealings with them. I trust that we can get an outcome that will not hurt too many people.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (8.15 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Although I say that it is a pleasure to rise, I must also say that the issue that has been put on the table today has created some hassles for members on this side of the House as it represents the absolute gutting of local governments throughout Queensland. This comes after the promises that were made, as detailed by the shadow minister, to lead local governments through the Size, Shape and Sustainability process. Approximately 18 months or two years ago, I addressed a conference at which I suggested that after the election the state government would be looking at some amalgamations and forced amalgamations. I was probably doing that tongue in cheek but, unfortunately, it has turned out to be the case.

The minister and the Premier have said that the effort that has gone into the Size, Shape and Sustainability process will be preserved in the ongoing role of the commissioners, and I can understand that that can happen. However, I have to say that local governments have put a lot of emotional and physical effort into working together to determine common boundaries and to change boundaries. As we heard from the minister today, while some may not have been doing that to the very best of their ability, I believe that a whole range of local governments throughout Queensland were doing a damn good job because they knew that, at the end of the day, if they did not then this government would move in and do something pretty drastic.

I was a spectator of the amalgamation of the Pioneer shire and the Mackay City Council during the last attempt at reform. Even though the mayor of Mackay has indicated that that amalgamation has been a success, I can tell the House that the people who live in the old Pioneer shire certainly disagree with her. The Pioneer shire had substantial assets that were taken over by the Mackay City Council. The old Pioneer shire mostly comprised rural land owned by farmers who made up small communities.

Those communities now have only one or two representatives on the Mackay City Council. The services that are supplied to the old Pioneer shire are pretty meagre. I have talked to the people who live in that area and I can assure the minister and others that they no longer receive the same level of services that they received under the old Pioneer Shire Council. The situation is possibly getting worse simply because the enlarged Mackay City Council is struggling to deal with the boom times that the city is experiencing. One would have to imagine that, under a review of the strategy we are currently looking at, the Mackay City Council area would possibly be enlarged by including perhaps one or two other shires. The council would represent that region with some difficulty.

My electorate covers six shires throughout that region between Rockhampton and Mackay covering Sarina, Broadsound, Nebo, Mirani, part of Livingstone and part of Mackay. The demographics of those local communities are unique, as the member for Gregory has indicated. They are different. They have different needs. Let us look at the differences between Nebo shire and Sarina shire. Nebo is struggling with a coal boom in its area. It has around about 3,000 permanent residents and about 6,000 itinerant people. In some way the community has to cater for that number of people. The community is getting very little support to upgrade its sewerage plant. It is only getting a 40 per cent subsidy whereas under normal circumstances it should have got an 80 per cent subsidy. The shire is trying to build facilities to enable that enlarged population to have recreation time in the shire. It is getting very little support for that. When this is looked at across all of Queensland, the imposts that have been put on local governments over many years by, more particularly, the state government but possibly by the federal government are quite extensive.

In my own shadow portfolio of emergency services, particularly in disaster management and SES et cetera, the costs that have been transferred on to local governments are quite severe. The councils have to maintain an SES group and run the disaster management program, which they get very little support from the state government for. On top of that, the councils run vegetation management programs such as weed and pest control, and quite a lot of other programs are run by the local government that are not really properly picked up in costs by any other level of government. The councils do not get compensated at all in terms of running those protocols.

I wonder, if those councils were expanded, how it would ever look after the expanded area. The best part about the smaller shires in my electorate is the fact that someone can ring somebody up and they know exactly what they are talking about, where they come from, what their problem is and they can almost tell them what their problem is before they can enunciate it.

If we are going to judge the councils or local governments in terms of dollars and cents, I think we have just completely lost the plot. The reality is that there is more to local government than making a profit. The reality is that being in a local government is about service. It is about looking after the people in that region. Quite frankly, all of my shires develop their area for the benefit of their local community.

Take Sarina Shire Council, for instance. Our businesspeople said that people drove through Sarina; they did not actually ever stop. The council got off its backside and got some money to do a pilot plant, and set up a small sugar mill and a distillery. My wife works as a volunteer there. This plant is now distilling alcohol and selling mango schnapps and butterscotch schnapps, and hopefully in the future it will sell different types of alcohol. Hopefully it will also showcase the sugar industry so they can take people through the plant, showing people the equipment and the history of the sugar industry in the Sarina region. I would go so far as to say that, if it were not for the Sarina Shire Council doing that, that facility would not be there. If we had a council that was remote from that region that would not happen either.

I have another instance that probably happens throughout Queensland as well, except for in the major metropolitan areas. I was involved in helping setting up an ag unit at Sarina High School, which is a state government program. There was a minimal amount of money for that. The council came in and did most of the plumbing and a fair bit of the earthworks. No money changed hands, yet at the end of the day that will not ever show up on the profit and loss table of the council.

When people really look at what local government does, we can never put it down on a profit and loss sheet nor should we ever try to do so. If people are going to start judging whether or not the local governments are profitable or sustainable, people really want to look at what they actually do in the communities. In my region, Broadsound shire has a coastal based component and an inland based component. If someone was to take away, say, the coastal component and split that up between, say, Sarina and Livingstone, there are going to be small communities on the Bruce Highway that are basically 150 kilometres away from anywhere. It is going to be very difficult for people in those communities to get any sort of representation or services under those conditions. If the commission is not going to look at how those smaller communities are serviced, it is just wasting its time.

Most of the shires in my electorate are dealing with boom times. The shires are having some difficulty getting affordable community housing. It is costing the shires a lot of money to do that. Very little money flows in from the state government except for special programs. The shires do a lot off their own bat. At the end of the day, unless those sorts of things are taken into consideration, I really wonder where we are going. Small, effective local governments—and I use the word ‘effective’ advisedly

because there are different ways of judging that—are a far better way to deliver services into our regional communities than one larger local government that is remote and not dealing on a daily basis with the people in that area.

I reflect on the way in which it is proposed to look after the Torres Strait island communities in terms of the regional council, with one member who sits on that council coming from each of the islands. I thought that we had left the one regional council model quite a number of years ago. Members representing the islands travelled to that regional council. I thought we went away from that because that was not effective. I am wondering if we are going back to the past. Perhaps the minister could enlighten me on that as we move forward in this legislation.

Mr Fraser: It is not in this bill. None of that is in this bill. That will come at a later time.

Mr MALONE: Okay.

Mr Fraser: Torres Strait is not in this bill. There will be a separate act.

Mr MALONE: Okay. Moving on, the things that councils do in our coastal communities that probably never get on to a profit and loss sheet are issues such as maintaining boat ramps and maintaining the roads to the boat ramps. They are usually half funded by Transport. Quite often extra work goes into maintaining those boat ramps that are never covered by Transport. For instance, in a lot of the creeks and rivers on the central Queensland coast, and probably other places, the boat ramps do not wash clean. They have mud on them from time to time that has to be cleared off. If a council has to hire a truck to come 100 kilometres to wash those ramps it is quite expensive. When there is a council truck that might be working on a road close by, the operators of the truck can wash the mud off. The cost is minimal. These are the sorts of things that really have to be considered. I am concerned that we are going to see some of the councils in my electorate being amalgamated. The ratepayers, even though they may pay a few dollars less in rates, will actually have very little or no services that they are currently used to.

We have had the issue of the Environmental Protection Agency imposing very strict terms on the way in which councils handle rubbish. I can assure members that that has been a huge impost on councils. Throughout my area, the council put in place temporary transfer stations and now it is actually closing them down because under the regulations they are not acceptable et cetera. We now have people who live 50, 80 or 100 kilometres away from a regional dump who have nowhere to put their bigger articles or even just their white goods—their refrigerators et cetera—which under normal circumstances they would just take to the local transfer station. That can no longer happen. Even mowing contractors cannot dump their clippings. They have to cart them to a regional recycle station which, as I said, could be 100 kilometres away.

Instead of actually enhancing services, we are restricting services. Councils are endeavouring to supply a service to their community but their costs are going through the roof. At the end of the day, as I said, most of those costs are being imposed by the state government. There is hypocrisy in this whole deal because the state government is comparing local governments in terms of profit and loss and the ability to be sustainable, and then we look at a situation where the state government has all this money flowing in with the GST, stamp duty and a growth tax which it can utilise very effectively.

I have to say that my own electorate probably reflects 90 per cent of the electorates and local governments throughout north Queensland. In terms of disaster management, for instance, we saw the councils take the lead role after Cyclone Larry in looking after their communities and making sure that the building programs were brought into place, the rubbish was cleaned up et cetera. If we amalgamate shires and reduce the number of councillors, for instance—and that cannot be done unless the number of employees is reduced as well—I wonder whether we will be able to handle a major disaster in Queensland. I am really concerned about this legislation. As the shadow minister has said, there is no way we can support it.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (8.33 pm): I rise to contribute to this debate on the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. There is no doubt that the Size, Shape and Sustainability issues are the central issues in this bill. That is because our local council—our grassroots level of government—is both the closest to the people and the one the people are most familiar with. It is something that, if it is to be changed, should be changed slowly, with care and great deliberation and in full consultation with the people themselves. This was recognised with the five-year time frames and referendums both being referred to in the explanatory notes. However, in light of the announcements of yesterday morning by the Premier and the local government minister, I believe the Size, Shape and Sustainability objectives now need even closer attention.

This bill brings local councils and councillors more in line with state government election requirements by amending the Local Government Act 1993, the City of Brisbane Act 1924, the Electoral Act 1992 and the Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act 2004. I find it hypocritical that this government, which has made a fine art of gilding the lily, is now bringing in legislation calling for more transparency and honesty in local government. The reckless speed with which the Beattie

government is bringing in these changes is breathtaking. It is simply short-circuiting procedures that affect an entire tier of government, which is to be forced into massive changes on an almost willy-nilly basis. This is arrogance in the extreme.

Our next round of local government elections may be more transparent, but this government's dictatorial approach remains as murky as ever. It would have been far more credible if it had provided real leadership by being more honest and accountable itself, but instead it has made a polished art of cabinet confidentiality, secrecy and spin-doctoring, and there is little or no evidence of widespread problems with the running of the majority of local governments in this state.

There were matters relating to a specific council on the Gold Coast and a specific election. Yes, they highlighted some potential issues, but let us remember that the people of Queensland in general have no real problem with their government at a local level. But they certainly do have problems with the government being delivered to them from Canberra and they certainly do have problems with the standard of government being delivered by 'Team Beattie'. But it is not those levels of government that are the subject of the bill before us tonight.

The explanatory notes for these amendments spell out a number of steps towards achieving the stated objectives of more transparency and accountability and of bringing local government elections more into line with state elections. These include greater standards of disclosure regarding financial matters, including third party expenditure returns, donor returns, loans, gifts and fundraising. There will be definitions of what constitutes a group of candidates and prohibitions on local government candidates from undertaking electoral activities together unless they are part of a registered group. Penalties will be introduced for electoral offences consistent with those applying in state elections, and independent and group candidates will have to have specific accounts for election purposes.

Councillors will face a formalised process dealing with what constitutes a conflict of interest. They will be required to identify any conflicts and declare them prior to taking part in decision making. Any councillor conflicts of interest must be minuted by the council. However, most local governments are already operating on this basis, so this will be more of a formality than anything else.

There are other provisions, including provisions for the appointment of a financial controller to a local government in certain circumstances. Councils will also be required to provide a formal statement of reason for deciding not to accept officers' or consultants' recommendations for significant decisions. Another provision makes it an offence for a councillor to direct council officers and there will be a penalty of 85 penalty units if this provision is breached.

Electors should have the final say on the size, shape and boundaries of their council, but this government is determined to deny them their voice even on such an important issue. As I have said, the boundary changes and amalgamation issues relating to the Size, Shape and Sustainability review processes are my main area of concern.

I know that the four tablelands shires in my electorate do not want to amalgamate. Some are happy to share some services, but amalgamation has not been on their radar. All these shires have been represented well and do not feel the need to amalgamate at all. The councillors, the CEOs, the administration and their workforces have all served their communities well. They have not asked for this, they do not want it, and it should not be forced on them.

The matters as originally presented in this bill have been overridden by the announcements of yesterday morning. Originally, councillors were to have five more years to consider their needs through Size, Shape and Sustainability processes. The original explanatory notes stated that the results of this exercise would underpin reforms to the Queensland local government system. There is even an indication that this process, taken in detail over a number of years, would lead to 'some potential structural/boundary changes'—in plain English, this means amalgamations and shifting boundaries.

This is nothing less than an attack on the three-tiered Westminster system of government that underpins our tolerant and democratic society. Following the recent announcements by the Premier which gazump his own legislation, it is an attack he is determined to make. And it is an attack which appears to be underway, despite clear evidence that amalgamations in particular are now clearly identified in academic work as not—I repeat, not—being a good answer to supposed sustainability issues for local governments.

A February 2007 working paper by the Centre for Local Government in the School of Economics at the University of New England spells it out. The abstract at the beginning of the paper says—

Local government has always been the favoured policy instrument for Australian state and territory governments intent on improving the operational efficiency of local councils. This policy consensus has flown against mounting evidence from Australia and abroad that council consolidation is not only largely ineffectual in reducing costs, but also generates significant unintended negative consequences. Despite the recent wave of compulsory amalgamations in New South Wales, there are at last significant signs that the erstwhile consensus on the desirability of local council amalgamation appears to have evaporated. This paper considers the deliberations of various recent reports into Australian local government on structural reform and demonstrates that a sea change in opinion on amalgamation has indeed occurred.

I will not quote the paper in full but I do refer members to it. It is significant that amalgamations are now clearly identified as not only not good but in fact bad. We do not need to see our local governments lumbered with amalgamations which are now well understood to be pointless.

There are references in the bill before us tonight to allow changes to boundaries to be voluntary. But this too has been gazumped. I believe it is vital that any decision on such vital matters as amalgamations and boundary changes be left with the affected communities. Local councils are the true grassroots government. I firmly believe that the people should have every chance to speak out on issues like this.

We have all heard over and again the Premier complaining about how Canberra is stripping away state rights and how a new federalism is needed to ensure that states continue to have a voice. Yet, at the same time, he and his government have set about gutting local government and destroying an entire tier of our Westminster system of government.

It is gobsmacking to hear the Premier and the minister argue that councils need to amalgamate to cope with the increasing burdens they face when it is the state government that is imposing those very burdens in areas ranging from waste disposal to weed control and a host of other matters well beyond the traditional roads, rates and rubbish responsibilities. It is underhanded to screw councils into the ground with these extra cost burdens and then insist that they have to amalgamate to overcome them. I do not support the bill.

Ms van LITSENBURG (Redcliffe—ALP) (8.41 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. The purpose of this bill is to amend the Local Government Act 1993 to establish a legislative framework that facilitates the restructure of Queensland's local government system to improve sustainability and service delivery. The rationale for this is that there has been no major reform to local government since its inception and the current boundaries have not changed since then.

There are many local government regions around the state that encompass large areas but only sparse populations in small communities which are costly to provide services for. The rate base does not support the various community needs. In fact, of the 297 local governments in Australia with less than 5,000 people, 88 are in Queensland. The Queensland government has a history of support for local government that exceeds that of other states. This bill is about continuing to do that because this government is committed to supporting local communities.

A recent PricewaterhouseCoopers report commissioned by the Australian Local Government Association concluded that between 25 and 40 per cent of local governments across Australia are unsustainable with 30 per cent having the potential to collapse. A similar report on financial sustainability produced by the Queensland Treasury Corporation concluded that 43 per cent of councils have a weak, very weak or distressed financial status.

There are a lot of stresses on local governments today. These include the need to provide infrastructure, such as roads, sewers and parks. It can be difficult to find the funds to provide this infrastructure at a time when development is occurring across the state. Many of these small local government bodies also have difficulty in acquiring the specialist staff required to plan, develop and manage economic, environmental and social infrastructure. The reforms in this bill aim to place councils in the position where they have the wherewithal to provide the services for their communities that they were elected to provide. That will make for better government and healthier and more prosperous communities.

The appointment of an independent bipartisan Local Government Reform Commission to review the structure of local government across the state will support the Size, Shape and Sustainability program that 118 local governments have been engaged in for over a year. The amendments will change provisions in the existing act which do not support the proposed statewide reform of local government and will establish a process to facilitate the transition of existing local governments into new local governments. This commission will report back in August. The necessary changes will occur in time for the local government elections. This is vital to the continuity of services in every small community across the state, particularly with elections coming up at the beginning of next year. There will also be an Indigenous committee established to facilitate issues with Aboriginal local councils.

I took the opportunity to speak to the mayor of Redcliffe, Councillor Alan Sutherland, yesterday when this legislation was announced. He supports this bill. He fully supports the establishment of the Local Government Reform Commission as announced by the Premier and the minister and sees it as an opportunity to provide better outcomes for the citizens of Redcliffe.

Although there is a lot of uncertainty for many communities and local governments, including possibly within my own electorate of Redcliffe, we need to stay focused on the result—better local government and long-term security for our communities. The minister is to be commended for delivering this effective bill which will cause some short-term pain during the reorganisation but will deliver more effective local government for hundreds of communities across Queensland. It will make the business of government less stressful for many local politicians. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr GRAY (Gaven—ALP) (8.47 pm): I rise to support the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill which is before the House. Unlike many others this evening I want to focus on the original intent of the bill rather than the recent amendments. This bill amends the Local Government Act 1993 and the Electoral Act 1992 in order to ensure that future local government elections are conducted in an accountable and transparent manner which is a more than reasonable expectation of the Queensland community.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr GRAY: Bring it on. The amendments proposed in this bill have arisen from the Crime and Misconduct Commission report of the inquiry into the 2004 Gold Coast City Council elections. It could be referred to as the 'Gold Coast city clean-up bill' or possibly it could be named after the individual councillor of the Gold Coast council whose courage, tenacity and persistence led to the CMC inquiry. I of course speak of Councillor Peter Young—one of the few Gold Coast city councillors held in high esteem by the community.

As most members would be aware, I contested a by-election in the electorate of Gaven in April 2006—a by-election I lost. When doorknocking throughout the electorate the question asked of me most frequently was: 'What are you going to do about the Gold Coast City Council?' As the CMC inquiry was underway I could only correctly reply that as an inquiry was underway the government would have to wait for the outcomes of that inquiry before taking necessary action. Had I made some rash promise about wanting to sack the council or work towards it I am convinced that I would have won the by-election by 3½ per cent, not lost it by that amount—but I do not make rash and undeliverable promises. My presence here tonight speaks volumes for the sense of the electors of Gaven when given the choice between rash and undeliverable promises and promises of honest intent.

As the minister said in his second reading speech, this bill is a clear statement of the Queensland government's commitment to the outcomes of the CMC inquiry and to avoiding a repeat of the deception many voters felt over the Gold Coast City Council elections. Of the 19 recommendations flowing from the CMC report, the government will implement 17 in full or in part to give effect to that commitment. I now wish to refer to the comments of the CMC head, Mr Needham, in his foreword to the report of the inquiry findings which provides clear comment on the character or lack of character of many of those investigated during the inquiry. To paraphrase Mr Needham, he said—

On the third day of the CMC's public hearing in this matter, a Gold Coast solicitor ... suggested ... that 'some people in Brisbane' did not understand that, on the Gold Coast, big business meant development. A number of comments by later witnesses reflected a similar theme: outsiders (like the CMC) can never really understand the way things are done on the Gold Coast.

In their view, to paraphrase LP Hartley's famous opening line to *The go-between*, 'The Gold Coast is a foreign country; they do things differently there.'

It was also suggested in several of the final submissions to the inquiry that counsel assisting did not understand the political arena. They were accused of 'political naivety' for criticising candidates who made false or misleading statements during the election, and called pious and hypocritical for suggesting that councillors should be concerned about the likely public perception of their actions. The latter comments appeared in submissions made on behalf of partners in an advertising agency, and presumably reflect their views about acceptable political behaviour.

He continues—

The LGAQ categorised the actions undertaken in this matter at the instigation of ... as a 'perfectly ordinary political process'.

Not so. He continues—

In the Commission's view, what happened in this matter could not legitimately be categorised as an ordinary political process unless the Gold Coast is to be treated as another country, where the ordinary responsibilities of public life and obligations to the law that bind the rest of Queensland do not apply.

Mr Stevens interjected.

Mr GRAY: Let us hear it from the developer's friend, the member for Robina. Get the white shoes out, Ray. They fit you well. And to think this man spent many months advising the mayor of the Gold Coast city. The report continues—

Overall, the evidence given by some councillors at the inquiry, and their conduct outside the inquiry, has created an impression that they are entirely unwilling to accept responsibility for either their actions or their words. They have shown a worrying lack of insight into how their actions might be perceived by the general public and an even more worrying mindset that the only remedial action necessary in this matter is punitive action against those who have made complaints.

So punish the victims was the intent. It continues—

Changes to the public perception of the Gold Coast require a realistic assessment of what the problem areas are. An indication of how much needs to be done before there can be any real change is perhaps best obtained by examining a report produced in 1991 when the Commission examined similar issues about Gold Coast developers making donations to candidates for election (*Report on a public inquiry into payments made by land developers to aldermen and candidates for election to the council of the City of the Gold Coast*).

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Mr Stevens interjected.

Mr GRAY: Nothing was learnt, member for Robina. The report continues—

Despite the 15 years between that report and this, the conduct reported is uncannily similar, even to the extent that some of the same parties are involved.

So they hung around for the 15 years. It continues—

The 1991 report examined, amongst other things:

> whether there had been any attempt to keep confidential donations made by developers (including the Niecon Group and the Raptis Group) to candidates
>
> the taxation ramifications of some of the donations being recorded as business expenses
>
> whether benefits were sought or received by any land developers for the payment of funds
>
> whether any alderman or candidate was compromised or potentially compromised by any payment.

The report concluded that there had been an attempt to keep some payments to candidates confidential because of the belief that the public would react adversely—

fancy that—

to the knowledge that developers helped the election campaigns.

Nothing had changed! Nothing had changed! Public trust in the democratic process for local government elections is vital and a policy intent of this bill is to increase public trust, for if trust is lost in local government then it is also lost in the powers they exercise. At the centre of the CMC inquiry was the philosophic and financial alliances of a group of candidates for the Gold Coast City Council 2004 election, known commonly as 'the bloc'. This bill will ensure that those alliances are declared when candidates nominate. The alliances held by candidates influence their acceptance amongst the voters, thus the definition of a 'group' in the Local Government Act is to be amended to include candidates who undertake cojoint funding.

The question of how-to-vote cards with misleading information has long been a concern, I suggest, to all members of the House. The provision within this bill for the lodgement of such cards seven days prior to the polling date allows for the rejection of cards which do not comply with the act—a very sensible way to go. This public concern over conflict of interest is a very real concern, for when judgements are made by councillors based on vested interest then it is inevitable that someone else pays. In respect of the Gold Coast City Council and, I would suggest, every other council, it is the ratepayer who pays. New provisions in the bill give councillors a great deal of certainty in dealing with matters which may constitute a conflict of interest, particularly when a material personal interest is involved. The obligations in this bill will ensure that councillors clearly identify and declare conflicts of interest and have them recorded so that the public will have access to such records.

In addition, the amendment of section 230 of the act creates an offence and penalty if the councillor directs, purports to direct or attempts to direct a local government employee or other person engaged such as a contractor to supply services to the local government about the way to perform a relevant duty. The amendment clearly defines relevant duty and sets the penalty of 85 penalty points—a substantial penalty, and so it should be. For too long people in Gold Coast city have had difficulty in deciding whether a decision of council has been made on the basis of personal or public interest. They tell stories of many Gold Coast city councillors entering council as paupers and leaving with substantial property empires. I am aware of situations where Gold Coast City Council officers have been told to remove various recommendations from reports because a suggested solution to a problem before council resides in a certain councillor's division.

These amendments also require councils to provide a statement of reason for a decision taken contrary to the advice of council officers in particularly significant matters—a fair and reasonable requirement given that the allegation of self-interest abounds in council deliberations and actions. The insertion of the new clause 246A provides councillors with a process to deal with matters that are conflicts of interest but not a material personal interest. This is a problematic area for many councillors. Section 229 of the Local Government Act provides in relation to a councillor's role that in performing the role a councillor must firstly serve the overall public interest of the area and, if a councillor is a councillor for a division, the public interest of the division; and, secondly, if conflicts arise between the public interest and the private interests of the councillor or another person, they must give preference to the public interest.

At this point I must comment that a number of current and past Gold Coast city councillors would not know what public interest was if it hit them in the face. I refer readers to the comments of Mr Needham that I quoted at the introduction of this speech—

A councillor has a conflict of interest in an issue if there is a conflict between the councillor's private interest and the honest performance of a councillor's role of serving the public interest.

Interest, of course, may be pecuniary or nonpecuniary. New section 246A provides a process that allows councillors to be accountable and transparent about conflicts of interest in carrying out their councillor duties and obligations. It further requires councillors to declare their conflicts of interest and have recorded in the minutes the nature of the conflict. That will become a statutory obligation under the local government council code of conduct.

I turn now to the amendments of sections 383 and 384, which relate to false or misleading information. Clause 20 replaces these sections with a new section 383.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr GRAY: I hear mumblings from across the chamber but, as usual, they are unintelligible. This amendment aligns the offence and penalty for giving false or misleading information with section 98B of the Criminal Code, which applies to state and Brisbane City Council elections. This amendment brings all councils into line, which is a vital point. It is a wise and necessary provision as it amends the bribery provisions. Corruption and bribery are terms that are too commonly applied to many councillors. Much is perceived, but often perception becomes the reality. The focus of this bill is to remove that reality by changing the perception.

The amendment of section 385(2) creates a penalty for asking for or receiving anything that could influence or affect a person's election conduct. Clause 21(2) amends section 385(3) to increase the penalty for giving, promising or offering anything in order to influence someone's election conduct. Again, that aligns the penalty for that offence with the provisions of the Criminal Code.

I desire to speak to many other sections of the bill, but time is limited and I am aware that my colleagues will address the many other parts of this legislation which, to me, is an excellent response to the CMC's comprehensive inquiry. It vindicates the determination of the three councillors of the Gold Coast City Council, led by Councillor Peter Young, to call the election of councillors at the 2004 Gold Coast City Council election a fraud. Those councillors stand tainted by the deceptive and unprincipled arrangements that they entered into with developers prior to the election. They then compounded the situation by denying the existence of the funds that were set up to fund their elections with the obvious expectation of a return on the money invested.

The minister is to be congratulated on acting so correctly and completely on the CMC report by introducing this bill. It is appropriate, well-drafted legislation that will restore a large degree of faith in the fair election process at the local government level. I strongly recommend the bill to the House.

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (9.03 pm): I also rise to speak in support of the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. I am not going to even try to refer to the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report, because clearly the member for Gaven, who is very familiar with it, has said everything and more.

Opposition members interjected.

Ms BARRY: I sit very closely to members of the opposition. I do not think that they have very much to say at all. I commend the member for Gaven for his response.

I am a little bit surprised that those opposite can see absolutely no value in what the minister proposes. In the context of everything that the members opposite talk about and their great concern for their communities, it is unbelievable that they cannot see the obvious benefits in this legislation that has been proposed by the minister. It is history in the making. Queensland will be the last state to undertake such local government reform. I was in Victoria when that state started its reform of local government and I have to say that the bleatings I hear now from the members opposite are familiar. With the good and the bad that came out of that process, it is well and truly about time.

This legislation arises as a result of the cabinet's strategic deliberations and a five-year plan. I am incredibly proud of a government that does that. This is very much about successful and responsible governance—to have the cabinet sit down and ask, 'What are going to be our risks and our opportunities for the next five years?' If we were any business of any size and we were not doing this, we would be called irresponsible. This is about making gutsy decisions.

These reforms are absolutely necessary, because we see imminent failure with the current process. In response to the Size, Shape and Sustainability process delivering in five years, I have to say that I live in the Pine Rivers shire and that shire does not have five years. The electorate of Aspley, which is contained mostly within the Brisbane City Council—and that will not change—is every single day subjected to the problems of not having a coordinated and now-is-the-time approach to infrastructure. The majority of people who live in Pine Rivers and Caboolture travel to Brisbane every single day. They do so by driving up the middle of Gympie Road. My electorate is becoming a car park. Councils need to determine the development—

An opposition member interjected.

Ms BARRY: It is a great road, but there are far too many cars on it, because everybody is coming into the city.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms BARRY: The member should listen and learn. We do not have councils that are able to get their acts together and develop regional centres in which people live and work. I know Pine Rivers shire has a regional centre, but to be honest I have lived there for 11 years and we need action now. We need strategic planning right now. The people of Aspley deserve to not be accommodating everybody's roads. It is all very well for those opposite to sit here and say 'Roads, roads, roads.' Those roads are running up the middle of where my people, who I care about as much as the members opposite care about their communities, live. My electorate does not have to be a car park and a road network for everybody because we have not taken the time to make the gutsy decisions that this minister, this Premier and this government are making on regional communities.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Ms BARRY: I take the member's interjection about small communities. I agree that your heart and soul is where you live. But not one of those members opposite who said that they were committed to their communities mentioned the facts. The facts are that 43 per cent of councils in this state are financially weak, very weak, or financially distressed.

Mr Stevens: Not correct. Not correct.

Ms BARRY: I am sorry, but I am not sure that the member for Robina has any different information. Let us face it: 88 councils service a population of 5,000 or fewer. It is simply not fair to stand in this place and make the claim that all is rosy with the councils. Councillors may be very hardworking people. I have no doubt about that at all. But let us be fair to those people who put themselves up for public office and be honest with them and not hand them what is effectively something that we know is going to fail. They will wear the consequences for that and the communities represented by the members opposite will wear the consequences of inaction. It is absolutely disingenuous of those opposite to stand in this place and give the impression that everything is fine and at the same time say that they care about their communities.

The Pine Rivers shire, which is where I live in my electorate, has 143,000 residents and is one of the major growth areas. The council is very hard working. We hear about people just living and breathing council matters, but hardly a single councillor in the Pine Rivers shire was challenged. People are disengaged from the council. They are disappointed and often feel that there is no way that people are listening to their views.

This process will do a number of things. It appoints an independent commission that is cross-party. It will be ready for the next election. That is a responsible use of taxpayers' money. It will be industrially responsible. It will provide for extensive consultation. It will be the impetus for people in Pine Rivers and places like that to begin to engage with their council and to say, 'We are interested. We are confident that it has plans.' It is courageous. It is sensible. Quite frankly, those opposite have been irresponsible. They should get on board with this change. They should have their say about what is important for their community, because we need to do something and we need to do it now. I congratulate the minister on this legislation.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (9.11 pm): The decision to force councils to amalgamate is one of the greatest attacks on a democratic tier of government ever in Queensland's history. For the past year the majority of local councils have been working to review how best to deliver services to local communities in a process known as Size, Shape and Sustainability. Council had initiated the review and the state government had endorsed it until yesterday when the Premier chose to force amalgamation without any consultation with the primary stakeholders.

The government abolished the SSS process yesterday and decided instead to establish a Queensland Local Government Reform Commission, which will be given a strict three-month deadline to make recommendations on amalgamations and boundary changes. This decision by the state government is centralisation at its worst. Local residents are being denied the opportunity to determine the future of their community. Premier Beattie had laid the foundations where local representation would be removed and rural residents would lose their voice. Our councillors are democratically elected and are the first people most residents approach when they have an issue regarding any level of government. They are well-known, well-respected community members and take their position seriously.

This is dictatorial and does not have the support of the majority of councils in this state. I would like to express concern at the number of council employees whose positions would become redundant as a result of the planned amalgamations. I ask the government whether it will guarantee job security after all of these councils are amalgamated. I am sure that they will be standing up for these workers when these amalgamations do take place.

In my electorate there are nine shire councils—Etheridge, Richmond, Flinders, Dalrymple, Bowen, Peak Downs, Belyando, Jericho and Aramac—and one city council, Charters Towers City Council, which provide wonderful support and representation to their communities. But at present their future is bleak and there is much fear about the future of smaller rural towns that will lose their local representation by being forced to amalgamate with larger councils.

The Premier has already stated that 88 local councils with fewer than 5,000 residents are not sustainable. How could he state that—that 88 local councils with fewer than 5,000 residents are not sustainable. What an antirural government we have. How is the amalgamation of shires going to contribute to the future of our smaller towns? With some towns and some shires more than 100 kilometres apart, there is a risk that the smaller towns will be neglected and deserted. It is with great passion that I vehemently oppose this legislation.

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—NPA) (9.13 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006. At the outset I would like to say that I support what the shadow minister had to say today. It was a full-blooded speech and he covered all of the issues in the

bill. I represent two complete shires, Gatton and Laidley, and three part shires—Esk, Beaudesert and some rural parts of Ipswich city. This legislation is of concern to some of my local councils. I must admit that none of my councils have 5,000 residents or fewer. They are all larger than that. The large ones are very sound, and a couple of them are progressing into a very sound position through the hard work of the local councillors. They work extremely hard. As the member for Charters Towers stated, they are the first contact for members of the community and it does not matter what level of government we are talking about.

Unfortunately, if we do amalgamate these shire councils into enormous shires, I feel that there is almost one level of government that we do not need. I think the state government will become redundant. I cannot see the point.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: The member for Cook would be totally useless. He is now, so that would make him even more useless. The councillors would replace him and he would become redundant. I think that would be quite obvious if we had big shires up in that area. Local government is what it is all about—local issues and local people. As I heard the opposition leader say before, they know your phone number. They ring you up in the morning about whatever the issues are. They see you in the streets. That is what it is all about in our local rural shires.

Mr McNamara: Do they ever lose local councillors? Do they ever get voted out?

Mr RICKUSS: They get voted out. Every four years we have a half—

Mr McNamara: They all sound like saints the way you are talking about them. Some of them are duds, aren't they?

Mr RICKUSS: Some of them are; some of them are not. Some of the blokes in here are duds too, aren't they?

Mr Bombolas: There is one behind you.

Mr RICKUSS: There are a couple sitting over there who are probably on the margin. The government wants to run with the foxes and hunt with the hounds on this issue. There is a proposed super prison in one of my local council areas. The government always wants to talk regional but when it suits it it acts locally. It has isolated the prison into one shire and will not give any benefits to the two neighbouring shires that actually have villages closer to the prison than the shire that has the prison. I had a meeting with the corrective services minister this afternoon. She really was reluctant to support the other two shires. She has isolated two of the shires and is trying to deal with just one shire. Yet this legislation is saying that we want to have one big regional shire. That is the real issue.

Some of the smaller shires have been very successful with some of their recycling programs. They have a really good recycling program in the Gatton shire, for instance, run by one of the disability services people. They have kept it out of the hands of JJ Richards. It creates opportunities for people with a disability. It provides some respite and it is well managed. I wonder when we get into larger shires whether these types of things will keep going. I am sure they will not, and that will be disappointing.

I do support the introduction of divisions. I think that not having divisions within shires is very hard—councils try to look after everywhere but virtually look after nowhere. When they do not have divisions it is very hard to nail them down to the issues. I think divisions are more appropriate for the shires. The councillors then realise that they actually do have to look after certain areas. In some shires they do not look after divisions and that makes it very awkward to get some action, especially for some councils where they are pushed for work.

I heard the Premier say this morning that there is a shortage of workers—town-planners, engineers and that sort of thing. I cannot see how amalgamating shires is going to make that workload any less. If the town-planner is flat out in one small shire, they are still going to be flat out in big shires. I cannot see how it is going to decrease the workload. The workload is still going to be there. The state government has not done enough planning in previous years to have the full complement of town-planners and engineers available for the community.

There are some really big holes in this legislation, particularly in the amendments to the Local Government Act. Unfortunately, I cannot see how we can support this legislation.

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (9.19 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill was introduced originally to address matters that arose as a result of the CMC's report into the 2004 Gold Coast City Council election, a department of local government, planning and sport review of the 2004 local government elections in general, and as a result of the reviews that were being undertaken as part of the government's Size, Shape and Sustainability initiative. Obviously, following the controversial decision announced yesterday in this place by the Beattie government regarding the derailment of the Triple S process and as a result of the amendments foreshadowed by the minister for local government, the bill takes on a very different complexion.

The bill amends the Local Government Act 1993, the City of Brisbane Act 1924, the Electoral Act 1992 and the Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act 2004. The original intention of the bill was to increase public confidence in the election process at a local government level. Until yesterday, the bill may have succeeded with this stated aim, but confidence is now rapidly disintegrating within local government circles across Queensland. The bill is now the instrument by which the Beattie government will deliver its marching orders to many local government authorities and hardworking councillors across the state of Queensland.

The original part of the bill proposes a wide range of changes to the way local government elections are conducted with respect to guidelines about how candidates can conduct themselves and about the roles of various institutions during local government elections. I am going to offer a few comments about those proposed changes because they deserve some attention. It is a shame that the amendments foreshadowed by the minister have been attached to them.

With respect to the proposal to create a caretaker period for local councils, I am not fully convinced of the appropriateness of this measure without some flexibility being provided to accommodate the circumstances of individual councils. Communities expect local councils to be responsive to community needs. Local government is the level of government that is the closest to the people. With respect to local government, as opposed to Queensland state elections or elections for the Commonwealth parliament, the dates for local government elections are fixed in the month of March every four years, so there is less of an opportunity to exploit council decision making for political benefit in the lead-up to an election. Decisions designed to extract a political benefit can be easily exposed as stunts when an election date is fixed.

If the government is committed to introducing a caretaker period, the minister might like to consider giving individual councils an opportunity to have some input into individually determining the length of the caretaker period, depending on the individual nomination periods. As I said, local government is the level of government closest to the community and this means that it needs to be responsive to the community needs at any given time. As such, any caretaker arrangements imposed on councils ought to be carefully considered for any inadvertent disadvantages that it may impose on communities. Indeed, as far as accessibility of local government is concerned, I fear reduced accessibility will be one of the real negatives forced on local communities when the Beattie government dumps its new local government boundaries on the people of Queensland.

With respect to the proposal to introduce a code of conduct for candidates contesting local government elections, such a code would be effective in providing a level of guidance for local government candidates, particularly first-time candidates, as to what is and what is not appropriate behaviour for candidates during a campaign. The code for candidates contesting state elections would probably be an effective model. On the matter of donations to campaign funds for local government elections, I am comfortable with the requirement being proposed in the bill for enhanced disclosure on the part of candidates, donors, broadcasters and publishers to similarly disclose any contributions made to the campaign funds of candidates in local government elections, bringing those contests more in line with the disclosure requirements associated with state elections.

Four local government authorities are covered in whole or in part in my electorate of Hinchinbrook. Members will be aware that in this place I represent part of the Johnstone Shire Council. On the afternoon of Thursday 8 February this year, the minister for local government came into this parliament and moved a motion to dismiss the Johnstone Shire Council. At that time I made two points which I genuinely believed the minister would take on board and accept as reasonable requests in light of the very significant decision that he had taken to dismiss the Johnstone Shire Council and the predicament of the shire.

The first point I made was that I felt strongly that the government should undertake an extensive education program about how the installation of an administrator affects the governance of the Shire of Johnstone. Secondly, and more importantly, I said very clearly to the minister that he should be conscious of the fact that in 2006 this community had struggled, and it continues to struggle, following the devastation caused to that area by Cyclone Larry.

I told the minister that it was incumbent upon him to act in good faith, especially with respect to critical issues pertaining to the government's Size, Shape and Sustainability initiative which involved the Johnstone Shire and the Cardwell Shire. I said that it would be vitally important that the administrator establish very strong links with the community that are representative and reflective of the attitudes of the community with regards to the Triple S process, given that he was not an elected representative. The prospects of the Johnstone Shire Council, the Cardwell Shire Council and, indeed, all councils and ratepayers across Queensland to determine their own future have now been steamrolled by the government.

I register my disappointment with the minister's actions yesterday as they relate to the Johnstone Shire and what happened earlier this year. I feel that to a certain degree he has failed to uphold the statement that he made when responding to the contributions of several members in this House during that debate. According to *Hansard*, on that day the minister said—

> I think it is important and indeed incumbent upon me, the government and the department of local government to make sure that we can in fact provide every support to the residents and indeed to the administrator, Mr Webb.

Taking into consideration what occurred yesterday, I am now left with the feeling that to a certain degree he was being disingenuous when he made those remarks. Now the plight of the Johnstone Shire ratepayers and residents has become even more desperate. Instead of being faced with the obvious challenge of moving through the Triple S process without an elected council—although that is no reflection on Mr Webb, who I believe is doing a good job in difficult circumstances—they will now have their future decided by a government appointed commission.

The Cardwell shire and the Johnstone shire were partners in the Triple S process. I acknowledge that, as far as timeliness for furthering the Triple S process is concerned, those two councils may not have been as far down the track in their negotiations as other council groups were. However, it is also true that in 2006 no two other councils were as seriously affected by Cyclone Larry, which is when the Triple S process began. Certainly in 2006 the Johnstone shire faced tremendous challenges and spent much time, energy and effort in literally putting the shire back together. Therefore, it should have been expected that there would be limits to the ability of those two councils to further the Triple S process as it related to them.

In recognition of those challenges, it is only reasonable to take the view that the Cardwell and Johnstone shire councils deserved more time to progress the Triple S process. The time lines set down by the Beattie government for completing the Triple S process were tight for all councils across Queensland. For the Cardwell and Johnstone shires, they were plainly unrealistic given the enormous difficulties that those shires faced in 2006. However, the state government has not recognised those patently obvious circumstances and has imposed its one-size-fits-all view of the world on those struggling communities.

In the southern part of my electorate, the Hinchinbrook Shire Council and the Thuringowa City Council are members of the North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils known as the NQROC. All six councils that make up the NQROC tackled the Triple S process together. They have advanced the Triple S agenda significantly, working towards a more effective sharing of resources and establishing long-term partnerships between their councils as requested by the government. I know that the councils in the NQROC have put a considerable amount of work and effort into the Triple S process, because I have been speaking to them and they have told me so.

The councils are deeply perturbed by the decision of the government that was announced yesterday to abandon that process. The NQ ROC really grasped the bull by the horns when presented with the Triple S process and did everything that it was asked to do to move it through the process. Its award for compliance with the wishes of the Beattie government is to be ignored and betrayed.

I express my dismay at the sudden announcement by the government yesterday that it will force Queensland local councils to amalgamate without going through a process of consulting local communities affected by the changes. I join with my colleagues from the coalition in condemning the Beattie government's plan to ride roughshod over councils and force amalgamations within a time frame of only months.

The Queensland coalition will maintain its long-held policy stance to oppose the forced amalgamations of local government authorities. We will continue to respect the rights of individual councils and their ratepayers to determine boundary changes or amalgamations with other local councils.

As the member for Warrego and the Leader of the Opposition have already said, amalgamations may be right for some councils but not right for others, and there should not be a one-size-fits-all approach to local government. The councils and ratepayers of the affected shires should make those decisions free of standover tactics from the government.

The government committed itself to working in partnership with councils through the Size, Shape and Sustainability process, but its announcement yesterday shows that it has not been honest about its intentions. Local councils and ratepayers have every reason to be outraged at the duplicity and arrogance of the Beattie government.

Debate, on motion of Mr Cripps, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Acting Leader of the House) (9.31 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Bundaberg Sportsmen and Women

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (9.31 pm): Australians love their sport and, as a nation, we do extremely well at most of them considering our population and vast distances. Sport is just one of the many fields that Bundaberg residents excel at. Over the years Bundaberg has produced a long line of sporting greats that include the likes of Don Tallon, Mal Meninga, volleyballer Anita Palm-Spring, test Rugby League players Antonio Kaufusi and Les Kiss, Olympic swimming medallist Michelle Pearson, winter Olympian Michelle Steele and Paralympic heroes Tracey Oliver and Chantel Wolfenden.

Recently local champion Troy Elder, a member of the Athens Olympics gold medal winning Kookaburras, announced his retirement from international hockey after a distinguished career. Troy Elder is an inspiration to many young people and is a wonderful example to all aspiring young locals of what can be achieved through hard work and dedication. Fame and success has not changed Troy, and he is only too happy to regularly come home and help nurture young local talent. Countless other local rising stars are excelling in a range of sports including occasional Socceroo Clint Bolton and Australian under-20 representative Mitchell Langerak, who has signed with A-League Premiers Melbourne Victory.

Others who are on the pathway to international stardom include Australian surf life saving and open water swimming champion Cara Brown, who has been awarded a scholarship in kayaking due to her tremendous strength, character and work ethic, and 207 centimetres tall volleyball giant Tom Edgar. On the state scene, a Bundaberg teenager has taken out the coveted Surf Life Saving Queensland Pelerman Nipper of the Year award for the second year in a row with Scott Boon following in the footsteps of Riley McGregor. Riley has gone on to win a gold medal and several minor medals at this year's Australian championships, while another Bundaberg star, Matthew Pearce, claimed victory in the under-19 male beach sprints.

Many outstanding deeds have also continued to flow in the local sporting arena. Brothers became the first team to take out the Bundaberg cricket premiership undefeated and seal a hat-trick of consecutive titles. During the season their player-coach fast bowler Boyd Williams laid a claim to a place in the Guinness Book of Records with a hat-trick of hat-tricks while three other players excelled. These players were Mick Warden and captain David Boge, who were joint Tallon medallists, Bundaberg's equivalent to the Allan Border Medal, and Peter Johnson, a club junior product who has been the heart and soul of their A-grade team for 21 years.

I ask all members of the community to keep fostering our good young sportspeople in all fields to make sure that every person reaches their potential, whether it be becoming a world champion or just achieving a personal best. Sport teaches everyone many important life skills and adds to the social fabric that makes Bundaberg such a great place in which to live and raise a family.

Narangba Industrial Estate

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (9.34 pm): Now that the fire and fire water risk minimisation inspection at the Narangba Industrial Estate has been completed and the report tabled by the Minister for Emergency Services, it is up to the businesses at the estate to take to heart the lessons of the report and adopt world's best practice. Mere compliance with legal minimums is not enough. We have seen what can happen. It must not recur.

If there was a fire at certain sites on the industrial estate, the layout of the buildings would impede access of fire appliances to one or more of the four sides of a blazing structure; the lay of the land and the lack of bunding would cause fire water to run into the creek; and the presence of ordinary combustible materials that do not have to be where they are, and the manner of storage of chemical inflammables which could be stored differently, would cause any fire that started to grow with rapid momentum. In these circumstances, it is amazing that at the time of the report being written none of the sites had a fire alarm connected to the Firecom centre. I believe that one site has fixed this since then, but only one site has a sprinkler system for early suppression of a fire. It is true that these common-sense measures are not required by law. The Building Code of Australia requires sprinklers only for sites over 2,000 square metres.

But while Queensland works, as it will, to get the federal body to change that rule, I am calling on site owners to do the common-sense thing and take these elementary precautions. Frankly, the time has come for businesses on the estate to do more than the law requires and do what common sense requires. Any business that does not do so is not welcome.

There are only five lots on the industrial estate that remain unoccupied. I am calling on the government to undertake that these vacant sites will not go to noxious or hazardous industries. I am strongly in favour of more local industry and more jobs for my constituents, but my constituency groans under the burden of more than its fair share of noxious and hazardous industry, and my constituents have had enough.

Bentley, Mr B

Mr STEVENS (Robina—Lib) (9.37 pm): From the backblocks of the bush in Queensland to the beaches of Coolangatta on the New South Wales border, from the far north of the state to the leafy suburbs of Hamilton, there is no more vilified and despised despot than Bob Bentley, chairman of Queensland Racing. This Merri Rose appointed messenger for the Beattie Labor government has wreaked havoc, instability and divisiveness throughout the Queensland racing industry, and it is time for him to go.

Bob Bentley is the grim reaper of Queensland Racing who is now embarking on his third unsuccessful attempt to provide his own monumental edifice to racing in the guise of a so-called supertrack on the Gold Coast. His first blunder was to propose this at Wacol, in Brisbane's west, funded by the sale of Eagle Farm and Doomben. That was a failure; strike one.

Bob Bentley's second blunder was to propose the sale of Doomben to upgrade Eagle Farm and leave Brisbane with only one racecourse. That was a failure; strike two. Now, in conjunction with some of his southern property developer mates, he is making wild promises to the members of the Gold Coast Turf Club of another supertrack on a flood-prone block in the middle of the Gold Coast City Council's Green Heart parkland in order to seduce the turf club into selling its current prime position of the best located turf club in Australia, which he and his developer mates will then cut up for high-rise development. That was another failure; strike three.

As deputy chairman of UNiTAB, which is a private company charged with maximising its bottom-line profit from wagering regardless of the betterment of any form of racing, he has a plain and undeniable conflict of interest. This dictator of the Queensland racing industry is not answerable in any shape or form to the shareholders of the Queensland racing industry—that is, its participants. He is solely answerable to the minister for sport—not the minister for racing, note well—and, as such, the minister and the Beattie government must accept full responsibility over this misguided, power-hungry and self-serving Labor appointed troublemaker.

If the minister for sport is not interested in racing, he should say so. If the Beattie government is not interested in racing, except to siphon off valuable racing industry funds to Treasury, it should say so. But I say to the thousands of racing industry participants—the strappers, jockeys, stablehands, trainers, punters, owners, administrators and, most importantly, racegoers—let the Beattie government know what you think of Bob Bentley and the Labor government. Do not forget.

Time expired.

Sailability

Ms CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (9.41 pm): I wish to take this opportunity to bring to the House's attention the remarkable efforts of the wonderful volunteers of an organisation called Sailability and the recent successes of two of its members, Sonja Gilmore and Belinda Hill. Firstly, Sailability is a volunteer-run organisation that works to facilitate sailing for people with disabilities. On the Gold Coast, Sailability operates out of Hollywell every Tuesday. I have on many occasions visited to experience firsthand the fun the volunteers and clients have during a day of sailing on our beautiful waters.

Participants at Sailability can sail as a crew member or sail solo in a dinghy. Sailability is well equipped to assist people with mobility problems with slings and winches, and of course all with the assistance of the fantastic volunteers. For people with diminished capabilities, Sailability offers them freedom from their disabilities and encourages them and inspires them to acknowledge their abilities and their individual skills.

Sonja Gilmore and Belinda Hill are two Sailability sailors who have not only discovered the fun of Sailability but have excelled exceptionally on the water. Their intellectual impairments have not stopped them from learning sailing and progressing to competing and indeed winning titles. I am pleased to announce that both these girls have been selected for the national team to compete at the 2007 World Summer Special Olympics to be held in Shanghai in October. Sonja and Belinda will be part of the Australian team of 128 aspiring athletes and 36 dynamic team officials.

Both ladies began sailing six years ago, and I am told that they race every Sunday at the Southport Yacht Club and both of them always take home a place or a medal. I know they have been training hard for their Special Olympics inclusion with their coach, Chris Ruston, and I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Sonja and Belinda on their selection and wish them well.

As the girls have to raise $13,000 to get them there, I am encouraging the Gold Coast community to support their fundraising efforts. The Southport Yacht Club and the Runaway Bay Rotary Club, Mission Australia and the department of sport and recreation are huge supporters of Sailability—and so too are many individuals.

Recently, I had the great pleasure of officially commissioning a new boat, *The Nola belle*, which was generously donated by current treasurer, Nola Goode. This two-person sailing dinghy is a great asset for the club to assist in delivering the service they provide to many people with disabilities keen to get out on the water. I congratulate Sailability for its wonderful work and encourage sailors out there who would love to become a volunteer or know someone whose quality of life can be improved by learning to sail to contact the president of Sailability Gold Coast, Bob Curtis. It is a great team and people are guaranteed loads of satisfaction and fun.

Environmental Protection Agency, Bowen Salt Works

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (9.43 pm): In May last year Graham Odger, a Bowen constituent, noticed that two-thirds of his mango trees on his 28-acre farm—including trees as old as 40 years—were defoliating. Many had lost all their leaves, even the normally tough neam trees alongside them. Subsequent tests proved that the defoliation was due to airborne saline emissions. His farm happens to be across the road from the Cheetham owned Bowen Salt Works.

Negotiations with Salt Works management proved confrontational, with accusations that the trees were affected by lack of water or underground salinity. However, photographic evidence showing knee-high green grass at the base of these trees makes these claims ridiculous. It was not until three months later and many phone calls that the EPA finally decided to investigate. Significant points from these investigations include the following. The minister's letter dated 3 October stated—

Cheetham Salt does not require a development approval or registration certificate but it does have a general environmental duty under the EPA Act.

Another significant point is an EPA letter on 2 November which stated—

Tree defoliation appears to be from an external emission source. An EPA air specialist has indicated that the tree defoliation was likely caused by the deposition of a substance (salt) in high concentrations on the leaves. Most significant areas of defoliation appeared to be in the path of the plume that was observed coming from Cheetham Salt.

Subsequently, Mr Odger has experienced a further major damage to his trees, and 150 mango trees are now severely defoliated. Last year he lost his entire mango crop as a result of this poisoning, and he claims the severe damage that has again occurred this year has set his crop back another five years. As well as this damage caused to his principal source of income, a three-year old Colorbond shed is almost eaten out with rust, as are vehicles and equipment. Independent tests taken at his own expense have shown heavy concentrations of sodium chloride—that is, salt—on the saltworks side of the trees but not on the other side of the trees. The EPA still claims there is no conclusive evidence that these emissions are coming from the saltworks, even though the direction of the prevailing winds and salt plume when the drier is going does seem to state the obvious.

Mr Odgers and I have no complaint against the staff of the EPA. They have done their very best but are seemingly powerless to act or have any jurisdiction over this environmental hazard. This is an expensive department that has no teeth; it does not have any real legislative powers to act in cases such as this.

I understand that the saltworks has just been issued with a renewed lease from the Department of Mines and Energy and also from the Department of Natural Resources and Water. I seriously question whether these departments are even aware that this factory is causing significant environmental degradation; else why has this lease been renewed?

Mr Odgers is a farmer and small-business man. He has battled for years and this is the absolute last straw. His income and his harvest have been severely affected, and his property and machinery is rapidly deteriorating and becoming worthless. He is unfortunately now completely powerless and at the mercy of a large corporation.

Time expired.

National Youth Week

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (9.46 pm): This week is National Youth Week. It is a time when we can recognise the achievements and aspirations of our young people. Last Saturday I had the honour of being invited to address the state conference of young people who are members of the Church of Latter-day Saints. I would also like to acknowledge that my parliamentary colleague the member for Mount Ommaney also attended. I would like to congratulate the organisers of the church who organised a state youth conference for over 1,200 young people. The Church of Latter-day Saints brought together young people from all around Queensland, from as far north as Cairns. At the conference, I addressed the young people on three main issues: firstly, climate change; secondly, youth engagement; and, thirdly, community service.

The young people were very interested in my comments about climate change. At the end of last week, I along with the member for Ashgrove attended a national climate law conference in Canberra. The purpose of the conference was to discuss what laws Australia will need to implement to combat climate change over the next 10 years to minimise the impact of global warming.

Climate change affects everyone. Last month the United Kingdom introduced a bill to reduce their emissions by 60 per cent by 2020. Canada, one week later, introduced a similar draft bill. In Australia, the premiers met for COAG in Canberra on Friday and put forward a proposal to reduce Australia's emissions by 60 per cent by 2050—consistent with the UK and Canada. This was rejected by the Howard government.

Be under no illusion: young people are very aware of this issue and they will look to the different parties to see how they plan to combat climate change in the lead-up to the federal election. It should never be underestimated how important climate change is for young people.

The second issue I raised was in relation to youth engagement. Young people today face their future in a society which is becoming increasingly complex. A key process that this state government has to engage with young people is the Queensland Youth Council. These young people are able to give advice to the minister for communities so he and the government can better understand their concerns.

The third issue that I raised was community service. Project Love and Care was started by two remarkable women in Inala, Ann George and Jean Thomas. The aim of Project Love and Care is to provide kits for young children about to enter the child protection system. These kits provide items such as colouring books, journals, toiletry items, soft toys, socks, pyjamas and underwear. As part of the conference, 1,200 young people packed over 500 kits in a couple of hours. I am pleased to inform the House that Project Love and Care recently received a state government award for National Foster Carers Week recognising its outstanding contribution and work.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the work of the Church of Latter-day Saints and their strength in bringing together so many young people from throughout Queensland for this remarkable three-day conference.

Surfers Paradise Fire Station

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (9.49 pm): Recently I had the pleasure of attending an awards ceremony with the honourable Minister for Emergency Services at the Surfers Paradise Fire Station in my electorate where four Gold Coast firefighters were bestowed with an international award. The Robina Fire Station officers received the prestigious Higgins and Langley International Award in Swift Water Rescue, recognising their efforts in rescuing a couple from a raging Coomera River in March 2004.

Station officers Steven McKitterick and Steven Lohmann and senior firefighters Michael Mills and Robert Smyth carried out Queensland's first swift water rescue in torrential rain at Wongawallen where they freed a man pinned under a four-wheel drive in rising floodwaters. The dramatic rescue, which was recognised by firefighters in the United States where the Higgins and Langley International Award originates, highlights the changing face of our Fire and Rescue Service.

While there is a perception that firies only fight fires, our dedicated firefighters work around the clock responding to fire alarms, road accidents and natural disasters when they occur. Swift water rescue is one of the many skills of our modern day firefighters and the Gold Coast is fortunate enough to have a specialised swift water rescue team based at Robina Fire Station. I think they have taken over this role from the State Emergency Service over the last few years.

During the ceremony at the Surfers Paradise Fire Station, a flagship of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, 23 firefighters received national medals and clasps. These federal awards recognise 15 and 10 years of dedicated service respectively. It seems we are fortunate to have some of the most experienced firefighters in the state working on the Gold Coast. I have been fortunate to have been given a tour of the Surfers Paradise Fire Station and am very impressed with the new facility which was opened in 2003. I think it was codesigned by the people who work there. They are very appreciative of it.

Surfers Paradise is the busiest fire station on the Gold Coast, attending to more than 2,800 calls each year. It is certainly one of the busiest in Queensland. With a concentration of high-density living, as is the case in my electorate or the coastal part of it, the challenges facing modern day firefighters are immense. Last year it took five fire trucks, one ambulance and several police cars to quell a kitchen fire on the 36th floor of the Q1.

Fortunately, while many alarms turn out to be false ones, we must not forget the dangerous and incredibly important job that our firefighters do in the community. This point was not lost on the crowd at the Surfers Paradise presentation where two fire appliances were dedicated in memory of two firefighters, Herb Fennell and Noel Watson, who lost their lives in the line of duty on 11 February 1994. Around the anniversary of their deaths, firefighters reminded us that issues such as clothing, crew sizes, equipment and tasks constantly need to be revised in order to keep our firies safe on the road. I call upon the Minister for Emergency Services to heed their requests when they call and I congratulate the 23 recipients of awards. It was a great day. The families of fire service workers were there and the families of Herb Fennell and Noel Watson. That accident I remember very sadly.

Sophie Nance

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (9.52 pm): I would like to talk tonight about a beautiful little girl in my electorate called Sophie Nance. Sophie is the daughter of Mandy and Wayne Nance and the twin sister of Matthew Nance. Sophie was born in the Mater Mothers Hospital on 3 October 2005. She was first born of twins with a brother Matthew born one minute later. Little Sophie is a very happy girl.

After 13 months of tests, on 3 November 2006 she was diagnosed with Maroteaux-Lamy Syndrome, also known as MPS-VI, which is one of the rarer mucopolysccharide disorders. The disorder varies enormously in the severity of the problems it causes. However, Sophie has been diagnosed as severe.

The characteristic of those diagnosed with MPS-VI include their heads being rather large with a short neck, chubby cheeks, a broad nose with a flat bridge and wide nostrils. Their shoulders also tend to be narrow and rounded and their stomachs tend to stick out. Their hair is courser than usual. The also

have eyebrows which are bushy and there may be more hair than usual on the body. The skin may become thickened and less elastic than usual. Adults with Maroteaux-Lamy Syndrome will normally be of restricted growth. For example, their height may be anywhere between 107 centimetres and 138 centimetres. Poor Sophie has been diagnosed with this condition.

Sophie's parents came to me in relation to her particular medical condition and the fact that she needs certain medication which is very expensive to help save her life. I went to the Minister for Health and requested his personal intervention in relation to Sophie's need to be able to get this very special enzyme to be able to save her life.

Since then Sophie has had an operation. On 27 December last year she had surgery at 8 am which lasted some 4½ hours. That is quite traumatic for a little girl. Can I say on behalf of the family that even though she is wearing a halo at the moment and it is quite uncomfortable for her the surgery looks to be successful. When the doctors say that she needs this special enzyme drug she will get it paid for in the interim by Queensland Health. In fact, Queensland Health will pay for it whilst the federal government decides whether it will permanently pay for this lifesaving drug.

Tonight I ask Tony Abbott to find a place in his heart to intervene and fast-track this approval process and to stop dillydallying and get on with it because the Nance family needs certainty. They have to spend their whole time looking after Sophie. They do not need the constant worry about long-term funding. In the meantime, Queensland Health will pay for the drug, which I understand will be around $200,000 per year initially. Little Sophie weighs only five kilograms. The annual cost could be up to $1 million a year to keep this beautiful little girl alive. The family would like to thank everyone involved, including the minister and the doctors at the hospitals who have been looking after her.

Bioreactor Landfill Facility; Nicklin Electorate, Dental Health

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (9.55 pm): This morning I read into the parliamentary record one of the many letters that I have received from my constituents and residents of Maroochy shire who are concerned about the council's proposal to build a bioreactor landfill facility without first consulting shire residents and asking them what their views were on the proposal to build the bioreactor dump in the shire or ascertaining if there were cheaper or other more appropriate options for consideration.

The Maroochy Shire Council cannot build and operate its proposed bioreactor landfill facility without first receiving the appropriate approvals from the state government. This then leads me to my call for the state government and the minister for the environment to research around the world to gather up-to-date information about the operations and management strategies for bioreactors before processing the council's application for the appropriate approvals.

The action committee which has been leading the charge against the bioreactor has been researching around the world, has been visiting other waste disposal facilities in Australia and certainly has some very real concerns about the Maroochy Shire Council's proposal.

The reason I raise this again tonight is not by way of criticism of the minister. I am simply attempting to draw to the minister's attention the real concern in the shire, and the real concern of many of my constituents that the departmental staff who process this application should be in possession of the most up-to-date and most recent information about the operation of bioreactors before they actually consider and process that application.

I also wish to draw to the government's attention my real concerns about the state of dental health in my electorate. I would urge the federal government and the leader of the federal opposition to actually reconsider the needs for dental health in Queensland and reconsider the needs for dental health on the Sunshine Coast. When I visit and speak with the dental officers in our schools they share with me some of their experiences about the state of dental decay and these are deeply concerning. More importantly, the senior people in our community who are in need of public dental health have significant concerns about the waiting lists. I urge the Prime Minister and the alternative prime minister to seriously consider this call for assistance to help the state government respond to the issue of dental health.

Multiculturalism

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (9.58 pm): I had the privilege to represent the multiculturalism minister, Lindy Nelson-Carr, at the Caboolture Shire Council multicultural forum held at Burpengary in the Kallangur electorate. The focus of the forum was multicultural youth. There has been a lot of discussion in the media and in the community about the term 'multiculturalism' and whether such a policy is still relevant in Australia. I think that it is. Multiculturalism enables newcomers to maintain the best parts of their culture while becoming part of the Australian family. The facts are that migrants change their hosts' way of life just as their hosts change the new arrivals, and this is a dynamic process which has been mainly beneficial to our community.

At the Burpengary Junior Rugby League grounds on any Sunday during the season you can see the practical effect of that multicultural policy when the junior teams are playing. Boys and young men and some girls, many of whom have parents from other parts of the world, are playing Rugby League. The discussion on the sideline is not about country of birth, colour or race but how their respective team and their opposition are playing. One of the points made by one of the speakers at the forum which I found interesting—and it is probably a point that is common to many of us in this parliament—is the concept that cultural practices are not always consistent or continuous but often depend on circumstances. As an example, a young person may go to work and not undertake any discernable cultural practices and live life generally that way but on the weekend when visiting mum or grandparents act in a culturally appropriate way either because that is the 'done thing' or as a simple act of respect.

A range of Queensland government strategies have been developed to help ethnic youth who may have problems adjusting to a new life such as at school or settling into the community. The Queensland government, through Multicultural Affairs Queensland, also funds community relations and community development programs for young people from a diverse background. For example, councils, including Caboolture, partner with the state government to deliver more targeted youth programs through the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program, and those workers across the state deliver programs to help migrant youth and inform the government of the issues these young people face. Patricia Rios, Caboolture's multicultural planner, will be able to identify the issues confronting multicultural youth in the Caboolture region. The success of multiculturalism in Queensland is something which I think gives us hope for the future. So should the idealism, the energy and the enthusiasm of our young people. If recent young arrivals are to make a successful go of their life, they need to be able to access services freely and equally without prejudice or barriers.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 10.02 pm.

ATTENDANCE

Attwood, Barry, Beattie, Bligh, Bombolas, Choi, Copeland, Cripps, Croft, Cunningham, Darling, Dempsey, Dickson, Elmes, English, Fenlon, Finn, Flegg, Foley, Fraser, Gibson, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hobbs, Hoolihan, Hopper, 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, Reynolds, Rickuss, Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Seeney, Shine, Simpson, Spence, Springborg, Stevens, Stone, Struthers, Stuckey, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson