



# RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS (HANSARD)

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## WEDNESDAY, 12 MARCH 2008

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The Legislative Assembly met at 9.30 am.

### ABSENCE OF SPEAKER

The Clerk informed the House of the absence of Mr Speaker.

Mr Acting Speaker (Mr JM English, Redlands) read prayers and took the chair.

The honourable member for Keppel was nominated by Mr Acting Speaker as Deputy Speaker.

Mr Acting Speaker acknowledged the traditional owners of the land upon which this parliament is assembled and the custodians of the sacred lands of our state.

### ACTING SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

#### Photographs in Chamber

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** I wish to inform honourable members that I have given permission for a *Courier-Mail* photographer to take photos in the chamber this morning under the normal standing media conditions.

### ACTING SPEAKER'S RULING

#### Privilege, Alleged Intimidation of Member

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Honourable members, yesterday Mr Speaker delegated to me consideration of a possible matter of privilege raised by the member for Burnett. That matter relates to an alleged intimidation of the member by a legal firm.

The issue of intimidation of members by threats from legal firms has been dealt with recently in Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee report No. 82. I have considered what the committee stated in that report. The issues identified by the committee as needing to be resolved in establishing whether an allegation, on the face of it, gives rise to a contempt are as follows. Did the letter from the legal firm to the member constitute an attempt to threaten or intimidate the member? If yes, did the alleged threat or attempted intimidation constitute improper means to influence the member in his parliamentary conduct? If the alleged threat or attempted intimidation did constitute an improper means to influence the member in his parliamentary conduct, was this the intention of the legal firm?

I have considered the letter at issue. I am not convinced that, on the face of it, the letter constitutes an attempt to threaten the member, either expressly or implied. Indeed, the letter simply looks like an attempt to put certain facts before the member and refute some of the member's statements. It is moderate and informative, not threatening or intimidating. I do not intend to refer the matter to the committee.

### PETITION

The Clerk presented the following paper petition, lodged by the honourable member indicated—

#### Iconic Queensland Places Bill

**Mr Wellington**, from 665 petitioners, requesting the House to add all parts of the present Maroochy Shires which lie within the Blackall Range region into Schedule 1 of the Iconic Queensland Places Legislation.

Petition received.

### TABLED PAPER

#### MEMBER'S PAPER TABLED BY THE CLERK

The following member's paper was tabled by the Clerk—

Member for Caloundra (Mr McArdle)—

- Erratum to the Explanatory Notes to the Criminal Code and Other Acts (Graffiti Clean-up) Amendment Bill 2008

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

### Patel, Dr J

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.34 am): Many Queenslanders would now be aware of the overnight arrest of Dr Jayant Patel in the United States. He was arrested by FBI agents at his home in Portland, Oregon at around 1.30 this morning Queensland time. I was advised just after 2 am.

I am pleased that the matter has now reached the courts in the United States after what has been a very long legal process in applying for extradition. I am advised that Australian authorities submitted 16 charges relating to five patients. US authorities have determined that 14 of those charges relating to the five patients were strong enough to proceed. These include three manslaughter charges, two grievous bodily harm charges, one negligent act causing harm charge and eight fraud charges.

Dr Patel has appeared in court this morning in relation to Australia's request that he be extradited to Queensland to face prosecution for criminal offences. It is my understanding the hearing has been adjourned until Friday and Dr Patel has been remanded in custody until that time.

Given these events, it is important that public comments about Dr Patel's case be kept to a minimum. Nothing should be said or written that might prejudice court proceedings. As I said, I am pleased that the matter has reached this stage but as the matter is now before the courts in the United States it would be inappropriate for me to make any further comment.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Gregory!

**Mr Johnson:** I did not say anything, Mr Speaker

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Gregory.

### Public Sector Reform

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.36 am): The Queensland public sector is the engine room of government. A modern, professional public service focused on the needs of Queenslanders, harnessing the energy and ideas of our best and brightest, is vital to the prosperity of our state. As Premier I am determined to ensure that we have the best public sector framework in place to get the best results. To that end I can advise the House today of five major new public sector reform initiatives. These initiatives will result in the most wide-ranging changes in the Queensland public sector in the past decade. There is no doubt that we are framing a budget in a very difficult national and international financial climate. To maintain our strong economic position tough decisions need to be made. Delivering front-line services needs to be our priority. The reforms I am announcing today are part of that process and will deliver real cost savings that can be allocated in direct public service delivery for Queensland taxpayers. They will also help create a more modern, efficient and effective Public Service.

These reforms are as follows. Firstly, we will create a new Public Service Commission by amalgamating the Service Delivery and Performance Commission with the Office of the Public Service Commissioner. Secondly, we will create one amalgamated Civil and Administrative Tribunal, replacing some 26 different tribunals across the state. Thirdly, the government will introduce a productivity dividend on relevant agencies, which is expected to result in up to \$80 million a year being freed up for redeployment to front-line services such as health and education. Fourthly, the government will establish an expenditure review subcommittee of Cabinet, including an independent outside expert, to monitor and prioritise spending across departments and agencies and deliver the productivity dividend. Fifthly, we will conduct a review of all government boards and statutory bodies with a view to reducing both number and cost.

Let me discuss these in more detail, firstly the amalgamation of the Service Delivery and Performance Commission and the Office of the Public Service Commissioner. Both the Office of the Public Service Commissioner and the Service Delivery and Performance Commission are aimed at improving the management of government business and the capacity to deliver it. The difference between the two organisations is one of focus rather than objective. By amalgamating the two bodies we believe that we can save money and deliver greater efficiencies. Amalgamation will align in one place our performance management expertise with our human resources management knowledge and expertise. The new commission will be overseen by a board comprising significant private sector expertise. I am pleased to advise that both of the current independent commissioners with the Service Delivery and Performance Commission, John Story and Marian Micalizzi, have agreed to continue with the new body. They will be joined by senior academics Dr Anne Tiernan and Dr Jackie Huggins and business representatives James Strong and Ann Sherry. We expect to have the new Public Service Commission up and running in July this year.

Secondly, there will be a new Civil and Administrative Tribunal. A recent review by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General found that the system of civil and administrative justice in Queensland is inefficient and fragmented, reducing the community's access to justice at the tribunal end.

There are approximately 26 different bodies in Queensland performing civil and administrative appeal and review justice functions. These include bodies such as the Film Appeals Tribunal, the Animal Valuers Tribunal, the Veterinary Tribunal, the Racing Appeals Tribunal, the Nursing Tribunal, the Small Claims Tribunal, the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal and the Fisheries Tribunal. The list goes on and on. Each one of these serves a valuable purpose and provides an avenue for justice to Queenslanders in different specialist areas. However, the system is confusing. My government will establish one single gateway for members of the public to access justice. We will consolidate the back-of-house functions of these tribunals and harness the specialist legal knowledge of each of the various members of the tribunals and amalgamate them into the new Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Former justice the Hon. Glen Williams will oversee the creation of the tribunal including the scope of jurisdiction, membership and registry structure, accommodation, information technology and other infrastructure needs. He will be assisted by respected lawyers Julie-Anne Schafer and Peter Applegarth in his task. It is our intention to have the new tribunal up and running during the second half of 2009. As well as making our system of justice easier, more accessible and more user friendly we expect to significantly reduce court costs and generate significant savings and improved services for taxpayers.

Thirdly, our government will introduce a productivity dividend on relevant agencies. The Treasurer yesterday wrote to all ministers advising them of their obligations in this regard. Today the Treasurer will outline this initiative in more detail. A new productivity dividend will ensure that more taxpayer dollars are pumped into front-line services such as health and education. It will target duplication and waste across government departments. We will be putting the wood on each organisation to deliver a set amount of savings each year. In the first year we are targeting savings of \$60 million, followed by \$80 million a year. Front-line service providers such as hospital staff, teachers, police and child safety officers will be quarantined from the dividend requirements. It is also important to note that money saved in key portfolio areas will be reinvested back into services such as health, education, child safety and others.

Fourthly, we will be instituting an expenditure review committee which will oversight the delivery of the productivity dividend and ensure that it is delivered. It will be chaired by me as Premier and include the Deputy Premier and the Treasurer. It will also include an independent appointee with extensive business expertise. I am pleased to advise the House that Mr Greg Moynihan, the former CEO of Metway Bank, has accepted this position.

The committee will look at all areas of government spending and, as happens in other jurisdictions in Australia, it will look to generate cost savings and ensure that taxpayers are getting the best value for their tax dollar. It is not a razor gang. It is about directing funding to where it is needed most—and that is at the front line. However, we will make sure that we have the right people, with the right skills, working on the issues that matter for Queensland communities.

Finally, I have instructed that a review of the 600-plus government boards and statutory bodies be undertaken to review their effectiveness. I want to cut unnecessary red tape and identify and free up people and funding for the delivery of core public services. Professor Pat Weller, the chair of governance and public management at Griffith University, and Simone Webb, a former deputy director-general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and currently working with David Solomon on his review of FOI, will lead this review. It will be completed by the end of this year.

Yesterday relevant public sector unions were invited to attend a briefing on these initiatives this morning. The Treasurer and Attorney-General will shortly outline some of these initiatives in more detail. There can be no doubt that they are very significant reforms—reforms that require hard decisions; decisions that deliver real benefits and real savings to Queensland taxpayers.

### Andy Warhol Exhibition

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.44 am): I am pleased to advise the House that the exclusive Andy Warhol exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art has been an extraordinary success. Since opening on 7 December the exhibition has attracted more than 166,400 visitors. This has been a winner for cultural tourism, with almost half of all visitors to the GoMA exhibition travelling from regional Queensland, interstate and overseas, particularly New Zealand. A break down of visitors to the exhibition shows that 54 per cent of visitors are from metropolitan Brisbane, 17 per cent are from regional Queensland, 16 per cent are from interstate and 11 per cent are from overseas.

I am pleased to inform the House today that the Andy Warhol exhibition will be staying in Brisbane for an extra two weeks. The exhibition season was due to end on Sunday, 30 March, but the gallery has been offered an extension by the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. The season will now continue until Sunday, 13 April. This means that there are 4½ weeks remaining for Queenslanders and visitors to this state to experience this significant collection of Warhol's work. The popular Andy Warhol Up Late program and the children's programs will also continue until 13 April.

### Gold Coast Titans

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.45 am): I am pleased to advise the House that at 7.30 on Friday night the world's Rugby League followers will be looking at the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast Titans will take the field against the North Queensland Cowboys in an NRL clash at our new \$160 million Skilled Park at Robina. The clash between the two exciting Queensland teams at such a magnificent new facility is a promoter's dream, launching this the centenary year of Rugby League.

Titans fans will be hoping for a replay of the 24 February preseason clash when the new-look halves Scott Prince and dual international Mat Rogers led the Titans to a 30 to 22 win over the Cowboys in Cairns. I am sorry to remind the Townsville members of this. On Sunday, 2 March the Titans scored another impressive 32 to four preseason win over the Wests Tigers. Almost 15,000 fans were on hand for that game, but come Friday night and the NRL season opener we will see a capacity crowd of 27,000 fill Skilled Park. I am pleased to say that it is a sell-out. What a great start to the season. It is a tremendous result for the Titans and for the people of the Gold Coast and one I hope to see replicated many times throughout the season.

I take the opportunity to remind Gold Coast and regional fans that public transport is the best way to get to see their team at Skilled Park. I encourage all those attending the game to get on board the trains and buses.

While I am a self-declared Titans fan, I acknowledge that another great Queensland NRL club will take to the field this weekend. Wayne Bennett might be in his last year as the Broncos coach, but he will not be looking to go out without adding another premiership to his remarkable six premierships. We wish the three Queensland teams and all the Queensland players taking part in the 2008 season all the best for a safe and successful season.

### Hale Street Bridge

**Hon. PT LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning) (9.48 am): Hope springs eternal for those of us who were at the Reds on Saturday night. I would like to provide the House with an update on the Hale Street bridge project. As members would be aware, work on the first of the lord mayor's TransApex projects—the north-south bypass tunnel—is underway. This project was originally proposed under the Soorley Labor administration and has progressed under Councillor Newman with the state government providing full support for approvals, land acquisition, tolling powers and traffic management plans.

The Brisbane City Council asked for and got state government help to manage the approvals process for NSBT. Unfortunately, the lord mayor did not ask for the Hale Street bridge project to be declared a significant project, which would have meant the approvals process would be managed by the state. This proposal has the support of both the state labor government and, I understand, the council Labor opposition. Councillor Newman is entitled to take credit for the project but he should also take responsibility for the cost changes, the delays it could cause and the changes in scope. The original proposal was worth \$240 million and included flyovers on both the southern and northern side of the bridge that would have eliminated the need for traffic lights at the intersection.

While I am advised Main Roads had no concerns about the impact of traffic on the southern side of the bridge during construction, the northern side, which connects on to Coronation Drive, is another matter entirely. Under the lord mayor's plans, work on the bridge would have caused an extra delay of up to 50 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon for people using Coronation Drive and delays of up to 50 minutes each way for people using Milton Road. The traffic management plan the lord mayor delivered to the state government in November, which included up to 50-minute peak period delays each way each day for two years, was not reasonable. I note that the lord mayor again repeated claims in the media on Sunday that Labor had frustrated his plans to get this bridge built.

The truth about the Hale Street bridge is this: the state government supported the original project and granted conditional tolling powers in May last year, subject to council meeting some reasonable conditions so council could get on with the job. The lord mayor has again failed to own up to the truth that his original plan was fatally flawed. It would have visited traffic chaos on Brisbane like it has never seen before. He is out there at the moment writing to people in the western suburbs having a go at Ronan Lee, the member for Indooroopilly, because Ronan Lee had the temerity to stand up and say, 'We are not going to accept 50-minute additional delays for the people of my electorate.' What would have happened had the state government allowed this to happen? Councillor Newman would be the first person to put the blame on people like Ronan Lee and the state. Ronan Lee has stood up to Councillor Newman, and I note in this letter to people in the area that Councillor Newman has not mentioned in one paragraph the 50-minute additional delays that he wanted to visit on the people of the western suburbs.

Earlier this week the media reported delays of up to three minutes during the construction of the northern busway. Clearly the community would not support the sort of delays the lord mayor was keen to see created. But the state will save Councillor Newman from the consequences of his own lack of planning. Council will obviously have to go through significant redesign to fix up the problems it has created. Motorists have every right to know why the scope of the works on the southern side of the

bridge is going to be reduced. There was no suggestion about that with traffic. Why now does he want to pull the overpass on the southern side of the bridge? People also have every right to know whether there will be savings as a result of the redesign or whether the reduced costs will merely be used to cover up the cost blow-out and what will happen with tolls. Construction budgets everywhere are under significant pressure, but he should be up-front about this.

I repeat that the state government is keen to see this project built and we were keen to work with the lord mayor. On any number of major infrastructure projects—the north-south bypass tunnel, the Inner Northern Busway extension and the Gateway upgrade project—the council and the state government have worked together. Indeed, we are putting up the absolute vast majority of the money for the Airport Link project. They are hardly the actions of a state government that does not cooperate with the Liberal lord mayor or the council. But we should not sit on our hands and let delays like this happen to motorists, and, frankly, neither would Labor in council. In fact, it is doing what it does best—keeping the mayor accountable, whether that mayor is Labor or Liberal in the future.

### State Budget

**Hon. AP FRASER** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer) (9.52 am): This government has made no secret of the fact that the state budget which I will hand down on 3 June will be the toughest in a long time. The latest Commonwealth Grants Commission determination means that we will lose significant GST revenue from projections, markets are seizing and the Reserve is intent on slaying inflation. These facts are also no secret. To keep Queensland in the excellent economic position it has maintained for the past decade, we need to respond to these external events. The recent audit of the Ambulance Service by government resulted in lessons learned for that agency. It also resulted in the identification of savings in the region of \$12 million. It was a powerful demonstration that there is always room for improvement. As the Premier outlined this morning, a new Expenditure Review Committee will be charged with undertaking the foreshadowed systematic forensic audits of government programs to achieve savings of \$100 million per year that will be directed towards front-line service delivery.

This fortnight families around Queensland are once again sitting down at the kitchen table and redoing their sums. With the latest Reserve Bank interest rate rise, families are asking themselves where they can trim, shave and find savings. Companies large and small are doing the same. And their government should, too, and we are. Last night I wrote to all ministers advising them of the dividend that will be applied in the budget I will introduce on 3 June. It will implement a savings mechanism across government to collect \$80 million a year, phased in from next year with a target of \$60 million. It will provide the discipline upon agencies to make their dollar go further. Agencies will not be permitted to trim services to achieve these savings; they must go back to their kitchen table and redo their sums. It is the discipline that has been visited upon Queensland families, and we are visiting it upon government agencies.

For the record, there will be no forced redundancies among the Public Service, but there will be some decisions that take leadership and vision to achieve better value for money. Our decisions to streamline the Service Delivery and Performance Commission with the Office of the Public Service Commissioner, the amalgamation of tribunals and the wide-ranging review of government boards, panels and councils are exhibits A, B and C in our renewed commitment to reforming, leading and taking decisions for the future.

This is about responding to the global economic environment. It is about taking action to maintain our position—our position way out in front of the pack. This is a drive to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government activity. It is about discipline and value for money. It is what businesses do all of the time, it is what families are doing right now and it is what the government must do also.

### Queensland Ambulance Service

**Hon. N ROBERTS** (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (9.54 am): Per capita, the Queensland Ambulance Service receives more funding than any service in the country. As the House is aware, one of the Premier's first initiatives was to announce an audit into the Queensland Ambulance Service. One of the key recommendations from the audit was to reduce staff working in corporate services and non-essential areas and to redirect resources to the front line. Already staff holding more than 40 positions in non-essential areas have been advised that their positions will no longer exist. Work is continuing to identify additional positions in accordance with the audit findings. The union has been consulted throughout this process and, as committed last year, efforts are underway to redeploy and retrain these staff. There will be no forced redundancies for permanent staff.

The audit targeted savings of around \$12 million, which is to be redirected to front-line service delivery including the funding of an additional 100 front-line ambulance officers. Already the department has identified more than \$4 million in savings to be achieved by June this year. The remainder will be identified and secured during the next financial year. In addition to targeted savings, the audit also identified a range of demand management strategies which are currently being progressed. These strategies include an education campaign to cut down on hoax and non-urgent 000 calls and letting mobile paramedics treat some patients at home rather than take them to hospital.



At the same time we are implementing the audit recommendations, and roster reform for ambulance officers at our busiest 24-hour, seven-day-per-week stations and communication centres is underway. The 12-hour shift proposal is based on providing a core roster built around the principle of four days on, four days off. This will deliver officers with more consecutive days off more regularly, and already some rosters are proposing in excess of an additional 20 rest days per year. The ballot papers issued to staff clearly outlined every element of the proposal, which was supported by an 81.1 per cent majority. I am aware of some attempts by the opposition to destabilise the ballot process, which clearly ignores the wishes of an overwhelming majority of ambulance officers. We are committed to providing ambulance officers with the package of reforms they so overwhelmingly supported. These roster reforms, coupled with the government's response to the audit and the record funding, will help to ensure our ambulance services continue to meet the high expectations of Queenslanders.

### **Queensland Tribunals, Amalgamation**

**Hon. KG SHINE** (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (9.57 am): The government is focused on improving the efficiency of Queensland's justice system and increasing the community's access to justice. The current system is inefficient with over 30 different bodies performing civil and administrative justice, each with a separate infrastructure. As the Premier has announced, the government will amalgamate up to 26 of these bodies into a single recognisable decision-making tribunal. This will create a one-stop shop tribunal structure which will reduce the costs associated with running the civil and administrative tribunal system. The cost will come through improved efficiencies including streamlined registry functions, reduced accommodation costs, shared information technology and a streamlined membership structure.

An excellent example of the success of this amalgamated model is the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal. Between 2003 and 2006, the number of jurisdictions administered by the CCT grew from four to 19 while its operating costs decreased by \$100,000. Our current fragmented system costs a similar amount to Victoria's centralised model but handles almost 40,000 fewer applications each year. Our move to a one-stop shop tribunal will help to reduce that cost through a simpler, more coordinated and accessible system.

As the Premier has announced, an independent panel of experts will be established to provide advice to the government on how best to implement the amalgamated Civil and Administrative Tribunal, including the precise scope of the jurisdiction of the new tribunal; membership and registry structure; and accommodation, information technology and other infrastructure needs. The panel will report back to cabinet before a final decision is made on which jurisdictions will be amalgamated into the new streamlined and efficient tribunal. The medical assessment tribunals will not be amalgamated into the new Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal due to the specialised nature of their deliberations. The amalgamation may result in a number of tribunal positions no longer being required. However, the administration of the new structure will require a number of Supreme and District Court judges as well as other tribunal heads being retained.

We want Queenslanders to have access to a coordinated, simple, easy to access tribunal system which in turn will increase the community's confidence in our justice system. Our current system does not achieve this. It is bureaucratic, costly and confusing to many people in our community. This new system will be easier to understand, user friendly and more flexible. A coordinated system with these attributes will only increase confidence in our civil and administrative justice system while also significantly reducing the operational costs of our tribunal system.

### **Schools, Environmental Sustainability**

**Hon. RJ WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (10.00 am): Today I am pleased to announce to the parliament a new statement on sustainability for all Queensland schools. This new statement, titled 'Enough for all forever', serves as a guide for schools to meet their environmental obligations. This document brings together a set of values, principles and approaches to support environmentally sustainable practices in all our state schools across Queensland. This statement is about living sustainably and making environmentally responsible decisions that will leave a positive legacy for future generations.

Environmental sustainability in schools is more than curriculum, facilities and saving energy and water. It is more than a vision; it requires strategies that are supported by the whole community. This statement supports our whole-of-government priority of protecting the environment for a sustainable future and the ClimateSmart 2050 strategy. It was developed after consultation with the public and the independent and Catholic school sectors. Through this statement on sustainability we are encouraging schools to implement strategies and actions in partnership with the community and within the school to reduce every school's ecological footprint.

We have already seen the difference our schools can make when they put their minds to saving water. Between 2004-05 and 2006-07, state schools in south-east Queensland reduced their water consumption by a remarkable 48 per cent. Statewide, our state schools reduced their consumption by

almost 31 per cent. These savings have been accomplished through tap and shower retrofits, the installation of water tanks at some schools and educational programs more broadly. Our principals, teachers and students are to be congratulated on the savings they have made already. We now have a generation of young people who understand the need to conserve water as a critical natural resource.

We will also be encouraging our schools to get involved in Earth Hour on 29 March 2008, where around the globe people will be turning their lights off for one hour in an effort to reduce energy consumption and combat climate change. It will be a significant symbolic statement of our community's and our school communities' commitment to saving the planet. The passion of today's children and young people about the environment and sustainability is most evident in all our schools. This statement on sustainability now provides our schools with a new road map to help them work towards an environmentally sustainable future at school and beyond.

### Coal Exports

**Hon. RJ MICKEL** (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Transport, Trade, Employment and Industrial Relations) (10.03 am): The coal industry in Queensland is a major driver of our state's economy and is delivering prosperity, directly and indirectly, to all Queenslanders. During 2006-07, Queensland's coal exports totalled over 153 million tonnes, which represents a massive growth of 93 per cent over the past decade. Our coal was exported to over 31 countries, with our major markets being Japan, Korea, Taiwan and India. Of course, the emergence of China as an industrial powerhouse has the potential for sustained demand for coal used in steel making and power generation for many years to come.

The resources industry has responded to this global demand for coal by investing billions into new mines and infrastructure. The Queensland government has also undertaken massive investments in infrastructure such as railways, port facilities, water supply and energy provision. This government's key role is to have a long-term plan for the delivery of infrastructure, to identify the best options for delivering those projects and to ensure that the coal export supply chain is working as well as it possibly can.

In order to capitalise on the resources boom for the benefit of all Queenslanders, the \$5.4 billion major coal transport infrastructure investment program was implemented. I am advised by my department that so far this program has delivered a 52 million tonnes per annum increase in port capacity, a 26 million tonnes per annum increase in rail track capacity and a 23 million tonnes per annum increase in rolling stock capacity. This program is part of the broader \$15 billion Coal Infrastructure Program of Actions.

The Queensland government is about looking forward and planning for the future. Last week I was at the Abbot Point coal terminal to announce a \$163 million investment that will include expanding capacity to 25 million tonnes per annum. Just yesterday Queensland Rail signed the CoalConnect project alliance agreement with partners Leighton Contractors, GHD and KBR to deliver the \$1 billion Goonyella to Abbot Point expansion project, including the northern missing link. The Queensland government is planning for the future prosperity of the resources industry, which will in turn deliver rewards for all the people of this state.

### Mining Industry, Skills Training

**Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Mines and Energy) (10.06 am): As my colleague has just said, mining is booming in Queensland and the Bligh government is backing it all the way. The royalties the state receives from mining—totalling more than a billion dollars last year—helps build our schools and hospitals, puts police on the beat and teachers in our classrooms. The boom times are set to continue and that is why the government is redoubling its efforts to attract, train and retain skilled workers in the mines and energy sector.

The resources boom has been a magnet for jobs and job security and the Bligh government is paving the way with clear and accessible career paths and training schemes for young people. That is important, because today's training leads to tomorrow's jobs. We are spending \$1.6 million over four years to promote women in mining, construction and engineering. It is called Women in Hard Hats. Last July, the government and the Queensland Resources Council signed a landmark memorandum of understanding to increase the number of Indigenous people employed in the state's mines. We are also providing significant funds to support the Mining Industry Skills Centre.

Queensland's energy industry is the second largest in Australia and the fastest growing. Ergon Energy and Energex have experienced an unprecedented demand for services across Queensland. They are taking positive steps to attract and retain skilled staff and are actively recruiting the best available specialist staff. The skills shortage is a national problem. Queensland is not alone. It was basically brought on by the absence of a national skills and training strategy under 11 years of the failed Howard government.

But this government, through Energex and Ergon, is doing its bit and investing in the future of Queensland by hiring and training record numbers of apprentices and field staff. Ergon has around 400 apprentices now—four times more than it had five years ago. I had the privilege of meeting Ergon's newest recruits at an induction ceremony in Rockhampton last month. They have entered the industry at a time when skilled workers are in strong demand. As apprentices in the trade, our new recruits are the future of the energy industry in Queensland and Australia. Currently, Energex has around 288 apprentices and more than 50 of their brightest and best will graduate this year. These new recruits will be the powerline workers, the electricians and the communication technicians of the future. They will help us meet the challenges of being the fastest-growing state in Australia.

### **Torres Strait Islands, Safety of Public Servants**

**Hon. S ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (10.08 am): Yesterday I indicated to the House and to the media that I would be prepared to release the report into security and maintenance of Queensland Health staff accommodation subject to the receipt of legal advice that its release would not jeopardise the police investigation that is currently underway. I have received that legal advice and now table the report, titled 'Torres Strait Risk Assessment'.

*Tabled paper:* Report by Queensland Health entitled 'Torres Strait Risk Assessment'.

This review into the standard of security and maintenance of Queensland Health staff accommodation in the Torres Strait identified many problems and deficiencies. Queensland Health, in partnership with Q-Build and other agencies, is working to fix those problems on all island health facilities. On Monday, a Q-Build locksmith and Queensland Health electrician commenced repairs on the nurses' residence on Mabuiag Island to fix locks, doors and windows. Security screens are also being replaced. Priority repairs on all outer islands are underway and should be completed by the end of March. A new system is in place for nurses to contact Q-Build directly to log maintenance relating to safety and security issues.

This morning my director-general and the Chief Nursing Officer are travelling to Mabuiag Island and other islands to inspect progress and ensure improvements are being made as quickly and as efficiently as possible. They will also oversee an overhaul of Queensland Health processes to deal with critical situations involving staff on outer islands. This will ensure that quick and appropriate responses occur when staff on the islands are in danger or in distress.

Today I have also instructed my director-general to initiate a statewide audit of the standard of security and maintenance within Queensland Health staff accommodation. In the first instance that review will concentrate on ensuring the safety and security of our staff who work in remote locations throughout the state and will prioritise single-person accommodation. This audit will be undertaken by teams of occupational health and safety practitioners and security experts. While I understand that the scope of the audits is quite large due to the geography of Queensland and the large number of accommodation units owned by Queensland Health, I have requested that it be completed within a month. However, I have directed the director-general to instruct district management to take immediate steps to repair any security flaws where they may already be known and not wait for the conclusion of the review.

The events in the Torres Strait were shocking. In all areas of our state the safety of our doctors and nurses is paramount. They deliver vital services in often challenging and difficult circumstances. If their safety cannot be guaranteed then urgent action must be taken and that is exactly what we are doing.

### **FIFA World Cup**

**Hon. JC SPENCE** (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport) (10.11 am): As members are aware, Football Federation Australia wants to bid for Australia to host the soccer world cup. The next world cup will be held in South Africa in 2010 and the 2014 world cup will be held in Brazil, so the next available opportunity is 2018. Both the Prime Minister and the Premier support the idea.

There would be obvious benefits for Queensland in securing a share of the world's largest sporting event after the Olympics. It is early days, but as a first step the FFA wants to work with all state and territory governments to conduct a national infrastructure audit. The FFA executives want solid information on which venues would be acceptable for the large crowds the world cup would attract. They also want to be sure that the right transport is available and that there would be enough accommodation.

Here in Queensland the department of sport and recreation will assist with this task. The audit, to start in March, will focus on identifying key match and training facilities, and accommodation and transport options. In relation to match venues, a minimum capacity of 40,000 seats is required so the focus is on Suncorp Stadium. Suncorp is a proven facility that would be an excellent venue for world cup matches. The audit will also determine Queensland's best 10 to 20 venues to host training sessions. Dairy Farmers Stadium and Skilled Park will top that list. The department of sport and recreation will head a committee of government agencies to provide this information to the FFA.

Once the FFA hears back from all states on their facilities, an analysis will be undertaken to determine where existing infrastructure fails to meet FIFA requirements. The FFA hopes to have a final analysis on infrastructure by May. If Australia is to try for the world cup, the bid would have to be submitted to FIFA by December 2010, with the host nation to be announced in October 2011. I am sure the infrastructure audit will find Queensland well positioned to grab a share of the world cup if a bid goes ahead and it is successful.

### **Mackay Flood Recovery Task Force**

**Hon. RE SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (10.13 am): I do not need to tell members that in February Mackay was hit hard by flooding. Yesterday, the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries and member for Mackay and a group representing relevant insurers travelled to Mackay for the inaugural meeting of the Mackay Flood Recovery Task Force. Yesterday I indicated to the member for Mirani that his omission from that was an oversight for which I apologise. At that stage I did not realise that a substantial amount of the damage occurred in his electorate. Given that we had a full plane, I could not change things at the last moment. I have undertaken that should it be necessary in the future he will certainly be included.

As members would be aware, John Gaskin, the president of the Master Builders Association, is leading the recovery effort on behalf of the state government. He is being assisted ably in this role by Mackay Mayor Julie Boyd. I wish Ms Boyd well as this is her last couple of days as the mayor of Mackay. Yesterday's meeting also involved representatives of some of Australia's largest insurance companies as well as officers from a number of government departments. I particularly thank the Department of Communities for the comprehensive report that was presented at the meeting which indicated that offices of that department are still dealing with a large range and number of health and wellbeing issues.

The aim of the meeting was to bring together all relevant bodies to evaluate the job ahead and to set some time lines for the flood affected residents. Members should make no mistake: with some 4,000 homes damaged by the flood waters, the job ahead of the task force is an enormous one. However, yesterday's meeting resolved to set the goal of having those homes habitable by Christmas. I am sure affected homeowners could not think of a better Christmas present. Of course, this goal will only be met through continued cooperation between stakeholders. If the willingness to cooperate demonstrated at yesterday's meeting is any indication, the goal will be reached and hopefully even bettered. An interesting point to come out of yesterday's meeting is that insurance assessments totalling more than \$169 million have already been completed. Of course, that figure will continue to rise as more assessments are completed.

I am also pleased to update the House on the activities of the Mackay Rebuilding Coordination Centre, which is being managed by the Queensland Building Services Authority. Since opening on 25 February, more than 200 building contractors and suppliers have registered their interest in helping with the rebuilding task. The centre is now coordinating those contractors with homeowners and insurance companies to streamline the process and get homes repaired fast. As of yesterday, 44 homeowners have lodged their details with the coordination centre and are being assisted. I expect that number to grow in coming weeks.

The message from yesterday's meeting is that many people require a lot more support. People may drive past a house and think that it looks intact, but the inside of the house will be a disaster. A lot of people, and many of them are poor people, are seriously out of pocket. I would urge anyone who has not yet given to the appeal in the parliament to give very serious consideration to doing so. Those people need a lot of help.

### **Climate Change Impact Statements**

**Hon. Al McNAMARA** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation) (10.17 am): Last Wednesday the Premier and I announced a groundbreaking change to cabinet processes in that, for the first time in Queensland and indeed in Australia, all relevant cabinet proposals will be required to include an assessment of the climate change impacts of the submission. Today I would like to provide the House with further information about those climate change impact statements.

The requirement to prepare a climate change impact statement is in response to the cross-cutting nature of climate change and the need for a whole-of-government response to this critical challenge. The economics of climate change in Australia, currently under consideration by the Garnaut review, show that the cost of acting too late is greater than the cost of acting now. As each sector of the economy contributes greenhouse gas emissions, so must each government agency consider policies and measures to avoid or reduce emissions and prepare for climate change impacts. A climate change impact statement in relevant cabinet submissions will assist all government agencies and cabinet to evaluate immediate and longer term climate change issues prior to the implementation stage of any proposal, thus saving potentially costly adjustments at later stages.

In preparing a climate change impact statement, agencies will undertake several key assessments including quantifying the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the proposal, including any increase or decrease in emissions; describing the mitigation measures that will be employed to avoid or reduce any increases in greenhouse gas emissions; identifying the risks and vulnerabilities to the proposal from likely changes to the climate over the proposal's life; and describing the adaptation measures to reduce the risks from climate change impacts.

The climate change impact statement will allow cabinet to better consider the impact of decisions on the state's greenhouse gas profile and to ensure that risks from climate change impacts have been appropriately addressed. In addition, it will provide an important tool for government agencies in considering their own policies and activities as Queensland moves towards a low-carbon future.

It is anticipated that from 1 July 2008 all cabinet submissions will include a climate change impact statement. Through this commitment the Queensland government is demonstrating world leadership in responding to climate change.

### **Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Capital Works Projects**

**Hon. TS MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (10.18 am): The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries is value-adding to our world-renowned expertise with more than \$30 million in capital works projects supporting a vision of profitable primary industries. Next month the \$8.3 million Queensland Crop Development Facility at Redlands Research Station will be opened to stand amongst the world's leading plant bio-industry centres. I understand that you will be there, Mr Acting Speaker. This collaborative project with QUT and UQ sets a benchmark for crop research and has attracted interest from multinational companies wishing to co-locate at the facility, further reinforcing the links between the public and private agricultural biotech sectors.

Built on ecologically sustainable development principles with the latest water and energy-saving technology, it will provide almost 1,400 square metres of greenhouse space. The commitment of \$5.34 million by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, \$3 million from the Smart State Research Facilities Fund and further funding from QUT and UQ has ensured that this facility will integrate seamlessly into the Smart State biotechnology vision.

The creation of a centre for excellence in animal science research is also underway through the department's Centre for Advanced Animal Science. The extension at UQ's Gatton campus is in its second stage and due for completion late this year. The project has been funded with more than \$11 million each from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and the University of Queensland, and \$9.5 million from the Research Facilities Fund. A flexible design will allow it to meet contemporary and future research needs in areas including animal nutrition, metabolism and growth, reproductive biology and biotechnology, animal diseases and vaccines, food safety and quality.

A further \$5 million is being injected into the Bribie Island Aquaculture Research Centre to enhance the ecosciences precinct and aquaculture. Diversifying this facility will maximise DPIF's research into pest fish and stocking strategies to maintain the sustainability of Queensland's fish resources. The tender process will be complete by the middle of this year, and when built, the centre will be a world-class facility for combined fisheries and aquaculture research. A further \$13.44 million expenditure has been allocated for the relocation of the Wacol Tick Fever Centre, the construction of the regional office at Nambour and to refurbish the Coen Information Centre on Cape York Peninsula. DPIF has world-class staff. It is only proper that they have world-class facilities.

### **Parenting Skills**

**Hon. MM KEECH** (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women) (10.21 am): Supporting vulnerable families is one of the Bligh government's key priorities. I am pleased to take this opportunity to highlight some of the Smart State's innovations being introduced by child safety staff in working with Queensland families to develop parenting skills, which we often take for granted.

I have been particularly impressed by an initiative of the Woodridge Child Safety Service Centre designed to help parents develop the skills they need to give their children the best possible care. I commend the local member, Desley Scott, for her passion and hard work as the champion for Woodridge families. The Woodridge mums and cubs playgroup is run by the centre's child safety support officers each week. This informal, social gathering for families may involve children who are living in out-of-home care spending time with their parents or those who are still living at home but whose parents are working with the department.

There are craft activities for the mums to do with their children and there is a variety of toys, books and games that encourage imaginative play. Parents are encouraged to 'play' with their children and the child safety support officers role model how to interact at an age appropriate level. The children learn social skills and learn to share and play together in a safe environment. The mums are offered tip sheets on areas that the mums themselves identify as areas they need more information about, including sleep problems, teething, and ages and stages of development. This is also a chance for the mothers to

socialise and make new friends while sharing their own experiences of parenting. Guests are invited occasionally, and this includes the child health nurse once a month who is available for the mums to ask advice.

I am particularly pleased to say that this program was developed and implemented by staff from the Woodridge Child Safety Service Centre who came up with the plan as a way of offering support for vulnerable local families. I do congratulate the hardworking Woodridge staff on their initiative. Offering families the chance to learn parenting skills in a supportive way allows them to spend more time and reconnect with their children. We also hope to see families reunited and children in safe, happy, loving homes. It is through initiatives like this that the Bligh government is helping parents ensure that they are giving their children the very best possible care.

### **Vegetation Management, Kyoto Protocol**

**Hon. CA WALLACE** (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Water and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland) (10.24 am): As members of this House may be aware, as of yesterday Australia is an official signatory to the Kyoto protocol. The 90-day transition period for Australia to join the Kyoto protocol ended yesterday after Prime Minister Rudd ratified the agreement in December. Ratifying the Kyoto protocol has been an outstanding achievement of the new Rudd Labor government. The Kyoto protocol is an international framework that aims to reduce greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

Most members will know that the greatest single contribution to Australia meeting its Kyoto targets up until now is Queensland ending broadscale tree clearing. Under Queensland's Vegetation Management Act—a law of national and international significance—broadscale tree clearing ceased in December 2006. This has led to a cut in greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 20 million tonnes each year. Before this legislation was introduced, up to 500,000 hectares of Queensland native vegetation was being cleared annually.

**An opposition member:** Why don't you just table it?

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Members!

**Mr WALLACE:** I know they do not like the Kyoto protocol and that is a shame. The tree killers opposite—

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

**Mr WALLACE:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. The tree killers opposite hate the Vegetation Management Act and the tree killers opposite hate the Kyoto protocol.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! I call the minister.

**Mr WALLACE:** They are waiting for the day to bring out the chains, to bring out the balls, to bring out the dozers. They are waiting for that day, but Queenslanders will not allow it. Queenslanders will not allow it. The Queensland Labor government put a stop to broadscale land clearing. Millions of hectares of remnant vegetation are now preserved forever for our children and their children.

**Mr Copeland** interjected.

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Cunningham! Member for Gregory!

**Mr WALLACE:** This act also prevents the loss of biodiversity and land degradation, and don't they squeal, Mr Acting Speaker. This state Labor government recognised that landholders will still need to clear vegetation for management purposes such as building fences, controlling weeds or harvesting fodder.

**Mr Johnson:** Look at your colleagues; they're embarrassed.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr WALLACE:** They hate it, Mr Acting Speaker, and listen to them squeal because we preserve our biodiversity. The VMA takes into account the needs of landholders. Amendments to the VMA were passed in this parliament late last month. These legislative amendments ensure that endangered vegetation continues to have the highest level of protection in Queensland and provide certainty to landholders.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr WALLACE:** Listen to them squeal, Mr Acting Speaker. They are ready with their chainsaws.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable the minister.

**Mr WALLACE:** Ready with their chainsaws.

**Mr Springborg:** It's amazing what a difference 10 days makes.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Callide! I call the minister.

**Mr WALLACE:** Ready with their chainsaws and who were following them—

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order, Minister!

**Mr WALLACE:** And who were following the Nationals on this death march for Queensland trees? Who were following the Nationals on this death march for Queensland trees? Their mates in the Liberal Party—the member for Surfers Paradise, the member for Currumbin—

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order, Minister!

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gregory! The minister will direct his comments through the chair, not to honourable members.

**Mr WALLACE:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. If it moves, shoot it. If it stands still, cut it down. They have not changed their spots and the Liberals are right behind them. Last week I met with the new Minister for Climate Change and Water, Penny Wong, at the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr WALLACE:** Listen to them squeal. They hate the trees. They hate them. And now the member for Clayfield hates the trees as well. He voted against this legislation. He hates the trees.

**Mr Welford:** No tree is safe.

**Mr WALLACE:** No tree is safe in Queensland if the Liberals and Nationals get their way.

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

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

## PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

### Report

**Ms STONE** (Springwood—ALP) (10.29 am): I lay upon the table the Public Works Committee's report No. 98 on its inquiry into the Suncorp Stadium project.

*Tabled paper:* Report No. 98 by the Public Works Committee entitled 'Suncorp Stadium Project'.

I would like to thank all those who have assisted the committee with its inquiry. The committee appreciates the effort involved in making submissions and appearing before the committee. I thank my fellow committee members for their assistance and support. I also thank the committee staff for their assistance.

Suncorp Stadium is the product of the redevelopment of the previous Lang Park sports ground. The site is of great historical and cultural importance, and over the years it has established its own sporting iconic status. The stadium itself is excellent. The committee is satisfied that the redeveloped stadium will adequately accommodate the public and service areas and will meet its operational needs for the foreseeable future. I commend the report to the House.

## NOTICES OF MOTION

### Order for Production of Documents

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.30 am): I give notice that I will move—

- (1) That under the provisions of Standing Order 27, this House orders both the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education to lay upon the table of the House copies of any and all briefings, reports, audits and other documents under the control or in the possession of the Ministers or the departments for which they are responsible, that have been created in the last five years and which relate to:
  - (a) crimes committed against educators, health professionals and other public servants engaged by their departments on the Torres Strait Islands of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu and other Queensland communities;
  - (b) the safety of educators, health professionals and other public servants engaged by their departments on the Torres Strait Islands of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu and other Queensland communities;
  - (c) the transfer of educators, health professionals and other public servants engaged by their departments due to crime or safety fears on the Torres Strait Islands of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu and other Queensland communities.
- (2) That the Ministers be permitted to remove from the copies of the briefings, reports, audits and other documents any names or identifying features of individuals before laying the documents on the table of the House.

### Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (10.32 am): I give notice that I will move—

That the Local Government Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2008, Subordinate Legislation No. 48 of 2008, tabled in the House on 11 March 2008, be disallowed.

This is a regulation whereby the minister has revoked the resolution of the Aramac Shire Council to give its workers an eight per cent pay rise. You are against the workers!

### QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

#### Torres Strait Islands, Safety of Public Servants

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.32 am): My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. I will read the recommendations for Mabuiag Island which are listed in the report that the minister tabled in the parliament today. The recommendations are—

1. Train core staff in ABM
2. Install security and fire systems
3. Training in security and fire systems
4. Install closed circuit television systems
5. Training in CCTV software use
6. Perimeter lighting to be substantial to illuminate external risk areas i.e. Not household general lighting
7. All windows of health facility and staff accommodation need to be security grilled with a exit in the event of fire
8. Perimeter doors needs control pad or access control
9. Planned maintenance agreement needs to be established for security systems and building structures such as doors, lighting, locks etc
10. Install security intruder system

**Mr Swarten:** Just table it.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** These are important issues. The recommendations continue—

11. Emergency staff exit strategy needs to be developed
12. Remove all glass louvres
13. Procedures for responding to fire/aggression/exit strategy

**Mr Finn:** Come on!

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** And they do not want to hear it.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the Opposition, questions are supposed to be short. Please ask your question.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Every member now has a record of this paper. This is a litany of failure from this government.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Please ask your question.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Can the minister tell the House whether if these repairs had been carried out—as they were urgently requested 16 months ago—the subsequent alleged rape of the nurse on Mabuiag Island could have been prevented?

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** I need to seek advice. Again, as it is, I believe that question does not comply with the standing orders. I will give opposition members a hint that they need to look at the wording of their questions because that question is technically hypothetical in nature. Given the current interest in the debate, I will call the minister.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Mr Acting Speaker, as you quite correctly indicated, that is a hypothetical question and is incapable of being answered given the circumstances. Whilst I understand the significant interest in this report, I request that all members in this place understand that there is an investigation underway. I hope they take care with their questions and any debate that may ensue on these particular issues.

Nonetheless, in answer to part of the opposition leader's question, the answer is clearly no. A number of those issues were not attended to, despite the receipt by district management of this report. I indicated yesterday and I restate today that that is completely unacceptable. The fact that this report sat on the managers' desks for over a year and was not acted on frankly beggars belief in terms of what any minister or any senior executive of any organisation would expect out of their line managers who are working to implement their responsibilities. I have made that perfectly clear and I state that again today.

What I have indicated today, as I did yesterday, is our response. Having received this report, we are not only acting to upgrade security and safety across all islands in the Torres Strait—and, as I indicated during my ministerial statement, my director-general and the chief nurse are in the Torres Strait today to oversee the implementation of rectification works which will be completed in a timely fashion, as soon as possible. I have also indicated that I have directed my director-general to send a memo to all district managers in Queensland to conduct an immediate review of safety and security in



staff accommodation across the state. Also, if any security issues in terms of staff accommodation are known to management, they will not wait for the conclusion of that review but will move today to rectify those particular issues.

I sincerely regret, as I said yesterday, what happened to this nurse on Mabuiag Island. What occurred is, under every circumstance, unacceptable. What we will do now, however, is ensure as much as possible that it will never happen again. I believe that what I have outlined yesterday and today goes a long way towards achieving that aim.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Before calling the Leader of the Opposition, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of students and teachers from Aspley East State School in the electorate of Aspley, which is represented in the chamber by the honourable Bonny Barry.

### **Torres Strait Islands, Safety of Public Servants**

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My second question without notice is also to the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to the department's occupational health and safety management system, which says—

Queensland Health will investigate all violent incidents at work as soon as possible, and within 72 hours of the incident.

That is in this document. Can the minister confirm whether the alleged rape on Mabuiag Island was investigated within 72 hours, as per the minister's own policy, and can he confirm what the findings were? Or is this another case of how the Bligh government has failed to bring about cultural change after the cover-up of Dr Patel?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** In terms of our response to what has occurred up in the Torres Strait based on what has come to our attention subsequent to that, we have at all times been open and transparent. That includes what we have done here—that is, we have tabled the report which was mentioned in this place yesterday and in media reports a week or so ago.

That is the measure of our commitment to transparency in dealing with ongoing issues in an organisation of some 65,000 people who ply their trade across Queensland in some very, very challenging environments. It is clear that the managerial response to that report was completely inept and unacceptable. I say publicly to all district managers in Queensland Health that when they receive reports such as this that were, in fact, commissioned by the organisation, they have an obligation to act on them. That is what they get paid to do. Managers who do not act on those reports are derelict in their duty. As I have said previously, this was not a budget issue; this was a clear case of managerial incompetence.

As it turns out, the individual involved has since retired and there is a new management team in place. I have asked my director-general to ensure that that manager is supported. Indeed, we are looking at bringing in external management to assist that new manager to get on top of a range of issues in the Torres Strait so that this never happens again. Frankly, had this occurred with that manager still in place, then some very, very serious action would now be undertaken by the director-general which, in my personal view, would have resulted in that individual's removal from his post.

I say to my organisation today: learn from this. This is clearly unacceptable. There is an obligation upon managers to look after their workers. Clearly, the contents of this report show that the matter was not being attended to in a satisfactory manner. That is why I have today directed my director-general to undertake a statewide review so that we get to the bottom of this issue right across the state. Quite frankly, our nurses in particular work in very isolated parts of this state. In order to maintain those services in a sustainable way we need to ensure their safety, and that is what we are dedicated to doing as a result of the actions I have put in place over the last 48 hours.

### **Local Government Reform**

**Ms MALE:** My question without notice is to the Premier. Can the Premier update the House on how transition arrangements for local government amalgamations have proceeded?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I am pleased to have an opportunity to draw to the attention of the House the report of the Local Government Association of Queensland, the February-March edition of their magazine *Council Leader*. As members would be aware, there has been a lot of controversy about the government's proposal to amalgamate councils and form large regional councils. I refer honourable members opposite to this document. I am very pleased to read in it that the President of the LGAQ, Councillor Paul Bell, advises that transitional arrangements are proceeding well. Greg Hoffman, the director of policy and representation, says—

While much has been done to prepare for the changes, for which the Local Transition Committees and interim CEOs are to be congratulated—

And I join with Greg Hoffman in congratulating those people who have worked so hard to make the transition work. There is no doubt that the LGAQ continues to have concerns about this process, and I am not in any way moving away from that, but I congratulate them for recognising the work that

their members are doing. They have a four- or five-page feature headed 'Progress: councils moving smoothly through transition', which states—

Local Transition Committees have been working cohesively towards implementation of the new Queensland government local structures.

There are personal accounts from a number of councillors throughout regional and rural Queensland who outline the sort of work that has gone into making the transactions effective work, and I congratulate them because amalgamation is not easy. Merging organisations that have their own culture and traditions and bringing them all together in one new model is not easy but it does appear to be going well here.

The same, of course, cannot be said about another very famous amalgamation proposal. I was interested to read today in the *Courier-Mail*, 'Name kills merger'. What we have seen in today's press is that the leader of the federal Liberal Party, Dr Nelson, who on Sunday said that he would stake his leadership on a merger, by Wednesday is saying what he really meant by 'merger' was that the Nationals would join the Liberal Party. Of course, we have Warren Truss saying that is a takeover and it is rejected. Readers of the *Gold Coast Bulletin* will know that we have had existing Liberal members of the Liberal caucus talking to the *Gold Coast Bulletin* and saying—

All the Nats want to talk about at joint party meetings are dams, fishing and stock routes. We believe in daylight saving and they won't have a bar of it.

Best of all, one disgruntled Liberal went on to say—

The Springborg ultimatum sounds more like the rebranding of the leadership of a former loser.

The prenuptial agreement has not even been signed and they are talking divorce proceedings. They cannot even agree on the wedding invitation.

#### Patel, Dr J

**Mr McARDLE:** My question is to the Minister for Health. No-one is more pleased than the opposition at the arrest of Dr Patel. Queenslanders have to date spent \$561,000 to extradite Dr Jayant Patel. How much did the minister's government spend on the business class air fare that allowed Dr Patel to flee the country in the first place?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is an issue that was canvassed exhaustively some years ago. In order to help the honourable member, I refer him back to the records of the day for the answer.

#### Alcohol Misuse

**Ms BARRY:** I, too, would also like to welcome Aspley East State School to the public gallery. I understand that there are four groups coming through this morning. My question is to the Premier. The Prime Minister has announced that he wants to see a major change in the attitude of Australians to alcohol. What is Queensland going to do to stop binge drinking?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for the question and for her genuine concern on this issue. I welcome the interest of the Prime Minister on the issue of alcohol and its distribution. I am pleased to advise the House that the Queensland government's determination for reform in this area is proceeding. Every year in Queensland there are an estimated 812 deaths and 20,900 hospital admissions caused by alcohol misuse. These are extraordinary figures. The cost of alcohol misuse is estimated to be about \$1.8 billion every year, including health care, the loss of productivity, law enforcement costs, the cost of crime and the impact of premature death. The social costs attributable to alcohol misuse in Australia are estimated to be \$7.6 billion every year. This is something we need to turn our minds to.

The Queensland Liquor Act will be reformed. The reform that we are determined to apply is a requirement that every person who works in the liquor industry, whether they be bottle shop attendants, glass collectors, security personnel or bar staff, will be required by law to have training on responsible service of alcohol. I know that the member for Burnett is out opposing this.

**Mr Messenger:** No, I'm not. I'm just opposed to you charging for it.

**Ms BLIGH:** What is important here is that we understand the importance of training for every member of an organisation that is selling alcohol, because responsible service of alcohol makes a difference in how much people drink, when they drink it and in what condition they leave the establishment. Secondly, we are determined to crack down on the extension of trading hours. Any hotel or club that wants to apply to trade outside the standard hours of 10 am to midnight will be reviewed to ensure that it can safely do so. This will have an impact not only on drinkers and their ability to consume alcohol but also on the amount of time that people can spend gambling at pubs and clubs.

I know that there is some concern in the industry about our proposals in relation to early opening, but frankly the rise in people using poker machines before breakfast is out of control and we are determined to do something about it. A new fee structure based on the hours of operation will apply to hotels and clubs that have extended hours and the extra money will be spent on ensuring safe service rules are applied.

Queensland's proposed reforms have been the subject of thorough consultation with the industry. The deadline for public feedback is tomorrow. I would encourage any members who are aware of any club or pub that has a view on this to make sure they know about that deadline. Every Queenslander has a responsibility to themselves to take care when consuming alcohol. Our government made the tough decisions on smoking in our hotels and clubs to protect patrons and staff alike. We are going to do the same to ensure that alcohol is served safely.

### **Bundaberg Hospital**

**Mr MESSENGER:** My question without notice is the Premier. Under the Premier's government, widows of Bundaberg Hospital victims are receiving compensation payments of between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Does the Premier honestly believe that what the government is giving is fair and reasonable when it barely covers the cost of funerals?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the member for the question. It is not a matter for me to determine whether these payments are fair. That is a judgement made by the claimants in each case, upon advice from their legal advisers. We have put in place an expedited claims process to ensure that those people who have an entitlement to a claim can have that claim dealt with swiftly and as expeditiously as possible. Claimants or people who believe they have an entitlement are not required to use this process. If they want to take their matter through the full court process they are entitled to do that.

**Mr Messenger** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order!

**Ms BLIGH:** It is precisely because we understand that people want to see these matters settled quickly and as cost-effectively as possible that we put in place this process. We are not requiring people to accept these payments. They are being offered to the claimants. They make an informed judgement as to whether or not they will accept the offer based on advice from their lawyers, not government lawyers. I can advise that 385 claims for compensation have been received under the special process and almost 90 per cent of those claims have been dealt with to date. I understand that this—

**Mr Messenger:** How many did you not pay?

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Burnett!

**Mr Messenger** interjected.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Burnett, I warn you under standing order 253. You have asked the question and the Premier is answering the question on the topic. I call the Premier.

**Ms BLIGH:** I note the continual interjections from the member for Burnett. I can only repeat what I have said. The government put in place a special process to expedite the normal court processes to alleviate high court costs and long delays for those people who have been affected. Their willingness to be part of that process is entirely a matter for them. The decision as to whether or not to accept the nominated sum is a matter entirely for their judgement, not mine, and one that they make in conjunction with the legal advice that I understand the government is paying for.

I think it is fair to say that we have put in place extra-special arrangements for the people concerned. I think that is right and appropriate. I am pleased to see that so many have come forward and are having their claims settled expeditiously.

### **Ipswich CBD**

**Mr WENDT:** My question is to the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier please advise the House of moves by the Bligh government to ensure that one of south-east Queensland's fastest growing centres has the CBD it needs and deserves?

**Mr LUCAS:** Yes, I can. I thank the honourable member for his question. The members for Ipswich West, Ipswich and Bundamba are a trio of very energetic and effective local members who have a real vision for a place in south-east Queensland that I think has a tremendous future. It has had a very proud history in the past. What is even more important is that it has a future and a great vision for the future.

Over the next 20 years the population of the Ipswich region is expected to double to 318,000 people. That is why the state government is serious about planning for growth in the region. Last month, together with the mayor, Paul Pisasale, I launched the Ipswich Regional Centre Strategy, which outlines 17 initiatives for the area, including an integrated transit centre.

I took the opportunity before that time to walk through the CBD of Ipswich with the mayor. In the past I have inspected the railway station with the members for Ipswich and Ipswich West. Frankly, the CBD of Ipswich is tired. We cannot have a dynamic growth city like Ipswich and people who own land who do not share the vision of the city, of the mayor, of the council, of the state government and of the business community to develop Ipswich. I say to the minority of people like this who own land in the Ipswich CBD: 'If you are not prepared to share the vision and work towards growing Ipswich CBD as the vibrant centre that it deserves to be, the state government will take action to ensure that is the case.'

Recently the Coordinator-General indicated a proposal to declare Ipswich CBD a state development area—

**Mr Horan:** You'd force people to make a loss, would you?

**Mr LUCAS:** I see. Let it be on the record that the member for Toowoomba South opposes taking action. Thank you very much for that. This is strongly supported by the local business community. When you go to shop there with three or four—

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Deputy Premier—

**Mr Rickuss:** There's no-one in the shops.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Lockyer! Deputy Premier, please direct your comments through the chair.

**Mr LUCAS:** When you go to a shop and the shops next door are empty because of a lack of investment and support by landlords then you have to take action. We are doing that. We will put \$5 million towards developing the strategy and proposal. But additionally, the Premier has announced that we will be relocating approximately 1,200 public servants to the Ipswich CBD. That will help provide the business case to attract more people there—more people working there, more people living there, more people shopping there.

This community will double in population in the next 20 years. This is about making a CBD that we can be proud of again. This is about the role of the state government. The private sector will ultimately build these buildings but we will be there supporting the community and the business community, even if those opposite do not.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Before calling the honourable member for Warrego, I would like to acknowledge in the public gallery a second group of students and teachers from Aspley East State School in the electorate of Aspley, represented in the chamber by the honourable Bonny Barry.

### Local Government Elections

**Mr HOBBS:** My question is to the Attorney-General. This week for the upcoming local government elections a Chinchilla resident received a central downs ballot paper, ballot papers have been sent with the incorrect names of candidates, the wrong ballot papers have been sent to the wrong shire divisions, people have received their return envelopes with no ballot papers, voters in the Wishart ward in Brisbane are receiving wrong ballot papers, residents of the Whitsunday shire have reported that they have received ballot papers for the Brisbane mayoral election, ballot papers for voters in the Winton shire in Queensland have been sent to Winton in Victoria, and councils are receiving hundreds of calls from voters receiving no postal ballot material at all. Minister, do we need to call in the United Nations to supervise this local election so that candidates can be assured that the Bligh Labor government can run a fair and democratic election?

**Mr SHINE:** The answer is no. I think that the course recommended by the honourable member is entirely unnecessary. The honourable member asked in parliament recently a question of a similar nature in relation to the postal ballot papers distributed in the Balonne shire. I sought advice from the independent Electoral Commissioner, Mr David Kerslake, as to the particulars of what had occurred. He responded to me on 10 March. I will table a copy of a letter from him dated 10 March.

*Tabled paper:* Letter dated 10 March 2008, from Mr David Kerslake, Electoral Commissioner, to Hon. Kerry Shine MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, concerning ballot material for local government elections in the Balonne Shire.

The Electoral Commissioner advises that, in a number of cases, the incorrect reply paid envelope was enclosed. These envelopes were addressed to the returning officer for Southern Downs Regional Council. The returning officer for Southern Downs is aware of the issue and will ensure that any ballot material that has already been returned to him will be delivered to the Balonne shire returning officer. The commissioner has also contacted any other affected electors and arranged for dispatch of the correct reply paid envelope. The returning officer for the Southern Downs has also advised that he has received a number of calls from electors stating that they did not receive ballot papers with their voting material.

In all cases, a fresh ballot paper has been reissued. The commissioner is also aware that a small number of incorrect ballot papers were issued in the Wishart ward of the Brisbane City Council and the Whitsunday Regional Council. In all cases, appropriate remedial action has been taken to ensure that all electors are able to cast their votes. If there is any new material raised by the honourable member I will ensure that appropriate action—bearing in mind the time constraints—is carried out immediately.

### Housing Affordability

**Ms DARLING:** My question is to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology. Every week I receive letters and phone calls and have meetings with constituents complaining about housing hardship and exorbitant rents in the private housing market. Can the minister advise what the government is doing to try to ease the housing affordability burden?

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I am very conscious of the efforts the honourable member goes to in order to assist her constituents, and I have before me a letter which she sent on 10 March where she indicates the plight of a family that is paying 50 per cent of their household income in rent. This is a matter of grave concern to this side of the House; it is not the laughing matter that members opposite greeted that question with. It is a serious matter right throughout the state. I notice that in the *Glasshouse Country News* the Rotary Club is sufficiently concerned about it to have a meeting on the subject. I notice that it is featuring very heavily in council elections at the moment. I notice in the Townsville area the council is donating a property. Everywhere around the state people want to do something about it, but what do the tories opposite do? They laugh about it, which is what they have done for the last 11 years.

We have been fighting above our weight on this issue for the last 10 years. The result has been that we now have 65,000 units of accommodation in Queensland and we are now spending \$479 million this year on housing—record budgets each year that I have been a minister. But what has been absent is the private rental market support which is now under threat in this state like it has never been since the Great Depression. It is great to have a federal Labor government and a federal housing minister who finally will be meeting on Friday with the housing ministers about this issue. The former federal housing minister—a tory—did not bother to turn up. The great Mal Brough did not even bother to turn up to the Darwin meeting! But Tanya Plibersek will be there on Friday to sit down with us to try to hammer out a solution to this problem.

Already the Prime Minister has announced a new private rental product subsidised by the federal government which will bring 100,000 new homes into the Australian private rental market. That is the best news that this parliament has had for at least 10 years, and it was welcomed by this side of the House and derided by that side. And why not of course, because we know of the deafening silence that has existed over there for the last 10 years! The absent Leader of the Opposition had the hide to go to the UDIA the other day and announce that he was going to bring out this great policy on housing affordability. He has had a long time to do it, and what have we seen? We still have the blank sheet of paper coming from the opposition—the same derisive remarks that we always hear when the issue of housing affordability arises. I look forward to being there on Friday with all of the other Labor states with a Labor federal government to try to hammer out a solution to this problem—the most disastrous legacy in this country's history after 11 years of rotten, filthy tory governments federally.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the House, I would ask you to withdraw those last few words as they were unparliamentary.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I withdraw.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Before calling the honourable member for Nanango, I acknowledge in the public gallery students and teachers from the Anglican Church Grammar School in the electorate of South Brisbane, which is represented in the chamber by Premier Anna Bligh.

### Kunioon Mine

**Mrs PRATT:** My question is to the Premier. During the Premier's visit to the Whipbird Chapel at Coolabunia on 6 March did she, as has been reported to me, indicate to the women who are impacted by the development of the Kunioon mine that she would be revisiting the Kunioon mine decision due to the nature of the coal produced? Has she spoken with the Minister for Mines and Energy? What will be the future of the Kunioon mine?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the member for the question. I am happy to advise that I did advise the group that this was an issue that the member brought to my attention and that she was unable to be at that meeting on that day but that it was an issue that she had an interest in.

What I indicated to the women concerned—and they gave me correspondence and asked me to pursue that, and I will be doing that with the Minister for Mines and Energy—was that this project is now the subject of an environmental impact statement and that that statement goes beyond just environmental impacts in the strictest sense of that word and that that is a process that will allow them to draw attention to social and broader impacts and that they should put that submission through. I indicated that the environmental impact work will have to stack up for this mine to proceed, as is the case with all such applications. However, I think it would be inaccurate to say that I said that it would be revisited on the basis of the quality of the coal. I do not recall discussing the quality of the coal and do not regard myself as an expert on that issue. But I did indicate that the EIS was an opportunity for them to draw attention to their concerns—and I think they are legitimate concerns; they are locals—and I encouraged them to be part of that process.

As the member would be aware, that process can have a number of outcomes. Firstly, an EIS can result in the identification of impacts that are not capable of mitigation and are unacceptable. That brings into question the whole project—whatever it is—and there are some examples of that happening in recent times. Secondly, the process can identify impacts of the project that can be mitigated and ways to ensure that they are mitigated and the project is then approved to proceed on the proviso that those mitigation strategies are put in place. Thirdly, the impact statement can identify that there are no or

minimal impacts of any particular project and it can go ahead in its original form. I do not want to pre-empt that process, only to encourage the member's constituents who are living nearby or who have a concern to know about the process and to know how they can have a say in that process. I am happy to facilitate that in any way with the member or her constituents.

### Office of Fair Trading, Household Budgets

**Mrs REILLY:** My question without notice is to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland. Can the Attorney inform the House of the help available for families to control their household budgets through the Department of Fair Trading? And I will be listening intently to his answer.

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Recent interest rate rises, high petrol prices and other factors are placing significant pressure on Queensland household budgets. It is getting tougher for families to balance their household budgets. This government is determined to ease the financial burden on Queensland families. The Office of Fair Trading has a number of programs to help mums and dads better manage their household finances. One of these is the Office of Fair Trading's *How to be moneywise* pamphlet, which is produced to assist consumers in managing and understanding debt. It covers topics such as budgeting, obtaining credit, the different loans available, managing debt and where to go for help. This is a handy reference tool which can help consumers who are getting in over their head to manage their credit.

Home affordability is a major issue in Queensland, and in most cases a home will be a person's largest ever purchase. This government can assist people in making informed decisions so that they can buy and keep their home. We have a homebuyers guide on the Office of Fair Trading's web site which provides homebuyers with information and resources for managing their credit arrangements before and after they borrow to buy real estate. It helps people work out how much they can afford to borrow—

**Mr Lucas:** Don't see the member for Caloundra—rule 1!

**Mr SHINE:** I take that interjection from the Deputy Premier. It does help people work out how much they can afford to borrow, save a deposit, get finance and research the property market. There is also a free budget planner spreadsheet which makes it easy to tally up household expenses and calculate how to save money or meet loan repayments. Through the homebuyers guide, this government is giving consumers the practical tools to help them save for a home, buy it and pay it off. We are also prepared to help people with information on other credit and financial issues such as comparing loans, direct debit pitfalls, using finance and mortgage brokers, vendor finance and wrap loans, and payday lenders and loans.

We also provide a wealth of information and consumer warnings on the Office of Fair Trading web site. These include information on how to deal with harassment from creditors struggling with debt and using credit wisely. This valuable information will help Queenslanders to control their budgets which in turn will alleviate stress and foster a happier family and financial environment. I would encourage anyone who is under pressure financially to contact the Office of Fair Trading or log on to the web site and use these important tools to balance the household budget.

### Local Government Elections

**Mr MALONE:** My question is to the Minister for Main Roads and Local Government. It is estimated that the cost to run the local government elections under the government's model will be \$15 million—almost double what it would usually cost for local government elections. Can the minister explain to the ratepayers of Queensland why they should foot the bill for the extra cost of running Saturday's elections?

**Mr PITT:** This is the first time that the local authority elections in Queensland will be conducted under the auspices of the Electoral Commission of Queensland. It is an historic occasion. It is my understanding that, up until now, the Brisbane City Council was the only jurisdiction that did this. I may be wrong in that respect.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr PITT:** By choice. However, I think it is very important for us to understand that the people of Queensland want to have as much transparency and confidence in the way in which their councils are elected, and no more so in this new environment where we have new regional councils and some councils changing their boundaries, even though they may not be amalgamated. The people of Queensland have indicated this. They wanted the ECQ or some other body to take control of these elections so that they would have confidence.

Having said that, the elections must be paid for. Previously, the elections were run internally by each of the councils. A number of councils have written to me to indicate that they believe they will be footing an unacceptably high bill. The figures that they have provided to us are not complete figures. They have not provided to us figures that would take into consideration all the arrangements regarding

an election. But in the past they have absorbed most of this internally. Staff have done a lot of those things themselves. As well, things such as printing have been done internally. So it is very hard to take at face value the figures that have been put forward by a number of local authorities.

The government of course realises that in setting up this new system for the conduct of elections there will be a need for start-up costs for the ECQ. That is why a figure of \$1.2 million has been made available to assist with that process. We should always understand that these costs are not costs, as some would indicate, that have to be paid immediately. If there are costs incurred by the councils they can be spread over a four-year period. We must balance the costs associated with this process with the important principle that electors and ratepayers have confidence in the efficacy of the way in which the process takes place.

### Energy Consumption

**Mr FENLON:** My question is to the Minister for Mines and Energy. Today people are being asked constantly to reduce their energy consumption to help combat greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. However, while most people are keen to help out, for many some of the low-energy options are not low cost or easy to implement. What is the government doing to show Queenslanders how they can save energy and money?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the member for the question. It is heartening that Queenslanders are ready and willing to climb on board and conserve energy. In the past 10 years Queensland homes have changed enormously. Today, one-third of Queensland's homes have two or more air-conditioners, 50 per cent have two or more fridges and 12 per cent have at least one plasma TV. To cut to the chase, these appliances use a lot of electricity.

We need to be smarter about when and how we use electricity. We have energy conservation strategies to help householders save energy and save money. It is as simple as ABC. They are in our home EnergyWise kits. There are self-audit kits with tips for householders to save energy and money. The Department of Mines and Energy will be distributing these in the very near future. They will also be given to every household that gets a Home WaterWise adviser. So they will get two in one: a home EnergyWise adviser as well as a Home WaterWise adviser.

In addition, over the next few months householders will also be able to borrow energy do-it-yourself toolboxes from the local library. There will be a number of things in these toolboxes. One of them will be an appliance meter. I just happen to have one here with me for the assistance of the House. This appliance meter will enable every householder to measure the electricity consumption and the cost of the consumption of each appliance they have in their house. They will be able to go through their house and do an audit on each energy-using appliance. Of course, if we plugged it into the opposition, we might not find much energy. This appliance is a smart use of energy. So the government is doing its bit.

But when it comes to climate change and energy conservation, the recycled Leader of the Opposition has his head in the sand. Nineteen days ago he released two skimpy pages comprising 40 sentences on renewable energy and a climate change strategy for Queensland. The clock is ticking. I ask members to compare that release to the 35 pages that were released nine months ago that set out the government's strategy for climate change. In June last year, the recycled opposition had this to say about greenhouse gas emissions—

The greatest emitter of greenhouse emissions—being carbon dioxide—is our oceans as they heat up, followed by volcanoes.

Time expired.

### Rail Freight Services

**Mr JOHNSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport, Trade, Employment and Industrial Relations. Following the recent deluge that has totally disrupted rail services from Emerald to Barcaldine and to Longreach and Winton and the discontinuation of freight services to the central west, will the minister confirm that the freight services will be reinstated to full capacity, along with the full complement of freight terminal personnel, and that the current disruption is not used as a trigger by Queensland Rail to further scale down rail freight services to the central west?

**Mr MICKEL:** I am unaware of any attempt by Queensland Rail to do that. Let us not skirt around the issue, because I notice the member for Charters Towers, after voting down the benefits for employees last year, has suddenly become the workers' friend. On any aspect of rail, whether it be in the coal business or the freight business, Queensland Rail is facing enormous competition. If the members opposite do not believe that is happening in the central west, they should have a look at the coal division now. I am advised that the people who are ordering locomotives from Siemens in Germany are from Pacific National. I see the member opposite nodding his head. So he agrees with that.

In other words, Queensland Rail is facing competition. Third-party access means that. Accordingly, it is up to Queensland Rail, as it did prior to Christmas, to get its organisation in shape for that competition. The members opposite are kidding themselves and deluding themselves if they do not feel that Queensland Rail should shape up to that competition. It has to.

Of course, last year the member for Clayfield just wanted to abandon all passenger—

**Mr Johnson:** No rail competition on the line—

**Mr MICKEL:** You were not admonishing the member for Clayfield last year when he wanted to abandon rail services—

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, please direct your comments through the chair.

**Mr MICKEL:** Absolutely, Mr Acting Speaker. The other point about freight—and do not kid yourself about this one, either—is that Queensland Rail is no longer the monopoly player. Over the past couple of decades it has been losing market share to trucking operations, operated by people in your own area. Those companies are operated by people whom you represent, who put their livestock on trucks. Those are the facts.

**Mr Johnson:** Because they can't get them on rail.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gregory!

**Mr Lucas:** We're the only state that does livestock on rail.

**Mr MICKEL:** We are the only state that does livestock. Accordingly, what you have to do—and you cannot kid people as you have been trying to do—

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Minister, please direct your comments through the chair and refer to the member by his correct title.

**Mr MICKEL:** The member for Gregory and the member for Charters Towers. I will not run around kidding people that you cannot face up—

**Mr JOHNSON:** I rise to a point of order. I find that offensive and I ask the minister to withdraw that I am trying to kid people. He knows full well how I operate.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! You have asked for a withdrawal. Resume your seat.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I ask him—through you, Mr Acting Speaker—to answer the question, yes or no.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gregory, resume your seat.

**Mr MICKEL:** He has copped a full charge, Mr Acting Speaker.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Minister!

**Mr MICKEL:** He has been fully charged.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Minister, you will withdraw those words.

**Mr MICKEL:** I withdraw that he is fully charged, Mr Acting Speaker.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** I did not hear the minister's withdrawal. Could you please repeat it?

**Mr MICKEL:** I withdraw, Mr Acting Speaker.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you. I call the honourable member for Redcliffe.

**Mr Johnson:** Go and write it out 1,500 times.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gregory, I have given you a formal warning and numerous other warnings. I now ask you to leave the chamber under standing order 253.

**Mr Johnson:** I've got unfinished business.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! member for Gregory, please leave the chamber.

**Mr Johnson:** I'm just getting my glasses.

*Whereupon the honourable member for Gregory withdrew from the chamber at 11.21 am.*

### Queensland Women

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Women. At a time when working families in my electorate of Redcliffe and right across the state are struggling to cope with increasing interest rates, petrol price hikes and mortgage stress, can the minister outline some of the ways in which her department is making things easier for Queensland women?

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Before calling the honourable minister, I acknowledge in the public gallery a third group of students from the Aspley East State School in the electorate of Aspley, represented in the chamber by the honourable Bonny Barry.

**Mrs KEECH:** I thank the member for Redcliffe for the question. I commend her on her hard work in support of working families in Redcliffe. Balancing the budget is becoming more and more difficult for working families around Queensland, particularly with rising interest rates and rising rental prices. Meeting their day-to-day financial obligations whilst planning for the future can seem overwhelming in the face of the growing cost of living.

The Bligh government recognises the pressures facing many families throughout our state and the importance of women in particular having the skills to manage their money effectively. That is why my Office for Women is running free seminars designed to empower Queensland women by improving their financial literacy. The Economy Wise + Budget Smart seminars will deal with everything from basic household budgeting skills to investing in the stock market and buying property.



Last year's seminar series was a huge success with more than 250 women from all over Queensland benefiting from this initiative. The seminars were held in a number of regions across Queensland including Cairns, Yeppoon, Hervey Bay, Kingaroy, Warwick and Dysart. They were a huge success; they worked very well indeed. Clearly the scheme had a positive effect on the women who attended, with 95 per cent of the participants telling us that they felt much more confident in managing their money after participating in the seminars. Pleasingly, 92 per cent of the women said that they would make changes to the way that they handled their money based on the information they had received.

There has been a strong interest in the Economy Wise + Budget Smart model from organisations in Victoria, Tasmania and New Zealand. Once again, the Smart State is leading the way. This year's seminar series will once again offer this training to women in rural and regional areas, including Indigenous communities. The seminars will be tailored to specific audiences and will be offered at beginner and advanced levels to maximise the benefits to those taking part.

Empowering women to make sound financial decisions is a priority, not only for the Bligh government but also at a national level. Like me, the federal minister for women, Tanya Plibersek, has a strong focus on this issue. It is something that we will be discussing at the meeting of state and federal ministers for women which will be held in Brisbane later this year. Ensuring that Queensland women have access to the very best possible money management skills is just one way that the Bligh government is helping to ease the pressure on working families.

### **Horse Owners Representative Organisation**

**Mr HORAN:** My question is to the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. This Friday in Brisbane the DPIF is holding a horse industry meeting. Industry sees this meeting as a continued attempt to force upon Queensland horse owners a representative organisation that more than 80 per cent of the industry does not want. The meeting will also attempt to force through a private web portal, funded by the DPIF, that industry does not want and will not work with. Is the minister prepared to listen to the vast majority of horse owners and appoint the Queensland Horse Council as the industry representative and then negotiate a practical system for notification of horse events?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for the question. During the last sitting of parliament I explained the situation, but I will reiterate what was discussed for the information of the House. As members would know, people have asked why the Queensland government is providing funding for an industry debate about a peak body representation for the performance and pleasure horse sector. At the beginning of the equine influenza crisis, the performance and pleasure horse sector lacked the capacity to provide detailed and informed advice and to work with government. The more than 100 associations, clubs and representative groups were not linked or aligned, making the rapid and efficient engagement of membership and the eradication of disease impossible. Members of the industry recognised this.

With the support of government, representatives of clubs, associations and groups within the industry elected a Queensland performance and pleasure horse industry crisis committee to provide advice and direction to government. The committee included representation from the Queensland Horse Council, the Equestrian Federation of Australia's Queensland branch, the Pony Club Association of Queensland and others with particular skills and knowledge to represent the industry.

The crisis committee has been very effective. However, the experience with equine influenza has been a potent incentive for the performance and pleasure horse industry to consider its information resources and government structures to ensure that it has agreed and informed representation in preparation for any future emergency. The Queensland government is assisting the performance and pleasure horse industry to reflect on its learnings from the equine influenza crisis and develop governance options for the future. The Queensland government is sponsoring a conference on 14 March where industry representatives can consider those options. It is hoped that a consensus on a way forward will be reached. Any sectorial governance is a matter for the industry to determine. I reiterate that it is a matter for the industry to determine.

The performance and pleasure horse industry remains divided. The Queensland Horse Council has claimed that it is the peak body in Queensland and the government should simply talk to it as the representative of the industry. That position is strongly challenged by others in the industry. A great deal has been achieved by the industry through the efforts of the crisis committee. I call on members to work collaboratively for the future growth and development of the sector.

### **Home WaterWise Service**

**Mrs LAVARCH:** My question is to the Minister for Main Roads and Local Government. Can the minister update the House on how the state government's popular Home WaterWise program is helping families in south-east Queensland save both water and money?

**Mr PITT:** I thank the member for the question and the answer is yes, I can. The Home WaterWise Service is part of the Queensland government's comprehensive package of initiatives designed to preserve our precious water assets. Despite the flooding incidents across the state this summer, water conservation remains a critical issue for many communities, particularly in south-east Queensland, where level 6 water restrictions are still in force.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Members, there is far too much audible conversation in the chamber. Question time has not finished. Please keep the conversations down. I call the minister.

**Mr PITT:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. These restrictions have included Target 140, the Water Commission's successful campaign to restrict daily water usage to 140 litres per person. Helping residents achieve this target is the Home WaterWise program, a subsidised service involving the installation of water-efficient devices in households by licensed plumbers in south-east Queensland. The state government, in conjunction with the council of mayors, has made it easy for householders to take up this service by substantially subsidising the cost. Under Home WaterWise, a registered plumber will visit your home, provide water conservation advice, install water-saving devices including a new showerhead and fix some leaky taps—services worth \$150 for the low cost of \$20. As of this week, the program has completed more than 183,000 home retrofits which will save an estimated 3,847 billion litres of water each year. We are now fast approaching the 200,000th retrofit—excellent progress for a service that was launched in only July 2006.

Every household retrofitted through this service will potentially save up to 21,000 litres of water each year—good for the environment and good for the hip pocket. But they are not the only savings. Queensland householders are also benefiting by an additional \$14 million, or an average of \$80 per household, each year in energy savings through reduced hot water consumption. These measures and benefits combined can be clearly seen as helping to ease the financial burden on families. So there are good reasons—financial reasons and environmental reasons—for householders to book a Home WaterWise Service.

Just because there has been some rain this summer does not mean that we can ease up on our conservation efforts. Through this initiative, this government remains strongly committed to saving water, and I urge all Queenslanders to continue doing their bit to help preserve our precious water supplies.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** That concludes question time.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Further Answer to Question; Torres Strait Islands, Safety of Public Servants

**Hon. S ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (11.31 am), by leave: I refer to a question asked by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to Queensland Health's occupational health and safety guidelines. I am advised that these guidelines do not apply when there is a criminal investigation underway. Queensland Health would not investigate an alleged criminal matter as it would potentially compromise the crime scene. I can say, however, that of course Queensland Health will cooperate fully with this police investigation and provide every assistance to ensure that investigation comes to appropriate conclusions based on a full analysis of the facts.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Patel, Dr J; Torres Strait Islands, Safety of Public Servants

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.32 am): Last night Queenslanders witnessed the arrest of Dr Jayant Patel. What we should not see here today is a rewriting of history from those members opposite. Let us recap for a moment what actually happened in this parliament on 22 March 2005, when the honourable member for Burnett came into this place and raised concerns about this surgeon in Bundaberg.

Members of this government stood over there and criticised and lampooned us for raising this issue in the parliament. It went on for days and days and days and weeks and weeks and weeks. The government denied that there was any problem. It stood in the way and accused us of denying the people of Bundaberg a very good surgeon. The government accused us of all sorts of things. It did not want a public inquiry. The other thing the government did in very hasty form was arrange for this surgeon to be flown out of Australia one way—

**An opposition member:** Business class.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** One way, business class. What we have seen today is that this government does not want to acknowledge its involvement in this. This government does not want to acknowledge the fact that when it comes to standing up for the people of Bundaberg against this surgeon—when the

people of that area needed it the most—this government was found wanting. This government was making excuses. This government was in denial.

This morning the Minister for Health raised in this parliament, under considerable pressure from us, the report which we had been calling for on the Torres Strait islands risk assessment. The Mabuiag Island matrix risk assessment, of what would happen with regard to nurses placed there, shows that the likelihood of an incident was possible, that the consequence was extreme and that the risk was very, very high. If the warning bells were not ringing some 16 months ago then we must wonder when they did start to ring with this government. We just heard a moment ago from the minister—

Time expired.

### **Gold Coast Highway Upgrade**

**Ms CROFT** (Broadwater—ALP) (11.34 am): Recently I joined with my colleague Peter Lawlor, the member for Southport, to officially commission the \$22 million first stage of the Gold Coast Highway upgrade. Complete with two new bridges over Loders Creek, the upgrade between Robert Street and Stevens Street also provides an extra lane in each direction on one of the Gold Coast's busiest roads. The two new bridges have allowed for widening of Loders Creek, increasing the capacity of the creek and significantly reducing the possibility of flooding.

Apart from the additional capacity of the highway, the upgrade includes traffic lights, dedicated right-turn lanes and pedestrian crossings at Stevens Street, Marine Parade and Robert Street. The completion of this project is not just great news for motorists; the upgrade has allowed for wider kerbside lanes in each direction, providing for more comfortable and safe conditions for cyclists.

The completion of this major road project comes after months of toil, both on the ground and in the planning and design phases. I would like to thank Miles Vass, Derek Arrowsmith and Allan Johnson and their team from the Department of Main Roads; Allistair Pagan and his construction team from Seymour Whyte; Peter Muir and the contract administration team from Connell Wagner; and Tony Glover and his design team from Sinclair Knight Merz.

Design is underway and land resumptions have been completed for stage 2—the Robert Street to Broad Street section. Preliminary works—fences, letterboxes, service relocations—will start this month, and the main construction of this section is expected to start in late 2008 and be completed by late 2009.

Finally, I would like to thank Gold Coast motorists and Labrador residents for their patience during the construction process. Prior to 2001 an upgrade of Frank Street was not a priority on the roads implementation plan. The then minister, Stephen Bredhauer, listened to the lobbying by Peter Lawlor and me to deliver the much-needed funding to get this upgrade planned and underway, and I thank him and the current minister for the government's commitment to improving infrastructure needs in our area. I look forward to working with the department, my colleague Peter Lawlor and the community to deliver and see through the second stage.

### **Queensland Rail, Coal Industry**

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydhore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.36 am): Queensland Rail has been named as the bottleneck in the Queensland coal chain, costing the industry \$1.2 billion in 2006-07. The coal basin is the engine room of Queensland's economy, and the government's crippling of this industry through lack of timely action has also cost our state its international reputation and is damaging our tax coffers, as \$1.2 billion equates to \$63 million of lost royalties to Queensland taxpayers. That means four new schools or 325 public housing dwellings robbed from the public purse.

Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal has just been upgraded to an exporting capability of 65 million tonnes, but the rail bottleneck will still be in place until 2011. So lost royalties could climb to several hundred million dollars over the next three to four years. That is a lot of schools and a lot of public housing. Queenslanders expect their government to deliver timely infrastructure to keep our engine rooms competitive. Yet this ongoing rail failure is damaging Queensland's reputation as a forward-thinking, competent state.

I welcomed the statement of the minister for transport this morning that the CoalConnect contract was finally signed yesterday to build the Goonyella to Abbot Point line, including the missing northern link rail line. But the EIS for this missing northern link was completed in August 2005. Why has the government sat on the project for 2½ years, costing this state billions of dollars in the meantime? All this government does is play catch-up after catch-up with its infrastructure announcements. It is time for a culture change to build timely infrastructure ahead of growth, ahead of demand, so that the crises which are foreseeable are avoided. It is time to see that Queenslanders do not have this cost inflicted upon them by an incompetent government.

### Northern Busway

**Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (11.38 am): I am pleased to inform the House that construction of the \$198 million first stage of the Northern Busway from the Royal Children's Hospital busway station to Windsor, in my electorate, will begin this month. At an official sod-turning ceremony on Sunday morning, 9 March 2008, the Premier and the Minister for Transport, Trade, Employment and Industrial Relations welcomed an alliance involving Main Roads, Abigroup Contractors and SMEC which has been formed to deliver the first 1.2-kilometre section of the Northern Busway. The sod turning marked the start of the construction phase of the project.

The first stage is scheduled to be completed by late 2009. It represents a key link to the existing Inner Northern Busway and will greatly improve public transport access to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. By 2016 more than 13,000 people per day are expected to get on or off at the RBWH bus station. The busway will cut travel time from the hospital and Windsor by almost five minutes, and it will be up to 20 minutes faster to continue along the Inner Northern Busway to the city. This all adds up to a fast and hassle-free public transport system and represents a win for all northside public transport users as buses will be able to bypass a known traffic bottleneck.

The project includes an elevated two-lane, two-way busway with a new modern, three-level busway station at the hospital complete with high-quality security and surveillance including closed-circuit television linking to the busway operations centre. This exciting first stage will eventually link up with the second stage of the busway from Windsor to Kedron being delivered as part of the Airport Link construction, and that is commencing in 2009.

The northern busway is an integral part of the Bligh government's long-term plan and infrastructure commitment to meet the transport needs of Brisbane's growing northside communities and to tackle congestion on our roads. It is a great plan to serve future growth. Part of the government's infrastructure spend includes buses having their own congestion-free, dedicated busway to free up road space, thus reducing travelling time for busy commuters and motorists.

### Disability Services Queensland, Whistleblower Allegations

**Mrs MENKENS** (Burdekin—NPA) (11.40 am): Disability Services Queensland is responsible for the care of the most vulnerable people in our community and its staff are compassionate and committed people. Allegations raised by whistleblowers recently at a Rockhampton service centre are very concerning. The allegations are that a male resident at a DSQ home targeted a female resident with physical abuse for 12 months and that in recent times that physical abuse changed to sexual groping and lifting her skirt. The lady is unable to verbally communicate her objections to this behaviour but her actions and the look of fear on her face clearly communicate that she is petrified of this man.

Recently, the man made the same sexual advances towards a staff member who reported the incident. DSQ policy is that this sort of behaviour be reported, which the officer in charge did. A house meeting was called and two managers were present. DSQ policy is that in the event of a report the reporting officer must be present to relay facts and answer questions. Allegedly, this did not happen and the managers laid blame on the staff member about her inability to handle the male offender. Instead of moving the offending man to a different house in order to protect the female resident, staff were simply reminded that it was their obligation to 'foster relationships' between residents, even though this was not a normal relationship and the female resident was obviously terrified.

Seemingly, this issue has been brushed under the carpet by the department. Such an outcome is not acceptable. Both of these clients are victims in this situation. They are vulnerable people, and DSQ is responsible for their care and for preserving their dignity and safety. The ministerial statement said that investigations found that the department had responded appropriately and that those matters have now been resolved in consultation with the families. I am told that the female client has no family. I call on the minister to fully investigate this situation to ensure a positive outcome for all concerned.

### Burpengary Meadows State School, School Crossing Supervisors

**Hon. KW HAYWARD** (Kallangur—ALP) (11.42 am): I want to take the opportunity to speak about the Burpengary Meadows State School, a primary school located in the Kallangur electorate. This great school opened at the beginning of 2007 and, like the community it serves, it is going through tremendous growth. As I said, last year was the school's first year and there were 288 students enrolled. This year, at this stage, there are 529 students at this school, which is an increase of over 80 per cent.

The Bligh government is responding to that growth in a number of ways. One of the most important ways is by increasing road safety through the provision of crossing supervisors. School crossing supervisors increase safety for students, parents and teachers. The state government worked closely with the school community and the Caboolture Shire Council to provide two supervised crossings at Rowley Road and Kurrajong Drive.

I was pleased to attend the official opening of these new supervised school crossings. Representing the school community was the president of the Parents and Citizens Association, Mr Ian Robson, and representing the Caboolture Shire Council were local councillor Peter Flannery and Mayor Joy Leishman. I strongly supported the school's application for supervised crossings and I was very pleased to see the supervisors on duty from the beginning of the new school year.

I think it is important to understand that school crossings impose a responsibility on parents. Parents can help by teaching children to always obey the supervisor. They can explain to their children who the supervisors are, why they are there and, most importantly, why it is important to obey them. Obviously, it is important that motorists obey the directions from the supervisors to ensure the safety of children using the crossings. I want to take the opportunity here today to congratulate the teachers, parents and students of Burpengary Meadows State School for the excellent road safety record the school enjoys—a record that will only be enhanced by the school crossing supervisors.

### **Port Curtis Integrated Monitoring Program**

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (11.44 am): The Port Curtis Integrated Monitoring Program, or PCIMP, launched its inaugural *Port Curtis ecosystem health report card* on 4 March. PCIMP is a consortium of members from 15 bodies representing industry, government and other stakeholders which have developed a collaborative integrated monitoring program for managing the ecosystem health of Port Curtis. The monitoring—now valued at over \$750,000 per year—commenced in 2006 and is directly funded by the members. PCIMP members have cooperatively agreed to provide the results of the monitoring to the community as a whole-of-harbour assessment in the form of an ecosystem health report card.

The PCIMP members are Boyne Smelters, the Gladstone City Council, the Calliope Shire Council, Gladstone Pacific Nickel, Cement Australia, NRG Operating Services, the Centre for Environmental Management, Orica, the Central Queensland University, Queensland Alumina Ltd, the Central Queensland Ports Authority, Queensland Energy Resources, the Fitzroy Basin Association, the Environmental Protection Agency, Gladstone Area Water Board and Rio Tinto Aluminium Yarwun. There is a synopsis of the report and a full report. Rather than table them, I would like to offer them to the library.

Four discrete areas were examined: water quality, intertidal monitoring, sea grass health and oil spill assessment. The oil spill assessment was particularly topical because we had a major oil spill and the department responded to that well. The ongoing health of the harbour is of interest not only to recreational fisher men and women but also to the professional fishing industry. This is an ongoing examination and I encourage members to read the report. The initiative shows cooperation from all of the partners and their interest in maintaining the environmental health of the harbour.

### **Inala Electorate, Transport Infrastructure**

**Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (11.46 am): Last parliamentary sitting, I spoke about the state government's announcement of the new \$15 million Darra Railway Station and the commencement of work on the third track from Corinda to Darra. This week I am pleased to announce even more expenditure on infrastructure in the south-west corridor. The much needed upgrade of the Wacol to Darra section of the Ipswich Motorway is about to commence. This will also incorporate a total upgrade of the Centenary Highway interchange. The Australian government has committed \$700 million for this project which will relieve congestion along this section of the motorway and improve safety and reliability for all motorists.

The four existing lanes on the Ipswich Motorway will be widened to six, and it will also allow for expansion in the future to eight. For construction purposes, the project has been divided into two sections. Construction of the first section—which is east of Progress Road, Wacol—will commence in 2008. The second section involves the area west of Progress Road. The whole project is expected to be completed by 2010. This new Centenary Highway interchange will also cater for the rail track from Darra to Springfield that I mentioned the last time. This is good news for the people living in both the south-west region of Brisbane and Ipswich.

The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, was on hand in the electorate of Inala for the official sod-turning ceremony, accompanied by the federal minister for transport, Anthony Albanese, the state minister for main roads, Warren Pitt, and several of my state colleagues. Both the Bligh government and the Rudd government are committed to providing the infrastructure necessary for our region's growth. This is welcome news for the people living in this corridor to help alleviate the traffic congestion on the Ipswich Motorway.

Next week, community consultations will begin on the Ipswich Motorway upgrade. These sessions will be held at the Centenary Community Hall in Darra, the Darra State School, the Inala town centre, the Forest Lake Village and the Portugese Centre at Carole Park, to name just a few. I encourage all members of the public to come along to these sessions to find out more information.

### Moggill Electorate, Roads

**Dr FLEGG** (Moggill—Lib) (11.48 am): Tomorrow morning local ABC Radio will be travelling from Karana Downs to Toowong looking for Brisbane's worst commute. The people of Karana Downs would not have been surprised to hear on the radio yesterday that Labor's lord mayoral candidate for Brisbane did not even know that Karana Downs was part of Brisbane. This is an area in which people's needs have been ignored for far too long.

The delays and traffic congestion on Moggill Road have impacted on the lives of people so seriously that hundreds of people leave the area simply because they cannot cope with the road. It is a nightmare for emergency services and it causes chaos for businesses. It can take in excess of one hour to travel on just the stretch from Mount Crosby to Kenmore. I welcome this focus on a very serious issue that impacts the lives of Queenslanders, who should not be asked to live under these conditions.

**Ms Palaszczuk:** Do you want the bypass or not?

**Dr FLEGG:** I hear the protests from the other side. They are the ones who have ignored this problem for so many years. I welcome some attention finally for these very long-suffering residents in this very unacceptable situation.

Another group of residents on Moggill Road is the large returned services community at Fairview at Pinjarra Hills on Moggill Road. They and their families served this country during difficult times of war. Those people living at Fairview, for whom I have the utmost regard for their contribution to this country, have signed a petition requesting better and safer access to the bus service that they have. I have previously raised the issue that we do not have a safe crossing across Moggill Road for this community. I table this non-conforming petition for the benefit of the transport minister.

*Tabled paper:* Non-conforming petition relating to an unofficial bus stop outside the Fairview RSL Retirement Village, Pinjarra Hills.

### Graffiti

**Mrs REILLY** (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (11.51 am): Mudgeeraba is a very safe place to live and work. It enjoys relatively low rates of crime and compares favourably with other parts of the Gold Coast and Queensland, but in recent months Mudgeeraba has increasingly become a target for graffiti vandalism. Crime prevention officer Dale Jackson from Queensland police has empowered local residents to fight back against this blight on our beautiful commercial and residential districts.

On Saturday, 8 March some 40 volunteers from the police community consultative committee, neighbourhood watches and other groups hit the streets and conducted a comprehensive audit of graffiti in Mudgeeraba, Bonogin, Tallai and Worongary—and it is continuing in Springbrook—finding 133 tags just in the CBD. Notably, more than 70 per cent of these tags are believed to be the work of one offender. Local police have already acted to curtail the activities of this prolific vandal, but his work to date remains visible.

This audit was just the first step in the battle to make Mudgeeraba graffiti free. Queensland police will now work closely with the Gold Coast City Council, the Department of Main Roads and other public sector agencies and private property owners to get the graffiti cleaned up. It will not happen overnight, but the audit has provided agencies with an easy-to-follow list of locations and descriptions and has provided police with evidence which can be used for the future prosecution of offenders.

I thank the many local residents who turned up to help on Saturday. The response was absolutely overwhelming and it just shows what a community can achieve when ordinary people take action. I also encourage property owners and local residents to make crime reports to police of graffiti tags if they have them on their property so that police can commence an investigation for future prosecution. The audit was just the first activity of a crime prevention and community safety project to be rolled out in Mudgeeraba in the next six months. The project will encourage the wider community to become involved in crime prevention and safety and will target graffiti and hooning.

### Queensland Air Museum

**Mr McARDLE** (Caloundra—Lib) (11.53 am): I have raised in this House on at least two or three previous occasions the issue of the Queensland Air Museum located in Caloundra. I intend to do so again because of the historical value of the aircraft memorabilia retained and maintained by a group of very strong and dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly day in, day out to ensure that wrecks of old and very important aircraft are brought to the site, are restored piece by piece and, when they are put together, can be maintained for many years to come.

There are well in excess of 40 aircraft and many other pieces of memorabilia stored at the museum, which contains within its walls an historical collection of not just military but also general aircraft in Queensland and throughout Australia. It has been rated as one of the top three such museums in this country, and there is a real risk that it may be lost not just to Caloundra but to Queensland as a whole. The inherent danger in doing that is that we lose a very distinct and positive link to the past, not just for us but for our children and our children's children.

If we are to understand who we are at this point in time and understand where we want to be, it is crucial that we understand where we came from. Aircraft has had a very long and illustrious connection to Queensland and Australia in forming exactly what this nation represents. The loss of so many aircraft and so much memorabilia would be an enormous disservice to the future generations of this great country.

The men and women who work at the site do so, as I said, on a volunteer basis. Each year in June they hold what is called an open cockpit day. That day allows members of the public to come in and better understand the history of not only the site but also the aeroplanes and memorabilia stored thereon. It enlarges the knowledge of the people of Caloundra as to what exists not only in Caloundra but across the whole of the Sunshine Coast as a tourist destination. Not only that, it provides a mouthpiece whereby these people—

Time expired.

### **Carina Ambulance Station**

**Mr BOMBOLAS** (Chatsworth—ALP) (11.55 am): It has been a long time coming, but finally the Carina Ambulance Station is up and running. Last Friday I had the pleasure of joining emergency services minister Neil Roberts to officially open the new station in Narracott Street. At the last election I made a commitment to the people of Chatsworth to ensure that we had a new ambulance station after former Deputy Premier and Treasurer Terry Mackenroth started the ball rolling. I must admit that there were a few frustrating delays along the way. At one stage the acquisition of land from the Brisbane City Council was held up. Then there were water management issues. As such, the November 2007 completion date came and went. Concerned about these delays, I hounded previous emergency services minister Pat Purcell and his successor. The result is a \$1.86 million state-of-the-art facility which will boost emergency services in the area.

I am pleased for the Carina paramedics as well as the people of Carina and nearby suburbs, who now have an ambulance station of their own, remembering that the Carina ambulance crew has always delivered an excellent standard of prehospital emergency health care even when they did not have a permanent home. In fact, last year, whilst based at their temporary accommodation, the Carina crew received the Brisbane station of the year award at the Commissioner's Star Care Awards. There is a great sense of ownership and pride amongst the 19 Carina paramedics headed by officer in charge Matthew Hannabery.

I thank Premier Anna Bligh and Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts, Rod Welford, for taking part in a special presentation at the Carina State School. On the same day as the ambulance station opened, we also celebrated the delivery of the 10,000th laptop in the Computers for Teachers rollout. In front of the whole school and invited guests, year 6-7 teacher Ms Nicole Trembath received her very special laptop. It is all part of the government's Smart Classrooms strategy. Here is hoping laptop No. 20,000 might find its way to another of our wonderful schools in Chatsworth and we can celebrate that significant milestone, too.

### **Kilcoy Bypass**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (11.56 am): I bring to the attention of the House a particular couple who have lived in Kilcoy for the past 22 years. Their home suits them completely, and it is where they planned to stay for the rest of their lives—that was until the Kilcoy bypass became a reality. We are very grateful for that bypass, but the angst it is causing is considerable. The house that this couple owns is the only property the government has to purchase in order for the bypass to be built. Main Roads has offered the lowest possible price of \$240,000 in spite of the fact that two agents believe they would get over \$300,000. Main Roads does not take into account real estate valuations and have relied on a professional valuer.

While that sounds fine, there are lots of small details that are being overlooked. For example, this couple have looked for properties that are closely aligned with their own property, where they keep their horses. The prices range from \$255,000 to \$290,000. Some of these properties are situated in the middle of town and have no facilities for horses. The lowest priced unit is \$15,000 above the \$240,000 Main Roads has offered and the most expensive is \$55,000 above. Of course, there is one property available at \$230,000. It is called a 'renovator's delight' and it could be snapped up if a person had the energy and the time to revamp it. One might conjecture that the vendors of the abovementioned properties might drop their prices, but there is no guarantee of that.

If this couple are locked into a miserable offer of \$240,000 where will that leave them? The couple will also have to pay rent to Main Roads until they move out. If that were not enough, their pension will be reduced while the money from the sale of this property is in the bank. This is definitely a win-lose situation, with the couple losing. The couple have \$3,000 in the bank saved from pensions for a rainy day. These people are in a terrible position. The government has been so mean-spirited that it will not ensure this one and only property is purchased for an appropriate price.

### Redlands, Fire and Rescue Service

**Mr CHOI** (Capalaba—ALP) (11.59 am): The Queensland government's commitment to maximise front-line emergency services delivery will see a beef-up of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service coverage in the Redlands region. For the last few years the government has been trying to find the best way possible to provide this essential service to the people of the Redlands. There have been a few options available but none in my view service the people in my electorate of Capalaba better than the one adopted by the government.

The Minister for Emergency Services visited the Redlands a few days ago to see firsthand the issues. Subsequently, the Hon. Neil Roberts delivered the good news that Capalaba Fire Station will continue to be operational as well as the one in Cleveland. With an increasing population in the Redlands the minister further reinforced that a new fire station will be built in the Redlands electorate as well. This is a good result for the people of Capalaba and, in particular, the Redlands as a whole. The state government has listened to the concerns of my constituents and given a great deal of consideration to all the advice received from the department. The government has clearly listened to and acted in the interests of the community. I thank Minister Roberts for his understanding and support.

I would also like to thank the many constituents who contacted my office through emails, faxes and letters for their passionate representations. I would like to register my appreciation of the advice I received from service personnel in Capalaba. This ensured that I fully understood the issues at the coalface of service delivery.

This matter clearly indicates the benefit of having three local Labor MPs on the government side working together as a team. I thank my colleagues John English and Phil Weightman, the member for Cleveland, for their partnership. I also take this opportunity to offer my thanks to all the emergency services staff who attended the recent rescue attempt in Mark Street, Capalaba, which, unfortunately, resulted in the tragic drowning of a young man. I fully understand that everything possible was done to avert this tragedy under very difficult circumstances. I sincerely thank the officers for their efforts.

Time expired.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Before calling the member for Gympie, I would like to acknowledge in the gallery another group of teachers and students from Aspley East State School in the electorate of Aspley, represented in this House by Bonny Barry. I call the member for Gympie.

### Moreton Bay Marine Park, Rezoning

**Mr GIBSON** (Gympie—NPA) (12.01 pm): Right in south-east Queensland's backyard is Moreton Bay, a complex system of islands, beaches, reefs, and seagrass beds, a haven for turtles and dugongs, an anglers' paradise, a productive commercial fishing region and a natural tourism drawcard minutes from Brisbane. All of those groups who enjoy the bay agree it is important to protect the environment. No-one wants to see the bay destroyed by becoming a barren water wasteland. However, reasonable-minded people believe it is possible to achieve a balance where we can still have people fishing and enjoying local seafood and providing tourism opportunities while still protecting the environment.

The Moreton Bay Marine Park rezoning is being driven without addressing the broader impacts. No current detail can be provided by the EPA on what income is derived from the recreational fishing sector despite a 2003 recreational fishing study which showed Queensland accounted for \$319 million in recreational fishing. The reality is that there might be 10 or 20 per cent of that bay that is actually highly productive fishing grounds. If we took that 10 or 20 per cent away we would be actually stopping all fishing in the bay. This is not what any person wants. We are putting at risk the economic value of tourism brought to Queensland through recreational fishing and boating. The national visitor survey found that in total those fishing in Queensland spent \$856 million per annum on their trips in 2001. The EPA cannot provide us with current details.

Commercial fishermen estimate that up to 80 per cent of their take will be at risk with the new zones. This will impact on all Queenslanders who enjoy local seafood. High-speed ferry services are being asked to slow down to six knots in three areas in the interest of protecting the dugong and turtle populations. These changes will result in an increase in the trip by about 20 minutes. Based on the current timetable, this will increase travel time by 12 hours and increase running costs by 40 per cent. This is putting more propellers in the water for 40 per cent longer with the associated increase in greenhouse gas emissions and therefore putting these beautiful creatures at even more risk. Everyone wants to protect Moreton Bay for future Queenslanders to enjoy, but let us be sensible in how we achieve this.

Time expired.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The time for private members' statements has expired.



## WATER FLUORIDATION BILL

### Second Reading

Resumed from 12 February (see p. 74), on motion of Mr Robertson—

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (12.03 pm): I stand here today with great pride and conviction. As I address the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008 I am reminded of a favourite quote by John F Kennedy, 'A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures and that is the basis of all human morality.'

This is the biggest change in dental health measures in Queensland for 40 years. Today I am proud to be a member of this parliament as we pass landmark legislation that will improve the health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders. I say 'landmark' because many said this day would never come. They said the oral health of Queenslanders was too entrenched in politics rather than in science and that this government did not have the courage or the conviction to make the tough decision in spite of the undisputed evidence of the health benefits of water fluoridation.

Today I am proud to offer my support and that of the Queensland coalition for the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. As the short title suggests, this bill provides a mandate to boost the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders by adding fluoride to bulk water supplies. It is a contentious issue as many members will attest and one which we have visited a number of times during my tenure as a member of this parliament. Today I am proud because today one of my core policies will take its place in Queensland's statute books.

At a quarter past four on 18 March 2004 I stood up in this chamber as a new member of parliament and addressed Queenslanders for the first time. After a long, exhausting campaign I was fortunate enough to take my place in the Queensland parliament. The people of Surfers Paradise had given me a voice. On that day I used that new-found voice and I spoke about the issues I am passionate about—improving local roads and infrastructure, providing better health services for all Queenslanders and offering better support for families and young people.

In my manifesto maiden speech I spoke about the very issue we are debating in this parliament today—four years after I first raised it in this forum. As the first dentist to be elected to state parliament in 70 years—the last one being John Donnelly in the seat of Wynnum from 1935 to 1938—fluoridation was obviously going to be an issue for me. In my professional experience, spanning more than two decades, I am a firm believer in the virtues of water fluoridation as a means of improving oral health. As a health professional I am also aware of the areas where government could be doing better to achieve better clinical outcomes for patients. Fluoridation is one of those areas. I would like to quote my maiden speech. I stated—

The argument for fluoridation is very strong. Fluoridation will make our children's teeth better. We already add vitamins to many everyday items in our diets such as bread and cereal. Why not supplement our water with fluoride? The government is adamant on pursuing its Smart State mantra, yet how smart is it to place our children's teeth at undue risk by not fluoridating our water?

Back then I extended my hand to the then health minister Gordon Nuttall that I would be an ally in securing bipartisan support for water fluoridation in Queensland. Today I am proud to deliver on that promise.

For the benefit of members I will share my professional opinion of and experience with fluoride. Fluoride is a naturally occurring compound found in the ecosystem in elements including water, flora and soil amongst others as well as in some foods. It is a common ingredient in many brands of toothpaste. Fluoride helps protect teeth against decay by providing a barrier against acids produced by sugar and bacteria in the mouth which attack the tooth's surface.

When consumed frequently and in small amounts, fluoride makes teeth far more resistant to decay than without treatment. Adding fluoride to drinking water is one way in which fluoride is consumed. It is the most clinically efficient, cost-effective and socially equitable means of administering fluoride to the population.

During my years as a dentist I treated thousands of patients and I have lost count of the number of fillings I have done. Anyone who doubts the veracity of profluoride arguments should spend a day in a dental surgery. Most dentists do not enjoy drilling teeth, especially the teeth of small children and more especially when they have children of their own. Imagine seeing a child in severe cases having to be wheeled away for a general aesthetic so that their teeth can be fixed because they are too young to be compliant in a conscious state.

People despise going to the dentist because we are perceived as purveyors of pain. Dentists can repair holes but the most frustrating aspect of the job is fixing problems that may have so easily been stemmed if patients had received the right treatment from the start. When it comes to treating cavities, the right treatment is ensuring the body has the optimal defence against tooth decay. Fluoride underpins this defence. Lifestyle factors such as diet and oral hygiene and inherited susceptibility certainly have a role to play, but mineral supplements delivered via drinking water remain the single most effective way of improving oral health.

We have heard a lot about fluoride, certainly over the past few months since the Premier announced that she would introduce fluoride into Queensland's bulk water supplies to provide 90 per cent of Queenslanders the benefits of fluoride by 2012. The sheer volume of correspondence that I have received, along with all of my parliamentary colleagues, is testament to the untruths and misinformation circulating about fluoridation. A Google search returns many hits to propaganda designed to stir fear in the community about fluoridation. The fervent antifluoridation following is the reason Queenslanders do not enjoy the health benefits of fluoridated water today. This Labor government has been far more concerned with pleasing the electorate with populist politics than making tough decisions for the greater good of this state.

Of some of the antifluoridationists' claims, I was warned fluoride would cause allergies, arthritis, bone fractures, headaches and impotence, among other ailments. The nay-sayers believe that adding fluoride to water supplies increases the risk of cancer and even makes humans taller. As a dentist by profession, I want to make this point: fluoride is not a poison or pesticide. Fluoride is not a form of mass medication or chemical terrorism. There is no credible scientific evidence to suggest that fluoride has any adverse effect on health. Anyone who doubts that fact should speak to members from Townsville, an area which has been enjoying the health benefits of fluoride since 1964. Townsville, the fourth largest city in Queensland, has been adding fluoride to its main water supply for more than four decades and yet the residents are no worse off than people throughout the rest of the state. In fact, they are better off than most Queenslanders. They have better oral health than the residents of Brisbane.

The Australian Dental Association of Queensland, of which I am a member, found in a study that children in Townsville have up to 45 per cent less tooth decay than their counterparts in Brisbane. The health minister backed this finding in his quotes in a *Courier-Mail* article on 18 December about how children in Uganda, a developing country, have better oral health than kids in Australia. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare made the stark contrast with other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development—OECD—countries and found that Australian 12-year-olds ranked No. 8 of 44 behind England, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Uganda. The study also found that half of all Australian six-year-olds have two cavities on average and almost half of all 12-year-olds have cavities in their adult teeth. The statistics are worse in Queensland. Why? Because while children in every other part of Australia have enjoyed the benefits of water fluoridation, the Labor government chose to defer the tough decision in case it affected its electoral chances. I congratulate the Premier on finally acting on fluoridation, albeit belatedly.

The reality is that fluoridation will improve oral health in Queensland. The fact that Queenslanders have the worst teeth in the country can be directly attributed to the fact that we do not have fluoridated water in this state. Every state in Australia fluoridates its bulk water supplies. Every other state in Australia has been adding fluoride to drinking water since the 1960s and seventies—in some cases, more than four decades. Some 90 per cent of New South Wales residents drink fluoridated water, while 77 per cent of Victorians do, 80 per cent in South Australia, 86 per cent in WA, 91 per cent in the Northern Territory and 100 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory. Brisbane is the only capital city in Australia which does not fluoridate water.

As I mentioned, Queenslanders have the worst teeth in Australia despite the fact that the state government spends more money per capita than any other state or territory on dental care. In 2008-09 the government will spend \$145 million on oral health, yet the investment is not paying dividends. An inquiry by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that Queensland kids have more decay and up to twice the number of fillings of children in other states. Every year around 2,000 preschoolers are hospitalised for severe tooth decay and gum infections, often involving general anaesthetic as I mentioned earlier.

In Queensland about 80,000 public dental patients are waiting up to seven years for treatment. Projected figures indicate that introducing fluoride into our drinking water will dramatically lower waiting lists and reduce tooth decay by as much as 45 per cent. When one looks at this in dollar terms, it represents a staggering saving. Can I point out though that this will not happen if the downgrading of the public dental sector continues, as we have seen recently in Cairns and Townsville where the school dental service is now only going to do consultations and no treatment. I predict that the morale of dentists, therapists and oral health workers will be diminished. They will be deskilled and will look to leave the Public Service, causing those on waiting lists to continue to languish.

For every dollar spent on fluoridation, up to \$80 per person is saved in dental costs. In Queensland this equates to at least \$328 million. The amount of fluoride needed to achieve this saving and significantly improve Queensland's oral health is between 0.6 and 0.9 parts of fluoride per million parts of water. In real terms, that is just one drop of fluoride in a bathtub full of water. The Queensland coalition will support this bill because we are firm believers in preventative health care. This is one of the polarities of the Queensland coalition and the Labor government. We believe that health care is not just about hospitals. Health care delivery begins well before patients present to hospital or take a seat in the dentist's chair. Adding fluoride to Queensland's water supply is one preventative health measure which will keep people out of hospital, and I note the health minister's embracing of preventative measures. He is constantly mentioning preventative measures in relation to diabetes and heart disease. That is admirable and commendable and something that the government should be continuing.

Despite the indisputable evidence of the benefits of fluoride, the Labor government has been sitting on its hands for a decade refusing to fluoridate Queensland's water supplies. It has had a number of opportunities to implement this important preventative health initiative, yet each time it has backed down because it did not have the courage to take it to Queensland voters. The Beattie government offered in-principle support for fluoridation yet not one member of the Labor government ministry had the courage to deliver it. Former Premier Beattie even questioned the science of fluoridation even though his health minister supported it. Even when those opposite had the opportunity to put on record their support for fluoridation in this parliament, most failed to do so.

One of the very first things I did in my first term in parliament was introduce a private member's bill to add fluoride to Queensland's water supplies. On 1 September 2004 I brought the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill before the House to improve oral health throughout Queensland. Only five per cent of our population drinks fluoridated water in places like Townsville, as I have previously mentioned, as well as in Bamaga, Dalby, Mareeba and Moranbah. These towns have added fluoride to their bulk water supplies. Numerous other places in Queensland have naturally occurring fluoride in their water such as Adavale, Aramac, Barcaldine, Bedourie, Birdsville, Boulia, Cloncurry, Corfield, Julia Creek, Eromanga, Eulo, Gunana, Gilliat, Longreach, Ilfracombe, Jandowae, Karumba, Muttaborra, Thargomindah, Winton, Maxwellton, McKinley, Muckadilla, Quilpie, St George and Tara.

In introducing the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill, I wanted to ensure that all Queenslanders had the benefit of fluoridated water. As I have said, adding fluoride to water supplies is the most effective and socially equitable way of ensuring that everyone benefits from fluoridation. The bill would have amended the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1963, mandating that all controlling entities of public water supplies add a specified level of fluoride to the water supply. The bill provided an exception for small communities in the same vein that the current bill does. That bill failed. In fact, not only was it defeated spectacularly by 71 to six but I copped a lot of criticism from the current government about my plans to legislate for local councils and to take away their right to have a say on fluoridation. Fast forward a few years and it seems the Bligh government has changed its tune. Not only does it want to quash councils' rights to decide whether they introduce fluoride to water supplies; it wants to seize control of water assets completely and take the profits with it. It is this kind of politicised self-interest and inconsistency that is hampering this state when it comes to being a national leader in policy development.

Here we have a government that will not support good ideas if it does not think of them first. This is one of the biggest frustrations about being in opposition and something of which I am particularly aware. Water fluoridation is just one initiative that the Queensland coalition has brought before parliament, only to be defeated by those opposite. In 2006 I tried to change the laws to ban ice pipes. That was stymied, but only a few months later, after members opposite had voted against what I proposed, members opposite voted for amendments that were a carbon copy of those that I had proposed earlier and gave themselves a public pat on the back for doing something about tackling Queensland's ice epidemic. There was no mention of the fact that a few months earlier they had been opposed to such a move.

Water fluoridation is but one policy that this government has plucked from the Queensland coalition's policy books and plagiarised in this parliament. Another example is smoking in cars. The health minister gave me a royal dressing down when I suggested that we add a clause to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Bill—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr O'Brien): Order! The member will return to the subject of the bill.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I am just pointing out that in this case with fluoride we have had a reversal of the government's position. I am simply pointing out a couple of incidents where that has happened.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** And I have asked you to return to the subject of the bill.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I note that similar things happened with my private member's bill about excessive amounts of alcohol. But I note that when the Treasurer's legislation is introduced I am sure it will be seeking to do exactly that. I am confident the government members will support it then.

The point I am making is that if the government had honourable intentions we could tackle social and health problems much more effectively than we are currently with a divided House. If this government had the ticker, Queenslanders would have been long enjoying the benefits of fluoride and our dental waiting lists would be much better for it. Queenslanders need bipartisan leadership to ensure that we stay on top of the challenges that we face in daily life and in government.

When we last debated fluoride in this House, the Labor members voted against the Liberals' bill, offering specious arguments for their dissent. They used personal criticism, urban myths and perceived popular opinion as reasons for voting against the bill. I am pleased the members opposite have finally seen sense on this issue.

I make no apologies for the fact that fluoridation has been one of my top priorities as a legislator, as a parent and as a professional dentist. Whilst I acknowledge fluoridation is an emotive issue, I also know that good policy is not always popular policy. In saying that, I think it is important to note that not everyone is against adding fluoride to drinking water. In fact, there is actually more support for

fluoridation than there is opposition to it. Water fluoridation is endorsed by the Australian Dental Association, the Australian Medical Association, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Public Health Association of Australia. Internationally, water fluoridation as a means of improving oral health has the support of the World Health Organisation, the British Medical Association and the Australian Medical Association, to name a few.

The world's leading health authorities endorse fluoridation. That is because it has real, tangible benefits to those who consume a negligible amount of fluoride in their drinking water. The USA's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has endorsed fluoridation as one of the greatest public health achievements of the 20th century. I refer to one of Queensland Health's own documents and a quote from Professor John Harris of the Centre for Social Ethics and Policy from the University of Manchester who states—

In considering the ethics of fluoridation ... We should ask not are we entitled to impose fluoridation on unwilling people but are the unwilling people entitled to impose the risks, damage and costs of failure to fluoridate on the community at large.

In terms of public opinion, as the minister noted, the results of community surveys indicate a majority support for fluoridation in Queensland. It is interesting to note that a lot of the correspondence that I and my fellow honourable members of the Queensland parliament have received since the announcement that Queensland would fluoridate its bulk water supplies does not originate in this state. I received hundreds of emails and letters from all over the country and the world opposing fluoridation, and I am sure members remember the morning when our computers had to be stopped from receiving the volume of emails they were receiving due to them overloading the system.

**An honourable member:** Spam.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Yes, it was classified as spam. However, just like many voters in by-elections, contentious issues such as fluoridation tend to attract a more vehement no vote than a yes vote. Whilst I appreciate everyone is entitled to their own views on fluoridation and any other important health issue, it is important to note that it is only one opinion—one that is not proved by any credible scientific evidence or endorsement.

As I have said before, there is a lot of misinformation and conspiracy theories about fluoridation. For Queenslanders to hold an informed view of fluoridation, it is important that they receive fact over fiction. Public education has a huge role to play in ensuring Queenslanders are educated about fluoride. That is why I am pleased to congratulate Queensland Health on its fluoridation campaign. It has certainly come up with numerous publications, many of which I have used as references for this speech. Many members have also been able to use that information to give to their constituents. As I say, I congratulate Queensland Health on that. This information is not propaganda, although some of the extreme antifluoridationists have likened us to Nazi Germany for imposing what they allege is mass medication on Queensland residents. This is about providing the right information to empower people and to inform their decisions about fluoride.

By passing this legislation, we are not forcing people to drink fluoridated water. Whilst clause 7 in part 3 requires suppliers to add fluoride to relevant public potable water supplies, with part 4 laying out the consequences for noncompliance with the legislation, adding fluoride to water will not force it down people's throats. Obviously, the law will make it much more difficult for people to avoid fluoride consumption. However, people who do not want to drink fluoride do not have to drink public water. Of the people against fluoridation, statistics show that more than one-third of dissidents use unfluoridated tank water as their primary source of drinking water. Further, people who choose not to drink fluoridated water can filter their tap-water or drink bottled water, which does not contain fluoride. This legislation will not take away a person's right to reject fluoridated drinking water if they choose to do so.

For the small minority of people who will choose not to drink fluoridated water, the Queensland coalition is committed to assisting them with the purchase of reverse osmosis water filters. These water filters are most effective in extracting minerals, including fluoride, from tap-water and are relatively simple and inexpensive to install. In light of that, the coalition will move an amendment to the bill that will establish a government rebate scheme to compensate part of the cost of these water filters for those who are so fervently opposed to fluoridation. I envisage that this scheme would operate in much the same manner as the water tank rebate scheme and offer financial assistance to those members of the public who choose not to drink fluoridated water.

This bill will give effect to Queensland's obligations under the national health plan. At the Australian Health Ministers' Conference in 2004, the health ministers agreed to extend water fluoridation to all communities that had a population of 1,000 or more—a duty which the Queensland Labor government abrogated in 2005 when it voted down my bill to achieve this. With the passage of the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008, after four decades of being behind the eight ball, Queensland will finally be brought into line with other states.

I turn now to the mechanics of the bill. Division 2 outlines the objectives of the legislation as follows—

... to promote good oral health ... by the safe fluoridation of ... water supplies ... to be achieved by requiring the safe fluoridation of relevant public potable water supplies.

'Relevant public potable water supply' is defined in clause 6 as a water source serving at least 1,000 members of the public to be determined by an objective source, the Australian Bureau of Statistics' latest census figures. Part 3 and its ensuing clauses lay down the legislative framework for achieving these objectives. As I mentioned earlier, clause 7 mandates the addition of fluoride to relevant water supplies. The time frame in which they must comply is determined by reference to regulation. Presumably, this subordinate legislation will specify the phases in which fluoride is to be introduced into Queensland water. This staged program, which is on public record, will see all major water treatment plants in south-east Queensland, including those at Molendinar and Mudgeeraba on the Gold Coast, introduce fluoride by the end of this year. By 2009-10, residents in Cairns, Gladstone, Mackay, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, the Fraser Coast, Gympie, Somerset, the south Burnett and the southern downs will be drinking fluoridated water, which will see approximately 80 per cent of Queenslanders consuming fluoride in their town water. By 2012, it is expected that 95 per cent of Queenslanders will be drinking fluoridated water. Clause 7 also refers to part 4 of the bill, which sets out the consequences for contravening that section. It also notes that clause 12 outlines the specific and logistical requirements to achieve compliance with the clause.

Clause 8 contains a number of exemptions from the requirement to add fluoride to water supplies. An exemption will be made in circumstances where water already contains naturally occurring fluoride if the level of fluoride falls within the concentration requirements prescribed by regulation. An exemption may also be granted if the natural chemistry of a water supply would not support the additive. As the health minister stated in his second reading speech, that may occur if the mineral content of the water is such that fluoride will not dissolve. An exemption may also be granted by the minister in a situation where he is satisfied that the addition of fluoride to a water supply is unlikely to result in a substantial ongoing health benefit to the community and that the water supply provides water to fewer than 1,000 people.

In order for one of these exemptions to apply, a water supplier must apply in writing to the minister for an exemption from the requirement under clause 7, providing all the necessary evidence required to satisfy one of the clause 8 exemptions. Clause 8 also requires the minister to refer the application to the Queensland Fluoridation Committee, which is established by clause 76 of the bill. One of the functions of this committee is to advise the minister of the operation and application of the legislation. As such, the committee will also assess the application for exemption and provide advice to the health minister on the merits of such an application. I am confident that the committee—comprising the chief health officer, the chief dental officer, representatives of the AMA, the ADA and other persons with medical or technical expertise—will be able to provide the best expert advice to discharge their obligations stated at clause 77 of the bill.

Part 4 of the bill addresses the consequence of noncompliance. Under this section if the health minister has reason to believe a water supplier is not complying with the requirement to add fluoride to water supplies, he may issue a show cause notice under section 15, giving the supplier 28 days to fulfil the legislative requirements. The subsequent clauses outline the actions that the minister may take to ensure that the legislation is complied with. Part 5 gives authorised persons power under the legislation to enforce the law, including the power to enter and inspect a water supply premises and the power to obtain information and seize evidence.

As the health minister stated, the bill creates a number of offences for which a water supplier and/or their agents may be prosecuted. For example, it will be an offence for a person to obstruct the minister or a person authorised by the minister from taking action to fluoridate a public drinking water supply. The maximum penalty for this offence is \$7,500. In addition, the Water Fluoridation Bill makes it an offence to obstruct the chief executive from taking action to remedy a contravention at clause 62, while clause 65 makes it an offence to obstruct a person in the exercise of power conferred under the legislation. Again, the maximum penalty for those offences is \$7,500 or 100 penalty units. Other offences are created, such as providing false or misleading statements and/or documents at clauses 66 and 67, and impersonating an authorised person at clause 68.

The commencement of new offences under the Water Fluoridation Bill will ensure that the law may be adequately applied and enforced in Queensland. For Queenslanders to enjoy the health benefits of fluoridation, it is vital that the legislation is sufficiently monitored and enforced. I ask the minister to outline in detail how he will guarantee that all relevant public potable water supplies are fluoridated. I note that the bill provides for monitoring and enforcement as well as for the analysis of samples taken from a water source if a contravention of the bill is suspected. Will the same provision apply to water supplies not suspected of contravening the legislation? These matters were raised at a briefing and some answers were provided, but I seek clarification as to whether regular and random testing of non-suspect water supplies will be carried out either by the state government or local authorities—I presume it will be the state government, having taken over the water suppliers—and whether this testing will be carried out to ensure the successful operation of the legislation.

This bill will repeal the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1963, recouping the state's authority when it comes to fluoridation. The 1963 act devolved power over fluoridation to local governments. It was an unusual situation in that Queensland became the only state in Australia that

vested full responsibility for the fluoridation of public water supplies into the hands of local governments. For the most part, local authorities were unprepared for and generally disinterested in decision making about oral health. The act was amended in 2005—I remember debating it in December 2005—achieving little in the way of offering leadership or direction to councils on the issue of water fluoridation. It was another means by which this government avoided making the tough decisions.

These amendments only reinforce the current position that councils have the right to fluoridate local water without consulting the public, as well as having the right to conduct a referendum on fluoridation. As the Australian Dental Association of Queensland branch pointed out, the state government's tendency to hide behind the politicised legislation constituted an abrogation of the state's responsibility to provide public health services. This was also noted by Peter Forster in the Queensland Health Systems Review. On page 52 of the final report, Forster stated—

Responsibility for fluoridation of Queensland drinking water rests with local governments. In every other state and territory the responsibility for decisions related to water fluoridation resides with the state or territory governments. Capital costs are funded by the state or territory governments and the recurrent costs are generally borne by local governments.

Mr Forster went on to recommend that the state government and Queensland Health engage with the community on the feasibility of introducing fluoride to drinking water, the consequences and the cost of water fluoridation. He noted that fluoridation was a matter of increasing importance given the unsustainable nature of current dental health programs. Forster noted that trends indicated Queensland Health would not be able to continue funding free public dental health services to Queenslanders without increasing waiting times to the point where dental care is so neglected that lifetime damage would be the consequence. We are seeing this with the school dental van program I mentioned before, which is being scaled back in some parts of Queensland. As the Premier and the health minister are on record as acknowledging, water fluoridation will go some of the way towards improving the oral health of Queenslanders.

The prevailing attitude of members opposite has been that they have always been happy to knowledge the benefits of fluoridation but then cower away from doing something about implementing what is seen as a controversial and unpopular policy. Whilst the majority of councils deferred the decision on fluoridation, some including the Gold Coast City Council offered free fluoride tablets to residents who wanted to access the oral health benefits of adding fluoride to their diets. Unfortunately, those programs were abolished several years ago when fluoride became difficult to obtain and the costs became too onerous for councils, and then debate ensued about potential liability issues so councils put it in the too-hard basket.

Interestingly, when the *Gold Coast Bulletin* reported on the council's decision to scrap the program, then reporter Fiona Hamilton quizzed councillors about how many fillings they had and whether or not they grew up drinking fluoridated water. As this debate has progressed, many of us have heard similar anecdotal arguments. Anecdotally, the straw poll showed that generally those who had fluoride as a child, whether in the water supply or by supplement, had fewer cavities than those councillors who did not. I thought it was an interesting way to illustrate the impact of fluoride at a local level.

The Queensland coalition supports local government maintaining a voice over fluoridation. As the debate goes on we will hear more about why we should be listening to councils and residents. The reason we should be working closely with councils on fluoridation is this: Queensland's water politics has long been entrenched in local government. As I have mentioned, the Labor government has a tendency to pass the buck to local government when it comes to making tough decisions on fluoride. This is something that members opposite agree on, because in 2004-05 it was the prime reason they gave for not supporting my bill which mirrored the current bill before the House. Can members imagine how different our dental waiting lists might look today if the government had supported the opposition's initiative?

It is clear that Queensland is failing to provide adequate dental care. The Rudd government has been forced to pick up the slack for state governments by reimbursing parents part of the cost of dental check-ups. I might remind Mr Rudd and his health minister that up to the age of 15 teenage check-ups should be completely free to consumers. Check-ups and treatment procedures should be carried out through the school public dental program, which is a state program introduced by a coalition government. However, thanks to the Queensland government trying to cut costs, parents will be out of pocket for a service that should be provided free in schools. Families will be worse off even after the Prime Minister digs into his pockets for dental care. So much for caring for working families. Will the minister now be decreasing the oral health budget in Queensland?

In summing up, this is a historic day for Queensland. Today we will pass a law that has the capacity to improve the health of all Queenslanders. Anyone who has a genuine interest in fluoridation and who has done the research cannot refute the benefits of fluoride for oral health. As a legislator and dentist, bringing this policy to Queensland has been an ambition of mine since I was elected to parliament four years ago. Today I have realised that dream and I am incredibly proud to throw my support behind a bill that I hope—and my colleagues and my peers are happy to accept—will take away

business from my professional colleagues. No dentist enjoys drilling teeth. Hopefully, through this significant public health measure we will see a reduction in the number of children presenting with painful cavities and dental problems.

Finally Queensland has caught up to the rest of country on this matter. I congratulate the Premier for doing something which none of her party colleagues had the guts to do. It is about time fluoride was taken out of the too-hard basket and it is about time the government started doing what it was elected to do, that is, making the tough decisions. We have a duty to make decisions that will benefit the people of Queensland. Fluoridation may be contentious and it may not be popular, but it is the right thing to do. After decades of buck passing, inaction and cowardice, Queensland water will finally be fluoridated.

In closing, I acknowledge the staff from the health department who provided insight into the bill. I thank them for their time and effort. I thank the various stakeholders who provided me with a lot of feedback on the bill. With their endorsement and on behalf of the Queensland coalition, I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (12.38 pm):** I am pleased today to speak to the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. There is no doubt that this bill has caused a lot of controversy over many years and not just here in this state but wherever the issue of fluoridation has been debated. Certainly the people who are supportive of it and the people who are opposed to it are very passionate. It is one of those very interesting scenarios where someone has to make a decision.

We support the intention of this bill. I commend the shadow minister for his comments. As the shadow minister for local government, I believe that local governments, as well as the water authorities around the state, will obviously be one of the major groups involved in implementing this legislation that we pass today. The local government position has always been that if the state government wants this to occur it should pay for it. The state government has committed \$35 million, which may be the right amount that we need for this to occur. But we would like to see a commitment from the minister that the total cost will be met by the state government and not necessarily the ratepayers. I think that is essential.

The Local Government Association has discussed this on numerous occasions. The policy of the Local Government Association states—

- Local Government believes it is a principle of ethical public health policy that mass, involuntary medication must never proceed without the express consent of the community.
- Express consent of the community to fluoridate public water supplies should be sought either by the State Government or Local Government, if they choose to do so.
- As oral health is a State Government responsibility and the State will receive a direct financial benefit from the fluoridation of public water supplies, the State Government should fully fund Local Government for the capital and recurrent costs of its introduction.

The LGAQ further comments—

... \$35 million to support capital costs across the State, to be rolled out across the State by 2012. In addition, it is understood that the Government will fund a component of the recurrent costs of Councils in line with eligibility requirements under the Smaller Communities Assistance Program (SCAP).

That is where the LGAQ stands. A few other issues are important to remember as well. I am sure that there will be benefits for dental health and suchlike, but only one per cent of the water reticulated to households is used for drinking purposes. That is one of the complications we have. While there will be some benefits, the reality is that a lot of the water may not be used for drinking purposes.

The bill before the House has a lot of implications for those authorities who have to implement this process. We have to hope that that money can roll out fairly quickly. The government has been fairly slow in the past in providing funds. I think it is particularly important that there is no hold up. Once the program starts, the money has to start as well. Otherwise we will end up with a bit of a dog's breakfast.

As the shadow minister pointed out, there is a need to help those people who are fiercely opposed to this measure. There needs to be some assistance for those people who do not want to have fluoridation. They could do that simply by having a filter system. We could provide some financial assistance to help them defray those costs. Therefore, they will feel that they have been at least listened to, that we are not pushing something down their neck and that they have a choice.

Certainly we need a plebiscite or a referendum within those various communities. A news release put out by the LGQA states—

An independent survey commissioned by the Local Government Association of Queensland conducted early this week has shown strong support for fluoridation of the state's water supplies ... the survey shows 73 per cent of respondents favoured fluoridation, with 70 per cent of Brisbane metropolitan respondents approving, compared with the rest of the state's 77 per cent approval.

"However, the survey showed there was strong view that there should be a referendum before fluoride was introduced to water supplies, with 63.8 per cent wanting to see a state-wide referendum" ...

"If the decision were to be made locally, almost 56 per cent believed a local referendum should be mandatory" ...

That is probably the way to do it. I do not think we need to have it across the state; I think it should be the choice of individual areas. That is one way to at least respond and to listen to those people who are opposed to this. They have some valid points that they argued very strongly for. Many members in this House would have received millions of emails from both sides but certainly from those who are opposed to fluoridation. They have very, very strong views. They are very passionate in their views that fluoridation is not good for them. I think we should recognise that issue. We should understand it and we should try to do the best we possibly can to assist them to ensure that they have some way to work around it.

With those few words, I support the views of the shadow minister. He is obviously very passionate about this issue himself and he understands the issue. We support this legislation.

**Ms STRUTHERS** (Algeria—ALP) (12.45 pm): As a community we have taken our teeth for granted for too long. From a young age we have all consumed too much soft drink and lots of lollies and sweets. We probably have not brushed and flossed our teeth enough, and we have put off going to the dentist often until we desperately need to. For some children and adults their oral health is extremely poor. Poor diet, poor oral hygiene and the inability to pay for dental care have all contributed to their poor teeth.

Every year around 2,000 preschoolers need to be hospitalised for severe dental decay. Tooth decay ranks as Australia's most prevalent health problem, but we have not given due recognition to this. Twenty-five per cent of the Australian adult population has untreated dental decay. Dental and oral health certainly need to be given much more prominence in the health debate generally. Times are changing and this bill is part of a key wave of change. I commend the minister for his efforts in this regard and the staff of Queensland Health who have been quite amazing with their research and the information that they have provided to the members of the public and the government on this issue.

For oral health to improve in any community, three key steps are needed: ongoing public awareness about the importance of good diet and oral hygiene, greater access to affordable dental care and water fluoridation. I am confused by the position of the members opposite, though. In listening to the debate this morning, we had a very persuasive and compelling argument from the shadow minister and then we had the member for Warrego basically have two bob each way saying, 'Yes, but we'll have a referendum.' Again, that shows that we have a very disjointed coalition. Those opposite need to sort their act out before they come in here debating bills.

All three steps that are needed to support and improve oral health in Queensland will be there in place if we get the green light today to go ahead with water fluoridation. The facts are that Queenslanders have the highest level of tooth decay and the lowest level of access to water fluoridation in Australia. Levels of tooth decay for Queensland children are much higher than those in other states and territories, and the gap may be widening. Sixty-seven per cent of Queensland children have experienced tooth decay by eight years of age. Does this say something? You bet. It is now widely acknowledged that topping up fluoride levels in water can reduce the risk of dental decay by up to 40 per cent. Evidence of improvements in oral health will be shown, as evidenced by research, within five years of implementation. A recent review of water fluoridation found an average of 2.25 fewer decayed teeth per child.

On the question of safety, many people are cautious and concerned about fluoridation. I have met many people in my own local area and at community cabinets where people have raised concern about fluoridation. This is a natural response to a very significant public health issue and intervention. These concerns have been taken seriously by this government, as they have by governments throughout the world. There is certainly no argument—and I do not hear anything from the opposition on this—that we have rushed into this. In fact, it is probably the opposite. The Australian Dental Association and the Australian Medical Association have been fiercely lobbying governments in Queensland for years to implement fluoridation, and I commend their persistence.

Healthy debate on issues of such significance is good for public accountability and safety. The fluoridation of public water supplies has been practised around the world for more than 60 years, and it is acknowledged as one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century.

I must admit that over the years I have been a bit of a fence-sitter. I have had some doubts, but I have looked at a lot of the research from those years and I feel personally assured that one of the most credible bodies on this planet—the World Health Organisation—has given overwhelming endorsement to fluoridation. In addition, a recent national review of water fluoridation found no negative health effects and only a slight increase in dental fluorosis.

I have said that there are three key steps to better oral health in Queensland. Fluoridation is one of those critical steps, and affordable, accessible and quality dental care is another. An oral health review is currently underway in Queensland. Queensland provides the most comprehensive public oral health service in Australia, with over 1.9 million people—which is more than 48 per cent of our population—eligible for care. So it is timely that we have a major review of this substantial system.



The primary purpose of this review is to examine the delivery of public oral health services in Queensland and make recommendations for change. Already we have identified some possible reforms. These include providing public dental access to young people aged up to four years and after grade 10, integrating oral health care into general health care, and encouraging more committed, skilled and valued professionals to stay in the public oral health system.

The Bligh Labor government spends more on oral health per head of population than any other state, with our annual oral health budget at around \$145 million. We have also the broadest eligibility criteria for adult oral health services of any state or territory. In late 2006, for instance, the estimated number of Queenslanders eligible for public oral health services was 1.7 million.

Finally, after years of neglect of dental care under the former Howard government, the Rudd Labor government will fund up to one million additional dental consultations for Australians needing dental treatment by establishing a Commonwealth dental health program. Over the past 11 years the Howard government withdrew \$1.1 billion in dental services, despite the fact that 30 per cent of Australians reported avoiding dental care due to cost, 20 per cent said that the cost had prevented them from having recommended dental treatment and 18 per cent reported that they would have a lot of difficulty in paying a \$100 dental bill.

Governments have a responsibility to make dental care available to those who have a limited capacity to pay. I participated actively in campaigns in a former life when I worked at the Queensland Council of Social Service. I was involved in the national 'Biteback' campaign, which was urging the federal government of the day, the Howard government, to reinstate the public dental scheme. It is a long time coming, but it is so pleasing to see the Rudd government doing this. I was also involved in the 'It's crunch time' campaign. Both of these campaigns sought in different ways to provide more accessible and affordable oral health care. That is a key part in any step to improving oral health care.

The other required step in the battle to end tooth decay is public awareness of the importance of good nutrition and oral hygiene. Again, Queensland Health has been upping the ante in this regard with significant public awareness campaigns. Individual clinics around the state have also been joining in this effort.

I commend the minister for this bill. I support the thorough monitoring of water supplies once they are fluoridated and any future research to test for the impacts of fluoridation on oral health. For the fence-sitters in this debate I say again that the World Health Organisation says that fluoridation is a necessary thing, and there are not too many organisations more credible than the WHO.

**Mr HINCHLIFFE** (Stafford—ALP) (12.53 pm): Fluoridation is one of the most widely researched public health measures in the world and has overwhelming support from all the major medical and dental bodies here and overseas. The World Health Organisation, the Australian Dental Association and the Australian Medical Association are among those which have endorsed fluoride as an effective preventative dental health measure.

Research has shown that Queensland six-year-olds have nearly 30 per cent more decay in their baby teeth than the national average, with a similar result for permanent teeth in 12-year-olds. By contrast, a 1996 study in Townsville, where the water has been fluoridated since 1964, showed a significant difference in the level of tooth decay in children—with about 40 per cent less decay than in Brisbane children. Elsewhere in Queensland the communities of Dalby, Mareeba, Moranbah and Bamaga have fluoridated water supplies, and people in every other state and territory have been drinking fluoridated water for more than 30 years—resulting in significant oral health benefits for residents. I was born in Dalby and my family lived there for a further three years. I therefore have personal experience of drinking fluoridated water at a young age.

**Mr Shine:** They still remember you out there.

**Mr HINCHLIFFE:** They do still remember me out there. Both of my older brothers, who spent even more of these key early years in Dalby, had excellent teeth. I have read much literature on the subject of fluoridation and I concur with the experts that there is no credible evidence to link water fluoridation with adverse health effects. This information, along with the significant public support of health professionals and my own personal experience with fluoridated water, allows me to be very comfortable indeed with my decision to wholeheartedly support the fluoridation of the whole of Queensland's water supply. The member for Algeester made a very important point about the social justice measures involved in ensuring the fluoridation of the public water supply rather than relying on other methods of accessing the fullest range of oral health, and this point is particularly important in my decision making on this as well.

Other than the member for Algeester, I do want to acknowledge the contribution of my honourable friend the member for Surfers Paradise. I acknowledge his factual account of the benefits of fluoridation. However, I cannot ignore the partisan slights of the member for Surfers Paradise in relation to Labor's record on fluoridation.

**A government member:** Will you drill some holes in his argument?

**Mr HINCHLIFFE:** I will attempt to drill some holes in his argument. Historically, this issue was regarded by both sides of the House as a matter for determination by local authorities. I am glad that the coalition has agreed to join the Bligh government in overriding local councils on this important public health issue. However, on this issue, as with many others, it appears that a prospective single united conservative party has many holes in it. The member for Surfers Paradise told the House that water fluoridation is not 'mass medication', yet the member for Warrego described it in just those terms. The rickety coalition compromise—represented by the amendment to provide reverse osmosis water filters—just reminds us of the unscientific conspiracy theories entertained by the Nationals' leadership, including the feminisation of fish.

I have also seen—and I hesitate to use this term, but it is the best collective noun I could come up with—a book depository of conspiracy theories about the dangers of water fluoridation. The member for Surfers Paradise referred to a long list of googled conspiracies and this inspired me to seek out one more. I have to say that the most credible fringe theory I have seen was authored by right-wing American satirist PJ O'Rourke. From his 1995 compilation *Age and Guile Beat Youth, Innocence, and a Bad Haircut*, I refer to his flow chart entitled 'How Fluoridated Water Turns Kids into Communists'. For the information of all members and the entertainment of Queenslanders, I table a copy of the flow chart.

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'How Fluoridated Water Turns Kids into Communists'.

According to this satirical piece, there are a number of paths from the fluoridation of water supply to young people joining the Communist Party. While some honourable members may make reflections on representatives of the city of Townsville in this parliament, I can confirm that the resident of Townsville and only Communist Party member of the Queensland parliament, barrister Fred Paterson, joined the CPA well before the fluoridation of Townsville's water supply in 1964. I am, however, attracted to the logic of the last path cited in Mr O'Rourke's flow chart. He starts out with—

City government puts fluoride in public water supply

That moves on to—

Improved dental health results in fewer visits to dentist's office

I know that the member for Surfers Paradise is particularly concerned about that! The flow chart then moves on as follows—

Fewer visits to dentist's office make for less frequent exposure to *Reader's Digest*

Less frequent exposure to *Reader's Digest* causes child to be insufficiently alerted to the dangers of Communism

Child is thus an easy target for Communist propaganda

Improper associates and dangerous propaganda result in child joining the Communist Party

I commend the bill and fluoridated drinking water to the House.

Sitting suspended from 12.59 pm to 2.30 pm.

**Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (2.30 pm): The Water Fluoridation Bill 2008 will finally deliver for Queensland a holistic approach to better dental health. Dental decay rates can be reduced by up to 40 per cent through good oral hygiene, diet and nutrition and now water fluoridation. This initiative of the Bligh government announced on 5 December 2007 will be acknowledged as one of the most significant public health measures.

Research has confirmed that fluoride helps to repair minor dental tissue damage and promotes enamel resistance against tooth decay and this has been seen as a great benefit for both children and adults. I believe that it is not acceptable to continue to have Queenslanders missing out on the benefits of fluoridation. The current situation where Queenslanders have the worst rates of tooth decay in Australia should not be allowed to continue.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Queensland children have almost twice the number of fillings as Victorian children with our five- to 12-year-old children having more decay than their peers in any other state. My own personal experience with fluoride is when my daughter's first teeth for some unexplained reason were what can only be described as chalky and during her childhood resulted in some of her teeth, particularly her eye teeth, ending up about half their normal size. In consulting with our dentist it was determined that the best thing that I could do to improve and ensure a second set of healthy teeth for my daughter was to give her fluoride, which I have done in the form of a tablet for many years. She is now 13. I also add that the fluoride tablets were not always available and were quite costly, which is why I believe water fluoridation is good—equitable public policy. I am pleased to report that due to my efforts my daughter now has perfect teeth and, unlike her mother who had a mouthful of cavities and fillings by 13—maybe due to Brisbane's lack of fluoridated water—has no cavities or fillings whatsoever. Obviously good dental hygiene also assisted, but I am convinced that it was largely the fluoride treatment that gave her a great set of second teeth.

There is one major difference which may explain why Queenslanders have the worst rates of tooth decay compared with other states and this is that currently only five per cent of Queenslanders have access to fluoridated water and that Brisbane is the only Australian capital city that does not fluoridate its water supply. Queensland's figure of five per cent access for its citizens compares most

unfavourably across Australia where between 75 per cent and 100 per cent of state and territory populations have access to fluoridated water. To reverse this situation, this bill will enable government to work with local councils and water suppliers to provide fluoridated water for up to 80 per cent of Queenslanders within two years and more than 90 per cent of Queenslanders by 2012, with a fund of \$35 million to roll out the capital program needed to meet these targets.

I believe that this is a definite step in the right direction. The Bligh government is not expecting local government to pay for this initiative and is putting its money behind good public policy and shouldering the burden. As other jurisdictions are recording an overall decline in tooth decay over two generations, Queensland spends more than any other state or territory on oral health, with over \$145 million in this financial year. This bill will replace a statutory duty on all water suppliers who supply drinking water to over 1,000 persons to add fluoride to the public water supply under their control or management. In addition, water suppliers with less than 1,000 people may decide to add fluoride to the water supply but it will not be mandatory to do so. This acknowledges that not all drinking water supplies will be suitable for fluoridation. The bill also provides that the minister may grant an exemption of the obligation to fluoride. This is a most sensible provision and recognises that in some instances natural fluoride in the water is either at an average concentration or within the prescribed limits or above the maximum prescribed limit and therefore does not need any top up or where adding fluoride to the water is unlikely to result in a substantial ongoing oral health benefit. For example, this may occur where the town water is bore water which has a pungent odour and is generally not consumed by the community.

The bill also provides for the formation of the Queensland Fluoridation Committee, which will be an expert committee established to advise the minister about the safety and efficacy of fluoridation of drinking water supplies and also advise the minister when deciding whether to grant or not grant an exemption. I welcome the formation of the Queensland Fluoridation Committee, which I believe will play an important role in ensuring that the safety of the community is paramount and that this bill will deliver tangible benefits for the oral health of Queenslanders.

At this stage I think it is important to acknowledge that there are some in the community who are opposed and concerned at the prospect of fluoridated water. Indeed, I have received many emails and letters in opposition from constituents in my area and I have also met with constituents who have outlined their concerns to me in my office. I take this opportunity to thank them for the information they have provided to me and the frank discussions we have had over this issue. Any good debate hears all sides of the argument.

I can assure my constituents that I have read fully all the information provided. However, I believe that the ongoing dental health benefit through fluoridation, together with the large community support for this bill, outweighs these concerns. In addition, there is also extensive, credible, scientific evidence to dispel many fears about the health and safety of water fluoridation. In particular, I refer to the support by the Australian Dental Association, Queensland Branch, and the Dental Hygienists Association of Australia, Queensland Branch, which also support this bill. I must admit that the dentists and hygienists that I have spoken to in my electorate are very supportive of the bill and most congratulatory of the stance taken by the Premier and the Minister for Health.

We only need to compare the results of Queenslanders with the rest of Australia who have had water fluoridation for many years. Queenslanders have the highest level of tooth decay. Even when comparing children aged five to 12 in Townsville, which has had fluoridated water since 1964, with Brisbane children, Townsville children have 45 per cent less tooth decay. In both cases these improved dental health benefits have been achieved with fluoridation, with no adverse health and safety effects.

There are many common fluoride myths and beliefs, such as fluoride causes cancer, allergies, arthritis, bone fracture, excessive dental fluorosis and is bad for babies et cetera. In all of these cases there is ample scientific and medical evidence and support for fluoride to be added to our waterways. However, if members of the community are still not convinced by these findings and are concerned about fluoridated water it is important to note that there is still a choice for those who elect not to drink fluoridated water. These options include bottled water, tank water and reverse osmosis water filters. I welcome any reports from the soon-to-be-established expert Queensland Fluoridation Committee, which will report on any health and safety effects following the passing of this bill, which should provide some comfort to the community.

I look forward to the evidence of improvements in oral health which should be apparent within five years of implementation of water fluoridation achieved simply by adding a small amount of fluoride to top up the natural levels already present which equates to roughly one drop in a bathtub of water. Fluoridation is one of the most widely researched public health measures in the world and is endorsed by the World Health Organisation and a large number of scientific and medical bodies here and overseas.

As mentioned earlier, Townsville water has been fluoridated since 1964 and every other state and territory has been drinking fluoridated water for more than 30 years with no credible evidence to link water fluoridation with adverse health effects. It is for these reasons that I support the bill and welcome the improved benefits in oral health for Queenslanders that will follow. I take this opportunity to congratulate all members of the House who are supporting this bill but in particular to congratulate the

Premier and the Minister for Health for finally having the political resolve to advance this policy which brings Queensland in line with every other state and territory on the issue of water fluoridation. I commend the bill to the House.

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (2.40 pm): The bill before us today, the Water Fluoridation Bill, is designed to force the consumption of fluoride onto most Queenslanders whether they want it or not. The proposal is based on the presumption that fluoride in drinking water leads to healthier teeth and also that there are no negative side effects to be concerned about. The problem is that there is very strong scientific evidence on the other side of the argument as well. I have received copious amounts of correspondence on this issue from people almost unanimously against fluoridation, many citing learned papers, academic studies and a host of other documents against the use of fluoride and more particularly the adding of it to our mains and town water supply.

The science in favour of fluoridation is not clear. It is not clear on whether it is safe for adults and it is absolutely not clear on whether it is safe for infants and young children or nursing mothers or pregnant women. The Queensland Health web site states as a clear and established fact that fluoridated water benefits 'every person of every age and that children benefit as soon as their teeth are formed'. Yet there is clear evidence that this is not true.

The European Union's Scientific Committee on Cosmetic Products and Non-Food Products intended for Consumers issued an opinion on the safety of fluorine compounds in oral hygiene products for children under six which states, as an equally clear and established fact, that 'fluoride in infant formula became a problem as a result of water fluoridation'. It also states that, in relation to studies into risk factors for dental fluorosis, findings showed that the early use of infant formula and fluoridated toothpaste in fluoridated areas were among identified risk factors. This is in direct opposition to the statement on the Queensland Health web site that claims that water fluoridation 'poses no known health risks for babies and young children'. This same report made a number of other findings including that of ingested fluoride, about 50 per cent of which is retained in the bones and the rest is excreted via the kidneys.

Among the many pieces of correspondence that have come across my desk was one that I found most interesting. It indicated that there are many types of fluoride, all of which are poisonous. This document indicated that the kind of fluoride most often found naturally in water is calcium fluoride and, importantly, is basically insoluble and not easily absorbed by the body. Another type called sodium fluoride, in a very pure form, was used for many of the laboratory tests. This type is more readily absorbed. Yet a third type, silicofluoride, was what was actually being added to the water in a particular community. It was in fact a toxic waste product from fertiliser manufacture. So the fluoride being added, whether sodium fluoride or silicofluoride, is very different from the naturally occurring kind of fluoride. I believe it is impossible to describe the addition of a chemical that does not naturally occur in our water as 'adjusting the levels of a naturally occurring substance' and a blatant untruth.

Concerns are also raised in this same document, which is representative of the many I have received, about the potential for toxic exposure via the skin from bathing and washing clothes or the interaction of this chemical with others used in bathing products, such as sodium lauryl sulphate, which increases skin absorption. Even more worrying, silicofluorides are reported to contain other elements including arsenic, beryllium, mercury, lead and so on. To quote from this document, 'You would have to be crazy to put that stuff in the water.'

What I am doing is highlighting the only unarguable fact on the issue, that there is no undisputed science in favour of fluoridation. That being the case, we should err on the side of caution. I do not believe this government should go ahead and ram through a process that is riddled with doubt and inconsistencies. Whatever happened to the precautionary principle?

I have to say that I found another point on the Queensland Health web site very hypocritical. The point is that this government does not accept that those who want fluoride should exercise their choice and use tablets or other supplements. It dismissively says that those who prefer unadulterated water must now exercise their choice and purchase expensive bottled water or instil costly reverse osmosis filters or access sources of water other than mains water.

This forced adulteration of our water will leave Queenslanders who do not want fluoride additives in their mains water supply no other choice. Heaven knows, we pay enough for this water, and under future corporatised water supplies the costs will soar even further across the state. Most Queenslanders will be forced to drink this fluoridated water, shower in it, wash clothes in it, cook with it and so on because there will be no other readily accessible alternative.

It is interesting to see in just a few years how many ALP members have changed their tune on this subject. In 2005 most members of the ALP supported freedom of choice. In a debate in 2005 which called for the mandated introduction of fluoride, much like the bill before us today, the then health minister said—

The primary intent of the proposed bill before the House is for the state government to force local authorities to fluoridate water supplies under their control.

The minister continued—

The bill removes any requirement or mechanism for consultation with those bodies that control public water supplies to communities, that is, local councils. For this reason the government will not be supporting the bill.

Why oppose it then and not now? What has changed to bring about this synchronised backflip by the ALP? He went on to say—

As a government we stand by the view that fluoridation should occur only when there has been a sufficient amount of consultation with local councils and communities.

Where and when has there been consultation and why has the ALP changed its mind as the opposition in 2005 was so strong? During the debate the member for Bundamba said—

Quite simply this bill is flawed. The member proposes that the state override local government, which our government cannot support.

She went on to say that the member moving the bill wanted 'a Liberal Party dictatorship in relation to mandating the use of fluoride'. What is different about this bill that makes it any different from the dictatorship the member for Bundamba spoke about then? Today, it is the ALP establishing a dictatorship on fluoridation, just as it did with local government amalgamations. It will be interesting to see how the consciences of ALP members direct them today, especially the member for Bundamba.

The then ALP member for Bundaberg said that she could not support the mandated introduction of fluoride because, in part, 'There are still many people in our communities who have concerns about this issue'. What has changed between 2005 and 2008 on that issue? There has still been no public consultation. There are still concerns and they are being expressed loudly by interested parties but the ALP appears to be deafened by its own arrogance. During the same debate the ALP member for Pumicestone said after describing sodium silicofluoride as rat poison—

Then there is the question of rights. We live in a democracy and my constituents say that this is mass enforced medication. No-one should be forced to take a form of medication if they are not sick.

The member for Aspley, a former nurse, was blunt when she said—

The introduction of water fluoridation at the hands of a ham-fisted state government disdainful of the impact on local councils and communities is not a preferred way of achieving good public health policy outcomes.

That exactly describes this government's own health department in the words of one of its own members—that and the local government amalgamation debacle that proved what the ALP's real opinion of local government actually is.

It is interesting to see how the voting went back in 2005—just three years ago. Like good party sheep, every single ALP member in the chamber voted against the mandated introduction of fluoride. That includes today's Premier and health minister. Yet today the same ALP government members are ramming through exactly the same mandated introduction of fluoride to our drinking water. On this issue they flip-flop more than a dying fish. National Party members are also imitating a dying fish, flip-flopping just like the ALP on this issue. In the 2005 debate the member for Burnett said—

I will gladly support a bill that mandates milk in schoolchildren's little lunch, but I will not support a bill that mandates fluoride in their water.

The member for Toowoomba South said—

We could put a lot of things in water to combat disease. Some would agree with that and some would not. We could forcibly block off takeaway food stores so that people do not get fat. We could probably put road blocks across pubs so that people do not drink too much alcohol. However, in life a lot of things are about making one's own choices. It is not for us—

and this is what he said—

to forcibly put something into our drinking water that some people simply do not believe in and have a very strong objection to.

What has happened to change this very clearly expressed opinion? The member for Maroochydhore said—

It is not good enough to force or mandate fluoridation of public water supplies in Queensland if the public does not support that.

She also said—

Do not force it down people's throats or ultimately people will revolt, and even if this law is passed it will not stand.

The National Party voted en masse at the time against the forced fluoridation of water, yet today it has changed its colours again. With this substance added to every drop of water that passes through our mains town water taps, our showers, our washing machines, our lawns and gardens and so on, the question also has to be asked: how much of it will flow through, polluting our creeks and rivers, and go out to sea? We hear often enough about the supposed damage from fertilisers, sewage and other products when they run off and reach the Great Barrier Reef. Yet today this government is telling us that we should add a dangerous chemical to every drop of water that our towns and cities use, and that is then sent out into the natural environment.

I, along with so many other Queenslanders, remain unconvinced of the science behind this government's campaign. There are a great many scientific doubts and there are alternatives and I am still totally opposed to this government's arrogant, dictatorial attitude. Surely the lessons of Howard's demise are not beyond us. Arrogance is fatal, yet it seems it is endemic in George Street. I oppose the bill.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Palaszczuk): Order! Before calling the member for Kallangur, I welcome to the Legislative Assembly students, staff and parents from Hilder Road State School in the electorate of Ashgrove, which is represented in this chamber by Ms Kate Jones.

**Hon. KW HAYWARD** (Kallangur—ALP) (2.52 pm): I rise in this chamber to support the Water Fluoridation Bill. This is an important bill because it will enable the government to work with local councils and water suppliers to provide fluoridated water to up to 80 per cent of Queenslanders within the next two years and more than 90 per cent of Queenslanders by the year 2012.

There is a background to what this bill is all about, of course. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has stated that the fluoridation of public water supplies was one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century. Fluoridation is endorsed as safe and effective by more than 150 major health and scientific bodies in Australia and overseas, including the World Health Organisation, the National Health and Medical Research Council, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Australian Dental Association and the Australian Medical Association. In fact, it is my recollection that during the 1990s, when I was the health minister in Queensland, the Australian Dental Association was very solid in its view about the matter of fluoridating water.

Over 317 million people worldwide have access to fluoridated water with no credible evidence of any ill health effects. Yet Queenslanders have the least access to fluoridated water of all Australians. Only five per cent of Queenslanders have access to fluoridated water—and we heard from the previous speaker in this debate all of the doom and gloom—but we need to compare that to 90 per cent of people in New South Wales, 86 per cent of people in Western Australia and 77 per cent of people in Victoria. It is right, and it is now time for the government to act to give Queenslanders access to this significant public health initiative.

Water fluoridation is the most effective means of delivering the benefits of fluoride to the greatest number of people irrespective of age, income or education level. It benefits a person's teeth every time they drink water or consume food prepared with fluoridated water. As well as good oral hygiene, regular dental check-ups and a healthy diet, teeth need small amounts of fluoride throughout the day for the whole of a person's life to prevent tooth decay. The improvements in people's oral health as a result of fluoridation in parts of Queensland, Australia and the rest of the world are clear. A 1996 study showed that children in Townsville—a city in Queensland which has fluoridated water—had 40 per cent less tooth decay than Brisbane children. Assuming people behave rationally in Townsville and behave rationally in Brisbane—

**Mr Lawlor:** Big assumption!

**Mr HAYWARD:** But we are comparing both of them. Assuming that happens, the one factor that is different is the fact that Townsville water was fluoridated which resulted in 40 per cent less tooth decay than in Brisbane children. A recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study found that Queensland's five- to 12-year-olds have more tooth decay than their peers in any other state and almost twice the number of fillings of Victorian children of the same age. The 1999 York review from the UK found a 15 per cent increase in children free from decay in fluoridated areas and an average total decay reduction of 2.25 teeth per child. In other words, decay was much reduced in fluoridated water areas. In 2007 the National Health and Medical Research Council, Australia's peak body for supporting health and medical research, endorsed the York review's findings.

The Australian Council of Social Service estimates that for every dollar invested in water fluoridation families save up to \$80 per person in dental bills, and that is a significant thing. All of the time in this parliament we talk about issues—and I have been through meetings at lunchtime today on such issues—such as rebates for power or for this or for that. Recently at the federal level there was debate about the carers allowance and the allowance that pensioners receive for utilities. This is a simple measure: for every dollar invested we can save \$80 per person in dental bills. Queensland spends more on oral health than any other state or territory—\$137.7 million in 2006-07 alone. Yet this investment is limited in its capacity to make a difference while a key prevention strategy like fluoridation is missing.

Fluoridation is one of the most extensively researched public health measures in the world. I am sure that as this debate progresses certain speakers will refer to all sorts of information they have been able to drag up or find on the internet or wherever. But the fact is that fluoridation is endorsed as safe by all leading health and medical bodies around the globe. In 40 years of fluoridation there has been no credible evidence found linking fluoride with any ill effects. Studies purporting to link fluoride with ill health effects are generally of poor quality, published in biased publications and certainly not subject to independent peer review. Often opponents of fluoridation refer to research selectively, misquoting research to support their case. One can understand that. If one is an opponent of something, that is probably what one would do. The only condition definitively linked to excessive consumption of fluoride, including from ingesting toothpaste and misuse of fluoride tablets, is dental fluorosis. In most cases this is a mild cosmetic condition only.

The fact is that the great majority of Queenslanders support fluoridation. A number of studies conducted over recent years by the government, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the university sector and health professionals have consistently found that between 60 per cent and 70 per

cent of Queenslanders want their water to be fluoridated. It is of great public health benefit. If it means anything, it means a lot less pain for people in that they do not have to have as much dental work done. Therefore, the government's decision to fluoridate Queensland's water supplies is about responding to Queenslanders' very clear wishes.

In 2005 the government established a \$5 million program to reimburse councils 100 per cent of the capital cost of fluoridating local drinking water supplies. Very disappointingly, no council took up the government's offer. The government also enshrined in legislation the opportunity for councils to hold local polls to determine their community's support for fluoridation. Again, no councils took up this offer. As a result, and in recognition of the strong support of Queenslanders for fluoridation, it is now time for the government to act. I support this bill.

**Dr FLEGG** (Moggill—Lib) (3.00 pm): I find this debate today amazing, because I was here in 2004 when the member for Surfers Paradise introduced a bill which was similar to the bill we are debating today. I was here in 2002 to hear those opposite saying the complete opposite to what they are saying now. Government members not only sit opposite; they also speak the opposite. It is quite an astonishing situation to stand here to watch this amazing backflip by the members opposite without even an acknowledgement by them of their failure to act and the costs associated with their failure to act when they had the opportunity to do so.

Fluoridation is widely accepted as one of the most important public health measures that we can apply. The essence of most public health measures is their universality. Effective public health measures need to be adopted universally. Across a whole range of aspects of our lives, we have no problem accepting universal measures. We accept universal vaccination for children. Sometimes universal vaccination comes with some hazards that are certainly not associated with fluoridation. But we accept the important public health benefit of protecting children from infectious disease. We accept supplementing foods such as breakfast cereals or bread with folate to stop spina bifida and neural tube defects. In that regard we hear not a word about mass medication, because it is important to protect the health and welfare of the whole population, particularly children.

We take it further in what I think could safely be called public health matters. We make seatbelts compulsory. We do not say, as we heard those opposite say in the fluoride debate in 2005, that there are other measures available, such as—

**Mr Reeves:** Don't talk about the past; talk about the present. I wonder why you got dumped.

**Dr FLEGG:** It seems that some of the members opposite have not learned. If I had been forced into an embarrassing backdown such as they have I would not be trumpeting like the member for Mansfield is.

We make it compulsory to wear seatbelts. We do not say, 'The seatbelt is there. You can choose to use it.' We make it compulsory to wear bicycle helmets anywhere, even in places where there is no road. Why? Because for these measures to be effective they have to be applied universally. If you make these measures optional, the people who miss out are the ones who are the most vulnerable and who are the most at risk.

I acknowledge that, like other members, I have, as has my office, been contacted by people who have accepted some of the stories that get circulated on the internet. I accept that those people hold their strong views honestly. I have to say to them—as I have done—that I simply do not agree and that I do not believe that the evidence supports those sorts of ideas. In fact, fluoride is a naturally occurring compound. Our bodies are exposed to these sorts of compounds every day in everything we do—whether it is calcium, fluoride or chlorine. Chlorine was used as a chemical warfare agent, yet we hear very little about its use in water supplies. I do not quite understand why people would not be extrapolating some of their arguments to the use of chlorine. The reality is that some of these measures are necessary and should be applied universally.

There has been some discussion as to how and why fluoride works. Certainly, it appears that some of the effects of fluoride are as a result of its direct absorption into teeth. That is why, if we look at the figures, we see that over a long period there has been a decline in the incidence of tooth decay particularly through the use of fluoride toothpaste, where there is some absorption of the fluoride, and possibly the fluoridation of water having a direct effect as it is also absorbed into teeth. In some places the incidence of tooth decay has increased along with the increase in the use of bottled water and the decline in the use of town water.

I think it is fair to say that to a significant extent fluoridation is a socioeconomic issue. There is little doubt that children from disadvantaged families or children from families that have internal disruptions of one sort or another are much more likely to be overlooked. They are much less likely to have a routine in their lives that sees them using their fluoride toothpaste on a twice-daily basis. They are less likely to have parents who are organised enough to give them fluoride tablets every day. We have had a lot of debates in this place, including recently, about protecting people, particularly children, who are victims of social disadvantage. I have no doubt that fluoridation is another important measure by which to protect those children.

I sometimes hear or read in *Hansard* contributions by members opposite about fluoride being mass medication. That myth should be debunked. It is quite clear that fluoride is a compound that occurs naturally. It occurs frequently in the water supply in any case. Through this bill, we are standardising it in the town water supplies that people consume—and in some areas that fluoride occurs naturally.

Queensland has paid a very high price for its failure to act on this issue. I see that the minister is present in the House. I put this question on record: could the minister provide an estimate of the yearly savings from the fluoridation of water? What has it cost the state of Queensland because in 2004 this government rejected the fluoridation of water bill that was introduced by the member for Surfers Paradise? Since that time we have continued to disadvantage Queensland children. We have paid millions of dollars simply for the fact that the government wanted to play politics with the issue of fluoridation, about which it has now belatedly introduced a bill.

The consequences go beyond cost. From the point of view of government and legislators, the cost is significant and should not be played down. However, this issue also goes to the health of children and the effect upon them of having to attend dentists. In this state we have the alarming incidence of children having to go under general anaesthetic sometimes to have large numbers of neglected teeth treated in a single operation. Every time you put a child under general anaesthetic, to a small degree that child is put at risk. In this state people have died under general anaesthetic while having their dental problems attended to. A very high profile case occurred not very long ago. It is unconscionable to subject children in this state to numerous instances of general anaesthetic simply because the government did not have the courage to introduce this measure sooner.

From a medical point of view, poor-quality dental health affects people's general health. It affects their nutrition and it can cause various types of infection. It is the most common cause of bacteraemias, where germs get into the blood supply and potentially cause serious and occasionally fatal diseases. Of course, the best-known disease is infection of the heart valves. Frequently that occurs as a result of dental disease. There are a range of serious issues and consequences involved with this particular issue.

On a number of occasions the figures quoted grossly underestimate the incidence of dental disease in this state, because a massive proportion of the state's population comes from southern states that have fluoridated their water supplies since the 1960s. In actual fact, the dental health of native-born Queenslanders is worse than the stated figures suggest. I have read a lot of misinformation, and some of it is even in *Hansard*. I will not go into that too much. Stories from the European scene have been quoted, where it has been alleged that we do not fluoridate for various reasons. In fact, sometimes the choice has been made to fluoridate salt instead of water, just as we put iodine in salt. Years ago the Western world had a serious problem with thyroid disease and we responded by putting iodine in salt. Now thyroid disease of that type is a rarity in the Western world because we came to grips with the issue of iodine deficiency, yet in 2008 we are still dealing with the issue of fluoride deficiency.

On 23 February 2005 I spoke on the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill. In that speech I referred to a Channel 10 news report into the Asian tsunami and the number of people killed in that tragedy. The report stated that frequently an Australian's state of origin could be determined by the state of his or her teeth. If the teeth were appalling, the person was probably and generally from Queensland.

I note that the member for Pumicestone does not seem to be in the House today. If I had said what she said—

**Mrs Reilly:** She's here today; she's just not in the chamber.

**Dr FLEGG:** She is not in the chamber at the moment, and if I had said what she said in *Hansard* I probably would not want to be in the chamber, either. She interjected to dispute the benefits of water fluoridation. On 11 July 2004, the *Sunday Mail* carried a full-page article by Jessica Lawrence that dealt with the appalling dental health of Queensland children. She highlighted the burden that our hospital services bear from the number of young patients requiring general anaesthetic just to fix the effects of the lack of fluoridation in this state's water.

I have looked back through the debate that was had in 2005. Some of the comments that were made ought to be placed on the record again, as I do not hear many of those opposite correcting the record that was so distorted at that time. The then minister, who has had something of a chequered history since then, which we will not go into, said—

The issue to be debated tonight is not whether fluoridation of water is an appropriate thing to do ... The issue for debate is the best way to introduce water fluoridation.

He went on to say that this should be a matter for local councils and that it should not be a matter for the government.

The member for Bundamba made some quite amazing comments. I see that the member for Bundamba is not in the chamber, either. Once again, if I had made the comments she made I would not want to be here, either. She said—

The member is talking about mandating. Quite simply, the bill is flawed. The member proposes that the state override local government, which our government cannot support.



I am interested to hear the contribution that she will make later, as she believes that in this matter the state government cannot override local government. She went on to say that this is a local issue and should only be introduced 'wherever it receives the consent of the community'. She went on to attack members of the Liberal Party. In relation to the member for Surfers Paradise she said—

What he wants is a Liberal Party dictatorship in relation to mandating the use of fluoride.

Today I am happy and proud to support the government in mandating fluoride and, unlike the member for Bundamba, I certainly will not be accusing it of being a dictatorship.

The member for Nudgee, who is now in the ministry, said that he would vote in support of a proposal if the Brisbane City Council conducted a public poll. He went on to say that his wife was a dental therapist who had treated and provided dental care to schoolchildren aged from four to 18 in the public and private school system. He described the horrific extent of dental disease that his wife encountered in Queensland public and private schools. Even with that knowledge, in 2005 the member for Nudgee, who now sits in the cabinet, did not have the courage to support fluoridation. The list goes on and on. In this House Mr English said—

The Liberal Party wants us to believe that the end justifies the means. However, I cannot support that. I cannot support mandatorily overriding community sentiment.

He went on to say—

I believe the positive health outcomes as a result of fluoridation cannot be forced upon local councils.

The member for Glass House said—

I expect that any council wanting to introduce fluoridated water would give residents the chance to express their support ...

Her view does not extend to the state government. She went on to say—

The best way for the Queensland Liberal Party to help dental health is not to force fluoridation on everyone but to convince their colleagues in Canberra to fulfil their responsibilities properly.

Basically, she went on to claim that treating kids with dental disease was better than preventing it.

However, the biggest booby prize belongs to the member for Pumicestone, who made the most outrageous comments. She began her speech by saying that she was speaking on behalf of her constituents who oppose compulsory fluoridation. What about the majority of her constituents who support it? I practise medicine in the honourable member's electorate and I can inform her that the dental health of her constituents is dreadful. Within this state they will be among the biggest beneficiaries from the measure taken here today. She went on to say—

After all, dosing entire populations with a rat poison—

I think she is a bit mixed up between fluoride and warfarin there, but nevertheless that is what she said in *Hansard*—

for all of their lives could reasonably have adverse effects.

She goes on to say that we should be looking at things like the rate of the use of sugar in our society and mentioned that she had seen coca-cola in toddlers' bottles. I note that, despite her concern about sugar, the member voted against my bill to ban soft drink sales in schools, so she was not all that concerned about sugar in any case. She went on to say—

Obviously the Liberal Party is not basing its argument on scientific fact ...

I support this measure and I think the government is doing the right thing. It is belated and it is hypocritical following comments by government members last time, but nevertheless it is better late than never. This is an important measure. It will save millions of dollars in the state of Queensland. It will improve the health, wellbeing and lives of many children. The benefits of this have been enjoyed for 40 years and more in other Australian capital cities without ill effect. It is high time that this measure was also brought in for the welfare of the people here in Queensland.

**Mr GIBSON** (Gympie—NPA) (3.20 pm): It is a pleasure for me to rise and add my voice to this contentious issue of fluoridation of local water supplies. In my maiden speech to this parliament I said that I want the people of Gympie to know that I will fight for their interests because in the end I must return to live amongst them, and I will do that with my head held high.

**Mr Lawlor:** You could always move to Southport.

**Mr GIBSON:** I take that interjection.

**Mr Reeves:** I wouldn't have.

**Mr GIBSON:** I will take that interjection because there is no desire for me to move down there, although I do know that the *Gold Coast Bulletin* makes reference to me far more than it does any local members almost. I seem to be getting an outstanding run in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*.

**Mr Reeves:** Tickets, please. What do you think of that, member for Surfers Paradise?

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms van Litsenburg): Order!

**Mr GIBSON:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, on this issue I did feel it was important that I find out what the people of Gympie wanted. The best way for me to do that was to conduct a telephone poll, and that was done with 144 residents over two days in the past few weeks.

The results of this poll were very interesting for me and I think perhaps reflect the broader community's view on water fluoridation. There were two questions. It was not designed to be a push poll. Two simple questions were asked of people. The first question was, 'Do you support or oppose the fluoridation of the water supply?' Of the respondents, 45 per cent of residents supported fluoridation, 31 per cent were opposed to it and 23 per cent were undecided. This is a large number and shows that the vote would go either way.

In relation to the question, 'Should local communities be allowed to vote on whether fluoride is introduced in the local supply?', interestingly there was overwhelming support for the community to be given a voice. Eighty-seven per cent of people indicated that they would want to vote. Indeed, those people who supported fluoride in the poll also supported the opportunity to be given a say. It is a very important principle, I believe, that on contentious issues we engage with the community. I note that there has been some television advertising, but I also note, based on the responses that my electorate office has received, that there is a great deal of unrest. Many people feel that this has been forced upon them—many people who perhaps do not understand the complexities of the issue or who are taking that very simple approach of googling the information and then finding that which supports their personal point of view and which may not necessarily always be correct.

**Ms Nolan:** Where do you stand?

**Mr GIBSON:** My personal position is that I support fluoride. I do so very clearly from a personal perspective. Whilst I was in the Army I moved around. I have lived in Townsville and in other states around Australia.

**Ms Nolan:** So this is just lip-service.

**Mr GIBSON:** No, it is not lip-service. I think it is really disappointing that we see this attitude to it.

**Ms Nolan:** You know your position but you thought you'd just give a nod to the others—just give a nod.

**Mr GIBSON:** I take those interjections because this disappoints me the most. I appreciate that people can change their position on an issue. We have had a 'road to Damascus' experience both in the Labor Party and in the National Party in terms of members' views on this issue compared to what has been stated previously in debate. People—and it has been reported and referred to in many speeches—who were clearly opposed to fluoridation have now changed their position. I do not begrudge anyone that. In fact, I am really comfortable with that. It shows that people are willing to challenge their views. It shows that people are willing to rethink on an issue and then come to a new conclusion based on the evidence available to them. That is a sign of a healthy democracy. It is a sign of individuals who are willing to represent their constituency based on the information available to them.

If I had been in this parliament when the vote was taken in 2005, I hope and I believe that I would have voted in support of fluoridation because of the personal experience that we have had as a family. We have five children. Three of our eldest children have grown up in states where fluoride was freely available in the water. The two youngest children have grown up here in Queensland. Our two youngest children have had tooth extractions. I do not believe that we as a family have changed our diet that significantly. I do not believe that we are drinking any more or less soft drink or having any more or less sugary foods. I believe that the fluoride our children experienced in the early stages of their life in places where fluoride was in the water has had an impact on their oral health.

Having said that, though, we have to recognise that there are alternative points of view. That was the point behind conducting the polling—to find out the views of people in my electorate. I believe that, because of the 23 per cent who are undecided, there is an obligation on us to conduct better education on the issue of fluoride. There is an opportunity here for us to bring the electorate with us, for us to bring the people of Queensland along so that they understand the benefits of this. The moment a government takes heavy-handed action it will immediately lose the people. It will lose their support because we will start to see those ridiculous conspiracy theories that kick in, and unfortunately logic is often lost in that. Politics is indeed a strange profession.

**Ms Nolan:** It is on the National Party side.

**Mr GIBSON:** And, indeed, on the Labor Party side. It is a strange profession where people who refer to fluoride as rat poison will probably now vote to support its introduction. It is a strange profession because we are all faced with challenges. What disappoints me the most in this House is when good legislation is brought in and then is voted down because of party politics. I think the legislation introduced in 2005 was good legislation. I think it could have been made better, and I believe that we could have amended it to ensure its passage. That is what this House is about. It is not about just looking at our party manifesto and saying, 'We support this,' or, 'We're against this and there's no room to budge.' This is meant to be a House of debate. This is meant to be a place where people can engage with each other and listen to the arguments that are put forward rather than listen to the political apparatchik that chew in our ears telling us that this one issue must go this way or that way.

The National Party has a fortunate position in that we have a policy of 'electorate first'. I have used that once in this House already in the short time I have been here. That was on the hospital boards bill, when I said that I would not support it because that is what the people of my electorate wanted me

to do. I appreciate that not all other parties offer that. A case in point is the former member for Noosa, Cate Molloy, who very clearly came out against the proposed dam at Traveston Crossing and then suffered the political consequences from her own party for that.

From all the correspondence that I have received from my electorate there is one piece I wish to take some elements from. Whilst my constituent was opposed to fluoridation, I think she sums up the concerns that people have. Shirley, who lives at Rainbow Beach, wrote to me and said, 'David, I feel very strongly that the addition of fluoride to the public water supply will take away my right to determine what I put into my body.' She says—and it is her view—that it will also endanger her health and the health of those in the community. Interestingly, she then says in her final paragraph that we should continue to allow individuals the right to choose. I believe we need to take this one step further. We should have given individuals the right to be heard.

I heard some members say earlier that, because councils had the opportunity to conduct a poll but they did not do that, somehow that is a reason for us to act now. I do not agree with that. What I do agree with and what I do think should have happened and could still happen is that we should engage with the people of Queensland on this contentious issue. We should enable them to be educated on fluoridation through a government education program on its benefits and then we should enable their views to be heard on it.

This was not an election issue. There is no clear mandate for this to be introduced. I think we all have to accept that. Personally, I can see that this is necessary and it is something that would be of benefit, but I am not comfortable with the idea of us overriding the rights of Queenslanders. I am not comfortable with us not listening to what they want to say. That is why I engaged, in my own very small way, in a process of giving them that opportunity.

I respect the reasons that people use to speak against fluoride. I respect the concerns that people have with regard to forced medication and other issues, but I do believe that we can look at this as an opportunity for us to work together. There will be an amendment before this House that could enable the people of Queensland to have a voice. If we are genuine about doing our job, then we can embrace that amendment. Yes, it will cost some dollars, but what is the price of bringing the majority of Queenslanders along with us so that they understand the values and benefits of fluoridation?

I hope we take this opportunity to work in a truly bipartisan way, to look at the amendment and, if necessary, knock some of the edges off it but take it at its point of giving the people of Queensland a voice. Yes, fluoridation is good, but it is also good to allow the people to come along with us. The arguments that were put forward by the Labor Party members and others when they spoke against the bill that was introduced back in 2005 really summed up this issue of saying that we need to have the community onside. A few television advertisements clearly have not done that. There is an opportunity in the amendment for us to do something, and I will certainly be speaking more about that. I commend this bill to the House.

**Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (3.32 pm): I rise in support of the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. Dental health is an important issue in the electorate of Bundamba and it is important across all age groups and socioeconomic spectrums—all of them. I have received only a handful of comments, letters and emails from constituents who are in fact against fluoride in the water. I have, however, received enormous support in favour of water fluoridation, as these people understand the benefits of having good dental health.

I noticed that the member for Moggill was talking about social disadvantage before. Well, I am about to give him a lesson in social disadvantage in my electorate across many generations. The older people in my community recall how they were hospitalised, many in their teens, to have all their teeth pulled out and then be measured up for false teeth after a week or so. Many remember the experience as being horrifying, almost barbaric, but they were told that because they were poor and because they would not be able to afford good dental health they had to have this done as a preventative measure.

My parents were amongst this generation of Ipswich people. They went into the Ipswich Hospital—or the St Andrew's Hospital as it was then—and they had their teeth ripped out of their head by the dentist. They had to suffer all the pain and the indignity as their gums healed over several days before they could then be fitted with dentures so they would not have the cost later on in life of good dental health. That is what you call social disadvantage—people who could not afford, through no fault of their own, to have private medical insurance or good dental health.

I have spoken to many people in the Bundamba electorate in national seniors organisations and other organisations and I have spoken to the community elders, those people in their 70s, 80s and 90s. Many of them—in fact, it is almost universal—support this legislation because they do not want any other generation to go through the pain and the indignity they had to go through when they were younger.

Many people in the electorate of Bundamba have very little money as most of it is spent on the mortgage or rent and putting food on the table. There is very little spare money and there is a low proportion of families who have private health insurance. In fact, we could probably count those in my area who have private health insurance in the hundreds rather than the thousands. So what happens if these families have issues with their teeth? I am about to tell you what happens.

Usually, if they can scrape some money together—by borrowing it from family and friends—they can go to a dentist and have an examination to see how much it will cost to get their teeth fixed. If, for example, they need a root canal treatment, constituents are often advised that it could cost around \$2,000. They then go into a sheer, blind panic. If there need to be extensive fillings, it may cost several hundreds of dollars, if not thousands of dollars, and they also get worried and go into a panic. So the final quote they get from the dentist is: 'How much does it cost to have my teeth pulled out?' I can tell members that that is what happens in my electorate. Most of the dentists end up pulling out the teeth of my constituents. That is just absolutely shocking. In the electorate of Bundamba, we can tell how well-off people are in financial terms generally by the state of their teeth. If they cannot afford preventative dental care, as I said before, my constituents get their teeth pulled out.

It is important that we look after the next generation, the little ones in our community. I have a good friend Vicki who is the mother of two teenage children. She has one tooth in her mouth and she is proud of that tooth. She is a great mother and a valued member of our community, but over the years she has sacrificed her own teeth to make sure that her children's teeth are well looked after. The dental health of our teenagers has been boosted recently with an announcement by the Rudd government in relation to dental health. I welcome this initiative and I was grateful to be able to thank him personally when he was here a couple of weeks ago to turn the sod on the Ipswich Motorway.

Water fluoridation will result in benefits that will improve dental health. It will result in less pain and suffering in the community. There will be a reduction in the loss of income because we will actually have people at work. We will also have economic savings in public health, specifically dental health care.

I am proud to stand here to support what I believe is a well thought out, well-constructed Water Fluoridation Bill presented by our Labor government. As the member for Tablelands pointed out, no, I did not support the tory bill. I did not support it because I am a member of the Labor Party and a proud member of the Labor Party. As I recall, there was no consultation with local government by those tories at that time. If the member for Moggill were in the House, I would invite him to come over to my electorate so I could teach him a little bit about social disadvantage.

**Mr Reeves** interjected.

**Mrs MILLER:** If he wants to come over and set up a bulk-billing practice in my electorate, good on him. If the member for Moggill would like to cross the river and leave the toffs over there in Moggill and come to Riverview or Goodna, I will show him social disadvantage. He will be able to see it and he will be able to breathe it. He will know exactly what it is like for people who suffer social and economic disadvantage every day of the week. In fact, it makes me sick to hear him try to lecture us on disadvantaged communities.

In my view, this bill will go a long way to improving dental health for the future generations in my electorate. I want the people in my electorate to have the same opportunities that others right across Queensland have. I can tell members that dental health is an important issue in my area. I am very proud to support a Labor bill, not a tory bill.

**Mrs REILLY** (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (3.40 pm): I am pleased to rise in support of the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. I do so with the full understanding and knowledge that there are some people in my community and the Queensland community who are vehemently opposed to the bill and the intent of the bill. However, I am firm in my conviction that these people are in the minority and that this bill, which will result in the fluoridation of Queensland's water supply over the next five years, enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of Queenslanders.

Surveys conducted over recent years by the Office of Economic and Statistical Research, the Local Government Association of Queensland, Central Queensland University and the Queensland Oral Health Alliance have consistently demonstrated that between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of Queenslanders support the fluoridation of drinking water.

We are charged in this place as legislators to make hard decisions and to do what is right based on the best available information at the time and our own convictions and policy on behalf of our constituency and indeed for their benefit. As several previous speakers have said, there is a social justice agenda here; no-one has articulated that better than the member for Bundamba, who preceded me. This social justice agenda recognises that for some residents of Queensland—those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, people in remote communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—fluoridation may be the only answer to their future and potential oral health.

I am delighted to see bipartisan support for this move, albeit with the other side taking the opportunity to take a few pot shots at the government. I want to acknowledge that it was the member for Surfers Paradise, John-Paul Langbroek, a former dentist, who first pushed for water fluoridation in this House. I have talked to him about it and the state of my children's oral health over the many years that I have known John-Paul. It is outside the realms of possibility—it is pure science fiction—to imagine that any government would knowingly harm or poison its electors, as has been the charge from some of the more outrageous opponents of the bill. As for inadvertently mass poisoning electors—that is, doing it

accidentally—I am more than comfortable with the level of research, science and investigation undertaken not only by my government but also by many, many credible sources which indicate and guarantee that water fluoridation is safe and beneficial.

Fluoridating Queensland's water supply brings us into line with the rest of Australia's population. Fluoride has been in all other states for more than 30 years. It was introduced in Townsville in 1964. Coming from the Gold Coast as I do, where a person would be lucky to find one in 10 people in a room born in Queensland, the rest having migrated to the state from other states where they have had fluoride in their water their whole lives, I have not actually encountered any opposition to this on the ground in my personal discussions with constituents, friends or acquaintances. I have, however, received a number of emails, many of them spams from overseas, from opponents of fluoride. They come from far and wide. A very small percentage, maybe two to three, are actual constituents from my electorate. There are a great many from fictitious or deceased individuals that, while amusing in a disturbing sort of way, did little to bring credibility to their argument in opposition.

I want to point to a couple of issues that these opponents to water fluoridation have raised that I have taken some time to research. They raise the experience of a number of European countries, claims from detractors, some who are scientists and medical professionals, that fluoride causes negative health effects or that it provides negligible oral health benefits or they run the argument that fluoridation is akin to mass medication and they simply object to being force-fed. I will come back to some of those arguments in a moment, but I want to place some facts on the record.

Queenslanders have the worst teeth in Australia with tooth decay now affecting 50 per cent of children by the age of six and 95 per cent of adults. Currently only five per cent of Queenslanders can access fluoridated water and Brisbane is the only capital city that does not provide water fluoridation. Other states have between 75 per cent and 100 per cent access and four states are constructing even more fluoride plants. These states are recording an overall decline in tooth decay over two generations.

Children aged five to 12 in Townsville have 45 per cent less tooth decay than Brisbane children. Around 67 per cent of Queensland children have experienced tooth decay by the age of eight and every year around 2,000 preschoolers need to be hospitalised for severe dental decay. My son Louis, who is now eight, is one of these. I was shuddering and trying to block my ears when the member for Moggill described the very severe and serious risks involved in anaesthetising young children, particularly for the purpose of something like dental work which could be so avoidable. Hospitalisation means having dental work such as deep fillings or extractions done under general anaesthetic that could not be done on a two, three or four-year-old. Believe me, it happens. I have watched Louis go under twice in his short little life. The first time he was nearly four and the second time he was six. I spent those agonising, guilt ridden, anxious hours waiting for him to wake up swearing that if I could do something to make sure my children and my grandchildren do not have to go through this then I would do it. Guess what? Here I am in a unique position, unlike the other mums who go through this every day, where I can come into this place and I can do something. In this case I am doing the very thing that the dental professionals who worked on my son asked me to do. They begged me to do it. 'This could have been avoided', they said, 'Deliver fluoridated water in this state'.

To me it is a very simple proposition. Why would the very practitioner who made money from me and my son's rotten teeth be asking me to introduce a measure which will hopefully and ultimately reduce his own workload and potentially cut back on an avenue of his income—a very lucrative avenue of income? The answer is not something nefarious or twisted; we are not in some conspiracy here. It is actually quite simple. Dentists, and dentists like my son's paediatric dentist, believe that fluoridated water will make the difference. They actually do not want to be putting little kids under anaesthetic to rip out their teeth, do painful fillings or put in place silver crowns to try to save teeth. It may be lucrative, but it is nasty, risky and unpleasant and they would rather be doing basic scale and cleans. Every dentist that I have ever spoken to, including the one in this House, is a firm advocate for water fluoridation. Snap—that is enough for me.

As a result of my experience I have long been an advocate for water fluoridation. I have made that position known in my role as often as I could. I was delighted when Premier Anna Bligh took the courageous step of announcing that 95 per cent of the state will be fluoridated by 2012. Why is it a courageous step? Simply because it is interventionist. It is courageous because opponents to fluoridation are vehement and passionate in their opposition, some might say a little unreasonable. While they are not in the majority, they are organised, networked, loud and unbending. It is courageous also because there has been ongoing debate worldwide with varying outcomes. I make no apology first up for supporting interventionist policy.

A Labor government needs to be active and interventionist. That is what a Labor government can be, particularly on issues which will make a long-term difference and deliver long-term community and health benefits. Many actions of Labor governments are interventionist and are most usually welcomed, from the restriction of harmful substances to efforts to curb teenage binge drinking as we have been talking about recently; from immunisation to banning smoking in public areas to alcohol management

plans in Aboriginal communities. There is a fair and reasonable expectation that governments will, and that Labor governments especially do, step in and step up where needed and this is distinctly one of those occasions.

It is safe to say that in much of Europe, however, especially northern Europe, a part of the world with a very different history, tradition and cultural ethos to Australia, the UK and the US, there is not that expectation. In fact, there is very much a culture, if my own European-born parents are anything to go by, that the state should and does leave its citizens pretty much to their own devices when it comes to personal choice and health. In much of Europe people still smoke in airports, offices, railway stations, restaurants and pretty much damn well where they please. There are highways with no speed limits. There is a fairly broad tolerance of a wide range of drug use and suggestions that binge drinking or drinking copious amounts of alcohol on a regular basis should be curtailed are simply not on the radar. Our system of government and community expectation of governance has more in common with Britain, Canada and the United States where fluoridation began and where it is still being rolled out to new communities.

Water fluoridation is practised in approximately 60 countries, meaning that some 360 million people worldwide are drinking fluoridated water. These countries are not obscure, small places that cannot be found in an atlas; they include Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Israel, New Zealand, Ireland and, most recently, South Africa. The European countries which have rejected fluoridation have done so in the main because they could not do it if they wanted to. They do not have centralised water supply systems, some have particularly high levels of oral health—good for them—others do not, or because of a philosophical objection to intervention on community health. They just do not believe that the state should do these things. We come from a different perspective.

Most of these countries have introduced salt fluoridation. So that means that they eat it rather than drink it. It is interesting to note that amongst the European countries that have rejected water fluoridation, seven out of 10 have higher levels of decay, missing and filled teeth than Australia which, for the purposes of comparison, considers Australia is 100 per cent fluoridated even though it clearly is not yet. The World Health Organisation and the Pan American Health Organisation have endorsed water fluoridation since 1964 with the most extensive investigations and most significant number of published documents of the effects of fluoride being undertaken in Australia and Britain. One of the concerns raised is the dose of fluoride, suggesting that a range of people who ingest higher than average amounts of water will be overfluoridated.

The news is that sportspeople, babies, diabetics and people with kidney disease also live in other states of Australia and there is no credible evidence of any harm being experienced due to overexposure after up to 40 years of fluoridation. The amount of fluoride to be added to Queensland water will be in accordance with Australian drinking water guidelines and below the World Health Organisation guidelines. Legislation will also regulate the concentration according to air temperatures and level of fluoride naturally present in the water supply. In warmer climates where we expect people to drink more water there will be a lesser concentration of fluoride. I remember reading that a person would need to drink a bathtub full of water a day to get anything over the minimum dose. The government has supported water fluoridation—

**Mr Lawlor:** Whose bathwater would you have to drink?

**Mrs REILLY:** It depends whose bathwater you would be tempted to drink, member for Southport. Thanks for that interesting interjection. There is a view that the government has done some sort of backflip or changed its mind in some way. I have never changed my mind on this. I have had this view from the start of the debate and since I first heard of fluoride in water. But the issue had been whether we had the correct legislation before the House, whether we had the support of Queenslanders and whether we had enough documentation to actually support the personal-felt belief that we had about the safety of fluoride. We have those things now.

In 2005 we were committed to this. We established a \$6 million program to reimburse councils. But councils did not want to do it. That was their choice. They did not want to take up the offer. So now it is time for the state to act. Sure, I wish we had acted earlier. We now have the benefit of hindsight. We now have additional information to back up our move.

**Ms Darling:** And we're going to do it right.

**Mrs REILLY:** And we are going to do it right. Thank you, member for Sandgate. I will be one of the first Queenslanders to drink fluoridated water as the Mudgeeraba water treatment plant is one of six to come on line this year. I could not be happier about it. I just hope that it is not too late for my two-year-old's teeth. I congratulate the Premier and the health minister, in particular, on taking this step.

I want to thank all the public servants who have put in an enormous amount of work to get this information through to us so that we can inform our constituents. I thank all the health professionals who have worked with the government to get us to this stage. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr FOLEY** (Maryborough—Ind) (3.52 pm): Let me start by saying that I do not believe that fluoride is going to make people grow three heads or develop some sort of strange system. I do believe that fluoride is significantly effective in mitigating tooth decay. It is not a question of whether or not fluoride works. Of course it does. That is demonstrated by the Townsville experience. In my mind it is a question of how it is most efficiently delivered.

During our last sitting week I had quite a long talk with the only person who is really qualified to answer this question in our parliament, the member for Surfers Paradise, who is a dentist. He and I had a long discussion about topical versus systemic. He told me that modern dental thinking says that it is more efficient to deliver fluoride topically than ingesting it. It is a question of efficiency of delivery.

Adding fluoride to water in a mass manner, which is what we are considering here, also means that we are flushing our toilets with it, washing our cars with it and, before we had a water crisis, hosing our driveways down with it. It is very much a shotgun approach to delivering fluoride. In an ideal world if fluoride could be delivered topically, which it is through fluoridated toothpaste and vigilant parents, that would be a much more efficient method of delivery than putting a microdose in our water supply.

This is an issue I have very much struggled with. I am personally in favour of fluoride for mitigating tooth decay but I have had an extraordinary amount of lobbying from those in my electorate who are against adding it in a mass manner. We have already been through all the arguments about mass medication and all those sorts of things.

I made a commitment when I came into this place that I would reflect the wishes of my electorate unless they were sensitive issues such as issues of a moral nature or so forth. I must say that the jury is still out in my mind as to what the real position is in my electorate. There has been so much passionate lobbying by people who are antifluoride, whereas those in favour of fluoride have tended to say, 'We think it is a good idea,' and not done any lobbying.

The argument that the sort of people who could not be bothered applying fluoride topically need it in the water supply is a specious argument in some respects because they are also often the sorts of parents who feed their kids a steady diet of cordial, soft drink and lollies. The parents who could not be bothered caring for their kids teeth are often the parents who do not encourage their kids to drink water and if they drink tea and coffee have loads of sugar in it.

I find it amazing that members on the other side of the House have had a Damascus road experience. Many members today have stood up and passionately spoken in favour of fluoride yet in 2005 they all voted against it. I think that underscores how the political party system in Australia really makes a mockery of democracy.

If we fluoridate water but we are not vigilant about making kids clean their teeth and watch their diet they will still have tooth decay. I know lots of people who use water filters. When we consider that one per cent of potable water is actually drunk but humans then put fluoride in 100 per cent of water, it seems to me to be a very inefficient means of delivery.

My brother-in-law who grew up in Maryborough has the most incredible teeth. He does not have a single decay at over 40 years of age and yet he grew up in a town that has no fluoride in the water supply. The only conclusion that I can come to is that he had a mum—he grew up in a single parent family—who was extremely vigilant about tooth hygiene. I am not sure whether or not he used fluoride tablets.

I am not arguing against the efficacy of fluoride for mitigating tooth decay—I think that is absolutely proven—but to put it in our water supply I am still not convinced is the most efficient method of delivery. I have very mixed feelings about this particular debate and may not even make up my mind until we call a division.

**Mr PEARCE** (Fitzroy—ALP) (3.58 pm): I rise to support the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. A letter from the Central Queensland Health Collaborative states—

The collaborative supports public water fluoridation due to the overwhelming evidence that it is the safest, most effective and most equitable means of improving the oral health of Queenslanders.

We take the advice of international experts including the World Health Organisation that there is no creditable evidence that links optimal community water fluoridation to any adverse health effect.

I table a copy of that letter.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of a circular letter, dated 11 February 2008, from Peter Shanahan, Chair, CQ Health Collaborative, Rockhampton in relation to the fluoridation of public water supplies in Queensland.

The CQ collaborative is made up of respected health professionals from the private, public and non-government sectors who are in touch with the health needs of families in central Queensland. I know a few of the people on the collaborative. It is through my knowledge of them and the respect that I have for them that I am convinced that we are going down the right track by introducing this legislation.

The collaborative's words of support sum up my position on the intent of this legislation, which is to impose an obligation on all water suppliers that supply drinking water to the public to add fluoride to supplies for populations greater than 1,000 and to do this without fear of causing health issues for those drinking the fluoride treated water.

One of the most compelling examples of the strengths of the argument put forward in support of fluoridation in fact exists in Queensland. Townsville children aged between five and 12 years have 45 per cent less tooth decay than Brisbane children. Townsville's water has been fluoridated since 1964. With an open mind and alert to the fact that nothing is perfect, I have searched for evidence to support the concerns of those who have contacted my office that fluoridation might, for instance, cause allergies, brittle bones, decreased thyroid function, damage to the immune system, lower IQ and even cancer. But I keep coming back to the fact that numerous studies—any number of systemic reviews—have confirmed and continue to confirm the safety and effectiveness of water fluoridation in reducing dental decay for the whole population. I say to every member in this House that over their years of existence on this planet listening to the news, reading newspapers—

**Ms Jones:** How many years?

**Mr PEARCE:** However long you have been here; it is all right for you, young one.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Wendt): Member for Ashgrove!

**Mr PEARCE:** Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have not seen, heard or read stories about health impacts on populations that have had access to drinking water treated with fluoride. I have not been able to find one single example. I could not even find an example on the net where people have actually had a health impact.

From a personal perspective, I believe that fluoridation has been beneficial to my family. Before moving from New South Wales to Queensland, my sons lived in places where drinking water was treated with fluoride and they never had any tooth decay problems. In fact, my sons have only had minor teeth problems in their late 20s and early 30s and I personally believe that is because they got such a good start to oral health and the benefits of fluoride in the water. As a government, do we not have an obligation to try to give each and every Queensland child the best start to oral health that we can?

The statistics confirm that children from lower socioeconomic groups are at the greatest risk of tooth decay. This is because they are not applying proper oral health care or, perhaps more likely, they are less able to afford regular visits to the dentist. The introduction of fluoride to drinking water is going to be of significant benefit to these children. At the same time, protection from tooth decay will be enhanced through fluoridation for those who are taking appropriate steps to look after their teeth and the teeth of their children.

In introducing fluoridation across the state, the minister has taken what I consider to be a sensible action by setting up a Queensland Fluoridation Committee. Consisting of 18 members, the committee will advise the minister about the safety and efficacy of fluoridation of public water supplies and about the general operation and application of the same. That is a good, accountable process for the minister to have in place. The committee will have the expertise to appropriately assess the introduction of fluoridation under the legislation before us. The committee will appropriately advise the minister so that the people of Queensland get the best possible outcome in protecting our state's children from high levels of tooth decay.

In supporting this legislation, I acknowledge that there are those with concerns about the introduction of fluoride to our public water supplies. I say to them as a member in this place that I have an obligation to reflect the views of my constituents and to support actions that I believe are genuinely in their best interests. Since the Premier's announcement on 5 December 2007 that the government would tackle the poor condition of Queensland oral health by introducing fluoride to the state's water supplies, my staff have reported to me that, as far as they can ascertain, given the fact that some correspondents have failed to provide a residential address, I have had only one letter or email—and that was just this week—from a constituent opposing the introduction of water fluoridation. I do acknowledge that I have had several hundred emails of opposition from residents based outside Fitzroy, the majority of which seem to have come from—

**Ms Stone** interjected.

**Mr PEARCE:** They had no addresses on them; that is correct. The majority of these seemed to come from the south-east of Queensland. With regard to phone calls, a check of my office records shows that since the Premier's announcement we have had just one phone call regarding the issue, and this was from a health professional working in the field of school dentistry who expressed their wholehearted support for the government's decision. They confirmed that day in, day out they see many children with bad teeth and they welcome the decision to introduce fluoridation as they genuinely believe that this will make a substantial difference. These comments come from someone at the coalface who is dealing on a daily basis with the staggeringly worrying oral health statistics of Queensland schoolchildren. The lack of response from my own constituents suggests to me that support for water fluoridation within Queensland is high.

I note the 2007 survey undertaken by Professor Kerry Mummery of the Centre for Social Science Research based at the Central Queensland University. This survey was conducted by means of computer assisted telephone interview surveys from a sample of the Queensland population. The



results revealed that 70 per cent of the total sample surveyed supported water fluoridation, with more than 71 per cent of the sample population agreeing that water fluoridation was safe. If these sample survey results are representative of the views held by the people of the Fitzroy electorate, the broader central Queensland region and indeed the state of Queensland, then I am duty-bound to support the bill before the House.

One of the main arguments that keeps being raised by opponents of fluoridation is that many western European countries do not add fluoride to their water supplies. The argument goes that if progressive countries such as Denmark and Sweden, which have high life expectancy rates, do not fluoridate their water supplies then why is Queensland going down this track? There is a range of reasons western European countries do not fluoridate their water supplies. The reasons include already having sufficient levels of naturally-occurring fluoride and high levels of good oral hygiene which obviate the need for fluoridation. Belgium is an example of this. With regard to cost-effectiveness, many European water supplies supply only very small populations through reservoirs rather than dams. So water fluoridation is not a cost-effective means of delivering the benefits of fluoride in those countries. For a similar reason, we are mandating the addition of fluoride only to water supplies supplying over 1,000 people. For some countries other methods of distributing fluoride are more appropriate—for example, through salt fluoridation.

In short, it is necessary to look at the unique situation of each country before jumping to conclusions about their position on fluoride. The assertion that western European countries are reversing the trend towards fluoridation is typical of the antifluoridation lobby. It is selective about the information it quotes and typically misquotes this in a way which promotes its agenda. It is worth noting that the British government this month committed £42 million to increase the rate of fluoridation beyond its current 10 per cent of the population. So it would seem that at least one European jurisdiction is following a similar path to Queensland. This legislation is necessary. This legislation is common sense, and it is a pleasure for me to support it on behalf of the people of Fitzroy.

**Ms BARRY** (Aspley—ALP) (4.07 pm): I, too, rise to support the Water Fluoridation Bill with enthusiasm. I want to say from the outset that I support water fluoridation and I always have. It is only the implementation process about which I have disagreed with the member for Surfers Paradise previously in this place. In fact, in my speech, to which a number of members have referred, I made the comment that a heavy responsibility would have been put on councils in terms of both the cost of fluoridation and education. Indeed, with this decision to fluoridate the water, this government has recompensed councils for water assets and taken on the financial responsibility for the fluoridation and education. We have done so much more, and it is a process that I agree with. I understand the shared frustration that many in the health profession have had with respect to this particular matter, but I am particularly pleased that this Premier has had the courage, with this health minister, to move and to make those commitments that I previously outlined.

I would have to say that, in my seven years in this place, in relation to changes to policies and legislation about matters that health professionals hold near and dear, the two PPs—patience and perseverance—are the most important things that you can have. The bill requires that public potable water suppliers that supply potable water for over 1,000 persons must add fluoride to the supply under their control. Additionally, those suppliers to fewer than 1,000 people may add fluoride, but it is not mandatory. The addition of fluoride must be added in a way and a form that is prescribed by regulation. This introduction of fluoride will take place over four years and it will take the percentage of Queenslanders who have access to fluoridated water from five per cent to 90 per cent by 2012.

The consultation on the bill has been extensive and the legislation has received support from the majority of professional organisations that have an interest in matters relating to oral health and general public health. The bill also has its objectors, and I am aware of a number of my own constituents who have written to me objecting to the bill. That said, I believe that the overwhelming majority of my constituency support the bill.

When the minister and the Premier made the announcement in January of this year to introduce fluoride into our water supplies, I wrote to the minister and advised him that I believe this decision will have one of the most dramatic and positive effects on the long-term health of Queenslanders that we have seen in a generation. It is up there with the introduction of penicillin, the efforts to stamp out smoking and the introduction of the Gardasil vaccination against cervical cancer as an action that will change the health of future generations. The detractors of this legislation are prone to quote the effects of the addition of fluoride on the health of the general population. Most of those claims about fluoride are unfounded and untrue. As with all matters that require real leadership, there must be a consideration of the facts and the consideration at the forefront of the decision making should be the best outcome for the majority.

The facts are that poor oral health is one of the most significant comorbidity factors in ill health and disease for both the young and the elderly. Poor oral health leads to a raft of medical problems, such as circulatory diseases, coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular accidents—or strokes—diabetes, respiratory disease, arthritis, cancer and preterm and low birth weight babies. In children, tooth decay

and the pain that that tooth decay brings leads to eating problems, sleep disturbances and poor concentration at school. People with poor dental health are often the people who are most at risk of suffering from this range of diseases, many of which are preventable or at least treatable.

All too often people with poor oral health are reluctant to seek help, because they are embarrassed about the state of their mouths. People feel inhibited by the fact that they will be labelled lazy or dirty because they have poor dental health. Missing teeth, gum disease, halitosis—which is bad breath—and black and stained teeth are all the obvious signs of poor oral health. People with poor oral health often develop a strategy to avoid drawing attention to their mouths and the problems they suffer from as a result of that poor dental health. They develop malnutrition, avoid social contact and fail to seek help even when in pain as they are often embarrassed about having delayed seeking help for so long.

We know that diet, oral care and a tendency to develop dental caries owing to our hereditary disposition are all factors affecting the state of our mouths. It is truly a shame that my children may indeed suffer from the same poor oral health outcomes as experienced by me and my family not only because of bad luck in the hereditary lottery but also because of the lack of available fluoridated water in Queensland as they grew up. When my children were young, as a single mum I simply could not afford to buy fluoride tablets. Today, it remains the case that many cannot afford to buy fluoride tablets for their children.

There can be no greater example of the tragedy of poor oral health than in the impact that it has on the elderly. All too often we see senior citizens whose lives are diminished greatly by poor oral health. That combined with poor access to dental health services for the aged, particularly those in nursing homes, is a double whammy for our seniors. We must be the last generation of Queenslanders who are victims of preventable health problems caused directly and indirectly by poor oral health. We must accept that improving our oral health will directly improve the health outcomes for a generation and greatly reduce our healthcare costs in the future.

The greater good of fluoridated water supplies is overwhelmingly evident. That is why I am offering my strong support. This is an important bill and one that I believe is among the most significant that we have passed in my time in this place. I am proud to support the bill.

**Mr WELLINGTON** (Nicklin—Ind) (4.14 pm): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak to the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. In speaking to this bill, I reflect on other speeches that I have made in the chamber in the past in relation to the very contentious topic of water fluoridation. I note that in his second reading speech the minister indicated the level of consultation that the government has undertaken in relation to this very contentious issue.

In my electorate there certainly is a divide between those who support water fluoridation and those who do not. I note that some of the people who are most passionate about not supporting fluoridation certainly appear to have very good dental and oral hygiene. I speak with dentists and nurses and I hear about and see evidence of the shocking incidence of dental decay in young children in our primary schools. When I make inquiries about this issue, it concerns me to find out that some children whose parents, can I say, may be struggling seem to have the worst dental decay. When I speak with other people involved in this field they talk about the high level of sugar content in the drinks that children are drinking today, the large quantities of soft drink that many children and young people are drinking as if it is simply water because it is so cheap, and the prevalence of these sugar based drinks that parents are providing to their children from a very early age.

I am genuinely concerned about the lack of appropriate parental supervision of children. Clearly, the dental decay that children are experiencing is as a result of bad parenting. When I speak with dentists and nurses in the dental industry, I ask them to give comparisons between the level of dental decay today to that of the past. It is frightening to hear from them that the level of dental decay in our children has increased significantly. It seems to me that the only reason we are seeing that significant increase in the level of dental decay in small children in our community is the increased prevalence of soft drinks that children are taking to school and which they are consuming in much greater quantities than children did in the past. In the past, we did not have the high prevalence of the sugar based drinks that we certainly have today.

I am at the crossroads with this bill. Do I support it or do I not? In this instance I am going to support the bill, because, quite frankly, I am concerned about what I see happening in my community with the high level of dental decay in our young children which simply should not be happening. If it is the case that parents are not able to provide their children with proper dental care, it seems to me that governments are going to have to take the responsibility for that. Unfortunately, with such issues it is always the case that governments have to take some responsibility because parents are not providing the appropriate level of care that is required.

If there are people in our community who are passionately against drinking fluoridated water, then maybe they should use the range of other water products that are available. I am concerned about the high level of sugar based drinks that we are consuming, but it seems to be a fact of life. These drinks are so cheap that they certainly have a growing market.

I will be supporting the bill. I know that is a position that is different from the one that I took a number of years ago when this matter came before the House. I refer to the extensive consultation that the minister has referred to. I believe that the government has a responsibility to improve the dental hygiene of all Queenslanders.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (4.19 pm): I rise to oppose the legislation. I do so because overwhelmingly people in my community have told me that they are not happy with the mandatory nature of this fluoridation legislation. Because I have been requested to do so, I will read into *Hansard* the concerns provided to me by various organisations and by some members of my local community. I believe that it is very important that their thoughts and concerns are put on the record.

Many of us have received hundreds and hundreds of emails opposing mandatory fluoridation, and it is easy to argue that some of those are mass produced emails. During the last sitting of parliament IT advised us that it had put a block on some American emails because approximately 14,000 emails had been received in a couple of hours. We knew that the intent of the overwhelming majority of those emails was to oppose mandatory fluoridation.

Queenslanders Against Water Fluoridation has been very active in sending information. I want to read from one of its emails. It states—

If fluoride is allowed to be added to bottled water it means even more choice for people who wish to use fluoride, adding to fluoridated toothpaste, mouthwash, fluoride tablets and drops.

While I do not believe that bottled water should be fluoridated, QAWF is saying that there are other options available to consumers who wish to use fluoride. The email continues—

Recent years has seen reports of increasing children's teeth decay rates in heavily fluoridated Australian states and the consumption of bottled water has been put forward as an explanation by the Australian Dental Association.

At odds with this, is a 2004 study, that looked at South Australian children who had always consumed fluoridated water and those who had never consumed fluoridated water and found "*no significant difference*" in the decay rates of permanent teeth of children aged between 10 and 15 years.

Certainly the QAWF has been vigilant in supplying to members of parliament information and its point of view. On 23 February the QAWF sent an email that made some allegations about the information on which the Queensland Premier and the health minister based their decision to mandate fluoridation. I will not read all of that email because some of it is quite inflammatory. In part it states—

Examination of the source of the data used reveals that Qld Health staff have changed results from "teeth surfaces" to "teeth" a four to five fold difference ...

They are saying that the statistics should be divided by four or five to get the genuine incidence of tooth decay. The email states that this one change in wording led to—

... a false and exaggerated impression of tooth decay favouring fluoridated Townsville. Brisbane children were falsely shown as having 2 more decayed baby teeth than Townsville children, when in reality, averaged out, it would have been only a fraction of a tooth. The data from permanent teeth in children aged 6 to 12 years old which was available but not used by Qld Health, showed on average only a tiny fraction of a tooth difference in decay rates ...

It continues—

Freedom of Information shows that a senior Oral Health adviser to the Health Minister had written in 2006 that there are no scientific studies to prove water fluoridation is safe.

The QAWF presents further information which it certainly has the resources to identify.

My office has sponsored an e-petition and a paper petition requesting a referendum on this issue, which is contentious. The response from the community indicates the strength of feeling among people who are opposed to mandated fluoridation. When I looked this morning, the e-petition had 2,363 signatures. The paper petition is gathering signatures, although not at that fast rate. The e-petition has not been in the system for very long. As I said, the petitions ask for a referendum so that the people of Queensland can have a say about what they ingest through the reticulated water supply. I think that is a very reasonable request to make.

There are other contributing factors to children's oral health, and the member for Nicklin talked about sweet drinks et cetera. In this chamber members have acknowledged how difficult it is for some families to afford private oral health care. The cost of going to a dentist can be prohibitive. More and more families that are under financial stress rely on the oral health facilities provided by the state. Those services were partly funded by the federal government, but it pulled out of that funding arrangement. Under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, the federal government is looking at re-funding those sorts of programs. A contributing factor to problems with children's teeth is the fact that they are not getting the regular check-ups that they need. With the school van process, the time frame between visits is lengthening and children's teeth are not getting the attention that they need.

Merilyn Haines, a writer for the QAWF, has requested that the debate on this bill be held over until the numbers in the e-petition and the paper petition are finalised. I acknowledge that it is the government's prerogative to hold the debate at any time it sees fit; however, to date I believe that the e-petition, the paper petition and the volume of paperwork that we have all received indicate that there is an overwhelming opposition to mandatory fluoridation.

I have received a number of emails as well as verbal comments from people in my electorate. Some people are in favour of the legislation. Not for one minute would I say that every single person who has spoken to me on this issue has said, 'We don't want mass fluoridation.' A small number are in favour of the proposal, but I would have to say that overwhelmingly there is opposition to the mandatory nature of the legislation.

Mr Rex Warren, the national president of the Australian Chemical Trauma Alliance, has written to all members of parliament. He said—

ACTA does not support forced fluoridation of Queensland drinking water supplies and does not believe assurances of safety based on the "no credible evidence" terminology used in the government's advertising campaign. I personally recall federal authorities claiming "no credible evidence" when ACTA and other environmental health organizations raised serious concerns about some (registered for use) pesticides about 12 years ago in relation to chemicals that are now banned world-wide.

ACTA is also concerned mistakes in previous campaigns by dental health lobbyists claiming high levels of tooth decay on the lack of fluoridation involving cities that had fluoridated drinking water for many years. A case of distorting the truth due to over enthusiasm or does fluoridation in fact make no difference?

When thirty three per cent of the Australian population already suffer adverse reactions from chemical sensitivity to some degree, it makes no sense whatsoever to add another toxic chemical to our drinking water. When in fact it makes more sense to add magnesium to not only strengthen teeth and bone, banish calcium oxalate kidney stones and reduce calcification of the arteries in the population.

With magnesium, everyone benefits.

With fluoride (despite claims to the contrary) it can cause serious health problems, especially when ingested long term in conjunction with the many other toxic pollutants we are exposed to in the modern world.

Rex sent a copy of that letter to all of us. Rex lives in my electorate. His son has some very severe intellectual and behavioural disabilities. Rex is very attuned to the impact and effect on an individual's health and behaviour as a result of what they ingest. He is not speaking from an uninformed or ill-informed position—quite the opposite. He has made this a very sharp focus of his interest and his life because of his son Alexander. I place that before this parliament.

The other email that I wish to read into the record is, I believe, a very telling one. The Clinton branch of the ALP have written to a number of MPs. They state—

We ... ask that compulsory fluoridation of our water be stopped because we have very serious concerns about:

- mass fluoridation takes away our right to choose
- possibility that bottled water may be contaminated with fluoride compounds
- fluoridation being a waste of money as most water is for non-drinking purposes
- the dose varying dramatically with how much people drink
- Local regions were promised 5 years to consider the changeover but are given less than 3 years.

Comprehensive information about the dangers of Water Fluoridation can be obtained from—

and then they give a number of web sites. They go on—

The latest National Children's Dental Survey (pub 17 Dec 2007) in the "National Summary", page 25 shows 75.1% of Queensland Children aged 5 to 12 yrs, have no decay at all in their permanent teeth.

At the end is a Fact Sheet with websites—

and they have included those in this email. They go on—

A decision about mass medication must be subject to scientific rigour, ample open public debate, and the highest standards of ethics and truthfulness. Our concerns are based on information that

- fluoridation began after early studies which were very poor quality and non-scientific
- the pressures to introduce fluoride compounds comes from industries which benefit financially
- these chemicals have never undergone safety studies

Further concerns are that if a referendum is passed to mass fluoridate

- it is being done without each person's Informed Consent (which means Truthful Information about that medication and a demonstration that they have understood)
- a referendum does not permit for each person's informed consent
- prescribing medication for individuals/entire population must be subject to strong ethical principles
- it is a "compulsory mass medication" as it is not given to individuals according to need, but given to all regardless. No amount of home filtration or bottled water can screen a person from the fluoride.

Numerous studies have shown fluoridation to cause harm

- It has been revealed that there has been an apparent cover-up of evidence from Harvard School of Dental Medicine linking fluoridation with elevated risks of a fatal bone cancer in young boys. Osteosarcoma (the Harvard study director, Chester Douglass, failed to report the seven-fold increased risk seen in the work he oversaw)
- Eleven studies since 1990 found an association between fluoridation and hip fracture

About the promotional literature: It fails to present the most telling scientific evidence of all.

In cities that have ceased fluoridation the studies show that decay rates have decreased over the following decade such as where fluoridation has been discontinued in Canada, Germany, Cuba and Finland.

Other areas of misinformation promulgated by fluoridation authorities are too numerous to discuss here, and include the effects of fluoride exposure on the endocrine and nervous systems, nature of the industrial, contaminated, non-pharmaceutical grade chemicals used.

Thankyou for your consideration for citizens of Queensland.

It is signed by the Clinton branch of the Australian Labor Party, again a branch that is in my electorate. So these people have had access to presumably any party information that might be circulated. I do not know how the structure of the party system works in terms of internal information, but they have been sufficiently concerned. The few members of the Clinton branch that I do know are from a cross-section of the community. They are from varying walks of life and varying interests. They have put pen to paper and sent this email to a number of electorate offices including mine. There is a list of electorates at the top of the email. They are expressing significant concern about mass fluoridation and the mandatory nature of it.

Given the speakers so far, when a division is called there may not be sufficient numbers to even register a count, but I do not believe that invalidates in any way the concerns expressed by people in my community and in the broader community about the nature of mandatory fluoridation. The fact is that the information that has been placed in the community, particularly the ads sponsored by the Queensland government, have only been to confirm the Queensland government's decision. There has been no objective information about concerns. There has been no objective and independent information about possible implications of fluoridation. On that basis other speakers may say that the concerns are ill-founded, but there has been nothing given to the community to alter their perspective to convince them otherwise. That is why many, many people hold very active and aggressive concerns about mandatory fluoridation.

As I said, the overwhelming majority of people in my community who have spoken to me are opposed to mandatory fluoridation. In fact, I can only remember a handful, if that—and I am being generous—of emails that I have received that have actually been in favour of it. I think that shows a significant amount of interest in the community and a significant level of concern. I have no misgivings about opposing this legislation.

**Mr MOORHEAD** (Waterford—ALP) (4.34 pm): It is with great pleasure that I rise to support the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. The reforms contained in this bill will make significant improvements in the dental health of the people of the Waterford electorate, whom I represent in this place, as well as the residents of Queensland.

The question of water fluoridation has traditionally been a decision left with local government. However, with the state government taking responsibility for more and more of our state's bulk water supply, this decision is one that falls for this parliament to determine. Water fluoridation as a public health initiative has been used for more than 50 years and is used around the world. In falling behind on fluoridation, Queensland's dental health has suffered. Any dentist I have ever spoken to about this issue will say that they can tell whether a person is raised in Queensland as soon as they open their mouth. I must say that I am probably one of them. This bill will give Queensland's residents, particularly our children, the same opportunity as our interstate cousins.

The evidence of the benefits of fluoridation is comprehensive and thorough. I have listened to those constituents who have contacted me with their concerns, but the best advice available supports this important public health measure. But these concerns will be monitored by the Queensland Fluoridation Committee, an independent statutory body created by this bill to provide advice on safety and efficacy of fluoridation of potable water.

The Bligh government has also put its money where its mouth is when it comes to fluoridation. This bill is matched with a \$35 million commitment in funding and will see 54 per cent of Queenslanders having access to fluoridated water by the end of this year, 80 per cent by the end of 2009 and 95 per cent of Queenslanders by 2012. What this shows is that the Bligh government is moving forward with this important initiative for the health of Queenslanders. For the cost of \$1.50 per person per year Queenslanders will see improved oral health and less need for remedial dental work. This is yet another initiative by the Bligh government to have Queensland Health continue to focus on preventing people needing to go to hospital while continuing to provide quality health services to those who need them.

There is no coincidence that Queensland has the highest level of tooth decay in Australia but by far the lowest levels of access to fluoridated water. It came as a shock to me that 67 per cent of Queensland children under the age of eight years have experienced tooth decay. The path of a person's dental health is established during these early years. There are many Queensland children who are starting their life with poor dental health. Less than five per cent of Queensland residents have access to fluoridated water. The next lowest level of access in Australia is the Northern Territory, with 70 per cent access, while most other states have 80 per cent access, 90 per cent access or even more. Fluoride is not a new thing, with all other capital cities in Australia fluoridating water since the 1960s and 1970s.

Water fluoridation is the addition of less than one part per million, or one drop in a bathtub, of fluoride to drinking water when it is treated. Fluoride's value to improving dental health is in preventing decay. Evidence from previous implementation of fluoridation has shown improvements in dental health within five years. Fluoride will reduce the pressure on family dental expenses as well as on the dental programs run by Queensland Health, and hopefully with the Rudd government there will also be dental programs run by the Commonwealth government.

In my view, the long-term future of a fluoridated Queensland will see Queensland Health able to provide more preventative treatment, particularly more school dental clinics for children, with less pressure from decay. When the evidence of fluoridation shows a reduction in decay of 40 per cent, public health dentists will be able to spend less time filling cavities and more time preventing decay. Water fluoridation has been practised for more than 60 years, commencing in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1945 and in Australia in Beaconsfield, Tasmania in 1953. In Queensland, fluoridated water has been available in Townsville, Bamaga, Dalby, Mareeba and Moranbah and in many other communities where the levels of fluoride in water already meet the standards proposed in this bill.

The decision to add fluoride to the water is not taken lightly. While fluoride is something that naturally occurs in varying levels in drinking water, there have been numerous and extensive studies on the benefits and risks of adding fluoride to drinking water. I commend to members of the House the National Health and Medical Research Council 2007 report entitled *A systematic review of the efficacy and safety of fluoridation*. While there are numerous studies, I would like to mention just a few of the study outcomes.

Studies have shown that water fluoridation has led to an average of 2.25 fewer decayed teeth per child—that is a reduction of 225 decayed teeth for every 100 children; that children aged between five and 12 years living in fluoridated Townsville have 45 per cent less tooth decay than children in non-fluoridated Brisbane and south-east Queensland; and that for each \$1 invested in water fluoridation the estimated saving in dental bills is between \$12.60 and \$80 per person. This saving is particularly important for those people who struggle to pay for dental treatment. On a crude calculation, these savings mean that the state government's \$35 million investment will save Queenslanders \$440 million and possibly more than \$2 billion. It also means less time and pain suffered in dental chairs. Most importantly, it means dignity for those who might be embarrassed by the state of their teeth should they continue to decline.

The state of our teeth is something very personal and it is something that is seen by all we meet. Eating a steak in public is something that some people cannot enjoy because they risk exposing their poor dental health. I was particularly touched by the comments of the member for Aspley, who summed it up quite well by saying that some people are afraid they will be considered dirty or lazy because of the state of their teeth. That is a real fear that people have when their dental health declines. They fear being judged by people they meet simply on the basis of their dental health.

I must acknowledge that water fluoridation is something that some people feel strongly about, both for and against. I thank the eight constituents who live in my electorate who have contacted me with their concerns with this bill, and I hope I have addressed their concerns in my response to them and in my contribution today. I assure them that I have taken their views very seriously. I know that they are views which are genuinely held. However, there have been many reviews and much research which support water fluoridation. I must also recognise the Australian Dental Association for its continuing advocacy in support of fluoridation, including local advocates such as Dr Michael Foley. The ADA presented the Premier with a petition of more than 25,000 signatures in support of water fluoridation.

However, as every dentist will tell you, fluoridation is not the magic bullet for every dental health problem in Queensland. It is not that easy. We must continue to ensure that dental health is promoted through healthy diets, dental hygiene, including brushing and flossing, and regular dental check-ups. Water fluoridation will make a great contribution to the dental health of Queenslanders, young and old. This will be of most benefit to families, including many in my electorate, who cannot afford to provide their children with the dental treatment they would like to.

Water fluoridation is an important social justice measure. It means that the minimum level of dental health in our community will be lifted, regardless of income or parental support for preventative measures. I am proud to be able to support this important public health reform. Water fluoridation will mean better dental health for Queenslanders. Better dental health means a better quality of life for the people of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mrs SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (4.43 pm): The addition of fluoride to the water supply is one of those issues which evokes strong opinions, and the amount of correspondence and emails we have each received is testament to how a negative campaign can be mounted by engendering fear in a section of the population. I believe that many of those who oppose the Water Fluoridation Bill do so with the best of intentions. However, I believe there has been a lot of misinformation peddled. Dental caries is a serious issue and rotting teeth can affect the entire system, cause pain and suffering, affect eating and sleeping, as well as have a detrimental effect on a person's self-confidence and social life.

The cost of this entirely unnecessary impost on our health system is huge. In 2007-08 alone, some \$145 million has been spent on oral health. Having spent 10 years as a dental nurse—seven of them in Queensland—I have seen many young children in distress with a high number of decayed teeth and requiring a general anaesthetic for extractions. In fact, back in the days when I worked for dentists in Toowoomba in the sixties, we actually performed general anaesthetics in the dental surgery, and I can attest to the fact that there were times when lives were almost lost.

I believe the incidence of dental decay has increased in recent years due to the high incidence of sugary drinks, poor food choices, lack of oral hygiene and the absence of sufficient fluoride in our water. It is easy for those who oppose the fluoridation of our water supply to say it can be easily remedied with a healthy diet, good oral hygiene and fluoride tablets. Changing lifestyle habits that have been established over many years and that sometimes are intergenerational is not as easy as simply mounting a public information campaign. There are children who never see a toothbrush until they start school and are given a toothbrush and taught how to clean their teeth. Some do not know the names of simple vegetables and fruit. They are fed preprepared meals, takeaways and white bread, and at the checkout counter often parents take the line of least resistance and give their children sweets to suck on. So to suggest that these families would purchase fluoride tablets and each day ensure their children take them is to live in fairyland.

Fluoridating our water supply is the only way that we can improve the plight of many of these children. Introducing healthy tuckshop food has been a great start. Although it may not change the habits of high school students, it is having an appreciable impact in our primary schools and we do hope that this will continue as habits of healthy eating throughout their lives.

This bill will ensure that within two years 80 per cent of Queenslanders will have access to fluoridated water and that by 2012 that will rise to 90 per cent. It is time Queenslanders were given the same protection from tooth decay that the populations in other states have enjoyed for many years. Having spent 17 years outside of the state in both New South Wales and Victoria, and having given birth to my three sons in Sydney, I can attest to the good dental health my children have enjoyed.

The amount of fluoride added to the water supply is indeed small but significant, being between 0.6 and 0.9 parts of fluoride per million parts of water—not a drop in a bucket but a drop in a bathtub. Adequate safeguards will be in place to ensure compliance with the act, and appropriate training will be given to operators of our water supplies. Capital costs will be borne by the state government, with funding of \$35 million having been allocated. When compared with the annual cost of our oral health, this is indeed money well spent.

In years to come this measure will save the state massive health costs, save our children and adults pain and suffering, and increase general health and wellbeing with no detrimental effect. In Logan City we have a superb school dental health service led by a wonderful, dedicated man, Dr Trevor Holcombe. Here, many masters degree students from the University of Queensland are able to obtain valuable clinic experience, and we are fortunate that our children are able to access such a service. However, with such a high incidence of tooth decay, the pressures are huge. A visit to the dental service at Logan Hospital makes it clear that they are simply unable to cope with the demand. This legislation will ensure that in years to come our services will change and there will be far fewer extractions and a greater ability for our services to really care in a positive way to ensure healthy teeth.

I want to commend the Premier, Anna Bligh, for her decisive action in moving quickly to bring this legislation to the House. I am proud to be part of a government which is seeking to improve the health of our children and families in many diverse ways—promoting healthy eating and keeping active, cutting out harmful substances such as cigarettes and drugs, cutting down on alcohol, and now adding fluoride to our water supply. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (4.49 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to support the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008. Finally the government has accepted the overwhelming body of medical and scientific evidence that fluoride is safe and is the best way to protect the teeth of Queenslanders. I place on record my admiration for the clear and strong statement of support put forward earlier in the House by the member for Surfers Paradise who, as we all know, is a practising dentist and the best expert in the chamber to comment on the benefits of adding fluoride to our drinking water.

For years we have heard of the very poor state of dental health in Queensland, particularly amongst young Queenslanders. The Americanisation of diets, and in particular the diets of our young people, has resulted in the adoption of sweet foods and sweet carbonated drinks. We all know how cheap they are, how they are pushed and are accepted by young people in our community. Carbonated drinks, along with highly refined fast foods, are the real culprits. They are advertised very widely and it is virtually impossible to keep young people away from the bad habits that are formed at a young age and will continue into later life. We have heard plenty of reports in the parliament today about how it is easier to give in to a child in the fast lane in the supermarket when they want a packet of lollies. It has been a few years since I have had to chastise my children, but certainly my grandchildren are doing the same thing. At the end of the day it is about parenting and healthy lifestyles.

Queensland has one of the highest rates of dental decay in the Western world. It is so bad that our standards have been called Third World. It is a terrible situation and one that none of us can be very proud of. We need to move beyond Third World dental standards. Medical and scientific experts tell us overwhelmingly that the best way to do that is to add fluoride in approximately one part per million to our drinking water supplies. It is a low-cost addition to the filtering and chlorination that already occurs and the cost benefits are enormous. We have only to look at the dental records of communities around the world where fluoride occurs mostly naturally in drinking water through groundwater supplies to see that it works well and it works very safely. I note that despite claims of danger and damage—certainly all of

us have received emails to that effect—as far as I am aware, and certainly from indications by the member for Surfers Paradise, there is not one documented case of disease or bone damage that has been caused by fluoridated water.

The issue before us has become quite difficult. As I said earlier, we have all received masses of emails. It has certainly created a situation in all electorates where there are people who are very strongly opposed to adding fluoride to water. There are two aspects to that. The first aspect is that there are a lot of people who are opposed to being forced into a situation where they have to accept the fluoridation of their water supply. The second aspect, of course, is the fact that they are opposed to the fluoridation. The opposition has drafted two amendments to the bill whereby we give the opportunity to people in our state to have a say as to whether they want to fluoridate the water or, alternatively, for those who are opposed to actually ingesting fluoride, to subsidise the cost of filtration for them. I think that is a good compromise. As I said, there are real concerns about those two aspects in our community and I accept that. I personally believe there are major health benefits to the fluoridation of water, but there are other views within the community that we must recognise. The members of parliament who have spoken very eloquently on the subject recognise that.

There are not many here today who can remember back to the old school dentist who used to come in with a collapsible chair and a foot-driven drill that used to pedal away and be driven through leather belts et cetera. If it ever got into your mouth—and most boys I knew would not let it; they would bite the dentist's finger off—the reality was that it felt like a jackhammer in your mouth and the pain was pretty ordinary, too. We have come a long way since those days. It is a real shame to see young children go to the dentist and have teeth extracted simply as a result of a bad diet and a lack of good dental hygiene. The simple method would be to make sure that everyone cleaned their teeth on a regular basis and had a healthy diet. I am sure that through our education program we could go some way towards that. But I am sure that the people in our community that are most affected by this situation would probably not take any notice of it and we would still have a huge number of children in our community who would be guaranteed to have bad teeth.

The greatest event in my dental history was when I was in high school and I got a kick in the mouth with a football boot. I consequently lost two teeth. We did not have the fancy technology that we have nowadays where they are able to save the teeth so I lost two teeth out of that. Technology has come a long way, as I am sure the member for Surfers Paradise can tell us. I am sure that his bank balance can attest to the costs involved in that. With those few words, I support the bill before the House. Be assured, though, that I have some concerns in terms of the application and other aspects.

**Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—Lib) (4.56 pm): From the start let me say that I am very happy to be able to support and commend the Premier, the health minister, the shadow health minister—my friend the member for Surfers Paradise—and others in supporting this long overdue legislation that will effectively see most Queenslanders drinking fluoridated water in the very near future.

Supporting this bill is pretty straightforward for me. It is about supporting the oral health of Queenslanders. It is supporting not only the health of Queenslanders today but also the health of many generations of Queenslanders in the future. When the Premier announced it I actually wrote a letter to her saying how impressed I was that this government was able to put aside some of the fearmongering and the scaremongering that we have all been subject to and to take possibly the last single remaining medical initiative in Queensland to ensure good health for all of us. Perhaps it is not necessary for people who are well-to-do, who can afford to go to the dentist, who know the right food to eat and who practice the right oral hygiene; perhaps the people who do not have those skills, people generally regarded as less well off, will benefit the most. Government is about helping those people who will benefit the most from these sorts of initiatives. It follows in the great tradition of science and public health, from the introduction of sewerage, clean water supplies and dealing with polio, diphtheria and smallpox. This is the latest in a long line of outstanding public health measures that benefit a whole community.

The coalition supports the bill on the basis of the introduction of a similar private member's bill by the member for Surfers Paradise back in 2004, a bill that unfortunately, due to the politics of the time, was defeated 70-6. It would have been better to have had that bill in place four years ago and to be four years further down the track in the fluoridation of water, but that was those times. I can remember back to 1997 and the Brisbane City Council election at that time when water fluoridation was probably the single biggest issue. To his eternal shame, Jim Soorley campaigned on the basis of pure blatant politics and the politics of fear, shame and envy. He was successful in doing so. There is possibly a lesson to be learnt there as well. We have moved on 10 years since then and we are now at the stage where we can debate this maturely and rationally and we can do the things we should be doing. We should be accepting the science. We should be accepting a rational logic. We should be accepting the evidence of experts, not only here in Australia but around the world.

It will not be betraying confidence to reveal that the health minister and I had a discussion about this at a function at the Brisbane Powerhouse back in 2004. This is when we first discussed the benefits and otherwise of the fluoridation of water and what needed to be done to get fluoride into the Brisbane water system. As a parliamentarian I am glad to be able to support him and the government today in the introduction of fluoride to our water supply. I put that clearly on the record.



**Mr Robertson:** You have a good memory.

**Mr NICHOLLS:** I do have a good memory; do not forget it. Members have gone through the statistics for the last couple of hours. I will touch on a few of them for the sake of completeness. In Australia people have been enjoying the benefits of fluoridated water for up to 40 years. Bulk water supplies have been fluoridated since the 1960s and 1970s.

It always amuses me when we get those emails in our offices that warn us about the increase in the rates of osteoporosis, bone cancer and so on. I think to myself, what do people do when they go to Sydney and have to drink the water? Why are the figures not up in Sydney and Melbourne? Why are the figures not up in all the other parts of the world where there is fluoridation? It goes to the basis of the issue. There is no credible scientific evidence for that. Anyone with a modicum of learning could not dispute the fact that there is no relationship between fluoride and those diseases that are talked about in the emails, letters and piles of correspondence that we receive.

In Sydney, 90 per cent of residents drink fluoridated water. In Melbourne, 77 per cent of residents drink fluoridated water. I spent my early years in Melbourne and I do not have any symptoms of any of the things that people are talking about. I may be a little crazy on occasion but that has nothing to do with fluoride, I am sure.

In South Australia, 80 per cent of Adelaide residents drink fluoridated water. In Perth, 86 per cent of residents drink fluoridated water. In Darwin and Hobart, 91 per cent of residents drink fluoridated water. In the ACT, 100 per cent of the population are drinking fluoridated water and have been enjoying the benefits of fluoride. I do not think we can ascribe the problems that occur in Canberra to the fluoride in the water. There might be other reasons for it.

This is a natural progression of what has been carried out across Australia over the past 40 years. Obviously there are parts of Queensland—Townsville, the Darling Downs, the tablelands and Charters Towers—in which there is already fluoride in the water. The member for Surfers Paradise ran through all those towns in which fluoride occurs in a natural state and where fluoride has been ingested and has been flowing over people's teeth for generations. At the moment 75 per cent plus of Australia's population in the other states and territories drink fluoridated water. Queensland is lagging behind. Only five per cent of our population drink it. This will bring us up to speed.

According to recent research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, children in Queensland have more decay than children in other states. They have twice as many fillings as children in other states. Despite our being in the 21st century and having access to dental and oral health services, our children's teeth continue to suffer decay and rot. Children in Townsville, where the water is fluoridated, are 45 per cent less likely to suffer from tooth decay than are children in Brisbane. We have all heard the figures about the 2,000 preschoolers who are hospitalised every year with severe tooth decay and gum infections. This is despite the fact that enormous amounts of money are spent in Queensland on dental health care. There are approximately 80,000 public dental patients waiting up to seven years for treatment from the Queensland public dental health scheme.

The fact of the matter is that the government cannot keep up with the rate of poor oral health. As a society we cannot keep up with this, and nor should we try to. We have a simple, straightforward solution to the problem and that is fluoride in our water. We need to start looking at these preventative measures. We need to look at measures that will work and measures that are scientifically proven. The World Health Organisation says that this is the most effective public health measure for the prevention of dental decay. Water fluoridation is a multiprofessional activity in which engineers, chemists, physicians, nutritionists and dentists all play an important role.

The Australian Dental Association also makes comments in relation to the benefits that people will enjoy from having better oral health including a better quality of life, which has been mentioned by other members. The Australian Medical Association also supports this. The centre for disease control in Atlanta, Georgia and the British Medical Association support it. A 600-plus page report of the National Health and Medical Research Council found—and this is stated in the explanatory notes—

... the fluoridation of drinking water remains the most effective and socially equitable means of achieving community-wide exposure to the caries prevention effects of fluoride.

Perhaps later on we might be able to ask the health minister or even the shadow health minister why they use the word 'caries' instead of 'cavities' which everyone else understands. I am sure there will be some good reason for it. I thought we should ask my friend the member for Surfers Paradise. Maybe they can charge more when they say 'repaired two caries' instead of 'repaired two cavities'. Certainly in the legal profession we would not use funny words, Latin and convoluted terms just for the sake of charging an extra few dollars! Who is to know what the dentists will do?

The bill will encourage the better oral health of our state. It will encourage better economic health. This is based on the figures provided. For every dollar spent on fluoridation up to \$80 per person is saved in dental costs. That is many hundreds of millions of dollars in Queensland over the years to come. This is a relatively cheap, simple and straightforward solution to a fairly significant problem that we see.

I want to comment on something that has occurred with the debate on this bill. This occurs every time fluoride is mentioned as a government response or a council response—I know this from my other career—to dental and oral health. We invariably get inundated with an enormous plethora of emails. For members who want to know, they can ask IT services to set up a dump box so that the emails go straight there and members do not have to go through them all and get rid of them.

I am sure everyone has experienced an increase in emails mainly from overseas. I think I tracked down one out of the hundreds that actually came from my electorate. The concerns range from fluoride being a poison, a pesticide, a form of mass medication and even a form of chemical terrorism. People have been concerned about the effect it will have on allergies, headaches and arthritis. When one goes to the internet—and this proves the dangers of the internet—one will understand why so many myths are being peddled out there. They are being sold as truths and some very convincing arguments are given on the internet. One site I came across was entitled 'Fluoride: an invisible killer'. The web site states—

We would not purposely add arsenic to the water supply. And we would not purposely add lead. But we add fluoride. The fact is that fluoride is more toxic than lead and just slightly less toxic than arsenic.

To make the information even more confusing, the quote was taken from another web site which was said to have been written by someone claiming to have a PhD and quoting 85 different sources. It is impossible to get to the bottom of those sites. It is impossible to get to the basis of those claims. We must act on the basis of proven scientific evidence from those organisations that we as a community put a lot of money into to develop these programs, to research these programs. If a 600-plus page study by the National Health and Medical Research Council finds conclusively that it is the single best thing we can do to improve oral health then we are wasting our time in this place, we are wasting our time in school education and with universities, we are wasting our time with dentists, we are wasting our time with epidemiologists and we are wasting our time spending any money on education. We need to go with the people who understand and study this. They have studied this until they are blue in the face.

I am happy to support this bill. I believe it is in the interests of the good oral health of Queenslanders. I believe that fluoridation is a step in the right direction. It is not a cure for bad teeth. It is not a cure for decay. People will still have cavities. Fluoridation has never been offered as a panacea for all that ails people who have bad teeth. For the vast majority of people in this state there will be a significant, measurable and worthwhile benefit. This is good legislation. I am very happy to support it.

**Mr WEIGHTMAN** (Cleveland—ALP) (5.07 pm): I put on the record my support for the government's decision to give over 1,000 Queensland communities access to water fluoridation. I appreciate that this decision will not have and has not had the consensus of the broader community. It is a topic that has stimulated discussions from a small sector of the community. While I have received a number of emails from people from all over Queensland and in fact around Australia, only a few have been from the Cleveland electorate.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr WEIGHTMAN:** I take that interjection. I am sure many other members have received exactly the same emails.

**Mr Hayward** interjected.

**Mr WEIGHTMAN:** Only a couple are from my electorate. I have been contacted directly by some people about this issue. At the same time, I ensured I took the time to listen to the arguments put forward by anyone who wished to speak to me about water fluoridation. I have given them every opportunity to be heard and to provide me with information from their perspective. I will say now that I appreciate the input from all the interested groups who have contributed to the debate. I have looked at both sides of the argument before making my decision to support this bill.

Like the minister and the Premier, I believe that this decision is not one to be taken lightly and that both sides of the argument must be balanced against each other. The decision to introduce fluoride into our water supply will bring Queensland into line with other states, many of which have had access to fluoridated drinking water for many years. Brisbane is the only capital city in Australia that has not had access to fluoridated drinking water. Having all other states go before Queensland in this instance at the very least provides a volume of evidence to support this government's decision to move forward. The overwhelming evidence indicates that water fluoridation will serve to benefit Queenslanders of all ages because it immediately acts to strengthen the outer surface of the teeth, making teeth stronger and more resistant to decay.

An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study indicates that Queensland children have twice as many fillings as children in Victoria. It is an indisputable fact that Queensland children aged between five and 12 have more decay than children of similar ages in other states. One argument touted by some people is that parents allow children to consume the wrong foods, to drink too much soft drink and to eat too many lollies which are all contributing factors to tooth decay. I agree with this assertion, but I am also happy to say that the government is addressing this because tooth decay is not the only fallout from these inappropriate diets. Obesity and diabetes are two issues that result from poor dietary choices. Actions taken to address these issues will have a flow-on benefit in fighting high levels of tooth

decay. But altering diet is only part of the fight to raise dental health standards in Queensland. Research indicates that dental decay rates can be reduced up to 40 per cent through good oral hygiene, diet and nutrition along with water fluoridation. The government is willing to play its part in this regard. The introduction of fluoride into water supplies is only one way this government is acting proactively to address health issues in this state. The introduction of fluoride can only serve to aid and improve the Queensland healthcare system, as such preventative actions will reduce the stress on the dental system in the future.

Queensland spent over \$145 million in 2007-08 to address oral health. Despite this financial commitment, Queensland still trails other states significantly in this area. One exception is in Townsville, where children have 45 per cent less tooth decay than children in Brisbane and this is because Townsville children already have access to fluoridated water. This is a fact that cannot be ignored in this argument. It clearly supports the benefits of fluoridation. In my mind, the missing piece of the puzzle is fluoride in the water. Townsville fluoridated its water supply in 1964. I lived in Townsville for six years from 1968 to 1974 and I still know many people who live there. I have yet to hear anyone from the area express a concern that their water supply has had fluoride in it for 45 years.

The minister clearly stated in his second reading speech that untreated oral disease has long-lasting effects beyond tooth decay. Untreated oral disease disrupts eating, sleeping, work and socialisation. It can be a precursor to other medical conditions or exacerbate existing chronic disease. The minister spoke about the present economic impacts caused by oral disease being in excess of those caused by mental disorders, cancer and diabetes. It is important that with Queensland's growing population we are proactive in providing our communities with proven and endorsed precautionary measures. The estimated additional cost per person per year to introduce fluoride will be about \$1.50. The Australian Council of Social Service estimates that fluoridation of water supplies can save up to \$80 per person in dental bills. This in itself is a strong case for the introduction of fluoride.

I will say that the people who spoke against fluoridation were very passionate people and I did appreciate them taking the time to provide me with their side of the argument. The fact remains that there were too few people representing this argument for me to believe that it was the overwhelming will of the people of my electorate. I believe that the vast majority of people in my electorate accept that there is a need to proceed with fluoridation of water. However, I have been asked by some of my constituents to caution the government to continue to consider any up-to-date and valid information that may arise about the effects of water fluoridation.

I understand the government has consulted, researched and sought support from a wide variety of sources including the Australian Medical Association of Queensland, the Australian Dental Association Queensland branch, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, the Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists Association, the Dental Hygienists Association of Australia Queensland branch, the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, the University of Technology dental school, the Queensland University of Technology School of Public Health, the Griffith University school of oral health, the World Health Organisation and the Queensland Nurses Union. In my mind, these people cannot be wrong. The list I am sure is not exhaustive and the indications are all positive, pointing towards the need to fluoridate our water supplies.

As I said earlier, this is not an easy decision although the benefits far outweigh the supposed downside. The volume of evidence at this time clearly indicates that there is a need to proceed down this path and we need to do it now to ensure the good oral health of the people of Queensland into the future. I am comfortable with the legislative measures being put into place to manage the introduction of fluoride. I am proud to be part of a government that has taken an informed decision to improve the oral health of all Queenslanders. I congratulate the minister, the Premier and all people associated with making the decision to bring this legislation before the House, and I commend the bill to the House.

**Ms NOLAN** (Ipswich—ALP) (5.15 pm): I rise to speak in support of this bill, which mandates the addition of fluoride into Queensland town water supplies. The state should not be accused of rushing this decision. Townsville has had fluoridated water since 1964 and every other state and territory has had it for more than 30 years. Nonetheless, I note that a lack of due consideration is exactly what the Nationals' member for Gympie is claiming. While his shadow spokesman, Mr Langbroek, stood in this debate today and quite rightly drew attention to his consistent support for this measure, the member for Gympie put out a press release a week ago saying—

Despite not having a mandate from the people, it appears that Anna Bligh is intent on forging ahead with this.

Someone should tell the man it is his party's policy too! In the same breath Mr Gibson told us all, including Mr Langbroek, that he was a bigger star in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* than any of the local members down there. Today should be a good day, so I am sorry about how it is going, John-Paul. Like other members, I have been contacted by members of the public who are almost hysterically opposed to this measure. I was at the Gold Coast community cabinet at which antifluoride activists monopolised the public question time, claiming that fluoride was mass medication, that it was poison and that some people suffered such strong allergies to it that they would be unable to bathe. Some people consult ouija boards too! I support the measure, and I do it for a simple reason: I am a proponent of scientific thought.

Fluoride is one of the most widely researched public health measures in the world and is endorsed by the World Health Organisation and a large number of scientific and medical bodies, both here and overseas. There are clear health benefits created by fluoride's ability to repair minor damage to tooth enamel, and after decades of research and decades of use there is no credible evidence of negative health effects.

Those in the community and in the parliament who oppose this measure need to share with us not just their conspiracy theories; they need to share with us the rationale for their antiscientific view of the world. From the age of the early natural philosophers through Galileo and Sir Isaac Newton to the 18th century age of enlightenment, scientific method has evolved as the only legitimate basis for understanding the phenomena of the natural world. Scientific method consists of the collection of data through observation and experimentation and the formulation and testing of hypotheses. It replaced superstition and religious dogma as a means of understanding our world, and on its foundations sit both the wonders and the comforts of modern life. Those like the member for Tablelands who want to reject scientific consensus as a means of understanding our world need to explain to us the superiority of their intellectual paradigm and those of us who do accept science should never, ever fail to defend it. I fear that we increasingly live in an age of unreason, an age in which either simple politeness or the flawed post-modern theory that all bases of understanding are somehow equal allows gobbledegook to just go unchallenged.

It happens in the political world and it happens in the broader community debate. In his terrific book *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World* the British author Francis Wheen nominates 1800 as the high point of the age of science in American civic debate. In that year John Adams stood against his old friend Thomas Jefferson in the contest to be President of the United States. At the time Adams was president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and Jefferson was president of the American Philosophical Society. The nation which they stood to lead had been established 24 years earlier thanks in no small part to the great enlightenment scientist, Benjamin Franklin.

How frightening then that by the Reagan era the President's wife was freely consulting an astrologer in the making of public policy decisions. How disconcerting that former Vice-President Al Gore, who actively promoted himself as the 'Mr Science' of American politics, actively appeased creationists in his home state of Tennessee. And how dead scary that just a couple of months ago Americans were considering nominating Mike Huckabee, a man who seriously contends that the world was entirely created in a week 6,000 years ago, to inherit the Jeffersonian legacy.

But it is not only in American politics where it would seem that the lunatic fringe are gaining hold. Here, members of the National Party remain climate change deniers. If my memory serves me correctly, it was the member for Warrego—it might have been one of the others—who just a few years ago was telling us in a debate on vegetation management legislation that climate change would be turned around if only we chopped down more trees. I guess members could safely bet that he was not likely to be reprimanded by the Leader of the Opposition, because it was not long after that that Mr Springborg came in here and told us that recycled water changed the sex of fish. Someone should keep that man away from a Google search.

Unreason should be resisted at every step of the way. As a government, we should continue to resist the push for the teaching of so-called intelligent design in Queensland schools. We should continue to oppose the hippy fringe who threaten all children's health by refusing to vaccinate their own. We should judge sceptically the essentially philosophical opposition to scientific advances such as genetically modified food. We should act fearlessly on the compelling scientific evidence of climate change, biodiversity loss and peak oil. We should always pursue evidence based public policy and we should, accordingly, pass this bill to improve Queenslanders' dental health by fluoridating our drinking water.

**Mr WETTENHALL** (Barron River—ALP) (5.22 pm): It has been very interesting during the course of the day to listen to all of the honourable members who have contributed to this debate, and I acknowledge the points that many of them have made. My colleagues on the back bench will be relieved to hear that I will speak very briefly to this bill because I do not want to repeat a lot of the points that have been made.

It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak in support of this bill. The fluoridation of water is a very important public health initiative in this state, and it is timely. During the course of this debate we have heard how all of the other states have introduced this particular measure and the enormous benefits that it has brought for oral health in particular. We have also heard, though, that poor oral health could in some cases lead to hospitalisation and in severe cases lead to the need to give people a general anaesthetic, which incurs very great risks for those patients who reach that stage. That is why I think fluoridation is such an important initiative.

**Mr Hayward** interjected.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** As the honourable member for Kallangur has pointed out, poor oral health is not only a health risk but also comes at a cost to the public purse and to the individuals concerned. There is no doubt in my mind that we will see those savings start to flow through once this legislation is passed and the fluoridation of drinking water takes effect.

Not so very long ago one of my local newspapers, the *Cairns Post*, ran some fairly graphic and shocking pictures of the poor state of oral health of young people and those who live in Indigenous communities in particular. Certainly, poor oral health in the far north is a big problem. I am sure the introduction of fluoride into the drinking water supply will be welcomed by the vast majority of people in far-north Queensland.

Like other members, I have received some correspondence from constituents and others purporting to be constituents putting forward their opposition to this important public health measure. To those who hold genuine concerns about fluoridation, I want to place on the record that I respect their genuine concerns. To those who have forwarded to my office material—in some cases large volumes of material—that they would regard as arguments against fluoridation or evidence that contradicts what to me are quite clear public health benefits of fluoridation, I say to them that I have considered that carefully and I have done as much research as is possible to reach the conclusion that I have, and that is, as has been said during the course of this debate, there is no credible evidence that has been produced that would lead me to harbour any real concerns about the health benefits or any health risks of fluoridation.

I want to mention one individual in particular—a man for whom I have a great deal of respect. He is a friend of mine and a party member. His name is Mr Bill Kilvert. Bill has waged a campaign in the party, and quite properly so through the various channels of the party organisation—

**Mr O'Brien:** He's a great party member.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** He is a great party member. Bill is one of those people—and I acknowledge that there are others but he is one who I know—who has a very genuine concern about fluoridation. In the great traditions of the Labor Party, Bill has utilised all the democratic processes of our great party to advance his arguments, to bring forward his beliefs and to generate a very important debate in our party. I want to pay tribute to Bill. He will not be the happiest Queenslanders if this legislation is passed, as I believe it will be. But I say to Bill that he has shown great courage and the courage of his convictions in bringing forward the issues that he believes in so passionately. Although I remain unconvinced by Bill's arguments—and that is why I am supporting this bill—I genuinely hope that in time in Queensland we will see the benefits of fluoridation in the form of improved oral health, which has been demonstrated in other states and around the world and that Bill and others who have genuine concerns about fluoridation will accept that those benefits have flowed through.

This bill is very important legislation. People in the community have changed their view about fluoridation and have now reached the point at which they accept the need for fluoridation and the benefits that fluoridation will bring. I am absolutely convinced of that. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Wettenhall, adjourned.

## MOTION

### Order for Production of Documents

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

- (1) That under the provisions of Standing Order 27, this House orders both the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education to lay upon the table of the House copies of any and all briefings, reports, audits and other documents under the control or in the possession of the Ministers or the departments for which they are responsible, that have been created in the last five years and which relate to:
  - (a) crimes committed against educators, health professionals and other public servants engaged by their departments on the Torres Strait Islands of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu and other Queensland communities;
  - (b) the safety of educators, health professionals and other public servants engaged by their departments on the Torres Strait Islands of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu and other Queensland communities;
  - (c) the transfer of educators, health professionals and other public servants engaged by their departments due to crime or safety fears on the Torres Strait Islands of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu and other Queensland communities.
- (2) That the Ministers be permitted to remove from the copies of the briefings, reports, audits and other documents any names or identifying features of individuals before laying the documents on the table of the House.

It is very important that the parliament has a realistic understanding of the extent of the security concerns of its employees, particularly those in remote and isolated communities throughout Queensland. I have moved this motion after a degree of consideration and thought. A range of our employees are particularly vulnerable. Generally they are teachers, nurses and other health professionals who work in isolated communities, often on their own. We also know that this government has a very bad record of hiding information, particularly when that information is embarrassing to it. Therefore, this motion seeks to ensure the parliament's access to reports and audits that have been done for our teachers, nurses and other health professionals who work throughout Queensland, particularly in isolated communities. Mr Acting Speaker, you might ask why we are seeking this

information. We do so to make sure that the parliament has all of the material available to it so that we can know, comprehensively and properly, that this government is doing the right thing to secure the safety of its vulnerable employees.

In addition, the motion has been moved in this way to ensure that all of the information can be provided to the parliament. This standing order is not used very regularly to ensure that information is released to the parliament, but this is the most comprehensive way of doing that. If passed, this resolution of the parliament would override freedom of information laws in Queensland. Information that would normally be hidden or unavailable would have to be made available to the parliament because, in a nutshell, the parliament is the master of its own destiny. This parliament is the grand inquisitor. It has the power and the authority to request all information. Therefore, we come back to the question of whether or not the government is willing to be open, accountable and honest and release to the people of this state the information that they are entitled to access.

In the motion we have stated that of course we do not expect the release of identifying particulars of individuals. That would be fundamentally unfair. However, it is very fair for the parliament to expect openness and accountability from the government when it comes to information relating to the safety of its employees. Today the issue of Dr Patel has been raised, and we all know about the saga surrounding that issue. We know the saga surrounding yesterday's refusal by the Minister for Health to provide the report to the parliament. That report was flushed out and he was forced to provide it to the parliament today. *The Torres Strait risk assessments—*

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I rise to a point of order. I find that untrue and offensive. I ask him to withdraw. That is untrue and offensive, and you know it.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Opposition will withdraw.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I withdraw. However, I ask members of parliament to reflect on what happened yesterday when the matter was brought to the attention of the minister. Initially the minister refused to release it and subsequently at a press conference he again refused to release the information. After the heat was turned up, he decided to release the information to the parliament today.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I rise to a point of order. Mr Acting Speaker, that is untrue and offensive. I ask him to withdraw. The record does not show that at all, member for Southern Downs, and you know it.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! We are not going to debate the issue, Minister. Resume your seat.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I withdraw. Yesterday when the minister was asked to—

**Mr Robertson:** Tell the full story!

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Minister, you will have your opportunity.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Yesterday in this parliament the minister was asked to table this information and he refused to do so. He gave some mealy-mouthed answer about how there might be legal complications. He kept up that line when he went to the media conference.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I rise to a point of order. That is untrue and offensive, and I ask him to withdraw.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I withdraw. When we looked at the veracity of what the minister argued yesterday, it did not stand up because there is absolutely no legal impediment. Nothing in here would jeopardise any future court case, although something might jeopardise the minister's credibility, which is fast falling away. Something in here might reflect sadly on the minister's administration of his department, but nothing would in any way compromise a court case or an investigation. Members can make their own conclusions as to why the minister was anything but keen to release that report yesterday. Public scrutiny and pressure certainly mounted on the minister as a consequence of that.

If we look through the report we see exactly why the minister was reluctant and reticent to release it. Let us turn to Mabuiag Island, although all of the islands show the same results. The likelihood of identified hazards is listed as possible, the consequences are extreme and the risks are very high. Surely that means there is a very strong possibility that something will go wrong. How else could anyone read that? This government has fundamentally failed in its duty of care to its employees who, in many cases, are vulnerable women working on their own in isolated areas. In this case a nurse was attacked, but I am aware that concerns have been raised by single female teachers who work in isolated communities throughout Queensland. They are also concerned for their safety.

Today the actions of the government have been flushed out and the minister has been forced to release this report. We do not know how many other audits of this type the department of health has. We do not know how many the department of education has. If this government is truly open and accountable, the very least it can do is release the information to the parliament tonight. Honourable members opposite should be similarly concerned, because many of their constituents may be at risk as a consequence of the government's failure to properly exercise its duty of care and provide the protective environment that its employees deserve and that we are obliged to provide.

Let us look at what the AMA has said today. It is available on the World Wide Web and anyone anywhere in the world can see it. The president-elect of the AMA in Queensland stated that in this instance it is clear that Queensland Health has let down not only its employees but also the whole community. On Tuesday, 4 March the Queensland Nurses Union raised concerns, and it did so again on Wednesday, 12 March. Those concerns go on and on and on.

As he did yesterday, today the minister protested that it was not his fault; it was someone else's fault. He blamed the bureaucrat. In another exercise of misleading by glossy brochure from June 2006, there is a picture of the health minister and then Premier Peter Beattie and a statement that Queensland Health is all hunky-dory and that everything has been fixed. The brochure states 'Keeping our promises'. The brochure talks about revealing more information than ever before in a transparent process. I would not have called yesterday's effort 'a transparent process'. What we hear from the government is the same old thing: shoot the messenger—in more ways than one—bully people and say it is someone else's fault. It is never its fault; it is always someone else's fault. Where is this government's accountability? If it is going to be truly accountable, the government should come into this place prepared to release that information.

I turn to the government's own occupational violence report. Again this morning the minister said, 'This does not apply in criminal events.' Can the minister tell me which occasions of assault do not have a criminal implication? The government says, 'Queensland Health will investigate all violent incidents.' What violent incidents do not have a criminal component? You can call the police in whenever you want. Once again, the government is not living up to its own guidelines, which state that Queensland Health will investigate all violent incidents at work as soon as possible and within 24 hours. It is not unusual for any department throughout Queensland to have co-investigation processes, because not everything meets criminal standards. Sometimes things do. Sometimes there is disciplinary action and other issues that need to be considered.

I turn to occupational health and safety management systems in the government's guidelines. As I said in this place yesterday, and I will say it again: wouldn't the average employer in Queensland love to be able to weasel their way out of something by saying this—

If the cost of implementing protective security arrangements at a facility or specific areas within a facility outweighs the benefits to the facility, the need for those arrangements needs to be seriously questioned. Where the cost cannot be justified, the security arrangements should be reduced or not implemented at all.

That says it all.

Time expired.

**Mr McARDLE** (Caloundra—Lib) (5.39 pm): I rise to second the motion put forward to the House today. I say at the outset that the need to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our front-line service workers is paramount, and no government, regardless of which side of politics it represents, should attempt to hide or mislead the Queensland public or Queensland public servants on their failings. We have a duty to stand up for our public servants, who are committed to providing services to people in remote communities sometimes at great risk to their personal safety. It is not easy to recruit staff to work in remote communities, communities which under this government have undoubtedly been starved of basic services.

The 16-month delay in implementing the terms of the report and the subsequent alleged rape of a health worker on Mabuaig is the last straw. It is time that this government came clean on what is really going on or more to the point what is not happening in these Torres Strait island communities. By that I mean what this government has not done to secure the safety of medical and teaching staff despite warnings of workplace health and safety issues being raised by staff and highlighted in the report tabled by the health minister today. The first paragraph of the executive summary of this report reads—

The security risk assessment found that the level of general security afforded to the TS&NPA Health Service District exposes Queensland Health staff to very high risks. There are significant risks that need to be addressed to ensure the district meets its obligations under the Workplace Health & Safety Act 1995 which is 'to provide a safe working environment for its staff'.

That paragraph uses the phrase 'very high risks'. As one goes through this document and goes to each of the islands or areas dealt with, the risk is classed as either 'very high' or 'high'. In relation to Murray Island the report states—

Murray Island health centre is a reasonable building but has serious faults with its duress/fire systems. Like the rest of the health centres there is no training or maintenance programme to maintain or repair faults or equipment.

This document in itself is an example of a government that is out of touch with reality. It is a government that simply does not provide for the needs and safety of its own employees, both nurses and teachers. This document alone shows and lays open this government's neglect of public servants employed by it to provide services to those in remote communities in this state of ours.

There can be no doubt that this government, through its departments of health and education, has conducted not just one but many assessments. Many reports have been prepared in relation to the issues dealt with in the motion before the House tonight. We are simply saying to the government that, if this report existed 16 months ago, how many other reports are out there laying on tables, laying on

desks, that have not been actioned and that should have been actioned months, if not years, ago and how many crimes that have been committed or alleged to have been committed would not have been committed? This document is the tip of the iceberg. Sixteen months down the track we have a minister who stands in this House and all he can say is, 'The public servants got it wrong.'

**Mr Springborg:** Naughty public servants!

**Mr McARDLE:** Naughty people. 'The public servants did the wrong thing. Naughty public servants.' The buck stops with the health minister in this scenario. This document is one of many. If this government opened its doors and allowed parliament to access all of those documents we would find a litany of such documents without a shadow of a doubt, and the minister is quite well aware of that.

This report was picked up by Steven Ryan of the Queensland Teachers Union on 5 March. He said in support of the Nurses Union—

These issues are ongoing. The state government must address them. It's something that's paramount in our members' minds at the moment and our state council is actually meeting this Saturday to consider many of the issues in relation to these community schools. The Queensland Government says it will use QBuild maintenance staff to boost security.

The issue of security in remote areas is very much in the mind of teachers at present, particularly given some of the situations that have occurred at Woorabinda and I certainly don't think QBuild can be used as an excuse to providing security.

More importantly, the Premier today is quoted in an AAP report, which states—

Premier Anna Bligh described the report as 'damning' and admitted a culture of secrecy still dogged Queensland Health, despite an overhaul of the system following the Jayant Patel scandal in Bundaberg.

'It reflects, I think, a culture that is still in need of change,' Ms Bligh said.

Queensland Health has not turned the corner. It has gone off the rails completely.

Time expired.

**Hon. S ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (5.44 pm): I move the following amendment—

That all words after "That" are deleted and the following words inserted:

"This Parliament notes the information tabled by the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training regarding staff in the Torres Strait."

I will table an outline of action taken by the state government to improve the quality of accommodation for staff in the Torres Strait. This table will also include figures relating to assaults on Queensland Health staff in the 2007 calendar year. I would stress that this document that I will table has been put together in haste and is the best that we can do in the time that is available to provide this parliament with information to inform this debate.

In recent years the state government has been working to provide appropriate accommodation for our staff stationed in the Torres Strait. New quality staff accommodation worth some \$1.7 million opened on Thursday Island in 2006. This new housing is being occupied by nurses and other health professionals. It is a six-unit complex consisting of two two-bedroom and four one-bedroom units. We have also started work on a \$30 million chronic disease prevention, management and renal dialysis centre.

On Erub (Darnley) Island, we are nearing completion of a \$6.6 million replacement primary healthcare centre and staff accommodation complex consisting of two two-bedroom and one three-bedroom units. We are also nearing completion on a \$4.45 million replacement primary healthcare centre and a new staff and staff accommodation on Warraber Island which will deliver two two-bedroom units. On Saibai Island, we have committed some \$5.7 million towards replacing the primary health centre and providing two two-bedroom short-term units and a three-bedroom residence. On Mabuaig Island, Queensland Health is currently in negotiation with the local council to purchase land opposite the health clinic to build new staff accommodation.

There are also other activities undertaken to improve the comfort and importantly the security of our staff on the islands. For instance, all remote area nurses on the island now have a CDMA phone, which they can use in times of danger or distress. The CDMA network is the best possible coverage on these islands. This week Queensland Health and Q-Build have been identifying and fixing priority areas regarding security and maintenance, starting with of course Mabuaig Island.

What the document that I will table demonstrates, as I said, in the time that is available to us to bring this information together is that in 2004 there were no physical assaults reported; in 2005 no physical assaults reported; in 2006 one physical assault on a staff member by a patient and one physical assault on a staff member by another staff member was reported; and in 2007 one physical assault was reported. In relation to safety, we have undertaken the following audits of staff accommodation and health clinics in the Torres Strait: the Torres Strait risk assessment 2006 document, which I tabled in the parliament today and which I will return to in a moment; and the environmental scan of occupational health and security in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District dated February 2008, which is being undertaken in conjunction with the Queensland Nurses Union.



In relation to staff turnover, Queensland Health has advised that there has been minimal staff turnover in the Torres Strait over the past five years. For example, on Saibai Island the same nurse has been employed there for over three years; on Mer (Murray) Island the same nurse has been employed there for over three years; on St Pauls or Moa Island, again, the nurse has been employed there for three years; at Kubin, on Moa Island, it is a new position and the nurse has been employed there since September 2007; on York Island the same nurse has been employed there for over three years; on Badu Island the same nurse has been employed there for over three years; there is no nurse stationed on Duan Island, covered by Saibai; and on Mabuaig Island it was a new position with the nurse employed in December 2007 and now, of course, unfortunately vacant. I will now table that document.

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Offences against health professionals'.

Those statistics show, in response to the unfounded allegations by the Leader of the Opposition, that things like security issues have been attended to over time. This has led to a comparatively stable workforce and, on the figures available to date, minimal issues with respect to assaults against workers.

I do take exception to one of the many issues that was brought up by the Leader of the Opposition—that is, his allegation that I somehow was reluctant to table that document. I made it very clear yesterday in the parliament and in the press conference that I personally had no problem tabling that document but that I wanted to be cautious because of my concern that a police investigation was underway. Once I received that legal advice, what did I do? I came into this place and tabled that document. That gives an indication of the transparency that I am committed to in my position as Minister for Health.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Before calling the honourable minister for education, I would like to acknowledge in the public gallery residents of the Palm Lake Resort at Redbank in the electorate of Bundamba, which is represented in the chamber by the honourable Jo-Ann Miller.

**Hon. RJ WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (5.50 pm): I second the amendment moved by the Minister for Health. I join in this debate by indicating to the opposition that the government is very happy to provide full disclosure of the records that we have in relation to incidents that affect the welfare or safety of staff in the Torres Strait and in particular, in my case, of teachers and other educational staff. That of course is a top priority for us.

We have initiatives in place to ensure the safety of our teachers in remote communities around the state, including in the Torres Strait. As I have stated in this House over the last two days, any teacher in a remote location who feels unsafe or whose behaviours indicate they are not coping are given transfer options. This is a standing arrangement that my department has with the Queensland Teachers Union. Today I will table some information in response to the opposition leader's request for information regarding the safety of teachers and other public servants in the region. I table that document.

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Department of Education, Training and the Arts—Records relating to Notice of Motion in the Parliament on 12 March 2008'.

This document outlines the three categories that were identified in the original motion—that is, crimes committed against educators, the safety of educators and the transfer of teaching staff in that region. I have obtained from the department a statement of facts in relation to those matters over recent years so that the opposition can see what has happened. In relation to education, it is fair to say that there is not a great deal of activity in those statements but I will detail some of it now.

My department has around 62,000 employees and the broadness of the original query—which talks about all communities—made it impossible for us to respond with precision on what it is the opposition was specifically seeking. However, I can say that in relation to the key issues in these remote communities, and in particular in the Torres Strait communities, the statement from my department will speak for itself. I am happy to answer further questions from the opposition in future question times in relation to it.

As opposition members and members of the government would be aware, the department undertakes routine security and maintenance checks of education facilities, including teacher housing, so that repairs and upgrades can be carried out. A major capital housing upgrade program was initiated in 2002-03 which did focus on security. An audit was conducted of Torres Strait and cape residences which resulted in an expenditure totalling \$406,104 to upgrade housing with security screens and doors and locks. This funding was used to upgrade residences at a range of Cape York and Torres Strait Islander communities, and I am happy to table details of that. More recent upgrades have focused on kitchen and bathroom upgrades, the installation of smoke detectors and residual current devices being fitted to residences.

In January 2008 my department commenced an audit of facilities in the Torres Strait, with the regional facilities manager undertaking a number of trips to the Torres Strait to examine staff housing. The facilities account manager for far northern Queensland is visiting the island campuses of Tagai State College today—that is, 12 March—and tomorrow, 13 March, to inspect the schools and teacher housing to determine priorities for any required repairs and upgrades. The department is also conducting intensive induction and orientation processes in November and January each year for

teachers who go to teach in the cape and Torres Strait. Principals of these remote schools also attend this program and spend significant time working through real scenarios and situations which teachers might encounter.

To the extent that there is any risk to teachers in the cape, this is not reflected in the attrition rate or the transfer rates in that region or in the Torres Strait. The attrition rate is 2.2 per cent, which is almost half of the far north Queensland overall rate of four per cent and half of the state rate of 3.8 per cent. In relation to specific incidents, I can say that there have been two WorkCover claims of an assault by a parent at Tagai State College at the Mabuiag Island campus. These did not result, as I understand it, in any criminal charges being laid or police investigations but opposition members would have to check that. The only records my department have relate to WorkCover claims.

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (5.56 pm): This week we have seen some extraordinary behaviour from the health minister. Yesterday he refused to release the report on the security assessment of Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District facilities compiled 16 months ago. When pressed by the opposition in question time as to whether the health minister had seen the report, he refused to answer our questions in parliament and confirm or deny his knowledge of the report. In true form of this media driven administration, it was the media who finally got him to admit that he had seen the report but only after he had actually learnt about the report through the media. The minister still refused to release the report to the public.

This morning he tabled the Torres Strait risk assessment report, and what a damning read it is. As I read the report, I could not believe that the minister and his senior departmental staff had no idea the situation was so bad in these remote communities. There are 20 district managers in Queensland Health—yes, 20, not 200 or 200,000. There are only 20 who answer to three area health managers who answer to the minister. How far up the chain do you have to go to be confident that a message will get through to the minister? Can we seriously look at these assessments in this report and say that the minister has never had any complaints from staff on any of these remote islands about problems with their accommodation?

The other thing which I think is an issue here is that the assessment that was done for the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District was done by people from the Townsville Health Service District security service. Wouldn't the people who did these assessments have come back and said to their district manager, 'My God. I've just assessed the Torres Strait and you wouldn't believe the problems they've got there with security and possible crimes'? Wouldn't the district manager have then said, 'I'd better have a talk to the Torres Strait district manager and maybe we'd better talk to the minister'? Is that what is happening amongst Queensland health district managers—of whom there are only 20? That is the question the minister needs to answer. Do the 20 district managers get to speak to him and report the problems that are obviously out there? Has he had any reports of these problems?

The November 2006 report found that the likelihood of security breaches on Mabuiag Island was 'possible', the consequences 'extreme' and the risk 'very high'. Similar assessments were made of health facilities on Sabai, Boigu, Badu, Horn, Murray, Erub, Masig, Coconut, Bamaga and Thursday islands. Regardless of whether the health minister had seen this particular report or not, he should have been aware that his staff were being forced to live and work in these squalid conditions. If we are to believe that the health minister was not aware of the appalling conditions his department inflicted upon its employees and if we are to believe that the health minister did not know about the existence of this report, then we can conclude that the member has been derelict in his duties.

The individual whose sad case highlighted the latest crisis in health—and, let us face it, it was only a matter of time before there was another one—had complained to her employer, Queensland Health, the minister's department, about the dangerous, filthy conditions she worked in and that she worked in isolation. Her pleas for help were ignored by the minister's department, as was the risk assessment report that I have just mentioned by the Townsville Hospital security service manager, Russell Grigg, and the security coordinator, Bruce Irvine.

If the living conditions are as bad as this report leads us to believe, there is no way the minister could not have known he was sitting on a time bomb. It was only a matter of time before someone was attacked. We have heard the health minister talk about how saddened he is by the story of this young nurse, but instead of taking responsibility and apologising to this woman, he is buck-passing his responsibilities as a health minister and blaming public servants.

Firstly, he blames his own department for not alerting him to the problems. He has publicly berated senior staff in Queensland Health, labelling them completely inept and their behaviour unacceptable. It is little wonder staff morale is so low in Queensland Health. The health minister is once again shooting the messenger. Secondly, he points the finger of blame at Q-Build. I see that the minister for public works is here.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I rise to a point of order. That is untrue and offensive and I demand that it be withdrawn.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, we are not going to debate the accuracy of that comment so there is no point of order.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I wonder how the minister for public works feels about his colleague passing the buck to his department for the security problems in the Torres Strait. Queenslanders do not want to hear excuses for their stuff-ups; they want to see action. It is not good enough to order that improvements be made as soon as possible; they need to be made immediately. It is not good enough that the minister orders another audit of the standard of security and maintenance within Queensland Health staff accommodation. The health minister has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that no person is left unprotected and at risk for one more night working on his clock. He needs to take action now. He needs to either urgently introduce physical security into these facilities or immediately withdraw his staff and make arrangements for a nine to five, fly-in fly-out facility. We cannot afford to wait another day, another week or another month to improve health facilities in remote areas of north Queensland.

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Cook—ALP) (6.01 pm): The alleged rape of the nurse on Mabuiag Island a few weeks ago was clearly a terrible event. My deepest sympathy goes out to that lady. I briefly met the nurse when she was relieving on Darnley Island late last year, but I must admit that I do not know her as well as some of the other nurses in the Torres Strait, most of whom have been there for some time.

I completely refute the suggestion the Liberal and National parties are pursuing here tonight that teachers, nurses and other public servants in remote Torres Strait communities are more susceptible to being victims of crime than in other parts of Queensland. The data provided to the House this evening by the health and education ministers clearly bears witness to that fact. I want to refute the suggestion that teachers, nurses and other public servants in these communities are anything but welcomed, anything but valued and anything but included into the rich cultural life of these communities. Yes, there are isolated incidents; yes, there are very occasionally horrible incidents, but they are not the norm. They occur in other places and they are condemned by the leadership and the overwhelming majority of people in these communities.

I strongly suggest that before those opposite come in here and malign the communities of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu they go there, spend the night and speak to teachers and nurses working there. They will find that those workers just love the experience they get by working with the children and families in the idyllic Torres Strait. They will tell members that they rarely, if ever, fear for their safety and most will say that they would not want to be anywhere else. Many of these nurses and teachers come up to the Torres Strait for a two-year stint and stay for much longer. Some never leave. Some even end up marrying a local and becoming part of the great Torres Strait family. That is why I simply cannot fathom the motion put before the House this evening. Yes, a terrible incident has occurred on Mabuiag, but to suggest that this is in some way part of a concerted campaign of violence against public servants, as the opposition has done this evening, is quite simply repugnant racism. I also cannot fathom why the four communities of Saibai, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu have been singled out. I certainly look forward to informing the people of those communities of the picture the Liberal and National parties are trying to paint of them to the wider world.

I will not stand here tonight and say that everything is perfect in these communities, just as everything is not perfect in Brisbane where teachers, nurses and public servants also face occasional acts of violence. The tyranny of distance makes it difficult for managers to support their staff and the cost of providing services, as well as the cost of living, is much higher than in other parts of Queensland. Island life is not for everyone. Some people struggle to fit into a community where they are a minority, where English is not the main language and where they are a long way from their family and friends. Both Queensland Health and Education Queensland put new employees into the district through a rigorous cultural awareness program but, as I said, island life is not for everyone and some people do not cope with the glaring cultural differences and isolation they will confront in places such as those mentioned in the substantive motion.

The way that violence occurs in these communities is no different from the way violence occurs in other communities in Queensland. Perpetrators are more often than not young men under the influence of alcohol and victims are just as often known to the perpetrator. This is the same in Brisbane, Badu or Boullia. Over the years I have had a number of facilities issues raised with me by both nurses and school principals in the Torres Strait but never from the angle of personal safety. Generally the facilities issues that are raised with me are from the perspective of improving services to clients. We are talking about very altruistic people whose main aim in life is to serve the community and help others. I have had some ding-dong meetings in the Torres Strait in my time. As the member for Warrego likes to remind the House, I was punted off Dauan Island during the amalgamation debate, but it was not aggressive or violent or anything like that, it was polite and respectful, as was the invitation to come back afterwards. I remember clearly a meeting the current health minister and I attended on Badu when we were undertaking negotiations surrounding the island's native title determination and he was the natural resources minister. People were angry and upset with the government's position of the day, but they were never disrespectful. That is the deal. Show respect for Torres Strait Islanders and it will be returned in spades.

The suggestion that violence in these communities is deliberately aimed at public servants is abhorrent and wrong. The members opposite have got it wrong in here tonight and they have insulted the overwhelming majority of decent Christian Torres Strait Islanders who welcome teachers and nurses with open arms and open hearts.

**Mr COPELAND** (Cunningham—NPA) (6.06 pm): I rise in support of the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition tonight and seconded by the member for Caloundra and against the amendment moved by the Minister for Health and seconded by the Minister for Education.

This is a very, very simple process that the opposition is after. In recent times we have seen reports of a very disturbing incident in the Torres Strait, something that we would hope would never happen to any public servant anywhere in Queensland. But it has happened. The allegations have been made. The coverage has occurred. What is worse is that in the last couple of days we have seen attempts by the government to deny that there have been any issues regarding security of public servants in some isolated communities.

This morning, after much pressure, the Minister for Health tabled a 16-month-old document highlighting very, very real issues on a number of islands in the Torres Strait. These are very real issues confronting health workers who work in many cases in isolation—issues that should have been acted on. These issues should have been addressed 16 months ago and they were not. There was no action taken at all to address the issues raised in that report. That is an indictment on this government. That is an indictment on the health department and particularly the health minister who has responsibility for the department.

Once again the member for Cook has this completely wrong. There is no suggestion by the opposition that the people in the Torres Strait are any more at risk than anyone else in Queensland, which is why in the motion that has been moved tonight we specifically said 'and other Queensland communities'. We want to know what is going on in those other communities as well. We know, because of the publicity that has been given to the particular issue in the Torres Strait, that those islands have been named because they are the ones that are in the report that was tabled this morning. We do know that there are issues in other communities. Woorabinda is a very good example where Education Queensland staff have had ongoing issues and where they have feared for their safety. They have had houses vandalised and possessions stolen. There are other areas in Queensland where this has happened as well.

I would have liked the government to come in and say, 'Yes, here is all the information. There are not any problems.' That would put to rest our concerns about the safety of public servants. If there are no issues, no problems, let the government produce that information. Let the government put upon the table of this House the concerns that have been raised with them so that we can have these fears and concerns allayed. As long as the government does not provide that information, we can quite rightly think that there are problems out there that have not been addressed, that there are still problems when it comes to the housing, safety and security of public servants no matter where they live in Queensland, not just in the Torres Strait.

Yesterday I asked the Minister for Education whether concerns had been raised with him about the safety of members of his department. He gave a good answer, outlining what the department does, how the staff undertake training before they go up and how the district executive directors make sure they see what is going on. What he did not say was whether any concerns had been raised with him, and he still did not do that tonight.

The government has a duty to look after its staff. There is an absolute fundamental responsibility to make sure that the people who work for Education Queensland, Queensland Health or any of the other departments are well looked after and do not have any concerns for their safety. The information tabled by the Minister for Health stated that there were no physical assaults reported in 2004-05. However, that does not address the issue of whether staff have been fearful or have concerns for their own safety. If it only gets to a physical assault, that is a terrible thing. However, that does not report all those other things that could have happened as well.

It is a very simple thing for this government to lay upon the table of this House this information. We know these audits have been done. We know that audits would have been done into housing and security right around the state. The government should be willing to lay it upon the table of the House. Then if there are no problems this issue would go away and members of the Public Service would know that their concerns are being addressed. It is a very simple step, and by moving this amendment tonight the government has proven that it is not willing to take that step. It is not willing to show that it has addressed concerns that have been raised. It is not willing to show that it has addressed the upgrades that have been required after these audits. Given what has happened in the Department of Health, that gives us no confidence whatsoever.

**Hon. JC SPENCE** (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport) (6.11 pm): The incident on Mabuiag Island is currently before the courts. It would be inappropriate for me to comment in any detail. However, it can be confirmed that Queensland Police Service officers from Thursday Island were dispatched to Mabuiag Island as soon as possible on the day of the alleged offence, arriving by charter flight about midday. We do not have police stationed on every island in the Torres Strait. It would not be feasible to do so. We do have state police on Horn Island and Thursday Island. A water police unit is based on Thursday Island.

I want to point out a few ironies in the debate. One of the first is that the federal government—the Howard government—as part of its pre-election new-found interest in Indigenous affairs, offered to fund police stations around Australia in Indigenous communities. We said to Mal Brough and John Howard that we actually have police stations in all our Aboriginal communities in Queensland but if they were interested in helping us out we would like a police station on Badu Island, a remote island in the Torres Strait. We were told very clearly by Mal Brough that he was not interested in funding anything in the Torres Strait and we had to come up with another option.

Another irony in this new-found interest of the opposition in the Torres Strait is that the only law and order policy issue that the opposition has is to buy the police a helicopter and locate it on the Gold Coast. Last year we again resisted doing that. What did we do? We funded a new aircraft. We have never had a police aircraft in the Torres Strait. So we have been funded to purchase a Britten-Norman Islander aircraft with a dedicated police pilot which will be based on Horn Island because the police believe—and this is the police priority—that the quickest way to ensure service to the outer islands is if they have their own plane. As a part of this year's budget we announced funding of \$4.9 million over four years for the set-up and ongoing maintenance of the new police plane. The expenditure includes the purchase of the aircraft, the costs of the building and operating the Police Air Wing, the salaries for two pilots, the hangar and accommodation. Just last month the Police Air Wing was finalising plane specifications with Britten-Norman and the company should be providing police with a timetable very soon.

It is ironic that the opposition has suddenly discovered an interest in Public Service accommodation and what goes on in the Torres Strait. I am pleased to say that the Torres Strait has a higher level of policing than the rest of Queensland. As we know, the Queensland police-to-population ratio is one officer for every 430 people. In the Torres Strait it is more like one officer for every 300 people. I have studied the crime rates in the Torres Strait over the last three years and I am pleased to see that they are not increasing. I know that is no consolation for this poor nurse who was allegedly raped, but we are keeping crime levels under control in the Torres Strait and in some categories we have seen significant reductions in crime.

I would like to point out one more irony in this debate tonight. Yesterday I said that the way we are moving more police very quickly onto Woorabinda is by buying shipping containers and fitting them out for accommodation for our police officers. Immediately we saw Mr Messenger and Mr Johnson out there in the media criticising this idea, despite the fact that the Police Union has had a look at these shipping containers and it regards them as a satisfactory, quick-fix option for police to get them into these communities.

I have done a bit more research into these shipping containers. I am told that they are widely used around the world. There is a bold housing development on a London wharf called Container City 2, which features multiple containers stacked on top of each other. In Scotland artists are living in them and using them as artist studios. They are used as hostels in South Africa. A Dutch company recently won the support of the city council to create a container city for students. They are also widely used in the iron and mineral industries in the Kimberleys, north Queensland, the Northern Territory and even the Antarctic. The federal government used these shipping containers when it moved the Army and public servants into the Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory just last year. So those members should not profess concern or even any understanding of the issues that governments face when trying to house public servants in these Indigenous communities. We try our best to negotiate land deals in these communities. Native title conversations can take five years or more. It is a long, arduous process but we are determined to do our best to make sure that we can get public servants into these communities in a timely manner.

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—NPA) (6.16 pm): I rise to support the motion moved by the coalition and, in doing so, condemn this government for the manner in which it has treated our public servants. I condemn it for deliberately creating a climate of fear and intimidation within the Queensland Public Service.

Today's motion is an opportunity for the government to vote with us and take the first step in cleaning up its act, changing direction and becoming an open and honest government—a government for the people of Queensland. While I am ever hopeful that the Queensland Labor Party will miraculously find a conscience and a heart and support our motion, I suspect that if it tabled the documents and information required by the motion, it would mean the beginning of the end for this government. The Labor government's public record shows a callous disregard for the rights and safety of its employees, and this latest revelation regarding the alleged rape which occurred on a Torres Strait island, unfortunately as the member for Caloundra said, is just the tip of the iceberg. This rape allegation and attempt at a cover-up by this health minister has incensed every decent Queenslanders, including my constituent Tim Bryant, who writes in relation to the latest incident—

This could be foreseen.

So there has been a total failure in carrying out their responsibilities in protecting citizens and employees, particularly whilst that employee is there to help the community from which the (alleged) perpetrator comes!

Therefore the demonstrated incompetence calls for a dismissal of at the very least the minister, in this case, Robertson, if not the premier who is ultimately responsible.

With a quick whip around, a list of incompetences could be collected, this one demonstrates the epitome of it. This is unacceptable.

Mr Bryant also writes—

Of course Nuttall was the minister when the Patel affair came to light.

With political deftness Beattie changed ministers, but nothing has changed: the same culture exists within the department of health ...

Honourable members should look at the public record on how this government has treated its staff, especially nurses. The day after nurse whistleblower Toni Hoffman's letter exposing the deadly mismanagement at the Bundaberg Hospital was tabled here in parliament she and every other staff member in the Intensive Care Unit at the Bundaberg Base Hospital was told that they would be thrown in jail if they talked with their local member of parliament. Which politician from the Labor Party ordered that manager to say that? We will never find out. He has resigned. Today the health minister is blaming the local health manager for sitting on the building report and no-one can be held to account because he has retired. The managers who did the bidding of this government at Bundaberg could not be held accountable because they resigned.

What about the manager of the Townsville Base Hospital who was there doing the health minister's bidding while the cardiothoracic unit was closed and the whistleblowers were crying 'cover-up' and the secure mental health unit was turned into Abu Ghraib for three Aboriginal youths? What happened to the manager of the Townsville Hospital? Surprise, surprise! He has resigned. He is now working in New Zealand. If we ever find out that the Townsville whistleblowers are right and that people's lives have been needlessly placed at risk and Aboriginal people have been abused, manacled and marched around an exercise yard naked, then the minister has another convenient excuse—another ex-manager to blame.

I just had a very interesting conversation with an SBS reporter who has been questioning the CMC. The bottom line is that the CMC does not have the power to review or examine the independent review commission by the health department in relation to the mental health unit in Townsville. The company used by the health department for the independent review can remain anonymous, and I would assume that we would not have the ability to FOI or access any of its documents because it is not employed by the government directly but rather is on contract. This government has learned the lesson of Bundaberg very well. It launders every scandal and assault by referring it to its own hand-picked independent consultants who produce a report that it can hide behind.

This government has gotten better. This government has gotten better and learned how to bully better. This government has learned how to intimidate better. This government has learned how to cover up better. I urge all members opposite to seriously consider the motion before the House tonight. They should stick up for the public servants who work within the Queensland government. They should look after them, value them and value their safety. They should vote for this motion and vote against the government's sham amendment.

**Hon. RE SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (6.22 pm): Getting a lesson on workers' health and safety and matters of propriety from those opposite is like getting an instruction on table manners from a rhinoceros. The absolute hypocrisy that is dripping from the benches opposite here tonight is breathtaking. I have been around schools, teacher accommodation and all the rest of it for a long time. I remember when you lot were in government. I remember the conditions that you put teachers under. How dare you stand up here tonight with this puffed hypocrisy and pomposity!

**An opposition member** interjected.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** You can laugh! I know you find that funny, because actually what you do is highlight exactly how fair dinkum you are on this issue. The poor nurse in this case is just the collateral damage on your way to a political campaign. That is all that is.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Minister, I ask you to direct your comments through the chair.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** This is not fair dinkum. Anybody who believes that tories believe in standing up for the rights of workers just has to look at the history of the tory parties, and all they have to do is look at their current policies in this regard. I doubt if any of them have been to Woorabinda in the last few weeks, because if they had they would not have made the ill-advised and stupid comments that I have just heard coming from over there about not caring about the safety of teachers. Q-Build has been there many times and put Crimsafe all over the buildings. My oldest mate is the principal of the school there. I was in his teacher accommodation last week. Do not tell me that the education department or this minister are not on top of that issue! I have here an email from the teachers at Aurukun thanking Q-Build for its fine effort in putting the latest Crimsafe on the buildings there—\$160,000 worth. Why Crimsafe? Because that is a fairly new development. I have been going to Aurukun for nearly 25 years and the upgrades to security have been ongoing since we have been in government—certainly not during the times that those opposite were in government, I can assure you of that. So those opposite should not come in here with this nonsense.

With regard to the member for Surfers Paradise misquoting and misleading this parliament and claiming that the health minister had somehow been critical of Q-Build, that is absolutely incorrect. I have had several meetings with the health minister about this. He is absolutely of the understanding that Q-Build is the agency that can deliver this maintenance in this part of the world and does so very well. Q-Build has depots in places like Bamaga and is in the Torres Strait all of the time in very difficult circumstances. Honourable members should remember that every single metre of Crimsafe that goes into those places has to come from outside. It is not a simple matter of walking around the corner and buying a door lock. When something goes wrong halfway to Papua New Guinea, it is not a simple matter of getting an electrician to go and fix the light. It is not a simple matter. The further hypocrisy of that lot over there to suddenly start taking the side of Q-Build is nauseating—absolutely nauseating—when their plan has always been to criticise and privatise Q-Build.

The fact of the matter is that, yes, there has been a dreadful set of events here. I have heard the minister, as any other decent person in this House and any unbiased person would, say that there has been no cover-up here. The words were unequivocal yesterday: 'I will take advice on this matter,' and so he should. This is a very serious case, but to somehow turn this into a debate that says that this government is not there on a daily basis protecting public servants who fill these difficult roles while those opposite run the cart over every single community and suggest that those communities are out to get public servants is simply not true. The fact of the matter is that this is a matter of great regret, but it is not one that should be used as a political football by those opposite with their lack of scruples.

We on this side of the House very much understand what workers' rights are all about and what workers' health and safety is all about. Every single minister in this parliament has been to more islands and more remote places in Cape York than any single one of those opposite, and I doubt that anyone over there has been to Mabuiag Island. I bet half of them could not even spell Badu. I bet that the number of times cabinet ministers have been into each of those communities rivals anything that ever happened in the past, when the only time tory ministers ever went to the Torres Strait was to go fishing on the *Melbidir* and subsequently got sacked. That was the only time those opposite had any interest in these communities. So do not come in here with this retrospective view that somehow or other you would do something to alleviate these circumstances. You would not. You are a pack of hypocrites!

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** The question is that the motion be agreed to, since which it has been proposed that the question be amended by omitting all words after 'that' and inserting the words contained in the amendment.

**Mr COPELAND:** I rise to a point of order. Mr Acting Speaker, could I get you to rule on standing order 91(b), which states 'omitting certain words in order to insert or add other words'. The amendment actually deletes all of the words in the motion. Can you rule whether that complies with the standing orders?

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** No, it has been the practice since these 5.30 debates started in 1996 to allow this. So this practice does comply with standing orders.

Division: Question put—That the amendment be agreed to.

**AYES, 53**—Attwood, Barry, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Grace, Hayward, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Lucas, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wetenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Jones

**NOES, 29**—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Elmes, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Rickuss, Dickson

Resolved in the affirmative.

Question put—That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Motion, as agreed—

That this Parliament notes the information tabled by the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training regarding staff in the Torres Strait.

Sitting suspended from 6.34 pm to 7.30 pm.

## CRIMINAL CODE (PROTECTING SCHOOL STUDENTS AND MEMBERS OF STAFF FROM ASSAULTS) AMENDMENT BILL

### Second Reading

Resumed from 17 October 2007 (see p. 3652), on motion of Mr Copeland—

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Hon. KG SHINE** (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (7.30 pm): The member for Cunningham and shadow minister for education and training and shadow minister for the arts, Mr Copeland, introduced

the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill as a private member's bill on 17 October 2007. The bill attempts to insert a new chapter into the criminal law targeted at assaults and other acts committed against school students and members of staff on school grounds. The bill is not supported by the government for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the Criminal Code already contains a number of generic offences that would apply to this conduct. These offences include common assault, which attracts a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment; assault occasioning bodily harm, which attracts a maximum penalty of seven or 10 years imprisonment; stalking, which attracts a maximum penalty of five or seven years imprisonment; wounding, which attracts a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment; grievous bodily harm, which attracts a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment; and threatening violence, which attracts a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment.

The bill does not rectify any gap in the law, nor does it change the law's existing ability to charge and prosecute a person who assaults or commits other acts against school students and members of staff. As a result, the bill will not, as the opposition has suggested, provide students or staff with any greater protection than they are currently afforded under the laws that are in force in this state. The offences contained in the Criminal Code are also complemented by the offences, powers and disciplinary measures that are contained in the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006. The relevant provisions assist in the prevention and management of violence and other similar conduct in schools.

Rather than simplifying the law, the offences proposed by this bill will be more difficult for the prosecution to prove than existing offences, as they require additional elements to be established. For example, currently a person who assaults a student—a complainant—on school grounds and causes them bodily harm, which is a bodily injury which interferes with health or comfort, will be charged with assault occasioning bodily harm. In prosecuting that offence the prosecution merely has to establish that the accused assaulted the complainant and by that assault caused the complainant bodily harm. There is no requirement for the prosecution to prove that the complainant was a school student or that they were attending school at the time of the assault, as required by the opposition's proposed offences.

I will now turn briefly to the bill itself. The bill aims to introduce a new chapter into the Criminal Code titled 'Assaults, stalking, harassment or intimidation at school premises'. Proposed section 346A(1) contains the relevant definitions for the chapter, including a definition of 'stalk' which will exist in addition to the definition that is currently contained in section 359 of the Criminal Code. Having differing definitions of the one word contained in the same act is a legislative nightmare. The bill's definition of 'stalk' does not include a number of the elements required to be established under the existing provisions of the code. For example, the code requires the conduct which constitutes stalking to be engaged in on one protracted occasion or on more than one occasion. The conduct must also be intentionally directed at the stalked person and cause the stalked person apprehension or fear of violence, or, alternatively, the conduct must cause detriment. The definition contained in the bill does not include such elements. The presence of the two different definitions in the code will result in ambiguity about the meaning of the term, particularly given that proposed section 346A(1) appears to indicate a wider application than is currently provided under the code.

Proposed section 346B contains the offence provisions. Proposed subsection 1 creates the offence of assaulting, stalking, harassing or intimidating a student or member of staff of the school while they are attending that school. The offence effectively melds a number of distinct and generic offences, such as common assault, which appears under section 335 of the code, and stalking, which appears under chapter 33A of the code, into one offence provision. Proposed section 346B(2) then proposes to make it an offence to assault a student or member of staff of a school while they are attending the school and cause them bodily harm. This offence is similar to the current offence of assault occasioning bodily harm but contains additional elements. Proposed section 346B(3) will apply where a person unlawfully and with intent to injure either wounds or causes grievous bodily harm to a student or a staff member who is attending school. The maximum penalty for this offence is 14 years imprisonment.

Although the existing offences of wounding and grievous bodily harm under the code require the offender to act unlawfully, there is no additional requirement for the prosecution to prove that the person possessed an intent to injure. This additional element will make the offences more difficult to prove and there will be no benefit in proceeding under the proposed section in relation to acts causing grievous bodily harm as the existing code offence is punishable by the same maximum penalty. The reality is that this proposed section would never be used, because the existing provision is easier to prove, contains fewer elements that have to be proved and, in any event, the penalty is the same as that which is already provided.

Proposed section 346B(4) proposes to establish an offence where a person enters school premises with intent to commit an offence under this section. The maximum penalty proposed is five years. However, I note that under existing section 421 of the code a person who enters a premises, for example a school building, with intent to commit an indictable offence, for example assault, will be liable to a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. That is double the penalty that is proposed under this legislation. If the person actually carries out their intention they are liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment, or life if, for example, they break a window to gain entry to the school building.



Again, the opposition's proposed section will never be used, because the offences that an offender must attempt to commit are offences contained in section 421 of the code. All are indictable offences and so will attract the higher penalty of 10 years imprisonment instead of five whilst having fewer elements to prove.

I conclude by restating that this bill does not address any deficiencies in Queensland's current law. It is truly a cynical attempt to make Queensland parents believe that their children are not being adequately protected within schools. All parents want their children to be safe at all times, particularly when they are at school. The opposition's attempt to use this concern for political gain is an insult to Queenslanders and a disgrace to this parliament. The opposition leader—if he was here—should show some leadership and tell his shadow ministers that enough is enough. Instead, the recycled leader just gives us more of the same.

There has been no change on the other side of the House. So much for a fresh start! Our laws already provide protection to students and teachers when they are at school. They are the same laws that apply to all Queenslanders at all times. As I have indicated, people who commit assaults and similar attacks on school students and members of staff can be subject to charge and prosecution for a number of generic offences that are already contained in the Criminal Code. Those generic offences are easier for the prosecution to prove than the proposed offences because they do not contain additional elements such as establishing that the complainant was a school student or member of staff who was attending the school at the time the offence occurred. For these very good reasons, the government will not be supporting the bill.

**Mr McARDLE** (Caloundra—Lib) (7.40 pm): I rise to support the bill before the House. I congratulate Stuart Copeland on the effort that he has put into the bill that is before the parliament tonight. It is a progressive bill. The bill seeks to expand the boundaries of the law and tackle a problem that is escalating not only in Queensland but also throughout the nation. In essence the bill models legislation that has worked in New South Wales for some considerable time. It is designed to deal with violence committed against teachers and students in our schools. While we do have legislation that deals with this behaviour in general, the bill fits the location to the crime. It deals with an issue that is growing and that is of concern to parents and teachers, and it should be of concern to this government. It sends a very clear message that violence in Queensland schools simply will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

It always amazes me that when we debate bills that the opposition has introduced into the House, the government finds extreme reasons for not supporting them. At the very least those reasons are wishy-washy and fail to acknowledge the fact that modern society needs modern laws. Amazingly enough, the government seems to believe that only the laws that it has put together encapsulate the essence of our society and our community.

**Mr Hoolihan:** That makes them part of the legislative program.

**Mr McARDLE:** Oh dear! The nutcracker up the back! Every day we are confronted with an ever-growing trend of violence occurring in what should be the sanctuary of our school environment where children and staff should be able to learn and teach in safety and harmony with one another. More and more we find that the sanctity of the school is being violated by people who act for their own interests and without any regard for what others are attempting to achieve.

We do need this legislation. We do need the government to get on board. On too many occasions we have come into this House and found the government wanting in its capacity to understand the community's call for change, unless of course it has brought the legislation into the House. It votes our bills down, choosing to play politics with the issue. It chooses to play politics with the lives of innocent teachers and children. It chooses to ignore the necessity to put in place real laws that protect the children of this state and their children in the future.

It is now time for the government to stop playing politics and to protect the lives of children and teachers by getting behind this bill and making it law. It is amazing that, by rejecting this bill, the government de facto approves of violence in schools. This bill deals directly with an environment that has generated more and more violence in the past five to 10 years, yet this government turns its back on it and thereby turns its back on the teachers of the state who in the past have called for protection against what they have to cope with at schools on a day-to-day basis. This legislation is not about locking people up. It is about protecting people. It is about protecting the children and the teachers, and ensuring their safety. That is exactly what the member has put into the bill that is before the House tonight. He has recognised the necessity to provide for children and teachers and, for whatever reason, the government fails to understand that that is an important element in modern society.

A simple Google search will reveal recent violent attacks on students, which are being shown on MySpace and which highlight that the lowest sorts of acts are occurring in our schools. The Attorney-General would definitely be aware of the attacks that have been shown on MySpace and he would be aware of the violent nature of those attacks. Those people are playing sport. They are committing violent acts for the sake of getting on MySpace to make a dollar or to make a name for themselves. That sort of action should never be endorsed by our society. Certainly it should be condemned by this government.

Between 2003-04 and 2006-07 in Queensland there has been a 24.5 per cent increase in the number of assaults reported to police that were committed at educational facilities. The New South Wales legislation has been in effect for some time. Between 2005 and 2006 in New South Wales the number of AVOs taken out by teachers against students has decreased from 13 to four. There is no doubt that this legislation has had an impact upon the violence in schools. It is about time that we recognised the fact that we do need to take steps to ensure the return to the community of the safe environment that many of us knew years ago. Many of us went to school at a time when if you stepped out of line you knew that you were in serious trouble. Now the reverse is the case. Students are willing to take dramatic steps and actions, and in fact assault teachers and other students. That did not occur years ago.

**Mr Shine:** No, the teachers used to assault you.

**Mr McARDLE:** We have to recognise that there has been a generational change. Maybe as a student the Attorney-General was beaten. That may explain a lot.

**Mr Shine:** You went to a Christian Brothers school.

**Mr McARDLE:** I did too and maybe that explains a lot as well. I accept that comment. It is five bob each way reaction, so to speak. At the end of the day, a generational change has occurred and it has resulted in a greater violent streak occurring in our schools and among our students. We should not accept that openly and willingly.

Without a doubt the statistics from New South Wales have shown that in the past three years the legislation is having an impact and the law is working. I table a report by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research that highlights the impact that the legislation has had over the past three years.

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'NSW Criminal Courts Statistics 2004 to 2006'.

The law can work in a school setting. If it is introduced in Queensland it will offer additional protection and send a real message that violence committed against teachers and students simply cannot be tolerated. In the past I have spoken about the necessity for legislation to be modernised to reflect modern society and modern norms. This bill does that. We are living in a different society to that which existed when the Criminal Code was constructed well over 100 years ago. We are living in different society to that which existed when Sir Samuel Griffith put pen to paper and first created the code in written format. We are living in a society that the government recognises is moving forward and changing day by day. This is one area where, in my opinion, the government is wanting and lacking in fortitude if it does not come forward and acknowledge the necessity to look at the matter of violence in schools and protect both students and teachers as they go about their daily duties.

It is important in my opinion that the government passes this bill for the one simple reason: children at school today are the future of the state and this country tomorrow. And the teachers who educate them have in their hands the most important and most wonderful resource they could ever have: our children. They have before them a golden opportunity to develop those children into whoever they want to be. Those teachers in my opinion in many cases have the best job in the world because they have a capacity to mould a young mind and mould a spirit so that that person can leave school in five, 10 or 12 years time and be the adult that they want to be and dream what they want to dream and achieve for them what perhaps you and I never did achieve. If we cannot create or continue the environment in which they are educated and taught in a positive manner, we have failed. We can do nothing better in our lives than to protect our children, and this bill simply does that. I commend the member for the work that he has done, and I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (7.50 pm): I rise to support the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill. The objective of the bill is to introduce a number of offences into the Criminal Code Act 1899 that will protect both teachers and students from assaults and physical intimidation whilst on school grounds.

According to Queensland police statistics, there were 732 assaults reported on educational facilities during 2005-06, which represented an increase of 84 assaults from the previous reporting year. These figures were almost double that reported on public transport and in health facilities. In fact, the explanatory notes associated with this bill advise that educational facilities had the highest recorded number of assaults in any institutional setting. Such a statistic surely recommends this bill to all members of this House as a soundly conceived proposal that is required to protect teachers and students who are at school to instruct and to learn respectively, not to be assaulted by individuals who would use schools to pursue an act of violence.

This bill seeks to address this violent trend by affording legislative protection to students and teachers from persons who assault and seek to intimidate others whilst on school grounds. People who enter school grounds and assault others must be held responsible for their actions, and victims of such violence perpetrated in these circumstances should enjoy the fullest protection the law can provide.

I understand, as the member for Caloundra also mentioned, that there is evidence from New South Wales that such a legislative response has been effective as part of a broader approach to addressing youth violence in that state. Schools in Queensland already have a policy of conducting an

integrated risk management assessment of behavioural risks, which includes requiring visitors to report to the administration office of the school when entering school grounds. However, it is not likely that such individuals intent on acts of violence will necessarily acknowledge or have sufficient regard for these risk management policies to comply in all cases. So the intention of this bill is to provide for some recourse if acts of violence are perpetrated against staff or students on school grounds. So the provisions of this bill complement the risk management initiatives already in place and will contribute to ensuring maximum safety for staff and students in Queensland's education system.

The introduction of the bill has been prompted in response to the growing phenomenon of organised violent confrontations, known colloquially as 'fight clubs', amongst students in a bizarre recreation of scenes of organised violent confrontations in the Hollywood movie of the same name, in a sad case of life imitating art. There is a need to make it clear that violence in schools will not be tolerated. This is applicable to students as well as teachers. People who commit violent assaults must be held responsible for their actions and victims of such violence should have the full protection of the law. The law should treat acts of violence with the utmost seriousness, and I believe that the provisions of this bill do that.

The bill provides comprehensive protection to a range of people at schools including members of staff who perform voluntary work for the school. The bill covers pre-primary schools, primary schools and secondary schools. The bill is drafted to protect school staff and students in a range of circumstances. The bill will define school premises as including parks or other community premises when they are being used for the purposes of the school.

In this bill, a school student or member of school staff is taken to be attending a school while the student or member of staff is on school premises for the purposes of school work or duty, while the student or member of staff is on school premises for the purposes of before school or after school child care and while entering or leaving school premises in connection with school work or duty or before school or after school care. The bill provides for a person who assaults, stalks, harasses or intimidates any school student or member of staff of a school while the student or member of staff is attending a school without actually physically harming them to be sentenced to imprisonment for five years. Physical violence is not the only way in which antisocial behaviour can have a negative impact on individuals in that work environment or in this case in that learning environment. Non-physical abuse should also be treated seriously.

The bill further provides that a person who physically assaults a school student or member of staff of a school while the student or member of staff is attending a school and by the assault occasions actual bodily harm is liable for imprisonment for seven years. This reflects the seriousness of physical violence being perpetrated against an individual in that environment. In the case that the assault is a particularly severe offence, such as a person who maliciously by any means wounds a school student or member of staff of a school or inflicts grievous bodily harm on a school student or member of staff of a school while the student or member of staff is attending a school, the bill provides for a sentence of imprisonment for 12 years.

Importantly, however, this bill is careful to distinguish between violent assaults and appropriate actions undertaken by staff to maintain discipline in the classroom. Nothing in this bill is designed or intended to apply to any reasonable disciplinary action taken by a member of staff of a school in the course of disciplining a student and so this bill will not interfere with the established behaviour management policies of our education system.

The bill provides for any person who films, encourages or contributes to group violence on school grounds to be liable to imprisonment for five years. This provision is in response to the increasing instance of these organised fight clubs being recorded and posted on the internet for public viewing through the modern tools of MySpace and YouTube. The *Courier-Mail*, in an article dated 17 June 2007, reported students at Brisbane Grammar School having joined the alarming trend of filming vicious brawls and posting them on the internet. It was reported that students slugged it out in front of classmates in an organised 60-second fight caught on camera, set to rap music and placed on the popular internet site YouTube. In the fight, one student knocks the other to the concrete floor and repeatedly kicks and punches him in the head.

The phenomenon is not confined to one area of Queensland. The *Townsville Bulletin*, in an article dated 19 May 2007, reported fight club clashes at Kirwan State High School in Thuringowa in north Queensland being broadcast on the internet through a YouTube site. The article reports that the clips, which last for 20 seconds to one minute, each shows pupils swearing, punching and kicking each other while students watch and cheer. Another clip is even more disturbing as it depicts what appears to be a fight club like set-up where about a dozen students stand in a circle, before two move into the centre, roll up their sleeves and attack each other without any appeared provocation. Forty-three seconds later the two students rejoin the group and the clip ends. This type of behaviour would no doubt be of very serious concern to parents in the general community. It is totally inappropriate behaviour on school grounds.

These changes could be proposed through an amendment to the Criminal Code or by an amendment to the education act. By pursuing the matter through an amendment to the Criminal Code it sends a stronger message to the community about the seriousness of the issue. The bill also allows police to conduct investigations into violence in schools, which means these matters will be dealt with by people who are charged in many cases with dealing with violence in the broader community and that we are making no differentiation about the unacceptability of violence regardless of where it is perpetrated against innocent people.

This bill is worthy of support to address an issue that is of increasing concern. I call on the government to support the efforts of the opposition to address this matter. It is modern legislation to address a modern problem. I congratulate the shadow minister for education, the member for Cunningham, for bringing forward this private member's bill, and I commend the bill to the House.

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—Lib) (7.58 pm): It is indeed a pleasure to rise this evening and support the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill 2007, introduced to the House by my honourable colleague the member for Cunningham, the shadow minister for education and training. This bill creates the new offence of assault on school grounds and, more importantly, affords teachers and students increased protection, with perpetrators being liable for up to five years imprisonment for assault, harassment, stalking or intimidation of a student or member of staff on school grounds. Further, with a maximum 10-year penalty for assault causing bodily harm and a ceiling of 14 years where a person with intent has caused wounds or grievous bodily harm, we can uphold the indefeasible entitlement of Queensland students and their teachers to work and learn in safe surroundings.

I listened to the Attorney's argument this evening and I ask him: if these offences were already contained in legislation, why, then, do we have this escalating problem? The Bligh government is not moving at the speed that this urgent matter requires. For too long, the Bligh government has not acted when needed to address the growing problem of assaults in school grounds and, in particular, the latest out-of-control youth fad of fight clubs. The latest we hear, of fights being organised, instigated, filmed and then posted on the internet by students, is basely appalling at best. Members on this side of the House are putting forward and supporting this bill in order to put a stop to appalling episodes such as this and to take action against mounting assaults and violence within school grounds.

With the 2008 year well underway, teachers, parents and students should be able to undertake their duties without a climate of fear where school violence is their major concern. That is certainly not a state of affairs that I or any of my coalition colleagues would like to see for any of Queensland's schools, teachers or students. It is of course tragic that school violence has featured so prominently in the media, when places where we mould and shape the minds of tomorrow should be viewed as safe havens for learning.

However, with the problem clearly not going away and violence of some description a part of many schools today, it is essential that we as a parliament take the necessary steps to put the interests of Queensland's future first, ahead of rigid political ideology, and combine in a bipartisan effort to support our educators and students. Once again, it falls on the backs of the coalition to initiate the steps necessary to see results. It is no concern of the coalition to play the games of the Bligh government. We just want to see this bill passed so that there is effective legislation in place to ensure teachers and students are safe whilst on our school grounds.

The most recent *Queensland Police Service Annual Statistical Review* reports a most astonishing figure—that is, 732 assaults were reported within our educational institutions within 2005-06. In fact, educational facilities had the highest number of assaults of any institutional setting—a figure which was almost double those that occurred on our public transport or in our health facilities. Troubling still is the fact that state schools have reported 45 incidents of parents threatening staff since July last year.

In a vox populi conducted by the *Gold Coast Bulletin* last month, when asked 'Should the government reintroduce corporal punishment so teachers can discipline students?' an overwhelming majority of 88 per cent felt that, yes, corporal punishment should be reintroduced into our education system.

**Mr Shine:** Did you ring 88 times?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I am not saying I advocate corporal punishment here; I am simply translating the feeling of the people on the Gold Coast.

**Mr Rickuss** interjected.

**Mr Shine:** You're a troublemaker.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** We will just call him Corporal, I think. The Bligh government needs to take a long, hard look at these statistics. It is not an illusion; rather it is a situation that requires urgent attention. Do these figures not lend weight to the fact that this issue needs addressing? We do not need any more spin and grin from a government which is obviously out of touch, bankrupt of ideas and ready to wash its hands when it comes to assaults and violence within school grounds. These figures clearly demonstrate

that a stronger precedent needs to be set and a louder message sent to the community. We must instill in the public that there is absolutely no excuse for, nor will there be tolerance of, assaults within school grounds.

Recently, there have been many alarming reports of organised fight clubs operating within some schools. This situation has now reached an unacceptable and out-of-control level. The honourable member for Hinchinbrook mentioned this disturbing trend only minutes ago. The time has come for action on this issue, amid myriad assaults, abuse and altercations on school grounds.

The *Gold Coast Sun*, my local newspaper, which I applaud for its community dedication, reported a few weeks ago on a 17-year-old who hurled abuse at an Elanora State High School teacher while trespassing on that very school ground. A vicious and premeditated fight between girls at Benowa State High School was posted on YouTube late last year, amid outrage from the Gold Coast community at large. The organised fight took place with a crowd watching, baying and jeering and was later posted on the net for all to see. This itself is sickening and highlights the urgent need for new laws to crack down on violence within school grounds.

It is not just happening in Queensland. In June last year, the *Australian* reported that students from Scotch College—one of Melbourne's most exclusive private schools—were discovered to be organising fight clubs in which teenagers ruthlessly beat one another while others captured the violence on video before posting it on the internet. The footage posted on the web shows the two Melbourne school students fighting, while more than 20 others watched the brawl and screamed 'Fight' and 'Get the terrorist'. This is a follow-on from a similar brawl involving Melbourne's Xavier College in October 2006. Also, in June last year ABC News online published a story about the posting of a Brisbane Grammar School brawl on the internet. The video shows one student punching another boy to the ground before repeatedly kicking and punching him in the head.

As honourable members have heard from my colleague the honourable member for Caloundra, this legislation being put forward by the Queensland coalition is relatively similar to the legislation introduced by the New South Wales government in 2003-04. The legislation in New South Wales appears to have been quite a success, with evidence from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research indicating that there have been a number of guilty verdicts in the past three years and that there has been a reduction in the number of AVOs being taken out by teachers against students between 2005 and 2006. This situation in New South Wales is remarkably different to that in our state of Queensland.

The Beattie and Bligh governments have sat on their hands and allowed school violence to flourish. Our schools are suffering because of this fight club culture and because there is no effective legislation in place to deal with assaults in schools. Students in our schools should not be able to act in this deplorable manner and get away with it constantly. We must halt this behaviour now and address this dilemma before these problems stream out of our schools and take root in our communities. Let us face it: if students are allowed to act in such a barbaric manner without facing consequences, they will act this way within society as well. This is not a Queensland that I or my colleagues or our constituents wish to live in.

Consider the Columbine High School massacre of 1999 in which 12 students were killed and the countless examples in Virginia, Pennsylvania and elsewhere which have scarred human society. Where do we draw the line with bullying, harassment and assault which may eventually lead to such tragic events? The place in time to draw that line is here and now, to stop assaults in our schools. Failure to do so by the Bligh government and those members opposite would be advocating, condoning and excusing this appalling behaviour. I urge all honourable members to support this bill, which will effectively help to create a better and safer Queensland with secure and prosperous schools, as it is in the best interests of all Queenslanders to protect our young people and our teachers by addressing the problems of violence and assaults on school grounds.

**Mr Shine:** And halving the penalty.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** This matter is serious, Attorney, and it needs to be tackled now so that schools can return to being places where young minds are stimulated to learn and to thrive. I commend the bill to the House.

**Ms STONE** (Springwood—ALP) (8.07 pm): As the Attorney-General has said, the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill was introduced by the member for Cunningham, the shadow minister for education and training and shadow minister for the Arts, as a private member's bill on 17 October 2007. I note that in his second reading speech the shadow minister stated—

This bill creates the new offence of assault on school grounds, gives teachers and students increased protection, and allows police to conduct investigations into violence in schools.

The bill claims to create a new offence of assault on school grounds, but whether this gives teachers and students increased protection is another matter entirely. As the Attorney-General pointed out, the bill will not have the desired effect for a number of reasons. For starters, the dual definition of stalking which will be inserted into the code creates ambiguity. Having two different definitions of the one word contained in the act is nothing more than drafting recklessness. Putting that aside, the new

offences contained in proposed section 346B of assaulting a student or teacher while they are at school contain a number of elements that are not contained in the common assault provision in the code. So having additional elements will make the offence that much more difficult to prove.

Proposed subsection 346B(2) would make it an offence in the same circumstances where the assault causes actual bodily harm. Again, this provision has additional elements which will make it more difficult to prove. Where the person either wounds or causes grievous bodily harm to a student or teacher attending school and does so unlawfully and with the intent to injure, the penalty under this new section is 14 years. Under the Criminal Code, the offence of wounding or causing grievous bodily harm already carries a penalty of 14 years, and this does not include the necessity to prove the element of intent to injure. Again, we see that the provision will be more difficult to prove and it carries the same penalty that already exists.

There is also a new offence when a person enters a school premises with the intent to commit an offence under the proposed new section. The maximum penalty is five years. Under the Criminal Code at present, it is already an offence to enter a premises—for example, a school—with the intent to commit an indictable offence. This applies to any indictable offence, not just those contained in proposed section 346, and the penalty that is currently provided for this offence is a maximum of 10 years imprisonment. Where they actually commit the offence or carry out their intention they are liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years or life depending on the circumstances.

This is not a bill which provides any greater protection to students or teachers. It is, as the Attorney-General has said, an attempt to use the natural concerns of parents for political point-scoring without even giving them the greater protection it claims to. I heard the member for Caloundra speak about political point-scoring. There is only one lot that is doing that and that is the opposition.

The private member's bill that was debated last sittings was another great example of disgraceful conduct from the opposition. It used our hardworking ambulance and fire officers in the same cynical way for its own political gain as it is doing tonight with parents and teachers. I have lost count of the number of bills the members opposite are introducing into this parliament that are so flawed that it is a disgrace and tonight we see it again. This bill demonstrates laziness. What the bill does is bring this House into disrepute by lowering the standard of debate and legislation that is presented to the people of Queensland through their elected representatives. I only hope that the standard of private members' bills introduced by the opposition into this parliament improves because otherwise we are just going to keep wasting our Wednesday nights sitting here debating more of the same when we could be doing so much more and being so much more productive for the people of Queensland. I certainly cannot support this bill.

**Mr FOLEY** (Maryborough—Ind) (8.11 pm): I rise to speak on the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill. The Attorney-General has said that existing laws are adequate, but one cannot help feel that what this bill is all about is new crime, new time. We do live in a different time altogether than when I was a kid at school. If we look at the increase of 84 in the number of assaults, the percentage is actually 12.96 per cent which is an alarming statistic when just looked at as a statistic, but if we look at it as young people whose self-esteem and physical safety are shattered, things that cannot easily be recovered from, it puts a much more human touch to this whole argument.

The fight clubs, which were a great gift to us from Hollywood, no doubt—I say that with all the cynicism I can muster—are a horrific blight on our system. It is an interesting thing to see young people prepared to do anything so that they can get publicity. If that is not a cry for self-esteem from the kids I do not know what is. We should do everything that we possibly can to enhance the safety of children and teachers in our schools.

To bring in specifics as this bill does compared to using general legislation will only enhance the situation: creating a new offence of assault on school grounds, giving teachers and students increased protection and particularly allowing police to conduct investigations into violence in schools. As many schools seek to get increased funding and reach benchmarks, they will be tempted to give sanitised reports on how the school is doing and perhaps be tempted to sweep incidents that may happen at school under the carpet, but if students know that there may be a police investigation into the particular shenanigans that they get up to that might be a very sobering wake-up call.

We are in an era of new crime with cyberbullying, fight club videos and so forth. Five years for filmed fights sends a very, very strong message to kids that this is not a situation that will be tolerated. As a father of five kids I think that sometimes it is easy to debate these things as an academic exercise, but I ask each member here tonight to reflect and consider whether they might feel a little differently if it were their sons or daughters who were bashed senseless in a school bullying incident.

It is interesting that the figures are almost double the number of reported assaults on public transport and in health facilities, yet we are horrified and sickened by this. Every time I put the news on and hear another story of someone being bashed at a railway station or being set upon by a cowardly group it absolutely sickens me to the core. Yet this figure is nowhere near as high as the figure for what is happening in our school system. Again I say that it is a case of new crime for a new time.

It is interesting that in the information on the bills there is strong evidence from New South Wales that such a legislative response has been effective as part of a broader approach to addressing youth violence. I remind the House that the government in question in New South Wales is a Labor government. One of the failings of our parliamentary system is the fact that if the government introduces legislation the opposition thinks it is rubbish and if the opposition introduces something like this tonight then it gets rubbished by the government. I call upon the Attorney-General and all other members here to take a much more bipartisan approach to these public safety issues and, in particular, the safety of our children.

**Mr Rickuss** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): I remind the member for Lockyer that the member for Maryborough has the call.

**Mr FOLEY:** I take that interjection. I conclude by saying that after listening to what the Attorney-General said, yes, there are broad definitions of legislation here that at least theoretically cope with the situation, but this bill simply strengthens that situation. Anything that we can do to enhance the safety of our school students and teachers I am all for. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr RICKUSS** (Lockyer—NPA) (8.16 pm): I rise to join the debate on the Criminal Code (Protection of Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill 2007. I support what the member for Maryborough said about the bipartisan approach to good ideas. I note that in other parliaments with upper houses good ideas do actually get through the upper houses and therefore are treated with a bit more standing.

The Criminal Code needs to reflect the needs of modern society. That is what the member for Cunningham has done with this excellent piece of legislation. It reflects the needs of modern society. The world has changed since the poor old Attorney-General went to school. He probably got knocked around the head a bit when he was at school and he has not come off too well from it. The world has changed since he was at school, with the use of MySpace, the internet and mobile phones. There really is a need for this type of legislation that will reflect the needs of our modern society. The bill will assist to create a non-violent environment at schools and that is really what both sides of the parliament are after—a non-violent place for teachers, students and staff to participate in. I am sure that the Attorney-General will agree that that is what we want. In relation to the 732 assaults on school grounds, does the minister know how many of those were in high schools?

**Mr Shine:** It is your bill.

**Mr RICKUSS:** They are not broken down into high school assaults. It would be interesting to see the difference between high school and primary school assaults. It was probably too onerous to drag that out of the data. Unfortunately, we already have less than 50 per cent of the available students in the metropolitan area attending state high schools. This bill will make our state high schools a safer place to attend. With less than 50 per cent of the students in the Brisbane metro area actually attending state high schools I think we need to encourage students to go to these state schools. I have some wonderful state high schools in my area. We need to make them safe environments for the students, teachers and staff. Similar legislation is working in New South Wales. We on this side of the House accept good ideas. I do not think the shadow minister has been too proud to acknowledge that the legislation is working in New South Wales.

**Mr Messenger:** Introduced by Labor.

**Mr RICKUSS:** It was introduced by Labor. It is a good idea and a good idea is a good idea. It is as simple as that. Unfortunately, the Attorney-General will not accept a good idea. I am a bit disappointed in that. I thought he was of greater stature than that.

**Mr Shine:** Are you saying Lockyer High is an unsafe school?

**Mr RICKUSS:** No, I am not saying that Lockyer State High School is an unsafe school. It is a good school. However, I would like it to be safer and I would like there to be fewer threats to students, staff and parents who are at the school or involved with the school. That is what I would really like to see happen. That is what this bill would do if it were passed.

MySpace, the internet, mobile phones, fight clubs—all those sorts of things—actually have changed society. One of the other high schools in my electorate had some bad press when some fights were screened on Channel 7 or *A Current Affair*. The following year the enrolments dropped dramatically, and that is a fact of life. I will not name the school because it is actually a very good school and has great facilities, great teachers and great staff. I am old enough to say that when I was at school some of the private schools held boxing as a sport. That was in some of the Brothers schools. Attorney, did you go to any of the schools that had boxing as a sport?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): Order! I would ask the member to direct his comments through the chair.

**Mr RICKUSS:** Right up until the sixties some of the schools actually held boxing as a sport. It was done with gloves and the Brothers would supervise it. Now, unfortunately, it is done behind the sheds and quite often it is video recorded on mobile phones and sold off to the highest bidder.

A real example of how the world has changed was the incident of the streaker who appeared at the Gabba the other night. He received \$7,500 for appearing on *A Current Affair* afterwards. This is the sort of money that can be made from these indiscretions. These are examples of how the world has moved on. Unfortunately, this Labor government is not moving with the world. It wants to stay back in the fifties, when it was in power prior to the conservatives modernising Queensland. It is still back in the fifties in terms of some of its thinking. The shadow minister has done a wonderful job with this bill. I fully support the bill.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (8.22 pm): I rise to speak to the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff From Assaults) Amendment Bill. I noticed that in the shadow minister's second reading speech he said that the coalition has long maintained a policy of protecting teachers and students in the sanctity of school. I agree with this policy and so would everybody in this chamber. The teachers—now and in the past—have a very challenging job of not only educating our children for life but also giving them a measure of safety and protection while they are within the school grounds. Teachers have to be vigilant in protecting children not just from people outside the school but also from parents or others who might attempt to come on to school grounds for inappropriate reasons. Some students lack self-control and there are issues of bullying in the schoolyard. It is very difficult for teachers to be able to adjudicate in terms of provocation and appropriate response by students of varying ages, some of whom are old enough to have learnt good coping and negotiating skills. However, many are either too young to or do not have the right personality.

Teachers today are faced with a huge number of challenges. As a generic comment, people in the community expect a huge amount from teachers. They are not only responsible for educating their students but we are heading down the track where often the catchcry is, 'We'll get the teachers at the school to do that.' I am not arguing the right or wrong of it. It is expected that they will teach children how to eat properly, have good manners and negotiate in the schoolyard in terms of personal interaction. If we are not careful, they will have so much on their plates in terms of what the community and the legislators expect them to do in the six hours they have the students at school that education will become a poor cousin.

I have the greatest respect for schoolteachers. That is not to say that there are not one or two whom we come across who themselves have some difficulties in interpersonal relationships. That at times can cause problems not only for the parents and students but certainly for the school administration. That is an acknowledgement on my part of reality. I have good schools in my electorate and good principals and great teachers. However, there have been incidents in which parents have contacted me with a complaint that a teacher may not be listening to their concern about their son or daughter. On a couple of occasions those complaints have been from parents who are fairly volatile people to deal with. Certainly the teachers and, to some extent, other students would have a measure of concern if those parents regularly interacted with the school staff on school property.

The principle of giving as much protection as possible to the school staff as well as the students at the school is very important. Not only do we have, as I have already said, students who sometimes have difficulty in personal interactions and parents—and they are often the parents of the same students—sadly there are incidents—and it probably occurs more in America than over here—in which people without any real contact with the school enter the schoolyard with the wrong motives. All schools now have to have in place lockdown procedures to deal with those sorts of incidents.

As I said, I did not hear all of the Attorney-General's comments in relation to his concerns with this bill. However, the principle of increased protection for students and for teachers at schools is important. Teachers should be free to educate and to prepare students without the threat of violence from either other students or other adults coming into the school grounds. I will be interested to hear the shadow minister's summing-up in terms of his comments on the speeches of the Attorney-General and other speakers in opposition to this bill. As I said, I support the principle. I commend the teachers not only in my electorate but across Queensland who in the main offer an excellent opportunity for young boys and girls, and young men and women to endeavour to reach their full potential. Schoolteachers, principals and other support staff in the educational sphere really are a gift to us. I certainly support providing added protection for them. As I said, I support the principle of the bill and I will be interested in hearing the summing-up.

**Hon. DM WELLS** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (8.27 pm): For centuries, our culture has preferred justice to be blind. Our laws do not require that a victim prove who they are or what status they have but only that they have suffered harm. Yet we have before us a proposition that we create offences which can only be committed if the Crown can prove that the victim is duly enrolled as a student or is employed as a teacher at a particular school. For centuries our culture has preferred that the majesty of the law does not lower its aegis because a citizen goes from one public venue to another. Yet we have before us a



proposition that an assault should be treated as less serious and its punishment should be less severe if the perpetrator waits until the victim steps outside of the school boundary. This bill rewards premeditation.

It would be actually harder for the prosecution to prove the offences this bill would create than to prove existing offences. It would not be sufficient to prove that the victim was assaulted, stalked or harassed. Under this bill it would be necessary to prove that they were enrolled or employed at a school, that their enrolment or employment were valid, that the events occurred at the school and that all the elements of the offence occurred in these circumstances.

If in fact the situation was complex—for example, if it included text messages sent from outside of the school or, as in the story in today's paper, it involved a group of people some of whom were at the school and some of whom were not, or if some of the acts which constituted the offence occurred outside of the school—then the charge might fail. If the prosecution had not also laid the alternative charge—that is, the existing law—the culprit would get off. A smart defence lawyer could drive a horse and buggy through the gaps in this legislation. I do not doubt that the opposition is sincerely concerned about violence in our schools—as we all are—but this will not fix it. Youth violence is very confronting, especially when it is promoted and premeditated and put on YouTube or when it is immortalised on the TV news.

I am sure, and I accept opposition speakers' assurances on this subject, that such things never happened when honourable members were at school. Back then, undoubtedly nobody ever agreed to have a fight up behind the shelter shed at recess and certainly nobody ever ambushed or planned to ambush an unpopular kid at the bike rack when the teachers were not looking. We all know that those things happened then, as they happen now. Now they are on YouTube; back then they were not. But it was bad then and it is bad now. The problem is that this bill does nothing to fix it. In his second reading speech the member for Cunningham stated—

Penalties for offences addressed in this Bill need to be unique and varied.

They can and will include community service and probationary services to deal with developmental issues.

I have scrutinised the bill to see if I can find any reference to these unique and varied penalties. The only penalties provided in the bill are the maximum penalties for each of the offences which in every case is a term of imprisonment. There is nothing unique and varied about changing three years to five years or making any of the other alterations that the opposition is proposing. Every single one of these alterations, however, is nugatory, because not only is the opposition moving the wrong amendments; it is moving amendments to the wrong act. Almost all of the behaviour to which this opposition bill is directed is the behaviour of people aged 17 years or less—people whose sentencing is governed by part 7 of the Juvenile Justice Act, not the Criminal Code which we are here amending tonight.

Courts sentencing such people, if this legislation were passed, would still have to do so according to the detailed sentencing provisions of the juvenile justices legislation. In practical terms, the opposition's amendment would have no effect whatsoever. All we see is a bit of cosmetic window-dressing which is being applied to an act of parliament in respect of which it will have no result. We are getting rhetoric and we are getting bleeding-heart declarations of how much those opposite are concerned about youth violence, and they come here with a measure making the wrong amendments to the wrong legislation. The only people who would actually, as a result of these amendments, feel the full force of the opposition's tough law-and-order stance would be the minuscule number of mature-age students who go to the trouble of going back to school after being away for a while and then fall into the habit of playing up and behaving very badly. I doubt that this is what the opposition actually intended. It is not that silly. I forebear from estimating exactly how silly it is, but the people of Queensland deserve better than this opposition legislation.

**Mr WELLINGTON** (Nicklin—Ind) (8.34 pm): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak to the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill 2007. I support the intent of this bill. The member for Cunningham has tried to bring forward debate in this House so that we can be aware that there is an issue of concern in our community. I listened to government members say that this is a waste of time and a waste of space. I certainly do not share that view. This is an opportunity for this parliament and for all members to focus on an issue that is very real and present in many of our schools, whether we like it or not. When I go around to schools in my electorate and schools adjoining my electorate I speak to parents and ask why they have taken their children out of state schools and put them into private schools, and often it is related to the issue of violence.

There are far too many teachers and principals in our state schools acting in positions. There is no stability, there is no security and basically there is no real leadership. It is time we not only considered the issues that the member for Cunningham has raised in this bill but also looked at the bigger issues in terms of leadership and violence control and making sure that, wherever possible, there are full-time principals and full-time teachers serving in full-time positions. There are far too many teachers acting in teachers' positions and far too many principals in our state schools acting in principals' positions. There is not the level of stability and there is not the level of leadership that we desperately need in our state schools.

More importantly, I have a real concern that there are not enough males teaching in our schools. We do not have that leadership position from the man to provide that stability that is often required. There are very wonderful women teachers, but I believe that we need to keep the balance and the balance needs to be fair and even. Unfortunately, at the moment we do not have enough males teaching in our state schools because of concerns of unfounded allegations and the difficulties that they simply have to put up with. I support the intent of this bill and I hope that this debate may prompt government members to think about other ways in which we can improve safety in our state schools. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mrs MENKENS** (Burdekin—NPA) (8.36 pm): I rise to speak to the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill. I am very happy to support the shadow minister in this initiative. This is an important area that he has highlighted, and I must commend him for bringing this issue to the forefront in order to discuss it in a forum such as this tonight. I urge government members to lend their support to this legislation because this is not a party-political issue. We are not talking party politics. It is an important social issue, and it is a social issue that has begun to emerge with much more frequency in recent years. Protecting our children and, in association with those children, the people who are responsible for them should be of the highest priority in any community, and that is what this bill before the House tonight does.

The objective of the legislation is to introduce a number of offences that will protect both teachers and students from assaults and physical intimidation whilst on school grounds. The reasons for the bill have been outlined very succinctly, and I have no doubt that previous speakers in this debate have gone through those reasons in quite a lot of detail. The explanatory notes indicate that 732 assaults were reported on educational facilities during 2005-06 which represented an increase of 84 assaults from the previous reporting year. These are statistics that cannot be ignored. We just cannot walk away from these statistics without seriously looking at them. It is an appalling number, particularly when this figure is compared with the figure that applies to public transport facilities, health facilities and the like. The number of assaults in educational facilities is almost double those other numbers. I note also from the explanatory notes that educational facilities have the highest recorded number of assaults of any institutional setting. That is absolutely appalling, bearing in mind that these are our children—these are our vulnerable members of the community—yet educational facilities are where the highest level of assaults occurs. For heaven's sake!

Queensland students and department of education staff deserve far better legislative protection than they have currently. Victims of violence within school grounds should have the full protection of the law. This legislation is similar to that which exists in New South Wales. There is strong evidence in New South Wales that such a legislative response has had a really positive effect on addressing this type of violence within school grounds. All members in this chamber would agree that our schools should be safe places. But I ask members: are they safe places? How safe are our schools and what are we doing about it? Schools should be safe places for both students and staff. But, unfortunately, in today's society that is not always the case. As a society our teachers and students should be able to attend school without fear of assault or intimidation. This bill seeks to introduce more protection for members of the school community.

Teachers have always had the welfare of their charges at heart. Unfortunately, over recent years their responsibility for the safety of their students has developed into a much more demanding role, adding further stress to what is at times a stressful, even though rewarding, career. So much more pressure is put on teachers now. They have to play the role of parents, comforters and carers. All of that extra responsibility is being put on them because of where society is going. At the end of the day, teachers also have to watch their back so that they can protect themselves from what could happen to them. That is just not acceptable.

As well, sadly, by their very nature at times schools attract paedophiles to the area. School staff members have to be constantly alert for any danger to the children in their care. Schools now have lockdown procedures that are carried out for the protection of students should the school be notified of any undesirable characters reported in proximity of the school. Of course, this is always a danger and an ongoing problem.

There has been a huge increase in violent incidents and assaults, particularly among young people within the community. No doubt many studies have been done on why this increase in violence has occurred. The evidence points to the situations of many of our children in today's society. Research consistently shows that there is a correlation between the maltreatment of children as they are growing up and negative life outcomes. These negative life outcomes can lead to juvenile delinquency and, very sadly, the evidence shows that that leads to criminal behaviour. Children who have violent home situations naturally exhibit these same types of behaviour when they are out. As well, sadly, this becomes an ever-increasing spiralling trend. It enlarges with generations and this must be addressed.

A sign of the times is the increasing number of educational institutions that have full- or part-time chaplains attached to them. I applaud this initiative. Those chaplains provide support to the school community, they provide spiritual guidance and they help counsel students during stressful times. Their assistance in helping these students cope with the pressures of study, peer pressure and that of their friends and family is invaluable.

**Mr Rickuss** interjected.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer. School chaplains do a marvellous job. I really applaud the work that these good people do. It is a magnificent achievement. The fact that they are being funded and provided for is a tremendous initiative. I have no doubt that, as time goes on, we will see positive results from the efforts of the school chaplains, particularly with those students who are coming to terms with difficult home environments. Those students who have problems at home then kick out at the rest of the world when they go to school.

Principals and school staff set up specific programs to develop supportive and safe learning environments for their students so that they have the best environment in which they can thrive and be successful. There is lots of information available and techniques also on hand to assist the school community in the prevention of school violence. But at the end of the day, no matter how professional these school environments are, violence is still occurring. Staff and students often work in an atmosphere where their safety is at a very real risk. Therefore, we need legislation to afford protection to students and staff from assault and intimidation while they are attending school. This legislation should be supported. We owe that to our teachers, we owe that to our support staff, we owe that to our students. We owe it to them to provide places of learning that are welcoming and safe for all. I truly support this legislation. I commend the shadow minister for bringing it to the House. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr COPELAND** (Cunningham—NPA) (8.45 pm), in reply: At the outset, I thank all of my coalition colleagues who have supported the bill that I introduced and the Independent members who have also stated their support for the principles of this bill. I am disappointed, but not at all surprised, that the government is not supporting this bill. After all, it is a private member's bill and the government does not support private member's bills regardless of the principles involved or the validity of the concerns that are raised within them. I do not think I have ever seen a private member's bill put forward by the opposition that has been supported. But one day it might happen. We get a lot of criticism from the government for not providing bipartisan support, but we never, ever see bipartisan support provided by the government to the opposition. That might change one day, but I suspect not while this government is in power. Can I also say—

**An opposition member:** They can't even see a good idea when it's put in front of them.

**Mr COPELAND:** That is right. The government cannot see a good idea when it is put in front of it. I am particularly disappointed that a number of the members of the government who made contributions dismissed this debate tonight as a waste of the parliament's time. As the member for Nicklin said—and he said it quite rightly—he did not regard this debate as a waste of time, because violence is a concern within our community and it is certainly a concern for parents and teachers at our schools. For the government members to say that it is a waste of this parliament's time to be debating this bill I think shows how ridiculous that statement is and how removed they are from the reality of what is going on in our schools and the valid concerns that are held by the people who are involved in our school communities.

**Mr Rickuss:** They don't want to modernise society.

**Mr COPELAND:** As the member for Lockyer said, the members opposite do not want to modernise. We have moved on. Our schools are different places today. The internet is a real feature. Glorifying violence has become a routine thing to be shown on the internet. There has been an increase in violent activity at our schools against teachers and students. As a parliament, we have to send a very clear message that violence in our schools simply will not be tolerated. That is what the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff From Assaults) Amendment Bill 2007 is about. It is about sending a very clear message to our community that we will not tolerate any violent activity in our schools to our teachers, to our staff and to our students. It is an unfortunate side effect of developments within our community that we even have to debate this bill. I wish violence in schools was not a problem that we had to confront. But it is. It is real, it is happening in our schools and we need to address it.

Earlier today there was a debate regarding teachers, health professionals and others who may feel for their safety. In preparation for that debate I asked the Parliamentary Library to do a quick search of some media stories for me. It was interesting to note the number of stories that had been written in recent times about violence in our schools. I will run through the headlines: 'Teachers bullied more in public schools', 'Snarl, you're on bully camera as schools act', 'Violent kids run amok in schools', 'Stressed teachers paid to stay out of class', 'Class wars—our school shame: 1000 students banned each week', 'Bid to stem violence in classrooms', 'Teachers want code to curb student, parent bullying', 'Sin bin may be cure for school thug menace', 'Violence in classrooms ruins lives', 'Teachers to be taught self defence', 'Student aims fake revolver at teacher', '1300 classroom assaults on teachers—under siege', 'Terror tales from blackboard jungle', 'Lesson in violence', 'Teachers plan to sue over violent pupils', 'It's war in our schools'.

Those are the sorts of reports that we hear time and time again, and we need to address them. I was intrigued to read through one particularly interesting newspaper article that the Parliamentary Library found. I will quote a reasonable amount of it because I think it is instructive to the parliament, particularly about how this government operates and has operated for a number of years. The headline is 'Save us from parent rage—principals want abuse outlawed'. It states—

ANGRY school principals are demanding the State Government introduce laws to protect them from violent and abusive parents. The Queensland Association of State School Principals has called a meeting this month to formulate a proposal to convince the Government such incidents need to be made illegal under the Criminal Code.

That is what we are proposing in this private member's bill. It continues—

Association president Tom Hardy said school staff, students and visiting parents had the right to be safe and protected from violent or abusive intruders.

Mr Hardy said harassment was becoming 'more frequent and that's why we're taking this action.'

'We know as professionals you can't legislate for the removal of this kind of thing but it may be a deterrent,' he said.

'It would serve to inform the community that these behaviours are just not acceptable.'

Mr Hardy said principals were dealing with people who lived 'more and more on the edge of desperation'.

'They find that the school is an easy target—the school and the people within it', he said.

'They bring their trauma and tensions from home into school.'

The article continues—

Australian Principals Federation President Terry Howard said other states should follow the lead of New South Wales, which had stringent penalties for people coming from off-campus and causing problems.

'In New South Wales you can receive a jail sentence just for coming onto the school grounds with the intention of verbal or physical assault', he said.

Education Minister Anna Bligh said it would never be acceptable for parents to attack school staff.

'This sort of behaviour also sets an appalling example for students,' she said.

'Parents are not welcome at schools if they are acting violently.'

There are procedures in place for parents to lodge complaints, and threatening people at schools is not one of them.

I have asked my department for advice on the suggestions being made by the principals' associations and we will consider all possible options.'

When did that happen? 18 May 2003! That was five years ago. When the Premier was the education minister she said she would do something about it. What has been done?

**Opposition members:** Nothing!

**Mr Rickuss:** A bit like the locks on the doors.

**Mr COPELAND:** Yes, flick it off again. The government says, 'Yes, we'll have a look at it and see what we can do.'

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Moorhead): Order! Members, there is too much audible conversation in the chamber. Please keep it to a minimum. If you need to have a conversation, please go outside.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. That shows the disregard the members of the government have for this bill. As we have seen time and time again, when an issue such as this arises government ministers will say anything to make the story go away. They will say, 'We are going to address it. We'll look at it. We'll do something. We'll look at what the principals are asking for.' What has happened? Nothing! It is five years later and the opposition has introduced a bill to take seriously the issue of violence in our schools, yet government members say it is a disgrace and a waste of this parliament's time to even discuss the issue.

The private member's bill that we have introduced is based very closely on the New South Wales act that was referred to in that 2003 *Sunday Mail* article. For the interest of members, I table the relevant section from the Crimes Act New South Wales.

*Tabled paper:* Page from the web site of NSW Consolidated Acts downloaded on 27 February 2008 titled Crimes Act 1900—SECT 60E.

The legislation was introduced by the New South Wales Labor government and has been in operation since 2003-04. The New South Wales experience is that it has been effective, it has been of assistance and it has been a worthwhile move. Certainly the principals' associations think that it was a worthwhile move because they have been calling for the other states to do exactly the same thing. In 2003 they were calling for Queensland to do the same thing. However, what have we seen? Absolutely nothing!

Violence in our schools is a serious issue. Unfortunately, the number of incidents is growing. We have to stamp it out. We have to address it. We cannot keep our heads in the sand as the government appears to do. We cannot pretend that the issue will go away on its own. Clearly the current provisions are not working. They do not address the issue. They do not fix the problem. We need to change the way that we are addressing it.

If the government thought that the principle of this bill was worth examining, it would support the vote during its second reading stage. If government members thought it could be improved, they would introduce amendments to it. Clearly by voting against the bill at the second reading stage, the government is voting against the principle of the bill. It is voting against the principle of getting rid of violence in our schools. It is voting against sending a very clear message throughout the community that we do not accept violent behaviour against staff or students in our schools. Our schools should be a sanctuary where people can learn in a safe, caring and compassionate environment.

Instead, the government will vote against the bill at the second reading stage, sending a very clear message that it does not take the bill seriously. That is a shame and it needs to be addressed. The principals' associations thought it needed to be addressed in 2003 and since then things have only got worse. The Criminal Code provisions that currently exist have not led to a decrease in the violence in our schools. Schools have recorded the highest number of assaults of any public institution, and that is not acceptable. By voting against this bill the government is sending a very clear message. I urge all parents, teachers and principals to take very clear note of what the government is doing tonight. I commend the bill to the House.

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

**AYES, 30**—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Elmes, Flegg, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, Lingard, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeney, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Rickuss, Dickson

**NOES, 51**—Attwood, Barry, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, English, Fenlon, Finn, Fraser, Grace, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Jones

Resolved in the negative.

## **CORONERS AND BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES REGISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL**

### **Second Reading**

Resumed from 17 October 2007 (see p. 3654), on motion of Mr Langbroek—

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Hon. KG SHINE** (Toowoomba North—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland) (9.03 pm): The government will not be supporting the Coroners and Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill 2007. The bill seeks to implement the recommendations for legislative change made in the report of the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry, the Davies report.

The bill seeks to implement the Davies report recommendations by (a) inserting a new category for reportable death into the Coroners Act, mainly deaths which occur within 30 days of an elective health procedure—that is, health procedures that could be delayed for 24 hours without the death of a person who is to undergo the health procedure being a likely outcome of the delay; (b) providing in the Coroners Act that where a person's death occurs in the above circumstances the doctor in charge of the procedure must report their opinion as to the cause of death to a coroner; and (c) amending the births, deaths and marriages act to provide that where a person dies in a public hospital the doctor responsible for the deceased person's care must complete the cause of death certificate.

The government considers that a Davies style automatic reporting requirement, whereby every death within 30 days of an elective health procedure has to be reported to a coroner, will be costly and problematic. This is because any prescribed time frame is arbitrary. Any distinction between an elective and a non-elective health procedure is artificial. It will not necessarily capture every death warranting coronial scrutiny but will certainly capture a significant number that do not and will cause families unnecessary distress and unfounded concern. The government considers that a front-end administrative response based on timely death review processes in all hospitals is a more effective means of delivering the intent of the Davies recommendations.

The Queensland Health Quality and Complaints Commission death review standard, which became operational on 1 July 2007, provides just such a front-end measure. The HQCC standard applies to all deaths in public and private—and I emphasise private—hospitals, including day surgery centres; deaths in hospital emergency departments if the patient has not been admitted; and deaths occurring in the community within 30 days of discharge from the hospital, the latter relying on general practitioner-specialist doctor reporting. Under the HQCC death review standard, these deaths will be subject to hospital review and checks to ensure deaths that qualify under the criteria of reportable deaths under the Coroners Act are reported to the coroner and all cause-of-death certificates are accurate and comprehensive. The government considers that time should be allowed to ascertain

whether the HQCC standard achieves the underlying intent of the Davies report recommendations. The process has not even been in place for a year. In fact, it had only been in operation for a little over three months when the opposition presented this bill to the parliament.

Finally, the government considers it impractical to require that the doctor responsible for the deceased person's care in a public hospital always certifies cause of death. Where a death occurs within 30 days after discharge from hospital, the doctor may no longer work at the hospital or may be on extended leave overseas. To require that in all circumstances the doctor who provided the patient's care in the hospital must sign the death certificate is cumbersome and will cause unnecessary delays in registration of deaths and therefore issue of death certificates in some situations. This delay may cause hardship for families trying to sort out financial arrangements.

This bill, introduced by the member for Surfers Paradise, is ill conceived, will cause unnecessary delays for families in making financial arrangements at a time when they are already suffering and will cause unnecessary distress and concern by family members where a coroner is required to unnecessarily investigate a death. Families want to know that a family member who dies when in hospital has received the best care possible. The death review standard strikes the correct balance in ensuring accountability of hospitals whilst recognising the rights of family members to have the least intrusion into their lives as possible at a difficult and painful time for them. For these reasons, the government will not support the bill.

**Mr DEMPSEY** (Bundaberg—NPA) (9.09 pm): I rise to support the Coroners and Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill 2007. The objectives of the bill are to amend the Coroners Act 2003 and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 to implement the recommendations made by the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report—specifically, the recommendations made at 7.50, paragraphs (a) and (b), of the report.

There are two very important clauses in the bill which I wish to bring to the attention of the House tonight. The first is clause 3, which would amend section 8 of the Coroners Act 2003 by amending when a death is reportable under section 8.3. A new paragraph would be inserted in this section to provide for a new circumstance of when a death is a reportable death. The new circumstance is when a person dies within 30 days after the person underwent an elective health procedure. The other clause I wish to mention is clause 4, which would insert a new section 10B into the Coroners Act 2003. The new section 10B would require that, in the event of a person's death within 30 days of an elective health procedure, the doctor in charge of that procedure must report their opinion as to the cause of death to a coroner, thus continuing their responsibility in relation to that patient.

Under the current Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003, a death certificate can only be issued if a doctor is able to form an opinion as to the probable cause of death. Where a cause of death certificate cannot be issued, the death becomes subject to a coronial system, and we all know that a coronial system can inflict a lot of grief and suffering onto family members. The Davies report identified loopholes in the current laws which can allow senior doctors to instruct junior doctors to certify the cause of death based on false and/or misleading opinion, thus evading the examination of the coroner. As Davies submitted, this gives rise to the risk of concealment of medical error or neglect or, more seriously, crime or other wrongdoings.

This bill is a common-sense approach to assist risk management procedures in our health system. This legislation also protects medical workers and puts in place regulations that take away the 'Trust me, it'll be all right' attitude and replaces it with concise and thorough guidelines in the future.

By supporting this bill, we are bringing the current Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 into modern accountable practices. Families deserve an open, transparent and thorough working system to protect them and their rights. We also need systems that streamline and give responsibility back to those who are directly responsible at the time. I support the bill before the House.

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—NPA) (9.13 pm): In rising to contribute and support the Coroners and Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill 2007, I congratulate the shadow spokesperson for health, the member for Surfers Paradise. This is an intelligent, incisive, timely private member's bill which has been introduced into the parliament. Unlike the Attorney-General, the member for Surfers Paradise has learnt the lessons of Bundaberg. He appreciates the fact that in this parliament we as politicians, as legislators, have the ability to make life and death decisions. This is one of those cases.

When we make the right decision, people live; when we make the wrong decision, people may lose their lives, people could die. This is one of those pieces of legislation before this chamber tonight. If we make the right decision, people will live; if we make the wrong decision, people will die. I suggest that voting against this legislation will be a case of making the wrong decision and unnecessarily endangering people's lives.

People who vote against this bill do not respect the people of Queensland and do not respect the \$6 million that has been spent on royal commissions and investigations. The recommendations that form the basis of this bill come directly from a very eminent person, a retired Supreme Court judge. Obviously, we are going to have those opposite who think they know better, that they are more intelligent, that they can come up with better solutions. I do not think so.

This amendment through the Coroners and Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill has come about after the Hon. Geoffrey Davies found a number of significant flaws in the Coroners Act 2003 while carrying out the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry. I remind the House that this was an inquiry that not only cost \$6 million but cost the lives of 87 people as well. There is a lot of money mixed in with that inquiry and there is also the blood of a lot of people.

Despite extremely controversial circumstances surrounding the deaths of patients at the Bundaberg Base Hospital, the deaths of only two patients—that being Des Bramich and Mr Nagle—out of 17 were initially reported to the coroner under the Coroners Act 2003. I well remember the death of Des Bramich. It was the death that prompted Toni Hoffman to come and visit me. His wife, Tess, contacted my office around October 2004. I went and visited Tess. Mr Bramich's death came about in peculiar circumstances. He was underneath a caravan and the caravan fell and crushed him and he was rushed to the Bundaberg Base Hospital. Just 24 hours after his injuries there was a photo taken of him sitting up in his hospital bed looking hale and hearty, but 48 hours later he was dead. That death was a pivotal death in the events that happened at the Bundaberg Base Hospital and it prompted Toni Hoffman to blow the whistle. It was a death that affected Toni greatly and it was a death that affected the communities of Agnes Water and the Town of 1770 greatly.

**Mr Stevens:** Thank God she did.

**Mr MESSENGER:** And thank God she did; I take that interjection. I wrote to the health minister of the day probably about seven months before Toni Hoffman came to me, and I was fobbed off by the health minister of the day on that death. I was told that there were legal proceedings, from memory, and therefore it could not be pursued. But this government knew about Des Bramich's death seven months before Toni Hoffman came and saw me and this government did nothing about it. Perhaps if this legislation had been in place, something may have been done about it, lives might have been saved. This is why this legislation is so important. The Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report stated—

Under s7 of the Act, the duty to immediately report a death was imposed upon all who became aware of a death that appeared to be reportable and who did not reasonably believe that someone else had already reported or was reporting it.

The report continued—

At the Bundaberg Base Hospital and, perhaps, generally within Queensland Health, there appeared to be no adequate system of audit or review of deaths to ensure there were no instances of misstatement or mis-diagnosis of deaths or whether treatment may have caused or contributed to any death.

The Davies report revealed clear inadequacies—let me say that again for those opposite: clear inadequacies—in the current laws which allowed a doctor who was employed, and I will mention his name, Patel, to instruct junior doctors to verify the cause of—

**Mr SHINE:** I rise to a point of order. As the honourable member would be well aware, there is a case on foot in relation to that matter and I ask you to direct the honourable member to be extremely cautious in relation to his comments.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead):** The standing orders make it clear that you cannot refer to facts or issues that might be in question in criminal trials that are on foot. I would ask you to observe that very carefully so that criminal trials may not be prejudiced.

**Mr MESSENGER:** I appreciate your direction. Davies recommended that the Coroners Act 2003 be amended by adding a new subparagraph s(8)(3) after subparagraph (d) to read, 'The death happened within 30 days of an elective procedure.' This is an addition to the legislation that I think the people of Townsville and patients who were operated on in the cardiothoracic unit, where there have been allegations of higher than normal mortality rates, would be very happy to have. I have been speaking to whistleblowers who have worked in the cardiothoracic unit and they would like it to cover not only people who have died on the table but also those who have presented a week to two weeks later with strokes and have died. They are the people we want to catch with this. We want to work out exactly why those deaths occurred and whether those deaths were as a result of previous operations. That way we would pick up what is going wrong.

Davies recommended that the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 be amended to ensure that, in the event of a death happening within 30 days of an elective health procedure, the health practitioner in charge of the procedure is obliged to provide to the coroner his opinion on the cause of the death. He recommended also that it be amended to ensure that all deaths otherwise occurring in public hospitals are certified by the health practitioner responsible for the care of the deceased person; that a dedicated medical officer be appointed to the State Coroners Office to assist in determining whether deaths happening within a stipulated period of an elective health procedure are required to be further investigated and to assist in the conduct of that investigation; and that a panel of specialist persons trained in the various health service disciplines be appointed and given such powers

as are considered necessary to enable coroners to consult with and receive assistance from such persons on an hourly or part-time basis for the purpose of determining whether deaths happening within the stipulated period of an elective health procedure should be investigated.

In summary, this bill seeks to implement a number of these recommendations. If they are enacted they will apply to all hospitals throughout Queensland, whether in the public or private sector, including regional and remote Queensland. This will protect Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The bill will ensure that all deaths that are not the reasonably expected outcome which occur within the perioperative period of an elective health procedure are subjected to investigation by the coroner. This bill will save lives. There is no doubt about it. I cannot believe that this government will not present itself on a bipartisan basis in this chamber to pass this bill. It is very well thought out and researched and going on the recommendations of an eminent person. I support this bill wholeheartedly.

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (9.23 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Coroners and Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill. In doing so I congratulate the shadow minister for health, the member for Surfers Paradise, for bringing this private member's bill forward. The objectives of the bill are to amend the Coroners Act 2003 and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 to implement the recommendations made by the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report, also known as the Davies inquiry after the commissioner, the Hon. Geoffrey Davies AO. The Davies inquiry was completed in November 2005.

Specifically, the bill proposes to implement the recommendations in chapter 7 of the report made at 7.50 paragraphs (a) and (b) of the report which are as follows—

#### Recommendations

7.50 I make the following recommendations:

(a) The Coroners Act 2003 be amended by:

...

- (i) adding a new subparagraph to s8(3) after subparagraph (d) to read:  
'The death happened within 30 days of an elective health procedure'.
- (ii) adding a new definition in Schedule 2, to read:  
'Elective Health Procedure' means a health procedure that can be delayed for a period of 24 hours without death being a likely outcome.'

...

(b) The Births Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 be amended to ensure that:

- (i) in the event of a death happening within 30 days of an elective health procedure, the health practitioner in charge of the procedure is obliged to provide to the coroner his opinion on the cause of death;
- (ii) all deaths otherwise occurring in public hospitals are certified by the health practitioner responsible for the care of the deceased person ...

Clause 3 of the bill proposes an amendment to section 8 of the Coroners Act 2003 by amending when a death is a reportable death. A new paragraph is inserted to provide for a new circumstance of when a death is a reportable death. The new circumstance is when a person dies within 30 days after the person underwent an elective health procedure.

Clause 4 of the bill proposes an amendment to the Coroners Act 2003 to require that, in the event of a person's death within 30 days of an elective health procedure, the doctor in charge of the procedure must report their opinion as to the cause of death to a coroner.

Clause 5 of the bill proposes an amendment to schedule 2 of the Coroners Act 2003 by adding the definition of 'elective health procedure'. The new definition defines an elective health procedure as a health procedure that could be delayed for 24 hours without the death of the person who is to undergo the health procedure being a likely outcome of the delay.

Clause 7 proposes an amendment to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 to clarify which doctor must complete a cause of death certificate for a person who died in a hospital run by the state.

The purpose of running through the recommendations of Commissioner Davies in his report and running through the clauses in this bill is so that members can see that this bill faithfully implements the recommendations contained in the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report. Today this parliament should really be asking some serious questions of the state Labor government as to why it has not moved to implement these recommendations of the Davies inquiry despite the fact that we are coming up to 2½ years since that report was provided and recommended these amendments to the Coroners Act and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act.

The state Labor government has been consistently slow to implement a range of matters recommended by the Davies inquiry, and indeed where it has moved sluggishly to implement some changes it has failed to implement them faithfully. For example, in March 2007 this parliament passed the Whistleblowers (Disclosure to Member of Parliament) Amendment Bill. The fifth Parliamentary



Crime and Misconduct Committee of the 51st Parliament supported the views of the Queensland Ombudsman and Commissioner Davies with respect to Queensland's whistleblower legislation. There was a high degree of consensus concerning the nature of changes required to ensure that appropriate levels of protection are afforded to whistleblowers in Queensland.

There were recommendations that Commissioner Davies put forward to provide for strong protection for whistleblowers. Those recommendations were absent from the state government's Whistleblowers (Disclosure to Member of Parliament) Amendment Bill 2006. The recommendations were supported by the fifth PCMC, the Queensland Ombudsman and Commissioner Davies and yet they were not implemented by this government. What is even more damning is that the Queensland opposition had tried to give effect in their entirety to the relevant recommendations of the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report by introducing the Whistleblowers Protection Amendment Bill 2006, but the state Labor government voted it down for base political reasons.

This state government has form as far as putting politics ahead of delivering the best possible legislative arrangements for Queensland is concerned. The same situation applies to this bill. It is extraordinary, after all the rhetoric of this government, that it has not substantially implemented the recommendations of the Davies inquiry. Let us consider the comments of the former Premier, Peter Beattie, after the state government took delivery of the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report in late 2005. In a ministerial statement in this place on 1 December 2005 former Premier Beattie said—

I want to use this opportunity to formally thank the Hon. Geoffrey Davies for his report on the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry. His thorough investigation, which pulled no punches, provides Queensland Health, when added to the Peter Forster report, with a clear way forward.

The former Premier went on to say with respect to the Davies inquiry—

Some of the lessons are difficult. Many of the changes are tough. We are determined to face them head-on.

The former Premier added—

This report puts the patients first, and our response to it will give patients the same priority.

Finally, former Premier Beattie said—

We are now rebuilding the health system. We are making the tough decisions and making the changes required.

Unfortunately, more than two years later the clear way forward provided by Commissioner Davies has not been provided by the state government. The tough lessons have not been learned. The government has not faced them head-on. The government is not putting patients first and the government has failed to rebuild the health system. Certainly, the state government is not making the changes required and this is clearly and unequivocally demonstrated by the fact that it has not implemented the recommendations of the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report despite the fact that in December 2005 the then Premier welcomed it in glowing terms and with open arms.

How times have changed. The Attorney-General, on behalf of the state government, today described Commissioner Davies's recommendations on these matters to be 'arbitrary and too costly'. Frankly, I am horrified and alarmed that the government could be so casual about abandoning key recommendations of the report of the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry, a watershed inquiry in Queensland. I wonder who should tell the Hon. Geoffrey Davies, AO, that the Attorney-General and the state government consider his recommendations to be too costly and arbitrary with respect to these matters?

This bill has great merit. The Davies inquiry arose out of complaints relating to the very serious problems that plagued the Bundaberg Base Hospital. The exposure of these problems by a brave whistleblower and the Queensland coalition led to the uncovering of a much wider culture of secrecy and mediocrity in the Queensland health system presided over by this state Labor government. There is no legitimate reason for the government to oppose this bill save for base political reasons. I commend this bill to the House.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (9.32 pm): I rise to speak to the Coroners and Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill 2007. I would like to put on the record my appreciation for the contribution of the member for Hinchinbrook, who I think spoke in a very convincing manner. The main issue for me in relation to this bill is the policy objectives. The objectives of the bill are to amend the Coroners Act 2003 and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 to implement the recommendations made by the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry report, specifically the recommendations made at 7.50, paragraphs (a) and (b), of the report, and the member for Hinchinbrook read those paragraphs verbatim.

I understand the Attorney-General when he says that anything that is done at this particular point in a family's experience needs to be done sensitively. The death of a loved one is a difficult time. It is a time when necessary legal processes have to be carried out and have to be followed. I have certainly had people who were grieving over a long period of time come and talk to me because of delays in obtaining death certificates, both adult deaths and infant deaths. It certainly is not a situation in which we should be legislating to complicate the matter.

Commissioner Davies made these recommendations to make the process accountable, to put in place safeguards to ensure that deaths that are in any way inexplicable or unexpected are properly investigated. I have been meeting with one of the funeral parlour owners in my electorate who is concerned about some changes in the process. Previously they were able to collect deceased persons from their home and take them straight to the funeral home. They are saying that now they have to take them to the mortuary before they can be removed to the funeral home. I am yet to get to the bottom of that situation. That is a complication that is unnecessary where there are clear indications as to the cause of death.

I believe that the implementation of the recommendations made by the commission of inquiry is important. Unless there are clear and compelling reasons why recommendations should not be implemented then they should be followed through. From my perspective I do not believe that clear reasons have been given as to why this recommendation should not be brought to fruition. I support the bill.

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (9.34 pm), in reply: I thank members of the parliament who have contributed to this debate this evening, especially members on the coalition side and the member for Gladstone. The common theme of their thoughtful input was a genuine desire to improve the state of the health system in Queensland. Of course, this is in stark contrast to the members opposite, including the honourable the Attorney-General, who this evening basically said to Geoff Davies, AO, who conducted the Davies review, 'What we think about your great review is that your recommendations are costly and problematic. The time frame you suggest is arbitrary. Thanks for all the work, but we do not really need what you have done, Mr Davies.' Basically, he was telling us that this will not capture every death that needs coronial review but it will capture those that do not.

I was shocked to hear the Attorney-General come up with such a trite response as, 'We have a review in place because it has come from the Health Quality and Complaints Commission.' I was on the select committee that had a look at the implementation of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission. Let us have a look at what the Health Quality and Complaints Commission came up with as part of its seven standards. The minister says he is happy to throw Geoff Davies out the door and replace him with the HQCC.

We conducted hearings around the state and we spoke to public providers, private providers, private hospitals and nursing homes. Here is what the providers said about consultation in relation to the commission's standards—the seven standards of the HQCC by which the Attorney-General has just said we will review deaths. The report states—

During the review, health service providers across the board raised concerns about the level of consultation prior to the release of the standards by the HQCC on 1 July 2007 ... In some instances, providers also queried the requirement for particular standards and their evidence base.

It seems to suggest that the HQCC and its standards and their evidence base have been questioned by the Private Hospitals Association of Queensland. The general manager of St Stephen's Private Hospital in Hervey Bay said—

A lot of consultation happened after the standards were developed and key groups were not involved significantly in the development of the standards.

**Mr Shine:** No, you endorsed the standards.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** The Attorney-General has endorsed these standards this evening. So now we are going to look back at the seven standards which the HQCC, by its own admission, consulted on during an eight-week period. That is not as good as Geoffrey Davies, AO, conducting his royal commission—no, seven weeks is enough—between 5 March and 21 April 2007.

I return to the *Review of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission and the Health Quality and Complaints Commission Act*. It states—

During the consultation period, the commission sought feedback on matters such as the need for the standards—

The HQCC went to other people and said, 'Do you think we need a death standard?'

**An opposition member:** That might be a good idea.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** 'That might be a good idea. Maybe we do need a death standard. Shall we use the one of Geoffrey Davies, AO? No, we probably do not need that.' In the words of the Attorney-General, 'That might be costly and problematic with a time frame that is arbitrary.' The report goes on—

During the consultation period, the commission sought feedback on matters such as the need for the standards, the ability of the proposed standards to address gaps in other health service standards, the quality monitoring component of the standards and the proposed reporting measures.

The select committee heard that the commission did not distribute the interpretation guide and the self-assessment mechanisms to the standards prior to convening the education sessions.

So it had some education sessions where it told people, 'We're going to have all these standards, but we don't have an interpretation guide. We don't have a self-assessment mechanism so you can tell how you're going to apply this standard, but that's a standard that we think we're going to apply'—that is, the Health Quality and Complaints Commission will apply—'and it's superior to Geoff Davies AO and his royal commission.' Is the Attorney really serious in telling us that this standard from the HQCC is superior to that recommended by Geoff Davies? I ask members opposite to consider if they are really serious. What else did the HQCC say? The HQCC said—

We will go through ongoing processes to look at reviewing of standards to see if we could have done something better within those standards ...

Even the HQCC was saying that it knew it brought in these standards pretty quickly and it would have to review them to see if it could have done something better, because everyone we spoke to said that the actual interpretation of the standards in terms of deaths that occurred in hospitals would be completely unwieldy.

I cannot remember the statistic, but I think there are something like 30,000 deaths in Queensland every year of people who have been in hospitals, private hospitals and nursing homes. Many of the hospitals said to us, 'Do you know what? We don't know what happens to those people when they leave the hospital.' As I said, people providing services in both the public sector and the private sector said to us, 'We don't know the outcome of every person who has been in this hospital.' In other words, many of them leave hospital and die. They may be extremely old and told to or choose to go home and they die. A hospital does not always find out what happens to these people. The member for Sandgate is in the chamber, and I guarantee that she will remember these same words being spoken.

With regard to all of the seven standards of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission, the standard about which most questions were raised was the death standard. Tonight the Attorney-General has come in here and discounted this bill, which was a lift—and I am happy to admit it—from Geoff Davies, because I think Geoff Davies's recommendation is one that we should be adhering to. The Attorney-General is happy to say that—

**Mr Shine:** But did that apply to private hospitals?

**Mr LANGBROEK:** If we are going to apply it to every hospital and every nursing home and they say that they cannot apply the rule as the HQCC has as its draft standard, then it is not going to work, and it is not going to work more effectively than what Geoff Davies said in his report.

**Mr Shine:** But your bill does not apply to private hospitals—your bill!

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Even the commissioner of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission said—

We will go through ongoing processes to look at reviewing of standards to see if we could have done something better within those standards, whether the evidence has changed or if something is different that we need to take into account from the point of view of the providers' perspective.

Recommendation 20 of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission Select Committee that I was a part of states—

That the Health Quality and Complaints Commission consults with health service providers regarding existing standards—

and remember, these are the standards that the Attorney-General has endorsed unequivocally tonight as being superior to those of Geoff Davies AO—

for quality improvement and prior to the implementation of any new standards. This would include consultation in relation to issues of implementation, data collection, compliance measurement and reporting mechanisms.

The Attorney-General said that this bill was ill conceived and would cause financial delays and distress to families in traumatic times. With regard to his words that the bill will not capture every death needing coronial review but will capture those that do not, there are at least 15 deaths in Bundaberg where there are serious question marks as to whether they needed coronial review and they did not receive it because of the inappropriate way that the deaths were reported. Of course, those are matters that are yet to be raised in court, hopefully, following the events of earlier today. I understand the sense of not wanting to cause unnecessary concern for families and distress at difficult times, but for the Attorney-General to come in here and say that the time frame of the bill I have presented is arbitrary—the 30 days, which is something I am sure the commission thought through extensively—and that it is costly and problematic when I have just dissected the one that he thinks is better—the Health Quality and Complaints Commission death review—is just specious to say the least.

The Attorney also made the point that the Health Quality and Complaints Commission death review standard had been in effect for only three months when the opposition presented this bill. That is because the committee went around the state and I heard of the deficiencies in the standard and thought, 'There's got to be a better way to do it.' I looked at the Davies review and there was the recipe. I also find it unbelievable that there is only one person from the government who is prepared to speak on this bill.

I want to go back to the Davies report to acknowledge that the impetus for the bill came from the Davies report. I refer to pages 535 and 536. Recommendation 7.50 states—

I—

that is, Geoffrey Davies AO—

make the following recommendations:

- (a) The Coroners Act 2003 be amended by:
  - (i) adding a new subparagraph to s8(3) after subparagraph (d) to read:  
‘The death happened within 30 days of an elective health procedure’.
  - (ii) adding a new definition in Schedule 2, to read:  
“‘Elective Health Procedure’ means a health procedure that can be delayed for a period of 24 hours without death being a likely outcome.”
- ...
- (b) The Births Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 be amended to ensure that:
  - (i) in the event of a death happening within 30 days of an elective health procedure, the health practitioner in charge of the procedure is obliged to provide to the coroner his opinion on the cause of death;
  - (ii) all deaths otherwise occurring in public hospitals are certified by the health practitioner responsible for the care of the deceased person;

This bill acted on these recommendations. This bill sought to amend the Coroners Act 2003 and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 in order to implement the advice of an independent auditor commissioned by the Beattie-Bligh government to provide advice on how they can improve Queensland's embattled health system. Tonight the same government that vowed to fix our health system has failed Queenslanders again.

The Davies commission of inquiry arose out of complaints relating to Dr Patel at Bundaberg Base Hospital in 2004 and early 2005. Dr Patel has been linked to the deaths of 17 former patients. We know now that he has been arrested and is facing extradition. He is facing multiple charges.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I rise to a point of order. I am wondering whether you could seek some advice, Mr Acting Speaker, on the nature of the statements that the honourable member is now making. I think they are running close to the bone of sub judice.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** I agree that they are running close to the bone and I am listening closely. I call the member for Surfers Paradise.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Following the Bundaberg Hospital inquiry and the Forster report into the Bundaberg Hospital events and the state of Health more generally, the Premier and health minister commissioned another independent review of Queensland's public hospitals. The minister stated that he wanted a warts-and-all report on where Queensland's hospitals were lacking and where improvements needed to be made for patient safety. It is no surprise, then, that we got a weighty tome—a 558-page analysis. Davies made a raft of recommendations that he thought should be implemented to improve the state of our public hospitals.

In the commission's final report, chapter 7 examined the practice of reporting hospital deaths to the coroner. The chapter entitled ‘Amendments to the Coroners Act’ begins with an ominous statement Patel made after surgery. ‘This isn't my fault,’ he said. ‘This has nothing’—

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! Are you quoting from the report?

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I am quoting, Mr Acting Speaker, from chapter 7 of the commission's final report.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Please continue.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** The reports states—

This isn't my fault. This has nothing to do with my surgery.

I am hopeful that that question will be tried in a court of law, although we may have to wait a while yet. In his investigation into how so many unexpected deaths could go unnoticed, Davies found that only two deaths out of 17 were reported to the coroner under the relevant act. It is relevant to note here that 10 of these deaths occurred within 30 days of an elective health procedure carried out by Dr Patel. The current act requires referral in any case where death was not a reasonably expected outcome of a health procedure. It seems very likely that none of these deaths linked to Patel was a reasonably expected outcome of the procedure carried out by him. Despite this, Davies concluded that Patel was able to circumvent the requirements of the Coroners Act 2003 by falsifying death certificates to avoid scrutiny or suspicion. In his analysis of the current practice, Davies identified glaring inadequacies in the current laws which allowed Patel to instruct junior doctors to certify the cause of death—

**Mr SHINE:** I rise to a point of order. These are really matters that are the subject of some of the charges. In the interests of what we all want to see—

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** I do agree. The member is making allegations against Dr Patel. I would ask you to leave that subject alone and get back to the bill.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I thank you for your guidance. The opposition believes, and Davies clearly found, that there are glaring inadequacies in the current laws. Under the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 a death certificate can be issued only if the doctor is able to form an opinion as to the probable cause of death. If the doctor is unable to form an opinion as to the probable cause of death, it is referred to the coronial system. The problem with the current reporting system is that it is dependent upon a doctor correctly identifying deaths that should be reported in referring those cases to the coroner. Clearly, this arrangement is grossly impractical. The current legislation provides a disincentive for doctors to report the unexpected death of a patient because they are likely to come under investigation as a result. Anyone in that situation would think twice about such self-incrimination. However, the danger for patients is that the current reporting system cultivates the concealment of medical error or neglect or, worse, crime or wrongdoing.

Davies sought to introduce a new standard for the reporting of hospital deaths. He wanted to reduce the opportunity for the misuse of individual hospital codes of conduct by introducing an objective standard upon which deaths are referred to the coroner. Davies wanted all deaths that occurred within the peri-operative period, that is within 30 days of an elective health procedure, to be subject to investigation by the coroner. No ifs, no buts, no exceptions. The report states further—

The requirement that all deaths happening within a certain period of time following an elective health procedure are reportable, removes the dependence presently placed upon a single doctor to decide whether a death was reasonably expected.

The Davies recommendation sought to remove the risk of misuse and abuse of the current act by mandating all deaths that occurred within 30 days of an elective health procedure being investigated. That is what this bill sought to achieve. Clause 3 of the bill achieves the recommendations contained in paragraph 7.50(a)(i) by amending section 8 of the Coroners Act 2003. Clause 5 of the bill implements recommendation 7.50(a)(ii) by amending schedule 2 of the act.

I note that the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee in its appraisal of the bill raised the question as to whether the bill did, in fact, implement the Davies recommendations. I responded to the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee report and it would have discovered, but did not note in its final report, that the bill does, in fact, wholly implement the legislative recommendations set down in the final report of the Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry.

**An opposition member:** Faithfully.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Faithfully. I take that interjection. Clause 4 seeks to amend the Coroners Act 2003 by inserting a new section 10B regarding notification about cause of death in elective health procedures. In the event of a reportable death, defined by proposed section 8(3)(da), the bill requires the doctor in charge of the relevant health procedure to give a coroner a written notice stating the doctor's opinion as to the cause of the person's death, as per Davies' recommendation. While prima facie the clause appears to be in different terms, the object of clause 4 of the bill is to implement recommendation 7.50(b)(i) of the Davies report, which recommends amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003. However, upon legal advice in addition to Parliamentary Counsel's recommendation, it was agreed that this recommendation would be better achieved by incorporating it into the Coroners Act 2003. This bill implements the legislative recommendations made by Geoff Davies at chapter 7 of his report.

Finally, I want to return to the comments made by the Attorney-General. The minister said that he will not support the bill because there is a standard by the HQCC. I have dealt with that standard. I say to the Attorney-General: tell that to the victims at Bundaberg. Davies identified serious shortfalls in legislation and practice which left the door open to impropriety in our hospitals. The minister hid behind the Health Quality and Complaints Commission standards. The procedure advocated by the HQCC is a three-tiered system where a self and/or clinical team review is initially carried out, followed by an in-house review if necessary and, as a last resort, an external review. However, this regime is not mandated in legislation. Instead, the Attorney-General is relying on individual hospitals and individual clinicians to implement the standard despite no legal imposition to do so. Again, this system lends itself to abuse. Doctors may just as easily circumvent the HQCC standard as they may the legislation that is the subject of this amendment.

The HQCC estimates that some 30 to 40 per cent of death certificates are inaccurate. Furthermore, there is evidence in Queensland and interstate that suggests doctors may not be referring all reportable deaths to the coroner. A recent study by the Victorian Parliament Law Reform Committee found that up to 30 per cent of all death certificates inaccurately recorded the actual cause of death. In addition, it found that 20 per cent of doctors surveyed suggested that they would be prepared to alter certificates to avoid the scrutiny of the coroner. As members can see, this problem is not unique to Queensland, but the problem of this government is.

The Bligh government had the opportunity to take a real step towards improving Queensland Health for public patients. Instead of engaging in endless rhetoric about health action plans, the members opposite had the chance to make minor changes to legislation that would improve the integrity of reporting in Queensland hospitals. It would have set up an early warning system. How many lives may have been saved if this system had been in place?

While the HQCC standards represent an improvement to the current reporting system, they do not address the issue of subjectivity in determining the cause of death in issuing death certificates. Only legislative action will achieve that end. I remind members opposite that this is not my recommendation. This is my bill, but this is not my recommendation. This is the recommendation of an independent former judge of the Queensland Court of Appeal. No matter through which ideological prism we view this legislation, this is good policy and it is policy which has the potential to save lives.

I am disappointed that the Bligh government cannot bring itself to support good policy—and for the second time I have said this today—for the sole reason that it did not originate on its side of the House. To the Attorney-General I say: go read the Davies report. He should read it again or, if he has not read it, he should read it and make note of the recommendations that have been implemented on the watch of his government. I envisage that by the end of it he will be staring at a blank page.

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

**AYES, 27**—Copeland, Cripps, Cunningham, Dempsey, Elmes, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Knuth, Langbroek, Lee Long, McArdle, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Nicholls, Pratt, Seeneey, Simpson, Springborg, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Rickuss, Dickson

**NOES, 51**—Attwood, Barry, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, Fenlon, Fraser, Grace, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczyk, Pearce, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Roberts, Robertson, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Male, Finn

Resolved in the negative.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Hon. RE SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.03 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

### Scripture Union Queensland Chaplains

**Mr DEMPSEY** (Bundaberg—NPA) (10.03 pm): Chaplaincy is alive and well in the Bundaberg region with 11 chaplains currently working in 17 schools, achieving great outcomes for our youth. Chaplaincy is a program of the Scripture Union Queensland, which first introduced a chaplain to a school in 1990 and now provides the service in nearly 400 schools across Queensland. Working alongside other caring professionals, Scripture Union Queensland chaplains care for young people's spiritual and emotional needs through pastoral care, activity programs, community outreach and adventure based learning. Scripture Union Queensland chaplains provide a personal point of Christian contact, care and support for students, teachers and their families within their schools.

Scripture Union Queensland provides employment, training and support for all chaplains, with representatives from local churches, schools and communities administering and raising funds for their local chaplains. Recently Bryan Willetts took over as chairman of the Bundaberg Schools Chaplaincy Committee after Ewan Davie stood down following years of outstanding service to the cause. Pastor Stephen Hendrick of the Bundaberg Baptist Church is the secretary and Neil Ferguson is the treasurer. Craig Lear also does a great job as coordinator for the central Queensland region.

Formed in 1998, the Bundaberg committee engaged the first chaplain in 1999 and is heavily involved in fundraising as the salaries of quite a few of their chaplains are still paid for through fundraising and community subscriptions. The school chaplains' annual golf day is one of the major fundraisers. However, this dedicated group also works hard throughout the year to complement state and federal government funding and help provide this great service to young people.

Recently I attended the annual Bundaberg mayoral prayer breakfast which is held in conjunction with the Bundaberg ministers' association and was organised by a committee comprising Bundaberg deputy mayor Mal Forman, Pastor Viv Morse, Pastor Brian Robertson, Greg Uebergang, David Newby and Scripture Union Queensland's Craig Lear and Adrian Toft. This special morning was an uplifting experience with 170 members of the community, including student representatives from many Bundaberg primary and secondary schools, coming together for the function and being inspired by the guest speaker, the Rev A C Male. Young people are our greatest asset and, regardless of each person's religious beliefs, I urge every member of parliament to get right behind their local chaplaincy committees.

### International Women's Day

**Mrs ATTWOOD** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (10.06 pm): It seems that each year sees an increase in the number of events for International Women's Day, which was held on 8 March this year. Last Saturday, 8 March I attended the Kenmore Women's View Club breakfast at the Jindalee Hotel. Also present were a number of women from the Centenary View Club in my electorate of Mount Ommaney. The guest speaker was Penny Harland, who talked about her courageous life and her struggles after becoming totally blind and deaf at an early age. To hear what people were saying, she communicated through her carer who expertly tapped her hands and fingers to impart this information. Penny wrote a book about her life titled *A Penny for Your Thoughts*.

Penny was one of many interesting and courageous women I heard speak in the days leading up to International Women's Day. On Friday, 7 March I attended a breakfast event at Centenary State High School. It was the idea of token male principal Richard Morrison and a great morning was had by all. All of the local schools were represented by their student leaders and there were many teachers and some parents present. Guest speakers were both young and not so young, with the central theme being inspirational women who have influenced them.

It was an inspiring morning, as I moved on to Milpera State High School in Graceville and heard guest speaker Susan Booth, Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, talk about women's rights in relation to both multiculturalism and industrial relations, and in particular to equal pay. Other inspiring speakers included former Milperra students who talked about their active roles in society and the important milestones in their lives which have played a part in forming their impressive characters. I congratulate Principal Adele Rice for her enthusiasm in celebrating the multicultural side of International Women's Day. My electorate officer Michelle Bourke presented a bursary to a top student on behalf of her sister Kathleen Bourke, who unfortunately passed away two years ago. Kathleen was a long-term employee of the Milpera State High School.

Other events celebrating International Women's Day included the Queensland Resources Council breakfast and awards presentation, the Union of Australian Women dinner and, of course, the UNIFEM International Women's Day breakfast which was held at the Convention Centre. About 1,300 women from all walks of life gathered for that special event.

As I said previously, an increasing number of organisations are choosing to celebrate this special day to highlight the courage and achievements of Australian women. What these events have highlighted to me is that women still have a long way to go to reach equality in all parts of the world, and also that women have the capacity to overcome many obstacles in their paths, be it physical disabilities or cultural challenges, to move forward and to lead interesting and fulfilling lives.

### Road Toll

**Mr DICKSON** (Kawana—Lib) (10.09 pm): The Sunshine Coast has seen more than its fair share of tragedy on our roads this year. All too often we see on TV news footage and newspaper photos showing wrecked cars and telling us of deaths and serious injuries. We hear police, ambulance and fire brigade officers pleading with us to take more care, to slow down and to take account of road conditions.

What we do not hear so much is how road crashes impact on people's lives—not just the families of those people who are killed but also the many others who are affected. People who work in road safety call it the 'ripple' effect. It refers to those who are injured and require weeks or months of treatment before they are back to full health—or whose injuries may affect them physically or mentally for the rest of their lives. It refers to the emergency service workers who have to see and hear the results of serious crashes, who work in the emergency departments of our hospitals and those who have to tell families that they have lost a loved one.

It also affects people who are not directly involved in the crash at all—like those bystanders and passing motorists who are first on the scene. They see the worst and are often involved in comforting the injured. They can walk away from the crash scene but not far from the memories and nightmares that they have for the rest of their lives. I use the word 'crash' rather than 'accident' because these are rarely accidents. They are usually the result of speed, drink or drug driving, fatigue or poor decision making. The latter is often due to youth and inexperience. I applaud initiatives like those that restrict the number of passengers carried by young drivers. Distraction can be a major contributor to a crash.

I also applaud the work being done by the Sunshine Coast police in conjunction with the Maroochydore RSL. They are running workshops aimed at changing driver attitudes and behaviour, particularly that of young drivers. I have attended one of these workshops and I urge others to do the same, whether as a young driver or as the parent of a young driver. The road toll in our region is higher than it was at the same time last year. Despite all the campaigns about the dangers of drink driving, nearly 500 people have been caught driving over the limit on the Sunshine Coast alone this year. This is not good enough. We must heed the road safety message.

With Easter coming, I ask that all road users take care and think about how they are driving and about the terrible impact road trauma has on our society. People on the Sunshine Coast face many problems with young people in car accidents. They are dying three at a time, so we need to get the message out. Everybody in this House needs to tell their constituents and to tell their families to look after young people: teach them to drive properly, take them to these workshops. It is a great opportunity. It can save lives.

### Aged Care

**Mr HINCHLIFFE** (Stafford—ALP) (10.12 pm): The Bligh government is serious about planning and building for south-east Queensland's future. It was Labor that developed the South East Queensland Regional Plan and it was Labor that committed to a 20-year infrastructure plan. And it was this government that put all planning in Queensland under one department and brought it together with infrastructure to ensure that what we promise gets delivered. But I did notice recent promises by the Lord Mayor of Brisbane about his future approach to planning to provide adequate aged-care facilities in Brisbane that do not match his previous actions. On 29 February, he told the *Courier-Mail* that he wanted to offer incentives to developers and changes to zoning laws to ensure enough aged-care facilities could be built so elderly people would not have to move away from family and friends.

Indeed the lord mayor said, 'What we see happening now is our elderly population, who have lived in Brisbane all of their lives, having to move to the city fringes away from their families, their friends and their trusted doctors.' To that end, he has committed to establish 'an "Aged Care Taskforce" to ensure that there are better housing options for our ageing population'. For the information of members, I table an extract from a campaign pamphlet for him and his so-called 'Can-do' Councillor Norm Wyndham.

*Tabled paper:* Document entitled 'Listening to you and getting action to fix our important issues'.

These are worthy goals and the state government is looking into similar proposals, but I am not sure about the sincerity of the lord mayor's comments—said in the middle of an election campaign, too. I doubt the sincerity, because when push came to shove and Blue Care proposed to build an aged-care facility at Stafford Heights in my electorate, Campbell Newman and Norm Wyndham turned them down. Clearly, keeping elderly mums and dads close to home matters everywhere except Brisbane's north side. The proposal would have helped address the exact problem the lord mayor identified two weeks ago, but he said no. Thankfully, the state government called in the project in 2006 and approved its construction last year.

So like his public transport promises, like his tunnel promises, like the Hale Street Bridge, the lord mayor is out there saying one thing but doing another and getting the state government to clean up the problems he leaves behind. That is why voters in Brisbane this Saturday cannot afford to give Campbell Newman and his team of faceless Liberals a blank cheque. Voters should support my friend Greg Rowell and his team of active and involved local councillors and candidates. On the other hand, this government is serious about planning for the whole community, for the future and for the vulnerable in our community. Our commitment is year round and not just when it is the popular thing to say.

### Fraser Coast Sporting Shooters Association

**Mr FOLEY** (Maryborough—Ind) (10.15 pm): I rise to bring to the attention of the House a wonderful day that was held last weekend, and that was the Fraser Coast Sporting Shooters Association come and try day. Let me say at the outset before members all get too crazy about it that I would like to express my thanks to the state government for funding the day. It was a fantastic day for the sporting shooting community at large. It was a day to try some very historic disciplines such as black powder shooting where we got to shoot muscats that were older than Australia and Dragoon Guard pistols. They also had a reproduction Napoleon cannon, which was a black powder cannon. They asked me as the local member to fire that cannon. Let me tell the members that that was one very loud little unit. Also there was a very old school mortar—black powder mortar—which was the predecessor of course of the modern military style ones.

The black powder was put together and displayed by Barry Warendorp, who is a very active member of our local RSL club and a real larger than life character. He is an extraordinarily funny man who had people in fits of laughter as he was demonstrating some of the finer skills of the black powder shooting discipline. People dressed up in coonskin caps and all sorts of things. It is really quite a social event.

From the black powder we went to clay target shooting with shotguns. Again, people of all ages were allowed to try in a very safe environment that is the Fraser Coast shooting complex, which is nine kilometres into the bush. It is not exactly going to disturb any neighbours and it is a very safe range. The Sporting Shooters Association are extremely careful about safety. That is one of their major factors. From the shotgun clay targets, which I am happy to report I actually hit a couple, they then went on to the bolt action rimfire—the .22 section. Again, they demonstrated how they do target shooting on a professional range. We also had a fantastic barbecue lunch on the day.



**Mrs Sullivan:** Hope it was nothing you shot.

**Mr FOLEY:** No, it was nothing we shot. I take that interjection. It was definitely sausages, not game. This was target shooting, not hunting. The Sporting Shooters Association runs weapons safety courses—specific pistol safety courses to make sure that as people are engaging in the great sport of target shooting they do so with the utmost safety. I would like to pass on my congratulations to secretary Hazel Bozic, Rod Bolton and again Barry Warendorp and many other people who helped make the day a success.

### **Brisbane Youth Service**

**Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (10.18 pm): I rise to inform the House that the Brisbane Youth Service is celebrating its 30th birthday with celebrations being held this Saturday, 15 March 2008. Although BYS formally turned 30 last year, having been in operation since 1977, I wish them a very happy 30th birthday and wish them all the very best for their birthday bash on Saturday.

BYS is located in Church Street, Fortitude Valley in my electorate. It is a non-government organisation providing a wide range of community services to homeless and disadvantaged young people aged 12 to 25 years and their children in the inner city of Brisbane.

The current BYS vision is 'New Futures for Young People' and the BYS purpose is 'to support homeless and at-risk young people and their children in realising their potential by upholding their dignity and forming genuine partnerships'. BYS values include recognising the fact that young people and their children trust them to act with integrity and that respectful and trusting relationships are fundamental to growth and change.

BYS provides a range of services across multiple levels of immediacy and intensity, from immediate needs such as food and showers through to intensive, therapeutic and planned support. The current wide range of services provided include: drop-in services including access to showers, laundry, food, mail, storage of belongings, computers and phones; a specialist youth medical clinic including a doctor and nurse; access to drug intervention workers which includes intervention, education and support and a needle and syringe exchange program; access to emergency assistance for housing and fares; an on-site mental health outreach clinic; community cultural development projects; transitional housing support and education programs; a range of parent support services for young families; and intensive personal support and counselling, to mention a few.

So unique and professional are the services of the BYS that recently it was approached to assist in engaging with young people outside its inner-city area. Following the tragic and sad loss of a teenager's life in Capalaba due to an unfortunate accident in a stormwater drain, the BYS was approached to assist the grieving young people in the area. Young people going through grief at the loss of their friend in tragic circumstances were gathering at the site and the community felt this issue needed to be addressed. BYS workers visited and immediately connected with the young people affected, quickly determined what support services were required and assisted in ensuring that these support and counselling services were organised. They also obtained agreement from the young people to meet with the local councillor where it was agreed that a permanent monument and memorial would be undertaken.

BYS obtains 86 per cent of its revenue from government sources, with the vast majority of this funding coming from the state government. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the hardworking and dedicated executive management team of Angela Barnes, Phil Hancock and Jack Tong, whose commitment to helping young people is exemplary. I also acknowledge the tireless work and commitment of the current management committee, particularly President Mary Philip.

### **Toowoomba South Electorate, Gas Rebate**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (10.21 pm): The pensioners, self-funded retirees and working families of Toowoomba are struggling to meet the basic costs of life under the financial mismanagement that has been imposed upon them by the Bligh Labor government in Queensland. I have spoken previously in this parliament about the massive increases in gas and electricity prices. We have seen gas prices increase by around 350 per cent or more. These people have no other company to go to because we only have one gas supplier in Toowoomba because this government is broke and sold off its gas arm. As a result, pensioners, self-funded superannuants and the working families have to bear the brunt of this cost.

We saw an 11.8 per cent increase in electricity prices last year and now there is another seven per cent price rise being mooted. To add insult to injury, the government promised an annual \$55 rebate on gas accounts which would be backdated to 1 July last year but we found out this week that the government has done absolutely nothing about that. If there is anything that would indicate this is an arrogant government that has been in power too long, it is the fact that the government left those pensioners high and dry, promising them \$55 last year and doing absolutely nothing about it until provoked by a media release from our shadow minister just last week.

When I made inquiries about this through AGL, which had bought the gas system, I was told that the Queensland Competition Authority web site showed that there were other gas companies—Origin and Australian Power and Gas—that could provide for customers in Toowoomba. Wrong. There is only one company and it is AGL. It is a monopoly. AGL also asked for examples of how the price had gone up, so I told them. In one case, it went from \$19.53 to \$59.94. In another case, it went from \$7.21 a quarter to \$55 a quarter. If you work that out as a percentage, it is a massive increase.

This is all happening because this government is broke. It has a \$55 billion debt. That is \$10 million a day in interest, every single day of the year, that the government has to find. The government does not have repayment plans for the capital on most of that borrowed debt. So here we have a government which is selling off everything it can, getting money in through things such as the increased stamp duty on second-hand cars, telling ministers to jack up the prices, to get more money everywhere they can and to put staff off and all the rest of it.

It is the people who pay—whether that is paying through taxes or through the basics of life, like gas and electricity. The people pay because of this incompetent government that has been in power too long and has racked up debt. The government does not care about these people. If anything shows that, it is the fact that the government has not paid that \$55. Government members are lazy and slack and do not care.

### **Lions Club of Queensland, Youth of the Year**

**Mr HOOLIHAN** (Keppel—ALP) (10.25 pm): The Lions Club of Queensland—Parliament does not take part in the Youth of the Year quest, and it is rather sad that we are not able to do that because its members are not always in Brisbane. I would like to bring to the attention of the House the fact that throughout Queensland the Lions Youth of the Year quest is presently underway. In central Queensland last weekend, the zone judging was held at St Ursula's Convent. There were five finalists: Anna Fanelli, from Rockhampton Girls Grammar School; Katie Reid, from Yeppoon State High School; Joshua Preece, from North Rockhampton State High School; Katie McNamara, from St Ursula's Convent; and Paterson Boyd, from St Brendan's College. Of those contestants, Katie McNamara and Paterson Boyd will go forward to the district judging, which will be in Rockhampton this weekend at the Park Avenue Hotel, if anyone is able to get to central Queensland.

I give great thanks to the judges who took all day on Saturday to deal with the personal interviews and then listen to the public speaking on Saturday night. The judges were Deborah Burn, Roger Searle, Lynne Foley, David Murray and David Evans, who is the manager of the National Australia Bank in Yeppoon. The National Australia Bank is the major sponsor of the Lions Youth of the Year.

As I said, the event was held at St Ursula's Convent. We hear so much criticism of our youth, but the meal and the hospitality on the night were provided by the hospitality students from St Ursula's Convent and St Brendan's College. The meal was superb and the service was excellent. If these young people move into commercial life and provide that same sort of service and the same sort of support, then they really have a great future ahead of them. I give great thanks to the Principal of St Ursula's Convent, Catherine Dunbar, and her director of English study, Cheryl Moss—and I hope I have that right, but Cheryl will forgive me—who were there on the evening and took part in the whole judging.

This is something that we really need to take account of. We as a government and governments generally spend such a great amount of money on problem children, but there are a large number of very, very decent young people who want to get an education, who want to become part of our society and who are very proud of the society in which they live. I wish all five of those entrants a great future. I also wish Katie and Paterson the very best for their appearance on Saturday night. An interesting aside is that one of the previous national finalists was the former Premier, Peter Beattie.

### **Bundaberg Base Hospital**

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—NPA) (10.28 pm): After the news this morning that a former employee of this government was arrested by US authorities, the Premier this morning tried to make out that she and her Labor government are the long lost friends of the victims of the worst disaster and cover-up in Queensland Health history. The hardworking staff of the Bundaberg Base Hospital and the people of Burnett and Bundaberg know differently. We have not forgotten how her government fought to cover up and hide the truth revealed in two royal commissions. We have not forgotten her government's broken election promises of spending \$40 million and providing 30 new beds and extra staff—they were supposed to be up and running by now.

The Bundaberg Base Hospital is a hospital in crisis. On a good day it is operating at 110 per cent capacity. Even though the very talented and dedicated staff work miracles every day, the hospital is not coping with the number of patients. There are 1,200 births a year in only four birthing suites. Elderly and infirm patients are being discharged at 12.30 in the morning. There are massive waiting lists for joint replacement surgery. Patients are being kept in hallways on trolleys. There are access blocks at the accident and emergency department. Children are being mixed with adults in paediatrics. There is a

five-year wait to see an ear, nose and throat specialist in Brisbane if you are an adult. If you are a child, you get operated on and the operations are held once a month. There is no cataract surgery. The people are going blind while they are on a two-year waiting list. The elderly and infirm Bundaberg patients are being farmed out to outlying district hospitals and transferred away from their families. At the moment, the hospital services 130,000 people and we only have 120 to 130 public beds.

That population is set to substantially grow in coming years because Bundaberg is a high-growth area. In five years the population will be approaching 160,000 to 170,000; in 10 years, 200,000. While I appreciate every extra dollar that is spent on health in Bundaberg—I welcome the \$40 million and the 30 beds promised, when we finally get them—if we are fair dinkum about fixing the public health crisis, we need an extra \$400 million and an extra 300 beds now. Given the horrific history that the Bundaberg hospital has been through, what fair-minded person would deny the people of Bundaberg and Burnett the best public health system in Queensland—indeed Australia? We need a new hospital for the Bundaberg-Burnett region and we need to start planning and talking about it right now.

I congratulate Ian Fleming and his Bundaberg-Burnett patient support group for the great work that they do for the victims of Queensland's worst health disaster. Ian Fleming and his committee work tirelessly, often unrecognised and unappreciated by the media, and they have continually held this government to account.

### Cleveland Fire Station

**Mr WEIGHTMAN** (Cleveland—ALP) (10.31 pm): It is with great pleasure that I rise to inform the House that the plan to replace the fire station in my electorate of Cleveland and the neighbouring electorate of Capalaba with one station at Alexandra Hills has been scrapped. It was a direct result of the unified approach taken by me and my parliamentary colleagues the member for Capalaba, Michael Choi, and the Acting Speaker, the member for Redlands, John English. I take this opportunity to thank the Hon. Neil Roberts, the Minister for Emergency Services, for his willingness to listen to the constituents on whose behalf we advocated.

This is a clear example of how this government listens to its people in forming public policy and I am pleased to be a member of a government that listens. It is also an example of how members on this side of the House work together to ensure the best outcome for the people of Queensland. Together the member for Capalaba, the member for Redlands and I brought the overwhelming concerns of our constituents to the attention of the minister to ensure that the Queensland Fire Service continues to provide its residents with the facilities and the services it deserves. To his enormous credit, the minister recognised that the bayside is one of the fastest growing regions in the fastest growing state in Australia. I am sure that anyone who has been to my electorate will agree that it is a wonderful place to live. As a result of this growth our area requires an increased level of service provision rather than a restructure of the current resources.

In ensuring that the Redlands will have three fire stations instead of two, the minister has recognised this growth and we as a government have taken steps to protect our area as we continue to grow. The decision is also a tribute to the dedicated local firefighters who work in our area. I have met with many firefighters in my work in the electorate and early this week I had the opportunity to meet with the station officer, Steve Ellis, who has worked for over two decades fighting fires and saving lives in this area. Steve joined many of my other constituents who had advocated for three stations in the area and as far as I am concerned if the local fires believe that three stations is the best way to give our community the best possible response to a fire emergency situation then that is what we should have.

Once again I thank my colleagues—the members for Capalaba and Redlands and the Minister for Emergency Services—for demonstrating that this government works together, listens and provides the best possible solution for the people of Queensland.

Question put—That the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 10.33 pm.

### ATTENDANCE

Attwood, Barry, Bligh, Bombolas, Boyle, Choi, Copeland, Cripps, Croft, Cunningham, Darling, Dempsey, Dickson, Elmes, English, Fenlon, Finn, Flegg, Foley, Fraser, Gibson, Grace, Gray, Hayward, Hinchliffe, Hobbs, Hoolihan, Hopper, Horan, Jarratt, Johnson, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Knuth, Langbroek, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee Long, Lee, Lingard, Lucas, McArdle, McNamara, Male, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nicholls, Nolan, O'Brien, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Pratt, Purcell, Reeves, Reilly, Reynolds, Rickuss, Roberts, Robertson, Schwartz, Scott, Seeney, Shine, Simpson, Smith, Spence, Springborg, Stevens, Stone, Struthers, Stuckey, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Weightman, Welford, Wellington, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson