



# RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

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## TUESDAY, 19 MAY 2009

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The Legislative Assembly met at 9.30 am.

Mr Speaker (Hon. John Mickel, Logan) read prayers and took the chair.

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

### ASSENT TO BILL

**Mr SPEAKER:** Honourable members, I have to report that I have received from Her Excellency the Governor a letter in respect of assent to a certain bill, the contents of which will be incorporated in the *Record of Proceedings*. I table the letter for the information of members.

The Honourable R.J. Mickel, MP  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

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

Date of Assent: 30 April 2009

“A Bill for An Act to impose a moratorium on the clearing of particular regrowth vegetation”

This Bill is hereby transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, to be numbered and forwarded to the proper Officer for enrolment, in the manner required by law.

Yours sincerely

Governor

30 April 2009

*Tabled paper:* Letter dated 30 April, from Her Excellency the Governor to the Speaker advising of assent to a bill on 30 April 2009 [178].

### REPORT

#### Expenditure of the Office of Speaker Reynolds

**Mr SPEAKER:** Honourable members, I lay upon the table of the House the statement for public disclosure of recurrent expenditure for Speaker Reynolds for the period 1 July 2008 to 31 December 2008.

*Tabled paper:* Statement for public disclosure of recurrent expenditure for Speaker Reynolds for the period 1 July 2008 to 31 December 2008 [179].

### SPEAKER'S RULING

#### Common Procedural Issues

**Mr SPEAKER:** Honourable members, I am conscious that some more recent members of the House may not yet be familiar with all parliamentary rules, practice and procedures in this place. Some longer serving members also need reminding of our rules. I have therefore circulated a statement in the chamber to members, for incorporation into the parliamentary record, reinforcing the basic but important rules of the House. It includes the rationale behind my recent rulings as regards the use of the word 'you' in debate. In so doing, I reiterate the rulings and statements of previous Speakers, especially the statement by Acting Speaker Fouras on 24 May 2005, which I have largely reproduced. Is leave granted to incorporate the statement?

Leave granted.

#### Addressing the Chair and the use of 'you'

Last sitting week, on a number of occasions, I had to correct Members using the word 'you' in debate, particularly in questions to Ministers.

It is not that I have a personal dislike of the word 'you'. It is that the use of this word is indicative of a breach of Standing Orders.

Standing Order 247 provides that 'Members wishing to speak shall rise and address the Speaker.' This means that Members should not address each other directly across the Chamber—all statements should be made through the Chair.

This standing order, among others, is designed to promote civilised debate in the Chamber by having statements and questions directed through the Chair, rather than personally towards other Members. As such, reference to another Member needs to be in the third person such as 'the Minister' or 'the Member for'. When a second-person personal pronoun, such as 'you', is used it is indicating that the Member is not addressing the House through the Speaker.

### **Interrupting other Members**

I draw to the attention of Members Standing Order 251, which provides the general rule that when a Member is speaking no other Member may converse, make noise or disturbance so as to interrupt the Member speaking.

There are limited exceptions to this rule; unfortunately, a number of Members seek to use points of order or matters of privilege inappropriately to either interrupt other Members or interrupt the order of business generally.

### **Points of order**

A point of order is essentially a question as to whether the present proceedings are in order or allowed by the rules of the House or parliamentary practice and procedure generally.

An attempt to allegedly correct the record, or allege that another Member is misleading the House, or put the Member's own position on a matter, or introduce another topic or material, is not a point of order.

A Member's point of view is not a point of order and is merely disorderly.

Persistent, deliberately disruptive or frivolous points of order, being disorderly, may result in a Member being warned under Standing Orders 252-254.

I make it very clear to Members that I will be quick in warning Members who abuse the rules by making frivolous points of order.

### **Matters of privilege**

A genuine matter of privilege, suddenly arising, may be raised by a Member at any time under Standing Order 248. To satisfy the requirements of Standing Order 248, a matter must firstly be a matter of privilege and, secondly, it must be a matter that has suddenly arisen and requires immediate redress.

The reality is that few matters fall within the definition of a matter of privilege suddenly arising.

Matters that may fall into that category include: Members being unable or prevented from entering the Chamber, strangers being present in the House and interrupting proceedings, required material not being available for proceedings before the House.

Unfortunately, as with points of order, some Members attempt to use matters of privilege to allegedly correct the record, or allege that another Member is misleading the House, or put the Member's own position on a matter, or introduce another topic or material.

These matters are not matters of privilege suddenly arising and are simply yet another example of abuse of the rules.

If any Member believes another Member has deliberately misled the House, then the appropriate procedure is contained in Standing Order 269. The Member should write to the Speaker with all evidence available supporting the allegation.

I will not allow other Members to simply rise and allege a deliberate misleading of the House during the course of business.

Persistent, deliberately disruptive or frivolous matters of privilege, being disorderly, may result in a Member being warned under Standing Orders 252-254.

### **Correcting the record**

As a former Chair of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, I strongly support the statements by the Committee about the importance of Members correcting their own errors at the earliest opportunity.

A Member who has the courage to recognise that they have done something wrong, whether deliberately or not, and takes appropriate action is to be strongly commended and supported.

I will allow Members to rise at an appropriate point in proceedings to correct incorrect or misleading statements that they themselves have made in proceedings.

I suggest that Members attempt to confer with the Chair for an appropriate time.

### **Personal explanations**

There is time in the Order of Business each day for personal explanations.

A personal explanation is just that: an opportunity for a Member to explain their position on a matter raised about them, whether it be in the House or outside, such as in the media.

However, it is not an opportunity for a Member to attack another Member.

### **Language**

Members need also to remember that Standing Orders and practice and procedure also prevent:

- Unparliamentary language
- Personal reflections on other Members

These rules are aimed at ensuring civilised debate and questioning on issues rather than personal attacks across the Chamber.

Unparliamentary language is difficult to define and no exhaustive list of expressions can be provided. Largely, what is unparliamentary by necessity lays in the realm of who is in the Chair; but generally it is any language or expression that is unworthy of the dignity of the House or Parliament as an institution.

What may be acceptable language in some places outside Parliament, indeed may even be common usage in some places or forums, does not necessarily mean it is acceptable in this forum.

A further separate matter relates to personal reflections. Standing Order 234 provides that imputations of improper motives, personal reflections, and unbecoming or offensive words in relation to another Member are disorderly. A Member has a right to require the withdrawal of such personal reflections.

Generally, if the affected Member believes a statement is a personal reflection and objects to the words used, then the Chair will require withdrawal and not make an objective assessment. However, Members should not be overly sensitive, as this is to be a House of debate and scrutiny.

## SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

### Broadcast of Parliament

**Mr SPEAKER:** It is with much pleasure that I announce that the Australian News Channel will commence broadcasting, on a delayed basis, the Queensland parliament's vision of question time on its new Australia's Public Affairs Channel—APAC. APAC's commitment is to provide coverage of proceedings in the federal and state jurisdictions in a manner in which Australians can experience the political process in action.

I am sure that all honourable members will agree with me that this is a good opportunity to further increase the Queensland parliament's engagement with the community. APAC can be seen on channel 607 on Foxtel and Austar.

## MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

### Connolly, Hon. PD, QC

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.33 am): I move—

1. That this House desires to place on record its appreciation of the services rendered to this state by the late Hon. Peter David Connolly, a former member of the parliament of Queensland; and
2. That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to the family of the deceased gentleman the above resolution, together with an expression of the sympathy and sorrow of the members of the parliament of Queensland, in the loss they have sustained.

The Hon. Peter David Connolly was born on 29 September 1920 in Sydney, New South Wales, and was a student at St. Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace, and St. John's College at the University of Queensland. During World War II, Mr Connolly served in the 2nd Australian Imperial Force in the 2/12th Australian Infantry Battalion and during his service he was mentioned in dispatches. After his discharge from the Army in 1946, Mr Connolly returned to the University of Queensland to complete his legal studies. There he graduated with first-class honours and the University Medal in Law. Mr Connolly was admitted to the bar in 1949.

In August 1957, Peter Connolly was elected to the Queensland Legislative Assembly by winning the seat of Kurilpa for the Liberal Party. The seat of Kurilpa, of course, covered much of the electorate of South Brisbane, which I have the honour to represent today. Senator George Brandis in his recent *Courier-Mail* obituary on Justice Connolly noted that—

He—

Peter Connolly—

was never a natural politician, he was uneasy with constituents and his irascibility wounded the feelings of local party officials who arranged for him to be successfully challenged for preselection in 1960.

Peter Connolly subsequently did not recontest his seat in 1960. Clive Hughes beat Mr Connolly for Liberal Party preselection for the seat of Kurilpa and held it until 1974.

After leaving the parliament and resuming full-time practice at the bar, Mr Connolly was made a Queen's Counsel in 1963. I think it is important for us to acknowledge today that Peter Connolly had a long and distinguished legal career and that he was widely regarded as a brilliant lawyer. He served as a judge of the Supreme Court of Queensland from 1977 to 1990 and was a Justice of Appeal in Kiribati and the Solomon Islands from the 1970s to 1990s.

Among many appointments, Peter Connolly served at various times as president of the Queensland and Australian bar associations, as president of the Law Council of Australia and as chair of the Queensland Litigation Reform Commission. In 1976, Mr Connolly was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire—a recognition of his service to the law.

Outside of the law, Mr Connolly generously supported many community organisations, most of them associated with the arts. He was a trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery from 1959 to 1983—a very lengthy period of service. He also served as president of the Queensland Opera Company and Musica Viva.

A service for the late Hon. Peter David Connolly was held at St John's Anglican Cathedral, Ann Street, Brisbane, on 11 May 2009. I understand that there were many stories repeated about the late Mr Connolly at his funeral. One I read with interest is, I think, a testament of his well-renowned and

considerable intellect. The story goes that Peter Connolly, during leave, transcribed the New Testament from an ancient Greek version. His friends were suitably impressed when they thought it was transcribed into English but were stunned when they learned that it was transcribed into French. I take this opportunity to extend my sympathy and that of this House to Mr Connolly's family and friends.

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.37 am): It is my pleasure to rise to speak in support of the condolence motion moved by the honourable the Premier for Peter David Connolly, the Liberal member for Kurilpa from 1957 to 1960. Peter David Connolly was an outstanding Queenslanders who dedicated his life to service. A soldier, a politician and a judge, Peter Connolly was one of the respected few who have served in each of the estates of government. Born in Sydney in 1920 the son of Roy Connolly and Eileen Searle, Peter Connolly grew up in Brisbane, attending St Joseph's College at Gregory Terrace. He continued his education at the University of Queensland, where he excelled in law.

With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1940, Peter Connolly put his studies on hold to join Australia's military effort. He served in the 2nd AIF with the 12th Infantry Battalion between 1940 and 1946, rising to the rank of lieutenant. At the end of the war, Peter Connolly returned to Queensland to finish his law degree. He had a brilliant legal mind, demonstrated by his receipt of the University Medal.

During his early working life Peter Connolly was aide-de-camp to the Governor-General. It was an office he would later come to defend as a monarchist at the 1999 referendum. After lecturing in constitutional law at the University of Queensland, Peter Connolly was admitted as a barrister in 1949. During his time at the bar he gained a reputation as one of the greatest lawyers of his generation. His towering intellect, as Chief Justice de Jersey puts it, and diligence were both revered and feared by his colleagues. Her Honour Justice Kiefel of the High Court can attest to this. One of Her Honour's earliest briefs was to Mr Peter Connolly QC, who had been known to throw out briefs if they were not done to a very high standard. The brief survived and Her Honour went on to appear as Connolly's junior counsel.

Peter Connolly's eminent legal career was interrupted when he was elected as the member for Kurilpa in 1957. He sat in this House for only three years but in that time he made a valuable contribution to parliamentary debate. Last night I noted from reading his maiden speech that he spoke for 55 minutes and took numerous interjections. We now have time limits. He spoke for 55 minutes, which was quite comprehensive.

He approached his parliamentary duties with passion and enthusiasm. He believed in academic and judicial freedom. He stood for faithful obedience to the constitution and to the people of Queensland. In spite of his position he didn't care too much for petty politics. During his maiden speech he launched an attack on a Labor member who had previously said, 'We do not need arguments, we have the numbers.' He saw this as an affront to parliamentary process and Westminster tradition.

Peter Connolly took his parliamentary duties very seriously. He was highly critical of the draftsmanship of Queensland statutes, particularly those that deferred powers to the executive government to make regulations. The people vested power in parliament to make laws, not public servants. His attitude remains a good lesson in accountability.

Peter Connolly's commitment to the integrity of the legal system made him an exceptional legislator. He was a black-letter lawyer who believed in fairness and justice. It was these qualities that also made him an exceptional judge following his appointment as Justice of the Supreme Court in 1977. During this time, as the Premier has mentioned, he also served as Justice of Appeal to the Solomon Islands and Kiribati. He was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for his services to the legal profession. After his retirement Justice Connolly was commissioned to conduct a judicial inquiry into the Criminal Justice Commission, but was stood down from the investigation before it was completed.

Justice Connolly was a keen supporter of the arts. I note that he was a director of the Queensland Opera Company and the president of the Musica Viva Society. In his spare time he dedicated more than two decades to overseeing the administration of the Queensland Art Gallery as a trustee. I refer to Senator George Brandis's contribution to the obituary in the *Courier-Mail* where he relates a story that I have heard before about Justice Connolly—

He would sometimes indulge his waspish sense of humour on the bench: on one fabled occasion while presiding in chambers, he noted that the solicitor appearing before him on a routine application was from the Gold Coast. 'Oh well, we won't be needing these, then, will we?' he chortled, as he tossed his copy of the Supreme Court Rules theatrically over his shoulder.

Sadly, Justice Connolly passed away peacefully on 2 May. He is survived by his children, two sons and two daughters, who today can be proud of their father's significant contribution to our great state.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

*Whereupon honourable members stood in silence.*

## PETITIONS

The Clerk presented the following paper petitions, lodged by the honourable members indicated—

### Forest Lake Gardens Retirement Village, Bus Stop

**Ms Simpson**, from 124 petitioners, requesting the House to establish a bus stop outside the Forest Lake Gardens Retirement Village [[180](#)].

### Almaden and Chillagoe, Road Sealing

**Mr O'Brien**, from 678 petitioners, requesting the House to seal the 16kms of road between Almaden and Chillagoe [[181](#)].

### Charters Towers, Dementia Unit

**Mr Knuth**, from 2,280 petitioners, requesting the House to allow the residents of Charters Towers and surrounding communities suffering from dementia be allowed to 'Age in Place', according to the Aged Care definition [[182](#)].

### Nambour Connection Road

**Mr Wellington**, from 822 petitioners, requesting the House to ensure that the intersection of Blackall Street and the Nambour Connection Road, Woombye remains open; reduce the speed limit to 60 kmh on the Nambour Connection Road approaches to the intersection; install traffic lights at the intersection; and install fixed speed cameras on the Nambour Connection Road approaches to the intersection [[183](#)].

The Clerk presented the following e-petitions, sponsored by the honourable members indicated—

### Ipswich, Land Valuations

**Mrs Miller**, from 48 petitioners, requesting the House to reassess and reduce land values and rates in the Ipswich area as they are overpriced due to the mines [[184](#)].

Petitions received.

## TABLED PAPERS

### PAPERS TABLED DURING THE RECESS

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

24 April 2009—

[149](#) Queensland Government Response to the Report 'Brokering Balance: A Public Interest Map for Queensland Government Bodies—An Independent Review of Queensland Government Bodies, Committees and Statutory Authorities': Erratum

29 April 2009—

[150](#) Review of Organ and Tissue Donation Procedures Select Committee: Government Response to the Report of the Review of Organ and Tissue Donation Procedures Select Committee, October 2008

7 May 2009—

[151](#) National Australia Trustees Limited—Balance Sheet as at 30 September 2008

[152](#) Australian Executor Trustees Ltd—Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2008

[153](#) ANZ Trustees Limited and its Controlled Entity—Balance Sheets as at 30 September 2008

[154](#) Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee: Issues Paper—May 2009—Referral to Draft a Preamble for the Queensland Constitution

8 May 2009—

[155](#) Perpetual Limited—Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2008

[156](#) Queensland Theatre Company—Annual Report 2008

[157](#) Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee: Government Response to Report No. 68—Biannual meeting with the Ombudsman, November 2008

11 May 2009—

[158](#) Legal Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee: Interim Government Response to Report No. 69—Biannual meeting with the Information Commissioner, November 2008

13 May 2009—

[159](#) Response from the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (Ms Boyle) to an ePetition (1090-08) sponsored by Mr Wellington from 281 petitioners regarding Indigenous withheld wages and forced savings issues

14 May 2009—

[160](#) Toowoomba Grammar School—Annual Report 2008

[161](#) Ipswich Grammar School—Annual Report 2008

[162](#) University of Southern Queensland—Annual Report 2008

[163](#) Rockhampton Grammar School Board of Trustees—Annual Report 2008

- [164](#) Central Queensland University—Annual Report 2008
- [165](#) Queensland University of Technology—Annual Report 2008
- [166](#) Queensland College of Teachers—Annual Report 2008
- [167](#) Griffith University—Annual Report 2008
- [168](#) University of the Sunshine Coast—Annual Report 2008
- [169](#) Brisbane Grammar School Board of Trustees—Annual Report 2008
- [170](#) The University of Queensland—Annual Report 2008
- [171](#) The University of Queensland—Annual Report 2008: Appendices
- [172](#) James Cook University—Annual Report 2008: Volume 1
- [173](#) James Cook University—Annual Report 2008: Volume 2
- [174](#) Townsville Grammar School Board of Trustees—Annual Report 2008
- [175](#) Ipswich Girls' Grammar School and Ipswich Junior Grammar School—Annual Report 2008
- [176](#) Brisbane Girls Grammar School—Annual Report 2008
- [177](#) Rockhampton Girls Grammar School—Annual Report 2008

#### STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

The following statutory instruments were tabled by the Clerk—

Transport and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2008—

- [185](#) Proclamation commencing certain provisions, No. 37

Fair Trading Act 1989—

- [186](#) Fair Trading Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 38

Motor Racing Events Act 1990—

- [187](#) Motor Racing Events Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 39

Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008—

- [188](#) Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 40

Integrated Planning Act 1997—

- [189](#) Integrated Planning Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 41

Legal Profession Act 2007—

- [190](#) Legal Profession (Society Rules) Amendment Notice (No. 1) 2009, No. 42

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

- [191](#) Health Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 43

Water Act 2000—

- [192](#) Water Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 44

Building Act 1975—

- [193](#) Building Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 45

Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994—

- [194](#) Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 46

Carers (Recognition) Act 2008—

- [195](#) Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 47

Workplace Health and Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2008—

- [196](#) Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 48

Public Trustee Act 1978—

- [197](#) Public Trustee Amendment Regulation (No. 4) 2009, No. 49

Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002—

- [198](#) Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 50

Criminal Proceeds Confiscation and Other Acts Amendment Act 2009—

- [199](#) Proclamation commencing certain provisions, No. 51

Queensland Competition Authority Amendment Act 2008—

- [200](#) Queensland Competition Authority Amendment (Postponement) Regulation 2009, No. 52

Community Ambulance Cover Act 2003—

[201](#) Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 53

Duties Act 2001, Fuel Subsidy Act 1997, Land Tax Act 1915—

[202](#) Revenue Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 54

Mineral Resources Act 1989—

[203](#) Mineral Resources Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 55

State Penalties Enforcement Act 1999, Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995—

[204](#) Transport Operations (Road Use Management-Vehicle Registration) and Another Regulation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 56

Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994—

[205](#) Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 2009, No. 57

Forestry Act 1959—

[206](#) Forestry (State Forests) Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2009, No. 58

SPEAKER'S PAPER TABLED BY THE CLERK

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

Speaker of the Queensland Parliament (Mr Mickel)—

[207](#) Oaths or Affirmations of Allegiance taken by Members of the 53rd Parliament

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

### Water Supply, Fluoridation

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.45 am): Last week I was advised that during a shutdown of the North Pine Water Treatment Plant last month an incident occurred with the fluoride dosing unit. Affected residents in the Brendale and Warner areas were provided with information and an apology from SEQWater and additional information through a letter drop on Friday and Saturday last week. An information stand was also set up on Friday and Saturday at the Strathpine Shopping Centre.

As I have stated before, this incident is completely unacceptable. That is why Mark Pascoe, CEO of the International WaterCentre, has been appointed to conduct a thorough and independent assessment and investigation of this incident. Mr Pascoe has more than 20 years experience in the water sector and he has worked for and with organisations both in Australia and internationally. The investigation will make recommendations on remedial actions that may be required to ensure safe fluoridation operations in the future. The investigation will also provide independent advice to the chief executives of the Department of Environment and Resource Management and Queensland Health on the recommendations of the investigations into possible breaches of legislation administered by those agencies. I expect this advice will be delivered by 26 June.

Recommendations will be based on the review of the following aspects: the design and operation, including the control systems, of the fluoridation system at the North Pine Water Treatment Plant; monitoring programs undertaken by various relevant agencies, including a review of the data collected; the communication and notification systems that are in place and their effectiveness; emergency response plans and their effectiveness; other fluoridation systems in operation in South-East Queensland; and national and international experience in fluoridation systems.

While this rigorous investigation is carried out, the fluoride dosing unit at North Pine will remain offline. It will remain this way until the investigation is completed and any necessary action that may be recommended is taken to prevent any future reoccurrence. The health investigation team visited North Pine Water Treatment Plant last Friday to develop an understanding of the site and issues with a view to properly framing the investigation. I look forward to receiving information from Mr Pascoe and will publicly release the investigation, its findings and its recommendations.

### United States of America, Trade Mission

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.47 am): I advise the House that trade minister, Stephen Robertson, is leading a trade mission comprising more than 70 Queensland businesses and research delegates to the United States of America from 12 to 19 May 2009.

The trade mission's major focus will be biotechnology, with the minister representing Queensland at the 2009 Bio International Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. The Bio International Convention is the largest global event for the biotechnology industry and attracts the biggest names in biotechnology. It offers important networking and partnering opportunities and provides insights and inspiration on the

major trends affecting the industry. Unfortunately, the dates for this year's Bio International Convention coincided with the sitting of this parliament and I was unable to lead the delegation, but it is a very important convention. Queensland has led the way in leading the largest state based delegation every year and we will continue to do so. I look forward to leading the delegation next year. Against this backdrop I am very pleased to advise the House that our Smart State Strategy is continuing to reap benefits for Queensland.

Recent announcements in the federal budget mean that our investment here in Queensland of \$177 million in the development of three new world-class research facilities has been the catalyst for more than \$705 million in research. Three successful bids to the federal government's infrastructure and investment funds have secured \$170 million—on top of the state government contribution—for the three new projects. These projects are the Smart Therapies Institute and Associated Biopharmaceuticals Australia facility at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, the Queensland Institute of Medical Research's Smart State Medical Research Centre at Herston, and the Science and Technology Precinct incorporating the Hub for Sustainable and Secure Infrastructure at QUT's Science and Technology Precinct at Gardens Point Campus.

These three developments are crucial steps in building our state's innovative capacity and attracting the world's best researchers to some of the world's best facilities right here in our state. The Smart Therapies Institute, also known as the translational research institute, will be an Australian first and one of only a few institutes in the world to bring together a wide cross-section of health and medical research areas. Here we will see some 350 new researchers drive health solutions from bench to bed, ensuring patients have access to new therapies in the treatment of diseases such as cancer, liver and kidney disease, osteoporosis, obesity and arthritis. This institute will be critical to improving the future health of Queenslanders and it will add to the work that Professor Ian Frazer has done in this area. BioPharmaceuticals Australia, a pilot scale drug manufacturing and testing facility that will play a key role in accelerating laboratory discoveries into new drugs for clinical use, will be built adjacent to the institute and employ 120 new research staff.

QIMR's reputation for high-quality medical research is well known. Its new Smart State Medical Research Centre will boast facilities for clinical and basic research, and house some 400 scientists specialising in vaccines, cancer, tropical diseases and mental health.

The hub for sustainable and secure infrastructure within QUT's new science and technology precinct will focus research efforts on environmentally sustainable design, construction, management and protection of complex infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, ports, airports, hospitals and large housing developments. This hub will engage over 220 additional academic staff and higher degree researchers. That is almost 1,100 new Smart State jobs, not to mention the more than 3,000 workers who will be employed in the construction of those three new facilities. Planning of the three facilities is underway, with an anticipated completion by 2012-13.

This is what our Smart Start Strategy set out to do. If we put money on the table, we will be able to leverage funds from other sources for the first time in our history. In this case we have done that by putting \$177 million of investment into those three facilities, we have now seen the federal government contribute its share, the universities that are involved in the projects are putting their own source funding in and we are very optimistic about some further sources of funding in relation to philanthropic organisations. This is good news for all Queenslanders as we fast-track discoveries that will achieve better health and better environmental outcomes for Queensland, for our nation and, in many cases, for the world.

### Job Creation

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.52 am): As I have outlined previously, my government is getting on with the job of creating jobs for Queenslanders and keeping Queenslanders in work during the most difficult set of economic circumstances we have seen in many decades. To achieve that we have a four-plank plan: firstly, to protect our infrastructure program and our front-line services; secondly, to provide Queenslanders with training; thirdly, to pursue new investment in new industries; and fourthly, to implement new job creation programs to get people off the unemployment queue and back into work. We are creating jobs, not cutting them. Over the next three years we will continue to do just that, creating 100,000 jobs for Queensland workers and steering Queensland through these uncharted economic waters.

We are getting on with the task. We have already started to achieve results in our first priority of protecting front-line jobs. For example, since the election Queensland Health has employed 398 staff. These are the vital staff, at both the front line and behind the scenes, who are building our health system for the future of all Queenslanders. Of those new employees there are 38 additional doctors and 148 additional nurses, every one of them critical to keeping our health system going in a continually growing state.

In the area of law and order, since March we have seen the introduction of new front-line staff. We have 114 new police recruits in the Police Academy and, additionally, 159 new police officers have been inducted. We have employed 60 ambulance personnel, including paramedics, transport drivers and other operational positions. In Education, since 22 March there has been an increase of 668 employees across the department. This includes 135 new primary teachers, 71 secondary teachers and 17 special needs teachers. These are the front-line workers who guide our children through the education system, shoring up the future of Queensland.

In coming weeks I will be able to report further to the House on our ongoing and successful effort to recruit new employees to our workforce. This is a certainty because currently there are 689 jobs advertised on Smart Jobs Queensland. Unlike those opposite who simply would not fill these positions—in fact, they would cut them—we are actively recruiting workers to fill those important roles. What are those roles? Let us look at some of them. They include the role of the booking and billing clerk at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. That person performs the vital job of coordinating bookings for day and elective surgery. That job would not otherwise have been filled. Disability Services will employ an administration officer for community and home care on the Gold Coast, to provide assistance to staff, families and service providers. The currently advertised job of disability services residential care officer includes personal care of community members with a disability who are in care or respite. Of course, during the recent election campaign those opposite suggested that that role could be filled by a volunteer.

In Education and Training, we will employ an apprenticeship services manager at Nambour TAFE to ensure our apprentice training includes compliance with training standards. Finally, Corrective Services is seeking a case manager for the Central Queensland region, based in Longreach, to ensure the highest levels of community safety in supervising those affected by court orders. These are real jobs for real Queenslanders and they were at risk of never being filled if those opposite had won the government benches.

Earlier this month I was very pleased to join Qantas CEO Alan Joyce at the announcement that Qantas would secure 500 jobs at the airline's Brisbane heavy maintenance facility. Successful negotiations between Qantas and its Brisbane maintenance employees have meant that local jobs that were at serious risk of going off-shore will remain right here in Queensland to service the airline's growing fleet of A330s. In 2002 this government fought very hard to secure the \$85 million job-creating facility to Queensland. We fought off stiff competition from Victoria and Auckland. Its future, along with the jobs it creates, is now secure. Queensland is the birthplace of the 'flying kangaroo' and, as it is a company that now employs over 5,000 Queenslanders, it is local jobs that will keep that kangaroo in the air.

As I have said, my government is getting on with the job of creating and filling jobs, not cutting jobs. We have a four-plank plan, and the third plank of that plan is to invest in new industries. We need to think outside the square to create new opportunities and ensure our economy emerges from this financial crisis even stronger than before. The savage consequences of the global economic crisis mean that unemployment has risen in many areas of the state, but new figures show what a government that is prepared to look over the horizon can do for jobs in some of its regions.

The federal government's statistics show that the unemployment rate in the Darling Downs and South-West Queensland stands at just 1.7 per cent. Unemployment in this region actually fell by over 50 per cent during the past 12 months. That is an extraordinary result at a time when global economic forces are pushing up unemployment figures across the world.

It is generally accepted that the coal seam gas industry is one of the major reasons the Darling Downs has been able to buck the international trend. During the past 10 years the number of coal seam gas wells in and around the Surat energy resources province has increased from 13 in 1997 to over 600 in 2008. That is a growth from 13 just over 10 years ago to 600 last year. The industry has created and continues to create and support thousands of jobs in the region.

Labor governments have developed this industry and, through liquefied natural gas, my government will take it to the next level. Last month the Coordinator-General declared the \$35 billion Australia Pacific liquefied natural gas project to be a project of state significance. Up to 6,000 jobs could be created in this industry, the largest coal seam gas to liquefied natural gas project in Australia. Up to 4,000 kilometres of pipelines will travel from the thriving gas fields in the Surat Basin to the proposed processing plants at Gladstone's Curtis Island, creating jobs as they go. My government has already committed \$30 million to buy a corridor for an underground gas superhighway from Callide to Curtis Island, and as we speak the government is in discussion with companies to secure that highway.

Despite the nay-sayers, this job-creating industry is now becoming a reality. Six consortia have already announced plans to develop LNG plants in Gladstone. Just last week British Gas signed a gas deal worth up to \$60 billion of off-take agreements with China National Offshore Oil Corporation. All this means that LNG is building a head of steam, and that is good news for jobs in Brisbane, good news for jobs in Gladstone and great news for gas fields from the south-west right through to central Queensland.

The fourth plank of our job creation strategy is to reach our young unemployed with new job creation programs. That is what our Green Army program to create 3,000 jobs is all about, and we are already seeing palpable results. Our Green Army will provide 3,000 jobs over the next three years and is critical in my government's plan to create 100,000 jobs during that same period. It is critical also to the future of our national parks, our internationally renowned walking trails, our waterways and our Wet Tropics regions.

This is an initiative that addresses two critical areas of focus for our state's future: it offers jobs and training for our young workers as well as an important role in protecting our environment for future generations. It is a \$57 million commitment by my government to provide 2,300 work placements of up to six months on projects that conserve and restore the natural environment, green spaces and recreational areas. It will also provide for 700 year-long green traineeship positions for young unemployed Queenslanders, particularly those aged 15 to 24. This means 3,000 jobs providing 3,000 pay packets to 3,000 Queensland households at a time of global financial crisis.

Since the government launched a website in late April to encourage job seekers to lodge their interest in working as part of our Green Army we have had a phenomenal response. A total of 3,351 website hits have been recorded and, of those, 429 people have placed registrations of interest in Green Army work placements. Additionally, 205 people have registered their interest in joining the Green Army traineeship placements. That that number of people has registered in just three weeks since the website was launched is a very strong indication of the level of interest in this program.

This is a future-focused, groundbreaking initiative at a time of unprecedented economic crisis. I urge younger Queenslanders who are looking for a job and who have an interest in gaining a traineeship and a qualification that will equip them for the future and who have an interest in preserving our environment to go to the website and sign up.

### **Asbury, Mr A**

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (10.02 am): Finally, I would like to take this opportunity this morning to note the recent passing of Mr Albert Asbury, a former ABC News journalist and Queensland Chief of Staff of the ABC. He would be known to many members of this House. Mr Asbury worked for the ABC for 50 years. He guided the daily television news coverage as chief of staff in Brisbane for more than 30 years. On any measure this is an extraordinary contribution to public broadcasting in our state.

Mr Asbury will be remembered as a remarkable journalist and as someone who played a lengthy and pivotal role in television's daily reporting of Queensland's current affairs. He was a man of integrity who enjoyed the widespread respect of those he worked with in the ABC family and those who knew him from the wider media corps. I take this opportunity to extend my sympathy and that of this House to Mr Asbury's family and to his friends.

### **Federal Budget**

**Hon. PT LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Health) (10.03 am): Last week's federal budget confirms the beginning of a new era in health reform. It will ensure we can deliver better health services for all Queenslanders. However, we cannot forget that this new investment comes from a very low base and there is still a long way for Canberra to go.

Under the former Howard government the Commonwealth share of public hospital funding fell from around 50 per cent to about 35 per cent. At the same time pressures on our health system have increased due to a growing and ageing population. Under this agreement the Commonwealth share will grow to 40 per cent—the equivalent of \$1 billion additional over five years. This new funding arrangement begins to set right this massive short-changing of Queenslanders and their health system.

Together, the new federal and state governments are also delivering not only better health care for Queenslanders but also more jobs. Unlike the opposition that wants to cut workers' jobs, the federal and state Labor governments believe that creating and protecting jobs is one of the most important things governments can do in tough times. There is no better example of how the federal-state partnership can benefit Queenslanders than in health.

The Bligh government's \$8.35 billion health budget is the fastest growing health budget in the country—up 64 per cent since 2005. We have the biggest health infrastructure program in Australia and it is now being boosted by significant investment from Canberra. Following strong lobbying from Queensland, the federal government will invest almost \$500 million in hospitals and other infrastructure across the state.

The Bligh government is committed to delivering world-class health care to regional Queenslanders. That is why we made expanding the capacity of our regional hospitals a priority of our bid. Major commitments from the Rudd government will deliver not only better health outcomes for

Queenslanders, but also more jobs. The investment in the Townsville and Rockhampton hospitals alone will create more than 2,000 additional jobs in regional Queensland. That is on top of the almost 40,000 jobs that will already be created by our massive infrastructure program. Last Tuesday the federal government also announced it would spend more than half a billion dollars on cancer centres in regional Australia.

Our government wants more Queenslanders to receive their cancer treatment closer to home, and we believe that through this investment they will. Regional Queensland is very strongly placed to benefit from this \$560 million to establish a network of up to 11 best practice cancer centres.

The federal budget also gives women more choice in maternity care. An investment of \$121 million will result in the introduction of Medicare supported midwifery services. This means that Queensland midwives will be able to assist more women in the community through their pregnancy and birth. These reforms will be supported by our own commitment to ensure more Queensland mothers can receive maternity care close to where they live.

### ***Pacific Adventurer, Moreton Bay Oil Spill***

**Hon. PT LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Health) (10.05 am): All members of the House would be aware of the serious marine incident which occurred on 11 March when the ship *Pacific Adventurer* spilled 270 tonnes of oil, resulting in significant pollution to South-East Queensland beaches. At 6 am the *Pacific Adventurer* reported what they described as 'a little oil' in the water. Authorities activated the National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea at 8 am that morning. Under the national plan, the use of dispersants was considered. At the time, the team decided that the cyclonic sea conditions, with four- to six-metre swells and gale force winds, meant the use of dispersants was not safe, practical or realistic. Workers from state government agencies and local councils swung into action to start cleaning beaches, removing oil and retrieving affected wildlife. They worked tirelessly and in difficult conditions to remove the oil and restore the beaches. Thankfully, all affected beaches on the Sunshine Coast, Bribie Island and Moreton Island were reopened by 11 May.

I would like to draw to the attention of the House a report by Steve Raaymakers on the potential use of oil spill dispersants for the SEQ oil spill response, which I table.

*Tabled paper:* Report titled 'Independent evaluation: potential use of oil spill dispersants for the SEQ oil spill response, March 2009' by EcoStrategic coastal, marine and environment consultants [208].

Mr Steve Raaymakers, principal of EcoStrategic Consultants, was engaged to assess and advise on the oil spill response and the potential use of oil dispersants. Mr Raaymakers, who has expertise in marine biology, zoology and geography, is extensively published and has advised on maritime environmental issues including oil spill response on five continents. The evaluation report states—

It is concluded that considering all applicable circumstances, the decision to not use chemical dispersants on the SEQ oil spill was in full compliance with relevant policy and guidelines as contained in the *Queensland Coastal Contingency Action Plan*, and was totally consistent with international best practice.

What makes matters worse is that when we read this report we realise that using dispersants in the height of a storm could have caused additional environmental damage.

What is required in times like this is leadership. Australian governments, both Labor and conservative, have participated in such contentious international issues as military exercises with United States governments, both Democrat and Republican, notwithstanding their refusal to interfere in domestic political election issues. On the other hand, it is quite understandable for opposition leaders to play politics, and that is often what they do. However, it is a totally different thing for leaders of governments to put political gamesmanship ahead of sorting out problems. Leaders must be above politics when it comes to dealing with the best interests of the community. Peter Beattie and John Howard knew this, the Premier and the Prime Minister know this, and many of our leaders in local government know this as well.

### **Federal Budget**

**Hon. AP FRASER** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (10.08 am): Seven days ago the Rudd Labor government delivered its second federal budget against a backdrop of the most challenging global economic conditions since the Great Depression. Forecasts contained in the federal budget have serious implications for Queensland's budget, which will be presented to this House four weeks from today. Much debate has focused on the revenue implications—the massive write-down in GST revenue. The more concerning figure, frankly, is the unemployment forecast.

The GST plummet is stark. As a broad based tax, the GST is a close proxy for economic activity. As the economy slows, the GST slows with it. Across the nation the total GST revenue pool is forecast to decline by \$25.5 billion over the forecast period from the last budget.

Queensland's share of this reduction clocks in at a massive \$5.6 billion over the same period. That is \$5.6 billion that was locked into the forward estimates this time last year and now will not be received. Undeniably this places further pressure on the budget bottom line—a budget bottom line already hit hard by significant reductions in state revenues such as stamp duty and royalties. It brings the sum total of revenue wipeouts to \$14 billion. That is the price tag of the global economic crisis to date.

However, it is the unemployment forecast that is of most concern. Unfortunately, it is not just the rate; the forecast now reaches up to 8.5 per cent up from a forecast high of seven per cent contained in the Commonwealth's February update. That is not the most disturbing aspect. The federal budget forecasts that unemployment will now peak not next year in 2009-10 but the year after. As of today, we are up to two years away from the peak in rising unemployment. The forecast points to the frightening prospect of a largely jobless recovery, with unemployment remaining higher for longer. That recovery will be slow and low at first, as the Reserve Bank Governor has noted this morning in Sydney. It highlights the magnitude of the task ahead of us in working against the tide of the global recession.

The unemployment forecasts are precisely why the federal government's focus on infrastructure spending is so vital. For a long time we had a federal government that would not even talk about infrastructure. At long last we have a federal government that not only talks about infrastructure but is actually prepared to meet responsibilities and commit real dollars to funding infrastructure. I welcome the entry of the federal Labor government into accepting its role in funding long-term infrastructure in this nation. Of course, last Tuesday's budget must represent the start, not the end, of the federal government's role in infrastructure funding.

Investing in infrastructure is not only sensible, long-term economic policy but also vital in the short term to commit to jobs-generating capital works during these difficult economic times. This is the responsible approach to economic management that is needed to cushion Queenslanders from the worst effects of the global recession. It has been the policy of this government and will remain the policy of this government as we frame the 2009-10 state budget.

### Teachers Strike

**Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training) (10.11 am): I am advised this morning that all Queensland state schools are open and students are being supervised. All schools have a principal or another officer in charge on site and supervision arrangements are in place for those in attendance. Formal classroom instruction is not taking place, of course, but all those who attend will be supervised. Final numbers of students attending school today are still being collated.

We sincerely regret the disruption to parents this industrial action has caused. Many parents will have arranged alternative care for their children today, but we know that there will be some parents who simply have not been able to make other arrangements. That is why we have kept our schools open. We have a responsibility to those parents to ensure they have a safe place to send their children today. That is why I directed my department to put contingency plans in place to ensure that children who need to come to school today can safely do so.

Teacher aides and those teachers not taking industrial action are supervising students. Arrangements differ from school to school, with principals or officers in charge making decisions based upon the circumstances at individual schools. It is a shame that our students will lose a day's schooling, and we regret the disruption and inconvenience this has caused to parents. I would like to thank all of those involved for their hard work organising arrangements for today.

We value our hardworking teachers and the important work they do in shaping Queensland's future leaders. That is why we will continue to work hard towards an agreement to this industrial dispute. The government's offer to teachers is fair, reasonable and, most importantly, responsible during these tough economic times. It is critical that we get the balance right. The government owes it to the people of Queensland to invest their taxpayer dollars wisely.

Our \$900 million package offers teachers a substantial increase in pay, Australia's highest superannuation benefits of 12.75 per cent and superior leave arrangements. It is a total package which would put them up there among the best paid in the nation. Everyone is tightening their belts, and our offer to Queensland teachers finds a balance between valuing their hard work and responsible spending. I am disappointed that the Teachers Union has chosen to take today's action. However, we will continue to negotiate, and I remain positive about the prospects of ultimately reaching agreement.

### Anstead, Burst Water Main

**Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training) (10.14 am): As Acting Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy in the absence of Minister Robertson, I wish to report to the House that early this morning one of the major water feeder mains from Mount Crosby to Brisbane burst. I have spoken at length to the LinkWater CEO, Mr Peter McManamon. LinkWater, who owns and maintains the pipe, and the Brisbane City Council were quickly on site at Anstead in

Brisbane's western suburbs. While some of this trunk main is above ground, the section which burst is below ground and making it more difficult to repair. The damaged section has now been located and work has begun to shut off the valves supplying the main. This is not a simple task and could take a number of hours.

The preliminary advice from LinkWater is that the water supply would be restored to all residents by midday. LinkWater will provide further advice during the morning as investigations proceed on restoration work. Regrettably, the water supply to a number of western suburbs has been affected as a result of this incident this morning. These suburbs include Anstead, Moggill, Pullenvale, Acacia Ridge, Annerley, Tarragindi, Moorooka, Bellbowrie, Wacol, Mount Crosby, Pinjarra Hills, Kenmore and Karana Downs. LinkWater advise that there is no adverse impact upon water quality. The water remains safe to drink.

Updates have been issued via the media throughout the morning so that residents have the latest information. Once the break is isolated, water will be restored to affected suburbs through another main to ensure that Brisbane's water supply is not interrupted. The Brisbane City Council has been working in conjunction with LinkWater to keep residents informed. I have spoken to Lord Mayor Campbell Newman this morning. We are both very determined to get water restored to residents as quickly as possible and with minimum inconvenience.

LinkWater and the Brisbane City Council will provide a joint briefing to me later this morning. It is too early to tell what caused the break, with the main focus this morning being locating the break and ensuring that the valves are shut off and that water disruption to residents is kept to a minimum. I apologise for any inconvenience residents have experienced this morning whether through loss of water, reduced water supply, flooding or delays in travel time due to water on the road.

### Water Supply

**Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training) (10.18 am): The weather bureau is predicting large rain events over South-East Queensland this week, and we have already had a taste of those in the last 24 hours. That means that there is a real possibility that the combined capacity of our dams may indeed reach 60 per cent. This morning the dam levels were at 58.96 per cent. It is hard to believe when just over 2½ years ago the dams were around 16 per cent capacity and we faced tough new water restrictions.

Last month the Minister for Natural Resources, Stephen Robertson, requested the Queensland Water Commission to reconsider relaxing the water restrictions when the combined dam capacity hit 60 per cent. The minister's request came when the dams came close to reaching the 60 per cent mark just weeks after restrictions were eased when they reached 50 per cent and residents were allowed an additional 30 litres of water per person per day. We have come a long way in the past two years. I now believe that we are a more waterwise community. We do not tolerate water wastage, and nor should we.

The government thought that it was important to see how our region's consumption increased under the current Target 200 regime before a further relaxation was granted. The Queensland Water Commission has agreed to the minister's request and has indicated that if the dams reach 60 per cent in the near future it would delay the introduction of Target 230 for up to six months or until 1 December.

The conscientious water-saving efforts of the people of South-East Queensland are one of the reasons we are in this very fortunate position. While we want to reward people for their hard work, we are taking a cautious approach and are mindful that water is a precious resource that cannot be wasted.

### Responsible Consumption of Alcohol

**Hon. PJ LAWLOR** (Southport—ALP) (Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading) (10.19 am): Recent Queensland government advertising research has revealed that two out of three young Queensland men aged 18 to 21 understood the message to drink responsibly. The Bligh government's Every Drink Counts campaign has returned some great results but is just the first stage in a long-term strategy to change the drinking culture in Queensland. We have to start increasing awareness and getting the message through to Queenslanders that great harm can flow from binge drinking or drinking to excess, particularly for our young people. This is a difficult and complex issue.

**Mr Nicholls:** Say it with feeling, Pete.

**Mr LAWLOR:** It is no laughing matter. We are talking about a culture of binge drinking that is entrenched in parts of our society. I am personally concerned about the alcohol fuelled trends of glassings and driving in overcrowded cars whilst intoxicated. Many of these result in tragic accidents and an unnecessary loss of life, as we have seen as recently as this weekend.

Given the attitude and behaviour towards alcohol exhibited by 18- to 21-year-old males, the Every Drink Counts campaign has performed well in reaching 66 per cent of this target demographic. The next step is to build on the awareness among 18- to 25-year-olds, with a strategy to change behaviour.

I am very pleased that the campaign is reaching this target audience. I am particularly pleased to note that the visibility of this campaign was particularly strong for young males. It is particularly relevant that young men drinking large volumes of alcohol correctly identify themselves as the target of this advertising.

The research results include: 66 per cent of male respondents aged 18 to 21 recall the campaign; 54 per cent of all respondents aged 18 to 21 recall the campaign; 46 per cent of all respondents aged 22 to 25 recall the campaign; 46 per cent of respondents believe the message was to drink responsibly; and 36 per cent of respondents recall the slogan 'every drink counts'. The Bligh government is dedicated to building on the success of the Every Drink Counts campaign with new campaigns in the coming months. The government will not stop until it has reached every young Queenslanders with this important message.

### Social Housing

**Hon. KL STRUTHERS** (Algeria—ALP) (Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women) (10.22 am): Building work is well underway on brand-new social housing projects right across Queensland. It is a housing and jobs bonanza and it is our \$1.3 billion share of the Rudd government's nation-building economic stimulus package. It could not have come at a better time for Queenslanders. It means homes for people who need them most and jobs for thousands of workers in the state's building industry. Even in the face of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, Labor will never give up the fight for Queensland workers.

The newly elected Bligh government has its sleeves rolled up and has gone straight to work creating jobs and job security for building and construction workers from Cairns to Coolangatta and everywhere in between. Not only are we creating jobs; we are creating a fairer, more caring Queensland. We are reaching out to people who need our help more than ever before. We are giving them a roof over their heads. It is the biggest ever investment in housing infrastructure since the Chifley era.

With these funds, we are going to build 4,000 new social housing dwellings over the next 3½ years. We are spending \$80 million to repair and maintain our current housing stock, \$138 million on new social housing—we are able to fast-track projects already in the pipeline for an immediate start—and \$1.1 billion to build brand-new social housing projects over the next three years.

Work started earlier this month on the first project in North Queensland. Six apartments are being built in Hyde Park in Townsville. They are expected to be ready for tenants early next year. We now want more builders, developers and not-for-profit organisations to put in a bid for their share of \$1.3 billion. It is one of the most important building programs to be rolled out in Queensland. It is a win for workers and it is a win for people who need a roof over their heads. Members will be hearing a lot more from me about housing.

### Federal Budget, Disability Services

**Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs) (10.24 am): I welcome the Rudd government's continued recognition of the importance of Queensland's disability sector in the federal budget announced last week. The Bligh government is committed to working with the Rudd government to shape reforms within this area. The budget highlights the need to ensure ongoing support for vulnerable members of the community, particularly during these tough economic times.

Single disability pensions for recipients who receive the full rate will increase by an extra \$32.50 a week. The introduction of the carer supplement of \$600 a year to all 450,000 carers receiving a benefit also recognises the immense contributions carers make in caring for people with a disability. Some \$9.3 million over four years has been provided for an extra 250 places for outside school hours and vacation care for teenagers with a disability or severe medical condition.

It has also established a \$1.8 million national companion card scheme, which has been successfully running in Queensland. This will mean up to 200,000 people with a disability and their carers can attend sporting and entertainment events and venues without incurring the cost of an extra ticket. These national initiatives, to name a few, provide the Bligh government an opportunity to work in partnership with the federal government to deliver significant reforms across the country to promote social inclusion and to combat discrimination.

I am aware of recent reports in the *Courier-Mail* in relation to vision-impaired people being discriminated against because they have a guide-dog. This is simply unacceptable. This morning I spoke to the transport minister about this issue. Under section 2 of the existing Guide Dogs Act 1972, people accompanied by a guide-dog in public places cannot be discriminated against because of their guide-dog. Under the new Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009, all guide-dogs plus assistance dogs will have access to public places and all public passenger vehicles.

The aim of this new act, due to take effect on 1 July, is to ensure blind and vision-impaired people are able to have access to public places with their assistance dogs, including taxis, buses, shopping centres and restaurants. To enforce this, penalties for discriminating against a person accompanied by a guide-dog or assistance dog will significantly increase from \$100 for an individual up to \$10,000. The Bligh government is committed to improving the lives of blind and vision-impaired people and increasing their participation in all aspects of community life.

### **Building Services Authority**

**Hon. RE SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology) (10.26 am): Recently, there have been a number of media reports in Bundaberg and Hervey Bay questioning what the Queensland Building Services Authority is doing to assist consumers and contractors in the industry. These reports included comments from the honourable members for Burnett and Bundaberg, which were strongly critical of the Building Services Authority.

On 22 April, I informed the House of a number of initiatives being undertaken by the BSA to educate contractors in the industry. Clearly, those honourable members did not bother to listen. For the record, neither of those members has ever bothered to contact the BSA to raise their concerns. Nor could the Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels of the Burnett be bothered to join their constituents in attending the BSA seminars which were held in their area. The last seminar in the area was held on 13 May in Hervey Bay. That is just last week. Again, they were too lazy to get out of their own road to go.

It would have been pleasing to read some comments from them whereby they encouraged their contractor constituents to attend these seminars, but, alas, no such thing happened. On 3 June a BSA contractor and consumer seminar will be held in Bundaberg at Brothers Leagues Club. I invite you to invite your constituents to go along.

**An opposition member** interjected.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** If you had attended you would not have made the ill-informed, ridiculous comments that you did.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The minister—

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I withdraw, Mr Speaker. If the honourable members had bothered to attend they would not have made the ill-informed, ridiculous comments they did. I would also encourage the honourable members—

**Mr MESSENGER:** I rise to a point of order. I find those remarks insulting and offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Minister, the honourable gentleman has found the remarks insulting. I would ask you to withdraw.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I withdraw if I have offended the honourable member. Everyone in this House knows that these are tough economic times and it is—

**Mr Messenger:** How many times have I written to you, Robbie?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member—

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I am not insulted by that term, Mr Speaker.

**Mr SPEAKER:** The dignity of the House, honourable member for Burnett, is not improved by referring to the honourable member other than by his correct title.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** Everyone in this House knows that these are tough economic times and it is inevitable that some building businesses will fail, but the BSA is doing everything in its power to save contractors and help consumers. To protect consumers, we have the statutory Home Warranty Insurance Scheme that protects homeowners when their builder fails. Similarly, for contractors and subcontractors in dispute over payment, we have the Building and Construction Industry Payments Act 2004. This tough legislation gives the aggrieved party the opportunity to have the dispute adjudicated fairly and cost-effectively.

I might point out to this parliament that whenever this legislation has been presented every single member of this parliament has supported it wholeheartedly without amendment. The reality is that every member of this parliament is well aware, or should be well aware, of just what strength of legislation the BSA has in this state. The construction industry in this state is the strongest and most regulated industry anywhere in this country, anywhere in the world and, up until last week, enjoyed the bipartisan support of this parliament. Unfortunately, that has now gone by the wayside.

The Leader of the Opposition has a challenge here, and that is to either come up with better ideas—something which the opposition would know that I would welcome, as those honourable members who have shadowed me would know—but, more importantly, to pull these honourable members into line when they attack on an unfounded basis the good work of the Building Services Authority. For the information of these honourable members, I table a DVD which they may be able to get someone to produce for them and interpret for them.

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'BSA's Major Works Contract Kit' November 2008 [209].

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Building Contracts: Know your contractual rights' [210].

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Helping Queensland Build Better' [211].

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'The Building Game: How to survive it in challenging times' [212].

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Facts for Home Builders & Renovators—Edition Five—March 2008' [213].

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Building and Construction Industry Payments Agency: Get paid quicker!' [214].

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Facts for Licensees: A quick guide to the rights and responsibilities of BSA licence holders.' [215].

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Domestic Building Contracts Act 2000: What contractors need to know: Edition 7—February 2009' [216].

*Tabled paper:* Contractor Education SuperShow—2 DVD Set [217].

### Road Safety

**Hon. NS ROBERTS** (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (10.31 am): I rise today to make a plea to motorists to take greater care on our roads. Already this year 141 people have lost their lives across Queensland. While this statistic alone is of grave concern, it does not include the hundreds of Queenslanders who have been seriously injured as a result of road crashes. Queenslanders just are not taking enough care when they get behind the wheel. In the first three months of this year, more than 6,000 people have been caught by police driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. More than 160,000 people have been detected speeding. These are damning statistics.

The government is making a substantial effort to try to bring the road toll down. We are funding the Queensland Police Service to employ an additional 106 traffic branch officers to do enforcement on our roads. The first 53 of these officers will be hitting the streets in a matter of weeks. As the Premier announced on Sunday, the government is also developing six additional fixed speed camera sites on the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and west of Ipswich. It is proposed that these sites will be operational by July. The Bligh government knows that one of the best deterrents to unsafe driving practices is the high visibility of police and enforcement technology on our roads. That is why we are investing in 30 additional hand-held laser speed detection devices, 16 mobile radar speed detection devices, 12 micro-digicam speed detectors, eight additional Q-cars and 12 additional police motorcycles for traffic enforcement.

It is not just the government trying to reduce the carnage on our roads. This Friday is Fatality Free Friday, an initiative of Queensland driving instructor Mr Russell White. Motorists are asked to make a pledge to take extra care on the roads on Friday so we can achieve the goal of no deaths. This is an excellent initiative and I urge all honourable members to take the pledge and encourage their constituents to do the same. Fatality Free Friday should be the catalyst for all motorists to take extra care every single day so that we can reduce the terrible loss and carnage on our roads.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Before I call the Minister for Main Roads, I should clarify for the House that question time will start at 10.40 because of the condolence motion.

### Road Infrastructure

**Hon. CA WALLACE** (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Main Roads) (10.34 am): The Bligh government is building better roads for Queensland and we are working with the Rudd government to deliver better infrastructure for all Queenslanders. The federal budget announced last week will help overturn years of neglect of our national road system by the Howard government. This funding is a welcome commitment from the Rudd government and will build on the significant investment made by the Bligh government to address the needs of Queensland's road network. The Bligh government is continuing to deliver its record \$16.2 billion Roads Implementation Program over the five years from 2008-09 to 2012-13. This program represents a record commitment to building vital road infrastructure across Queensland and is the largest roads infrastructure commitment by any jurisdiction in Australia. The Bligh government's investment in our roads helps reduce congestion and makes our network safer. Most importantly, though, it also supports job creation across Queensland as we face these most difficult economic times.

I am pleased to inform the House that the Bligh government's road program actively supports around 25,000 jobs per annum in rural and regional as well as metropolitan Queensland. The federal government's commitments announced last week build on the substantial commitments of the Bligh government. It is great that we finally have a federal government that understands we need to invest in

roads to improve economic security, boost jobs and, importantly, increase safety. Federal budget funding to Queensland over the coming year under the Nation Building Program totals some \$1.5 billion and is to be invested in road infrastructure projects across the state. This is an increase of some \$668 million or 80 per cent on the 2008-09 allocation to Queensland.

In addition through the Building Australia Fund, a total of \$1.27 billion will be made available to Queensland for several of the state's key transport projects. This includes a further \$884 million to be invested in upgrading the Ipswich Motorway, a key job builder for Queensland with some 7,000 direct and indirect jobs being generated over the duration of the upgrade project. Under the Nation Building Program a section of the Bruce Highway between Sankeys Road and Traveston Road will be duplicated through an investment of \$488 million by the federal government. This will be welcomed right across the state. This section of the Bruce Highway is generally described as one of the most dangerous roads in the state. This will generate employment in the region of about 1,600 direct and indirect jobs sustained over the life of the Cooroy to Curra section B project. This is just part of the \$2.6 billion being invested in upgrading the Bruce Highway between Brisbane and Cairns over the next five years. Anyone who lives on the seaboard of regional Queensland knows that the Bruce Highway has been neglected over the last decade, and that is why we particularly welcome these funds.

For those members opposite who may be interested to put in it perspective, in the five years from 2003-04 to 2008-09 the Howard government allocated just \$844 million to the Bruce Highway through the AusLink program. The people of Queensland deserve better, and now the Rudd government has started to deliver. But just like *Oliver Twist*, I want more. I want more from the federal government for our roads. The Rudd government has started off well. It is playing a role in delivering better infrastructure for our roads, but I want more.

## SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

### Documents

**Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (10.37 am): I seek leave to table the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's *Legislation Alert*, two related submissions and a ministerial letter.

Leave granted.

**Mrs MILLER**: I table the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's *Legislation Alert No. 2 of 2009*.

*Tabled paper*: Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, Legislation Alert No. 2 of 2009 [218].

In addition, I table submissions received by the committee from the Cape York Land Council in relation to the Local Government Bill 2009 and from the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland regarding the Adoption Bill 2009.

*Tabled paper*: Submission from the Cape York Land Council in relation to the Local Government Bill 2009 (Qld), dated 23 April 2009 [219].

*Tabled paper*: Submission from the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland in relation to the Adoption Bill 2008, dated 14 May 2009 [220].

I also table a copy of the ministerial letter received by the previous scrutiny committee in relation to the Adoption Bill 2009.

*Tabled paper*: Letter from the then Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women regarding the Adoption Bill 2009, dated 17 February 2009 [221].

## AUDITOR-GENERAL BILL

## FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY BILL

### Cognate Debate

**Ms SPENCE** (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.38 am), by leave, without notice: I move—

That, in accordance with standing order 129, the Financial Accountability Bill and the Auditor-General Bill be treated as cognate bills for their remaining stages as follows:

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

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

**Mr SPEAKER:** During this morning's session teachers and students from Coombabah State High School will be visiting Parliament House. They are from the electorate of Broadwater, which is represented by Peta-Kaye Croft.

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

### Education Standards

**Mr LANGBROEK** (10.39 am): My question is to the Premier. Given that Queensland's school students have fallen to the bottom of the class compared to students in other states over the past four years, why does the Premier blame teachers and the unions rather than take responsibility herself?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for his question. I am not entirely sure what it means, but I am very happy to have an opportunity to talk in this House about the importance of literacy and numeracy. I was as disturbed as any other Queenslander by the results of the national literacy and numeracy testing last year. I took full responsibility by taking the action that I took, and that is to appoint an internationally renowned expert in this area, Geoff Masters, to undertake a review of last year's results. Geoff Masters did exactly what the government asked and that is present us with an interim assessment and some ideas about taking our results to a higher standard.

We implemented those early recommendations. Chief among them was his proposal that we undertake, as other states in Australia do, some opportunity for children to utilise the tests from the previous year so that when they come to this year's tests they are familiar with the test environment so that we find out exactly what they know rather than the test results being clouded by a group of children who, in some cases, have never sat a test of that nature.

I thought that was a very sound and practical piece of advice. We have implemented it. All state schools—and, I understand, many Catholic and independent schools—undertook that round of practice testing on last year's tests. As members know, all school students have now sat the NAPLAN tests for 2009. I know that our students, as a result of the good work that our schools, our teachers and our principals have done over the first semester of this year, went into this year's tests much better prepared than they were when they went into last year's tests.

So I look forward to seeing this year's results. I am very realistic about how long it takes to make significant improvement, but we need to aim over the next three years—and I have set this as a very clear goal for the education system—to be up among the best performers in the country and I believe that our children, our schools and their teachers are more than capable of that.

### School Closures

**Mr LANGBROEK:** My second question is to the Minister for Education. Given the government closed 57 schools between 1998 and 2008 while the number of students increased by almost 60,000, can Queensland families count on the minister and the Premier to continue closing a school for every 1,000 extra students?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. We have an unprecedented record in expenditure on capital works and on maintenance for building new schools in Queensland. Three to four years ago we had the Building Better Schools program of nearly \$800-odd million. We have also had the State Schools of Tomorrow building program of around \$950 million. We have a capital works program of around \$550 million for this current financial year—a record amount on an annual basis. We have a record amount of \$141 million allocated to maintenance in this financial year.

In addition, the recurrent cost of the education sector on capital works is over \$7 billion. Under this Bligh Labor government, about 20 per cent of the Queensland budget is devoted to not only the operational activities of Queensland's education system but also building better schools year in, year out—unlike what used to happen in the Bjelke-Petersen days, when there was inadequate funding made available for schools in Labor areas. New schools were not built. Maintenance was not carried out. They sit on the other side now. They have a deplorable track record in looking after one of the most important policy areas of this government, which is building schools, improving infrastructure and also investing in our teachers and in our students.

**Mr Springborg:** What about your educational standards?

**Mr WILSON:** The members opposite have a deplorable record on that. We will continue unabated in our march forward to spend record amounts on capital works and on maintenance in our education system. We will continue to invest in our young people of the future.

## Federal Budget

**Mrs KEECH:** My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier outline the impacts on Queensland of the recent Rudd federal budget and inform the House of strategies to deal with the consequences?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for her question and for her interest in what is happening in the world economy and its effects on our state. Queensland certainly welcomes the federal government's commitment to infrastructure funding. As members have heard this morning, this budget certainly delivers for the first time some significant new funds—funds for the Bruce Highway upgrade from Cooroy to Curra, the Brisbane inner-city transport study, the Gold Coast rapid transit project and the Ipswich Motorway. They are all important.

This commitment to infrastructure is welcome, but also we saw in the budget some seriously bad news for Queensland, and that was that the federal Treasury forecast for GST revenue continued to decline. We saw a further unexpected fall of \$2 billion in Queensland's GST revenue. That takes a total hit to our budget from the global financial crisis to an unprecedented \$14 billion over the next four years.

There are two ways that governments can deal with these sorts of circumstances. You can take our approach of keeping the building program going—keep supporting jobs, keep supporting them now when we need them to get through a global recession while dealing with the long-term reforms that will restore the budget to surplus—or you can take the approach favoured by those opposite: put the need for a surplus ahead of the needs of working families and cut the building program and cut jobs now. That was the program the opposition took to the electorate in this year's state election—in the middle of the worst global recession ever—to cut jobs, to cut 12,000 jobs a year, each and every year, and cut \$1 billion out of the budget each and every year.

Last week we saw the West Australian Liberal government adopt the LNP's economic strategy for getting through a global crisis. We also saw the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Surfers Paradise, put out a press release endorsing it and calling on us to do the same. We have not seen what usually happens after a comprehensive defeat of a particular policy at an election. Usually, a new leader separates himself or herself from the failed policies of their predecessor. What happened here? They have reaffirmed their commitment to sacking and taking money out of the budget. The Leader of the Opposition made the architect of that strategy his deputy leader. The Leader of the Opposition has appointed him as his mentor and made him the Liberal National Party thinker in residence. That thinker in residence is the architect of the opposition's economic strategy. He was the thinker in residence who gave it to them in the election campaign. That is what the people of Queensland said 'no, thank you' to and that is what the Leader of the Opposition has locked up to—a failed economic strategy that right now is delivering job cuts. We stand for jobs, not job cuts. That is what we stand for: jobs, not job cuts.

## Teachers Strike

**Dr FLEGG:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Given the bungling of advice to parents, can the minister now tell this House how many schools in Queensland do not have trained teacher supervision today and what action the minister has taken to protect students where trained teacher supervision is not available?

**Mr WILSON:** This is a very serious matter. This government takes seriously the responsibility that it has to the parents and children who use the state education system. At this very moment there is a principal or an officer-in-charge at every school in Queensland. At this moment in every school these people are supervising, in conjunction with other staff, the students who have arrived at school today. That is the position now. The advice from the beginning to now from the department has always been that the schools will be open and there will be a principal or an officer-in-charge at each school. Of course there will be serious disruption of normal classroom education today; one would expect nothing less. There will not be ordinary classroom teaching taking place, but there will be supervision by appropriate adults of the children who come to school today.

That supervision will be from over 9,000 teacher aides and teachers who are not taking part in the industrial disputation. Those people on the sites today, the principals and the officers-in-charge, have worked up to today to ensure that there are appropriate adult supervision arrangements in place so that the safety of students is properly maintained and that they are properly supervised. Why did we do that? Because whilst some parents have chosen, and wisely so in their particular circumstances, to keep their children at home or to make other arrangements, there are parents who cannot make those arrangements and they are entitled to expect that the department of education will fulfil its responsibility and provide safe, appropriate adult supervision to their children when they go to school today. We are looking after the parents and the students of the Queensland education system because that is our first priority and that is a priority that my department will fully discharge.

### Job Creation

**Ms DARLING:** My question is to the Premier. Will the Bligh government stand by its position to make jobs, job creation and jobs retention its No. 1 priority?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for the question and for her continued understanding of how important a job is to working Queenslanders and their families. In this context I note the comments made yesterday by the Liberal National Party, Commerce Queensland and the Retailers Association, all three of them singing from the same song sheet, that we should be cutting the jobs of workers who work in our public sector. I think it is very important, when people opposite are calling for cuts and sackings, to understand the context that Queensland is in. Queensland is a growing state. The one economic forecast that is unlikely to see any significant decline as a result of the economic crisis facing the world is Queensland's population growth. We are going to see more people coming here and making Queensland their home. What does that mean? It means that we will need more teachers and teacher aides, not less; we will need more road workers, not less; we will need more people cleaning our schools, not less; we will need more clerks in our hospitals keeping our medical records, not less; we will need more doctors and more nurses, not less. We have a job in these difficult economic times to bring the budget back into a stable position, but we have an equal obligation to provide the services that a growing population needs and we have a determination as a government to protect those people who are in jobs while this economy is ravaged by the worst of economic circumstances the world has seen for three-quarters of a century.

We went to the election promising that we stood for jobs, not job cuts, and we will maintain that as our single biggest priority. The middle of a global recession is exactly when we should keep people employed in our massive infrastructure program so that we can build until we recover; build so that when the economy starts to turn up again we will have the new infrastructure in our ports and our rails and our roads ready to take the opportunity.

I note, as I said, the chorus that one can rely on coming together around these issues. When the LNP says it has a policy, people could bet their bottom dollar that when they turn on the radio Commerce Queensland will be sprouting it. That is what we heard yesterday. I say to Commerce Queensland that it will not serve the interests of the businesses it represents if we cut back on road workers, if we cut back on teachers, doctors and nurses who serve the people that those opposite represent.

### Teachers Strike

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Education. In light of today's teacher strike will the minister inform the House of the ratio of supervisors to students throughout Queensland, including the actual number of supervisors rostered on today to ensure the safety and welfare of Queensland children?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The department has assured me, and the department has assured all of Queensland, that through the principals and officers-in-charge school by school there is appropriate adult supervision taking place and available at each of those schools today. Each school makes its own decision in conjunction with the district and regional officer of the department working closely on a day-by-day basis to determine the final numbers that are in place school by school to meet the expected attendance today of students who you could not care less about.

**Mr SPEAKER:** The honourable minister will refer his comments or take his comments through the chair.

**Mr WILSON:** Their priority is to ensure—and I have been told that this is actually what is happening on site today—that there is appropriate adult supervision being undertaken and provided by the 9,000 teacher aides, together with teachers not taking part in industrial action, and that those teachers and personnel are on site and available and providing appropriate adult supervision to the students who have arrived at school today. The first priority of the department right from the beginning has been to put parents and their children first. Why? Because whilst many will be able to make alternative arrangements today because no normal educational instruction is taking place, there will be many others who are not so fortunate. Many families with both parents working in difficult and challenging socioeconomic areas, or a whole range of other reasons, would not have been able to make alternative arrangements today for their children. That is why the department has taken the responsible position of ensuring that there is appropriate adult supervision available at each school.

Principals manage schools day in, day out. They are doing nothing today that is any different from what they do day in, day out. Those principals and officers-in-charge have established the safe working and operational arrangements that are in place today to ensure the safety and proper supervision of students who have come to school today because their parents are not in the fortunate position of being able to undertake alternative arrangements to deal with the inconvenience of this stoppage.

### Interstate Budget Developments

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** My question is for the Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development. Can the Treasurer inform the House of budget developments interstate?

**Mr FRASER:** I can. It is clear that the Leader of the Opposition has also been monitoring budget developments interstate because, as the Premier said earlier, he has put out a press release calling on us to match the achievements of the Western Australian budget. However, in his press release he did not mention that the Western Australian budget actually forecasts deficits in the out years. He does not mention that he wants us to match the achievement of forecasting deficits in the out years. He does not mention that in Western Australia the payroll tax rate is 5.5 per cent; in Queensland it is 4.75 per cent. He wants us to match the achievement of lifting the payroll tax rate. He does not mention that in Western Australia the threshold for payroll tax is \$750,000; in Queensland the rate is the highest in mainland Australia at \$1 million. Does he want us to match that achievement in Western Australia?

If we matched the achievement in Western Australia, we would get an extra \$450 million in revenue off the back of business. Can members guess what the surplus is in Western Australia this coming financial year? Did anyone guess that it is a bit lower than \$450 million? Yes, it is! It is \$409 million. The Leader of the Opposition wants us to match the achievement of implementing their cherished \$1 billion a year deep swathing cuts to front-line public sector services. What is the full carnage from the cuts that they so cherish? \$600 million in health and a freeze on extra doctors and nurses. What are the cuts in education? \$380 million and a freeze on extra teachers and teacher aides put in place through their ceiling on job hiring in the general government sector.

Clearly what is going on here is that the current Leader of the Opposition—the interim Leader of the Opposition—is so wedded to the policies of his mentor, the returning Leader of the Opposition—the Leader of the Opposition in exile—that he is just like the spurned lover because he is still on the rebound. He is still blaming everyone else and does not accept any responsibility for the policy that he took to the election. In my view he is not the only fan of the policies of the Western Australian government. I think the interim Leader of the Opposition should look at his deputy, the returning Leader of the Opposition, and wonder whether the deputy leader is not a fan of the Western Australian Premier himself, because just like Colin Barnett I think that the deputy is one horse back, one horse off the rails. As they seem to like to do in Western Australia, I reckon the deputy is looking at his chair and he has the sniff of victory right in his nostrils.

### Teachers Strike

**Mr NICHOLLS:** My question is to the Treasurer. Is the Treasurer able to quantify the value of work lost in Queensland today as thousands of mums and dads stay at home to look after their kids because of the government's mismanagement leading to today's Teachers Union strike?

**Mr FRASER:** I thank the shadow Treasurer for his question. Clearly—and this is odd, when you think about it—he is at one with the interim Leader of the Opposition because, of course, we have yet to hear from members of the Liberal National Party as to what they think should be offered to the teachers of Queensland. Let us put this in context. The reality is that we believe the offer from the government of 4½ per cent this year, four per cent next year and four per cent in 2011 is a generous offer in very tough circumstances. Of course we would like to offer more, but the reality of our circumstances is clear. The reality is that the cost of that offer is over \$900 million. By implication the shadow Treasurer says that it should be put beyond that—unless he is prepared to state a position otherwise, which I suspect he is not.

The shadow Treasurer is following the credo of the interim opposition leader because, as we see from his endorsement of everything Western Australian, he has decided not to come up with any new ideas other than to say that he will copy everything happening in Western Australia. In addition, last week on television when asked whether he had any ideas he said, 'It's up to the Premier to come up with ideas.' Earlier the Premier talked about the role that some industry groups play and, in the television interview, the Leader of the Opposition revealed clearly the current tactics of the Liberal National Party in Queensland. Just as he thinks it is up to the Premier to come up with new ideas, he said, 'It's also up to people in industry to do that and for us to say whether we are prepared to support them.'

The reality is that the interim Leader of the Opposition has no policy on the teachers strike and no policy on what his party would offer. He has no policy on this issue. He said, 'We like what is happening in Western Australia, but when it comes to any other ideas we don't think it is up to us. If someone like Commerce Queensland wants to put a policy position out there, our role is to say whether we are prepared to support them.' That is what the members opposite are prepared to do.

The honourable member's question implies that the members opposite hold a view that they do not. Members must make no mistake: all of these questions account for nought unless the interim opposition leader, the returning opposition leader or the would-be and really-really-wants-to-be opposition leader can say what it is that they would offer to teachers. If that all gets too hard, the question that they need to ask can always be answered by the new shadow minister for education, the member for Moggill. We have a question for him, too. Our question is this: can he assure the people of Queensland that he will be the minister for education after the next election, because, when we get onto that topic, by definition the support for this government goes through the roof.

### Dalby, Nursing Home

**Ms GRACE:** My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health. I understand that the Deputy Premier visited the Karingal Nursing Home in Dalby last week. Can the Deputy Premier please inform the House of the facility's progress in addressing the mice plague issues?

**Mr LUCAS:** I was shocked to hear that an elderly nursing home resident at a Queensland Health facility had been bitten by a mouse that had found its way inside the home. Last week I visited the Dalby Hospital and Karingal Nursing Home to see for myself what measures had been put in place to address the mice plague. Since February a baiting and trapping program has been in place and it is acknowledged—in fact, it was acknowledged by the local member in the media—that regrettably mice plagues are not uncommon on those parts of the Darling Downs. It is an issue that people need to address. Since April additional measures have been put in place, including extensive baiting and trapping, modifications to buildings to prevent mouse access, slashing around the facility, the spreading of an appropriate rodenticide in neighbouring paddocks and the installation of an electromagnetic mouse deterrent system around the facility. I am told that that has resulted in significant reductions in the number of mice around the facility. For example, around Anzac Day 160 mice were caught.

I have made it clear to my department and my staff that I should have been told about this sooner. It is not good enough to find out about it in the media. When I went to Dalby last week, I found an almost brand-new facility operated by very dedicated staff, most of whom reside in Dalby. Some staff come from an agency, but most of them reside in the local community. I have to say that they were somewhat upset at the nature of the publicity surrounding this incident. Not for a moment do I contend that this was not a matter of public interest in terms of the media. However, dealing with mice in a facility is not a matter that requires ministerial intervention, or it ought not to be. It is not a question of funding. It is a question of making sure that when these issues present themselves they are acted on immediately. It should not be necessary for ministerial intervention or notice in relation to these matters, as we expect them to be resolved locally. I acknowledge the hard work of our staff at what is a spotless nursing home facility. It is not on for this to happen. It is not on at all.

**Mr Springborg:** It was your bureaucratic madness.

**Mr LUCAS:** Isn't it interesting that we have a plague of mice but a single goose on the opposite side of the House! If the Leader of the Opposition pro tem thinks that every day the parliament should direct where the mouse traps will be laid, that shows how unfit he is—

*(Time expired)*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The expression you used in reference to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is unparliamentary. I ask you to withdraw it.

**Mr LUCAS:** I withdraw.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Thank you.

### Recycled Water

**Mr SEENEY:** Can the Premier explain how anyone can have any confidence in the government's plan to introduce recycled sewage to Brisbane's water supply when the introduction of fluoride has clearly been beyond the government's capacity to manage?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the member for the question. As I detailed in a ministerial statement to the House this morning, the incident at North Pine River Water Treatment Plant is under investigation. Until that investigation has been completed I am not in a position, nor are those opposite or anybody else, to understand exactly what happened, how it happened, how it can be rectified and if anything necessary has to be done. Let us have a good look at what the investigation says and then not only I but those opposite and the public will have a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding this event.

As I said, that matter is being investigated independently by an independent investigator. Until we see the outcome of that investigation, it would be inappropriate for me—someone who is not technically qualified in the area—to be speculating about the matters involved in that incident. I give this guarantee: the report of the investigation will be made public and members of the opposition, members of the public and members of the media will be able to scrutinise it fully, as they should.

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** The House will come to order.

**Ms BLIGH:** The other thing that I think is important for me to note in this context is just what an important public health issue fluoride is. This government will not be moving away from its plan to ensure the people of Queensland and the children in particular have access to fluoridated water right across the state. Our fluoridation program is proceeding and will continue.

What we saw during the election campaign was the interim Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Southern Downs, come out in the most disgraceful way and dog-whistle on the issue of fluoride. I did not hear the member for Surfers Paradise stand up as a dentist during the election campaign and say anything in opposition to that policy. It was a disgraceful dog-whistle and he knows it. He knew exactly what he was doing in relation to people's fears. The Leader of the Opposition stood by silently and made no effort on one issue of which he believes he is a champion. He made the author of those dreadful dog-whistling comments his deputy. He made him his appointed mentor and appointed him his thinker in residence. So expect more dog-whistling from the lot of them.

### Teachers, Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

**Mr FINN:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Education and Training. Can the minister update the House on negotiations with the Queensland Teachers Union over a new enterprise bargaining agreement?

**Mr WILSON:** As I said previously, this is a very serious matter—the negotiation of a sustainable, fair and affordable industrial agreement with the Queensland Teachers Union. The offer that the government has put on the table would put Queensland teachers up there amongst the highest paid in Australia. It is a \$900 million offer that the taxpayers of Queensland are putting forward through the Queensland government. It would not be responsible for there to be any other offer given that we are in a budget deficit. That is the short position.

We have to make sure that—yes, we value our teachers and they are hardworking—we strike the right balance between a fair wages outcome for them, a responsible wages outcome in terms of longer term planning for the workforce that is to play such a vital role in teaching young Queenslanders—our future leaders—and, thirdly and equally as importantly, an affordable wages outcome in the context of tough economic times and the budget deficit that we face.

As I say, this offer by the Queensland government would put teachers up there amongst the highest paid in Australia. It is a \$900 million offer on behalf of Queensland taxpayers. It is a very responsible offer. To offer anything different would not be responsible in the face of the tough economic times and the fact that there is a budget deficit.

We have put in a lot of hard work to negotiate a satisfactory outcome here. There are about 30 pages in the enterprise agreement. There are about 28 issues on the table. One alone is the salary and wages issue. This offer that we have put forward would put beginner teachers in Queensland second only to the Northern Territory and senior teachers second only to New South Wales.

I can also report that 15,741 students have attended school today. That produces a statewide ratio of approximately one staff member for every 10 students. Students are under safe and appropriate adult supervision in every school in Queensland today.

### Recycled Water

**Mr GIBSON:** My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning. In light of the Premier's failure to answer the question and the government's continued bungling of water infrastructure and supply, how can Queensland residents count on a Labor government to ever safely introduce recycled water into our drinking supply?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I would ask the honourable member to rephrase the question. I think he will find that the wording of it is outside the standing orders. If he rephrases it the question will be within the standing orders.

**Mr GIBSON:** Minister, how can Queensland residents count on Labor to ever safely introduce recycled water into our drinking water supplies?

**Mr HINCHLIFFE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I can tell the honourable member and the House that this government, the Bligh government, will be absolutely committed to ensuring that any water that goes into our water supply will be safe. That is the strong commitment that we have made in relation to the introduction and rollout of fluoride, which is a vital public health measure, and we made that commitment with the strong support of important medical organisations such as the Australian Dental Association and the AMA.

In relation to the issues about the introduction and use of purified recycled water, this government has made its position extremely clear: this government would, in the circumstances where our dams in South-East Queensland fall below 40 per cent, reconsider that measure. We have the absolute best fail-safe system—the multiple barriers that the purified recycled water must go through before being reintroduced back into the dam system. I can absolutely assure members of this House and the people of Queensland that any potable water that is supplied in Queensland will be of the highest quality and will undergo the most stringent testing regime to ensure that it will be absolutely and appropriately safe for the people of Queensland.

I will also support ensuring that building works continue so that, should our dams fall again to those levels—and I am very pleased to hear reports today from the acting minister for natural resources that we are hopeful that this current weather system over South-East Queensland will cause our dam levels to rise even further—those building works will produce even better outcomes for the water supply for South-East Queensland. I reiterate that this government, the Bligh government, is absolutely committed to delivering and supporting safe drinking water for the whole of South-East Queensland, including Toowoomba.

### **Aquaculture Industry**

**Mr HOOLIHAN:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland. Aquaculture is an important industry to Queensland. Can the minister explain some of the ways that Primary Industries and Fisheries scientists and researchers are working to assist this industry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Keppel for his question and his interest in agribusinesses. Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries employs more scientists than any other organisation in this state. The work they are doing is helping agribusiness across the state. Today I want to highlight some of the practical ways that our research is assisting aquaculture.

Our scientists are working on ways to boost prawn fertility and to destress mud crabs in research projects that could equal millions of dollars to industry and create new jobs. Black tiger prawns contribute over \$30 million to the Queensland economy. They grow to a large size fairly quickly. That is why aquaculturalists have focused on the black tiger prawn. They represent the bulk of the prawn farm industry in this state.

Historically farmers have captured the black tiger prawn brood stock from the wild, but more and more they want to grow and maintain the domesticated stock and breed selected lines. However, one major obstacle in this process is the sometimes questionable fertility of pond grown males. If farmers are going to maintain hundreds of male brood stock over winter, they need to know how they will perform come the breeding season.

To date, scientists and farmers alike have been baffled as to why pond grown male brood stock can be less reliable than the wild or tank grown stock. It is suspected that the low winter temperature and/or overcrowding are putting pond grown males off their game. The theory will be tested this winter in a joint Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries and CSIRO research project. This could lead to a larger and more consistent supply of prawns for Aussie consumers and contribute a further \$3 million at least to this industry.

Another one of our projects is showing industry how to maximise the survival rate of mud crabs. They become stressed as they are transported for days at a time. Our researchers use stress biomarkers to understand which handling steps along the supply chain impose the greatest stress on the crabs. It was determined that the major causes of stress are holding crabs out of water, handling disturbances and temperature changes. The major recommendation from our study is the inclusion of recovery steps along the distribution chain—

*(Time expired)*

### **Bruce Highway, Cooroy-Curra Upgrade; Federal State School**

**Mr WELLINGTON:** My question is to the Minister for Main Roads. I thank the minister for agreeing to meet with community representatives and me this Thursday to discuss the Nambour Connection Road. With the federal government now committing money to start work on the Cooroy-Curra road upgrade, will the government meet all of the costs for building the new Federal State School, including the costs associated with relocating the original Federal State School to the proposed new school site?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Before I call the Minister for Main Roads, I remind all honourable members about the statement that I circulated this morning about an unnecessary preamble.

**Mr WALLACE:** I thank the honourable member for his question. I ask the honourable member to again pass on my sympathies to the community and family of those involved in that tragic accident that occurred on the Nambour Connection Road the other week. It was a terrible accident, and I am looking forward to meeting with the member on Thursday.

The Bligh government believes that the Cooroy-Curra section of the Bruce Highway, part of the National Highway, is a high priority to be upgraded. As I said earlier in my ministerial statement, that is a very dangerous section of the Bruce Highway. That is why we warmly welcome the Rudd government's commitment of \$488 million for the section B upgrade. This will allow the much-needed project to proceed as soon as possible. This builds on the previous commitment of \$200 million for planning, design and land acquisition by the Rudd government. The finalised strategic planning study for the upgrade has been approved by the federal minister and the preferred alignment has been agreed between the state and the Commonwealth.

While pursuing this upgrade is important, I am aware of the need to ensure that community facilities and the community's wishes regarding the school facilities that the honourable member alluded to and the historic buildings or features are properly accounted for. With regard to Federal State School, this school will be impacted by a future section of the Cooroy-Curra upgrade. The school community has been negotiating with Main Roads and Education Queensland to achieve a solution for the school community. I understand that this historic school is set to celebrate its centenary next year, and it is understandable that the school community wants certainty about its future.

I am pleased to inform the honourable member that negotiations between my department and the education minister's department and the school community are progressing positively and well. Indeed, I spoke to my good friend the education minister again this morning and he is very keen to see this situation resolved.

A proposal for resuming the existing land and relocating the school to a new preferred site has been developed, and I am informed that this proposal meets the needs of the community. While compensation negotiations still need to be finalised, I am confident that the outcomes will satisfy all parties and will be agreed upon. This will include ensuring that compensation adequately caters for establishment of the school at the new preferred site, including relocation of the existing historic buildings.

I also understand that there is an issue surrounding the future of the historic Federal community hall that is often used by the school community. The hall committee is in the process of deciding its preferred option for the future of this particular building. Again, I am confident that negotiations over compensation arrangements will ensure the community's needs are appropriately catered for, including providing for relocation of the building if need be.

I thank the honourable member for Nicklin for his interest in this matter. I am looking forward to discussions with him on Thursday about that tragedy, but I can assure him that my department and the education department will work with the local community to ensure that this situation is resolved.

*(Time expired)*

### **Banning of Unsafe Products**

**Mr RYAN:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading. Would the minister please inform the House about what the Bligh government is doing to protect Queensland children from unsafe toys?

**Mr LAWLOR:** I thank the member for the question. The Bligh government is committed to providing the highest possible standards of consumer protection for Queenslanders. That is why as a government we have moved to permanently ban a range of products that pose a specific threat to Queensland children. Additionally, we will introduce compulsory safety labelling for treadmills.

Five products have been temporarily banned while Fair Trading officers investigated whether they were suitable for sale in the longer term. These investigations have found that these products are not appropriate for sale, and I have therefore had them banned permanently. Permanent bans of unsafe products ensure that Queenslanders and children in particular are protected from the risk of injury or death.

The first permanently banned product is Bindeez beads. Whilst they are no longer sold by retailers, the ban will ensure they cannot be used in the future. The second permanently banned product is fire footbags. These bags have a huge potential to cause injury when used by someone without the suitable skills. The product remains available for professional entertainers and theatrical use where the appropriate qualifications are shown.

The third permanently banned product is the amazing jumbo spiky light-up ball. This toy was supplied with a pump resembling a hypodermic syringe. In the hands of a child there is the strong potential for injury. The fourth permanently banned product is small expanding toys. These toys, which often come in the shape of an animal, can expand dramatically in size, potentially representing a hazard

if they are swallowed. The fifth permanently banned product is toothpaste containing more than 0.25 per cent by weight of diethylene glycol, DEG. DEG is a cheap substitute for glycerin—one of toothpaste's main ingredients—and is toxic under certain levels of exposure. The risk escalates significantly from repeated long-term exposure to the chemical.

In addition, a mandatory labelling standard will officially commence on 1 June 2009. The standard requires warning labels to be placed on treadmills, alerting users to the danger of friction burns from the moving belt to young children.

I have also banned the sale of toys containing excessive levels of lead until 31 December 2009, when a new mandatory safety standard will take effect. The Bligh government will not apologise for taking tough action against any product that could potentially cause harm to Queensland children.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I thank the honourable minister for scaring the heck out of us.

### Gold Coast Desalination Project

**Mrs STUCKEY:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning. Given the ongoing delays, the faulty pipes, the faulty valves and the unbalanced pumps at the Tugun desalination plant, which was due to be opened six months ago, will the minister advise the House when this plant will finally open?

**Mr HINCHLIFFE:** I thank the honourable member for her question. The Gold Coast desalination project is very important in the context of the government's commitment to the development of water security in South-East Queensland. As the honourable member appreciates, there have been ongoing issues surrounding the development and final commissioning of this plant. Investigations are being undertaken by an independent team of investigators contracted by WaterSecure. They are reviewing the known defects at the plant, determining the project's compliance and identifying any other problems should they exist. WaterSecure advises that the independent team will complete its investigation in May. A report of the reviewer's findings will be provided to WaterSecure and to the state.

The shutdown will have no effect on the desalination pipeline—people should understand that—and no impact on local residents along the pipeline route. The Gold Coast desalination project has created up to 1,000 jobs and is an important project at this time. It is absolutely demonstrative of the government's strategy to cushion the impact of the global financial crisis. It is certainly a project where challenges have been identified. It was made very clear by the previous minister in January that there would be a shutdown period of at least five weeks at this time. It will be during this shutdown period and the audit of the system that any deficiencies in the plant will be identified.

The reality is that we have an opposition in this state that is against seeing this project developed as part of the water grid. Those opposite voted against the water grid in this House. They are against seeing the Gold Coast desalination plant in full production and producing up to 125 megalitres of water per day. The scheduled five-week closure of the plant is occurring at the moment. We will identify any further issues through that process. I look forward to the report from WaterSecure.

### Homelessness

**Mrs SCOTT:** My question is to the Minister for Community Services and Housing. Minister, homelessness is an issue that faces governments the world over. Could the minister please inform the House what steps the Bligh government is taking to address the issue of homelessness in Queensland?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for her genuine interest in housing. I spent two days last week in Mount Isa at the invitation of the member for Mount Isa, Betty Kiernan. What a mighty member she is. What a great advocate for people in her community, with a genuine concern about housing issues and homelessness. It was wonderful to travel around with you, Betty, in your city: thank you very much for the invitation.

I met with people and listened to their issues about homelessness. I met with a number of organisations that are providing support to homeless people in Mount Isa—a roof over their head, training, support, life skills, literacy programs; the works. It was all happening in those services in Mount Isa. I pay tribute to those people who are working at the coalface of service provision.

One thing that struck me while I was in Mount Isa was that it has a proud history. It is very keen to support efforts that close the gap in terms of housing and health for Indigenous people. The Bligh government is certainly rising to meet the challenges of homelessness for mainstream communities as well as Indigenous communities around the state. We are working with the Rudd government to reduce the number of homeless people because we share the same goal—to make a real difference in people's lives. There can be nothing better than making sure people have a secure roof over their heads.

We will do everything we can to support the federal government's target to halve homelessness. On top of that, we will continue to financially support those dedicated people working in non-government organisations, like the ones I met in Mount Isa last week with the member for Mount Isa. We have set aside more than \$36 million this year to help them and others. I certainly commend the work they are doing. They are working at the very heart of their local community. They are able to come up with local solutions to challenges and harness local resources to help people when they need it most.

As we all come to terms with the harsh reality that we are indeed facing the worst economic crisis we have seen in a long time, their need is even greater. The Bligh government has also committed more than \$30 million this year to help women and children deal with domestic and family violence. Our funds will go towards vital crisis accommodation and counselling services. We will not turn our back on women and children in troubled times. We will do everything possible to ensure that they have somewhere safe to stay and counselling services to help them get their lives back on track. We have set aside more than \$40 million for homelessness services in Queensland. That is 118 crisis accommodation services, women's refuges and places for young people and families.

On top of that, we have embarked on the biggest ever investment in social housing infrastructure since the Chifley era. I am going to keep telling members this wonderful news. That is 4,000 new social housing dwellings we will see across Queensland in the next couple of years. The Bligh government is serious about tackling homelessness and it is rising to meet the challenges with sensible, workable solutions.

### Dalby, Nursing Home

**Mr HOPPER:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Earlier this morning the minister tried to avoid responsibility for the tragic outcome of the mouse plague at the Dalby nursing home. Given that the staff had pleaded with the minister's department since the end of February with no result, why did I as the local member, after sending an email personally to the minister at 12.20 pm on Wednesday, 29 April, have to resort to using the media to try to get attention paid to this issue?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Now you will rephrase the question.

**Mr HOPPER:** Why did the minister not act when he got my email?

**Mr LUCAS:** I made it clear before that I expect both my department and my staff to make these matters known to me immediately. I have to say, though, that there are many items of correspondence that come to a minister's office, particularly in areas such as Health and Transport—and those on the other side of the House who have been ministers will know this—that are simply beyond the capacity to be drawn to the minister's attention. This is not one of those issues.

I do not have any difficulty with the media publicly reporting this issue in the sense that it is a matter of public interest. I will make it quite clear: it is not an issue that one would ordinarily expect would require the minister to intervene in and respond to. It is a matter that ought to be undertaken within the resources and local management of the department.

**Mr Hopper** interjected.

**Mr LUCAS:** Absolutely. Do not try to—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr LUCAS:** Do not try this rot about suggesting that ministers should sit down and direct how rodent control should happen in Queensland Health facilities. People are entitled to expect that these matters will be resolved. It is not fair on the staff, who clearly did want something to be done about it but action was not taken. It is not fair on them; they are good staff who work very hard. Rodent mice are a fact of life on the Darling Downs. What is not acceptable is that this elderly gentleman, who obviously due to his infirmity is not able, like others, to avoid mice—

**Mr Springborg:** The Bligh government's bureaucratic madness.

**Mr LUCAS:** What a ridiculous statement!

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Deputy Premier will resume his seat.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr LUCAS:** They do not want to hear the answer, Mr Speaker.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The House will come to order.

### Far North Queensland, Great Walk

**Mr O'BRIEN:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. Can the minister update the House on the prospect of a new Great Walk to be established in Far North Queensland and progress on the wider network of Great Walks across Queensland?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Minister for sustainability, you have one minute.

**Ms JONES:** I do not think that many members in this House would dispute that the member for Cook represents one of the most beautiful and environmentally significant electorates in the whole of Queensland, if not in fact the country. What this government took to the people of Queensland in our election campaign was that we would build one of the greatest walks in his electorate, bringing tourism and jobs to Far North Queensland. We committed \$1.23 million for a feasibility study to build this Great Walk, which will be over 2,000 kilometres long. The reason we invest in parks and we invest in infrastructure like this is that we know that this investment brings jobs. In fact, our investment in national parks brings about \$1.3 billion to the Queensland economy via tourism. I also want to take the last 13 seconds I have to acknowledge the Youth Environment Council in the gallery today. Today I will be releasing its report which shows that over 70 per cent of young people between the ages of 14 and 24 care about climate change, and that just shows how out of touch the opposition is.

*(Time expired)*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The minister's time has expired.

## MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

### Bligh Government, Service Delivery

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.41 am): In the second parliamentary sitting week after the election of 21 March we are here discussing the very things that state governments are all about—that is, service delivery in all of the important areas. The LNP believes in delivering services in the areas of electricity, water, health and education. Minister after minister has stood up here and acknowledged their failures and said that they have to do better. The Premier is saying that the government will have to set some new targets and plans. However, service delivery is the problem with this government, and we see it in every area that government members speak about. Let us look at what was discussed here this morning. The Premier talked about jobs and this jobs target clearly when we identified in the first parliamentary sitting week the fact that the 100,000 jobs promised were going to be for as little as one hour a week. With regard to the Premier talking about her absolute commitment to creating these 100,000 jobs, let us look at the statistics. Last month there were 114,000 unemployed Queenslanders; in the same month last year there were 83,000 unemployed Queenslanders. There have been 8,000 unemployed Queenslanders added to the unemployment list since the election. Clearly, the Premier comes in here and says anything and talks about targets and plans, as she has always done in all of her portfolios, but service delivery is what really counts for the people of Queensland and their children. Obviously the Premier just comes in here and says anything.

This morning we even had the Treasurer in here talking about last week's federal budget in that it has plans and statistics that show that the unemployment rate over the next two years federally is going to go to eight per cent or 8.5 per cent. The Treasurer acknowledged that fact, yet we still have the Premier talking about creating these 100,000 jobs and jobs in a Green Army, which we welcome, but we have to remember that these are jobs which could be paying only a couple of hundred dollars a week; they are not real bread-winning jobs. When it comes to delivering, that is the thing that this government is short on. We expect 100,000 full-time, bread-winning jobs, and of course we knew that had to be a nebulous promise when the unemployment rate was 106,000 at the time of the election. This government just says anything to get elected, and all we get from it is promises and then bungles when we actually come into this place and ask it specific questions.

We just heard the health minister denying any responsibility for issues of workplace health and safety in a nursing home at Dalby. It took the local member to provide the information to the health minister, yet the health minister is in here denying that it is his job to make sure that those sorts of things do not happen when it is a basic service for the people in that area. No-one should be attacked by rodents and they should not be told that they are not allowed to mow the field next door. The member for Condamine had to point this out to the minister, yet the health minister came in here and said, 'Oh, it's not really my job. Someone else is supposed to be doing it.'

Since we were here last we heard about electricity—another basic human service in 2009. There is going to be a 30 per cent increase in the cost from a government and a Premier who said that no Queenslanders would be any worse off after electricity deregulation. Of course we know that the Electricity Act says that the minister can set the price but can also give it the Queensland Competition Authority, which is what he has done, and of course we have seen the bungle that has happened in electricity where Queenslanders are not going to be able to afford to pay for their electricity bill on top of all of the other costs that they are bearing. Once again from this government we hear platitudes and it tells people to look around for the best price when it is clear that there is no choice. There is no choice, and Queenslanders have to bear these costs.

The fuel tax is another issue that we now see the government flagging as a possibility, because clearly the budget is broken. We know that the government has gone from an \$800 million surplus to now having a \$1.6 billion deficit in this year, heading to a \$3.2 billion deficit in 2009-10. We look forward to hearing what the Treasurer has to say on 16 June, and of course today we have heard about the bungle in water. It has been bungle after bungle since the state government took control of our water supplies. It said that it was too confusing with councils in control, but let us have a look at the incidents we have had. We have the desalination plant at Tugun that is not working properly and that is rusty. There have been recycled water spills at Bundamba. I am the first to acknowledge that I am a supporter of having fluoride in our water, but it was always with a proviso that the administration—the mechanism of making sure we put fluoride in the water—would be done appropriately, and there is no excuse for poisoning the people of Queensland in certain communities with up to 30 times the dose. I can tell members that even as a dentist I would not want to be taking 30 times the dose of fluoride. No-one would advocate that, and that is a condemnation of this government in that it has not been able to ensure that the mechanism was done properly. Thirty times is just unforgivable and begs the question of just how this government is going to manage recycled water.

And of course today we had the Minister for Education standing in for the Minister for Natural Resources saying that they had located the water main at Anstead. This water main bursting nearly washed away an electricity substation. So it was really difficult to find—a geyser spurting up into the air! It begs the question of just how this government is able to deliver services. Providing water is one of the most fundamental services, and this government cannot even get that right. This is Queensland in 2009; it is not a Third World country. We should be able to expect to have water to drink and that our children can go to school, and of course that is something else that is happening today—a teachers strike. The Minister for Education did not know whether he was Arthur or Martha on this issue, saying that teacher aides were going to be supervising, saying that principals would be supervising. When asked today, he was unable to identify exactly the number of supervisors who would be there. There have been conflicting messages from the minister and the unions. There were ads in the *Courier-Mail* on Monday, 18 May from the Queensland government saying that people should keep their children home from state schools. But of course earlier in the week the Minister for Education was saying that parents could send their children to school because they would be supervised. There was another ad from the Queensland Teachers Union saying that the education minister claims that all schools will be open and all students can be supervised. The QTU knows that this is not possible. Our children in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are second last or last in the country according to the NAPLAN tests, the literacy and numeracy tests. Teachers have had to muck around with the curriculum all year because the focus has been on doing these tests to prepare our children, and we want our children to do better. We want our children to do better compared to the rest of the country.

Our children should never be coming last or second last in any field of endeavour. But the teachers could not teach what they usually want to teach because they have to focus on these tests. The Premier also said that teachers may have to sit a test to prove that they have literacy and numeracy skills and endorsed Geoff Masters's recommendation, which I believe was misinterpreted. If you go to university for three or four years and you are not literate and numerate, there is no way that you should be able to be a teacher, anyway. Someone should have found that out during their university course. I do not believe that there is a test that these teachers should be able to do that can give them a tick and suddenly they are able to be a teacher. That just shows that this government is short on substance and just grabs at anything that it thinks will be the issue in the paper today or tomorrow.

I can understand the frustration of teachers. During the last election campaign we promised teachers a pay rise. I promised that as the shadow minister for education. The government refused to address the issue. We knew that the enterprise bargaining agreement was coming to an end. We do not believe that our teachers should be the lowest paid in Australia, but the government cannot even work out whether teachers are the highest paid or the lowest paid. That shows it has no idea. Instead of that proposal as an alternative, we have the government trying to change the issue and talking about bringing in a new tax for Queenslanders.

The Liberal National Party has never brought this tax on Queenslanders. Every other state of Australia had a fuel tax and in 1997 Rob Borbidge, the former Premier, made sure that we did not get that tax in Queensland. In yesterday's paper it is reported that the Premier would not give any firm commitments on taxes, saying only that she is seeking to avoid raising taxes in the June budget. Yet we have had the Treasurer committed to not increasing taxes. On 11 March 2009 at a media conference he was asked if he could rule out any increases in taxes and he stated—

I'm happy to rule it out.

We also had the Treasurer saying—

Make no mistake about it: we'll be delivering a fuel subsidy scheme. It will stay in place.

But now we know they are considering a new tax. This is an outrage that the people of Queensland cannot accept. In health, in education, in roads, in police, this government cannot deliver. Do not listen to what they say; look at what they do.

## **Domestic and Family Violence**

**Mr MOORHEAD** (Waterford—ALP) (11.51 am): May—this month—is Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month. Domestic and Family Violence Protection Month is an opportunity to not only make Queenslanders aware of the scourge of domestic violence in our community but also recognise the great work done by agencies—both government and non-government—to ensure that homes are safe for the whole family.

Unfortunately, domestic violence is all too common. Almost one-third of all assaults against women are perpetrated by current or former partners. Domestic violence also plays a significant role in lethal violence, accounting for 27 per cent of homicides in Australia. But domestic violence is hidden behind a wall of silence, so often going unreported. Domestic violence is too often kept behind the closed doors of our homes, with only our children and the victims as witnesses. Not surprisingly, children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be victims of abuse themselves.

The human, social and financial cost of domestic violence ripples throughout our community, no matter where we are. But there is some good news. Queensland government agencies and non-government organisations are always developing new and innovative measures to promote community awareness of domestic violence, to prevent domestic violence and to support victims.

Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month was opened this year by the Minister for Community Services, Karen Struthers, with the announcement of the recipients of the 2009 Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Awards. It was comforting to know that there are so many people, organisations and agencies in Queensland who are working every day to prevent domestic and family violence. The government award was received by the St George police for their Domestic Violence Revisit program. By simply visiting the homes where incidents of domestic violence occurred within 24 hours after the initial call for assistance, incidents of domestic violence have been reduced by 40 per cent in that community. That is a massive achievement in the face of the number of domestic violence incidents rising elsewhere.

But close to my heart and to the people of the Beenleigh area is the individual award winner, Sister Carolyn Steiner. Over the past 15 years Sister Carolyn has established and led the Domestic Violence Assistance Program in Beenleigh. Sister Carolyn provided front-line court advocacy support and developed networks that advocated for women experiencing domestic violence and family violence. As a nun with the Sisters of Mercy, Sister Carolyn has worked tirelessly to prevent domestic violence in Beenleigh and Logan.

Sister Carolyn worked nights, weekends and long hours without funding from the state government for her position. On her retirement from the Domestic Violence Assistance Program, the presentation of this award was a great opportunity to recognise what a difference Sister Carolyn made to the victims of domestic violence in our community. Such was her contribution that the member for Albert and I had to advocate for funding for 1½ positions to replace her when she retired. I am truly grateful to the Minister for Community Services for her announcement of more than \$96,000 to support the work of the Domestic Violence Assistance Program.

But while we must always celebrate our successes, there are always opportunities for improvements. One of those key opportunities is for greater cooperation between domestic violence support services, the police and our judicial system. We must always be searching for ways to make sure domestic violence orders are accessible for victims to ensure that they can seek the protection of domestic violence orders. Many victims of domestic violence do not have access to legal representation, nor the skills to represent themselves in that legal process and rely on support services like the Domestic Violence Assistance Program. At the same time, we must ensure that our police can prosecute domestic and family violence for what it is—a crime—and ensure that our courts are friendly and welcoming places for people who are suffering from the extremely traumatic effects of domestic violence.

Interruption.

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Further Answer to Question; Teachers Strike**

**Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferry Grove—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training) (11.56 am), by leave: I can advise that my department has provided me with further information that says that the staff to student ratio of those attending today at school is one to 1.1.

## MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Resumed from p. 294.

### Mount Isa Electorate, Indigenous Services

**Mrs KIERNAN** (Mount Isa—ALP) (11.56 am): There is little doubt that services to people, particularly Indigenous people, are being impacted upon heavily in the city of Mount Isa and other smaller centres in the electorate. The reasons are many and varied. We saw an increase in numbers with the introduction of the federal government Northern Territory response. There was a marked increase in people coming over from the Territory, but it must be said that the residents of Lake Nash, which is just over the border, have always used Mount Isa as a service centre. There is certainly a drift of people moving from the gulf. However, again, many gulf families have established themselves in Mount Isa over many years for a whole host of reasons. There is little doubt that we have overcrowding in a number of homes, making life difficult for many families. Our soup kitchen has seen big increases, with the numbers rising weekly. This service is being used not only by homeless people but also by people residing in the suburbs—working families doing it tough.

Back in 2003, the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre was established to meet the specific needs of people who migrate to Mount Isa. Those facilities were established through the work of the government coordinating group involving elected members, industry, community groups, departments and the Kalkadoon people. We have the Arthur Peterson diversionary centre, where people who are intoxicated can be placed as opposed to being placed in jail. We have the Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House—known as KASH—where individuals and individuals' families can reside to beat addictions. We have a number of hostels dealing with young people.

We have Yallambee, which is a facility that was established many years ago. It has 11 houses, a community building and a recreation hall that delivers services for children. They are excellent services. Having said that, there are problems at Yallambee. No-one should live in squalor. It is as simple as that. Yallambee has been problematic for many years. Yallambee was built by the then Aboriginal housing organisation and over recent years has come under the jurisdiction of the department of housing. Houses have been boarded up because they have been badly damaged. The area has been both wet and dry over the years. Leaders within the Aboriginal community have maintained involvement, as have many government and non-government agencies.

Only recently, the Kalkadoon people put forward a proposal to work with the department to address the problems. Is it enough? No. When is it ever enough when dealing with people and their problems? There are calls from within my own community to establish town camps. What sort of solution is that? Mount Isa has a proud history and is proud of its Indigenous people. No-one wants to see the city's image tarnished by talk of cleaning out areas and setting up shanty towns. It is not on. I am all for sensible, workable solutions.

As the local member I have visited each and every service on numerous occasions. If I could fix the problems and make life better, especially for a child, I would. Last week I invited the new Minister for Communities, Housing and Homelessness to visit Mount Isa to see firsthand the issues and services. The minister visited every facility and met with many, many people right across the community. Do we need more housing and funding? Yes, we do. However, let us be realistic. Everyone has a role to play. It cannot be left to the state government alone. The federal government, local council and community elders all have a role to play. We should all work together and come up with a solution that is in everyone's interest.

### Teachers Strike

**Dr FLEGG** (Moggill—LNP) (12.00 pm): What we have seen today and over the past eight days or so is a debacle from the Minister for Education who was completely unable to give coherent and dependable advice to the parents and children of this state. The end result of that debacle is that we potentially leave children and their families as pawns in an enterprise bargaining dispute.

We heard the minister in this place this morning talking about individual schools organising supervision and keeping parents informed. I have two letters here, one from the Regional Director for the Greater Brisbane Area and one from the headmaster of a rural school nowhere near the Brisbane area. The striking feature of the two letters is that they are exactly the same except for the first word which in the case of the regional director is 'we' and in the case of the headmaster is 'I'.

The advice that allegedly is coming out from schools to parents about what is happening on the ground in their location is, in fact, coming from the minister or his department and is not reflective of what is actually happening on the ground. I will table those two letters for anyone who may be interested.

*Tabled paper:* Letter, dated 14 May 2009, to parents and caregivers from Chris Rider, Regional Executive Director, Greater Brisbane Region, regarding industrial action of state school teachers [222].

*Tabled paper:* Letter, dated 14 May 2009, to parents and caregivers from Philippa Sly, Principal, Yelarbon State Primary School, regarding industrial action of state school teachers [223].

To add to the confusion that has been inflicted on parents and their children, union representatives have also put out advice to parents. We have had the orchestrated departmental advice dressed up to make it look like it comes from a region or from a school headmaster when, in fact, it is advice from the department and the minister. Where the department is saying in its letter, 'Adult supervision will be provided at school for children whose families cannot provide alternative care on Tuesday, 19 May', the union letter to parents says, 'We are taking the opportunity to advise you of the directive as it will mean no instruction or supervision of children will take place at this school on that day'. I will table the letter from the union to parents.

*Tabled paper:* Letter, dated 19 May 2009, to parents from Cassandra Park, union representative, regarding industrial action of state school teachers [224].

The professional teaching staff in our schools—we are not talking about a bunch of wharfies; we are talking about the professional teaching staff in our schools—have been so mishandled by this government that members can hear outside this chamber as we speak teachers from our schools expressing their dissatisfaction.

**Mr Fraser** interjected.

**Dr FLEGG:** It is even more amazing when one considers the close relationship between the Teachers Union and the government, a relationship so close that the Teachers Union backed the government at an election just a few weeks ago. This government cannot even deal with a union in its own constituency to deliver an enterprise bargaining result that will ensure that children and their families are not ending up as pawns in an industrial dispute.

**Mr Fraser** interjected.

**Dr FLEGG:** We also had the minister, under repeated questioning today to clarify what supervision was available for students—

**Mr Fraser** interjected.

**Dr FLEGG:** This is a pretty serious matter. I am very surprised to hear the Treasurer wanting to play a political game on the other side.

**Mr Fraser** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Dr FLEGG:** Perhaps the Treasurer ought to start to consider the welfare of children and their parents in this state and stop trying to score a few cheap political points in a debate here in this place.

**Mr FRASER:** I rise to a point of order. I take offence at the imputation from the member for Moggill. I was merely asking him to put on the record what his position was. That is something that he clearly finds beyond his own capacities.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Treasurer takes offence at the statement. I ask you to withdraw.

**Dr FLEGG:** I will withdraw. The other issue that we heard this floundering minister unable to deal with today was exactly what is adult supervision. He dumped the questions about whether there was trained teaching supervision, whether we had people trained to deal with the things that might eventuate in our schools today. When he talks about adult supervision, there can be adult supervision at the local fun park. He wasn't able to tell us whether it was ground staff, secretarial staff, teacher aides or teachers. Parents and the students in this state have a right to be angry over the handling of this matter.

### Beef Week

**Mr HOOLIHAN** (Keppel—ALP) (12.06 pm): The events of 4 to 8 May were of great significance to the people and rural producers in the Rockhampton region and in Queensland and Australia. Our state and our region stood large on the international stage, with a substantial number of overseas visitors coming to Rockhampton for Beef Week 2009.

I should make the disclosure that all of our local members of parliament, including our retired member for Fitzroy, Jim Pearce, were beef ambassadors and it was an honour to be asked to promote Beef Week. Sixty thousand people came through the gates over the four days. In fact, I understand that the attendance on Tuesday may have exceeded the total attendance for the original Beef Week in 1988. There was a final event on 9 May, the *WIN* Beef Week Ball which was attended by 1,200-plus people. Accommodation was fully booked throughout Rockhampton and the Capricorn Coast and substantial spending occurred at our local businesses. I spoke to a number of traders and they had a bumper week with new customers from all over Australia and the world.

Exhibitors from all support industries, financial bodies, restaurants and many small businesses that operate in the general community came along to profile their wares to the beef industry. For instance, the Stone Grill Restaurant operated by the Ascot Hotel wanted to reach 1,000 steaks served per day; they only reached 960. Hard luck to Will Cordwell, but he has another chance in 2012.

Many members of this House will have recognised its significance and particularly opposition members. There were a number of ministers, including the federal minister for primary industries and the state minister and a number of other members. It is about time that opposition members rethought the silliness of some of their recent speakers in claiming that our government does not support primary industry. It is also probably time for some of them to be honest with their constituency so that we do not have the disgusting action of booing by a section of the attendees when the Premier was shown as part of a video presentation at the ball. There is no need to ask why when we consider the actions of certain of those opposition members during the last sitting week.

Beef Week 2009 was a celebration of the 21st anniversary of this great week which recognises the major contribution that beef production makes to our economy. There were 2,400 stud and show cattle in the ring over the week and another 2,600 at Gracemere. I congratulate our beef producers on their great support for this showcase of their industry.

Successive state governments have supported this week through infrastructure funding and operational funding. The Robert Schwarten Pavilion at Rockhampton Showgrounds was \$1 million in infrastructure and the new building referred to as the Kidman Pavilion was another \$4 million. These structures were utilised for the rodeo and other arena events and the new structure housed a variety of restaurants and exhibitors and then was cleared for the Beef Week Ball.

This year our government also contributed \$500,000 and the federal government has earmarked funding for the next three years leading up to Beef 2012, for which planning began on the closure of this year's celebration. The success of this week is a direct result of the hard work of the board, led by Chairman Geoff Murphy. Geoff is a hardworking livewire who is greatly devoted to his community and region. As well as being a beef producer, he also operates one of the largest construction companies in Queensland, JM Kelly Pty Ltd, and is presently spearheading the CQ NRL bid. To give an example of how much of a livewire he is, I can tell the House that he stood at the gate and greeted every person who was invited and introduced them to Beef Week.

Geoff was ably supported by his CEO, Noel Landry, and the 300 volunteers who worked tirelessly to make sure that no person who attended was disappointed. Sara Barnbaum should be recognised also for her efforts in organising the hundreds of attendees to the opening celebrations, the international reception and also the ball. I also congratulate Teys Bros, whose background is in beef, for the cocktail reception it held for its beef producers.

There can be no argument that Beef Week 2009 was a great success. Everyone who was involved in the organisation of the week should bask in that success. I look forward to working with all the people who are looking forward to an even better celebration of our beef industries at Beef Week 2012.

### **North Queensland Floods, Recovery Assistance**

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (12.13 pm): This morning it gives me no satisfaction whatsoever to rise to express my concerns about the progress of the state government's response to the major flood event that occurred in the Herbert River district in early February this year. I have spoken in the parliament before about the extent of the flood event that occurred in the Hinchinbrook shire and the severity of the damage that it caused. In February in this parliament a condolence motion was moved that in part offered sympathies to the people of North Queensland who had endured what was a very serious flood event.

At the time the floods in the Herbert River district got a lot of media attention and the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Emergency Services and the former minister for communities visited Ingham and all expressed what I believed to be genuine and heartfelt concern for the local community. The wider Australian community also demonstrated its empathy. The Premier's flood appeal raised \$8 million, which will soon be distributed to those in North and North-West Queensland who have submitted an application to the Red Cross.

However, all the goodwill in the world cannot get around the fact that the reports from the flood recovery committees that were established in the wake of the flood event in the Herbert River district have been with the state government for a month and no response has been forthcoming. Time is dragging on. The Hinchinbrook Shire Council, the Hinchinbrook Chamber of Commerce, tourism and industry groups, important local stakeholder groups like the Canegrowers organisation and the local community have been waiting for the state government to act.

During the flood event the Premier visited Ingham and saw firsthand the extent of the logistical challenges that local authorities and emergency services faced. On 10 February I wrote to the Premier and outlined several things that I believed would assist the local community to both recover from that major flood event and enhance the capacity of the Herbert River district to better respond to this situation in the future. On 12 February the Premier replied to me. Regrettably, not much was committed to in that reply, save for an undertaking to seal the hard-stand area surrounding the Ingham State Emergency Service unit headquarters and a commitment to replace, at no cost to the local SES, the

four-wheel drive SES vehicle that was swamped in floodwaters. Sadly, over three months later not even those relatively simple undertakings have been acted on. The capacity of the local SES to respond to incidents in the local community has been reduced because of its lack of a four-wheel drive vehicle. The Premier needs to honour the undertakings given to the Ingham SES directly.

The real trouble is that the recovery of the Herbert River district from this serious flood event became a low priority for the state government when it went on an election footing. Instead of being focused on the job of assisting communities that had endured a major natural disaster, the government was busy getting re-elected. I acknowledge that during an election campaign caretaker conventions exist and local authorities accept that new disaster recovery related decisions needed to wait until after the state election on 21 March.

I wonder if the new Minister for Transport has been made aware that the Premier advised me that she would urgently draw to the attention of the previous minister the proposal to upgrade the Ingham Airport terminal. I wonder if the main roads minister has been made aware that the Premier advised me that she would urgently draw to the attention of the previous minister a request to consider funding for the Hinchinbrook Shire Council to upgrade roads. Lastly, I wonder if the Minister for Emergency Services has been made aware that the Premier advised me that she had drawn to his attention the need for funding increases to local water and drainage management authorities to undertake flood mitigation works. It would not surprise me if none of those things have occurred, as I am not aware of anything being followed up by the previous ministers in those portfolios or by their successors, despite the advice of the Premier in her letter of 12 February.

As I said earlier, it gives me no satisfaction whatsoever to make these comments this morning. Recovery efforts from major natural disasters ought not be political exercises, but as I stated in my 10 February letter to the Premier and as I said in this parliament on the same day, as the member for Hinchinbrook it is my responsibility to advocate for the community that I represent in the wake of this major flood event. We have waited patiently for the state government to act. We have worked diligently through the local flood recovery committee process and submitted reports in good faith. Three months have passed. Many are saying that we have been forgotten.

Significant damage was caused to public and private property. Small businesses suffered badly from lost trade and damage to facilities. There was significant damage to sugar industry assets and infrastructure; we have lost 20 per cent of the 2009 crop and the crushing season is due to start in mid-June. Significant assistance was provided to the communities in Mackay and Emerald when they recently experienced major flood events, and they needed it. We feel strongly that that sets a precedent and the Herbert River district deserves to be treated equally.

### **Clem Jones Centre**

**Mr KILBURN** (Chatsworth—ALP) (12.15 pm): I am grateful for this opportunity to inform the House of a number of important events occurring at the Clem Jones Centre, which is located in my electorate. As the member for Chatsworth I am proud to support the Crackerjack Ball and Carnival that is to be held at the Clem Jones Centre on 29, 30 and 31 May. Those important fundraisers are being organised by the Camp Hill Carina Welfare Association, which was an initiative of Dr Clem Jones back in the mid-1950s. The objective of the Camp Hill Carina Welfare Association has been and continues to be the provision of affordable sport and recreation facilities for the young people of south-east Brisbane. The Camp Hill Carina Welfare Association is a not-for-profit organisation. The 35th annual carnival and the 22nd Crackerjack Ball will not only raise funds for Clem Jones Centre activities but also honour Clem Jones's wish to provide a local annual event for the young people of the Chatsworth community. This event will celebrate the Q150 initiative, with much of the program being built around a pioneering bush heritage theme.

This year in excess of 2,000 young people will participate in 17 different sporting clubs and teams that call the Clem Jones Centre home. As well as members of the different sporting groups, over 100,000 visitors will use the facilities of the aquatic centre contained within the Clem Jones Centre to improve their health and wellbeing. Those numbers clearly support the vision that Clem Jones had over 50 years ago. The centre also provides opportunities for the young people of Chatsworth to develop confidence and self-esteem, which develops young, well-rounded adults with a good community spirit. I urge the public and local businesses to support this event so that the Clem Jones Centre can continue to provide the young people of Brisbane with a worthwhile, safe and affordable centre to enjoy.

I would like to congratulate the Crackerjack Carnival organisers and the Camp Hill Carina Welfare Association for their extraordinary efforts in coordinating this event. With attendances expected to be around 25,000 over the weekend, I am sure it will be a great success. I encourage all members and residents of Chatsworth to attend the carnival to assist with this fundraising venture. I have been informed that last year's carnival raised over \$120,000 to help fund sporting facilities for the young people of Chatsworth. I congratulate the Camp Hill Carina Welfare Association for that.

Today I am also extremely happy to announce that the Clem Jones Centre is about to get a significant boost. I can inform the House that the Camp Hill Carina Welfare Association's Alan Ramsey Oval at the Clem Jones Centre will soon be transformed into a high-quality, international standard, wet dressed synthetic turf surface hockey field, thanks to a \$680,000 grant from the department of the Minister for Sport, Mr Reeves. The grant will go towards providing new hockey facilities at the Clem Jones Centre.

I would like to thank the Minister for Sport for his assistance in obtaining this grant, which will provide great benefits to the people of Chatsworth and the surrounding areas both in the short term and into the future. In the short term this will provide jobs to people in the local area and will be a boost for the businesses in my electorate. This is to be applauded and I thank the government for this grant.

This grant will allow the Eastern Suburbs Hockey Club to upgrade the existing grass cricket oval into a state-of-the-art facility including lighting and fencing for both hockey and touch football. The Eastern Suburbs Hockey Club chairperson, Mr Todd Fuller, said in a media release recently that this grant is a significant development in the club's 78-year history and they are very pleased to be able to join with the other 17 clubs of various descriptions that call the Clem Jones Centre home.

The Major Facilities Program provides financial assistance to organisations to develop and enhance sport and recreational infrastructure to meet the community's participation needs at a local, regional, national and international level. Without this funding program it is often impossible for sport and recreational organisations to fund major infrastructure. I congratulate the minister and the government on this funding and the great benefit it will provide for my constituents in the seat of Chatsworth.

### **Bribie Island, Erosion**

**Mr ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (12.20 pm): I rise today to speak about the disgraceful state of the northern tip of Bribie Island. On Tuesday last week I visited this area with the member for Caloundra to gain firsthand knowledge of the erosion. Erosion is taking place on a huge scale on both sides of the island with some 50 metres being lost in the very recent past on the coastal side alone. To illustrate my point, I table a number of photos taken during my visit.

*Tabled paper:* Photographs of beach at Bribie Island [225].

There are four points where the sea has flowed across the island. The vegetation there is now dead and during the next weather event the root systems to hold the ground together that were present before will not be there. There is a six-knot speed limit for boats in the passage and the channel runs hard up against the island. I observed that virtually no-one takes notice of the speed limit and boats regularly do up to 40 knots through this area, which intensifies the erosion.

On the ocean side there is little left of the dunes. In many locations the ground drops away behind the dunes. Once this is gone, there will be no protection to stop the break-up of northern Bribie Island. The sand loss has been estimated to be between 50,000 and 140,000 cubic metres per year. A beach nourishment campaign would cost between \$5 million and \$15 million and would additionally require a figure of somewhere between \$½ million and \$1.5 million per year to assist in the protection of the island. If we do nothing, which is the EPA's preferred choice, a major new channel will form, probably opposite Golden Beach, which is low-lying land susceptible to flooding. This would cost both taxpayers and the local council untold amounts of money to protect homeowners and the property. My advice is that the EPA has identified this distinct possibility and the dangers to the Caloundra community generally and has stated that a better solution may need to be investigated.

No-one is suggesting that rock walls or groynes be built. I submit that sand be pumped onto what is left of the area to protect the dunes and assist Mother Nature. The locals agree and the EPA has also identified this as an option. The government should take notice of locals, who have the best interests of Bribie at heart. I refer particularly to the Night Eyes organisation which is responsible for monitoring this section of the island. Aside from its other functions, it alone cleaned up 130,000 litres of rubbish last year.

The members opposite may wish to bury their collective heads in the sands of Bribie Island and say 'do nothing'. In that case I am wondering what the government will do about the LEED light on the northern tip of Bribie Island which is central to the navigation system that allows ships to enter and leave the Port of Brisbane. This LEED light is supported by four pillars, each some 60 centimetres in diameter. I table photos of the LEED light in question.

*Tabled paper:* Photographs of LEED lights at Bribie Island [226].

The LEED light is now just one metre from where the erosion ended in the last weather event. Twelve months ago it had a buffer of 50 metres. The government has four options and they are, firstly, to move the LEED light further into the island on the same line so that it continues to communicate with the one on the mainland. However, this is not possible because the land behind what is left of the dunal system is below sea level. The second option is to relocate the LEED light altogether, which means

relocating the LEED light on the mainland and the channel markers, costing vast sums. Another option, of course, is to do nothing and in the next weather event lose the LEED light altogether and shut down shipping into the Port of Brisbane. Let me inform the House that the EPA has reconstructed the dunes once already on one section of the beach and has stated that it would delay the breakthrough of the ocean in this location for between one and two years.

In the past we have allowed housing developments to be built in coastal areas that, with hindsight, should not have occurred. In Noosa a similar situation exists with erosion to the spit taking place on a large scale, with danger to the 30-year-old Noosa Sound development. If Golden Beach and Noosa Sound did not exist I would not put forward this argument. We have interfered with nature's natural process and, unfortunately, we have no option other than to protect in the most sensitive way what we have built.

It is crucial that sand be pumped onto the area in front of the LEED light, we reconstruct and revegetate the dunes and we protect the infrastructure. It is the only option, just as it is the only option in other locations identified to stop the break-up of the island and protect areas such as Golden Beach. To do nothing would invite disaster.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Ryan): Order! Before I call the member for Cook, I remind honourable members to keep the audible conversation down to a minimum.

### **Far North Queensland, Events and Festivals**

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Cook—ALP) (12.25 pm): There have never been so many reasons for Queenslanders and other Australians to holiday at home and head to Far North Queensland where many events and festivals are about to kick off. From Port Douglas to Mareeba to the tip of Cape York Peninsula there is always a lot to get stimulated about at the top of the state, but this year the calendar is particularly full.

It started last weekend with the great wheelbarrow race from Mareeba to Chillagoe in which teams of contestants delighted the crowds by pushing a wheelbarrow for the entire 140 kilometres, resting overnight in Dimbulah and Almaden on the way. The run helped raise funds for a variety of charities.

Next on the busy Far North events calendar is the Port Douglas Carnivale. For 10 balmy days and nights starting this Friday the festival carnivale takes over the seaside resort village of Port Douglas, offering a chance to flirt with life and engage in a kaleidoscope of free and ticketed events. There is music, arts, sports, food, culture and all styles of entertainment for all ages and absolutely every reason members need to head to Port Douglas. Now 17 years old, the carnivale has grown from a street fiesta to a broad program that involves the entire community. Port Douglas has a reputation for being a party town and the program certainly provides for a knees-up or two. However, organisers have taken great care this year to ensure that there is plenty to do for families and children and also for older community members.

After people dust themselves off from carnivale it will be time to head further north where they will have a choice for the Queen's Birthday long weekend. They can head due north and experience the Cooktown Discovery Festival or north-west to the Weipa Fishing Classic. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Cooktown Discovery Festival and promises to be the best yet as a rich three-day program has been organised for the many visitors who flock to the town. From go-kart races, fun runs, tours through Cooktown's historic cemetery and of course the famous re-enactment performance of Captain Cook's landing, the Cooktown Discovery Festival is something all Queenslanders should experience at least once in their life.

Cooktown has many historical buildings set in a beautiful surrounding with lots to see and do for everyone in the family. Of course, choice is good and if people so desire they can also head to Weipa for the Queen's Birthday long weekend for the Weipa Fishing Classic. The 2009 classic will be run solely for community benefit, with all proceeds supporting a large number of local community and sporting groups. While this is the fourth year that the classic has been held, initial planning indicates that the 2009 Weipa Fishing Classic has all the hallmarks of being the biggest and best yet. The Weipa Fishing Classic is becoming a 'must attend' event and is one of the largest fishing competitions in Queensland. It has volunteers throughout the community and the predicted nominations this year are about 1,300 competitors which many believe confirms our commitment to the Weipa community. The Weipa Fishing Classic continues to be a huge success. Both the Weipa Fishing Classic and the Cooktown Discovery Festival have received Q150 funding to ensure their success.

Also having received Q150 funding is the 18th Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival, which will be held between 19 and 21 June at the sacred Bora ground near Split Rock on Cape York Peninsula. The festival has been going for 30 years and is the best opportunity in Australia to celebrate the world's oldest living culture. Traditional segments of the festival include dance, song and other aspects of Aboriginal culture such as displays of hunting implements, weaving and spear throwing. Non-traditional components will include lifestyle choice programs, employment and recreational workshops, a short film

festival and night-time contemporary Aboriginal performers. On display at the festival will be the Cape York art awards, which is widely regarded as the most prestigious Aboriginal art award in Queensland and probably Australia. One will be able to view works of the most talented artists within Cape York and from a select number of invited artists.

The Laura races will be held on 27 June and the Cooktown races will be on 18 July. They are great fun days that are driven entirely by the community. The Mareeba Rodeo is the premier sporting event in tropical North Queensland and has become a national leader on the rodeo calendar. Top level competition and entertainment gives spectators plenty to watch. There are two days of full-on action at Kerribee Park, Mareeba on Saturday, 11 July and Sunday, 12 July. There will be all the usual rodeo events including bull riding, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, ladies and junior events and also the comedy clown. Many other events will be on at the Mareeba Rodeo. There have never been more reasons to travel to Far North Queensland for these events.

(Time expired)

### Youth Violence

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.31 pm): Without doubt many honourable members have seen some of the youth of the Gold Coast showcased for all the wrong reasons in recent weeks with a series of appalling attacks on and by high school children being filmed on mobile phones and then uploaded onto social networking sites like YouTube. Whichever way you look at it, it is wrong—the victim is further humiliated and traumatised by having the attack made public and it promotes violence as some sick kind of sport to be watched by audiences via available technology.

Inevitably and unfairly a school's reputation is tarnished by the unlawful actions of a few. It is good to see the police cracking down on this and charging a 17-year-old for assault for using a mobile phone to film a fight between two teenage girls. Hopefully this will send a strong message to young people that these activities will not be tolerated.

An increase in youth violence on the Gold Coast is a cause for alarm, and alarm bells should be ringing in this government's ears. It has sat back over the last few years and watched these antisocial behaviours escalating, setting up a few task forces rather than addressing the issue by putting in a range of initiatives that would not only deter these activities but also assist in engaging youth in the education process.

Like me, I am sure many honourable members in this House felt sickened by the ferocity of the attacks that they saw on defenceless students and agree that this behaviour must be stopped. Respect, restraint and repercussion are the three Rs that need to be taught in schools as a matter of urgency before there is an avoidable death. Young people need guidance, positive role models and set boundaries. They also need to learn to respect another individual, how to control their anger and that failure to do so will cause them to suffer a negative effect. Strategies must be implemented urgently if we are to restore civility and a positive learning environment.

Calls for school based police officers have fallen on deaf ears for several years when clearly they would have a stabilising influence and give some confidence to those who are being bullied and threatened. We need one appointed swiftly for the southern Gold Coast. As I said, these officers would provide a stabilising influence throughout the school community. The Labor government has frozen all funding for school based police officers, and we were told by the previous minister for police that they have no intention of including them in the next budget. By ignoring the invaluable role such officers play in schools, this Labor government has indicated just how out of touch it is with reality and today's youth.

But what hope have we? Figures show that the Gold Coast has one police officer for every 628 people, compared with the state average of one for 429. What a slap in the face for our dedicated officers. Weekend comments in the *Courier-Mail* stated that Education Queensland was working with police to combat school violence and cyber bullying, highlighting that 47 state schools now had school based police officers. This is highly misleading as schools that have been requesting an officer for years are ignored and, as I said, funding has been frozen.

Another strategy that should be implemented straightaway, even if only as a temporary measure, is the removal of mobile phones and other communication devices from children whilst in school hours. This occurs in some primary schools and is considered successful in reducing bullying. Tighter monitoring of school attendance is the most effective way to reduce truancy. Penalties should be imposed for those who do not have a medical or other acceptable excuse for nonattendance.

Kids go to school to learn. Getting an education is critical for them to be able to gain meaningful employment in a job market that is tightening. When we look at those expulsion rates, it is worrying to see 300 students expelled and 17,000 suspended. The LNP took some very strong policy into the last election that would curb absenteeism with children having to stay at school in a special class. Many see being expelled as a badge of honour and gets them out of school, which is seen by some to be quite cool.

Other LNP policy would have also seen strengthening of the juvenile justice system so that kids who repeatedly offended and seriously harmed others would have a spell away from home in a not so satisfactory location. However, we did also determine that it was important that children who were placed in some form of detention received skills and an education that they were not able or willing to achieve through the mainstream system.

Mobile phones are a major classroom distraction and deterrence to learning. As I said earlier, forbidding them during class would enhance learning capacity. It is often said that the carrot and stick approach has been not successful in getting people engaged. Well, perhaps it is time for more stick and less carrot.

We are blessed to live on the Gold Coast, which celebrated its 50th birthday recently. Whilst the government has a serious responsibility to make our neighbourhood safe, we also need to come together as a community and parents need to come on board to help guide our youth towards a life where education and respect for others becomes a given.

### **Emergency Services Cadet Program**

**Ms CROFT** (Broadwater—ALP) (12.36 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to inform the House about the Department of Community Safety's Emergency Services Cadet Program. I recently had the opportunity to visit an emergency services cadet group and was immensely impressed with how a program of this nature was contributing in such a meaningful way to the development of the youth of Queensland.

Conceptualised in 1994, the first State Emergency Service cadet groups were established in 1995 in the communities of Allora, Charters Towers, Hughenden, Ingham, Kingaroy, Middlemount, Moranbah, Mount Morgan, Southport and Tully. In 2003, the SES cadet program evolved into the Emergency Services Cadet Program, incorporating the Queensland Ambulance Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the State Emergency Service. This program reinforces the valuable work undertaken by the department in broadening the opportunities for Queensland's young people.

Since 2003, upon completion of the Emergency Services Cadet Program, 198 cadets have joined the State Emergency Service, 28 cadets have joined the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and three cadets have joined the Queensland Ambulance Service. The Emergency Services Cadet Program was the first government program in Queensland to receive accreditation through the Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations for the program's child protection policies.

Now boasting some 49 cadet groups across the state, the Emergency Services Cadet Program aims to introduce Queensland's young people to emergency services training whilst developing valuable life skills and personal strengths. Cadets are provided with positive opportunities for participation in their respective local communities, better equipping them for community life while importantly having fun in the process.

With a current membership of over 650 cadets, this program is of particular importance to rural and remote communities. Boasting tremendous diversity—with 46 per cent of cadet members being female, five per cent of cadets from an Aboriginal background, one per cent from a Torres Strait Islander background, two per cent who speak a language other than English and two per cent who have a disability—the program has assisted young people to develop into community minded members.

The Emergency Services Cadet Program has received wide recognition and achievements which include: being awarded the 2004 Minister's Award for Excellence in the category of 'Focusing on our people'; being a finalist for the 2004 Premier's Award for Excellence in Public Sector Management in the category of 'Focusing on our people'; being awarded the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Award for Excellence in 2005; and being awarded the 2005 Queensland Safety Communities Award in the pre-disaster category. In acknowledging these achievements it is important to recognise the dedication and commitment of the volunteer cadet adult members who facilitate and deliver much of this program.

Currently there are 298 adult members involved in the program who, as part of the Queensland government's commitment to protecting children, are screened through the Working with Children Check as prescribed in the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000. Importantly, the program provides the cadets with tangible and portable outcomes such as the opportunity to receive a Certificate II in Public Safety (SES Rescue) and a Certificate II in Public Safety (SES Operations). They are both nationally recognised qualifications based on the emergency services national competency standards.

The Emergency Services Cadet Program also encourages cadet members to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. I understand that the award sections within the Duke of Edinburgh Award link with most of the areas of the cadet training program. As well as establishing strong links with the department, the program supports whole-of-government strategies and contributes to Smart State strategies for safer and more supportive communities, including youth crime prevention, suicide prevention and child protection.

Last week was National Volunteer Week. I would like to take this opportunity to particularly thank the many volunteers who support and contribute to the work of the Department of Community Safety. There are thousands of volunteers carrying out significant roles in the SES, VMR, coastguards, rural fire brigades, local area ambulance committees and surf-lifesaving. On behalf of our communities, I would like to thank those wonderful volunteers for the wonderful work they do in protecting us.

## RESORTS AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

### First Reading

**Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Stafford—ALP) (Minister for Infrastructure and Planning) (12.40 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Iconic Queensland Places Act 2008, the Integrated Resort Development Act 1987, the Liquor Act 1992, the Mixed Use Development Act 1993 and the Sanctuary Cove Resort Act 1985 for particular purposes. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

*Tabled paper:* Resorts and Other Acts Amendment Bill [227].

*Tabled paper:* Resorts and Other Acts Amendment Bill, explanatory notes [228].

### Second Reading

**Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Stafford—ALP) (Minister for Infrastructure and Planning) (12.41 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The introduction of the Resorts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009 enables a package of interim amendments to provide early relief to resort communities as part of a broader reform program to modernise the Sanctuary Cove Resort Act 1985 and the Integrated Resort Development Act 1987. The resorts legislation predates the contemporary Integrated Planning Act 1997 for planning and development and the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 for regulating bodies corporate management. The two acts were only ever designed to help the resorts develop over a 10-year time frame and do not address current planning and development issues. The two acts are also unclear or silent on a range of bodies corporate management issues, resulting in a range of inequities for resort residents.

Consequently, a two-phase reform package is underway to simplify and modernise the complex planning and body corporate management framework surrounding these six resorts: Sanctuary Cove, Royal Pines, Hope Island, Kingfisher Bay, Laguna Whitsundays and the Sheraton Marina Mirage at Port Douglas. The first phase is the Resorts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009, which aims to introduce the resorts communities to the concepts underlying the broad reform program, address a range of pressing equity issues for resort residents and facilitate improved planning and development outcomes in the short term.

The bill responds to key issues raised through the 2007 discussion paper 'Resort management and development in the 21st century' and includes: provisions of the Resorts and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 which lapsed on 23 February 2009 with the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly; and proposed further amendments raised by resort stakeholders. Building on matters covered in the 2008 bill, this bill incorporates matters raised in consultation with stakeholders, including resort bodies corporate, resort owners and developers and other residential stakeholder groups.

Those stakeholders welcomed the initial bill, but took the opportunity to provide additional suggestions—many of which the government has incorporated into the new bill. I thank those resort stakeholders for the constructive role they have played in the development of this bill. Residential stakeholders told us during consultation that they wanted greater access to and involvement in the running of their community. Consequently, the bill provides for improved transparency and equity in the conduct of bodies corporate through:

- restrictions on the use of proxies;
- requirements regarding who can represent residents;
- increased financial disclosure;
- clearer access to dispute resolution;
- limiting certain body corporate management contracts to three years;

- introduction of several codes of conduct and related provisions relating to breaches of the code and termination procedures;
- provisions for more transparent election of certain bodies corporate representatives; and
- clarification of powers of certain bodies corporate including bringing SCRA into alignment with IRDA and resorts legislation into alignment with contemporary bodies corporate management legislation.

The bill also addresses current development issues, and responds to matters raised by resort owners and developers by:

- establishing a process to consider limited amendment to site boundaries provided that there is no net change to the resort site to effect good planning outcomes;
- introducing a process to amend land uses at Sanctuary Cove, currently available to all resorts except Sanctuary Cove; and
- making approved plan amendments sought by the Sanctuary Cove resort community with consequent voting entitlement changes.

The second phase of the broader resorts reform aims to transition the six resorts into contemporary frameworks and will achieve a clear separation between planning and body corporate issues. This will enable resort planning and development consistent with all other development under the Integrated Planning Act 1997 where:

- state interests are considered;
- there is clear community engagement in processes;
- rights, responsibilities and decision making are transparent; and
- resort development aligns with the resort's broader community and environment.

The transition would also allow:

- greater direction on appropriate conduct of bodies corporate,
- greater equity for residents; and
- rights, obligations and transparent conduct equivalent to those available to other residents in body corporate structures across the rest of Queensland.

This second phase will involve significant consultation and engagement with the resort communities and substantial legal and operational analysis to satisfactorily address complex rights, interests, obligations and other detailed transitional issues. In the meantime, this bill will address the pressing equity and procedural issues as a matter of priority and progress towards contemporary planning and management practice.

The bill will also make a minor amendment to the Iconic Queensland Places Act 2008 to clarify and confirm that building development applications are not captured within the ambit of that legislation. It was always intended that building development applications would not be captured by the Iconic Queensland Places Act, however the act did not specifically exclude building work where the council is the assessment manager. This amendment is required to make that intention absolutely clear and prevent unnecessary referrals of applications for building work in an iconic place to the development assessment panels for consideration.

This bill also contains amendments to the Liquor Act 1992, which regulates the sale and supply of liquor in Queensland. A review of the Liquor Act was recently completed with extensive legislative reforms coming into effect on 1 January 2009. A number of minor amendments are sought to clarify the government's intention relating to the application of ordinary trading hours of 10 am to midnight under the Liquor Act.

The first amendment relates to industrial canteens. Prior to the liquor reforms, industrial canteens were limited licences and not subject to ordinary trading hours. The canteens in question are located in remote localities with no permanent residential population where mining, road or rail construction is being undertaken. They trade for limited time periods and have a restricted clientele—primarily comprised of company employees, who are often shiftworkers. Employers have a vested interest in ensuring that liquor is sold and supplied responsibly so that employees are fit for work.

Industrial canteens that were licensed prior to 1 January 2009 can continue to trade during hours authorised on their licence. However, there are currently no provisions in the Liquor Act which allow the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing to amend these hours if a community need is established. Additionally, new industrial canteens are subject to ordinary trading hours of 10 am to midnight, which do not suit the unique conditions in which these canteens operate. In consideration of the low risk that the sale of liquor at these premises poses, an amendment is proposed to clarify, subject to the chief executive's approval, that industrial canteens are able to operate at times that suit the needs and conditions of the community in which they operate.

The second amendment relates to the trading hours of licences under the commercial special facility category. Prior to the liquor reforms, commercial special facility licences were special facility licences and not subject to ordinary trading hours of 10 am to midnight. When the new licensing category restructure commenced on 1 January 2009, special facility licences which converted to the new commercial special facility licence type kept the trading hours authorised by their previous licence, including pre 10 am hours. Apart from airports and casinos, which because of their unique characteristics are entitled to 24-hour trading under their commercial special facility licence, the government's intention for all other operators in this category is that they be subject to ordinary trading hours, like most other commercial licence types. Accordingly, the proposed amendment will remove any authorisation to trade prior to 10 am on all commercial special facility licences, other than airports and casinos.

The liquor reform implementation process has provided an opportunity to further review certain industry activities against the harm minimisation risk framework. In this regard, the third amendment is aimed at expanding the circumstances under which liquor may be sold without the authority of a licence. Although many of the recent liquor reforms were directed at minimising harm arising from the sale of liquor, red-tape reduction was also a goal of the reform process. The proposed amendment remains consistent with the goal of minimising the regulatory burden on industry in circumstances where the associated risk is low. A range of liquor sales are currently exempted under the Liquor Act, including spirituous cooking essences in specific volumes provided it is not used as or for making a beverage, sales to aircraft passengers, duty-free sales, sales by pharmacists for medicinal purposes, and sales at auction by licensed auctioneers. The Liquor Act clarifies the quantity of liquor and the conditions under which it may be sold by these operations without the requirement for a liquor licence.

Prior to the recently implemented liquor reforms, florists and gift basket providers had to obtain a liquor licence if they wished to provide liquor with other goods that they sold. The Liquor Act was recently amended to exempt these operators from requiring a liquor licence in circumstances where the liquor forms part of a floral arrangement or gift basket, the quantity of liquor is not greater than one litre and the value of the liquor does not exceed 50 per cent of the sale price of the basket or arrangement. It is proposed to broaden the exemption of liquor sales by florists and gift basket providers to allow them to sell up to two litres of beer or wine or up to one litre of spirits which forms part of a floral arrangement or gift basket and for the value of the liquor to not exceed 75 per cent of the sale price of the floral arrangement or gift basket. The arrangement or basket must be delivered to a person other than the purchaser, so there is no risk that these operators would be used as de facto bottle shops. This broadened exemption is further recognition that these operators pose little risk to the community in terms of liquor related harm and will also reduce the regulatory burden.

It is further proposed to extend the exemption provision of the Liquor Act to include the sale of liquor by other low-risk operators but under restricted circumstances. This amendment will enable retirement villages, limousines and hairdressers to sell or supply up to two standard drinks for consumption on the premises without having to obtain a liquor licence. The amendment will clarify exactly what quantity and under what conditions they may sell or supply liquor to their clients as a subsidiary aspect of their business. Sales of liquor by these businesses which exceed the specified restrictions would require the authority of a liquor licence. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Springborg, adjourned.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

### First Reading

**Hon. KL STRUTHERS** (Alger—ALP) (Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women) (12.53 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 for particular purposes and other acts as a consequence of the change of that act's title and to amend the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (Justice, Land and Other Matters) Act 1984, the Child Protection Act 1999 and the Young Offenders (Interstate Transfer) Act 1987 also for particular purposes. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

*Tabled paper:* Juvenile Justice and Other Acts Amendment Bill [229].

*Tabled paper:* Juvenile Justice and Other Acts Amendment Bill, explanatory notes [230].

## Second Reading

**Hon. KL STRUTHERS** (Algerster—ALP) (Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women) (12.54 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

During the election we made a number of commitments to strengthen the youth justice system. The bill I am introducing today delivers on these commitments. The changes proposed in this bill are based on a range of evidence and community feedback gathered during the review of the Juvenile Justice Act 1992. Youth justice is a complex and challenging area that requires balanced, evidence based approaches and actions. This bill sets out a robust package of changes to ensure Queensland's youth justice system promotes community safety, meets public expectations, acknowledges the rights of victims and contributes to positive outcomes for young people and their families. I would like to put on the public record my absolute commitment to tackling the issues associated with youth crime, including strengthening processes to ensure young people found guilty of offences can be dealt with effectively. I am also equally committed to supporting the victims of crime and to the provision of intervention, diversionary and support services to prevent and reduce youth crime.

Honourable members, youth crime trends for our state have improved over the past seven years, with the number of offences per 100 young people dropping from 9.3 in 2001 to 8.2 in 2008. This drop can be attributed largely to the efforts of many people, youth services and police who have been determined to tackle the causes of youth crime. Currently, Queensland's youth justice system comprises a range of prevention, detention, supervision, rehabilitation, diversion, police and court services to deal with young people between the ages of 10 to 16 who commit—or are alleged to have committed—offences. These interventions must be strengthened. The government funds a number of services to support victims of crime. There are intervention and diversionary programs such as the Safe Youth—Safe Communities initiative in Moreton and Woorabinda designed to address youth violence. Another is the Youth Opportunity Program in Cairns designed to assist families to manage young people successfully in the community while reducing the risk of further entrenching young people in the criminal justice system.

Honourable members, I am heartened by the fact that most young people who come into contact with the youth justice system do not reoffend. Unfortunately, there is a small cohort whose offending persists. Many of these offenders have dysfunctional families, poor educational attainment, mental health needs, drug and alcohol problems and limited access to health, legal and social services. These factors disproportionately affect Indigenous young people, who continue to be overrepresented in the youth justice system. Young Indigenous people are 15 times more likely to be detained than non-Indigenous young people. In view of these issues, the Queensland government recognised that input from community members and stakeholders in the youth justice field was vital in reviewing the act and the framework it provides for the youth justice system.

A major part of the review was therefore the public release of an issues paper. This paper outlined the terms of reference for the review, raised specific questions on prominent youth justice issues and invited submissions from the community. Some 174 submissions were received on the issues paper. Some 71 were from members of the public, including 53 from young people themselves, 26 were from youth advocacy and legal organisations and 30 were from other service providers. Other respondents included members of Indigenous groups, academics, members of the judiciary, government agencies and victims of youth crimes themselves. The consultation report released in early 2008 showed that Queenslanders do hold diverse views about youth crime, many people saying that they wanted to see more effort to tackle the causes of crime and some saying 'lock 'em up' was the only strategy. Again, as we know, these responses are very varied. Importantly, the majority of submissions to the review acknowledged the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth and highlighted the need for action on this front. The amalgamation of youth justice, housing and homelessness, child safety services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships within the new departmental structure offers us great opportunity to tackle these issues head-on.

Honourable members, I am pleased to advise that respondents largely supported the Juvenile Justice Act in its current form and confirmed that it generally works well. My thanks go to all of those groups and individuals who took the opportunity to have their say on the Juvenile Justice Act. Their experiences and knowledge helped us develop innovative and useful responses in this new bill. I now turn to key amendments proposed in the bill. In line with the Bligh government's election commitments and our commitment to strengthen responses to youth crime and ensure the youth justice system meets current needs, the bill focuses on:

- improved sentencing, accountability and diversionary options for young offenders
- protecting the identity of young victims
- refining youth justice conferencing, and
- reducing remand levels.

In particular, during the election the Premier committed to giving courts specific powers to place curfews on juvenile offenders to reduce the chances of them reoffending and to ensure that they are properly supervised. This bill implements this commitment. The Premier also promised to increase the minimum mandatory detention period for young people convicted of multiple murders from 15 years to 20 years imprisonment—the same as it is for adults. This government recognises the need to protect the community from serious young offenders and meet public expectations about their sentencing. In view of the time, I seek leave to have the remainder of my second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Although courts are currently able to sentence these young offenders in the same way as adults, the Juvenile Justice Act has enabled the young offenders to be released earlier. The amendment will ensure this no longer happens in these cases.

The Bill delivers on our commitment to reinforce court powers in relation to the naming of young offenders. The Bill provides specific guidance to courts about the naming of a young offender who commits a crime that is considered extremely serious and repugnant and naming is seen as appropriate for the purpose of protecting the community.

In addition, the Bill delivers on the Premier's commitment to giving police stronger powers to arrest young people who do not comply with youth justice conferencing requirements, who contravene an agreement or who fail to attend a drug assessment session, and to take the young person back to court, is delivered in this Bill. Also, the Bill clarifies how agreements that are incorporated in a sentence orders are enforced.

Honourable members the Bill contains a number of amendments to address matters raised by stakeholders during consultation.

Some young offenders remain in juvenile detention centres well after they turn 18. To streamline their transfer to adult prison, the Bill proposes that courts be required to consider setting a transfer date at the time of sentencing. This approach would apply to all young offenders aged 16 and over who are to be detained beyond the age of 18. The existing transfer process will be retained allowing the Department of Communities or young person to apply for transfer closer to their 18th birthday.

The Queensland government has also looked at ways to strengthen our legislation to provide increased protection for the identity of child victims. I am pleased to confirm that the Bill proposes legislative changes to automatically prevent disclosure of the identity of child victims of crime. These changes will expand the protection of young victims' right to privacy and match it to the level provided for young offenders.

As I said earlier, the Bill also contains a number of measures for reducing the number of young people held on remand. The review highlighted pressures on the youth justice system resulting from increased demand for services, particularly detention. These pressures are exacerbated by the high rate of young people being remanded in detention while waiting for court hearings. Less than 10% of instances of young people being remanded in detention subsequently result in detention. To help reduce the pressure, the Bill proposes that the court must:

- consider what the likely sentence will be when deciding whether or not to release a young person on bail, and
- ensure young people are not refused bail simply for welfare reasons, such as a lack of accommodation.

I am also pleased to inform the House that the Bill proposes a new name for the legislation—the Youth Justice Act 1992. This name is more reflective of the contemporary language used by our stakeholders and the general community, and is in keeping with similar legislation in other Australian states.

Finally, the Bill includes a number of minor and technical amendments to improve the workability of the Act. These range from streamlining court and departmental processes to making terminology consistent throughout the Act and giving courts the flexibility to reduce the time allowed for completing shorter-length community service orders.

All the legislative changes outlined in the Bill can be made without additional funding. I am confident these changes will complement other Queensland Government's funded initiatives announced in 2008 to improve the youth justice system such as—allocating funding of \$8 million over four years for youth justice diversion programs and \$170.6 million in capital funding for the expansion of the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Townsville. This will make an additional 48 beds available by early 2012.

Together these improvements in service delivery and changes in legislative changes will ensure our state has a responsible, robust youth justice system.

Once again, I thank all those who contributed to the review of the Act and informed the development of the Bill.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Springborg, adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm.

## RIGHT TO INFORMATION BILL

### First Reading

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (2.30 pm): I present a bill for an act about rights to government and other information. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

*Tabled paper:* Right to Information Bill [231].

*Tabled paper:* Right to Information Bill, explanatory notes [232].

## Second Reading

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (2.30 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Right to Information Bill 2009. In September 2007, as members will recall, I commissioned an independent panel, led by Dr David Solomon AM, to review Queensland's freedom of information laws. The panel's review of the freedom of information framework was comprehensive, and the report I received from Dr Solomon in July 2008 provided my government with a clear road map on how we could achieve greater openness and accountability in government. Dr Solomon concluded, and the government agreed, that it was time for the government to renew and reframe its commitment to public access to government information through a new legislative framework.

My government has demonstrated its real commitment to reform by acting immediately to develop two significant pieces of legislation, the Right to Information Bill and the Information Privacy Bill. Both of these bills were released late last year for a four-month public consultation period. A large number of submissions were received during consultation on the bills. Given the complexity and significance of the bill, the input of FOI experts, practitioners and users has been invaluable in finalising the drafting of the bill. The introduction of this bill and the Information Privacy Bill, which I will also introduce today, represents a significant step forward for democracy in Queensland, and demonstrates the Queensland government's commitment to openness and transparency.

Public release of information about government policies and decisions enables informed debate, scrutiny and public participation. Without information, people cannot exercise their rights and responsibilities or make informed choices. Increased openness and transparency also means the government can be held to account for its actions. For this reason, the right to information is a powerful means of promoting trust and integrity in government.

The Right to Information Bill establishes a right to information for Queenslanders. The objects and operational clauses of the bill emphasise that information is to be released administratively unless there is a good reason not to, with applications under the legislation to only be an avenue of last resort.

Under the bill, the public will have a statutory right to access information held by government unless, on balance, release of the information would be contrary to the public interest. The Right to Information Bill replaces the Freedom of Information Act 1992. The bill contains a number of key features that I will briefly outline.

Consistent with Dr Solomon's recommendations, the bill sets out a new public interest framework for determining access applications and fewer blanket exemptions for the release of particular types of information. The exemptions that have been retained in the Right to Information Bill are true exemptions that are not subject to a public interest test. Broadly speaking, the exemptions in the bill cover circumstances where it has been decided that there is an overriding public interest in not disclosing the information because of confidentiality, privacy or security. However, the bill will not prohibit agencies from providing access to exempt material.

Significantly, the exemption for cabinet material has been reframed under the bill, and will only apply to material created for the consideration of cabinet, or which would, if disclosed, prejudice the confidentiality of cabinet deliberations. This exemption will apply for a period of 10 years, after which release would be assessed within the framework of the public interest test. The FOI Act exemptions that are not retained as exemptions in the Right to Information Bill have instead been incorporated into the public interest test as factors favouring nondisclosure.

The reduced number of exemptions means there will be more instances where right to information decision makers will have to use their judgement in applying a public interest test. The starting point for decision makers in applying the public interest test will be that information should be released unless, on balance, it would not be in the public interest to do so. This is a complete reversal of the general approach in the current FOI Act, which allows decision makers to refuse access to information unless there is a public interest reason to release the information.

The public interest test is ultimately about balance. In his report, Dr Solomon recognised that there will be instances when it is not in the public interest for information to be released, for example, where its release could prejudice an individual's right to privacy or prejudice public safety, security or law enforcement.

Decision makers will need to weigh a range of factors outlined in the bill when applying the test—factors favouring nondisclosure and factors favouring disclosure. Each decision will need to be made on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the relevant facts.

The Right to Information Bill clearly emphasises the government's prodisclosure stance. The way in which factors are to be weighed up in applying the public interest test also emphasise the presumption of disclosure. As a result, I believe the new public interest test will result in better outcomes for applicants seeking information.

In keeping with the move to greater openness and accountability, this bill has broader application than the current FOI Act. Those government owned corporations that do not operate in competition with other private sector corporations will no longer be excluded and all government owned corporations will be caught by the right to information to the extent of their community service obligations.

The Right to Information Bill retains the time based charging structure that is currently used under the FOI Act. It is important that cost should not be a barrier to seeking information, so the threshold for free processing of applications will be increased from two hours to five hours for all applicants. The bill also gives effect to a number of procedural changes for access applications, including reducing the time frame for processing applications from 45 calendar days to 25 business days and allowing for the production of a schedule of relevant documents setting out descriptions of the classes of documents relevant to the application.

The bill expands the functions of the Information Commissioner and establishes a Right to Information Commissioner. The Office of the Information Commissioner will provide assistance to agencies and the public, including through training, guidelines and a helpline. It will also provide guidance on the legislation, monitor its application, and promote awareness of the right to information and privacy reforms. The Information Commissioner will have powers to make decisions under the legislation, to publicly assess agencies' performance and undertake external reviews.

The Right to Information and Information Privacy Bills provide that a review of the operation of the legislation must commence within two years. The review will look at the practical application of the right to information and privacy legislation, including the review decisions made by the Information Commissioner, and produce a report which I will table in the parliament. The review will enable us to identify and resolve any issues that arise in the implementation of such a significant reform.

The Right to Information Bill is a significant instrument in a broader package of right to information policy reforms. The Solomon report recommended that government should routinely and proactively push information into the public domain, instead of waiting for FOI requests to pull that information out of government. This 'push model' is central to my government's right to information reforms. As I said, the right to information legislation is intended to be a last resort for people seeking government information, that is, they should be able to access it by it being proactively released by government in the first place wherever possible.

The bill reinforces proactive administrative release of information by requiring agencies to operate a publication scheme setting out the types of information it holds and the ways in which people can access this information. In addition, where information is released as a result of formal application under the act, agencies may publish the information on a disclosure log at least 24 hours after provision to the applicant, to facilitate broader public access to the information.

My government is committed to increasing the proactive and administrative release of information outside of the legislation and promoting a prodisclosure culture across the Queensland public sector. This work is already well underway. Summaries of cabinet decisions are now available online, departments are publishing more information proactively, and publication schemes and disclosure logs are set to go live on 1 July. The government is also making strategic changes to information management and promoting good record keeping practices.

With this bill and the Information Privacy Bill, my government is putting into law the important reforms recommended by the independent review panel. The bills are the product of extensive consultation, expert advice and much careful consideration.

The Right to Information Bill recognises the information rights of Queenslanders. This bill, and the broader package of policy reforms that my government is rolling out with it, will make Queensland the most open and accountable government in Australia.

Debate, on motion of Mr Langbroek, adjourned.

## INFORMATION PRIVACY BILL

### First Reading

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (2.40 pm): I present a bill for an act to provide safeguards for the handling of personal information in the public sector environment, and to allow access to and amendment of personal information. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

*Tabled paper:* Information Privacy Bill [233].

*Tabled paper:* Information Privacy Bill, explanatory notes [234].

## Second Reading

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (2.40 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Information Privacy Bill 2009. This is Queensland's first privacy legislation. This is a bill to provide safeguards for the handling of personal information held in the public sector environment and provides a mechanism for people to access and amend their personal information.

Governments hold information about many personal aspects of people's lives. For example, governments may hold people's personal health records, adoption information or identity information such as driving licences. The government has an obligation to ensure that this information is appropriately managed and the public's privacy is protected.

The Information Privacy Bill codifies the existing administrative privacy regime and replaces provisions of the existing Freedom of Information Act that deal with applications to access and amend personal information. The bill is designed to work in parallel with the Right to Information Bill 2009 which I have just introduced. My government has developed the two bills to implement the recommendations of the independent review of Queensland's Freedom of Information Act led by Dr David Solomon.

Along with the Right to Information Bill, an exposure draft of the Information Privacy Bill was released in December 2008 for public consultation for almost four months. A large number of submissions from a range of external stakeholders contributed to the development of the two bills.

The Information Privacy Bill recognises the importance of protecting individuals' personal information through appropriate safeguards. It establishes how public sector agencies are to deal with personal information by setting out the information privacy principles to which agencies must adhere. The bill extends the application of the information privacy principles to service providers contracted by government by requiring agencies to contractually bind service providers dealing with personal information.

Ministers and parliamentary secretaries will be required to adhere to the information privacy principles in relation to actions they take in their ministerial capacity. This means that personal information held by ministers will be subject to the same degree of protection as personal information held by public sector agencies. Parliamentary committees and members of parliament generally will continue to be exempt from the bill. This is consistent with other jurisdictions and ensures that the bill does not infringe on the privileges of the institution of parliament.

The bill will also apply to local government. To allow time for local governments to implement the requirements of the Information Privacy Bill, there will be a transition period of one year before the privacy principles will apply to local government.

The bill creates a new process to allow people to complain to the Information Commissioner if they believe that an agency has breached the privacy principles in relation to their own personal information. The new Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal will hear any complaints that the Information Commissioner is unable to successfully mediate. If the tribunal is satisfied that the complaint has been substantiated, it may order up to \$100,000 to compensate an individual for loss or damage as a result of the breach.

The commencement of the privacy complaints function, however, will be delayed until the tribunal begins operating, which is expected to be in December this year. This will provide a transition period for agencies and allow the Information Commissioner to undertake training and awareness programs and set up processes for dealing with privacy complaints.

The bill gives Queenslanders a legislative right to access and amend their personal information. In putting information privacy into law for the first time and establishing a Privacy Commissioner, my government is ensuring that individuals' personal information is appropriately protected. Including this access and amendment function in separate privacy legislation was a key Solomon report recommendation, which the government has supported.

The operation of the access and amendment provisions of the bill will be monitored during the implementation phase and as part of the mandated two-year review of the operation of both acts. I am confident that the Information Privacy Bill and Right to Information Bill together will strike the right balance between promoting maximum disclosure of government information and protecting the privacy of its citizens.

Debate, on motion of Mr Langbroek, adjourned.

## PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL

### Second Reading

Resumed from 23 April (see p. 171), on motion of Ms Bligh—

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.45 pm): I rise to speak to the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009, which amends the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001. This bill is about government accountability. Accountability is one of the core principles of the Liberal National Party, yet it is a concept that seems to elude the members opposite. Nowhere is this more evident than in this bill that seeks to reform the existing committee structure. I say at the outset that we will be supporting this bill but we have significant reservations. It gets our reserved support.

I will not address the details of the previous bill that the Premier has brought in in relation to FOI, but I note that the Premier spoke about having received expert advice, that there was careful consultation and reviews and that all government departments were spoken to before bringing in the FOI changes, and yet there has not been that type of consultation regarding changes to this committee structure. That is a concern that the Liberal National Party has about the role of the executive in terms of coming to this parliament and controlling the parliament.

I note from the explanatory notes—because it was a very short second reading speech from the Premier—that, according to the government, the proposed changes to the structure of the parliamentary committee system are designed to create a committee system more focused on developing best practice policy and legislative solutions to issues facing Queenslanders while maintaining the necessary oversight role that parliamentary committees provide. It will align more closely with the current departmental arrangements and the priorities of the government. The bill will result in the parliament having six statutory committees.

The bill will amend the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 to create a Law, Justice and Safety Committee in place of LCARC and amalgamate the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee and their functions to form the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee. The functions of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, the Standing Orders Committee and the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee will remain unchanged under the bill.

The Law, Justice and Safety Committee will be a statutory committee as it will take on the legislative functions of LCARC. However, it is proposed that additional policy functions of a parliamentary committee will be conferred on the committee by resolution, as with the other parliamentary committees. The policy functions will cover an area regarding law, justice and safety that is referred to the committee by the Legislative Assembly. To complement the statutory committees it is proposed to establish three parliamentary committees to consider policy issues relevant to the portfolio areas of Economic Development, Environment and Resources, and Social Development.

A resolution of the parliament will be required to add parliamentary committee functions to the Law, Justice and Safety Committee in addition to the functions currently held by LCARC and establish and confer functions and powers on three parliamentary committees, namely, the Economic Development Committee, the Environment and Resources Committee and the Social Development Committee.

Having referred to some of those things from the explanatory notes, I come back to a press release by the Premier on Monday, 20 April 2009 in which the Premier announced the parliamentary committee shake-up, as the press release is headed, and I note that it was not necessarily after having received any expert advice or careful consultation or any reviews or any consultation with other government departments. It concerns me that, since the inception of the colony of Queensland, at every turn of the page in the history books Labor has eroded sacred democratic traditions. The old concept of the executive being accountable to the legislature has given way to a reverse system where the executive completely controls the parliament. Sadly, too often this Labor government seeks to emasculate the proper role of parliament in scrutinising the executive. We see this in how this government approaches question time, estimates, freedom of information and now parliamentary committees.

When I refer to that press release of Monday, 20 April I see that the Premier said that the shake-up will establish four new supercommittees, but on the second page of that press release she is quoted as saying—

Just as governments require renewal, institutions like parliament need to be refreshed to make them more effective and this is the most significant shake-up of these committees in decades.

Who has decided that we need such a refreshment or shake-up of the committee system? It is the Premier. She stated—

It is my belief that this system will produce better policy and better legislation for the people of Queensland.

If ever we had a case of the executive controlling this parliament and deciding what is going to happen with our committee structure, this is it—in the Premier's own words. The Premier has said we are going to change the committee system because she has decided that that is what we should be doing.

Weak though it is, the committee structure is one of the only remaining measures of government accountability in Queensland. We are the only Australian state without an upper house, thanks to the sneaky short-sightedness of early Labor governments. We have deficient freedom of information laws, and the Premier is at it again, manipulating the system to deter journalists from uncovering information that may be embarrassing to the government. Our estimates committees have become a forum for obfuscation and self-praise. And of course we have the committee system that is third rate when compared to the Commonwealth Senate committees.

The only measures available to the people of Queensland to keep their government accountable are controlled by the executive government. The Premier does not need to take 'Government Accountability 101' to understand the conflict arising from this. This bill seeks to amend the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 to provide for a new committee system. The Premier alleges this new system will develop best practice policy and legislative solutions to issues facing Queenslanders, yet the legitimate concern that members of my party have about this bill is that it seeks to establish a policy clearing house for the Bligh government.

This bill will create a system whereby parliamentary committees are merely a means of containing criticism of the Bligh government. This system will allow the Premier to avoid answering the tough questions by deflecting them to a committee. I note that that is a leaf taken straight out of the Prime Minister's play book. By establishing a review of Australia's tax system, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is apparently excused from coping questions or criticism because the matter is the subject of an inquiry.

Reforming the committee structure is a cynical move by the Bligh government, especially when we look at the lack of consultation before bringing this bill into the House. This happened in the first week of our parliamentary sittings and now we have been presented with this bill. We are raising significant questions about it in terms of our concerns that the committees may well come forward with policy decisions so that ministers can say, 'It wasn't me who decided it; it was a committee.' And of course the government would have the numbers on that committee.

In addition to providing a diversionary tactic so that she can avoid answering tough questions, the Premier wants to dress up bad decisions. The Premier seeks to give her legislative agenda a veil of legitimacy by suggesting poor policies receive the majority support of an independent bipartisan committee. If the Premier were serious about receiving independent advice and bipartisan recommendations, these committees would involve a non-government majority. That is the way you get independent views. You do not get independent views from Labor backbenchers who have factional interests as their first priority, with the interests of Queenslanders and good public policy running a poor second or third.

The Liberal National Party has serious concerns over the proposed terms of reference of the new committees. The briefs are so broad and ambiguous that we have doubts about the ability of the committees to carry out their role of holding the government to account.

The role of parliamentary committees should be to investigate areas in which the government is failing to deliver for the people of Queensland. A recent example of this is the toxic oil spill in Moreton Bay. My concern is that the environment committee tasked with investigating the circumstances surrounding the spill would be or could be confined to generalities, resulting in an obtuse report about Queensland's beautiful beaches. I found this to be true during my time on the Public Accounts Committee. For example, we do not have a performance management audit of government bodies or the audit facility as done by the Auditor-General. We have a performance management systems audit capacity. It does not get the same results, because performance management audits would be seen as having the potential to look at government policy and the implementation of it, which is something that this government does not want. Instead, the Public Accounts Committee had performance management systems audits which clearly do not end up with the same result.

The Public Accounts Committee would like to have looked into the cost blow-outs of the desalination plant, but instead we made an assessment of what happened when the government took over the project from the Gold Coast City Council and some of the management systems that were put in place. Again, things were found to be wanting but we did not deal with the nub of the issue that most Queenslanders would like to know about. Another example would be the \$9 billion blow-out in the cost of delivering water infrastructure in the state. That is the sort of thing that inquisitorial committees should be looking at.

We have little confidence in the vague nature of the descriptions of these committees, which are supposed to come up with policy ideas. Ministers are supposed to have ideas and the government is supposed to have ideas; they should not delegate these concepts to committees that, as I say, are supposed to be inquisitorial in nature.

There is no reason why these committees should not pursue a more active agenda. What is the government scared of? What does it not want us to know? The Premier is setting up the committees under the guise of accountability, but when it comes down to it the new committee structure is tantamount to the Premier's too-hard basket. The Premier has so little confidence in her own ministry and caucus to solve the problems Queenslanders are facing that she is asking the opposition to help them figure it out.

The Australian Labor Party is renowned for its hostility towards accountability measures. I recently met a delegation from the UK. Members of that delegation said that they found our interpretations of Westminster tradition and lack of robustness quite quaint. Whilst Queenslanders cannot be afforded the checks and balances of an upper house, we can readily ensure these important scrutiny functions are carried out by a parliamentary committee equipped with the necessary powers to hold the government to account.

While the committee structure established by this bill does not achieve this, as I have already indicated the Liberal National Party will give it our reserved support. I believe that we have a duty to Queenslanders to participate in these processes in spite of their questioned effectiveness. Therefore, today I foreshadow that I will be moving a motion for a review of the committees after they have been operating for 12 months under the new structure. This will help identify ways in which we can improve the system so that Queenslanders can have confidence in their parliament now and in the future.

**Dr FLEGG (Moggill—LNP) (2.56 pm):** The Queensland parliament without a stand-alone public accounts committee would be one of the effects of the legislation before the House today. The new structure of committees as introduced with, I must say, some brevity by the Premier makes some fundamental changes and, to my mind, raises some pretty serious concerns about the scrutiny and oversight of government in this state.

The government should not think that the LNP will simply accept the emasculation of committees in this place and accept whatever is thrown up. It is not acceptable if the only role of committees in this place is to do the policy work of government. It is not acceptable if the committee structure in this place downgrades the level of scrutiny that the Queensland government operates under. It is not acceptable if the committee system in this place downgrades the inquisitorial role that it should carry out.

We are not fundamentally opposed to some of the proposals to create general policy orientated committees; however, we do want to see how they are going to work and whether, in fact, they are simply a clever political ploy on the part of the government. The problem is not so much what is here in the committees; it is what is not here in the committees. What is not here is a vigorous system of scrutiny of the conduct of government. What is worse, the relatively limited scrutiny that we did have under the previous system has been downgraded severely as a result of these changes.

Years ago my very good friend Ian Prentice introduced a motion into this House to establish a public accounts committee. Ian and Terry White, who was his leader at the time, were committed to accountability in government. They were committed to accountability in government to the extent that they put their commitment ahead of their own political careers. History will show the price that those two particular principled men paid for having those principles.

**Mr Shine:** We know what they thought of the National Party.

**Dr FLEGG:** It is actually the Labor Party that is removing the stand-alone Public Accounts Committee from this place. I do not think that that is an increase in scrutiny of the government. Those on the other side are likely to say, 'But it is all still included under the new committees.' There is only one committee left to deal with both public accounts and public works. Honourable members should have a think about that. The accounts of the government and its \$35 billion or so budget—it might be a bit smaller now—and all of the public works that it does are being left to just one committee and that committee is a Labor dominated committee. I am sure that members of the general public are not fully aware of how a committee system functions. I doubt that members of the general public know that the members of those committees are prohibited by law from discussing what goes on behind those closed doors; they are prohibited from having any sort of discussion about the conduct of those committees. They are not open and they are not visible to the public. As many members of this House would know, from time to time there has been some pretty vigorous debate on some of those committees, but none of that is available for the people of Queensland to see.

The only option that is left open to the non-government members of these committees is to issue dissenting reports. The non-government members will have limited, if any, opportunity to set the direction of these committees, what they inquire about, how they function and the like. It is a disappointing day to see scrutiny downgraded.

The policy committees that have been set up act on the government's reference. In other words, they look at only what the government wants them to look at. They cannot inquire into the actions of government; they cannot scrutinise and examine the activity of the government; and, in the Premier's own words, they are there to bring forward some policy ideas. I guess most Queenslanders are aware

that Queensland could use some policy ideas. It sounds rather reminiscent of the 2020 Summit that Kevin Rudd conducted. Let us make no mistake that committees looking around for some policy ideas are not scrutinising the government. They cannot examine the government's mishandling of the oil spill. They cannot examine the government's mishandling of adding fluoride into our water.

The question that occurs to me in relation to this bill—and I hope it is the question that is asked by commentators, members of the media and the public—is: who is overseeing the government? Who is looking at the integrity of what happens within this government, particularly in relation to its handling of the taxpayers' money, particularly in the area of public works?

I can understand why this government would want to downgrade the role of the Public Works Committee. It has just built this multibillion dollar pipeline for recycled water and then decided not to use it. It then turns around and says, 'Our budget is in so much trouble we have to make all these hard decisions.' This is a government that is averse to scrutiny, and this piece of legislation is another effort on its part to avoid the sort of scrutiny that a good democracy and a good parliamentary system would deliver.

There is no upper house here in Queensland. There are no committees such as there are in New South Wales where the government does not hold the majority on those committees. The committees that we do have are very limited in their scope. Even a relatively casual observer of parliamentary democracy could not escape noticing that there is a vast difference between what passes for an estimates committee in this place and the much more vigorous process down in Canberra.

We have a government that has publicly proposed four-year terms. It has not even managed to run three years in either of its last two terms. One of the fallacies of this particular government in attempting to move to four-year terms is that the only way that is going to work is if the much longer running government is held to account and allowed some mechanisms of scrutiny in the processes of the parliament. As far as I am concerned, today we are taking a backward step in relation to scrutiny.

Where was the consultation on this bill? Where was the consultation? Who put forward the bright ideas that govern a whole major chunk of the activity of this parliament on which the people of Queensland spend a huge amount of money and in which they put an enormous amount of faith and confidence? Who was asked, 'What would make a better committee system in this place?' As far as I can see this has been done out of the Premier's office. Where is the all-party committee that would have—

**Mr Watt:** Where were your ideas?

**Dr FLEGG:** I take that interjection because we would have loved to have put forward ideas in relation to committees but we were not asked and nor was anyone else in Queensland.

Where is the all-party committee that should have been set up to allow this parliament—not this government, but this parliament—to decide what would work best in relation to a vital function of the committees? There is no all-party committee, there is no consultation, there is nothing except an announcement by the Premier. That is not good enough for the people of Queensland.

The lack of consultation and the lack of due process in ramming through such massive changes are a very poor sign of the government's goodwill and its intent in relation to its treatment of these committees. Consultation and due process are cornerstones of a good committee system. Members can argue that health, education and transport make up the bulk of the state government's portfolios and that there should be some oversight of them. It was actually members on this side who supported having a health committee some time ago. However, putting in place those government dominated committees that operate in secret should not be mistaken for any form of scrutiny.

We heard the Premier introduce legislation in relation to FOI and tout how extensive her inquiry and examination of FOI was. I would certainly be disappointed if we did not have extensive consultation and examination of FOI. However, that stands up in very stark contrast to the complete opposite on arguably something that is even more important—at least as important. The complete absence of any form of consultation and seeking of advice to make this a better functioning parliament really stands out.

I hope the government will take on board that we will not be accepting the misuse of these committees. If the Premier thinks that she can just flick every difficult issue of the day to a committee and then, when asked about the difficult issue of the day in front of her media conference, say, 'Oh well, it is before the committee; they will have a look at it,' then the government should think again. That is not what these committees are for and it is not how they work. If they are a political smokescreen for the government to hide from difficult issues, then we will be holding it to account.

**Ms Bligh:** We tremble.

**Dr FLEGG:** I take that interjection from the Premier that she is trembling. She may not be trembling, but she still owes the people of Queensland the level of scrutiny that this place and this government deserve and that those people expect.

**Ms Bligh:** And that's what they're getting.

**Dr FLEGG:** I take the interjection that that is what they are going to get. It is certainly not what is in this bill, and we will be looking to hold the government to account.

The work of a committee is detailed work, and it is by its nature restricted in the number of inquiries it can undertake and the breadth of subjects that it can inquire into. Without a committee being allocated by legislation to focus on a particular area, I can say to the House today that it will not focus on that area. That is my great fear in relation to this. I have served a couple of terms on the Travelsafe Committee, which I think contributed to the safety of people in Queensland, and it did focus on some of those issues. I note that, as with other committees, it has been gobbled up into a supercommittee. I hope that does not mean that we will reduce the focus on keeping Queenslanders safe in their travel.

From the opposition's point of view, this legislation raises grave concerns. I support wholeheartedly the motion foreshadowed by the Leader of the Opposition a few moments ago that in 12 months time in this place we on this side will move to have a debate on how well this committee system is functioning. We have done the right thing here today by giving the Premier 12 months advance notice. She does not get a blank cheque here today. The Premier can ram this through: the government has the numbers. But it will not be a blank cheque. We will be seeking to assess whether there is misuse of this committee structure and, more particularly, whether we have lost the role of scrutiny that currently exists.

These committees should not become simply places to launder difficult issues or to hide behind, as we have seen the previous Premier do in relation to the CMC. It did not matter whether it was under the charter of the CMC or not to inquire into an issue; every difficult issue was sent to the CMC and the Premier would say, 'Don't you worry about that. The CMC will sort it out,' but of course half the time it was a meaningless referral. It is not going to be acceptable for the Premier to refer matters to these very general policy committees and then escape any accountability by saying, 'Don't you worry about that. The committee will have a look at it.' They are Labor committees and they are committees that will operate in secret.

I appreciate this opportunity to raise my serious concerns, in particular to the downgrading of scrutiny in this place. I will certainly be playing whatever role is possible to review how this system is working and seeking to hold the government to account.

**Ms SPENCE** (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (3.13 pm): I am pleased to speak in support of the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill this afternoon. Members are right in acknowledging that this is one of the most far-reaching reforms of the committee system that the Queensland parliament has ever engaged in. It is a very important issue that we are discussing this afternoon.

The committee process has always been an important part of the Westminster system. Committees are important in holding the executive arm of government accountable. They are important in safeguarding the interests of the people. They have traditionally been an important part of allowing backbenchers and opposition members a role in policy formation. They have traditionally been important in taking the interests of the parliament and the government and those policy decisions out to the people for discussion. What we are debating today is a genuine effort by this Queensland government, by this Premier, to reform what has become, I believe, a pretty old and stale committee system in this state.

The history of committees goes back to the early Queensland parliament. I am informed that until 1922 Queensland used parliamentary committees exclusively in areas such as legislation, land transactions, sale of government assets and policy proposals, with members of both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council often working together on issues of concern. How sad is it, then, for us today to hear opposition members repeatedly tell us that they do not see themselves as having a role in the policy position of this government, that they think they are irrelevant, that they think the executive arm of government should be doing all of the policy formulation and that backbenchers and opposition members should not have a role in that? That is fundamentally what they are arguing here today. Before 1922 it was the case that the opposition did have a role in policy; in the new millennium obviously the opposition does not want to have that power.

With the abolition of the upper house in March 1922, by what is called a bold and visionary Labor government, came the demise of the parliamentary committee system in this state. Between 1922 and 1987 parliamentary committees only involved themselves in pretty mundane things to do with the running of the parliament. So there was the library committee, or the refreshment room committee, or the parliamentary printing and building committee. They did not have the kind of bold committee system that we are proposing here today.

Occasionally they did have select committees. I think a memorable one, the education committee, was chaired by Mike Ahern under the Bjelke-Petersen government in the 1970s. It was a very memorable committee because it brought to the fore the education issues of the day. Social issues were

discussed and sex education was discussed, which was quite a novel thing in the 1970s. That was a very important select committee of the day. But fundamentally we failed to have a very effective committee system from 1922 to 1987.

We have heard the opposition relive today the importance of the committee system when the Liberal Party, under Terry White, in 1983 proposed the establishment of a public accounts committee. Then Premier Bjelke-Petersen—who did not believe in the committee system because he felt it was a costly waste of time and who did not believe opposition members should have a role on committees and that committees should be for government members only—fought that decision and that ended in the dissolution of a 26-year-old coalition government in this state. So committees have always had an important role in Queensland politics, and members who are thinking about this issue today and debating this issue today ought to realise that we have a long history of fighting for a free, open and purposeful committee system in this state.

It took then Premier Mike Ahern in 1988 to establish first the Public Accounts Committee and then the Public Works Committee. Then we had the Fitzgerald inquiry, and one of the recommendations of the Fitzgerald inquiry was to have a comprehensive system of parliamentary committees to enhance the ability of parliament to monitor the efficiency of the government. After that inquiry, with the election of the Goss government, several other committees were established. Those committees have gone through some name transformations, but for the most part their functions have existed in that fashion for well over 20 years now in this parliament.

I think it is time for us to shake up the committee system. When committees were first formed in the early 1990s they did get a lot of attention. They made a lot of recommendations that were often quite critical of government, even though they were dominated by government members. Government certainly put a high price on making sure that it reported on and conformed to the recommendations that were coming out of the committee system.

I remember being on the Public Works Committee, which I chaired for one term but was a member of for two terms, and making a number of unpopular decisions as far as the government was concerned. One of the unpopular decisions was to move Aboriginal housing from the department of Aboriginal affairs into the Department of Housing. I think that was the right decision. We made that decision in the early 1990s. The government of the day did not necessarily agree with that decision.

We also looked at the refurbishment of the Townsville prison. We recommended that in that refurbishment they knock down the wall of the prison and replace it with a razor wire perimeter fence. At the time that was incredibly controversial. The prison officers did not like it. The department did not like it. I do not think the government liked it. I think they thought that the world was going to end and that prisoners were going to escape from Townsville prison in droves if they knocked down the wall and replaced it with razor wire. Of course, that did not happen. Now all of our prisons have razor wire perimeter fences rather than walls. A decision that the government of the time did not like remains, I think, the right decision.

Another decision of that particular committee was the recommendation to build disability access at the front of the Brisbane convention centre. What had been provided in the plans was backdoor disability access. Our decision to put disability access at the front of the convention centre added \$5 million to the cost of the project. I think the committee was not very popular as far as the government was concerned. I still believe that was the right decision. That decision really opened up the view of government on how disability access should be provided from that day forward.

They are three of the decisions of a committee in the early 1990s which came about because the committees were new and fresh and open to the possibility that they could scrutinise government and make recommendations that would be considered. I think that in the last decade or so a lot of the committee reports—and I generally have a look at them—have become very formula driven. Certainly, the media does not pay much attention to them anymore. While governments do pay attention to those reports, I do not think too many of us could pinpoint in the last decade too many recommendations that have led to significant changes in government policy.

I know that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward the proposition today that non-government members should outnumber government members on these committees. That is certainly not the case for committees in Australia or around the world. I was in Canberra last Thursday and spent the day talking to a number of Labor and non-Labor politicians, including quite a number of senators, about the committee system in Canberra where they have government-dominated committees. It does not seem to be a problem there. In fact, the non-government members, the opposition members, were incredibly enthusiastic about the way the committee system runs in Canberra.

The opposition members realise that they have more to gain out of the committee system than the government does. They realise that the committee system favours them and gives them the opportunity to scrutinise the government. That is a smart way of looking at it. That is what the

committees are meant to be about. I think it is sad that opposition members still have not worked out that they are actually on those committees to make the government accountable. They do not necessarily need to be the majority on those committees to do that. They can do it in a number of ways.

I am disappointed that the opposition continues to say today that these new committees are designed by government to rubber-stamp the policies of government. The Leader of the Opposition said that he thinks we want to contain the criticism of government in this new committee system. He also said that the government wants to dress up bad decisions by referring government policies to committees. This is simply not the case.

What the opposition has failed to realise is that the committees can make references themselves. They can generate their own inquiries. If members look at the legislation that we are debating here today they will find that it is not just about these committees accepting referrals from the government. The committees can still generate their own projects and their own references. I really hope that in the consideration in detail stage we do not have a debate based on that misunderstanding by those in the opposition.

I would like to comment on the comments made by the member for Moggill. He seems incredibly disappointed that the Public Accounts Committee is no longer a stand-alone committee. Under this particular model it will be aligned with the Public Works Committee. Having served on the Public Works Committee and observed the Public Accounts Committee for a long time, I am very comfortable with the fact that we are combining those committees. If members looked at the reports that have been produced by those two committees over a long period of time they would agree with me that they have become very formula driven. There are a lot of synergies between the work of the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. I am quite confident that the seven or so members on the new committee can do both jobs quite successfully. They will probably bring some different approaches to it which are long overdue.

Committees are an important part of the process for opposition members to gain greater understanding of the policies of government and the workings of the Public Service. The fact that public servants can be brought before these committees and scrutinised, given their incredible powers, is something that the opposition should applaud today.

I reiterate that this shake-up of the committee system is a genuine attempt by this government to enliven a committee structure which we believe has become rather staid and formula driven and needs fresh ideas. As we continue with this debate today I hope that opposition members—and I see there are a considerable number of them who want to contribute to this debate—will put their ideas forward with the appreciation that, rather than stifling the opportunities for opposition members to contribute to the accountability of government and to contribute to policymaking, we are hoping that we can open up their opportunities to do all of the things that an opposition should do in a committee system. I support the bill.

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (3.26 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill with regard to the changes that it makes to the committee structure of the parliament and to reinforce some of the views that have been expressed by the Leader of the Opposition. I note in the contribution by the Leader of the House that the member went to great pains to assure us that this was a genuine attempt by the government to reform the committee structure.

I begin my remarks by expressing the fervent hope that the member's words can be relied upon. If it is a genuine attempt to reform the committee structure then I think it will be very much a positive for the parliament. There is no doubt, in my view at least, that the committee structure needed reform. I certainly would not demur from many of the justifications that were put forward by the previous speaker on the other side of the House.

The committee structure needed to be reformed. The question for us today is whether or not we can trust the government's rhetoric when it comes into this place and assures us of its genuine motivations in reforming the committee structure. I think the model that has been put forward is seriously lacking from what I would consider to be the ideal. If we are to embark on a major reform of the committee structure of this parliament and all we get out of that major reform is the proposition before the House today, then we as a parliament have missed a great opportunity.

There are a number of things that could have been included in this reform of the parliamentary committee system that would have greatly enhanced the operation of this parliament. But that depends on the goodwill of the government. Goodwill of the government is required to institute any change here. The committee system is about placing the government under greater scrutiny. We cannot help being sceptical of the assurances that this government gives us that it is genuine about placing itself under greater scrutiny. We as members of this parliament cannot help being sceptical about that assurance.

In the time that I have been here I have seen some of the committees of this parliament work very well and I have seen some work very poorly. I am fond of saying at the consideration of the estimates committee reports each year that the estimates committees, like other committees of the parliament, are very much dependent upon the member who chairs them and very much dependent upon the attitude of the government members in relation to whether they allow the committee to work and allow the

committee to fulfil its function—that function of scrutinising the government. If a chairman of a committee or the government members on a committee want to protect the government—want to avoid that scrutiny—whether it be in the estimates committees or any of the other parliamentary committees that we consider today, then they can very easily thwart the committee system. They can very easily shut down the committee system, and there is nothing in the proposal before the House today to lessen that ability to deny the committee the opportunity to fulfil its proper function. The success of those committees depends upon the realisation of the people on those committees that they are an essential part of the parliamentary process. It depends upon the government members realising that we are all lessened if the processes of this parliament are lessened and we are all worse off if this parliament is not allowed to fulfil its proper function.

There has been much said about the fact that this is a unicameral parliament—that is, we only have the one house. A lot of academics have written volumes of work about the effect that that has on the decisions that this parliament has made, and the fact that there is only one house of parliament in this state has been blamed for many things over the years. There is no doubt that it is very different from the federal parliament, for example, or other state parliaments where they do have an upper house. But if the committee system is to be advanced as some sort of an alternative or some sort of a check or balance, then it has to be done in a genuine way. Despite the assurances that government speakers have given us this afternoon, I do not think that the proposition before the House in these amendments contained in the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill provide the parliament with the guarantee or the confidence that those committees are going to be able to fulfil that function. It is easy to see, as previous speakers on this side of the House have pointed out, how these committees can become a washing machine, if you like, for government policy—a mechanism to give government policy some sort of credibility that it otherwise would not have, and that is a situation that we have to ensure that we can avoid. But it is also possible for these committees to provide an outcome that is very much improved on what we have seen from the current or the former committee system. I reiterate the comment that I made before when I said that the changes to the committee system could have gone a lot further had that commitment that has been given to us this afternoon been a genuine one.

I want to look at some of the things that have been said in the Premier's second reading speech and in the resolution that was passed by the House when the other committees were set up. The Premier said in her second reading speech that, under the new structure, the parliament will have four new committees focusing on best practice policy and legislative solutions to broad issues within their area of responsibility. I guess that is the major difference, as members have pointed out already in their contributions to this debate—that is, the difference with these committees is that ability to focus on policy development and legislative solutions to broad issues. That, at first reading, at first consideration, would have to be considered to be a good thing—that is, committees should be able to focus on best practice policy development and legislative solutions to broad issues and to scrutinise the legislative solutions of government and to look at the policy that government adopts. However, that function is denied to these committees, and that is the opportunity that I think is lost. While the Premier in her second reading speech talked about these committees focusing on best practice policy and legislative solutions to broad issues, when one looks at the resolution that the House carried on 23 April, that function is denied to those committees. It is denied to those committees in section (8) of the resolution, which deals with the things that a committee cannot inquire into. Section (8) says—

Notwithstanding anything contained in this resolution, the committees ...

- (a) do not have the power to investigate and report on events, incidents or operational matters within the policy areas ... and
- (b) do not have the power to investigate and report on any matters that fall within the responsibilities of statutory committees established by the Parliament of Queensland Act ...

The difficulty I have and the great opportunity that I believe is being denied to the committees of this parliament is contained in subsection (8)(a) in that they do not have the power to investigate and report on events, incidents or operational matters within the policy areas. That severely limits, I would suggest, the ability of the committees to scrutinise the actions of the government. It severely limits the ability of the committees to act as a check and a balance in the same way that an upper house of this parliament or any other parliament may. There are a great number of examples of events, incidents or policy matters that I have heard debated in this House over a long period of time that would have benefited greatly, where the parliament would have benefited greatly and where the people of Queensland would have benefited greatly from some detailed scrutiny. Unfortunately, I think sometimes the debate in this House is misnamed. What we hear in this House too many times, especially with regard to contentious areas of policy or government decision making, is claim and counterclaim. The government makes a claim or the minister makes a claim or the opposition makes a claim, and sometimes those claims are equally absurd. I have heard absurd claims made in debates here from both sides of the House—claims that, given any sort of opportunity to scrutinise in detail, would not stand up for a moment. Yet there is no mechanism in this parliament to scrutinise those claims. There is no mechanism to deal with the detail of the claims that are made all too often by the government.

In a perfect world, those claims would be scrutinised in the media. But unless they can be fitted within the 10-second grab or the minute and a half that the parliament seems to get on the television every night, then that scrutiny is not forthcoming. But there was an opportunity with the changes that we are making to the committee system today to ensure that those committees could scrutinise those areas of broad policy. I agree that the committees should not be able to scrutinise every government decision. That would be impossible, anyway, because of the time frames that are involved. But when we look at the broad policy directions and some of the major events that have long-term and far-reaching consequences, then it is to the benefit of this parliament and the people of Queensland if there is a mechanism contained within our parliamentary process where the government's response or the government's direction or the government's focus can be scrutinised in some detail.

Let me give the House some examples. I have debated at length vegetation management legislation in this parliament over a period of 10 years. But there is no mechanism in this parliament to scrutinise some of the ridiculous claims that I have heard made in speeches in this House. There is no mechanism to call expert witnesses or for the parliament to avail itself of the great body of scientific knowledge that exists out there in the community. There is a very limited opportunity to bring that body of evidence and knowledge into the consideration of this parliament when it comes to issues such as that. But the committee that has been set up, the Environment and Resources Committee, because of the restriction that I spoke about in subsection (8)(a), will not be able to consider that issue or issues such as that. It will be restricted from considering issues such as that, and that is a great lost opportunity. It is an opportunity that has been lost to this parliament and it lessens, if you like, the assurances that government ministers give us that their attempts to reform the parliamentary system are genuine and that they are interested in improving the parliamentary processes.

There are a range of other examples that I might use. At times of catastrophic events, be it the government's response to something like a major cyclone in the north or the government's response to a major environmental issue, it is difficult for the public at large to make an informed decision about whether the government's actions were appropriate, because the opportunities to scrutinise the response of the government in those circumstances is very limited indeed.

Once again, you have a claim and counterclaim type of approach in this parliament. The opposition, whichever party it is, can make certain claims, either in parliamentary motions or in questions, and government ministers can make certain claims in the answers that they give or the contributions that may make to the debate. But there is no mechanism to examine those claims and counterclaims in any detail. There is no provision in the parliamentary process that we have to avail ourselves of expert opinion, expert knowledge or scientific knowledge that might be relevant to the consideration of those particular incidents. Section 8(a) of the resolution prohibits that sort of consideration by the committees that are being formed by the bill before the House this afternoon. That is a great opportunity lost and it certainly increases the degree of scepticism that I have that the government's intent is a noble one.

As has been stated in both the resolution and the amendment to the Parliament of Queensland Act that the House is considering, a number of these committees have a very broad purpose. A number of these committees also have an incredibly broad focus. An early part of the process for each committee would be to try to define its purpose and its focus to a much more manageable degree. That broad focus can in itself be either an advantage or a disadvantage, depending, once again, on the approach that the members of the committee take and, more particularly, the chairman of the committee takes. That will be very much up to the members of the committee.

There is no doubt that the bill before the House this afternoon will bring about profound change to the committee system. As the committees start to address these areas of policy and areas of contention, if you like, I think they will bring about a situation where there will be much more robust debate within the committees themselves. I believe there will be a significantly increased number of times when committees will be unable to arrive at a unanimous point of view on a particular policy issue.

In relation to the statutory committees and the standing committees that we are dealing with this afternoon, we will see used within this parliament a lot more the mechanism that we see used in the estimates committees process. It will have to be that way. Once we start dealing with policy issues, whichever party is in opposition will need to be able to use those mechanisms—the statement of reservations, or the dissenting report—that are commonly used in reporting the activities of the estimates committees. Those mechanisms will feature much more in these committee reports. And so it should be, because those policy areas that the Premier and the government members have spoken about are unlikely to be such that unanimous agreement on a policy direction is the norm. That is unlikely to be the case, given the philosophical differences that exist between a government and an opposition in a parliament such as this. That will be the case irrespective of which party sits in government and which party sits in opposition. There will be those philosophical differences, and so there should be. It is an essential part of this place that those philosophical differences are not just aired but also debated in a forum that allows the detail of them to be explored.

I think the committee structure that we are setting up today will be an improvement on the old system in regard to providing those opportunities and those forums for discussion, debate and dissection of those policy directions. But they certainly will not provide the sort of scrutiny that I believe should be an essential part of this parliament. They will not provide the opportunity for the activities of the government and the policy directions of the government to be scrutinised in the same way that they are and that they can be in a parliament where there is an upper house, such as those parliaments that exist in the other states and the Commonwealth parliament. In that respect, this parliament has missed a very valuable opportunity.

I respect the assurances that have been given by the Premier and the other members opposite, but I reinforce the view that was expressed by the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution to the consideration of this bill that in 12 months time we need to review the operation of these committees. We need to see whether the government's actions have matched its rhetoric. Too many times in this parliament we have seen the government's rhetoric run a long way ahead of its actions. In this case, I hope that, when we come back in 12 months time and consider how this committee structure has served the parliament for its first year, I am able to stand here and say that the government's rhetoric has been delivered upon. There have been many instances where that has not been the case and no-one could blame me for being sceptical about the assurances that we have been given today.

*(Time expired)*

**Mr McLINDON** (Beaudesert—LNP) (3.46 pm): I congratulate the government on embracing the concept of efficiencies, as instigated and highlighted by the LNP in the lead-up to the recent state election. However, I am concerned about where the government is embracing this concept, and it appears to be in the arena of transparency and accountability. In fact, accountability around here is so efficient I have yet to come across it.

In essence, the bill before the House can be summed up by the fact that the government is embarking on a PR exercise of merely rebranding the parliamentary committees. Of further concern is that the roles and responsibilities of those committees is not altogether clear. In Queensland's unique situation of having one house—where Rafferty rules—our only hope of any form of checkpoint of accountability lies within the parliamentary committees.

Reform is never an easy challenge, but if the government has the will to do it then it must be done properly. The notion of having four government members and three non-government members immediately dilutes and weakens any real form of robust debate. In fact, the structure simply allows the government to use its left hand as a convenient resource and reference point to endorse the actions of its right hand.

One of the major concerns about a parliament controlled by the executive is that the passage of legislation is poorly scrutinised in a process that has commonly been equated with the function of a sausage machine. When processes such as parliamentary committees are not under the control of the government majority, the opportunities for them to act as a check on government legislation are significantly amplified. This ability to use such processes to challenge the government of the day has been deliberately and systematically diluted in this bill.

I support the installation of muscular mechanisms and a rigorous committee system that keeps the government and its legislative program held to account. Sadly, this proposal does not do that in its entirety. Reform means just that: reform. All this bill does is rebrand. True and genuine reform takes more than a rebranding strategy. Real reform is instigating an upper house. Real reform is 50-50 membership from both sides of politics of parliamentary committees. Real reform is appointing a Speaker who is completely independent of the electoral process. Real reform is people showing their identification at a polling booth and their names being ticked off automatically by a centralised computer system once they have cast their votes. Real reform requires actions that constitute a desire to overhaul the current false democracy we Queenslanders find ourselves in. Real reform means replacing the existing process, which is currently lying stagnant owing to an incremental tranquilliser to accountability.

I urge the government to embrace higher standards and processes of accountability and to tune into the ideas of the reformative side of politics. In 1922, the Labor Party gave Queensland's democracy an uppercut and 87 years later Queenslanders are getting an accountability tranquilliser. The role of parliamentary committees needs to be outlined and defined conclusively in order to become an effective entity to replace the current hologram of fairy floss, which the government refers to as an accountability checkpoint. I look forward with a sense of scrutiny over the next 12 months to the implementation of this bill.

**Ms STONE** (Springwood—ALP) (3.50 pm): I rise to speak briefly to the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill as I believe that the areas that I would have covered in my contribution have been covered quite adequately by the government members who have spoken already and I do not intend to go over again the points that they raised. I would like to say that this legislation will reform our parliamentary committee system—something that certainly has not happened in decades.

The fact that we have only one house makes the committee system even more important. Not only is the committee system more important to our parliamentary process but also it particularly needs to be more relevant. Parliamentary committees have the purpose of scrutinising government, scrutinising legislation and scrutinising projects and expenditure. Today, we see in this bill a restructure of the current committee system that will allow the parliament to continue to undertake that scrutiny.

This bill also brings the committee system into a more relevant form to concentrate on the contemporary issues affecting our electorates. If we have a look around the nation at other parliamentary committee systems, we will see some of the issues that those committees are dealing with. I certainly think if we went out there and asked the people in our electorates, they would tell us that they are the sorts of issues that they expect us to be looking at as well.

This bill will see the number of committees rise from eight to nine. The new committees will be the Law, Justice and Safety Committee, the Economic Development Committee, the Environment and Resources Committee and the Social Development Committee. I think that if members asked their constituency they would say that there would be quite a number of policy areas that they believe would affect them and would certainly want committees to look at them.

The important oversight functions of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, the Standing Orders Committee and the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee will remain unchanged under the bill. There is no doubt that today more people want to participate in the democratic process. The committee system can certainly be a vehicle for that to happen. As committees seek public opinions through submissions and public hearings this will be done. The Senate committee system is probably the most well known of the committee systems and I hope that in time our committee system will be just as well known with the same reputation as our federal counterparts for delivering real outcomes.

As parliamentarians we are expected to deal with complex issues. Our constituency expects us to work towards solutions and outcomes that are for the greater good of the community. They want to see their parliament working as one to create legislation to deal with a broad range of issues. They want to see their parliament listening to public opinion and reflecting this opinion in legislation. An active committee system with the ability to have better informed committee members and a better informed community will be able to do just that as it tackles the issues of the day. I heard the member for Moggill say that the committees should not be used for hiding issues. This side of the House is very committed to achieving real outcomes with our committee system.

Over the last eight years I have been a member of the Public Works Committee and for the last few years the chair of that committee. That committee looked at a wide variety of projects at differing stages of construction. We certainly took a bipartisan approach and were able to produce good recommendations. If the former member for Beaudesert, who was the former deputy chair of that committee, was here in the chamber he would be on his feet telling us how the committee system had become stale and needed to be revamped. He told the House this on many occasions. Today he would be standing here very happy to see the restructure of the committee system to better reflect the relevant issues and opinions of the day.

If one looks at other committee systems around the nation and even in places such as New Zealand, one sees that they certainly have been able to make a real difference not only by scrutinising government activity but also by having a look at those complex issues. I look forward to my role as the chair of the Law, Justice and Safety Committee. I believe that with a bipartisan approach we will be able to tackle issues of the day important to all Queenslanders and make a real difference. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (3.54 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill. The bill amends the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 to provide for the Law, Justice and Safety Committee in place of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee—it is proposed that this committee will retain the existing functions of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee with the addition of a new area of responsibility which covers an area of law, justice or safety that is referred to it by the Legislative Assembly—and combines the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee and their functions to form the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee.

These amendments to the bill accompany a proposed wider restructure of the parliamentary committee system by the state government. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill state that the proposed structure is designed to create a committee system more focused on developing best practice policy and legislative solutions to issues facing Queenslanders while maintaining the necessary oversight role parliamentary committees provide.

The successful passage of this bill will result in the Queensland parliament having six statutory committees: the Law, Justice and Safety Committee in place of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee; the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee in place of the

Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee; the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee; the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee; the Standing Orders Committee; and the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee.

The Law, Justice and Safety Committee will be a statutory committee as it will also absorb the legislative functions of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. Additional policy functions, similar to those being bestowed on a number of other new committees being established for the first time during the term of the 53rd Parliament, will be conferred on the committee by resolution. The policy functions will supposedly cover an area regarding law, justice and safety and these will be referred to the committee by the Legislative Assembly. It is proposed to establish three new parliamentary committees to consider policy issues relevant to the portfolio areas of Economic Development, Environment and Resources, and Social Development.

A strong, active committee system is undoubtedly an asset in any properly functioning parliamentary democracy. A comprehensive system of parliamentary committees can provide for greater accountability of executive government by making the policy and administrative functions of the incumbent administration more open and accountable. Committees can also provide a forum for investigation into matters of public importance and give members the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of such issues.

I am not completely convinced that the bill before the House will enhance Queensland's parliamentary democracy by providing greater accountability or result in a more transparent parliament, notwithstanding the insistence of the explanatory notes accompanying the bill that this will be the case.

In the first instance I might say something about the establishment of these policy development committees designed to have a role in the development of policy initiatives: the Economic Development Committee, the Environment and Resources Committee and the Social Development Committee as they are referred to in the explanatory notes. The proposed terms of reference for the committees are so extensive, broad and vague that there is a risk that the government of the day may simply use the new committees as a political clearing laundromat where it can refer contentious matters for a supposedly independent inquiry. This has been remarked upon as a favourite tactic of the former Premier, Peter Beattie. While the inquiry is underway, ministers may be tempted just to bat away criticisms about an issue by responding that the matter is the subject of an inquiry and that they are awaiting the committee's report. When the committee has reported, the government may seek to fortify its position by saying that it is based on the considered recommendations of a majority of an independent parliamentary committee, notwithstanding that there will inevitably be a majority of government MPs on the committee.

Other jurisdictions have put in place parliamentary committee systems that scrutinise legislation and examine contentious issues but do not require a government to enjoy a majority on the committee. That is one way of ensuring that the committee system is not captured by the vested interests of the government of the day. But it is not the only way. The scope of matters that a parliament or, effectively, a government allows a committee to pursue unhindered and with what powers and resources it does so can go some way to achieving this goal. If this does not occur, the state government may find that it is going to create a culture of perpetual dissenting reports from non-government members of these policy development committees. It is creating a situation in which a government majority on the policy committee will be able to deliver, if it is so inclined, a government view on each and every occasion which will be, by implication if not reality, presented to the parliament and thus the people of Queensland as the view of an independent all-party committee, notwithstanding that the view has been determined more by politics than a robust consideration of the issue at hand.

The government has ministerial legislative committees of its own backbench and what it would have us believe to be a seemingly endless public consultation process on its policy initiatives. My question is: why would the state government propose this particular structure of parliamentary committee with a continuation of government majorities on the committee if, as was canvassed in the Premier's second reading speech, the stated intention is really to refresh the Queensland parliamentary committee system? It is not a renewal at all—in actual fact, it is more a perpetuation of the current system—but a widening of the scope of the committee process to include public policy issues related to ministerial portfolios.

According to the Premier's second reading speech, the proposed new structure of the Queensland parliamentary committee system is designed to create a committee system more focused on developing best practice policy and legislative solutions to issues facing Queenslanders, while maintaining the necessary oversight role parliamentary committees provide. Having canvassed matters relating to the former, I will turn to matters relating to the oversight role that parliamentary committees are charged with by the parliament and the implications of this bill on the effectiveness of those committees in discharging those responsibilities. I consider that the implications are substantial.

Long-term observers of politics and government in the state of Queensland would be forgiven for being somewhat surprised by the decision of the state government to amalgamate the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. If there was a charter that one would think the state

government would not complicate or burden with additional responsibilities or confuse with other charters, it would be the charter of the Public Accounts Committee. It would appear this sacred cow is no longer sacred. During previous parliaments many of the most heated political debates in this place were debates on the question of whether to establish an independent Public Accounts Committee. The role of the Public Accounts Committee is to assess the integrity, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government financial management. It achieves this by examining government financial documents and considering the reports of the Auditor-General. The Public Works Committee's areas of responsibility are public works undertaken by an entity that is a constructing authority for the work if the committee decides to consider the work and any major government owned corporation work if the committee decides to consider the work.

The charters of both committees are important and substantial. The scrutiny roles that both committees undertake on the integrity of the public finances of the state and the prudent expenditure of those public finances on capital works projects respectively are pillars of the current Queensland parliamentary committee process which, in a unicameral parliamentary system and in a parliament where almost one-third of the members of the Legislative Assembly sit inside the executive, are vital to the integrity of our democracy and public confidence in it. Amalgamating these two committees removes one of those pillars.

The important and substantial matters contained in the two charters of the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee will need to be discharged by a single committee. That is a very significant burden to be discharged if it is to be done as effectively, diligently and robustly as it was previously done or attempted to be done by two separate and distinct committees. I think the effectiveness of the new Public Accounts and Public Works Committee will be curtailed in comparison with its two predecessors. The capacity of the committee to uphold both charters simultaneously does not appear, from the provisions of the bill introduced by the government, to be enhanced by additional members of the committee being appointed, by additional resources being allocated to it or by bestowing on the committee additional powers in undertaking its functions and inquiries. Today is a step backwards as far as accountability in Queensland is concerned. It is a retrograde step and I am genuinely surprised that the government considers it appropriate to move in this direction. In doing so it is seeking to reduce scrutiny on the actions of executive government in Queensland.

Lastly, I canvass the impact of the bill on the committee that I am a member of in this 53rd Parliament and was a member of in the 52nd Parliament, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. The Parliament of Queensland Act provides that the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee has the capacity to pursue inquiries in the following areas: administrative review reform, including considering legislation about access to information; review of administrative decisions; antidiscrimination and equal opportunity employment; constitutional reform, including any bill expressly or impliedly repealing any law relevant to Queensland's Constitution; electoral reform, including monitoring generally the conduct of elections under the Electoral Act 1992 and the capacity of the Electoral Commission to conduct elections; legal reform, including recognition of Aboriginal tradition and Island custom under Queensland law; and proposed national scheme legislation referred to the committee by the Legislative Assembly.

Further and importantly, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee has a number of other statutory responsibilities in relation to the Queensland Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner and senior officers of the Electoral Commission of Queensland. In addition, the committee must deal with issues that are referred to the committee by the Legislative Assembly. Indeed, as we speak the committee is undertaking an inquiry of this nature in respect of the proposal to develop a preamble for insertion into the Queensland Constitution and the question of whether the oath or affirmation of allegiance taken by members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly needs to be modernised. In respect of its statutory responsibilities in relation to the Queensland Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner and the Electoral Commission, these responsibilities are important and considerable. Any member of this parliament who has served on the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee will acknowledge that if these responsibilities are to be discharged properly there will not be many opportunities to pursue the policy development agenda that this bill seeks to bestow on it.

Of course the history of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee is that it is a successor to the Electoral and Administrative Review Committee that was established as a result of a recommendation from the report that came from the Fitzgerald inquiry, which was a seminal, even watershed, experience in politics in Queensland. Again, I express my surprise that the government considers it appropriate that the integrity of the charter of the committee that is the successor to the Electoral and Administrative Review Committee, and still holds those responsibilities, would be complicated by, blurred by or frustrated by the requirement to undertake simultaneously broad, generalised and largely unrelated policy development responsibilities that are destined to be incorporated into the legislative agenda of the government of the day. My view is that the government has deemed that another sacred cow is no longer sacred, and that is regrettable.

The so-called Law, Justice and Safety Committee will be required to discharge simultaneously both the policy development agenda and the previous statutory responsibilities of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, without any increase in the membership of the committee, the resources allocated to the committee, or the powers bestowed on the committee to conduct its inquiries.

I endorse the view of the Leader of the Opposition that the LNP will lend cautious support to this bill and that we reserve the right to move a motion in 12 months time to review the effectiveness of the state government's supposed refreshment of the committee system in the parliament of Queensland. We shall see.

**Hon. DM WELLS** (Murrumba—ALP) (4.08 pm): The usual generosity of spirit that we on the government side have become accustomed to receiving from honourable members on the other side of the House seems to be sadly lacking on this particular occasion. In her second reading speech the Premier indicated to the House that, as a result of the positive experience of the two select committees that were set up during the last term of government—the organ donor committee and the surrogacy committee—she had been convinced that it was desirable to make the committee processes a little more bipartisan and allow honourable members on the other side of the House to play a role in parliamentary committees that actually had some input into policy.

In the light of that, what do we get from the opposition? Not 'thank you' but rather we get, 'No, it's all a trick.' That is what we got from the Leader of the Opposition and from the honourable member for Moggill. It was all a trick, the honourable member for Moggill said, to make opposition members accountable for government policy. It was all a trick because it gets them to become responsible for decisions. I would ask the honourable member for Moggill: what on earth did you come here for if it was not to be responsible for decisions that were going to be made?

The honourable member for Callide took it a step further. He stood here on the threshold of a new era of bipartisanship, a new era of consensus, and said that it was sad that he did not have the kind of veto that they had in the old days, when there was a Legislative Council. We offer him consensus, we offer him bipartisanship and what he wants is a veto.

The honourable member for Beaudesert took it even further. He said that real reform would be if there was fifty-fifty membership on the committee. If the honourable member wanted to follow the logic of this a little further, perhaps he would argue for fifty-fifty membership of this parliament, notwithstanding whoever won the election. The argument of the honourable member for Beaudesert, while interesting, is not as deeply steeped in democratic theory as perhaps in other circumstances we might hope that it might be. What we have is an expansion of the bipartisanship of this parliament as a result of these committees.

The honourable member for Sunnybank mentioned the kinds of committees that existed in 1987. She mentioned that there was a parliamentary library committee, a parliamentary building committee, a parliamentary printing committee, a parliamentary refreshment rooms committee and a parliamentary standing orders committee. In 1987 there was nothing outside of this parliament that any parliamentary committee had any purview of or any say in. Because these committees were all confined to the personal business of members of parliament, they were known in those days as the 'parliamentary maritime committees' because they all involved navel-gazing by members of parliament.

Prior to 1987 members of parliament were involved only in those things which were their own personal preoccupations. In 1988 the then National Party Premier, Mike Ahern, introduced public accounts committees and public works committees. That was a great step forward and it came from the other side of the House though, I must say, with an awful lot of prompting by the Labor Party. Then subsequently as a result of the Fitzgerald reforms we saw introduced into Queensland the EARC committee, the Parliamentary Electoral and Administrative Review Committee, and the CJC parliamentary committee. The CMC parliamentary committee is its successor. Subsequently a later government introduced estimates committees. Committee work has become a significant part of the work of this parliament. However, what we are getting today is new and that is the establishment, at the beginning of a parliamentary term, of a series of select committees which encompass portfolio areas such as health, education and environment.

Roughly speaking, we can divide the eras into three. Roughly speaking, we can say that until 1988 the parliamentary committees that existed were only those that related to address the preoccupations that members of parliament would have had as members of parliament. After 1988, members of parliament got involved in parliamentary committees, but they were involved in issues that were related to settled policies—where there was unlikely to be any significant policy development, where ideology was of very little relevance and where the issues were largely technical and strategic.

From today—with, as we hope, the passage of this piece of legislation and the establishment, which has already occurred by resolution of this parliament, of the select committees—we are beginning a new era where bipartisan parliamentary committees will be able to consider and examine policies. Indeed, some of them will be able to examine the executive arm of government in a way that has not previously occurred.

I understand that the Social Development Committee will have the responsibility for oversight of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, the Health Quality and Complaints Commission and the Family Responsibilities Commission in the same way that the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee has oversight of the CMC.

This is a big step forward—enabling a bipartisan committee to play a significant role not only in the oversight of the executive arm of government but also in the development of policy. Why would members opposite shrink from that and why would they be mealy-mouthed about that? Instead of saying, 'It's all a trick,' and, 'Why should we take the responsibility?', why not embrace that responsibility? If we have a new era of consensus then we can achieve a great deal.

As the late Jim Killen once said, it is not the case that all the good cricketers are in the same team. It may very well be that good ideas can come from the other side of the House—whoever is on the other side of the House. It might very well be that the experience that we have had of those two committees to which the honourable the Premier referred, which functioned so effectively and which delivered bipartisan reports so well, is a pointer to a future in which we can embrace, to a much greater extent than we previously have, the wisdom—limited though it might be in each of us—that might come from each side of the House.

This is a really significant reform. It is the beginning of a new era. It is the beginning of a period in which honourable members on the other side of the House have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes of government and of this parliament in a way they previously did not.

We all know that the process by which conclusions are drawn and decisions are made is a complex one. We all know that the paradigm that the public has of the way decisions are made is not actually correct. Many members of the public very broadly and very often believe that we sit here and argue the point with each other to try to persuade each other of a particular point of view. Of course that is not the case. The discussions on the legislation that is coming before the House go before the party meetings prior to them coming to parliament. Before that they go to committees of the particular political parties and their details are thrashed out in those fora, and so they should be.

When somebody stands for election in a particular electorate and says that they are a member of the LNP or of the Labor Party or of some other party, they betray not only their own principles but also those of the people who sent them here if they do something other than support the party for which they stood in that election—

**Mr Rickuss:** People are elected, not the party.

**Mr WELLS:**—and the process therefore is more complex. It is not a matter of standing here—and I do not expect to persuade the honourable member who just interjected of a point in the course of my argument because I understand that he has a different point of view from mine and that is why he sits on the other side of the House. However, while all these things are true and while it is the case that the processes and the decisions that are taken are complex and go through many stages, it needs to be understood that many of the decisions that emerge from this parliament emerge from joint committees and many of those decisions are completely bipartisan.

The other thing that needs to be remembered and needs to be emphasised I think to the general public is this fact: nearly all of the time when we are sitting in this place we are dealing with settled policies. It is only a small fraction of the time where the ideological divide cuts in. It is only a small fraction of the decisions that have to be made by government that actually do involve an ideological difference because in this the oldest of all democracies in Australia, in the oldest and most settled democracy in the world, we operate very largely in the context of settled policies. That makes this country and this place an ideal place to develop a process of bipartisanship in our committees. I thoroughly applaud the extension of that bipartisanship. I thoroughly support the opportunity which the government is giving to this parliament to develop more policy in a bipartisan way. I urge honourable members to support the bill.

**Mr McARDLE** (Caloundra—LNP) (4.21 pm): Before starting the bulk of my contribution, I join with the member for Callide in sincerely hoping that the words issued by the government do herald a change in the committee process and do in fact see a real bipartisan approach to the issues that beset and bedevil the state. I join with him in sincerely hoping that we have seen the last of the scenario whereby committees are the mouthpiece of the government and that they do become robust, independent organisations that delve into the real questions that have to be dealt with on a daily basis by such bodies.

The member for Murrumba is right in that, yes, new committees are being established. But the opposition's concern is simply this: will it still be the same process that we have come to depend upon and actually live through on a daily basis or will the outcome be that these committees will be ordained by the allegiance of the membership of the committees themselves? That is our real concern. The rhetoric is one thing; the reality, however, is another matter and will be tested over time.

Committees are a critical component in the efficient operation of the system of government under which we live—that is, a democracy. The government is subject to scrutiny on a daily basis in the media and in the parliament and, in my opinion, equally should be scrutinised by these committees. For that scrutiny to be real, it is important that the membership of the committee act as a unit, not as being part of a government or part of an opposition. Such committees are charged with an oversight role and are not merely to be a clearing house to develop policy for a government, whether it be an LNP government or an ALP government. It is wrong for any government to use a system such as that merely to clear policy, to whitewash and review their own actions and to come up with a positive response for the government.

This is exactly how the former Premier Peter Beattie used the CMC. On a continual basis he would move issues from this parliament into the realm of the CMC and then raise his hands and make it quite clear that he could not answer any questions until that body had made a determination. That in essence gutted the role of the opposition to question in this House what had taken place. It gutted the role of the opposition to act in an inquisitorial manner to deal with the issues that bedevilled the state during his time as Premier.

The new committees that are being formed—and some have already met—cannot be of a similar vein. They cannot be used in a manner whereby they are simply used as the scapegoat for the government. The role of these committees must be inquisitorial—that is, they are to probe, question and scrutinise the role of the government and to put in place solutions to problems, not merely, as I said earlier, to be the mouthpiece of this government or for that matter any other government that governs in this state.

Committees have been seen, and will be seen in the future by the opposition, as nothing more than a system that the government has put in place to clear through them what it wants to achieve and then to use the resolution of those committees to put in place a policy or legislation using the mantra that an independent body has had oversight of that ultimate outcome. That is not the role of these committees. If the men and women on those committees are to be independent, it is important that they put aside the allegiances they have within the parliamentary structure.

In addition, these committees do and will have the power to call for persons or documents. This is an essential tool. If we are going to get to the nub of any issue facing this parliament or this state, these committees must be able to use and exercise the right to call for persons and documents at any time they deem necessary. The real test of the strength or otherwise of the independence of the members of these committees will come when government members oppose a non-government motion to call for documents held by a department and for the appropriate officers to appear before the committee to delve into an issue confronted by that committee. That will be the real test. I have a real concern that, given that a non-government member will make the call, 4-3 will be the vote against that determination. I hope I am proven wrong and I could then join again with the member for Callide in saying that these will be robust and real committees. If the committees are to be of any value, the right for them to call for documents and for persons to appear before them must be used without fear or trepidation. That right must be used because it is only then, when we can access relevant documentation and the committee is properly and fully informed of a scenario, that that committee can come to a fully informed and effective conclusion.

In the Premier's second reading speech here today, the government has stated that the committees' role is to focus on best practice policy. Again, to develop policy in a state such as Queensland, which has significant issues facing it across the spectrum—let alone in health, let alone in transport—members must not be afraid to take the step and call in people and documents to ensure that the committee is fully informed about what action is to take place to find a resolution. The issue of personal allegiance to a party must be put aside. These bodies must have an inquisitorial role and must act in that manner.

The other point is that quite clearly here in Queensland we have a unicameral house. That is a unique system when it comes to parliaments throughout Australia. We do not have an upper house to rely upon to scrutinise or to refuse bills when they are passed by the lower house. That alone means that these committees form a critical function. If we accept that they are there to quiz, to probe and to look at the actions of the government, then these committees have a greater role in this state than in any parliament throughout the whole of this nation.

The opposition sees these committees in a unicameral system as absolutely essential to hold the government accountable. The fear of the opposition is that we will simply have a repeat scenario of what has taken place in the past where committees have been used merely as clearing houses and have not had the tenacity to take on the tough questions. Unless we have that accountability at the committee stage, given the unicameral house that we have here in Queensland, it is of little value having the committee system as the government of the day will simply go back to its party room, determine the policy itself and ram it through this House.

The reality is that this House alone cannot scrutinise the government but the committees in a bipartisan, open, honest and critical fashion can do so. That is the question we are putting to the government. The members of these committees must act independently. To be independent means that

people must act without fear or favour. This should be the case irrespective of whether it is the LNP in government or the ALP in government. If the government says that these committees are really independent then they must act without fear or favour. The government of the day must understand that that is the role of committees.

Recently in the United Kingdom we saw the role the committee system played in government members voting against the Prime Minister. That is the robust use to which committees should be put. They should not simply have pieces of paper rammed through them with the hope of a positive outcome and then the final solution put in place with the government saying that this has been looked at and consented to by an independent body.

The Leader of the Opposition indicated that the opposition will be watching the system very closely. This is an opportunity, as the member for Murrumba said, for new committees to be put in place. It is also an opportunity for the government to say, 'We are really committed to making certain that Queenslanders get an answer to their problems. We will open up and be totally bipartisan and honest and ensure that these committees are not simply mouthpieces but fulfil a real function and come up with real solutions based upon all the evidence and all the facts without fear or favour as to the consequences.'

**Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (4.31 pm): There is a need for a more robust committee system which provides the opportunity for parliamentarians, regardless of their political allegiances, to fulfil their role as parliamentarians by providing scrutiny of the executive government. This is particularly so in a unicameral system—a single house of parliament, which is the Queensland parliament. As we do not have an upper house to provide the review function, committees are intended to help fulfil this role along with the official opposition.

Scrutiny, not policy development, should be the primary role of standing committees. There is a valid argument for select committees handling discrete and complex policy issues which require a sensitive bipartisan approach. The surrogacy issue was an example of that. But to extend this broader policy determination beyond select committees to general standing committees is a reform of debatable merit as it poses the danger of undermining the role of scrutiny.

In reality, most legislation in this parliament has a degree of bipartisan support. If people were to actually look at the amount of legislation that goes through this parliament with the support of both sides of the House, they would find that it is the majority of the legislation. But we recognise that there is a role in a house of debate to be able to scrutinise and not always agree.

Not only in this parliament but in life, good decision making requires robust insight, robust debate, ongoing dialogue and different viewpoints. I am sure there are many people in this place who have come to the table with one view and have found after they have heard the views of others that they have changed their minds. That is part of informed decision making.

Unfortunately, in modern parliamentary debate committees do not fulfil the role of good decision makers because of the lack of opportunity to come to the table with good intentions. The government says that this new legislation will provide that opportunity. We only have to look to recent parliamentary debates to find where this has not been the case.

The Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee was previously able, in a bipartisan way, to select the person to fill the Information Commissioner role. That was a good reform. Subsequently, we saw former Premier Peter Beattie step away from that. It was then only the government chair of the committee who was involved in the selection process for the Information Commissioner.

There are circumstances that arose in LCARC, which I cannot divulge in this parliament, that became matters of great contention, as other members of that committee at that time know. We cannot divulge those issues in this parliament except by referring to the reports that came out as a result of a complaint. Under the rules of committees, members are bound by confidentiality. One of the concerns we have is that this Premier will start to abuse these general committees by asking them to consider policy matters. There may be instances where there has been robust debate behind closed doors about why certain matters will be considered or not be considered as agenda items, but those reasons will never see the light of day. Due to the confidentiality provisions that apply to these committees, the public may be left wondering why the official opposition is bound and unable to explain what happened behind closed doors.

My concern is that if policy based matters are to be considered by these committees then that may undermine the valid scrutiny role of the opposition. It may find that it is unable to explain why certain matters have not been brought into the public arena and have been considered behind closed doors. The committees have important roles to play, but the binding confidentiality requirements of these committees may undermine the scrutiny that is required to be fulfilled in a more public arena.

I want to address the very valid concern that has been raised concerning the merging of the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. As my colleagues have mentioned—the member for Hinchinbrook ably outlined this earlier—this will have a very real impact on the workload of the members of this merged committee. They will have a much broader scope of responsibilities.

I want to remind the House of a previous committee that had an amalgamated workload. I refer to the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee which was merged, under a previous structure, with the PCJC. As a member of that committee—and I am sure others who worked on that committee will agree—and without divulging the internal operations of that committee, I can say that it was an unsatisfactory workload and we could not properly scrutinise and fulfil both those statutory responsibilities. Consequently, those responsibilities were split because quite a considerable amount of work was required if appropriate scrutiny was to be provided with regard to the PCJC aspect of the committee, as required under the legislation of this parliament.

Therein lies the problem. The Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee are very important committees. In fact, they are two of the most important committees of this parliament with regard to the fundamental responsibility of providing scrutiny of the government. To see these committees merged into a broader framework raises the real danger that pertinent issues will fail to receive the level of detailed inquiry they require. Non-government committee members who have very valid concerns about issues that should be raised and put on the public agenda will find that it is even harder to overcome the objections of the government members who dominate in these committees. There are some very necessary issues that should be inquired into by these committees.

But, once again, we do not know the fights that go on behind closed doors with regard to why certain issues do not see the light of day and should be scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee and Public Works Committee. We can only assume what items may have been debated behind closed doors.

This is the joke. If parliamentary committees are really providing a robust level of scrutiny, shouldn't more of these determinations be open to public scrutiny? Shouldn't people see why certain items have been excluded from the consideration of these committees well before the final report and the dissenting report stage? The way the committees are currently structured, it does not provide that level of open engagement. As we should be reminded, accountability means that issues should see the light of day.

As I mentioned, one of the roles of committees is scrutiny. In reality, the government members control the agenda and determine what will and will not be debated. That is not addressed by the legislation before us. We only have the word of the Premier that there will be more of a bipartisan approach to issues than there has been in the past. The role of the opposition is certainly strengthened by having an additional 11 new members altogether, and we value the ability to have new people come on to our side to work with us on that very important role of providing scrutiny as well as active constituency support throughout this state.

In summary, this legislation is legislation that we have a great deal of concern about. We do support a strong and robust committee structure. This legislation does not guarantee that there will be a fundamentally different approach. We are committed to ensuring that we play our role, knowing that the resources of the committees are in fact being stretched further across a larger array of duties and not necessarily with a greater array of resources to provide appropriate backing. This parliament is one which over the years has seen a great predominance of government members who have distorted the legislative process. We believe that the committee structure should truly be reformed to ensure that there is in fact greater opportunity for proper inquiry where we have the opportunity to call witnesses to public forums, including those within the public sector, to have unfettered debate about issues which are currently gagged, and these rules of debate do not allow that gagging to be removed. I want to again raise my concern that the confidentiality provisions with committees are in fact going to continue to provide a gag upon those who are seeking to bring legitimate issues to the scrutiny of these committees and ultimately to the debate in the public forum.

**Mr MOORHEAD** (Waterford—ALP) (4.41 pm): It is quite appropriate that I follow the member for Maroochydore because, I am sure like the member for Maroochydore, I look forward to the first meeting tomorrow at 12 noon of the Economic Development Committee, of which the member for Maroochydore is a member.

**Mr Finn:** Who's chairing it?

**Mr MOORHEAD:** I am chairing it, member for Yeerongpilly, and this committee as part of this new committee structure provides great opportunities, and I will come to that later. The argument put forward by the opposition today is not only trying to walk both sides of the street but trying to do it in different directions at the same time. The Leader of the Opposition's position seems to me to be that, while the opposition supports the bill with reservations, this bill is somehow a trick to make it appear that something is happening when it is not.

I commend the Premier for bringing this bill before the House because I actually think it is politically a very brave move. This move opens up the committee system far more broadly than anything this parliament has ever seen before. I think we are moving into the third phase of the committee structure in our parliament. The first phase was when we originally looked at whether we should have a new building on the parliamentary site. The second phase started in 1988 and really took off under the Goss government where committees like EARC, PEARC and the PCJC were established. That really did provide backbenchers and the parliament with a greater involvement in the decision making in this place. This is the third stage that really lets the parliamentary committee structure, and the bipartisanship that that brings, sink its teeth into some of the key policy issues that are affecting our state.

The contradiction in the Leader of the Opposition's debate is pretty clear when he says that it is somehow an abuse of the parliament's role to have a proposal put by the government on how the parliamentary committee structure should work—that is, that somehow that is the executive dominating the parliament. I suppose I should say to the Leader of the Opposition that that is why we are here today. We are actually here today so that the parliament can consider and make the final decision on a proposal put by the government. If the parliament had a view to the contrary on what should happen to the committee structure, the parliament could decide that today and vote against it.

**Mr Rickuss:** Didn't you hear what the member for Murrumba said?

**Mr MOORHEAD:** I did, member for Lockyer, but I am not much interested in what you have to say unless you are on your feet. The parliament has given its time to consider this proposal put by the government, and I think it is a good one. It is a very brave move for a government to change from a system where the committee structure was largely based on consideration of procedural and civil rights type matters to really take up the questions of policy facing our state.

While the government is criticised for bringing its new proposal for committees to the parliament, the Leader of the Opposition then said that it is not the responsibility of the opposition to have ideas—that is, it is the opposition's responsibility to criticise ideas but not actually bring those ideas forward. My hope is that this parliament is a contest of ideas, and that means that ideas will come from everybody. That means that I do hope to see the LNP put some ideas into this parliament. We are yet to see any ideas put forward by the LNP, but one day we might just see that. However, the current opposition leader's policy is that no ideas should come from the opposition and that this is a cynical attempt by the government to steal ideas off the opposition. Can I say that it is a good opportunity for the government to consider those ideas put by the opposition, but on its track record we would have to scrutinise them very carefully. However, the opposition does have a responsibility to come to this place with ideas and put them forward to the committee process.

The opposition leader then said that we should be heard and criticised by the UK delegation which has been criticising this parliament about its accountability processes. I have been following the news lately and have seen the UK parliament dealing with more than 20 MPs relating to the expenditure of public moneys on matters such as manure for a garden and the renovation of a kitchen. Even yesterday the Speaker of the UK parliament apologised to that parliament for the outrageous expenditure of public money by MPs. While every parliament has its role to ensure that appropriate scrutiny has taken place, I do not think the Leader of the Opposition's referral to the UK parliament as the house of all virtue is accurate.

Last year I was privileged to be a member of the parliamentary committee investigating altruistic surrogacy in Queensland. I must say that that was a great experience which provided two key things. The first thing was an opportunity for members from both sides of this parliament and members who are not members of either political party to sit down and thrash out what is a very difficult social issue and to come up with what I think is a very sensible outcome. That committee also provided an opportunity for what is a very emotive debate to be carried on in a sensitive but open way and allowing the public to make contributions. On the same day of hearings we had the advocates for surrogacy and people who were personally looking forward to the day when they might be able to have children through a surrogacy arrangement followed by groups that were adamantly opposed to that policy. During that day of hearings there was strong debate which was quite friendly and which made what was a very emotional debate a very sensible debate about what is at the heart of that debate—that is, raising children in loving families. I hope that that experience can inform what is the future of these policy committees.

I refer in particular to the opportunity for public involvement. At the moment this parliament does not have a great deal of opportunity for the people of Queensland to come and have their say. They can obviously make their contributions to their local members, but this committee system provides the public with an opportunity to make their submissions and have them considered by all sides of the parliament. It provides an opportunity for members of this parliament to put aside their political differences and to get to the nub of the issue. That may not mean agreeing on what the outcome is, and in that case there is an opportunity for dissenting reports. However, that at least gets people to the point where they understand what they disagree on.

Although, as members from opposing sides of the House, from time to time we disagree, I think we all acknowledge that there are talented members on both sides of the House. The experiences and points of view of the 89 members who sit in this chamber differ markedly. We come from different backgrounds and bring different ways of looking at the issues facing Queensland.

Queensland is facing tough times. I think we can all agree that we are facing unprecedented challenges in a number of areas. Now is the time when creative solutions might be just the ticket for steering Queensland through these rough waters. The committee that I will chair will look into one of those pivotal issues—that of job creation in Queensland. I can think of nothing more important that that committee could examine and could provide the people of Queensland and particularly industry groups in Queensland—an opportunity to have their say.

The reform of the Queensland parliamentary committee structure, with this bill as its base, provides all of the backbenchers in this place with a greater opportunity to contribute to the development of policy and legislative solutions. Like the people of Queensland, we are a diverse bunch. That diversity means that between us we are capable of coming up with unique solutions.

The four new policy development committees that are created as part of this shake-up are charged with considering best practice policy and legislative solutions to issues within their areas of responsibility. These committees cover law, justice and safety; economic development; environmental resource management; and social development. The new committee structure makes great use of the resources available by involving more members of the House in finding ways forward for Queensland. I really look forward to seeing the creative solutions that these new committees can come up with.

Finally, on the issue of the scrutiny of legislation brought to this place, I am a bit bemused by the contributions of those members who said that there is insufficient opportunity in which to debate legislation before this House. There are 35 members of the LNP in this place. Each of those members has an opportunity to make a 20-minute contribution to the second reading debate of a bill. When it comes to the consideration in detail of a bill, every one of those 35 members of the LNP has an opportunity of 10 minutes in which to question the government and to scrutinise the contents of the bill clause by clause. That is 10 minutes for every member per clause. On top of that, the opposition spokesperson gets a further 10 minutes in which to speak for every clause. But with those resources at their disposal, the opposition members say that they do not have an opportunity to scrutinise legislation. The question that needs to be asked is whether the well-resourced opposition members are taking the opportunities that this House provides them.

**Mr WELLINGTON** (Nicklin—Ind) (4.52 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. As I was reading the bill and listening to the contributions of members I was thinking, 'Is this an improvement on the current committee system that we have?' In considering that question, I reflected on the contributions that many new members made during the last sitting—their first chance in which to speak and to be involved in parliament in Queensland—in their maiden speeches. Whether those members were from the government or the opposition, they spoke with passion about their desire to help and improve the lot of Queenslanders. There was goodwill from all members in their wish to improve the lifestyle and the quality of life of all Queenslanders. I certainly did not see the politicking that some members have intimated may happen on these committees. We saw goodwill from all members.

When I reflect on the committees that I have been involved in during my time in parliament, I can say that there has been unanimous goodwill. On the occasions when there is not unanimous agreement, what is open to the members of a committee? They can present a statement of reservation or they can present a dissenting report. If they are really passionate about an issue and think that it is not useful, they can simply resign from that committee.

I want to reflect on the most recent involvement that I had with the committee system, which was when I was a member of the Review of Organ and Tissue Donation Procedures Select Committee. I must say that when I became a member of that committee I had a pretty firm view on what I thought should happen. But after being involved in that committee with members from the opposition and the government I changed my mind—and, I believe, so did some other members of that committee, because we were able to get a better and wider perspective of the issues.

I think this is a wonderful opportunity for all 89 members to be involved directly in not just developing policy in Queensland but also changing the law. Is that not what we are about? That is certainly what I believe I am about—trying to change the law. Quite frankly, I do not care whether it is an idea from the government, the opposition or the crossbenches. I reflect on a motion that was moved by a former One Nation member representing an area in North Queensland in relation to organ transplant. That was a jolly good idea that was moved on and developed.

I believe that this proposal is a definite improvement on our current law. A number of members have spoken about the balance of the committee, being four government members and three other members—that it should be 50-50, that it should be even. The political reality is that a government is elected on a mandate and I believe it is entitled to have a majority vote on committees. In all honesty, if

the opposition were to have a majority or if the membership of the committee was 50-50, I think we would see real politics starting to be played on some of these committees because of the implications that could flow. On that point, I believe the four-three balance is reasonable. I think it has worked effectively in the past. There are options open to members who are on these committees and who do not support the views of the committee whereby they can express their views.

A number of members have said that the opposition does not have the full capacity to scrutinise legislation, or words to that effect, and that we need to have an upper house. Can I say quite clearly that I would love to see that proposal taken to a referendum in Queensland and for Queenslanders to be asked what they think about having another house of parliament. We just had an election. During the election campaign I did not hear any candidate say, 'If we get elected, we are going to introduce an upper house and have more politicians.' Elections are a chance for Queenslanders to vote. We all have a chance to vote for whomever we want, and whoever forms government, so be it. They have a mandate to lead. I certainly cannot support the call for an upper house because the opposition is not adequately resourced or is not provided with the capacity to scrutinise legislation. I believe that we have the means and the capacity by which to do that. It is a matter of pursuing those opportunities to the end that members want to pursue them.

One committee that I am very interested in is the Social Development Committee. When I returned to parliament I found on my table—and I understand all members have received a copy—a report titled *Cannabis: suicide, schizophrenia and other ill-effects*. It is a research paper on the consequences of acute and chronic cannabis use. I think it is a jolly frightening report. It seems to me that so many people in our community think that cannabis is a soft drug and is not a problem, that it is a recreational drug, that some sportsmen and women use it—that it is okay for them to get a rap over the knuckles and the next minute they are back being the star that they were before. I think this report is a damning indictment on our community.

I ask members to take the time to read the recommendations. Looking at that report, I believe that cannabis and illegal drug use is ruining the lives of young Australians, teenagers—boys and girls—and adults. If we go to our hospitals we see the cost to taxpayers of trying to solve and deal with these problems. That is something that I would hope could be considered by the Social Development Committee. I had a look at the proposed ambit of the Social Development Committee and it says—

The Social Development Committee considers the impact of chronic diseases on Queensland communities and the steps that can be taken to reduce the incidence of chronic disease in our community.

The definition of chronic is 'lasting'; the definition of disease is 'unhealthy condition of the body, mind, illness and sickness', and it goes on. I was thinking that that could fall within the parameter of the proposed Social Development Committee. Then it says—

In undertaking the inquiry the committee should consider programs that can help communities embrace healthier lifestyles.

I would have thought that every member of this House would be concerned about improving lifestyles to bring about a healthier community. If every one of the 89 members, through their representative on the committee, was able to speak about how we could improve the lifestyles of the people in their respective communities, I think that is something they could all be justly proud of.

I am not interested in just supporting this so that we can develop better policy; it is about changing the law for the good of all Queenslanders. If at the end of the day it is not working, I believe there are a range of options members can take. They can resign or there can be a dissenting report. I would hope, as other members have mentioned, that we see a review in the future. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr RICKUSS** (Lockyer—LNP) (5.00 pm): I rise to say a few words on the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. There has been a great debate in this House, and it has been interesting, too, about the pros and cons of the changing of the committee system. The House is in agreement that we do need a robust, sound committee system. That really would make the place work. There has been some hesitation on this side as to whether the system will really work. Committees involved with social policy do work well. Parliamentarians do have different views on social issues, as we have seen with the surrogacy debate and the cloning debate. People vote on different sides for different reasons. These committees do come into their own in relation to social policy issues.

The real problem is committees that are involved in the financial management of the state. I believe that this is where we will start to find problems. I do not think that it will be conciliatory. This is where the inquisitorial debate will have to happen so that we can really understand what is going on.

Unfortunately, as has been mentioned in other contributions, some of the committees will be snowed under. If one looks at the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, which I am a member of, it will be very busy. The Public Works Committee was busy before and now it has had Public Accounts thrown at it as well. It is about integrity, honesty, economy and efficiencies. That is a large area to look into. There are around seven reports that will be tabled in the next few months. We have to examine those reports. It will take a magnitude of work.

**Mr Hoolihan:** Afraid to work?

**Mr RICKUSS:** No, I am not afraid of work. I have an electorate that is rather large, like yourself, member for Keppel, and I am sure that you are interested in representing your electorate, just as I am. The amount of work is part of the problem that we will have. There is a concern that some things might get left by the wayside because of the amount of work involved. That is the sort of thing that will be discussed. The Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee—replaced by the Law, Justice and Safety Committee—has also had more work added to it.

Let us face it: we need these committees to be robust and vigorous. We want people to be able to be called in front of the committees. We want documents to be able to be placed in front of the committees. We want to be able to examine these things properly. It is really important. In our unicameral parliament the separation of powers will always be blurred. If you take 18 members out of that side of the parliament there will always be a blur as to whether the separation of powers will work. The Premier has made this decision and whether it is the best decision or not, I do not know. It is something that we have to explore. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition when he says that we should look at this again in 12 months time to see how it is working. It is not much use having committees, particularly managerial and financial committees, that come up with a dissenting report every time. I hope it works. I support a sound, robust committee system. I hope that the goodwill on both sides carries through.

**Mrs SULLIVAN** (Pumicestone—ALP) (5.04 pm): I rise to support the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. As the Premier indicated in her second reading speech, it is necessary from time to time to update the way our parliamentary committee system operates, because it has an important and very special role in this unicameral parliament.

For those of us who were in the chamber in the very early 1990s I can certainly recall the formation of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee under the Labor Premier, Wayne Goss, in 1992. My husband, Jon Sullivan, was its first chair. It was set up to scrutinise legislation and its effects on the rights and liberties of Queenslanders. It was appropriate at the time and is still as valid today as it was then. But reviews are necessary. In this case this bill forms the basis of a major restructure of the parliamentary committee system and will increase the number of committees from eight to nine with future administrative costs to government being minimal and met from within existing budget allocations.

Some committees remain unchanged—namely, the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, as I have previously mentioned; the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee; the Standing Orders Committee; and the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee. It does, however, join the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee together to form the new Public Accounts and Public Works Committee, and no-one on this side of the House believes that that amalgamation will diminish or curtail the role of either of them. The Law, Justice and Safety Committee will replace the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee and it will oversee administrative review reform, constitutional reform, electoral reform and legal reform.

Early this month the Premier moved the formation of the Law, Justice and Safety Committee, the Economic Development Committee, the Social Development Committee and the Environment and Resources Committee. As per the motion adopted by the 53rd Parliament, the Environment and Resources Committee will monitor and report on issues in the policy areas of environmental protection, climate change, land management, water security and energy. As I have a passion for the overall improvement and wellbeing of the environment, I am honoured to chair this committee. We met for the first time today. I note the member for Waterford's enthusiasm and passion for his role as chair of the new Economic Development Committee. I wish him all the best.

I want to place on record my appreciation of the other members of my committee: Mr Jeff Seeney, who is the deputy chair; Mrs Julie Attwood, the member for Mount Ommaney; Mr Peter Dowling, member for Redlands; Mr Simon Finn, member for Yeerongpilly; Mr Mark Ryan, the new member for Morayfield; and Mr Chris Foley, the member for Maryborough. I am very pleased that these members have expressed an interest in the committee and look forward to working with them as a team and gathering ideas from them and the general public who will be invited to make submissions to consider the following (1) the economic and environmental costs and benefits arising from energy efficiency improvements; (2) potential barriers and impediments to improving energy efficiency; (3) potential policy options for energy efficiency improvements with an emphasis on initiatives that are cost-effective for individual producers and consumers; and (4) the role of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and other Commonwealth government initiatives in encouraging energy efficiency. As broad as these terms of reference are, this does, I believe, create a great opportunity to allow the public to share in and make a valuable contribution to the ideas outlined above.

The committee is to report to the Legislative Assembly by 30 November 2009. I would like to place on record my heartfelt thanks to the staff for their work to date which has already been comprehensive: Mr Rob Hansen, research director; senior research officers Rachelle Stacey and Maureen Coorey; and Carolyn Heffernan, acting executive assistant. They will provide the committee

with proper administrative support and enough background information to assist the committee in reaching its objectives in the time frames. Mr David Embury from the Parliamentary Library will assist in an advisory capacity and I thank him for his future input.

Under the new structure, Queenslanders can rest easy and be assured that, while the bill allows for significant changes, there will be no diminution or reduction in the important oversight role which the parliamentary committees fulfill. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr JOHNSON** (Gregory—LNP) (5.09 pm): I rise to speak to the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. I go back to 1990 and the early days of the Goss government when the former Premier, the honourable Peter Beattie, would walk around this place holding in one hand a copy of the report of the Fitzgerald inquiry. From time to time Mr Beattie would quote from that document, highlighting issues of open, accountable and transparent government. It was as a result of the recommendations of the Fitzgerald inquiry that some of these committees were set up. I do not have a problem with the committees as such. I do have a problem when we no longer see the full worth of those committees exercised and put into practice in this place.

I have been a member of both the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, and I believe that they are two very integral committees. In the last parliament my colleagues the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Gympie were also members of the Public Accounts Committee. I believe that was one of the most responsible committees in this parliament, because it performed its functions of scrutiny and evaluation under the watchful eye of the Auditor-General, Mr Glenn Poole, and his very able officers. I pay tribute to Mr Poole. He is an officer who goes about his business in a very professional way. He gives great purpose and meaning to what he does. What I like about people like Mr Poole is their openness and their forthrightness if they see a flaw or an area that needs scrutiny or an account to be made.

I know full well that we have a unicameral parliament in Queensland and that means that it is more important than ever to have proper, thorough and honest scrutiny of government business. If we do not have full and proper scrutiny of our business, whether from a government or opposition perspective, the media will do it for us. That is precisely what I believe will happen as a result of this format change. In the past I have been a member of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, which is a very important committee for the evaluation and analysis of legislation. There have been many times when the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has made recommendations for change and written to ministers in relation to policy areas outlined in legislation. I believe that that committee worked well, as did the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. In conjunction with the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee, they have a real purpose in this place. I know it is the prerogative of the Premier and the government to make change, but the real issue here is whether that change will work to the benefit of the people of Queensland.

The Public Accounts Committee scrutinises finances and government expenditure. Just before the election was called the PAC held a hearing involving the director-general of the Department of Local Government and Sport. The committee was looking into some of the issues involving our Indigenous communities in the far north. While we can pick up flaws in government policy in relation to expenditure, et cetera, it is up to the government of the day to make absolutely certain that it has a policy in place that will be advantageous to the majority of Queenslanders. If we are going to talk about Indigenous communities, we have to make certain that government policy has proper financial management strategies in place to enable those people to bring themselves out of the doldrums and out of the shadows, and to give them an opportunity to be purposeful and show leadership in their own communities. It is so easy to victimise, criticise and ostracise those people. The legislation before the House today is all about government policy. It is all about the formulation or scrutiny of government policy. I do not believe that that is a role for a committee. I think that the old system was a far better one if committee members are to be responsible and do their duty in a professional and able way.

I remember a conference that was held a couple of years ago in Adelaide. Although the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee was not present, I was there as the deputy chairman. The current Leader of the Opposition and a couple of other government members were also present. I think the member for Pumicestone was there.

**Mrs Sullivan:** Yes.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Contingents of people from Africa and one of our near northern neighbours, Papua New Guinea, were there. The people from Papua New Guinea expressed concerns about the issues of accountability and integrity within the administration of government funding and finances. They were really concerned about accountability. At that meeting in Adelaide we were able to understand what those people were trying to do. They were trying to improve their lot so that their people got a better outcome from government expenditure. They were trying to improve and push corruption to the side. I know that governments in some countries have problems with accountability and corruption is an area of concern. Since the Fitzgerald inquiry, I believe that Queensland has moved a long way towards transparency and accountability. In the early days Peter Beattie espoused and prophesied open and

accountable government. While I certainly support that, I do not see why we have to rejuggle the chairs on the decks of the *Titanic* to get a system that may not work as well. I believe that the system that we had was working. If the opposition members of those committees had a problem with the system, they could speak out. I certainly spoke out, I know members from both sides would speak out in relation to issues, and most times we could come to an agreement on issues.

The real issue is making certain that Queensland taxpayer dollars are spent properly and that we see accountable expenditure. The Public Works Committee played an important role in checking the financial expenditure of public works programs across the length and breadth of Queensland. It checked what other jurisdictions were doing to see if we could do things better. I was a minister in this state as was my colleague the honourable member for Toowoomba South, who was Minister for Health for a time. In our time in government we certainly tried to find ways and means to put more dollars into our departments and get better outcomes for Queenslanders. I do not think in Queensland today there would be a member of parliament who would consent to the wrongful expenditure of dollars. However, we have to make certain that the government of the day is accountable for how it spends taxpayer dollars and for getting the best outcomes for the state.

I mention the Indigenous communities and local authorities that I represent. My colleague the honourable member for Mount Isa and I represent large and remote electorates. We are disadvantaged in representation because we have to cover so many miles and have so many issues to address. It is almost a logistical impossibility to do that to the best of our ability. The honourable member for Mount Isa and I both have large wealth-generation electorates and we spend a lot of time on the road and away from home, which brings me back to this legislation. People such as the member for Mount Isa, the member for Charters Towers, other country members and I travel long distances to be here. As members of a parliamentary committee, we read our committee paperwork the night before a meeting or maybe the week before if it comes through to our electorate offices. That is on top of our normal workload. We may have to absorb a lot of information overnight, or perhaps in the few days before a meeting. In the case of the Public Accounts Committee the meetings were usually held during the parliamentary lunch break. The Public Accounts Committee is a very important committee. It deals with the Auditor-General, who provides the final checks and balances for government expenditure. We had to make certain that we had it right.

I say to the Premier that it is a near impossibility to do it properly and do it right. We had some very good research people and other people who supported us in those committees, and I pay tribute to them. With the amalgamation of some of these committees, it is important that committee members be given time to absorb some of the material available and to ensure that in the exercise of their responsibilities they do not do anything to the detriment of the parliament or to them as members of parliament. I refer to the time members of the Papua New Guinea parliament visited Adelaide from Port Moresby. They were absolutely bamboozled. They were horrified to think just how far off the mark they were in Papua New Guinea in comparison to what we were doing. I hope this is not going put us back into the situation that they had in Papua New Guinea.

As the member for Pumicestone said earlier, we do not need conflict; we need to make sure this is valid. That is a fair comment, but the real issue is the specific roles of the members of these committees. In some cases it is vital to keep certain committees separate. Public works and public accounts are two very specific areas. We have to make certain that the government is kept honest in carrying out its responsibilities in relation to public works—on matters such as the Traveston Crossing Dam and the desalination plant on the Gold Coast. These are all very important pieces of government infrastructure or government policy in both the planning and the implementation stage.

Importantly, these committees can play a vital role in creating a balance between leadership and the responsibility to say, 'Listen, let's be fair about this. The government has got it wrong,' or, 'The government has got it right.' The taxpayers deserve to see us displaying honesty, openness, integrity and decency in dealing with some of these major capital works programs. They need us to make certain that those dollars are going to be advantageous to the majority of people in those areas in question and are not a knee-jerk reaction of the government of the day saying, 'We are going to do this but we are not going to let anyone check it out.' The next thing we know, the media has found out about it and they air it but it is all too late. Then we go to the people, it is swept under the carpet, we have an election and it is a new ball game with a change of players on the field as well as a change to the rules and regulations.

I hope the outcome is that this new committee system does work. I will be watching very closely to see how it works. I wish the players in the committees every success as they go about their business of being integral role players in the scrutiny of government business, legislation, public accounts, the CMC or public works. The new committees cover the very important areas of social issues and law, justice and safety. At the end of the day I think we have a big role to play here. I hope that the Premier will monitor this very closely as we enter the embryonic stage to make certain that it does work properly and that we are achieving the positive outcomes that the government of the day hopes it will have. If there is an area where there is a flaw, a discrepancy or a breakdown in the system I hope the Premier will revisit that with an amendment so that we can rehash it and get a fairer system in place.

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—LNP) (5.24 pm): The reason this bill is before this place is that, as stated in the explanatory notes, it forms part of a restructure of the parliamentary committee system. Instead of 'restructure' I would have preferred to see the word 'reform' in that explanatory note. The notes then state—

The proposed structure is designed to create a committee system more focused on developing best practice policy and legislative solutions to issues facing Queenslanders, while maintaining the necessary oversight role parliamentary committees provide.

One of the prime questions that we are asking during this debate is: why does Queensland need and rely on a parliamentary committee system? The simple answer taken from the Queensland parliament website is that a strong, active committee system is an asset in any functioning parliamentary democracy.

At the beginning of this debate I would like to acknowledge the good and great work which has been carried out by all members of this House—from both sides of the chamber—as well as the good and great work that is carried out by parliamentary staff in the committee process. However, the average person in Queensland is not aware of two important facts that have been raised during this debate. They are not aware that we have a committee system. Most average Queenslanders do not even know of the great work being carried out by those committees. Indeed, most Queenslanders would not even be aware of the fact that, compared to all the other Westminster governments—state and federal—our system of democracy and government in Queensland has been the least accountable, the least transparent and the least democratic in Australia and possibly the Commonwealth after the abolition of the upper house in 1922 that many people have spoken about.

In fact, when the facts and the legacy of the last two decades are considered, there is an argument to suggest that in Queensland we do not have a functioning parliamentary democracy. If we have a functioning parliamentary democracy, why have we had a government that has quite obviously lost control of the public finances with massive debt and a massive interest bill? If we have a functioning parliamentary democracy, why have we a government which has allowed generations of Queenslanders to graduate from our public school system without the ability to read, write or add up? If we have a functioning parliamentary democracy, why have we a government which, because of poor management—some would say criminal management—has created the worst health disaster in Australia's modern history? If we have a functioning parliamentary democracy, why have we a government which has abandoned Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander constituents and presides over an ever-increasing gap in mortality rates and social disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous Queenslanders?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr O'Brien): Order! The honourable member will return to the provisions of the bill currently before the House.

**Mr MESSENGER:** In this debate I have heard those opposite talk about this place being a battle of ideas, a chamber of debate where ideas clash. I would like for a few ideas to clash during this debate on the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009.

Where is the committee that is created by this legislation which acknowledges the fact that there is a direct link between the amount of political representation Indigenous people have and their mortality rates and the rates of social disadvantage? We should have that committee in this legislation, the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. Where is the committee that examines the fact that every community north of Brisbane—and I am sure you will agree with me, Mr Deputy Speaker—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Very unlikely.

**Mr MESSENGER:**—has been bashed, buried or burned when it comes to receiving its fair share of our state's wealth and services, even though those regional communities are responsible for creating the majority of our state's wealth?

Democracy, which is the prime subject of the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009, is a delicate flower which we all take for granted. It first bloomed ever so briefly approximately 500 years before the birth of Christ in ancient Greece. It disappeared for approximately 20 centuries and then reappeared during the enlightenment in revolutionary France. From those blood soaked times, democracy struggled to gain a foothold in this world and has had to always fight against dictators, tyrants, despots, autocrats and their ideologies of absolutism and—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr O'Brien): Order! Member for Burnett, as fascinating as your dissertation is here this evening, I would ask you to return to the provisions of the bill before the House. Thank you.

**Mr MESSENGER:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your direction. Once again, the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill talks about the lofty ideals associated with democracy. In speaking to those ideals, I would remind this House—this battle of ideas, this chamber of ideas—that most people forget that in World War I Australia was part of a very small group, a handful, of free countries governed for the people by democratic governments. There was indeed only Great Britain, France, America, Canada, New Zealand and, I am told, Italy who decided to fight against countries that had allowed the

ideologies of absolutism and totalitarianism to flourish, rule and oppress the people. Most people forget that as a result of the stand taken by those handful of democratic countries and the courageous sacrifice of freedom-loving generations since, the number of democratic governments has risen from a handful to hundreds now.

Most people also forget that just because we have grown up enjoying the democratic rights, privileges and freedoms there is no guarantee that those democratic rights, privileges and freedoms will continue to be enjoyed by future generations of Australians or Queenslanders. The journey back towards a system of government absolutism and totalitarianism, Mr Deputy Speaker, is just like any other journey: it is a journey of increments taken one step at a time. The point that I am making in my circular argument, Mr Deputy Speaker, is that we may very well be taking another step towards absolutism and totalitarianism today in passing this bill. It looks on the surface that it is, as members opposite have said, refreshing. It is almost like a TV commercial for toothpaste or something. It is refreshing.

**Ms Jones:** Cheese slices.

**Mr MESSENGER:** Yes, it is refreshing. It is updating the old. It is upgrading to a new model in relation to the committee process. The Premier, in selling this piece of legislation says, 'Trust me. The legislation is good for democracy.' But this is also the Premier who promised that her government would serve its full term. What happened to that promise? This is the Premier who is part of the government which has suspended standing orders and declared at least 26 bills urgent in the last five years, used the guillotine and rammed legislation through a unicameral parliament in Queensland. I would suggest that the proof of the pudding will be in its eating. It will be only after this legislation is passed that we will see whether there are slight faults or flaws within it. We will not know about the possible retrograde or subtle changes in the fabric of our parliamentary democracy produced by this legislation, which will decrease transparency—a term that the Premier talked about quite frequently—and accountability—another term that the Premier talked about—and protect the government from fair scrutiny.

We do know that this legislation has been designed by people who have a track record of a lack of foresight and who have taken the people of Queensland from crisis to crisis and have bounced them from pillar to post. That is the track record of the people who designed this legislation and decided that this, the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009, should be presented to this House.

The committees established by this legislation must not become political mechanisms to help the government avoid parliamentary scrutiny of difficult political issues. Why do I say that, Mr Deputy Speaker? Once again we only have to examine the government's track record, the history, the facts that are laid down in *Hansard* time and time again. How many issues were referred to the CMC? 'Oops. We can't talk about it because it is before the CMC.' 'No, please don't ask me questions. We sent it to the CMC.' 'I can't answer that.' How many times have we heard similar responses from politicians on the opposite side?

Mr Deputy Speaker, in closing I beg your indulgence. In the fight against the slide into absolutism and totalitarianism it can be an overt fight or a covert fight. It can be conducted on battlefields or in democratically elected chambers of debate like this. This is that what this chamber is about. I think it is appropriate to acknowledge in this place the fine Queenslanders and their families who are today courageously engaging in the overt fight against absolutism and totalitarianism. There are 1,100 soldiers of 1RAR and 2RAR who are travelling to Afghanistan and East Timor and are risking their very lives by continuing the fight for freedom and democracy.

Today in this House, by engaging in this debate and examination of this legislation, which could threaten our democracy, all members are involved in a fight for freedom and democracy but we are far less courageous and are not risking our lives. We are using words and arguments, not bombs and bullets, to shape our society and protect our freedoms. But we must never forget that the reason that we can sit in such luxury and be engaged in such civilised behaviour is the sacrifice that has been made by many Australians on countless battlefields. The worst we can expect here is an interjection or some verbal abuse; we are not at risk of being shot or blown up.

If those opposite find offence in our scepticism and vigilance in our questions and reservations, I would remind them of what is at stake. The legislation before the House, the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009, has the potential to subtly, overtly, attack the limited democratic protections that our state political system has in place. In closing, I would recommend that members opposite—all members in fact—listen to the RSL. I think they have got it right when they remind us that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom.

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (5.37 pm): The debate we are having today is under the umbrella of the particularly unique parliamentary system that we have here in Queensland. As I understand it, it is the only parliament in the Westminster system that is unicameral. I think what we are seeing in the changes that are before the House at the moment is a parliament that is struggling to come up with a system of accountability that in some way can make up for the checks and balances, a handbrake, the accountability and extra scrutiny that is provided by an upper house.

Queensland has had a single parliamentary system since 1922. I do not think Queenslanders who view parliamentarians perhaps as a necessary or unnecessary cost would stand for the addition of an upper house, but it is something that a number of members have mentioned today. I mention it because I believe that that is what this parliament is struggling to find in this debate about the committee system: a system of accountability and openness that can offset and balance the fact that we do not have an upper house. I have spoken at times to some of my colleagues in New South Wales and have noticed the vast difference in their approach to a particular debate because of the fact that they have an upper house.

When we have a debate in this House the opposition knows that it is dead set certain that it is going to lose and the vote will be a certain number to a certain number. In all the time that I have been in parliament I have never seen anyone cross the floor. This parliament simply reflects the vote at an election. That means that whatever the government of the day wants to put through it can put through. There have been attempts in recent decades to develop a committee system with some form of accountability or widening of scrutiny.

When I talk to my colleagues in New South Wales they say that they might lose a debate in the lower house but in the upper house there is a chance to get some amendments made and there is a chance for some tweaking of the legislation. So all is not lost because of what happens on the floor of the lower house. What we are endeavouring to come to grips with in this parliament today is the best possible scrutiny and accountability system that we can have through our committee system, which runs almost parallel to the parliament but does not have any real power like the parliament does.

With this bill today we are looking at six statutory committees being put in place. These committees came about in quite a weird, chaotic and confused way. First of all there was a press release on a Sunday night. Then we sat in this parliament. Suddenly we had to come forward with names of members for committees. In some cases, we had to put some people on two committees because these committees had not been put in place. We have ended up with this bill today which puts in place six statutory committees out of a total of nine committees.

Others in this parliament have spoken about the history of committees and how they have developed. Earlier there were committees on printing and catering but basically the first real committees were developed in the 1980s. If we look back this was the time of Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen. We had a Premier who had grown up in a time of great frugality and practicality when there was a need to be very careful with money and to live through austere times. I was not involved in politics then. My view as an outsider was that he was endeavouring to keep costs to a minimum and be pragmatic.

We know the costs associated with our committees. I do not have an accurate figure but the nine committees would probably cost in the order of \$3 million a year. We have to be sure that the results that come out of our committees are as good or better than maybe building 10 houses for elderly disabled people who need homes because their parents are in their 80s. It is public money that we are using. If we are talking about an esoteric result that we can put in publications to demonstrate that it is bringing democracy, openness and accountability to issues then that all sounds very good. However, if it does not actually deliver real results, has the \$3 million been well spent or could it have been better spent on those in our society who need a helping hand or a roof over their heads? One of the real issues in the debate on these new committees is the introduction of policy issues into four of the committees—one statutory committee and three put together by regulation. That is a totally new concept.

We operate under the Westminster system where the government of the day, by virtue of promises made, claims to have a mandate from the electorate and puts forward the policies it went to the electorate with. It is the job of the opposition to scrutinise and endeavour to keep the government to its promises and to remind the public when promises are broken. It is the job of the opposition to examine what is happening with the money, to make sure the system of government is the best possible system and to use its influence to maintain those standards and its opposition to things that it sees as wrong. That is the black and white issue for this parliament.

There are many in this parliament and many in opposition who have moments of frustration when they believe they have good ideas that would lead to the betterment of society and would like to be in a position to implement them. But the only way to implement them is to actually win government and then do it. That is how the system works.

What we are seeing in this legislation is the introduction of policy issues into four of these committees. We are not really told what this actually means. Is it policy of the parliament, is it going to be policy on particular issues or is it going to be broad policy? None of that has been espoused. We do not know how this will happen. The opposition in its role of scrutinising legislation, putting forward new ideas and giving new ideas a chance—we have said that we will vote for this bill—has the right to ask how that role will be part of these new policy committees. That is one of the concerns that we have raised in this debate.

Many members have spoken about the rules of our committees which quite clearly state that members are not able to divulge what has happened in a committee unless it is in a report that is tabled in the parliament. It almost seems like this is at odds with true democracy and true accountability. In this parliament we cherish the fact that we can stand up and speak publicly on any issue. That is why we have the protection that we have in this parliament to speak on issues openly and honestly.

Our committees, which are supposedly there to enhance accountability and openness of government, are a closed shop. No-one knows what happens inside those committees. We only know what comes out eventually in a report. I see that as one of the weakness of the committee system. For example, if a member is on a committee like public accounts or public works and they want to bring up an issue that is important to everybody outside, the sheer weight of numbers may mean that the government members may not have that issue looked at.

An issue that I have often spoken about in this parliament is the western corridor recycled water pipeline. People in my area were openly talking about the wanton waste. We saw the cost of that project go from \$1.5 to \$2.5 billion. It is still beset by leakage and spillage problems. We do not know whether that was asked to be looked at by the Public Works Committee or the Public Accounts Committee because we have this undemocratic, closed-shop system where what is discussed in the committee is not allowed to be brought out of that committee. If we are searching for a way to make the committees within this bill more accountable and more open then I certainly think that is one of the things that has to be looked at.

This legislation brings together the two committees I talked about—the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee. I would think that those two committees have the biggest workload of all. That means that the number of financial matters that can be scrutinised will be cut in half because the budget and the staff numbers will stay the same. The number of public works issues that can be looked at will be cut in half.

What are we doing with the two things that matter most to people—the finances of government and the major projects? We ostensibly have \$17 billion of public works that are underway or will be underway soon. Surely some of those projects could be scrutinised. The public are quite sure that about \$1 billion was wasted on the western corridor recycled water pipeline. But we will never know. To the best of my knowledge that matter has never been investigated. Certainly there has not been a report on that brought to the parliament. Whether it was ever discussed within the committee we will never know. Our system, that is supposed to be democratic, means that that is a closed shop. No-one will ever know what happens within our parliamentary committees.

The only parliamentary committee that I have ever been on was the MEPPC, and I had a few years on that committee. I will say this about my experience on that committee: I was quite amazed at the cooperation that came about from being on a committee. It made me think that perhaps the committee system has an ability to bring two opposing sides together to work towards a common purpose. During my time on that committee we had some very difficult decisions which were subject to reports that came into this parliament which at times involved opposition leaders, premiers, deputy opposition leaders, even the Speaker, many members of the parliament and people from outside the parliament. I must compliment the chairman and members of that committee for the absolute fairness that existed at all times and the determination to get the decision right, because that decision had to be right not only for the time but also for the future.

I do see benefits with committees, but if this bill is about committees for committees' sake—if it is just names; if we just change the names or add or subtract a certain number of committees—what is the end result that we are about? What are we trying to achieve from these committees? Are we trying to achieve a greater value for money for the taxpayers of this state? Are we trying to achieve a greater frugality in the use of public money and stop the wanton waste, spending and wastage of not just millions but sometimes billions of precious dollars at a time when we are finding out how precious that money is? Are we trying to achieve something in terms of social or environmental issues that are real, or is it just going to be some report that sits gathering dust? The point I am making is that we can have a bill to change names and to change the headings of committees, but are we actually progressing and stepping forward in how we operate this parliament through our committee system?

I certainly think one of the biggest challenges in this new system that will be introduced—and it will certainly be a learning experience for many—will be this issue of policy. I ask those on the government benches to put themselves in the shoes of those in opposition in terms of divulging good ideas that maybe might win the next election. We are trying to blend together an adversarial system complemented and working together with a cooperative system. That is what we are trying to do.

**Ms Jones** interjected.

**Mr HORAN:** The parliament of itself—the Westminster system of itself—is adversarial in that the ultimate aim is to win the election and to be in government, and that means that you have better ideas or better policy than the other side. That is one of the basics of going to an election. It is what the—

**An honourable member:** It depends what the public sees.

**Mr HORAN:** I take the point. That is what the four weeks of the campaign are about and that is what the end result is about, to a large extent. I think that will be one of the challenges, and we have not had explained to us by the Premier in introducing this bill exactly what all of this policy reference in the committees is actually about. We are only told that the committees will look at policy. We are not told what sort of policy. Is it specific policy, or what is it? The member for Maroochydore made the point that normally for specific issues a select committee—as it was for the issue of surrogacy—is put together to look at that specific issue. It would appear from looking at the very brief second reading speech that introduced this bill that there is going to be a broader scope looked at with regard to policy in some of those new committees. But we do not know, because that has not been explained in the second reading speech or indeed in the legislation.

The LNP is a very contemporary and progressive party and has supported this bill and legislation but, rightly, with the proviso that the Leader of the Opposition reserves the right to bring forward a motion for review in 12 months if we believe that this is not working. There is some new and uncharted ground that we are going into. The introduction of these new committees was done in a chaotic way in terms of the way it was introduced into this parliament. It was basically introduced by press release and then a whole convoluted system of committees was put together—statutory, select and so forth. I think it is right that we are going to watch over this and see what happens. I want to tell this House that the LNP wants to see the committee system work. We want to see the parliament become a better parliament, with the end result being that what is delivered from this parliament provides the taxpayers of Queensland with very efficient, compassionate and practical use of their funds. We will be supporting this legislation while keeping a very watchful eye on it in the future to see that it delivers something and it is not just a change of name with no net benefit to the people of Queensland.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (5.55 pm): I rise to speak to the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. Any fundamental changes that are made to the process that occurs in this House have to be done thoughtfully and carefully. I have listened to the many speakers who have spoken to the bill in the time that we have been debating this legislation, and each and every one has brought forward concerns about proper administration of this parliament and careful representation of the communities that we are charged to represent. We are a unicameral parliament—a unique creature in terms of legislative bodies in Australia and probably elsewhere. It is therefore very important that the committee structure that we have in place works effectively.

I have been on a number of committees since I have been in this parliament and I have found that overwhelmingly those committees work impartially. With regard to the last committee that I was on, the PCMC, I commend the chair, the member for Keppel. He worked tirelessly to see the reports et cetera that emanated from that committee were done on the basis of consensus. In terms of the other committees that I have been on, that has been the same intention of the chairs in the majority of instances. So there is the opportunity for these committees to act very constructively and positively. The new committees that are proposed to operate in this parliamentary term, the effectiveness of those committees, the objectiveness and the role that they will fulfil is yet to be tested. I would hope that, like the previous committees that have operated over a long period of time, there will be information that emanates from the deliberations of those committees that adds to our democracy rather than in any way undermines or weakens it.

As previous speakers have said, these committees do allow, when reports are generated, for members who hold differing views—and that is usually the non-government members—to include a dissenting report on matters under investigation. However, I would commend the concerns expressed by the member for Toowoomba South in that a lot of other deliberations that occur within the committee structure are not known by anyone outside the committee. Indeed, it is a breach of parliamentary protocol to discuss deliberations in the committee, and there were very good reasons for that in terms of committees being able to deliberate on matters without fear. But, as the member for Toowoomba South pointed out, it also means that much can occur—I am not saying that it does occur—within the committee that never sees the light of day.

Others have said that perhaps members of our community do not understand the committee process and structure, and I think that would be true. I think the majority of families in my electorate at least—particularly now but always—spend most of their time concentrating on fulfilling their family duties and their responsibilities and fulfilling their work obligations rather than looking in detail at the operation of parliament and the committee structure. However, the new committees that are proposed—the Economic Development Committee, the Environment and Resources Committee, the extended LCARC which includes the Law, Justice and Safety Committee and the Social Development Committee—all have the opportunity, because of the way the Premier has outlined their responsibilities and roles, to have a very public role in reporting on the matters that they investigate, which are either referred to them by this chamber or self-initiated.

Unlike the member for Nicklin, I support an upper house—not because I support having more politicians but because I believe in the role of the upper house as being a house of review. But, ultimately, a decision on that issue would have to be made by our community. Until that time—if it ever

came along—it is incumbent on all of us as elected representatives to be responsive to our communities, to be responsible for them and to be reflective of them in our deliberations in this chamber, and that includes in the committee system.

My hope is that the new structure is positive, that it has productive and positive outcomes, and that it operates in the same cooperative manner that I believe the majority of the committees have operated in the past and that those remaining committees will operate in the future. I think if we operate with the right motives and attitudes then there is every opportunity for us to empower and better our communities, whether that be in their quality of life or in the legislation that emanates from this chamber.

I look forward to seeing what happens with the new committee structure. I think that a review, as was proposed by the members of the opposition, in 12 months or two years is healthy in terms of being able to see whether the proposed aims have been met. I am going to support the legislation. I look forward to a productive time within the committee structure.

**Mrs KEECH** (Albert—ALP) (6.00 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Premier's Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. Since the recent election, the Premier and her government have undertaken a series of reforms to modernise the functions of the Queensland government. For example, the government has moved to abolish more than 100 boards, committees and statutory authorities in a sweeping move to reduce bureaucracy and to slash unnecessary red tape. The Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009 gives effect to the Premier's objective to reform the parliamentary committee system to produce better policy and better legislation for the people of Queensland.

I am a very strong supporter of the need to maintain and protect our parliamentary procedures and traditions. But I also know that the people of the electorate of Albert, which I have the privilege to represent in this place, expect that as a government and as a parliament we need to acknowledge that a system that has worked well for many decades can always be improved. That is why I strongly support the Premier's bill, because institutions such as parliament need to be reformed. It needs to be refreshed to ensure that the workings of the House continue to keep pace with the needs of a modern Queensland.

This bill and the related resolution passed by the parliament during the last sittings give effect to the most significant restructure of the parliament's committee system in decades. The time for reform has well and truly come. I congratulate the Premier in particular on the formation of the new committees. Unlike the opposition, I have every confidence that those new committees of law, justice and safety; economic development; environment and resources; and social development will achieve their outcomes. I look forward to their deliberations on these very important issues.

I am very pleased to be a member of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. I look forward to working with the chair, Kerry Shine, and all the other members of the committee—both government and non-government members. Like the member for Nicklin, who I have had the pleasure of working with on the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, I agree that previous committees have served the people of Queensland well. But we should not stand still when we have a very rare and unique opportunity for parliamentary reform in our parliamentary committees. Following the recent election there are now 19 new faces in this place. Each of those members brings new ideas and fresh ways of looking at issues.

The failure of the Leader of the Opposition to fully support this bill shows exactly what he thinks of his new team, the 11 new Liberal National Party members, and shows what he thinks of their ability to work in a bipartisan way in strongly advocating not only their party's policy positions but also their own positions. Contrary to the argument put by the opposition members, this new committee structure that is proposed by the bill enhances the opportunities available for all members to contribute to the development of solutions to the complex social and environmental issues Queensland and Queenslanders are facing. I support wholeheartedly the reform of the committee structure and the Premier's bill.

**Hon. AM BLYTH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (6.04 pm), in reply: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this debate. As a number of members have observed, this is an historic opportunity to consider the parliamentary committee system. This is not something that happens on a regular basis. By and large, it happens at a snail's pace. It has taken over a decade or more to occur.

Let me say a couple of things at the outset. Firstly, the bill that is before the House is a very genuine attempt by me as Premier and by the government to put in place a committee system that utilises fully the undoubted talents that I believe exist on both sides of the chamber and a committee system that genuinely puts in place arrangements that are capable of grappling with some of the challenges that we face as a community and as a state.

Although I welcome the advice from the Leader of the Opposition and a number of other speakers from the other side of the chamber that they will be supporting this bill, I cannot help but notice that they are supporting the bill by speaking against it with every word. It is hard to remember a debate in this

chamber in which I have heard more whingeing and whining from the opposition members about something they support. I will go through some of the arguments that have been used by the opposition members to speak against something which they claim to support.

The first argument—and I think without a doubt the most extraordinary—that was put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, and then repeated by other senior members of his team, is that the government should not ask the opposition to participate in addressing the challenges of our time. The Leader of the Opposition believes that it is up to ministers to solve all the problems and to come up with the ideas. I would have described anyone who thinks that as someone who believes that the executive should run government and that everybody else can go to hell. It would seem from the comments from the Leader of the Opposition and, as I said, particularly from a number of senior members of the opposition that they believe that they are more irrelevant than I do.

I believe they have something to offer. I have put before the parliament a bill that puts in place a whole new committee system that will work and that will realise its potential only if every member of the committee, regardless of whether they are a government, a non-government or a crossbench member, takes full advantage of the opportunity that this new committee system presents. These committees will work only if members approach them with a degree of enthusiasm, with a degree of diligence and with an appetite for some hard work on some tough questions. In that context, I refer to some of the committee work that I think has been outstanding, that represents how parliaments work when they are working at their best, and which informed my thinking in developing some of the new ideas around these committees.

I have mentioned before the work that was done by the committee looking at altruistic surrogacy. That committee dealt with issues that I think are without a doubt very complex legal, ethical and moral questions—questions that I believe require some bipartisanship if we are to truly represent the undoubted divided views on some of these issues in the communities that we represent across this chamber. I have done it before, and I am pleased to again congratulate the members on all sides of the House who contributed to the altruistic surrogacy committee, because I think, as I have said, it represented parliamentarianism at its best.

Similarly, I welcome comments from other members about the work that they have done on the Travelsafe Committee. The Travelsafe Committee is another example of a committee that had a role to develop policy and legislative ideas for government to keep people safe on our roads. That committee did a very good job. Again, some of the work that committee did has informed my thinking about how we could take that approach and apply it more broadly across a broader range of policy areas and across a range of more difficult questions.

Similarly, the work that has started under the previous LCARC committee and which is continuing under its replacement, developing a suitable preamble to the state's Constitution to recognise the Indigenous peoples of Queensland as part of our range of activities to mark our 150th anniversary as a state, is a good example of something which simply could not be taken forward with any sense of sincerity unless it was a preamble drafted by all sides of politics and which everybody could agree with, a preamble that would bring people together and around which there was political consensus. That simply cannot be done unless different sides of politics sit down and go through the hard work of inviting public submissions, talking to people, considering and weighing up the issues and developing a proposal that can then be put forward for the parliament to agree on.

What I sincerely hope that this parliament does see out of the work of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee's work on this is that we do have a preamble that we can all agree is a suitable addition to our Constitution. Many of us could be in this parliament for a long time and never have the opportunity to influence the shape of our Constitution. That is a unique and historic opportunity and to do it in a way that gives the best possible chance of bipartisanship in my view is the only way to address it. As I said, it is those sorts of issues that have driven my thinking about how we can get more of that sort of work happening around other broader issues of the day.

There were a number of comments made that were simply erroneous in fact. The member for Moggill relied for much of his argument on his view that these committees will be restricted in their activities to accepting referrals from the parliament. This is completely wrong. If the member for Moggill reads the bill he will find that there is a specific reference that provides for the committees to initiate their own work, as is appropriate in my view. But, of course, it provides for the parliament to equally refer matters. As it has done in relation to things like the preamble, when the parliament has issues on which it wants to see a bipartisan, well-developed approach, it has an opportunity to do that.

The Leader of the Opposition—indeed, much of the opposition contribution to this debate—centred on claims of a distinct lack of consultation. They even went so far as to criticise the government for not consulting with government departments. What happens in this parliament is not the job of government departments to determine; it is the job of the members who are elected to this chamber to determine. Those who have been here for some time understand that the standing orders of the parliament and the way that it operates is determined by the parliament itself. We are the masters or mistresses, as the case may be, of our own destiny in that regard.

Let me clarify for the benefit of the House what consultation did occur on this matter: early in the week of the first sitting of the parliament I contacted the Leader of the Opposition and advised him personally that I would be seeking to change the parliamentary committee system. I actually met with him personally. There was no requirement for me to do that, but in an attempt to ensure some bipartisan understanding of what the government was proposing I met with him, I went through each of the committee ideas, I provided him with information from other parliaments around Australia that demonstrated that there are very widely differing practices in this regard and went through each one of them with him. I invited him to advise me whether the opposition had any concerns about the proposed committees. I received no such advice from the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the House had similar consultations with her opposite number, the leader of non-government business, the member for Callide, who similarly advised of no concerns in relation to this matter. I think, in light of that, the government is genuinely entitled to believe that the opposition was satisfied that this was a reasonable way to take these matters forward.

The bill has sat upon the table of the House for the required period and, in fact, we had three weeks in between sittings which is plenty of time for those members who wanted to consider it in more detail or to seek further briefings and, as far as I am aware, no approach was made. All of the bleating we have heard in speech after speech about the lack of consultation simply does not measure up to any scrutiny. In that regard I congratulate the member for Callide for recognising that there is a real opportunity with these committees. His speech at least reflected his involvement in the development of them.

As I have said, there has been some questioning of just how they will function and whether they will be worthy and worthwhile activities. I can only repeat that that will depend entirely on the attitude that individual members bring to the work that they are responsible for on these committees. It will depend entirely on all sides of politics and on the activities of the cross-benches. I have more faith and confidence in the ability of opposition members to make a worthwhile and useful contribution to these committees than it would appear their leadership does. When I came into the chamber in the first week of the new parliament I was struck by just how many new faces there are. As other members have noted, there are 19 new members. Have a look at the boards out there. It is not that often that one of the parliaments has that kind of turnover.

**Mr Messenger:** Wait till you see it after the next election.

**Ms BLIGH:** That is what you said about the last one, honey. On the basis of what I have seen of the new members from both sides of the chamber, from listening to their inaugural speeches in this chamber, I believe we have some people with real talent on both sides, people who are here because they want to make a difference, people who want to make a contribution to public life, people who think they have something to offer their communities. I believed them when they said all of that. I am not sure that the opposition leader did. Through this committee system I am offering people from all sides, regardless of their politics, the chance to make a difference, the chance to work through complex issues and deliver a possible solution, and to put that to the government of the day and potentially see it implemented. I can tell you that is a very satisfying experience and I would recommend it to those members who will be on these committees.

What I have tried to put forward in these committees is a structure that is designed to harness the power of bipartisanship when it is needed and when it can be best utilised. It is not an easy thing for governments to extend the hand of bipartisanship. Governments of all political persuasions find it difficult. But what these committees attempt to do is just that. Those opposite who seek to maximise that chance, as I have said, will do themselves and the people that they represent a power of good and a lot of credit.

There have been all sorts of conspiracy theories about what the motive might be et cetera. The easy path for government would have been to simply let some of the old, stale, moribund committees just keep chugging along celebrating their own irrelevance. That would have been the easy path. That would be the easy thing to do, because I can tell members that the committees were not making a big contribution prior to this. In the past they have done some good things, but they needed some shaking up. When I talked about some committees that have done good work, generally they involved referrals directly from this parliament to the committees themselves or they were special purpose committees. This is a chance to completely refresh our own thinking about what a parliamentary committee can and should be. There are very good examples of these sorts of committees operating very well in other parliaments of Australia under governments of both sides of politics.

There was a suggestion that these committees diminish the oversight role of the previous committee arrangement. I make the point that there is no diminution at all in the legislative oversight powers that the committees will have. The power that they had under the previous legislation to oversee the activities of independent commissioners such as the CMC or the Auditor-General, for example, has not been diminished in any way. In fact, this legislation will bring other areas of

government into the oversight of parliamentary committees for the very first time. For the first time organisations such as the children's commission will now have a parliamentary committee to report to and that committee will have an opportunity to provide some oversight of the activities of that important commission.

In relation to the combining of public works and public accounts, there has been some suggestion that this is a way of watering down the power of both of those committees. I was mindful—and I explained this to the Leader of the Opposition and he expressed no concerns about it when I did—that we are doing this in an environment of very constrained budget circumstances and I wanted to put in place a new committee system that would not overly tax the budget of the parliament or require additional resources, and would not cost the parliament more in overall terms than the way that the committee system, both standing and select committees, had operated in the previous parliament. Combining the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee provided an opportunity to keep the numbers modest or keep them restrained, but it was more than that. When one looks at the reports the Auditor-General has submitted to the Public Accounts Committee for a number of years now, there is a very high number of reports from the Auditor-General about public accounts matters that go directly to the way that government operates its public works budget. It goes to issues around tendering processes, procurement issues and special purpose vehicles. The issues of public accounts and public works have an important synergy and putting them together allows the committee to look across government, across the issues that are raised, whether it is through accounts or through public works, and in a government that has such a big public works budget, I think it is easy to see the sorts of issues that would cross both of those areas.

In summary, I have to say that I am pleased that the opposition is supporting the bill, but I am genuinely saddened and disappointed by the calibre of the discussion and debate. Not only did the opposition support it by speaking consistently against it; I did not hear one single member stand up and say, 'I want to make a contribution to the public life of Queensland and, as a member of one of these committees, here are some of my ideas, these are the sorts of issues I think this new committee should be tackling, these are some of the things I will be putting on the agenda because I believe that this is an opportunity for us as parliamentarians to take our duties seriously and I will be taking that opportunity and grabbing it with both hands.' If those opposite continue to do that then it is fair to say that it is very likely that the committees will not work. What I hope is that after everybody gets the whingeing off their chests in this debate, they will attempt to take on their duties on these committees with a degree of enthusiasm. If a member has no appetite for the task, frankly, they should not be on a committee. If a member has no enthusiasm for it, they should excuse themselves from those duties now. Of course, that will not happen. They will all turn up at these committees. The challenge for every single member from both sides is to make the committees work because this is an opportunity and I would encourage each and every person who has the chance to grab that opportunity.

As I have said, I look forward to the support that has been committed by the opposition and to seeing these committees make a difference to our work in here and our ability together to find solutions to some complex issues. It is often said, and no doubt the Leader of the Opposition will say it in the valedictory speech at the end of the year, that somewhere between 60 and 80 per cent of what happens in this chamber is done with agreement from all sides of politics. But that is not what people outside often see. They see the things on which we disagree. If we really believe that rhetoric, then these committees are a chance to turn that rhetoric into an even greater reality and I challenge those opposite to leap at the chance.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

### Consideration in Detail

Clause 1, as read, agreed to.

Clause 2—

**Mr HORAN** (6.23 pm): This bill establishes six statutory committees. We have nine committees. The other three were established by regulation. I ask the Premier why six have been established under legislation of the parliament, under a bill, and three have simply been put in place through a regulation. The three that were established by regulation have this new broader structure, but there is also one in this six that has the same similar broad structure. From memory, in the Premier's second reading speech she spoke about those four committees—the Law, Justice and Safety Committee, the Economic Development Committee, the Environment and Resources Committee and the Social Development Committee. Three of those have been put in place by regulation and one has been put in place as a statutory system with the six that we are voting on in today's bill. Why is there that significant difference? Why are they not all the same in the way in which they have been put together?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the member for the question. No committee is being established by regulation. However, three are established by resolution of the parliament. There are numerous ways that committees can be established, either by resolution of the parliament or through the Parliament of Queensland Act. The committees in the Parliament of Queensland Act are those that were already there. They have been there for some time. As the member would know, some of them have very significant legislative powers, such as the CMC, for very good reasons. The other three are new. They are more of a policy nature. I guess, frankly, they are new. There may well be issues. After a review of them in a year and a couple of years, people might want to refine them. In my view, entrenching them in legislation at this point did not warrant that sort of basis. There is no difference to their ability to operate. The resolution of the House gives them the powers that they need. The power is just as good by resolution of the House for the purposes of those committees as if we had put it in the legislation.

It was also meant that we could establish those committees from the first week of the operation of the new parliament. I thought it was important to get them operational and get them moving. If you want to entrench them in legislation, I am happy to.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I also want to address this clause. I note that the Premier has spoken about the consultation that she had with me. I appreciated that meeting. It was a very brief meeting and I subsequently did seek some clarification from the director-general of her department. I had been briefed about some of the aspects but, of course, it was quite a brief meeting at which we discussed other matters as well and we did seek some clarification from the director-general of her department about other jurisdictions. That is the only consultation that we received and I am appreciative of it. We have concerns about what these committees are going to do and the purpose of them, and we have expressed those concerns today. We have said we are going to support them. We put members on these committees in the first week, but we have a right to come in here and express our concern based on the way the committees have operated in the past. I note that the Premier has made the mention that these committees have really served no purpose recently. 'They really have not done much good at all', I think are the words she used in her summing-up speech.

I beg to differ. I think they have done valuable work, but we are concerned that the changes the Premier has proposed have been brought here with no consultation with other government departments or other aspects of government, apart from a five- or 10-minute meeting with me in the first week of parliamentary sittings. That is why we have expressed reservations and why we need to review the committees—to see how they are going in the future, especially considering the executive has simply imposed this on the parliament.

Clause 2, as read, agreed to.

Clause 3—

**Mr HORAN** (6.28 pm): This bill brings together the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee. They are probably two of the most important committees. One deals with the multi billions of dollars of our budget or individual issues within the finances of the state, and the other deals with many billions of dollars worth of public works. By bringing the two together, basically we will be dividing the amount of material examined by two. This would really mean that, with the same staff, the same budget and the same amount of time available to one committee, the number of public works projects that could be looked at would be theoretically and in practice halved and the number of financial issues that could be looked at would also be halved. Those are two vitally important issues at a time when the state budget is under severe stress and strain from a \$74 billion debt and a predicted minimum three years of deficits. I would have thought that finance was one of the most important things to be examined. Secondly, I would have thought that it would also be very important to examine the efficiency, the probity and the accountability of spending on public works.

In my speech at the second reading stage I raised the issue of the western corridor recycled water pipeline, where a budget blow-out of a minimum of \$1 billion has occurred. Great public concern has been expressed about that particular issue. I would have thought the committee would prepare a report on that project, which is one of the bigger projects undertaken in the state. I do not know what has happened in the internal workings of the committee because, as I said in my speech, all of that was kept a secret.

As far as democracy and accountability goes, the public cannot be very clear about what has been requested to be looked at and what has been knocked back. In many ways it is a very limited form of democracy when you have this clamp-down on and secrecy about what committees can actually look at. It means that the government, because of its numbers, is in control. If it has a project with a budget that is blowing out by billions of dollars, it could be rorting, inefficiency, wanton waste, slack oversight or any number of things that cost the people of Queensland millions, if not billions, of dollars. But that gets shut down within the secrecy of the system.

I wish to raise two issues. Firstly, these are two of the most important committees. They need to be in place to examine a significant number of issues. In all practical reality, the amalgamated committee will only be able to look at half the number of financial issues and half the number of public works issues. It cannot do any more than it has the staff and the time to do.

Sitting suspended from 6.31 pm to 7.30 pm.

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for his questions in relation to this. Before answering his specific requests for information on this clause, I return to the previous clause he raised and add to my previous answer. The other effect of dealing with those three committees by resolution of the parliament, which effectively is a new way of dealing with those sorts of issues, is that they will cease to exist when the parliament is prorogued at the next election. The incoming government, whoever it might be, has an opportunity then on the basis of the performance of those committees over the three years to make a judgement about whether the work has been useful enough. At that point people might like to consider entrenching them in the legislation.

In relation to the Public Works Committee and Public Accounts Committee—and the member may or may not have been in the chamber when I addressed this issue in my summing-up—the reality is that there were two issues that really drove my thinking on this: firstly, the need to constrain the number of committees to one that is manageable within the budget of the parliament, which I think is important in these very challenging economic times; and, secondly, my observation that a number of reports that the Auditor-General has made to the Public Accounts Committee have, in many cases, referred or dealt with matters that go directly to the work of the public works budget of government. Issues around procurement, the development, design and accountability of special purpose vehicles and tendering processes are both public accounts and public works issues. They have a whole-of-government dimension. It seemed to me that there was considerable synergy, particularly in a budget which has such a big public works component, for one committee to be looking across both of those areas.

I accept what the member says, that it may lead to some additional workload. That is something that we have to keep an eye on as we roll out the work of these committees. I think that the committee and the staff who are assisting it are more than capable of determining the major priorities across those two areas.

I take the opportunity to endorse the comments by the member for Gregory in his remarks on the bill when he paid tribute to the work of Glenn Poole. As Auditor-General, Glenn Poole has served Queensland very well. I am confident that across those two areas of accounts and works he can work with the committee to determine the major priorities and address those through the work of the committee.

**Mr HORAN:** The Premier went back to that previous clause that we had talked about. I had asked why three had been put in place by resolution whereas the six that we are dealing with here are by way of passage of this bill. She said that those three that were put into existence by resolution could, depending upon the view of the incoming government, be kept or cease to exist when the parliament is prorogued. It does leave that fourth one that has come in. It was, in part, a previous committee established by legislation and, in part, has been created to be one of these four supercommittees. It means that it is then left in legislation. I make the point that it seems a bit of a mishmash. We have three supercommittees put together by resolution and one put together by this legislation.

Clause 3, as read, agreed to.

Clause 4, as read, agreed to.

Clause 5—

**Mr LANGBROEK (7.35 pm):** In relation to the establishment of the statutory committees I sought some clarification from the Premier's director-general. As I say, that information was subsequently provided to me in some form, but I would like some sort of assurance while we are here about the matters that will be coming before these committees. I sense that ministers may be bringing forward policy issues to the committees. We would like some sort of reassurance that issues will not be coming to these committees that will come back in some sort of bill form. We seek reassurance that a difficult issue will not be sent off to the committee and then the government says, 'We cannot discuss that because it has been sent off to that committee.' That is a concern that we expressed a number of times in our second reading contributions.

**Ms BLIGH:** I refer the member to the standing orders of the House, the bill and the act that governs the activities of these committees. Nothing in any of those prevents a matter being raised in this House merely because it is the subject of consideration by a committee. It never has been and nothing in this legislation or in the standing orders or in the resolutions that were passed by this parliament in relation to the committees will change any of those provisions.

I would just say to the Leader of the Opposition that he made an assertion before we went to dinner that this new parliamentary committee system was being forced upon the parliament by the executive arm of government. I remind him that a motion was put to the House and he voted for it. The remaining matters were brought before the House in the form of a bill and he has indicated that he is going to vote for that, too. When he votes for something it is very hard to say that something was forced on him.

Clause 5, as read, agreed to.

Clause 6, as read, agreed to.

Clause 7—

**Mr HORAN** (7.37 pm): This particular clause sets out the area of responsibility for the Law, Justice and Safety Committee. That committee also had some tasks set out for it in the resolution that the parliament passed which said that the Law, Justice and Safety Committee will, in addition to any other statutory responsibilities, report on issues in the policy areas of policing and public safety, emergency services, corrective services, justice and industrial relations. It is very similar to the other three supercommittees in that it is monitoring and reporting on issues in policy areas. That is what it says in the resolution.

The Premier said in her second reading speech that the parliament will have four new committees focusing on best practice policy and legislative solutions to broad issues within their area of responsibility. Can the Premier explain what she means by 'focusing on best practice policy and legislative solutions'? In particular, this clause that we are talking about now does not have any reference whatsoever to policy. The Premier may be using that in a more generic sense, but it certainly does not refer to policy in this legislation that we are debating. I would like some clarification of the way in which policy is going to be looked at or embraced or enacted in these committees and the way the Premier envisages that working.

**Ms BLIGH:** The activities of this committee are governed by both the legislation that is before the House this evening and the resolution of the House that was passed in the last sitting of the parliament. In relation to this committee, the resolution before the House indicated that it would be called upon to consider and report on issues in the policy areas of policing and public safety, emergency services, corrective services, justice and industrial relations.

The work of the committee will be firstly determined by any matter that is referred to it by a separate resolution of the House—so the House may determine a matter to be referred to the committee for its consideration and report back to the House—or it will have the power to instigate its own inquiries into legislative and policy issues with respect to the policy areas allocated to it. However, in carrying out its functions, the committee must give priority to those matters referred to it by any separate resolution of the assembly.

We have a very good example before that committee at the moment in relation to the broad area of administrative and constitutional law, and that is the determination of a suitable preamble to the Constitution as part of our 150th anniversary celebrations to recognise the very important place in our state of the Indigenous peoples of Queensland. That I think is a good example. They are the sorts of things that the House at any time may refer to the committee. As I said, it is open to the committee to investigate and to instigate its own consideration of matters. I would imagine that this committee, like all of the others, will not only be looking at matters that from time to time emerge of topical significance and that the community is debating and could benefit from consideration by a parliamentary committee before government decides to take any particular action but also be looking at something the committee itself identifies that may not be particularly in the public arena at that time but which has something to offer the people of Queensland in the longer term.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I have a particular interest in clause 7 as it relates to the responsibilities of the proposed Law, Justice and Safety Committee in terms of it absorbing the responsibilities of the existing Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee and its responsibilities of administrative review reform, constitutional reform, electoral reform, legal reform and an area regarding law, justice or safety that is referred to the committee by the assembly. In addition, I did mention in my second reading contribution to the debate that the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee has responsibility for oversight of the Information Commissioner, the Queensland Ombudsman and the Electoral Commission.

In terms of what this bill does, the proposed Law, Justice and Safety Committee will be the only committee amongst the new policy development committees and the statutory committees that currently exist that will straddle both of those areas of responsibility. It will encompass both the new policy development responsibilities and the previous statutory responsibilities of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. I think the Premier and all members would agree that the scrutiny of

the Information Commissioner, the Queensland Ombudsman and the Electoral Commission and the diligent, robust and proper scrutiny of those organisations is an extremely important function of the existing Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee.

I would like to ask the Premier how, when the committee adopts the new responsibilities for policy development in the area of law, justice and safety, will the charter of the previous Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee not be distracted, complicated or frustrated by the fact that it needs to take place simultaneously with the development of these policies in the area of law, justice and safety? It needs to do so without additional members being appointed to the committee, it needs to do so without additional resources being provided to the committee, and it needs to do so without any expansion of the powers available to the committee to conduct its inquiries. Given that it is the only committee that will now straddle the two different avenues of responsibility of the committee system, I ask the Premier to indicate to the House for my benefit, if for no-one else's, how the new Law, Safety and Justice Committee will undertake these responsibilities diligently, robustly and with proper scrutiny?

**Ms BLIGH:** Firstly in response to the member I say that he is wrong in fact. There are in fact two committees that will have joint responsibilities for oversight as well as a broader remit to look at policy areas. The new Social Development Committee has a new responsibility to oversight the Family Responsibilities Commission, the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian and the Health Quality and Complaints Commission—all independent commissions of government which I think everyone would agree are equally significant and important as the ones that the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee had previous responsibility for. The Social Development Committee will be looking at those three commissions with basically similar or the same provisions to monitor and review the performance of the commissioner, to report to the Legislative Assembly, to examine the annual report et cetera, as well as the broader remit in the social policy areas. There are two committees that have those responsibilities.

I think the question is a reasonable one. To some extent we will have to see how they go. But I say two things: firstly, I trust the judgement of the people we are appointing to these committees. They already have to make judgements on a regular basis about issues that they prioritise. At any given time some things will have more significance than others, and the people who are on these committees have been nominated to the parliament and supported. I am not aware of anybody whose judgement cannot be relied upon to make quality decisions about what the priorities are or should be.

Secondly, frankly some of the comments that have gone down this avenue of argument throughout the debate on this bill indicate that some of the people who might be on these committees are adverse to a little hard work. Frankly, being on these committees attracts an extra salary. I think people do expect to see members work hard on committees and for them. In my observation, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, while it has done what is required of it, I do not think one could say that it has been overly taxed by significant reports.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the Premier for correcting me in relation to my earlier statement that the new Law, Justice and Safety Committee will be the only committee that will straddle those new responsibilities of both having statutory oversight of organisations and being involved in that policy development process. I note the Premier's comments that the Social Development Committee will have responsibility for and oversight of those commissions that the Premier indicated. I ask the Premier to advise the House why then is the Social Development Committee not on the list of established statutory committees in the bill? Could the Premier please advise the reason the Social Development Committee does not need to be in the list of statutory committees in the bill?

**Ms BLIGH:** As I outlined earlier in relation to this question from the member for Toowoomba South, these are three new committees. Rather than entrench them in legislation prior to giving them a chance to get up and running and operate so that we can all as a parliament have a look at them and review their performance, they have been established by resolution of the House. The effect of this means that all of the powers that are given to them are given to them by this House. There is no question that they have those powers, so they have sufficient powers to meet all of their obligations. The effect of being a resolution of the House is that these committees will lapse when the parliament is prorogued for the next election. The then incoming government has an opportunity, after considering their performance for three years, to make a decision whether to entrench them in legislation.

I was trying to be reasonable in putting forward a whole new set of proposals to give us an opportunity, in some way, to trial them with the powers they need. The other committees have all been entrenched in legislation for a very long time, and I think that is where they need to stay. I do not think that we are going to see this parliament or indeed any parliament of Australia operate without a Scrutiny of Legislation Committee or the oversight of the PCMC, for example. However, if the opposition wants to move to entrench them in legislation I would be flattered.

Clause 7, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 8 and 9, as read, agreed to.

Clause 10—

**Mr HORAN** (7.49 pm): We probably went over this issue when we were dealing with clause 2, but I want to reiterate it because I think it is important. I believe that the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee were two of the most important committees in the parliament and that the public would believe that. I think the public of Queensland would see the Public Accounts Committee as extremely important. It should have a very heavy workload looking at the various financial issues that arise with a \$35 billion to \$37 billion budget and dealing with the money of the Queensland people which has become in the last 12 to 18 months very precious when we look at our debt and the deficit.

The public projects that are being undertaken at the moment or that have been undertaken in the past deserve full and substantial scrutiny. I have mentioned again and again the western corridor recycled water pipeline and its \$1 billion minimum overrun. That was about a 66 per cent to 70 per cent overrun. The original cost was \$1.5 billion. Surely projects of that dimension deserve to be and should be examined if we are fair dinkum about having a committee system which brings democratic process, accountability and scrutiny to our parliamentary system of democracy.

I note the Premier's comments during debate on a previous clause. She intimated that LCARC may not have been working as hard as it could. I do not know what her assessment is of the Public Works Committee or the Public Accounts Committee. If we work from the premise that both committees have worked hard and diligently—and the staff involved likewise—it is obvious that by combining these two committees the new committee will look at half the number of financial issues that should be looked at and half the number of major projects that should be looked at. If it still looks at the same number of issues then it will be a more superficial, not as in-depth and not as investigative look as it should be.

There are two major issues that government is responsible for. One is the money of the state and how it is spent. The multimillion dollar or multibillion dollar projects that are undertaken need to be scrutinised in terms of their project management, tendering processes, cost controls, cash flow processes and how variations are arrived at during the course of the projects. Those things need to be examined if we are going to have a very sound and successful scrutiny process. That will be diminished by 50 per cent in each case because of the combining of these two most important committees.

**Ms BLIGH:** I think this issue has been canvassed, as the member intimated. I think the answers I have given on a number of occasions have addressed his concerns. But he has continued to repeat an assertion in relation to the western corridor recycled water pipeline which is simply wrong. I let it go when he made his previous remarks, but I think that, as he has repeated it again, I need to address it.

The western corridor pipeline did not have a cost blowout. The western pipeline was increased in size and increased in capacity. That is what contributed to the additional part of the budget. We made a decision to allocate more funds to it so that it could produce more water. That was the decision that was taken, as was advised to this House on many occasions.

To finalise my answer in relation to the point raised previously by the member for Hinchinbrook, I should note in the context of my previous answer that the Travelsafe Committee was never entrenched in the legislation and had to be re-established with every new parliament. That has persisted since the Goss government. Those committees, while they are not entrenched in legislation, can actually become an entrenched part of the operation of the parliament. But the mechanism by which they are established is a different one, I guess because it gives some flexibility about what the committee might do.

It was remiss of me not to thank the member for Hinchinbrook for his warm welcome when I had the opportunity to visit Ingham the other day for the Italian-Australian Festival. I am sure he would agree with me that the work that his community was doing for that festival was outstanding, even more so given that they so recently suffered such serious flooding. I beg the indulgence of the chair to congratulate the community on a great festival again this year and for their remarkable recovery in the face of a very serious natural disaster.

Clause 10, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 11 to 16, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

### Third Reading

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (7.54 pm): I move—  
That the bill be now read a third time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

### Long Title

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (7.54 pm): I move—  
That the long title of the bill be agreed to.

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

Motion agreed to.

## MINES AND ENERGY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

### First Reading

**Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Acting Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade) (7.55 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999, Electricity Act 1994, Electricity—National Scheme (Queensland) Act 1997, Explosives Act 1999, Gas Supply Act 2003, Mineral Resources Act 1989, Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999, Petroleum Act 1923 and Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004 for particular purposes. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

*Tabled paper:* Mines and Energy Legislation Amendment Bill [\[235\]](#).

*Tabled paper:* Mines and Energy Legislation Amendment Bill, explanatory notes [\[236\]](#).

### Second Reading

**Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Acting Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade) (7.55 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Mines and Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 seeks to amend various acts administered within the mines and energy portfolio to:

- implement safety and health recommendations made by the Ombudsman including establishing a commissioner for mine safety and health;
- align mines safety and health legislation with other workplace health and safety legislation;
- legislate Queensland's support for the establishment of the Australian Energy Market Operator; and
- transfer economic regulation of the Mount Isa-Cloncurry electricity distribution network from the Queensland Competition Authority to the Australian Energy Regulator.

Further amendments are also proposed to clarify and improve the administration and operation of mining and petroleum regulatory frameworks to create efficiencies for industry.

The bill proposes amendments to mines safety and health legislation in response to a report by the Queensland Ombudsman in June 2008 about the Queensland Mines Inspectorate. This review was undertaken as part of the Ombudsman's normal business processes to review Queensland's regulatory agencies. Its main focus was to ensure the inspectorate's compliance activity is supported by a robust administrative framework. I am happy to advise that the Ombudsman did not find any evidence of undue influence by the mining industry within the Mines Inspectorate. However, the report does recommend changes to strengthen independence, in particular the creation of an independent statutory position of Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health.

The commissioner's role, will include: providing advice to the minister on mine safety and health issues; chairing the Coal Mining Safety and Health Advisory Council and the Mining Safety and Health Advisory Council; and reporting to this House on the performance of the Mines Inspectorate. This will be in the form of a written report tabled by the minister responsible for mines and energy.

While the government conducts regular audits and inspections at mining sites to assess whether risks to persons are at an acceptable level, members of the public may also report safety concerns. Therefore, the bill implements another of the Ombudsman's recommendations to create an offence for someone who causes detriment to a person providing information about a safety concern. It is

exceptionally important that where it is necessary for individuals to report unsafe or illegal practices they can do so without fear of retribution or victimisation. Individuals should not be penalised for doing the right thing, especially when doing so can prevent serious injury or even the loss of a life.

The amendments to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations represent a milestone. In less than 12 months since the Ombudsman released his report on the Mines Inspectorate, the Bligh Labor government has put forward this significant legislation to create a position of Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health and to offer protection to those who report on mine safety concerns. The current legislation limits the possibility for prosecution in cases where the Coroner's inquest reveals new evidence after 12 months. The amendments proposed in this bill will permit safety inspectorates to commence a prosecution within two years following the completion of a Coroner's inquest where the inquest reveals new evidence.

The bill also proposes amendments that will offer greater protection to statutory officials from civil liability. Currently, statutory officials are protected from civil liability under mining health and safety legislation for an act done, or omission made, honestly and without negligence. The bill seeks to amend relevant legislation to clarify that an act done can refer to giving information or advice. It is important that officials can go about their duties with the confidence that they have protection from civil liability.

The bill also includes amendments to complement national laws which will establish the Australian Energy Market Operator, or AEMO, which will commence operations on 1 July this year. AEMO will assume the functions of the existing gas and electricity market operators, including those operating in Queensland—for electricity, the National Electricity Market Management Co., NEMMCO, and for gas, the Queensland Gas Retail Market Operator. Amendments to the national electricity law and national gas law have been introduced into the South Australian parliament following unanimous agreement by the Ministerial Council on Energy. The Commonwealth amendments supporting the national operator are already enacted.

The bill contains supporting amendments to allow AEMO to carry out its functions in Queensland. For electricity, this will mean a name change of the existing market operator to the Australian Energy Market Operator. For gas, it means that the market operator for the Queensland gas retail market will now, similar to the electricity regime, be established under the national scheme laws as opposed to state legislation. Importantly, current consumer protection measures in the Queensland Gas Industry Code will continue to operate. However, the code will be amended to remove the Gas Market Retail Rules, which will become Retail Market Procedures under the new national framework. This means that Queensland market participants will see only minimal changes in market rules and procedures operating within this jurisdiction. Retail gas market participants will now also be brought under the compliance and enforcement regime of the Australian Energy Regulator in place of the Queensland Competition Authority. The benefits of a single market operator include ongoing improvements to efficiency and competitiveness in gas and electricity markets and making sure Australians retain secure, well-managed energy markets and the lowest possible prices.

The bill also contains amendments to transfer responsibility for the economic regulation of the Mount Isa-Cloncurry electricity distribution network, owned and operated by Ergon Energy, from the Queensland Competition Authority to the Australian Energy Regulator. The amendments in the bill essentially continue the current regulatory arrangements applying to the Mount Isa-Cloncurry network and will maintain consistency with regulatory arrangements for Ergon Energy's national grid connected networks.

From 1 July 2010, the Australian Energy Regulator will take over responsibility for the regulation of Ergon Energy's grid connected network under changes made to the national scheme laws in 2007. It makes good regulatory sense to transfer the regulation of the Mount Isa-Cloncurry network to the Australian Energy Regulator at the same time. In the absence of the proposed amendments, a separate regulatory process would need to be developed. This would introduce additional costs for Ergon Energy that would likely be passed on to customers.

Amendments provided in the bill minimise the regulatory compliance burden for Ergon Energy by maintaining a common regulatory framework across Ergon Energy's two largest networks. Ergon Energy has expressed strong support for the proposed amendments and both the Australian Energy Regulator and the Queensland Competition Authority are comfortable with provisions contained in this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Langbroek, adjourned.

## QUEENSLAND CIVIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL BILL

### First Reading

**Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (8.03 pm): I present a bill for an act to establish the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, to provide for the making and reviewing of particular decisions by the tribunal, and for other matters relating to the tribunal. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

*Tabled paper:* Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal Bill [237].

*Tabled paper:* Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal Bill, explanatory notes [238].

### Second Reading

**Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (8.04 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill establishes the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. It represents the most significant structural reform to Queensland's justice system since the re-establishment of the District Court in 1959. This bill is to be debated as a cognate bill with the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Jurisdiction Provisions) Bill 2009. The jurisdiction provisions bill amends 216 pieces of legislation to give QCAT jurisdiction for a wide range of matters. Together, the bills amalgamate jurisdiction from 23 bodies, 18 of which will be abolished, to create a one-stop shop for the community to access justice services.

This Labor government, in its previous term, gave a commitment to establish a new modern, efficient and accessible system of civil and administrative justice for Queenslanders. Several reviews and reports over the years, including the Fitzgerald report, have recommended that Queensland's system for review of administrative decisions be reformed. Most recently, in March 2008 the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee in its report titled *The accessibility of administrative justice* recommended the establishment of a general administrative tribunal to exercise original and review jurisdiction. In March 2008 the government appointed an independent expert panel to provide advice about implementing the new tribunal. The panel was chaired by former Court of Appeal Justice Glen Williams AO, QC and included Justice Applegarth SC, who resigned from the panel upon his appointment to the Supreme Court, and Julie-Anne Schafer, the Chairperson of the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal. These bills implement the panel's recommendations and have been the subject of much consultation to ensure the bills achieve their stated objectives. I will discuss consultation further in my speech introducing the jurisdiction provisions bill.

When QCAT commences on 1 December this year it will provide a streamlined framework for administrative and civil justice. It will be able to incorporate new and emerging jurisdictions in the future, avoiding the ad hoc proliferation of tribunals. By providing a single gateway, it will also prevent confusion among members of the public about where to go for help. QCAT will provide greater access and more flexible procedures than are used in the courts and will have a more inquisitorial approach compared with the traditional court based processes. Other features of QCAT represent additional benefits compared to existing single-issue tribunals. A larger, more flexible membership structure improves the quality and consistency in decision making while maintaining the use of specialist members when necessary.

The legislation now consistently applies the right to obtain reasons for decisions made by government agencies, enhancing public accountability of official decision making. QCAT will increase access to appeals and written reasons for decisions in jurisdictions such as small claims, minor debts and guardianship.

The QCAT Bill establishes the tribunal and generally sets out its jurisdiction, procedures and membership. The objective is to establish an independent tribunal which deals with matters in a way that is accessible, fair, just, economical, informal and quick. To achieve the objective, the bill requires QCAT to comply with the rules of natural justice and to conduct its proceedings in a manner that is responsive, informal, cost-effective to parties and as expeditious as is consistent with achieving justice and to act fairly and according to the substantial merits of the case.

QCAT will have three types of jurisdiction: original, review and appellate. In its original jurisdiction, QCAT will make decisions for the first time about matters including civil disputes between parties, guardianship and administration matters and disciplinary matters. In its review jurisdiction, QCAT will review a wide range of decisions of government agencies and statutory authorities. Matters in the review jurisdiction will generally be dealt with by way of a fresh hearing. This means the tribunal will not be confined to matters that were before the decision maker and may consider new material whether or not it existed at the time the original decision was made. This is the current approach taken in most existing tribunals and similar tribunals in other jurisdictions. QCAT will also have an internal appeal jurisdiction, enabling parties to appeal from an original decision of the tribunal to the appeal tribunal.

QCAT will be led by a president who is a Supreme Court judge and a deputy president who is a District Court judge. Supreme and District Court judges may also be appointed to sit as supplementary members on the tribunal. The presence of judicial members will enhance public confidence in the integrity of QCAT and ensure its independence and impartiality. It will also promote decision making of the highest quality.

Magistrates are also appointed as members of QCAT to hear minor civil disputes. This is the small claims and minor debt jurisdiction that magistrates currently hear. They may also be appointed as supplementary members for other types of matters. Magistrates will most likely be required to sit on QCAT matters in regional areas. QCAT will also have senior and ordinary members who will either be legally qualified or who will have particular expertise in areas within QCAT's jurisdiction.

Approximately 180 sessional members currently support the tribunals which will amalgamate into QCAT. The QCAT Bill will enable these members to be transitioned into QCAT for two years. It is anticipated that QCAT will have a pool of sessional members similar in size and skill set to the current sessional member arrangements. QCAT will also have legally qualified adjudicators, similar to judicial registrars in the Magistrates Court, to sit on less complex matters such as minor civil disputes and non-contentious matters.

Subject to specific qualification requirements in enabling acts, the president will decide which members and the number of members who will hear matters. For example, the Legal Profession Act 2007 will require QCAT, when hearing matters under that act, to be constituted by a judicial member who is a Supreme Court judge. In deciding who is to hear a matter the president must consider the nature, importance and complexity of the matter and the need for the tribunal to have special knowledge or expertise. No more than three members may hear a particular matter.

The QCAT Bill sets out the powers of QCAT and some of its procedures. Detailed procedures will be set out in the QCAT rules to provide flexibility for different types of proceedings. The rules of evidence do not apply. QCAT must, however, observe natural justice, act fairly, and in accordance with the substantial merits of the case. As part of its objective to deliver quick and effective justice, alternative dispute resolution will form part of the fabric of QCAT. Mediation and compulsory conferences may be held at any stage with the aim of settling the dispute.

To ensure QCAT remains as informal and as economical as possible, parties will generally represent themselves. However, if the interests of justice or the rules of natural justice require a party to be represented, QCAT will grant leave for the representation. To ensure QCAT is a low-cost jurisdiction, parties must generally bear their own costs unless the tribunal considers it is appropriate in the interests of justice to award costs.

One of the most significant reforms contained in this legislation is a requirement for QCAT to give reasons, orally or in writing, for its final decision. If the reasons are given orally, a party has 14 days to ask for written reasons which must then be provided within 45 days of the request. This is a new requirement for some amalgamating tribunals, for example the Small Claims Tribunal. Decisions of QCAT may be appealed to the appeal tribunal within QCAT. A party may then appeal a decision of the appeal tribunal to the Court of Appeal on a question of law with leave of the court. However, if a judicial member originally heard the matter, the appeal is to the Court of Appeal. Appeals from decisions of a judicial member are as of right on questions of law and with leave of the appeal tribunal or Court of Appeal on questions of fact or mixed questions of fact or law.

Different rules apply to minor civil disputes. Appeals can only be made with the leave of the appeal tribunal. This reflects the purpose of this jurisdiction, which is to quickly achieve finality in these disputes. However, this appeal right represents a significant enhancement of the current appeal rights for these matters. Currently, judicial review is the only means of reviewing the original decision for small claims. There is currently no right of appeal from decisions of the Magistrates Court in minor debt claims. While the QCAT registry will be centrally located at 259 Queen Street, in Brisbane's CBD, the tribunal will service Queenslanders across the state.

A number of initiatives will be implemented independent to the legislation that will also ensure QCAT's effective operation, including a standardised case management system, the automation of many tribunal processes and a new user-friendly website to help users understand how to apply to QCAT.

The bills give effect to a major commitment of this government to provide users with a simple, quick and effective process for resolving disputes and reviewing administrative decisions. We are committed to providing a justice system that is fair and accessible and meets the needs of Queenslanders in the 21st century—and QCAT will help us to meet these objectives. On behalf of the state government and the people of Queensland, I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Nicholls, adjourned.

## QUEENSLAND CIVIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (JURISDICTION PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

### First Reading

**Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (8.15 pm): I present a bill for an act to make consequential and other amendments of various acts that relate to the jurisdiction of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

*Tabled paper:* Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Jurisdiction Provisions) Amendment Bill [\[239\]](#).

*Tabled paper:* Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Jurisdiction Provisions) Amendment Bill, explanatory notes [\[240\]](#).

### Second Reading

**Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (8.15 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill is to be debated as a cognate bill with the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal Bill 2009, which establishes the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the reforms undertaken to establish QCAT, this bill should be read in conjunction with the QCAT Bill.

In my second reading speech for the QCAT Bill I outlined the key features of QCAT, including the procedures and membership requirements for the new tribunal. As I indicated in my speech introducing the QCAT Bill, this bill amends 216 pieces of legislation to give QCAT jurisdiction for a wide range of matters. The jurisdiction that is conferred on QCAT by this bill is in line with the recommendations of the independent expert panel that was appointed to advise government about implementing the new tribunal. This bill gives QCAT jurisdiction for matters to be heard in the original, review and appeal jurisdiction of the tribunal.

Examples of the jurisdiction conferred in this bill for QCAT's original jurisdiction include guardianship and discrimination matters, civil disputes such as building disputes, disputes between residents and owners of residential parks and retail or residential tenancy disputes. The bill also gives QCAT jurisdiction to decide applications by regulatory bodies for disciplinary orders against members of particular professions, vocations or occupations.

Under this bill QCAT, in its review jurisdiction, can decide applications for reviews of administrative decisions of government agencies and statutory authorities ranging from licensing, registration or accreditation decisions relating to liquor, gaming, the provision of community and educational services and a broad range of activities and occupations. Other administrative decisions that QCAT may review include decisions about children in care, decisions about the registration of a birth, death or marriage and film classification decisions.

This bill also confers jurisdiction on the appeal tribunal in QCAT. The bill provides for appeals direct to the appeal tribunal of QCAT for certain decisions under the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997. Decisions that may be appealed under the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 are decisions of an independent arbiter about body corporate disputes.

Some of the acts amended in this bill retain specialist procedures for a particular jurisdiction that modify the provisions of the QCAT Bill. While the QCAT Bill sets out the general procedural provisions, an enabling act may have different specialist procedures or requirements to ensure that the particular jurisdiction is exercised effectively.

An example of a specialist requirement is the requirement for certain members with particular expertise to hear matters in QCAT. For example, social workers will be required to sit on child protection matters and paediatricians will be required to sit on matters relating to sterilisation of children under the Guardianship and Administration Act 2000.

These provisions retain the specialist focus of the previous Children Services Tribunal and the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal while also achieving the general benefits of the single administrative framework as I have described in my speech for the QCAT Bill.

Both this bill and the QCAT Bill have been the result of extensive consultation both within government and with external stakeholders who manage and use the existing tribunals which will be amalgamated. Stakeholders generally support the bills and their feedback has been invaluable in the development of the bills and in improving the operation of the tribunal. I commend the bills to the House.

**Mr Nicholls:** Legislation to arouse the passions of any civil practice lawyer, I am sure, Mr Speaker.

Debate, on motion of Mr Nicholls, adjourned.

## AUDITOR-GENERAL BILL

### FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY BILL

#### Second Reading (Cognate Debate)

Auditor-General Bill resumed from 22 April (see p. 78), on motion of Ms Bligh, and Financial Accountability Bill resumed from 22 April (see p. 62), on motion of Mr Fraser—

That the bills be now read a second time.

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (8.20 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the Auditor-General Bill 2009. The shadow Treasurer will be speaking to the Financial Accountability Bill. I note the policy objective of the Auditor-General Bill is to replace and update parts 5 and 6 of the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977 and that the bill will emphasise and enhance the independence of the Queensland Auditor-General, address a number of operational issues to improve the ability of the Queensland Audit Office to carry out its functions and consolidate audit provisions contained within other parts of the FAA Act and the Government Owned Corporations Act into one piece of legislation and make further miscellaneous amendments.

I note that the Treasury department has undertaken a comprehensive review of the FAA Act with a view to introducing a new public sector financial management act, the Financial Accountability Bill, which, as I mentioned, the shadow Treasurer will be speaking to. It is considered that separation of parts 5 and 6 of the act into audit-specific legislation will serve to emphasise and enhance the independence of the Auditor-General and clarify the administration of these parts of the FAA Act. The Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor-General support this approach.

I wish to advise that I was part of the Public Accounts Committee in the previous parliament that considered these matters and it is my pleasure to speak as a former member of that committee and someone who really enjoyed the role that I had on the Public Accounts Committee. I note, though, that the Premier obviously feels that the work that was done there could easily be added to the efforts of the Public Works Committee. I note that my colleague the honourable member for Clayfield feels like his efforts on LCARC were similarly derided this evening in that perhaps they could all work a bit harder. It is all about hard work, as though members of parliament may not have been working as hard as they might have been. I enjoyed my time on the Public Accounts Committee, which I was part of for two terms.

The Liberal National Party will be supporting this legislation. It is a vital part of the democratic process here in Queensland. I do have a couple of concerns about a couple of sections of this bill. We see room for improvement to give more strength to the provisions that protect the independence and effectiveness of the Auditor-General in Queensland which, of course, were part of the objectives of the legislation.

I want to go through some of the background for those members opposite and those members who may be reading or watching this debate who are not aware of exactly what the Auditor-General does. Parliament relies on the Auditor-General to provide independent assurance that governmental activities are carried out and accounted for consistent with parliament's intentions.

The constitutional basis for the role of the Auditor-General is derived from the functions of parliament. The role exists to provide parliament with independently derived audit information of the state public finances and all public sector entities. To be effective the Auditor-General must be seen to

be independent and competent. The Auditor-General must be free from direction by the executive government and free from political bias and have the means to acquire the resources necessary to do the job properly.

The role of the Auditor-General can only be effective if the office is viewed as being independent and competent. Without these characteristics the assurances of the Auditor-General may lack credibility. To be seen to be competent, key stakeholders must view the Auditor-General as being the right person for the job. The Auditor-General must also have the means to access resources according to the skill requirements of the job to be done.

Factors that may significantly affect both the perception and the fact of the Auditor-General's independence and competence are: one, the process for appointment, suspension or removal from office; two, the term of office; three, the determination of the Auditor-General's salary and conditions of employment; four, the ability to employ staff or other suppliers of services; and, five, the process for determining the budget and work plans of the office.

It is incumbent that these matters all provide an appropriate level of independence and competence for the office of Auditor-General. To be effective the Auditor-General must have appropriate functions, duties and powers to achieve the tasks of auditing and reporting on the range of matters on which parliament seeks independent assurance. If the Auditor-General is to meet parliament's needs for independent assurance about governmental activities then the Auditor-General must have functions, duties and powers that reflect parliament's range of interests. Any limitation will have the effect of reducing parliament's ability to rely on the Auditor-General for assurance.

The functions of the Auditor-General are the range of matters that parliament wants to fall within the purview of the Auditor-General, and they are clearly set out in this bill. Although they may be expressed differently, the functions of the Auditor-General have been categorised as incorporating: the regular audit, including the audit of the financial and other information in the accountability statements of an entity; the audit of systems of internal control and the consideration of probity and propriety; and the performance audit, including the consideration of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The duties of the Auditor-General are the activities that parliament considers the Auditor-General must perform. These duties may vary according to the extent to which parliament feels it needs to regulate how the office's functions are discharged. A common duty of auditors-general is to conduct an audit every year of the statements of account, which may include both financial and performance information, of each public sector entity and to issue an audit report on those statements. Another common duty is to make at least one report to parliament each year on any matter arising from the Auditor-General's powers, duties and functions. Members of course will be very familiar with the Auditor-General, who does produce a lot more than one report—it is often seven to eight reports a year—on various aspects of public sector accounting.

The powers of the Auditor-General are the rights and privileges that parliament believes are needed to properly discharge the Auditor-General's functions and duties. Perhaps the most important power of auditors-general is that of access to information to carry out the audits. Another important power is the freedom to report to parliament on such matters as the Auditor-General considers necessary. Parliament should desirably appoint the auditor of all entities that are part of the executive government. Parliament may appropriately delegate the right to appoint the auditor to someone else if parliament decides it does not have a primary interest in scrutinising the performance of the entity concerned.

Parliament should desirably appoint the Auditor-General whenever it exercises the right to appoint the auditor of an entity. The range of entities for which the Auditor-General is the auditor is a matter for parliament to determine. Parliament will usually appoint the auditor of an entity when parliament itself has some direct interest in the accountability and scrutiny of the entity's performance. By appointing the auditor, parliament is ensuring it has access to independent audit assurance about the entity.

Parliament usually appoints the auditor of most public sector organisations because these organisations are, given our constitutional arrangements, accountable to parliament. However, in some cases parliament has decided to delegate the right to appoint the auditor to someone else, for example a board or minister. In doing so, parliament has limited its ability to rely on the audit function as part of parliament's own scrutiny of governmental performance.

When parliament exercises its right to appoint the auditor of an entity, normally it will appoint the Auditor-General because parliament can be sure that the audit role will be discharged in a manner that is independent of the executive government, parliament derives significant benefits from having a specialist professional agency devoted to serving the parliament's interests and parliament would find it administratively impractical to appoint and oversee separate auditors for every public sector entity.

The Auditor-General must be fully accountable for the performance and use of public resources in discharging the mandate of the office. The Auditor-General must be primarily accountable to parliament, not the executive government, in a manner consistent with the office's independence. Auditors-general play an important role in ensuring sound and proper accountability of public sector organisations. Auditors-general must expect the same high standards of accountability and scrutiny to apply to their own performance.

The role of the Auditor-General exists to help parliament perform its functions and to be independent of the executive government. Further, the functions, duties, powers and resources of the Auditor-General are conferred by parliament. Accordingly, as I said earlier, the Auditor-General should be primarily accountable to parliament, not the executive government.

Different arrangements have been adopted for holding the Auditor-General to account. Common features include arrangements that allow parliament to scrutinise and endorse the proposed budget and performance of the Auditor-General and arrangements for reporting actual performance and audit of the Auditor-General's activity. Some care is always needed to ensure that the particular arrangements adopted, while providing for effective accountability, do not impinge upon the independence of the office of Auditor-General and compromise the effectiveness of the role.

As outlined above and repeated by me, the key requirements for an Auditor-General are independence from the executive, accountability and protection of the public interest. The Liberal National Party is of the view that there are a number of areas that are either insufficient for the purposes of this act or are suboptimal relative to the importance of the role for which they are created. According to the Australasian Council of Auditors-General, there are a number of precedents for ways in which the independence of an Auditor-General can be upheld and strengthened. These include: in all jurisdictions the scope of the Auditor-General's mandate is described in legislation; in a number of jurisdictions the parliament, as the primary client for the audit assurance service, has a decisive say in the appointment of the Auditor-General; in a number of jurisdictions the appointment is for a limited, non-renewable fixed term, thereby providing for a form of mandatory auditor rotation; in New South Wales after an Auditor-General's term expires that person is precluded from taking a public sector position, except with the consent of the Governor. The final advice from the Australasian Council of Auditors-General is that in a number of jurisdictions audit costs are met from parliamentary appropriations and not from fees charged to the individual agencies being audited.

The opposition is concerned by the apparent shortcomings in this bill in two principle areas, namely, the process for the appointment of the Auditor-General and the post-appointment career of the person. The first issue is the most important. We are concerned that, even though the minister is obliged under section 9 of the bill to consult with the Public Accounts Committee, there is no effective way in which the parliament can express a view of the appointment of a particular person. I note from reviews of similar legislation in our contemporary Australian jurisdictions that there is precedent for the Public Accounts Committee to have a veto power or at least a period within which it may exercise a veto power against a particular nominated candidate.

Given that the very intention of the position of Auditor-General is to robustly and with fierce independence observe, monitor and audit the affairs of the executive and report to the parliament as its client, that makes it plain and undeniable logic to allow the parliament, or at least a subcommittee of the parliament, ultimate responsibility for the decision as to who should fill this role. I do not see that the utmost independence can be achieved if the Auditor-General is nominated and chosen by the minister with only lip-service potentially being paid to the parliament through a consultation process, especially when that candidate may well have come from that minister's own department and may have a long history of dealing with that particular political administration. Simply put, we believe the most appropriate way for the Auditor-General to be appointed is for the Public Accounts Committee to have a veto right over the appointment.

The second concern we have with this legislation is the question of the protection of the public interest. The opposition is concerned that the public interest will be jeopardised by the possible reappointment of a person to the Public Service after their appointment as Auditor-General. Before I proceed on that point, I will outline why we have concerns about the current process. I am aware that this is a re-creation of the old Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977 and there is, of course, a convention attached to that act that prevented former Auditor-General Len Scanlan from re-entering the Public Service. However, that convention would not operate under the new legislative provisions because it could be overridden by the passing of fresh legislation.

My question is whether this new legislation, even though it merely re-creates the provisions of the old FAA Act, would override the convention that auditors-general should not return to the Public Service after their tenure. My concern is that there is a risk that if the legislation is not amended to faithfully re-create the intention of this parliament, it is insufficient and may allow such an act to occur. We recommend that the intention of this parliament should be reflected by instead having a convention that an Auditor-General may not be re-employed in the Queensland Public Service for at least a period of two years. I take the figure of two years because that is the minimum required in the private sector for auditors who leave public corporations.

To conclude my comments, the upholding of the public interest must be the absolute paramount consideration when looking at this bill. We seek to strengthen the independence of the appointment of Auditors-General and protect the public interest on their departure.

**Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (8.34 pm): As the Leader of the Opposition and member for Surfers Paradise has intimated, I will be mainly restricting my comments to the Financial Accountability Act, although I will say something briefly about the Auditor-General Act. It is my great pleasure to join the cognate debate on these two bills. As the Leader of the Opposition has indicated, the opposition will be supporting the two bills with some suggestions for change and improvement. It causes me some pain, as I am sure it causes the Treasurer some considerable degree of pain, that there is not a greater degree of enthusiasm for this legislation. It would seem from today's speaking list that most members of this place do not join with me and the Treasurer in our enthusiasm for discussing these items of high finance. Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, the notable exception is your good self. I look forward to your contribution, given that your former profession was that of accountant, and the usual wit and verve that accountants are renowned for.

While I acknowledge the legislation is somewhat dry, of course it is fundamental to the transparent operation of the finances of this state. Indeed, when we think of our responsibilities to the people of Queensland, we would all rate the proper management of the finances of the state amongst the highest of our duties. After all, we are custodians of the wealth of the state, as well as the taxes paid by our citizens and companies, an increasingly heavy burden under this Labor government as it struggles to pay for years of reckless expenditure. Of course, this was and is a government that has gone bust in a boom.

The two bills being discussed today replace the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977. In passing it is worth noting how well that legislation has served the state for over 32 years, albeit with some amendment from time to time, the most recent amendments being in 2006. It is also worth noting how the Auditor-General has provided services to the parliament and to the state over that period. Some very exceptional and notable Auditors-General have carried out their obligations without fear or favour in this state, and we ought to be thankful that that has occurred. However, time has moved on and there is no doubt that there is a need to update and modernise the legislation to reflect the changes in the way that we go about business, changes in technology, changes in our understanding of the financial world and changes in the way government operates and the way we draft legislation.

For those members interested, the history leading up to this financial accountability legislation is set out on the Treasury website. If a member is suffering from a small bout of insomnia, I can commend that website to them. I think there are four papers there. I got through the first two pages of the first one. I do not mean to impugn the motives or the ability of the people who write on the subject, but it is a fairly dry subject. In fact, as my friend the member for Hinchinbrook said, it is a little like having 12 Saos shoved in your mouth at once and being asked to swallow. That is what it is like when you read this material. For those interested in the history of the development of the legislation, I commend the website. Over a number of days I struggled through it. I have copies here that I can hand out. The Treasurer may sign some and pass them around for auction if we get through it.

The legislation adopts the so-called principles based attributes of drafting legislation. In short, rather than the legislation prescribing every step to be followed by the government, departments and instrumentalities or statutory bodies and statutory authorities, this legislation will set out the broad outcomes required from those departments and authorities. In effect, the legislation changes from one of process—saying which 'i' to dot and which 't' to cross, which account to credit and which account to debit, and how to go about it all—to one establishing the outcomes that the departments, the accountable officers and others are to achieve. It sets out the end goal and leaves the manner of achieving that end goal up to the subordinate legislation and the financial management standard. The detail of how to achieve those outcomes—that is, the accountability and the transparency—is contained in a financial and performance management standard referred to in the act as a financial accountability regulation. Those will come into play subsequent to the Treasurer's approval and the Treasurer may make those standards. I will touch on that a little later on.

Many members may not be familiar with the terms we see and use in the administration of the state's finances. In fact, they are terms that I was unfamiliar with when I first came into this place and I am sure most people would be also unless they had a particular interest in the state's budget. If one goes to clause 6, which is part of division 2, one will see the meanings of 'ordinary annual appropriation act', 'parliamentary annual appropriation act', 'administered receipt' and 'controlled receipt'. I direct new members—and there are a few, particularly on our side of the House, and an intelligent and erudite bunch will pick this up with no trouble whatsoever—to clauses 6 and 7 of the bill, which will give them some assistance as we head into the budget week in terms of the definitions of 'administered fund' and 'controlled fund', why we have separate acts, one an appropriation act for the operation of the executive, that is, the executive arm of government, and why we have a separate appropriation act for the parliament. We differentiate between the responsibilities of the parliament as the people's house and the obligations of the executive which is formed by the representatives of this place on the government side.

I would also like to refer to clauses 8 and 9 of the bill. Rather than go through this in great detail in the consideration in detail stage I do ask for some indulgence. These clauses contain the meanings of 'department' because this piece of legislation, the Financial Accountability Bill, applies to departments and statutory bodies, and there are some definitions contained there. One of the issues that I put to the Treasurer is the applicability of the legislation and the audit act to bodies that are set up by the government to carry out specific jobs or specific purposes, in particular, companies such as City North Infrastructure Pty Ltd. It is a proprietary limited company set up by Treasury in order to administer the operations of the Airport Link tunnel and also the Northern Busway in both my electorate and the electorate of the member for Stafford and Minister for Infrastructure.

I notice that the houses on Stafford Road were demolished last week. I hesitate to say it is an improvement, but certainly it is a very clear piece of ground through that part of the world. Those bodies are set up for special purpose vehicles. If we ever see the Gold Coast rapid transit project get off the ground are we going to see a special purpose vehicle put in place in order to control that? Are we going to see special purpose vehicles in terms of PPPs that are being looked at around Coorparoo and the Eastern Busway? Those proprietary limited companies are not otherwise obliged to provide any detail of their operation, but they are government owned. The Treasurer is probably the sole shareholder of those companies. It would be appropriate, in my view, for the financial accountability standards to apply to those companies and for the Auditor-General's review of those companies to be applied to them. Are they subject to this legislation?

Clauses 10 and 11 of the bill set out some of the obligations of the Premier and the Treasurer. I looked at those with some degree of hope which no doubt will be dashed at some stage. The bill states—

From time to time, the Premier must prepare and table in the Legislative Assembly a statement of the State government's broad objectives for the community.

It then states that the statement must include details of arrangements for regular reporting on the outcomes. Clause 11 refers to the statement of fiscal objectives of the government including obligations of the Treasurer. I thought I would probably need to have a look at some of those to see if that has actually been done in the past. There is the Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility, which was first promulgated in 2001 and was updated in 2004. It is on the Treasury website. It is this two-page document here. Such obligations are meant to be printed on A3 so it is a bit hard to read. I will not table it, but it is on the website for those who are interested in it. It states—

The Government's fiscal objectives will see Queensland maintain a healthy budget surplus, competitive tax status, and a AAA credit rating.

That is obviously something that needs to be updated in order to comply with the requirements of this new legislation. Anyone with a modicum of reasonableness—and that is certainly us on this side of the House—would say that none of those objectives is currently being met. We do not have a healthy budget surplus, we do not have a competitive tax status and our AAA credit rating is long gone and unlikely to be returned anytime soon.

In terms of compliance there seems to be no sanction or penalty on the government for not doing what it says it was going to do. One has to wonder what are the real aims and objectives of clauses 9 and 10 of the Financial Accountability Bill. Are they goals, as the Premier is increasingly saying her 100,000 jobs promise is; are they promises, as she said it was originally to create 100,000 jobs; is it a commitment; is it something to achieve; was it a nice feeling they had when they were last sitting around the cabinet table that they put in writing? Some more depth is needed in relation to that Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility.

Part 3 of the bill deals with the Treasurer's specific responsibilities as the Treasurer, the minister responsible for the state's finances. He is also responsible for the continued operation of the Consolidated Fund which is, if you like, the general fund through which receipts and expenditures for the operations of the state's various activities during the course of the year are made. Clause 27 of division 3 provides for the annual appropriation for the executive and for parliament. Again, for those members who have not been through the thrilling process of the budget, budget reply speeches and estimates, I commend that clause to them in one of their quieter moments, although not those who will be serving on the new committees who will be working twice as hard.

One issue that has not been addressed in this legislation that I think ought to be addressed is the changes that are made to appropriations during a financial year. A budget is presented in June of each year. It is voted on by the House during the course of budget week. Then after those appropriations have been made and those line items have been approved, changes are made during the course of the year. That is only reasonable; priorities change, some products may not be available, some opportunities for expenditure are not there, some unforeseen or additional revenue comes in. So changes need to be made. After all, a budget is only a prediction of what might occur over the next 12 months, not necessarily a guarantee of what might occur. Often times there are changes in those appropriations. Those changes to appropriations are made during the year with no reference to this

parliament at all. After those changes have been made, after that money has been expended, during the financial year another piece of legislation is brought back in retrospectively authorising the changes to the appropriations that were made in the prior year.

This means that it is impossible during the year to assess how well the government is performing in terms of achieving on its proposed agenda and to hold the government accountable for either overachieving—not a task that we really would expect to see too much—or being unable to achieve. How well has it delivered on its infrastructure delivery program, for example? This year we have heard a lot about the \$17 billion infrastructure program. Will all of that money be spent this year? Have all of those projects been completed? Are they on track for completion? Is there a large lump sum—a balloon payment—that is going to be made before 30 June? These questions are not answered in clauses 31 through to 38 of the bill, nor are they answered later in terms of the provisions that allow the Governor in Council to make supplementary payments for unforeseen expenses. I would have thought that in an update of this type of legislation providing some form of measurement about how well the government is delivering in terms of achieving on its stated objectives would be a sensible and appropriate form of disclosure and transparency to the people of Queensland. In essence, there is no provision for information on variances to departmental accounts during the year.

Division 4 generally deals with the delegation of the Treasurer's powers to departments and the exercise of that power, it seems, is to be contemplated by the accountable officer of each department to whom the delegation is given. So the Treasurer can delegate—that makes sense in a government of the size we now find ourselves in—those administrative powers to the accountable officer.

Division 5 covers the delegation by the Treasurer of powers to a Treasury official—that is within his own department. These refer to certain powers that the Treasurer has to exercise in terms of decisions that are made within Treasury.

Division 7 deals with borrowings by the Treasurer. We know that the state will be increasingly forced to borrow more money as the debt burden increases and the failure to put aside reserves becomes more and more apparent. In short, the Treasurer has unlimited power to borrow within Queensland, within Australia and outside of Australia moneys for the state. So he can borrow moneys for the state. Obviously he cannot borrow to pay off the mortgage, unlike perhaps some of the people in the UK who seem to be using their allowances to pay their mortgage.

It is interesting to note that section 56 allows the Treasurer to charge departments a borrowing fee. I ask the Treasurer when he considers that he will charge such a fee to those departments and for what purpose such a fee will be charged, given that it will be an internal transfer of funds. So Treasury goes to the QTC and says, 'We need to accumulate borrowings of a certain amount for our borrowing program,' and QTC says, 'Treasurer, this is how much we will borrow and this is what the fee will be. So this is the cost to the taxpayers of Queensland for borrowing that money.' The Treasurer then says, 'Okay. Department of transport, I have borrowed money on your behalf to buy some new rolling stock. This is loaned funds. I am going to pass this money through to you, but I am going to charge this department internally a fee for those borrowed funds.' I just need some clarification about that. Is it an internal cost centres type of accounting arrangement that sees government departments responsible for the cost of their borrowings so that they are appropriately charged their share, if you like, of the total cost of borrowing? They do not get it scot-free, so it is an accounting process.

Division 8 deals with the financial management standards that I mentioned before. Section 57 of the bill states in part—

The Treasurer may make standards about the policies and principles to be observed in financial and performance management.

This is basically the subordinate legislation that is put in place.

Section 58 sets out a requirement that the Treasurer must consult with relevant people before making that standard. This is effectively, if you like, the accounting standards that are going to be applied internally by government departments and statutory authorities in terms of how they are to go about achieving the outcomes prescribed in the legislation.

There is already in existence a financial standard. I think it was originally due to expire in 2007. I presume it has been extended. Pending the outcome of this legislation today, I seek confirmation that the Treasurer has, as I am sure he will have, the appropriate financial management standards ready to roll when this legislation is passed and put in place, including any necessary regulations to make sure that those government departments that are covered by the legislation—which is all of them—do have the appropriate guidance and guidelines.

Clause 59 grants a power to the Treasurer to grant exemptions from compliance with the financial standards. One needs to ask why such an exemption should be granted. If financial standards have been brought into play and those financial standards are designed to deliver an outcome that is prescribed by the legislation, why would a department not need to comply with those financial standards and what other standards should they comply with? There is also no obligation to advise which of those

departments are not required to comply with financial standards. So which ones are exempt and why are they exempt? I would have thought that is a reasonable requirement to put forward. It may be something that could be put forward in each of those departments' annual reports. They may wish to make a statement about it or the Treasurer may wish to make a statement about it in his annual reports on the Treasury department.

Annual reports are now to be provided from each department and tabled in this place, and this really does formalise the procedure already followed. However, proposed section 63(2) is quite vague as to the timing for the provision of those reports. Proposed section 63(2) states—

The Minister must table the annual report in the Legislative Assembly within the time stated in the financial and performance management standard.

I am not really much of a cynic about too much of what this government does, but I have on occasions noted some reports being tabled in this place on the last working day before Christmas, on the last working day before the Easter vacation and on the Friday before a long weekend. Can I urge the Treasurer to ensure that the financial management standard does not allow this to occur and that the provision of those reports must take place within a satisfactory time frame so that there can be reasonable scrutiny and comment on those things?

There are a number of other provisions in the legislation. The other issue I want to raise is that of derivatives. I might touch on that in the consideration in detail stage. I just raise that there are concerns obviously around derivatives. The majority of the balance of the Financial Accountability Bill deals with consequential amendments. It goes through and changes all affected legislation.

In government the money trail is vital to understanding how the government works and what it does. Media statements are not outcomes. Where money is spent tells us and Queenslanders how our government is being run. I look forward to seeing the report for this financial year and how it accords with promises made in the budget, and since, by this government. It is vital that we do have robust accountability in this place.

**Mr WATT** (Everton—ALP) (8.54 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Financial Accountability Bill. As the previous speaker indicated, this bill might seem very dry, but in fact I think it is an important component of a package of legislation the new Bligh government has introduced since the recent election to modernise the workings of the Queensland state government and to further improve the accountability of this government.

Earlier this evening we passed legislation establishing a new form of parliamentary committees designed to involve the entire parliament in the development of new policy ideas and to strengthen the powers of parliament to inquire as to government policy and spending. The Premier also today introduced a bill to guarantee Queenslanders' right to government information, building on the landmark legislation introduced by the Goss government after its election in 1989. This bill tonight goes a long way to further improving accountability and transparency in government through regular reporting of the government's performance against its stated community objectives. This package of legislation and this particular bill are more signs of the government's determination to renew itself with the energy of the first-term government that it is. It is important in these financially constrained times to ensure that resources are focused where they will have the most impact. And this bill is a critical plank in achieving that objective.

The origins of this bill lie in a comprehensive review of the Financial Administration and Audit Act, which highlighted the prescriptive nature of the bill and subordinate legislation. They prescribe detailed and potentially costly compliance activities which departments and statutory bodies must observe. Research across jurisdictions showed that public sector financial management would benefit from the legislation being rewritten using a principles based approach. This bill has been written using such an approach in that it removes the detailed prescription from the legislation.

The prescriptive requirements have been replaced with high-level principles which outline the outcomes to be achieved by agencies without prescribing the processes or inputs that must be used to achieve these outcomes. It is anticipated that implementing principles based legislation will, in the longer term, improve the financial performance of departments and statutory bodies by streamlining compliance activities and reducing unnecessary costs without compromising executive accountability. This will enable them to concentrate on strategic priorities, including service delivery to the community.

One other important change made by this bill concerns the replacement of the Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility. The current Financial Administration and Audit Act requires the Treasurer to table this charter in parliament. To reflect the recent changes in ministerial responsibilities, this bill proposes that the current charter be replaced by two documents—one to cover broad community objectives and another to cover the government's fiscal objectives. As the minister now responsible for planning and performance, the Premier will prepare and table in parliament a statement of the government's broad objectives for the community. This statement will ensure there is regular reporting to the community about the outcomes the government has achieved against its objectives.

Responsibility for the fiscal objectives of the state remains with the Treasurer. The bill states that the Treasurer must prepare and table in parliament a charter of fiscal responsibility outlining the government's fiscal objectives. This charter will detail the fiscal principles supporting these objectives. The Treasurer will regularly report to parliament on the outcomes the government has achieved against the charter. As I said, this all sounds very dry, but they are crucial changes if we are to ensure that resources are achieving their desired effect and if we are to demonstrate to the community that government is performing to the degree that they are entitled to expect. I will give the House a couple of examples of how I think this bill will achieve this.

Under the current system, the Financial Administration and Audit Act, each year each department in its budget document sets out what it seeks to achieve with the money that is appropriated to it by this parliament. Too often what that means in practice is that each department specifies only the outputs it aims to achieve or, in common parlance, it talks about the number of widgets that are to be produced every year using the money that this particular company, being the government, has. I will give a couple of examples from my own experience working in government where I think that has been a problem.

One department in which I previously worked had an output measure around the number of briefing notes that would be prepared each year. Taxpayers are right to question whether preparing a large number of briefing notes is an adequate measure of whether the department is performing and whether their taxes are working for them in being used to prepare those briefing notes. No-one supports preparing briefing notes for the sake of it. But by setting targets around the number of briefing notes prepared it builds in an incentive to the department's employees to prepare a huge number of briefing notes when they may be better off doing something completely different—something that actually makes a difference to the lives of Queenslanders.

Another example from another department I used to work in is this. It had an output measure concerning the number of workshops that were delivered to small businesses around Queensland. Everyone accepts that delivering those kinds of workshops is important for the growth of small businesses. But taxpayers are right to question whether, even if the department delivers that number of workshops, their money has been used wisely. The workshops could be of low quality and they could attract very few attendees, but as long as the department delivered that number of workshops then it would achieve its objective or output.

The move to reporting on outcomes that is enshrined in this bill is a major step forward in reporting to Queenslanders on what matters—achieving real outcomes and improvements to their lives. This system underpins the government's vision for Queensland as set out in the Toward Q2 document which was released last year. That document set out five ambitions for the state and below that 10 targets for the state, covering everything from achieving high economic growth to delivering prosperity to reducing our carbon footprint and reducing chronic disease risk factors.

I think we would all agree, even members of the opposition, that they are critical objectives if we are to retain the quality of life that we all currently enjoy in Queensland.

**Mr Rickuss:** How are we going?

**Mr WATT:** By setting those 10 targets, the government clearly stated its objectives for the community. In an unprecedented manner, it was very open with the community about what its overarching objectives were to make Queensland a better place in which to live. The reporting system that is being brought in by this bill will ensure that the Queensland community has reliable data to measure the government's performance in achieving these objectives.

I belatedly take the interjection offered by the member for Lockyer. He was asking how we are going in achieving those objectives. The truth is that we are only one year down the track. But the important thing about producing that document and showing what the targets are and in now having this bill put in place a good system of financial accountability is that the member, I and every member of the Queensland public will be able to measure how we are going every year. I do not remember a National Party government ever being so open with the Queensland public about what it wanted to achieve or reporting on how it was actually going.

Even more importantly, this bill will allow Queenslanders to measure whether the taxes they pay are generating improvements in the things that really matter to their lives. As I said, this bill is an important component in a package of bills which have been introduced since the recent election which demonstrate that this government has renewed vigour and is more determined than ever to deliver open and accountable government to Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr GIBSON** (Gympie—LNP) (9.02 pm): I rise to make a contribution in the debate tonight on the Auditor-General Bill and the Financial Accountability Bill. For almost 150 years the Auditor-General's office has monitored Queensland through boom times, depressions, world wars, floods, droughts and social and political upheavals. The colony's first Audit Act was passed in August 1886, establishing the principles and responsibilities of public sector auditing and the terms of appointment of the Auditor-General—legislation which remained relatively unchanged from 1886 until 1977 when the current Financial Administration and Audit Act was passed.

Tonight, 30 years after that bill came into law, we are seeing an update of the FAA Act with these two bills—the Auditor-General Bill and the Financial Accountability Bill. Since the appointment of the first Auditor-General in 1860, the independent office of the Auditor-General has played an important role in Queensland, providing the Queensland parliament and the community with quality, independent audits of all state public sector entities each financial year.

Accountability is one of the fundamental features of good governance. Accountability mechanisms available in Australian versions of the Westminster style of government include our parliamentary questions without notice, questions on notice, debates on relevant legislation, motions for debate, debates on the adjournment of the House and—what we heard a great deal about tonight in this House—the committee system and the estimates committees. I would also add that the office of the Auditor-General is one that was established to serve the parliament and is potentially one of the most powerful mechanisms we have for accountability within our state.

Over time we have seen auditors-general obtain a mandate to conduct audits of performance management systems. This has seen the Auditor-General move beyond the focus of the accuracy of financial accounts and the use of funds in accordance with parliamentary appropriations to include an interest in the obtaining of value for money by performance system audits.

Performance management systems audit provides independent assurance to the parliament on whether a public sector entity has systems in place to determine if their delivery of products and services is efficient, effective and represents good value for money for Queenslanders. Performance management auditing has emerged as a wider tendency towards managerialism or new public management and can be understood as part of the broader process of the transfer of managerial practices from the private to the public sector.

If members are so interested, I would encourage them to read the paper by Kerry Jacobs of the ANU and Kate Jones from La Trobe University titled 'Politicising the Attorney-General' which provides a very good analysis of this trend using Victoria as a case study. I note that the main objectives of this bill are as follows—

- (a) to establish the position of the Queensland Auditor-General and the Queensland Audit Office;
- (b) to confer on the Queensland Auditor-General and the Queensland Audit Office the functions and powers necessary to carry out independent audits of the Queensland public sector and related entities ...

I believe the word 'independent' is critical when we look at the aim of this bill. It is essential that there is both perceived and real independence in the office of the Auditor-General. Whilst I commend this bill for what it is endeavouring to achieve in modernising and in bringing, in particular, the Auditor-General's office into its own piece of legislation, I fear we have missed an opportunity to improve the independence of the Queensland Auditor-General, again both real and perceived.

I note that the Treasurer is not here, but I will put this question forward for him to consider when he comes to his summing-up. One practical and very symbolic way of asserting the Auditor-General's independence from the executive is to specify in the legislation for the office that the executive may not direct him or her in their duties. It is a simple but symbolic act that would ensure that the perception of our Auditor-General is such that the executive cannot direct them.

We see within nine of the parliaments in Australia that four have provisions for statutory independence of their Auditor-General. I believe it is something that we could have included in this particular bill.

Another highly symbolic assertion to distinguish the Auditor-General from the executive to associate the office with the parliament is critical. The term used is that the Auditor-General is an officer of the parliament. That is understandable when the parliament is the primary client of the Auditor-General. That term 'officer of the parliament' has been formally applied to three auditors-general within Australia—the Commonwealth Auditor-General, the Victorian Auditor-General and the Auditor-General of the ACT. I believe that, had we designated that within this bill, again it would have been a symbolic but very potent way of identifying the independent nature of the Auditor-General.

When we look at both the Commonwealth and the ACT, they have experienced reports from their auditors-general that have been submitted in recent years—one on the sale of government buildings by the Commonwealth Auditor-General and one on the Bruce Stadium financing by the ACT Auditor-General. These reports would have been unlikely to have been made if the independence of their auditors-general had been compromised. I am in no way implying that the independence of our Auditor-General in Queensland has ever been compromised. I do believe it is important that both from a perceived and real approach we strengthen the elements of independence for our Auditor-General.

The primary client, as I have indicated, of the Auditor-General is the parliament. As such, it is appropriate that the parliament has a say with regard to the appointment of the Auditor-General. If I can talk about the Auditor-General's independence, the perception has the ability to be compromised from the very beginning if the selection and appointment are made by the executive itself. I note in subclause 9(1) of the Auditor-General Bill that all appointments are formally made by our Governor on the advice of the executive.

However, the fundamental aspect of the Auditor-General's independence is that freedom from direction by the executive. If I can put it this way to the Treasurer and the Premier: if the Public Accounts Committee is given more than just a consultation role—if it is given that ability for an effective veto over appointees proposed by the executive—then this will ensure that the independence of the Auditor-General is maintained, and it does that because of the role of the Public Accounts Committee. We have heard in this House today a great deal of discussion with regard to our committees, but one of the points that has been made consistently is the bipartisan nature of those committees. I believe that a veto over appointees would ensure—and it would not be abused—that the parliament is seen to be appointing the Auditor-General and not the executive, as is the current situation. The word 'consultation' does not do justice to what needs to occur to ensure that the Auditor-General has that independence.

I had the fortunate experience during the last parliament to be on the Public Accounts Committee. My experience has shown that there is a good and cooperative working relationship between the Auditor-General and the Public Accounts Committee—there certainly was in the time I was there—and that is essential. But I also noted that the relationship was not a cosy one. The Auditor-General listened to the views of the committee but he was never held captive to it and he was, in practice, able to work with the committee to ensure that mutual support was provided between both the Auditor-General and the Public Accounts Committee. The means of recruitment, selection and appointment of any Auditor-General could have great significance if it is seen to be directed simply by the executive and not by the parliament.

In keeping with the independence of the Auditor-General, both perceived and actual, it is appropriate at this time to also talk about what is lacking from this bill, and that is the restriction on a former Auditor-General taking another Public Service position. This simple act would again reduce any perception in the public's mind of a lack of independence and remove any real risk of a conflict of interest occurring should an Auditor-General find themselves in a position in the Public Service. This restriction on employment may not necessarily need to be a permanent restriction. The nature of government is such and the nature of auditing is such that the details change fairly rapidly, and a period of, let us say for example, two years could be quite appropriate for ensuring that independence and perception of independence for any Auditor-General.

There is also an added benefit in this, and that is that as we see an Auditor-General coming to the end of their term, as is the case with our current Auditor-General, there could be a perception that if the Auditor-General was looking to move back into the Public Service they may be vulnerable to pressure from the government for reports to be favourable to the executive in that period leading up to the reappointment. If we had that ban so that any Auditor-General was not able to seek appointment in the Public Service for a period of two years, it would ensure that the actions of the Auditor-General in that final term would not be held in question at all. I believe very strongly that this is something that would be of benefit to the Auditor-General, of benefit to the parliament and of benefit to the government in ensuring that all of our audits are conducted and perceived to be done in such a way that there is no question over their integrity.

With regard to the Financial Accountability Bill, I want to make a few brief comments. I note that it results from an extensive review of the FAA Act undertaken by Queensland Treasury in this area and that the fundamental change is with respect to the focus of the legislation. Whilst the present legislation when introduced over 30 years ago was a fundamental change from what we had existing before that, it is now seen to be prescriptive in its nature, containing low-level rules and compliance processes. I understand that this new legislation uses a principles based approach focusing on outcomes and accountability through the definition of roles and responsibilities. I note the aim of principles based legislation is to provide accountable officers with flexibility to design processes that best suit their functions whilst continuing to meet the legal obligations and to reduce compliance costs, and anything that can reduce compliance costs and therefore reduce the costs to the taxpayers of this great state is something that is warmly welcomed on both sides of the House.

In conclusion, I want to take this opportunity as a former member of the Public Accounts Committee to place on the record my regard for the current Auditor-General, Mr Glenn Poole, who, in my experience, has been an incredibly professional individual dedicated to his role as the Auditor-General and has ensured that Queensland continues under the legislation that was in place to have books that are of a high standard in its public sector entities.

What these changes will bring tonight I am sure will be of benefit to future auditors-general. As such, whilst believing that we may have missed some opportunities to improve the independence—both perceived and real—I believe that this legislation is going some way towards that, and I hope that the points I have raised tonight may be considered by the government.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (9.15 pm): I rise to speak in this cognate debate in the first instance to the Auditor-General Bill. As other speakers have said, it is critically important that the independence—both real and perceived—of the Auditor-General is retained and protected. The Auditor-General oversees many entities, including this parliament, and I believe it is important that the independence that the Auditor-General exercises over all of these entities, including this parliament and government, must be retained for a number of reasons.

If entities outside this parliament and outside the government of the day believe or observe that the Auditor-General is in any way encumbered in reporting on parliament or on the government of the day, then their ability to respect the findings of the Auditor-General in relation to their own operation will be significantly diminished, if not completely undermined.

It has been pleasing for all the right reasons to see a variety of reports from the Auditor-General over the years. In many instances the Auditor-General's reports on departments and on specific activities of government have been glowing and in other instances the Auditor-General's reports have highlighted deficiencies or oversights. That enhances the credibility of the Auditor-General's department and confidence in his or her reporting.

The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee report highlighted a number of issues in relation to rights and liberties of individuals. It highlighted the fact that this legislation introduces a number of additional offences, that it confers powers of entry and post entry powers on authorised auditors and, importantly—and something we should never agree to lightly—it removes the protection from self-incrimination, although in concert with that it confers immunity against proceeding and prosecution. With regard to any of these pieces of legislation, I have always valued the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's work and its *Alert Digest*, or what is now called the *Legislation Alert*, and the fact that it is able to highlight these intrusions or breaches of rights and liberties, because each of us here as we debate these pieces of legislation need to be mindful every time we change or infringe on the rights and liberties of the people who live in this state.

The second bill in this cognate debate is the Financial Accountability Bill. I have listened with interest to a number of the contributors to debate on this piece of legislation. I note that in the Treasurer's second reading speech he states—

The bill is principles based, written in clear language and focuses on outcomes and accountabilities. It provides discretion to executives to optimise resource allocation and tailor systems for administration of their agencies whilst continuing to meet their legal obligations and further emphasises accountability.

It goes on to explain that the approach was taken after the Queensland Treasury's review of the Financial Administration and Audit Act. It states—

The current Act is an overly prescriptive rules based legislation originally designed for the old cash based system of accounting and a less sophisticated environment than now exists.

I remember when councils were required to adopt a new financial accounting system. They went from a cash based system to an expenditure based system—that is, the debt was incurred at the time the expenditure was incurred. It was a significant change in council accounting. A huge workload was placed on all of the council's staff, and especially the accounting staff, to make those changes within the council. I have no doubt that the same challenges applied to government departments.

The member for Everton spoke about his understanding of and his support for the bill in relation to the changes it makes to the reporting structure. He talked about the output measures that have been used by departments that he has been involved with. He used the example of the number of widgets as being a measure. He also talked about the number of workshops as being a measure. He rightly pointed out that that system did not take into account the quality or the efficacy of the workshop. However—and I am not disagreeing with the contribution of the member for Everton in any way—as a parliament and as a government we have to have a method of accounting that members of the community can measure so that they can see whether the government is expending its money well and whether it is achieving goals, so that goals are set that are tangible and palpable and they are not just a string of words that sound good but are impossible to measure.

Since entering this parliament I have looked at the government's budget documents. Over time, the structure of those documents has changed significantly. I would have to say that they have become much more difficult to understand in terms of the detail, the goals that are going to be set, and to be able to measure the achievement of those goals.

No matter what financial accountability regime is put in place, it needs to ensure not only that the government is accountable but also that members of the community and members of this chamber can hold the government of whatever persuasion to account—to be able to ascertain what money is being allocated and then later to be able to ensure that the moneys allocated have achieved their goals in a tangible measure.

That is all I wanted to say. I would not say that I have the greatest understanding of detailed and complex accounting, but I certainly know that I and everyone else in my electorate want to be confident that, when a government gives an assurance that money is being allocated to something, that is going to be done, that if money has been allocated and is intended to achieve certain goals—whether it is the number of widgets or the number of workshops—that measure can also be followed through and that the person making the commitment, or the entity making the commitment, is held to account.

This Financial Accountability Bill is moving towards a principles based legislative framework. The minister in his second reading speech stated—

... high-level financial management obligations that agencies must comply with remain in the Bill.

He stated further—

The subordinate legislation will establish parameters within which agencies must operate to meet their legal obligations ... and, by necessity, will be prescriptive.

Some prescription must remain, because that helps people to measure the efficiency of any government. I support the legislation.

**Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (9.24 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Financial Accountability Bill. As a former public servant, I can see the merits of this bill, as it seeks to contemporise the Queensland Public Service and statutory bodies in terms of their financial management. The bill supports this government's commitment to ensuring that processes of government agencies are transparent and that they are effective and economical in their operations.

I would like to briefly cover three aspects of this bill, if I may: departmental budgets, delegations by accountable officers and statements by chief financial officers. The current government policy—but not legislation—requires departmental budgets to be tabled in parliament each year as part of the state budget papers. These budgets are currently included in the Service Delivery Statements. Budgets represent an important process in any business cycle, including that of individual departments. By being made publicly available, budgets allow members of the public to assess how well a department is managing its resources by comparing actual results with planned performance.

In recognition of the importance of budgets, this government wants to provide legislative support for this practice to ensure continuity into the future. As such, the bill requires departmental annual budgets to be tabled in parliament with the state budget each year. The bill does not, however, mandate the form of the departmental budgets or the time frames for tabling in parliament. That provides flexibility to the government of the day to respond to ever-changing needs.

The existing Financial Administration and Audit Act, which this bill will repeal, already allows accountable officers or directors-general to delegate powers and responsibilities to an officer within their department. Recent machinery-of-government changes and the creation of superagencies is a major step forward in reducing the silos that can exist between departments. In recognition of the increased collaboration between agencies, this bill provides for an extension of this power, allowing an accountable officer to delegate functions to public servants or other employees of the state outside of their department.

This provision operates, for example, where a department is working on an initiative in partnership with a statutory body and the accountable officer needs to delegate his or her powers to officers in that body. To provide safeguards, a delegated function cannot be subdelegated and any action by a delegate will be taken by law to have been performed or exercised by the accountable officer. That means that the accountable officer will remain ultimately accountable for any decisions or actions of an employee under a delegation.

Part of the responsibilities delegated by accountable officers to chief finance officers is the implementation and review of financial internal controls. These internal controls do a number of things for a department: they assist in protecting an agency's assets, they generally support the achievement of its strategic objectives and they go some way to ensuring the truth and fairness of an agency's financial statements.

As one of the certifying officers to the annual financial statements, the accountable officer needs assurance over the quality of the financial statements. The Financial Accountability Bill requires the chief finance officer, when presenting the annual financial statements each year, to also provide a statement about whether the financial internal controls are operating efficiently, effectively and economically.

Queensland is a decentralised state, which often provides major headaches to government agencies regarding service delivery models and resourcing, particularly for regional areas such as my electorate of Mulgrave. This bill allows accountable officers to meet their legal obligations but affords them the freedom to use their experience, expertise and good judgement to manage their departmental resources to the maximum benefit of staff and the public at large and to prioritise the areas and locations of greatest need.

I support this bill, because it has broad-reaching impacts and will allow accountable officers to customise their systems and processes to meet emerging needs, modernising and positioning Queensland as a leader in public sector management in Australia.

**Mr WENDT** (Ipswich West—ALP) (9.27 pm): I rise to contribute to this debate on the Financial Accountability Bill and to comment specifically on the roles of the chief financial officer and the head of the internal audit department which will be across the Queensland public sector. As we know, the Financial Administration and Audit Act provides for the officer responsible for the financial administration of the department, the modern equivalent term being the chief financial officer. This bill requires every accountable officer to nominate an employee to assume the responsibilities of the chief financial officer. As such, the bill establishes minimum responsibilities attached to the role. Although these

responsibilities are similar to those that are currently undertaken within departments, they recognise that the role has evolved over time from focusing on transaction processing to providing strategic advice and financial analysis to senior management and the accountable officer.

I think it is important to set out the minimum responsibilities of the officers nominated to take on the role of the chief finance officer. These responsibilities include the responsibility for financial resource management—that is, profit and loss and balance sheet management—including the establishment, maintenance and review of financial internal controls; budget management, including monitoring actual performance against budget; the preparation of financial information, including annual financial statements to facilitate the discharge of the department's statutory reporting obligations; the provision of advice on the effectiveness of accounting and financial management information systems and financial controls in meeting the department's requirements, for example, advising on the implementation of new accounting packages; providing advice concerning the financial implications of the financial risks to the department's current and projected services, for example, the budgetary impact of commencing new capital projects; and, finally, to develop strategic options for the department's future financial management capability, for example, being aware and advising on emerging issues that may impact the financial area of an agency.

These minimum responsibilities reflect the increased use of the shared service providers for basic transaction processing. As such, if the department's finance function has been outsourced to another public sector entity, it is important to know that the bill allows the accountable officer to nominate an officer in the service provider to assume the chief financial officer's role. This will ensure the department does not need to employ an officer specifically to take on the role and the minimum responsibility will still be applicable to any officer performing that role.

In addition to the above, the chief financial officer will be required each year to give the accountable officer a statement about whether the financial internal controls of the department are operating efficiently, effectively and economically.

Closely aligned with this role is the requirement that the bill also requires every accountable officer to nominate an officer to assume the responsibilities of head of internal audit. As with the chief financial officer, this is a key accountability role within departments and the bill will provide more clarity and standardisation around the minimum responsibilities of this officer.

I believe that the new roles framed above for both the chief financial officer and the head of internal audit will indeed make their jobs more accountable and transparent and, as such, I commend the bill to the House.

**Hon. AP FRASER** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (9.31 pm), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to the cognate debate on the Financial Accountability Bill and the Auditor-General Bill. I want to deal briefly with some of the issues raised in the substance of the members' second reading speeches, in particular in relation to the Auditor-General in which a number of issues were raised by, firstly, the Leader of the Opposition and then others principally around the issue of the appointment of the Auditor-General.

Some of the options put forward for consideration in the debate included issues around a veto or a time limited veto. I make the point that the bill provides for the explicit consultation with the Public Accounts Committee. I understand the manner in which the arguments were advanced by members of the opposition. It has been my experience that we have never suffered from an Auditor-General in Queensland who has not otherwise valued their independence and discharged their duties independently. In that regard, it is very much the case that I believe that the current process is sufficient. Moreover, it must be said in the context of this debate that the suggestions put forward presuppose a set of circumstances that is, in fact, in sharp denial to most of the arguments put forward before dinner in another context.

Secondly, in relation to possible reappointment, the Leader of the Opposition made some reference to a convention that he suggested existed in relation to former auditors-general that there is an acceptance or an expectation that that will be the case. It is not formalised and has never been formalised. That was not the argument that the Leader of the Opposition was putting forward in his contribution in relation to the former Auditor-General. It is the case, as I understand it, that he did subsequently go on to accept some appointments in the public sector but, obviously, given the reality of the circumstances that we face as a state, the people who have held the position of Auditor-General in the past I do not think have ever been coloured by the theoretical possibility that at some point in time they could rejoin the public sector.

I turn now to the Financial Accountability Bill. Some issues of substance were raised by the shadow Treasurer which I want to deal with briefly. In relation to special purpose vehicles, the Auditor-General does maintain audit responsibilities over special purpose vehicles. To the extent that they are owned by a department, obviously that is relevant to the accounting of that department. I point out to the shadow Treasurer that the bill actually provides for new steps towards further accountability measures in the formation of such entities, whether they are corporations or companies or other special purpose vehicles.

In relation to borrowing fees, that is a section of the act that provides for the recovery of those fees where appropriate. In essence, it is to provide for, as the shadow Treasurer suggested, the ability to recoup the entire cost where a borrowing is undertaken. If a department raises a borrowing in its own name then not only is the principal and the interest but also, if you like, a competitive neutrality fee able to be sourced that takes account of the full costs that are incurred by QDC in undertaking that borrowing on behalf of a department.

The financial management standard will be tabled before the go-live date of 1 July 2009, which is the date on which the new act will come into force. I can assure the shadow Treasurer and, indeed, all members of the House that that will be observed and that that subordinate legislation will lay upon the table of the House as is required.

Secondly, on that front, the shadow Treasurer raised questions about the exemptions that might be provided from time to time. Those are exemptions that might be provided for very small entities for not complying with all of the full accounting standards. For instance, the West Moreton Rabbit Protection Board, does not have to comply with all the accounting standards. It does have to have its accounts audited by the Auditor-General. I make the point that in that process: what is the safeguard on that? The bill obliges the Treasurer to consult with the Auditor-General and the Auditor-General to still to maintain audit oversight over those accounts. That is the mechanism for checking with the exemptions.

Finally, there was a question about the timing for annual reports. Annual reports of departments covered under the act previously, as the member would be aware, have had essentially four months plus 14 days—that is, they must be tabled within four months of the financial year and they must be provided to the minister within four months of the end of the financial year and then within 14 days after the minister receives them. In line with new standards, we are in fact bringing that forward to tabling those annual reports within three months. That, in fact, shortens that process to improve transparency.

I thank all members of the parliament for their participation in the debate. There is no doubt that this legislation together represents the architecture that allows this parliament to hold the government of the day to account. It is something that all of us as members of parliament should cherish as part of the architecture that requires accountability in this place. I commend the bills to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills read a second time.

## Consideration in Detail

### Auditor-General Bill

Clauses 1 to 6, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 7 and 8, as read, agreed to.

Clause 9—

**Mr LANGBROEK** (9.39 pm): I know that this is a little difficult as these amendments have only very recently been circulated. I move—

1. Clause 9—Appointment of auditor-general

Page 8, after line 23, insert—

- '(c) the parliamentary committee has had a period of no less than fourteen days notice of the intended appointment of a person as auditor-general, within which the committee has met and unanimously voted not to veto the appointment of the person as the auditor-general

*Note—a vote to veto the appointment of the person will render them unfit to hold the office of auditor-general.'*

This amendment will ensure that the minister takes into account the thoughts and decisions of the committee by providing the committee with a veto power. I note that clause 9(2), in relation to the appointment of the Auditor-General, states—

the Minister has consulted with the parliamentary committee about—

...

- (ii) the appointment of the person as the auditor-general.

This amendment is not novel. In a number of other Australian jurisdictions this is the norm. Most recently in Victoria, report No. 67 of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee recommended that auditors-general should be selected in close consultation with the committee and that the committee should be provided with veto power.

I remember the appointment of the current Auditor-General, whom I hold in high regard. I do recall that then Premier Beattie notionally consulted with the committee. The honourable member for Burdekin was there at the time. In practical effect it was little more than a formal introduction or even just a notification of his appointment. We know there have been other issues with other appointments of people to head statutory authorities. In the second last parliament there was an issue about the Information Commissioner. I note LCARC had expressed concerns, but was unable to do anything because of the method of appointment. This amendment will ensure that there can be no question raised about the independence of the Auditor-General. I think it is important and it is something that the parliament would do well to consider. I commend the amendment to members opposite.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** I would like to support the amendment. In this chamber much has been said about the importance of the independence of the Auditor-General. That independence will be enhanced by a specific resolution of the oversight committee to support the appointment of a specific person. I have been a member of committees where appointments of individuals to entities is done with the support of the oversight committee. It works well. I believe that the position is enhanced by that unilateral support. I certainly believe that this in no way will undermine the government's ability to put forward a person for appointment to the position of Auditor-General.

**An honourable member:** And the bipartisanship that we talked about.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** And the bipartisanship, exactly. I think that bipartisanship will strengthen the role of the Auditor-General and will enhance their independence in the role.

**Mr FRASER:** Members of the House have been furnished with an amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition in the last couple of minutes of the debate and that is absent from the explanatory notes and absent from further explanation. On the face of the amendment, the government will not be supporting the amendment proposed by the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr Rickuss:** Where's that bipartisanship we were talking about?

**Mr FRASER:** In debating two bills that are about the processes of government and, indeed, an aspect of one of those bills which is about the process of appointment, I was making a remark about the process of putting forward a suggestion about that process, for the benefit of the member for Lockyer.

In putting forward this amendment, I acknowledge that the Leader of the Opposition is drawing upon the legislative architecture that exists in other states. I also acknowledge the informed contribution he made to the debate earlier. However, it is worth noting that the amendment proposed by the Leader of the Opposition provides not a veto right for the parliamentary committee to be exercised in a bipartisan way but a veto right which resides in a circumstance where there has been anything other than a unanimous vote. The proposal here is not a veto exercised in a bipartisan fashion but, in fact, is a veto that can be exercised not just by one party represented in the parliament and not just by the opposition but, in fact, by any single member of parliament. I am not sure that the requirements for appointing the Auditor-General process in this state are deficient in the first instance. Secondly, I am sure that ultimately the process for appointing the Auditor-General in this state does not require and, indeed, ultimately would not benefit from a process that furnished the ability for a single member of parliament to veto that appointment.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I thank the Treasurer for his contribution. I note that there is no requirement for explanatory notes. I think I have moved a fairly straightforward amendment. Earlier today we debated the Parliament of Queensland Bill and the Premier spoke about the bipartisan nature of our committees. I served on the Public Accounts Committee in the last two parliaments and I do not think anything that was ever put to the vote received a single dissenting vote. Every vote was a unanimous one.

This amendment puts some rigor into clause 9, as it clearly states under 'Appointment of auditor-general' that the minister has consulted with the parliamentary committee about the appointment of the person as the Auditor-General. Clearly, currently there is no consultation. As I say, I am not trying to express any concerns about any auditors-general who have been appointed, but I think this would provide a safeguard and the parliament would do well to consider it. That is why I commend the amendment.

Division: Question put—That Mr Langbroek's amendment be agreed to.

**AYES, 36**—Bates, Bleijie, Crandon, Cripps, Cunningham, Davis, Dempsey, Dickson, Douglas, Dowling, Elmes, Emerson, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, McArdle, McLindon, Malone, Menkens, Nicholls, Powell, Pratt, Rickuss, Robinson, Seenev, Simpson, Sorensen, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Horan, Messenger

**NOES, 46**—Attwood, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, Dick, Farmer, Finn, Fraser, Grace, Hinchliffe, Jarratt, Johnstone, Jones, Kilburn, Lawlor, Male, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Brien, O'Neill, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Reeves, Roberts, Ryan, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Watt, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Keech, Kiernan

Resolved in the negative.

Non-government amendment (Mr Langbroek) negatived.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Any further divisions on the clauses of this bill will be of two minutes duration.

Clause 9, as read, agreed to.

Clause 10—

**Mr LANGBROEK** (10.01 pm): I move the following amendment—

2. Clause 10—Duration of appointment

Page 9, after line 7, insert—

(3) Once a person has served as the auditor-general, that person is restricted from being employed within the Queensland public service for a period of two years immediately following the last day of their service as auditor-general.'

Clause 10 is entitled 'Duration of appointment'. The amendment states—

Once a person has served as the Auditor-General, that person is restricted from being employed within the Queensland Public Service for a period of two years immediately following the last day of their service as Auditor-General.

Once again, it is a common-sense provision. There are no explanatory notes.

This amendment ensures that no question can be raised about the final portion of the term of an Auditor-General. The amendment provides a moratorium on further employment of two years, the same amount of time that an auditor of a public corporation in private enterprise is subject to, as I mentioned in my second reading contribution. It is not a novel introduction as similar restrictions also exist against auditors-general in other Australian jurisdictions. As I say, I think it is a common-sense amendment, one that I commend to the House.

**Mr FRASER:** To the end that the Leader of the Opposition is seeking here—that is, to overcome a potential for a perception that there is a lack of independence in the rigour of the discharge of the duties of the Auditor-General—I acknowledge the basis on which he is making that argument. I do not believe at this point that he has made out the case that that potential for that perception has in fact arisen or is likely to arise because of some defect within the architecture of the Auditor-General Bill that we are debating here tonight. I make the point explicitly that the whole architecture of the Auditor-General legislation being put in a separate bill is a matter that has in fact largely not been deliberated upon at length in the proceedings of the debate tonight, but that to this end seeks to enhance the independence of the Auditor-General.

I draw the attention of the Leader of the Opposition in this context to clause 14, which talks about the preservation of rights of an officer who performs their duties as Auditor-General. It is the government's view that the architecture proposed around the position of the Auditor-General does provide for independence of the discharge of the office and independence of the way in which an Auditor-General comes to office and discharges those duties. Given the existence of clause 14, it is clearly contemplated, as it has been for some time, that that situation can arise in whatever format into the future. While I acknowledge the arguments put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, the government will not be supporting the amendment.

Division: Question put—That Mr Langbroek's amendment be agreed to.

**AYES, 36**—Bates, Bleijie, Crandon, Cripps, Cunningham, Davis, Dempsey, Dickson, Douglas, Dowling, Elmes, Emerson, Foley, Gibson, Hobbs, Hopper, Johnson, Knuth, Langbroek, McArdle, McLindon, Malone, Menkens, Nicholls, Powell, Pratt, Rickuss, Robinson, Seene, Simpson, Sorensen, Stevens, Stuckey, Wellington. Tellers: Horan, Messenger

**NOES, 46**—Attwood, Boyle, Choi, Croft, Darling, Dick, Farmer, Finn, Fraser, Grace, Hinchliffe, Hoolihan, Jarratt, Johnstone, Jones, Kilburn, Lawlor, Male, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, O'Neill, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Reeves, Roberts, Ryan, Schwarten, Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Struthers, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Watt, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson. Tellers: Keech, Kiernan

Resolved in the negative.

Non-government amendment (Mr Langbroek) negatived.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr O'Brien): Order! Honourable members, it has come to my attention that there was an error in calculating the votes on the teller sheets in the last division. The error does not affect the outcome of the vote, but the tellers have adjusted the teller sheets and the record needs to be corrected. The result of the division was in fact ayes 36 and noes 46. I have instructed the Clerk to amend the records accordingly.

Clause 10, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 11 to 85, as read, agreed to.

Schedule, as read, agreed to.

### Financial Accountability Bill

Clauses 1 to 136, as read, agreed to.

Schedules 1 to 3, as read, agreed to.

### Third Reading (Cognate Debate)

**Hon. AP FRASER** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (10.15 pm): I move—

That the bills be now read a third time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills read a third time.

### Long Title (Cognate Debate)

**Hon. AP FRASER** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (10.15 pm): I move—

That the long titles of the bills be agreed to.

Question put—That the long titles of the bills be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Ms SPENCE** (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.15 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

### Blenheim Rural Fire Brigade

**Mr RICKUSS** (Lockyer—LNP) (10.15 pm): I rise to say a few words about the Blenheim Rural Fire Brigade. I had a delegation from the Blenheim Rural Fire Brigade at Highfields recently to meet with the minister and some of the bureaucrats. The meeting was rather disappointing. The minister seemed to take no notice of what the rural fire brigade people were saying and listened only to the bureaucrats.

The Blenheim Rural Fire Brigade is an outstanding rural fire brigade that has managed fires in the Blenheim area for something like 30-odd years. They have had some very good machinery but some of it is rather old. One is an old Acco truck and another is an old International Truck that are past their use-by dates.

In 2003, when Merri Rose was the minister, Michael Kinnane and Pam Milligan from the minister's office visited the Blenheim Rural Fire Brigade because it did not want to get rid of these trucks without a substantial replacement. They agreed that these trucks did not meet all the standards but they could not give them anything else to replace them so they could keep using them. The Blenheim Rural Fire Brigade has forwarded to the department on a yearly basis roadworthy certificates that are required for the continual operation of these vehicles. The department has accepted these certificates in the past. Suddenly the bureaucrats have become pedantic and ridiculous and decided that these two vehicles no longer meet the specifications of the rural fire brigade and must be put off the road.

They also had a Isuzu fire tender, which was virtually a new fire tender that they had made some minor modifications to. They had taken it to the body builders who said that the modifications were safe. They had also taken it to the machinery inspectors. It was 13 kilograms overweight on the front axles.

**Mr Cripps** interjected.

**Mr RICKUSS:** As the member for Hinchinbrook said, he and I are probably about 13 kilograms overweight on the front axles. We are talking about a 6,000 kilogram truck and it is 13 kilograms overweight. The scales at the Toowoomba machinery office would not be calibrated well enough to say whether or not that truck was overweight. The machinery boys said that they are not worried about it; it is not an issue.

Suddenly the bureaucrats from the department have decided that these machines must be put off the road. They now have to borrow a machine while they wait for the repairs to be done. I have had a phone call from one of the bureaucrats saying that \$13,000 worth of repairs have to be done. I think that is utter rot. The minister should take a hard look at some of these bureaucrats and see what they are doing to these rural fire brigades. They must manage their volunteers better or they will be driving the trucks themselves.

### Lions Hellenic Club

**Mrs ATTWOOD** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (10.18 pm): Last Friday night I had the pleasure of officially opening, on behalf of the Premier, the Lions Hellenic Club of Brisbane at the Greek Club. Some \$10,000 of Q150 grants allowed the hardworking members of the Lions Club to create a display of photographs, a book and ultimately a DVD which documented the contributions the people of Greece and Cyprus have made to the development of Queensland.

Greeks have contributed remarkably through commercial fisheries, construction, the sugar industry, the law and politics towards the development of Queensland, particularly in the years following World War II. Greek cafes and milk bars were found all around the state. They are still a regular feature on the Queensland landscape. I joined the Greek community to celebrate their Independence Day on 25 March this year. After 400 years of occupation by an alien power, they taught much of the world the true meaning of liberty and democracy.

Last Friday night I was cheerfully reminded of the wonderful Paniyiri Greek Festival, which will be taking place at Musgrave Park, South Brisbane this weekend. Paniyiri is Queensland's signature celebration of all things Greek. It is Queensland's largest multicultural festival and prepares to deliver Hellenic hospitality at its best for the 33rd time over the weekend of 23 and 24 May. It began as a community initiative of South-East Queensland's 25,000-strong Greek community but now attracts over 50,000 people from many communities in Brisbane and surrounds for the fun, food and friendship. The festival is about Greece, its never-forgotten traditions, its hospitality and its philosophy of living life to the fullest. In Musgrave Park more than 30 food stalls represent the Aegean, Ionian, mainland Greece, Cyprus, Chios, Crete and Rhodes regions and many more. In the Greek Club itself, a full program of cooking demonstrations and lectures will take place.

Paniyiri 2009 will also join in the festivities of Queensland's 150th anniversary, Q150, by celebrating the significant role the Greek culture and iconic Greek identities like Countess Lady Diamantina Roma Bowen have played in the city's development. For those who have been lucky enough to climb the historic steps of the Acropolis some 15,000 kilometres away, they will be reminded of the sights, sounds and tastes from the country which produced Homer and haloumi, bouzouki and baklava, and Effie and eliopita on our home soil. The much-anticipated festival will provide a means to learn about the leader figures and Greek scientists who forged advances in history, paving the way for the modern world, and the philosophers, the playwrights and the poets who set the foundations for much of how we learn and think today. These lectures are becoming increasingly popular for people in search of an understanding of the foundation knowledge. Funds raised by the Paniyiri Greek Festival are channelled back into the community via the Greek Orthodox community of St George, Brisbane's oldest Greek community established in Queensland in the 1920s.

*(Time expired)*

### Charters Towers, Dementia Unit

**Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (10.22 pm): Today I tabled a petition of over 2,200 signatures from the residents of the Charters Towers region calling on the minister to acknowledge that Eventide Aged Care Facility at Charters Towers has no dementia-specific unit and to acknowledge that families are forced to send loved ones hundreds of kilometres away to other care facilities separated from their local surroundings. This issue is one of the most heated and passionate issues I have ever faced. The Charters Towers district is not likely to slink off into the sunset on this one.

During the election campaign the LNP committed \$1.5 million to have a dementia-specific unit opened at Eventide within 12 months. The commitment caused much joy and a huge sense of relief throughout the local area. Members can imagine the pain and disappointment, even anger, I now hear from constituents as I travel around the electorate. People are desperate. They will not allow their loved ones to be taken away like some superfluous object to be placed over 500 kilometres away, far from their family and friends, to spend the remainder of their lives in what would seem like a foreign land. This is an absolutely appalling situation. Many of these patients have lived all their lives in the Charters Towers district, contributing their working lives to the area to become key figures in the community and now they are treated as cast-offs. There is a rising fury against the lack of a dementia unit in Charters Towers, especially given that such units are in other small towns.

The Pandanus unit at Eventide is well suited for such a unit. It is fenced and can be easily converted to house a dementia-specific unit. There is no issue with staff, as the Nurses Union has indicated it will not be a problem to staff the facility. People are no longer content to wait for something to happen in the distant future. They are determined to push this one through. There is a sense of loss in the area after feeling that a dementia unit was on the way after the LNP committed to have one up and running within 12 months. This issue will never go away. The Charters Towers region has an ageing population, yet it is unbelievable that a facility that takes in an area of 60,000 square kilometres has no

dementia-specific unit. This petition is not pie-in-the-sky stuff; it is reality. I ask the Minister for Health what his decision would be if one of his loved ones were to be hauled off into the unknown far away from familiar faces and places. I once again specifically invite the new Minister for Health, Paul Lucas, to visit Charters Towers and to speak to residents about his plans for a dementia unit in the city. He would be welcomed with true country hospitality and would meet a very determined dementia and aged-care action group.

### Logan Healing Ceremony

**Mrs SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (10.24 pm): It was a profound privilege for me to attend the Healing Ceremony between the Samoan and Aboriginal communities in Logan, held very significantly on Australia Day. Hundreds came and all were moved by the deeply spiritual and meaningful apology offered by the Samoan High Chief on behalf of his people to the Indigenous people of the area following the tragic death of one man and injuries sustained by two others. Aunty Betty McGrady said—

I was overwhelmed by the presence of so many people who had come to witness the event and who later came to me and expressed their feelings of gratitude to be allowed to participate. The opening of the ceremony by the clap sticks as well as the presentation of the 'Talking Stick' to the Samoan Elders held special significance to both parties and sealed the friendships that will take us on a journey together as we work with our respective groups to ensure continued harmony in Logan City. As the President of the Aboriginal Elders of Logan City I was moved by the whole experience and felt that we have paved the way for our younger generations and eased the process of developing relationships that will hopefully lead to lasting friendships.

This was truly a memorable event. From the tragedy of the death of one of our Aboriginal men and the injuries sustained by two others came the outpouring of grief from so many community members on all levels. Our multicultural community was shaken by the news, but particularly those who belong to our Aboriginal community and the Samoans who felt so keenly the shame and distress of this crime and the arrest of nine young men on serious charges. This could have resulted in retribution and a serious rift had it not been for the steady, clear thinking and understanding of many elders on both sides.

I also commend many others involved, such as our senior police, including Superintendent Alistair Dawson, district director of Education, Sam Knowles, regional director of Communities, Brook Winter and many others. I thank Aunty Peggy Tideman, Aunty Betty McGrady, Gloria Moore and Aunty Shirley Miles and the elders within our Samoan community such as Faimalotoa John Pale, Minister Aitui Fanene and Vaa Alifipo as well as our principals, teachers and students in our schools. I now share with members some of the thoughts of Mr Pale, President of the Voice of Samoa. He said—

My experience of the reconciliation ceremony between the Indigenous and the Samoan community was somehow extraordinary. This was the same sentiment shared by all the Samoans present on that day. The ceremony was so moving and solemn that people were touched and mesmerised by it.

*(Time expired)*

### Maryborough Aeromodellers Club

**Mr FOLEY** (Maryborough—Ind) (10.27 pm): I rise to bring to the attention of the House a fantastic day that was held in my electorate by the Maryborough Aeromodellers Club. I had done some work to help it gain some funding and it invited me to the opening of its new shed, which was a huge occasion in the life of the club. And a fantastic occasion it was. We were hosted by Neil Brockley and the other club members on the day. I have to say that as a pilot I am used to flying large aeroplanes, not radio-controlled aircraft, so this was a really fascinating day for me.

**Mr Schwarten** interjected.

**Mr FOLEY:** I take that very kind interjection from the minister; thank you. There were even radio-controlled jets which flew at phenomenal speed. These were jets that used straight kerosene, like large jets, with a two-litre fuel tank on board, which only lasted six minutes for very high performing—

**Mr Schwarten:** How much weight have you lost?

**Mr FOLEY:** I seek your protection, Madam Chair, from the rowdy members opposite.

**Mr Schwarten:** How much weight have you lost?

**Mr FOLEY:** I have lost 26 kilos.

**Mr Schwarten:** Forty-six kilos?

**Mr FOLEY:** Twenty-six.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Rockhampton, order!

**Mr FOLEY:** The aerobatic planes were also fantastic. They did amazing manoeuvres. But the highlight of the day was pylon racing, as per the Red Bull Air Race. Most members would be familiar with the pylon racing at that air race. These were model aeroplanes that travelled at 350 kilometres per hour.

It was an absolutely fantastic day. There was a young gentleman from the Sunshine Coast who actually clocked 350 kilometres an hour. He is a three-time world champion. He has travelled all over the world and has competed in Germany. So it was a fantastic day.

Steve Maynes is a fellow general aviation pilot. He is a mate of mine. We have flown together in the past. Allan Turton, who is a retired flying instructor, was there as well. So it was just a fantastic day for the opening of the shed. It was a great day in the life of the club. Any time members are in the area they should visit. We will even welcome the member for Rockhampton if he wants to come up as well.

### **Highfields State School; Hampton High Country Food and Arts Festival**

**Mr SHINE** (Toowoomba North—ALP) (10.30 pm): Highfields State School will receive \$584,000 to build a multipurpose community auditorium. The Minister for Sport, Phil Reeves, recently confirmed the funding, which is being provided under the Queensland government's Major Facilities Program. The funding will help provide additional opportunities for Highfields residents to participate in sport and recreation.

The \$584,000 will help Highfields State School construct a multipurpose community auditorium on the school grounds, which will be fitted with sports flooring to provide a venue for a variety of sporting activities. Without this funding program it is often impossible for councils and other sport and recreation organisations to fund major sporting infrastructure. I would like to extend a thanks for the extraordinary work that has been undertaken by the P&C particularly, which is led by their president, Bronwyn Cairns, and the teaching staff over a long period and particularly mention the deputy principal, Greg Hunter.

Nearby at Hampton, last Sunday I was very pleased to have the honour of opening the Hampton High Country Food and Arts Festival, as I have done in the past. The Hampton High Country Food and Arts Festival is certainly one event that gets bigger and better every year. The first time the festival was held, which was back in 2003, it attracted about 4,000 visitors. Over the years the number of participating restaurants, producers, performers and attendees has continued to grow. The organising committee is still hard at work figuring out the 2009 attendance numbers, but they are feeling pretty happy with the result.

The festival includes many restaurant stalls serving quality fresh food, Darling Downs wineries offering tastings and sales, cooking demonstrations, two stages of musical entertainment, a creative kids space, an art exhibition, art workshops and displays of the talents of artists of the surrounding communities. I would like to thank the festival organisers for bringing this event together.

The Hampton High Country Food and Arts Festival organising committee deserves mention, including Kerri Seccombe, Sue Groom, Michelle Fielding, Col Seccombe, David McEvoy, Leonie Brassey, Jo Petrou, Sue Oliver, Dan Kemp, Lynda Georgeson, Rosemary Jones, Barb Plant, Janet Rundle, Terri Rickard and Julia Crowley. I also want to thank and commend those involved in the talent on display for sharing their remarkable gifts and, of course, the tireless volunteers from the community who give up their time to make the festival a fun and successful event.

Some of the community volunteers who spent four days helping out tirelessly include Rob Groom, Geoff Brumpton, Murray Frickman, Stewart McEvoy, Graham Sanders, Roy Goring and Ross Plant. I am very happy to acknowledge their efforts today. From the committee to the community, this fantastic festival exists only through the support and hard work of these devoted volunteers.

*(Time expired)*

### **Mudgeeraba Electorate, Road Infrastructure**

**Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (10.33 pm): I rise to speak on behalf of the residents of Lower Beechmont and Springbrook. Beechmont Road was named RACQ's worst state main road in its 2008 survey, and not without good reason. Since December 2008, 15 accidents have occurred on this dangerous stretch of road. The latest accident resulted in the death of a local motorbike rider. It is believed that he hit a large pothole, which may have contributed to the accident.

Only days before I met with members of the Beechmont for Better Roads Committee, which had reported the pothole not once but twice to Main Roads. But unfortunately, it was repaired too late. During the 2009 election campaign, Better Roads for Beechmont presented a 900-strong petition from locals. As this petition was never tabled and no record of it exists—other than photocopies—one can only guess the whereabouts of the original. Sixty per cent of residents in the area signed protest cards sent by me and the member for Beaudesert demanding that this road be fixed.

This dangerous road needs guardrails installed and the road surface shaved back and resurfaced, not just resurfaced once again. Residents want this road fixed, and they want meaningful community consultation, which does not mean merely patching up the road. The road needs to be reprofiled, realigned and only then resurfaced. We should not be depending on near fatalities and fatalities before action is taken to fix our local roads.

This brings me to Gold Coast-Springbrook Road. Sections of Gold Coast-Springbrook Road between Little Nerang Dam Road and Pine Creek Road have remained closed for over six weeks since the recent landslide, which almost claimed the lives of a local Gold Coast family. I witnessed firsthand the enormity of the task at hand to stabilise this area and reopen the road to residents and tourists in a safe and timely fashion. The men working on this upgrade are to be commended as this work is highly dangerous and specialised. The size of the landslip is significant and it is readily apparent how dangerous and unstable this area has been and the intricacy involved in stabilising this area.

I also congratulate Main Roads for having the foresight to take the opportunity to bring forward much needed works now to avoid future disruption to motorists, including drain cleaning, visibility clearing, guidepost replacement and a general clean-up of the area. Although I understand the concerns of residents, and particularly the businesses in Springbrook, that each day this road is closed is of concern, I can assure residents that all that can be done is being done and that their road should be opened shortly.

*(Time expired)*

### **Kullaroo Trefoil Guild**

**Hon. DM WELLS** (Murrumba—ALP) (10.36 pm): On 9 March this year the Kullaroo Trefoil Guild held its first annual general meeting. Kullaroo is the traditional owners' name for part of Deception Bay, and it means 'place where all the tracks lead to the water'. The trefoil is an African tree with a three-part leaf. Apparently, Baden Powell was inspired by this tree to formulate the threefold promise for scouts and guides: to do your best, to help other people and to obey the law.

So who are the Trefoilers? They are the ladies who have served as guide, brownie or scout leaders but who wish to continue the comradeship they established during their years of service. Some of these ladies have retired as guide leaders, needing after their long period of service to withdraw from the rigours of that role. Others are current leaders. But all of them, looking back on that part of their life's journey that they spent in the guiding movement, have discovered that they have a social bond with those with whom they travelled that path—a bond they wished to maintain. But being who they are, they are not content merely to socialise but are setting out to raise funds for worthwhile causes, especially those involving children.

After a lifetime of helping their community, the Kullaroo Trefoilers' idea of a good time is to help the community more. One of the benefits of the guiding movement is that the girls have fun. A more long-lasting benefit is that the movement instils a sense of community and a spirit of altruism. I salute the ladies of the Kullaroo Trefoil Guild.

### **Indooroopilly Electorate, School Funding**

**Mr EMERSON** (Indooroopilly—LNP) (10.37 pm): Appropriate funding for our state primary schools must be a priority, which is why I am concerned that as much as \$100 per student of direct funding to those schools is set to be stripped away by the Bligh government. My electorate of Indooroopilly is fortunate to have state primary schools that produce education outcomes well above the state average. That is a testament to the dedication, skill and professionalism of teachers, the enthusiasm and hard work of students, and the support and encouragement of parents.

Those outcomes are also achieved while addressing the challenges those schools have in meeting their budgets with the juggling of limited funds and difficult choices being made as to where to direct spending. P&Cs are also being increasingly called on to raise funds to make up shortfalls, a task made even more difficult in the face of tough economic times.

It was therefore significant late last year when it was announced that the end of an historic funding anomaly would see Queensland state primary schools get an additional \$100 per student each year in federal funding. That means that if a school has 500 students that school should receive an additional \$50,000 a year for the next four years. I believe that that money should go directly to those schools so those on the ground have the discretion to determine where it can best be spent. Those working in a school understand that each school is different and know where additional funds will produce the best education outcomes. The federal government agrees with me, saying that while it cannot order the states to pass the money directly to primary schools as discretionary funds, it is the Australian government's strong expectation that they will do so. That additional federal money is yet to

reach any Queensland state primary school and I fear that it will be lost to those schools. I fear the Bligh government will use it instead to fund other programs or see it gobbled up by education department bureaucrats in Mary Street.

The Australian Primary Schools Principals Association clearly has the same fear, saying that it wants the extra money to reach the classroom and not be lost to bureaucracy in the state. The Queensland government's own recent Masters' report into the state's primary schools also supported direct funding, saying that individual schools are best placed to determine the details of the resources and support they require. The additional federal funds should not be lost to those schools so the Bligh government can use to it shore up its bungling efforts on the budget. It should not be lost to those schools so that a bureaucrat in the education department can further build their empire. It should not be lost so that the Premier and the education minister get a media opportunity to announce a one-size-fits-all program that is irrelevant or fails to address the individual needs of a school. Every cent of every dollar of that additional \$100 a year per student should go directly to the individual schools so that they can determine how it is best spent.

### Sekisui House

**Mr WENDT** (Ipswich West—ALP) (10.41 pm): Tonight I want to advise the House of a significant win last week for Australia, Queensland and particularly Ipswich. For those who know anything about the building game, the name Sekisui House will certainly make their ears prick up. However, for those who have not yet heard of Sekisui let me give you some details. Sekisui House is one of Japan's leading property developers and the largest house builder in their country. 'How large?', I hear you ask. Well, they are, in fact, the second largest home builder in the world with around 50,000 dwellings built last year. The company specialises in designing and building residential houses, condominiums and commercial retail buildings and was established in 1960. Last year, the company had sales of around A\$20 billion and it has completed around two million dwellings to date. What is even better is the fact that the company has committed itself to designing and completing a range of carbon neutral houses and, as such, it is expected that all future developments will, in fact, be carbon neutral, which is a huge win for our environment and puts the company ahead of the pack as a world leader in this field.

The reason I am telling members about this company is that last week I had the pleasure of joining with the Mayor of Ipswich, Paul Pisasale, in welcoming Mr Toru Abe and Mr Satoshi Yoshimura from Sekisui's Japanese office. They were in Ipswich to finalise and sign off on a deal which will see their company invest around \$190 million in partnership with the Australian listed company Payce Consolidated.

This new joint venture agreement will mean that the Ripley Valley project, which many members know is located south of Ipswich, will proceed as planned. As some may be aware, the development of this important section of the western corridor was placed in jeopardy with the recent demise of the previous developer, Babcock and Brown. It needs to be acknowledged that this deal is not just significant for Ipswich but also for Queensland and Australia. We all know Ripley Valley is a major initiative, master planned by the state government to expand Queensland's population along the western corridor and I for one think it is fantastic to see a major Japanese developer come on board to ensure the sustainability of the project. The fact that we can forge ahead with such a major development despite the economic downturn across the globe means that a new journey for Ipswich, Queensland and Australia is about to get underway.

I think that the important thing to remember here is that to survive the economic pressures of the world it is necessary to forge global partnerships like this and cast away not just the picket fences between cities but between states and across the globe.

In addition, I believe that there are many other opportunities that will come out of this alliance. Specifically, I know that there are discussions currently going on which involve how Ipswich can assist Sekisui House develop a large manufacturing plant which could be used to service our region and hopefully the rest of Australia. As members can imagine, a company that plans on designing and building thousands of houses will need a large headquarters in the region. What better location than Ipswich, which has 43 per cent of the available industrial land in South-East Queensland?

I suppose it is no secret that Sekisui House had been presented with a number of competing prospects to invest in across Australia. However, I am proud to say that they chose South-East Queensland and Ipswich as their best opportunity. It should be acknowledged that the catalyst for much of this work was the enthusiasm shown by the Ipswich mayor and his able council.

Question put—That the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 10.44 pm.

**ATTENDANCE**

Attwood, Bates, Bleijie, Bligh, Boyle, Choi, Crandon, Cripps, Croft, Cunningham, Darling, Davis, Dempsey, Dick, Dickson, Douglas, Dowling, Elmes, Emerson, Farmer, Finn, Flegg, Foley, Fraser, Gibson, Grace, Hinchliffe, Hobbs, Hoolihan, Hopper, Horan, Jarratt, Johnson, Johnstone, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Kilburn, Knuth, Langbroek, Lawlor, Lucas, McArdle, McLindon, Male, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nicholls, Nolan, O'Brien, O'Neill, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Powell, Pratt, Reeves, Rickuss, Roberts, Robinson, Ryan, Schwarten, Scott, Seeney, Shine, Simpson, Smith, Sorensen, Spence, Springborg, Stevens, Stone, Struthers, Stuckey, Sullivan, van Litsenburg, Wallace, Watt, Wellington, Wells, Wendt, Wettenhall, Wilson