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

Thursday, 11 March 2010

PETITIONS	849
TABLED PAPERS	849
MINISTERIAL PAPER	849
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS	850
Growth Management Summit	850
First Home Owner Grant, DEEDI Survey	850
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Report, dated 4 March 2010, titled 'Survey of New Residents in Queensland Regions 2010' by Deborah Wilson Consulting Services.	851
SEQ Futures	851
National Rugby League	851
Leukaemia Foundation, Shave for a Cure	852
Rockhampton Hospital	852
Wide Bay-Burnett Regional Plan	853
Asbestos Removal	854
Foster and Kinship Carer Week	854
Asbestos in Schools	855
Road Projects	855
Western White Gum Tree	856
Council Rate Rises	856
Population Growth, Affordable Housing	857
Services, Non-Government Sector	857
Nature Refuges	857
Workplace Safety	858
Emergency Services, Capital Works Program	858
Rail Network	859
Kangaroo Point Park	859
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Media	860
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	860
Issues Paper	860
<i>Tabled paper:</i> Economic Development Committee, Issues Paper No. 2, March 2010, titled 'Inquiry into the road safety benefits of fixed speed cameras'	860

Table of Contents — Thursday, 11 March 2010

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	861
Issues Paper	861
<i>Tabled paper: Social Development Committee, Issues Paper titled 'Inquiry into addressing cannabis related harm in Queensland'.</i>	861
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	861
Solar Hot Water Program	861
Home Insulation Program	861
Bligh Labor Government	862
Health System	862
People's Question Time	863
Local Government Reform	864
Jobs	864
Comments by Premier	865
Acting Speaker's Ruling, Question Out of Order	865
Community Safety	865
Schools, Solar Panels	866
Surat Basin	867
People's Question Time	867
Local Government, Funding	868
Ambulance Service	868
Health System	869
<i>Tabled paper: Courier-Mail article, dated 11 March 2010, titled 'Baby boomers "selfish", says MP'.</i>	869
Criminal History, Charges	870
Seniors	871
Road Safety, Schools	871
CIVIL LIABILITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL	871
Second Reading	871
Consideration in Detail	888
Clause 1, as read, agreed to.	888
Clause 2—	888
<i>Tabled paper: Explanatory notes to Hon. Dick's amendments to the Civil Liability and Other Legislation</i>	
Amendment Bill.	888
Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.	888
Clauses 3 to 5, as read, agreed to.	888
Clause 6—	889
Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.	890
Clauses 7 to 14, as read, agreed to.	890
Clause 15—	890
Clause 15, as amended, agreed to.	891
Clauses 16 to 51, as read, agreed to.	891
Third Reading	891
Long Title	891
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL	891
Second Reading	891
NOTICE OF MOTION	898
Dissent from Acting Speaker's Ruling	898
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL	898
Second Reading	898
Consideration in Detail	911
Clauses 1 to 5, as read, agreed to.	911
Clause 6, as read, agreed to.	911
Clauses 7 to 18, as read, agreed to.	911
Third Reading	912
Long Title	912
SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT	912
ADJOURNMENT	912
Hervey Bay Special School, Air-conditioning Units	912
Education, Capital Works Projects	912
Gary Larson Oval; Collapse of Building Companies	913
Runaway Bay Ambulance Station	914
Asbestos in Schools	914
Keppel Electorate, Funding for Schools	915
Southport, Student Accommodation	916
<i>Tabled paper: Article from The Public Sector Informant, December 2009, titled 'Living in a state of perpetual corruption'.</i>	916
Mental Health Services	916
Drug Abuse	917
Windaroo Valley State High School	918
ATTENDANCE	919

THURSDAY, 11 MARCH 2010

The Legislative Assembly met at 9.30 am.

Mr Acting Speaker (Mr Jason O'Brien, Cook) read prayers and took the chair.

PETITIONS

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

Cleveland-Redland Bay Road and Giles Road Intersection, Upgrade

Mr Dowling, from 90 petitioners, requesting the House to consider the urgent upgrade to a signalised intersection at the corner of Cleveland-Redland Bay Road and Giles Road, Redland Bay [[1882](#)].

Taxi Industry

Mr Wellington, from 1,072 petitioners, requesting the House to pass legislation which prevents any taxi dispatch company from restricting any legitimate holder of a Queensland Transport issued authority to drive a taxi from accessing any taxi company's dispatch system, without the permission of Queensland Transport [[1883](#)].

Taxi Industry

Mr Wellington, from 1,009 petitioners, requesting the House to declare that the Taxi Council of Queensland be no longer officially recognised by the Queensland government as the peak industry body for the Queensland taxi industry and move to establish a body which is more widely supported by the industry's stakeholders [[1884](#)].

Petitions received.

TABLED PAPERS

MINISTERIAL PAPERS TABLED BY THE CLERK

The following ministerial papers were tabled by the Clerk—

Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (Mr Roberts)—

[1885](#) Response from the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (Mr Roberts) to an ePetition (1335-09) sponsored by Mr Gibson from 326 petitioners requesting an increased police presence in the Gympie CBD on Friday and Saturday nights

[1886](#) Response from the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (Mr Roberts) to a paper petition (1369-10) presented by Mr Hobbs from 150 petitioners requesting the House to appoint a permanent police officer residing in the town of Warra

Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations (Mr C R Dick)—

[1887](#) Response from the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations (Mr C R Dick) to an ePetition (1346-09) sponsored by Ms Jones from 5891 petitioners requesting that the Classification of Computer Games and Images Act 1995 be amended to permit computer games to receive the R18+ classification when they have been refused classification under the Commonwealth Act

[1888](#) Response from the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations (Mr C R Dick) to an ePetition (1347-09) sponsored by Ms Darling from 245 petitioners requesting the House to implement the unanimous recommendations of the Investigation into Altruistic Surrogacy Committee

MEMBER'S PAPER TABLED BY THE CLERK

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

Member for Surfers Paradise (Mr Langbroek)—

[1889](#) Copy of an email, dated 10 April 2009, from Dewayne Monty, Managing Director, Ecovation, to the Southport Electorate Office, regarding the government's solar hot water systems program

MINISTERIAL PAPER

The following ministerial paper was tabled—

Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology (Mr Schwarten)—

[1890](#) Overseas report by the Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology, the Honourable Robert Schwarten MP visit to Singapore and Germany 25 February-7 March 2010

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Growth Management Summit

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.32 am): Queensland means a barbecue in the backyard, sun, surf and wide open spaces. Our lifestyle is the envy of the world but, if we want to keep that lifestyle for our children, we need to manage our growth. We are now just three weeks away from the Queensland Growth Management Summit, which will take place on 30 and 31 March. The summit has the potential to be a landmark on the road to a new deal for growth management in Queensland. The summit will be attended by over 200 experts in the areas of business, environment, local government and planning from across the state.

Along with members of the public, some of the people who will help shape the future direction of Queensland include—and I am pleased to see federal representation—the federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan; Lord Mayor Campbell Newman; Bernard Salt, one of Australia's most respected demographers and population commentators; and David Owen, a staff writer for the *New Yorker* and author of the acclaimed book *Green metropolis*, which explores sustainability and population growth. I can also advise the House that the summit will be facilitated by the acclaimed *7:30 Report* host, Kerry O'Brien, and it will be held at our wonderful State Library. A preliminary program for the summit is available on the relevant government website.

Information is being sent to all MPs on both sides of the House about how communities across Queensland can get involved in this summit. The event will be streamed live over the web and questions raised online during the streaming will then be put to the experts in a dedicated session. I encourage anybody with an interest in the future of Queensland to visit the website and register their interest, to complete a survey and to ask a question about what growth means to you.

Here in Queensland I think we each share a common goal: the effective management of growth to protect our lifestyle. We need to move towards a greater consensus between all levels of government, the community, developers and conservationists. Often viewpoints can seem diametrically opposed, but I firmly believe that if we listen to each other we can find a way forward. Planning for growth is one of our government's key priorities and we are tackling the growth challenge head-on with an investment of a record \$18.2 billion program to build the infrastructure that Queensland needs this year alone. That investment is building schools, hospitals, roads and other infrastructure that we need now and well into the future. We are committed to the SEQ Regional Plan, which protects 85 per cent of the region and outlines an urban footprint for responsible development of the rest. Meeting the challenges and recognising the opportunities of growth is something that our government is committed to.

First Home Owner Grant, DEEDI Survey

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.36 am): It should come as no surprise that each and every week more than 2,000 people are choosing to call Queensland home. The Queensland lifestyle is the envy of the nation, if not the world. Seventy per cent of our new arrivals choose to settle in South-East Queensland, which puts pressure on our fragile environment and on infrastructure demands. Late last year I proposed the idea of boosting the state funded first home owners grant by \$3,000 to encourage people to settle outside South-East Queensland. The extra money could entice existing residents and newcomers to buy homes in regional areas.

After the idea was floated, the Treasurer then wrote to every rural and regional mayor—some 61 local councils in all—asking for their views on the proposal. I am pleased to advise the House that, to date, 13 responses have been received, including from some very large councils such as Cairns, Townsville, the Fraser Coast, Gympie and Western Downs. All responses have been positive and in support of the idea. In some cases, they have suggested some changes or incentives to further attract people to their particular area.

By decentralising the south-east corner, we can take advantage of growth in industries such as LNG and coal in major resource areas such as Surat, Central Queensland and the Galilee Basin. All of these parts of Queensland will need extra workers, and potentially their families, over the coming decades. These are places that will see high levels of demand for labour and will provide a lot of opportunities for people to settle and to raise families in wonderful communities.

Today, I am pleased to table a new report that shows that one in 10 people who moved to South-East Queensland in the past five years say that they could be encouraged to move to a regional area in the future. The new research was commissioned by DEEDI in the run-up to the growth summit and includes a survey of 580 people who recently moved to key regional areas in Queensland. The report has some interesting findings. It shows that mining, construction, health and community services and government are the main industry sectors that are attracting new residents to the regions. The figures also show that the key reasons people give for moving to regional Queensland are, firstly, work opportunities, with some 33 per cent nominating work; being close to family and friends accounts for another 31.2 per cent; and lifestyle attractions account for 23.4 per cent.

Importantly, once people are in these regions, they are likely to stay there. The survey finds that 58.3 per cent of new residents in regional Queensland do not expect to leave and another 15.3 expect to stay for at least three to five years. This report tells us that, of the people who moved to South-East Queensland in the past five years, at least one in 10—10 per cent—would be interested in living in regional Queensland and of those people who have moved to regional Queensland in recent times, they love it. It is a great place to live, which should not be a surprise to anyone in this House but it is something that we would do well to promote in other parts of Australia and to people coming to this country. This report shows, as I said, that people do want to live in regional Queensland if the opportunities and services are there for them. I table the report.

Tabled paper: Report, dated 4 March 2010, titled 'Survey of New Residents in Queensland Regions 2010' by Deborah Wilson Consulting Services [1891].

Encouraging the movement of population growth outside of SEQ to relieve the pressure on Brisbane and the surrounding regions is an important part of our growth management strategy. In Australia we live in a free democracy. We cannot just shut down state borders and we have no intention of dictating how many babies people have. It is very difficult for state governments therefore to control the population growth in their own states. So managing growth and protecting lifestyle is critical.

The \$3,000 first home owners boost is just one of a raft of initiatives that our government is investigating to help relieve some of the population pressures here in the south-east corner. I thank those mayors who have responded for their initial support. This will be one of the items that we will be discussing in much more detail at the growth summit with a view to considering it during the budget deliberations this year.

SEQ Futures

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.40 am): Since the beginning of this month the Queensland government's growth management website has allowed members of the public to get involved in shaping Queensland's future. The growth that is happening here in Queensland means that we need to make choices today that will shape the Queensland of tomorrow. We cannot give Queenslanders a crystal ball, but we do have a new interactive tool on the website that does give them a chance to see what the future can look like. The SEQ Futures software application allows Queenslanders to nominate priorities such as less traffic congestion, more public transport, walkable town centres or environmental protection as their priorities. It lets people tell us what they value most about the regions, such as quiet neighbourhoods or environmental protection. The program then uses this information to offer the user a snapshot of what their ideas might mean for development in the South-East Queensland of the future depending on the choices that they make in the software.

This SEQ Futures tool means that Queenslanders can tell us what is important to them in planning for growth but it also allows them to see for themselves what their own futures might look like with their ideas included. Queenslanders will also be able to see the implications of different housing choices and transport choices. The site asks questions such as do we expand outward or do we become more compact; do we prioritise new roads or do we prioritise new public transport initiatives. Managing growth effectively involves trade-offs to make sure that we have the lifestyle that we want. Our government does not shy away from the fact that there are choices to be made if we are to manage growth better. SEQ Futures is another way for members of the public to be part of the debate and I encourage Queenslanders to visit the website and to take the SEQ Futures challenge today.

National Rugby League

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.42 am): All of those footy tragi-comedies in the House will know that the 2010 NRL season is almost upon us. Kicking off the action tomorrow night in a Queensland derby at Suncorp Stadium are the Brisbane Broncos and the North Queensland Cowboys.

Honourable members interjected.

Ms BLIGH: Everybody is excited now. Then on Sunday—I think this is an easy one for Queenslanders—it is the Gold Coast Titans up against the New Zealand Warriors at Skilled Park. Go the Titans! The fans are looking forward to a big 2010 season and I am sure that our home-grown teams will not disappoint. We have already had great ticket sales and it is expected that more than 60,000 Queensland footy fans will be at either Suncorp or Skilled Park to watch the games. This puts us on track to see Queensland venues once again recording the highest crowd attendances in the NRL.

It is not surprising so many people enjoy watching our world-class teams at our world-class stadiums. Since 2002 more than 23 million people have attended at a Stadiums Queensland venue—3.7 million of these in the last financial year despite the global credit crunch. Our world-class stadiums have also pumped upwards of \$300 million into our economy and they provide thousands of jobs for Queenslanders.

It is no secret that I am a mad keen Titans fan. I am hoping to see them this year go one step further in the national league. I was pleased to join many others in the *Courier-Mail's* NRL SuperCoach competition with a dream team that includes more than a few star Titans and other great Queensland players. Some of the world's best rugby league players are Queenslanders and playing for Queensland teams so I would not be surprised if this year we finally get to see an all-Queensland grand final.

Although not an NRL team, I know the Deputy Premier would be disappointed if I did not take the opportunity to say a big congratulations to the Queensland Reds on their bold showing last weekend. It has been a long time coming but I know that he is pleased to see it. I wish the team further luck this season.

Finally, well done to Queensland Bulls paceman Ryan Harris who was yesterday selected in the Australian test squad for the upcoming New Zealand series. I would also like to take the chance this morning to thank the *Sunday Mail* for its participation in our reading to kids campaign. Members may have seen last week's paper which contained a 10 per cent discount voucher for parents to buy books for their children from a range of leading booksellers. Literacy is everybody's business. It starts at home. This is one way that we can help parents and incentivise them to involve their children in more books. I hope people take up this great offer and get reading to their kids.

Leukaemia Foundation, Shave for a Cure

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.45 am): My job as Premier is to do the right thing by the people of Queensland. I would hope that every member of this House shares that sense of responsibility. In this state we have always faced danger and adversity with courage and good humour, but yesterday I became aware of a plot of such diabolical proportions that it shook me to the core. The horrible truth is that ABC's Spencer Howson has been threatening to wear a mankini to my press conferences. As Premier I have endured many difficult press conferences but this threat brings it to a whole new level. I cannot allow cameras to expose the people of Queensland to Spencer Howson in a pair of mutant budgie smugglers.

In his defence, Spencer did decide to hold the state to ransom in the interests of a very good cause. It is a very good cause which I hope has the support of every member of the House. Shave for a Cure to raise money for the Leukaemia Foundation starts today and runs until Saturday, 13 March. More than 125,000 people shave or colour their hair each year to raise funds for the Leukaemia Foundation. Somewhat bizarrely, Spencer Howson is unwilling or too scared to shave but has decided that donning a mankini is a more palatable idea.

There is hope, however, that this travesty can be averted. Spencer Howson has advised that the mankini will be decommissioned if between us in this House we can raise \$1,000 for the cause. The protection of Queenslanders is in our hands. I ask for bipartisan support and, indeed, I would suggest that those who do not see fit to contribute are in fact voting for the mankini.

To get the ball rolling I will donate the first \$100 and I ask each member here today to consider a donation of just \$20 to avert this possibility. I would also expect today that members of the media gallery will take some responsibility for their profession and join in this very worthy cause. They will not only be helping the people of Queensland avoid the possibility of Spencer Howson in a mankini but they will be donating to a very worthy cause. We have a hand up already for the first \$20 from the member for Brisbane Central who is very keen to avoid the terrible possibility of Spencer Howson in a mankini. The whip will be collecting a list of everybody prepared to be part of this. I think it is a moment of good humour but a very worthy cause. I congratulate the Leukaemia Foundation on the great work that it does, but I particularly congratulate Sandgate State High School for whom we will be raising this particular \$1,000.

Rockhampton Hospital

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Health) (9.48 am): The Reds came down from 18 nil last weekend to win 23-18 and will beat the Western Force at 4.30 on Sunday. Yesterday I spoke about my visit to the Fraser Coast and in particular Hervey Bay and Maryborough hospitals. This visit highlighted the key issue in health service delivery in a state as decentralised as Queensland: the need for strong links between hospitals across the state. The Hervey Bay and Maryborough hospitals work closely with each other to deliver complementary services as well as with hospitals such as the RBWH in Brisbane in areas of telehealth consultations and training.

I have said it before and I will say it again: no hospital is an island. Yet this is exactly what those opposite endorse with hospital boards. The history books in Queensland clearly demonstrate that when hospitals operate as silos patient safety is compromised—the Carter inquiry into Townsville Hospital's Ward 10B made this very clear. But we also agree that strong clinical leadership is fundamental. That is why the CEOs of a number of our districts are leading clinicians in their field.

Metro North CEO, Professor Keith McNeil, is an organ transplant expert who has performed as both a surgeon and specialist in post-operative care. Metro South CEO, Dr David Theile Sr, is a former president of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and was awarded the college's highest award—the Sir Hugh Devine Medal.

Gold Coast district CEO, Dr Adrian Nowitzke, is a neurosurgeon. Cairns district CEO, Julie Hartley-Jones CBE—one below a Dame of the British Empire—is a distinguished renal nurse and former president of the European Dialysis and Transplant Nurses Association. Rockhampton district CEO, Dr Coralee Barker, who holds a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery, was CEO of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service in Victoria and worked at the Alfred in Melbourne.

In just one short year, Rockhampton Hospital has come a long way, with much thanks to the strong clinical leadership of Dr Barker. She has provided a new beginning for Rockhampton Hospital and in just 12 months has made significant inroads to recruit and retain more staff. Where, in the past, the hospital faced challenges recruiting medical staff, Dr Barker has boosted the medical workforce at Rockhampton by undertaking recruitment of an additional 10.5 medical staff in the areas of paediatrics, general surgery, general medicine, emergency medicine, nephrology and cardiology.

Under the leadership of Dr Barker, Rockhampton Hospital has come a long way in just 12 months. In that 12 short months, she has led the development of a medical workforce plan with strategies to boost vocational and prevocational training for junior doctors. This strategy is now in place, with the number of internships based at Rockhampton Hospital increasing from 14 in 2009 to 20 this year and to 25 in 2011.

Dr Barker has also established positions of candidate care officers to assist in the attraction and retention of prospective and new doctors to migrate and transition into Rockhampton. These officers are expected to start in June. She has committed funding for clinical and academic research functions to further attract senior medical staff to the region. And what is more, she is working with staff to develop Rockhampton Hospital as a training hub for general surgery and general medicine. In just one short year Rockhampton Hospital has come a long way.

I single out Dr Barker but by no means is she alone. All of our district CEOs are working hard to put patients first and deliver world-class health care for Queenslanders, just as the Bligh government is committed to continuing to deliver world-class health care for Queenslanders through its \$6 billion health facility building program and delivering expanded services, closer to home, for Queensland patients. In the past 12 months in Rockhampton the Bligh government has opened a new MRI and rehabilitation building, awarded a \$2 million grant to the Cancer Council for off-campus cancer accommodation. And what is more, a \$74 million expansion of the hospital is underway. In just 12 short months Rockhampton Hospital has come a long way.

Wide Bay-Burnett Regional Plan

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (9.52 am): The Bligh government is committed to creating a better quality of life for Queensland, and that means tackling the challenges of growth. In parts of regional Queensland, those challenges are just as big as they are here in the south-east. This is no more evident than in the Wide Bay-Burnett region.

Treasury's latest population update revealed that the Hervey Bay area grew at a rate of 5.6 per cent between 2002 and 2007—faster than any other region in the country. That growth is not expected to slow down any time soon. Current forecasts suggest an influx of around 131,000 people by 2031.

To manage this growth, to lead for the future, late last year the Premier announced that the Wide Bay region would have its own statutory regional plan that would take in the Bundaberg, Fraser Coast, Gympie, North Burnett, South Burnett and the Cherbourg Aboriginal shire council areas.

Through my responsibilities as regional planning minister for the Wide Bay-Burnett region, last Thursday I attended and chaired the inaugural Wide Bay-Burnett Regional Planning Committee in Gayndah. I was joined by local mayors, councillors and the local member for Callide to take some of the first steps in preparing the Wide Bay-Burnett Regional Plan, which will be the framework through which the region grows into the future.

The statutory regional plan will be the pre-eminent planning document for the Wide Bay-Burnett region and will be accompanied by an associated state planning regulatory provision and regulatory maps. The plan will be a best practice planning document that addresses the issues relevant to the region and will be used to inform the development of local planning policy. The plan will contribute to creating a diverse local economy, protecting the regional lifestyle and local environment.

I thank all those who attended the meeting for their willingness to get behind this project and deliver a plan that responds to the challenges of growth, while maintaining the natural environment that surrounds these areas. I look forward to working with the local representatives and local community over the next 18 months as the regional plan for the area is developed. I want to acknowledge their goodwill, I want to acknowledge their unique insights and I want to acknowledge their experience.

Planning is about making choices. I am confident that the Wide Bay- Burnett Regional Plan will be one for the future, one that makes the right choices.

Asbestos Removal

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology) (9.55 am): The Department of Public Works through QBuild is always searching for ways to improve its health and safety performance to ensure that staff and others are not exposed to dangerous fibres when removing asbestos. It is imperative that we get this right.

In 2009, QBuild developed the practical asbestos training program. The program is the first of its type in Australia and is another example of the Queensland government and the Department of Public Works leading the way.

The practical asbestos training program, developed in consultation with the unions, was designed specifically for QBuild staff. This one-day session includes theoretical, practical, legislative requirements and best industry practice components. QBuild has rolled out these training sessions right across the state.

I am pleased to report that 98 per cent of relevant field staff who require the training have completed the program. That is more than 1,500 workers including tradespersons, forepersons, supervisors, condition assessors and apprentices. A second level of training will be delivered to all managers, estimators, procurement and program delivery personnel in the form of a course that reflects their responsibilities in relation to asbestos work.

As the practical asbestos training program is the first of its kind in Australia, we are in the process of having the course accredited through the Australian Quality Training Framework. It may have some relevance to contractors who want to do business with the Queensland government, and we will be investigating that.

QBuild has engaged the services of BIGA, a Queensland based registered training organisation, to facilitate the accreditation application. The course proposal has been lodged with the Department of Education and Training. If approved, BIGA will develop the course so it will also be available on the National Training Information Service database for other training providers to use.

People who have successfully completed this training and completed the associated exam will then be eligible to attain a 'B' class asbestos removal licence. QBuild will be encouraging eligible staff to undertake the exam as part of the series of field staff toolbox talks being held through to the end of April. This is just another example of the Department of Public Works leading the way when it comes to improving health and safety in the workplace and in the removal of asbestos.

In September last year the Premier announced the whole-of-government ICT strategy called Toward Q2 through ICT. With a focus on this strategy and the priority areas, I undertook an overseas visit from 25 February to 5 March this year to Singapore and Germany. I have tabled that report today and I am happy to have any discussion with members about that report.

Foster and Kinship Carer Week

Hon. PG REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport) (9.58 am): This week the Bligh government has joined in celebrating Foster and Kinship Carer Week. The week highlights the vital role that carers play supporting Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people. The Bligh government provided \$40,000 towards the week to encourage community participation and to support our carers. We have also provided \$128 million in the current budget to support foster carers across the state.

Our foster and kinship carers are the backbone of the child protection system and their commitment to Queensland's children is extremely valuable. Yesterday, I was pleased to present foster and kinship carer excellence awards to eight Queensland families from across the state. These awards recognised the outstanding contribution of carers to children who need a safe and loving environment. Couples like Mick and Pam Dunn from Ellen Grove—

Ms Palaszczuk: Amazing people.

Mr REEVES: I take that interjection—who have looked after around 150 children and young people in the 20 years they have been carers, and Sharan and Barry Winslade, who have a houseful of toddlers on their five-acre property near Ipswich, cannot receive enough accolades for the work they do.

Other award recipients include Paul and Natalie Upshall from Gympie, Lina and Paul Swalling from Carrara, and Cheryl Montgomery from Robina. A Mackay couple, who prefer not to be named, care for their six grandchildren aged two to 10; and Sam and John Devine from Thursday Island and Josie and Mark Beck from Central Queensland were all honoured. We are lucky to have such exceptional and dedicated people working with us to provide better opportunities for children and young people in need.

Of course we could not do this without our esteemed community partners and peak bodies who provide services to recruit, train and support thousands of carers throughout Queensland. Unfortunately, there is always a need for carers across the state, and we need more people to open their hearts and homes to Queensland children. I hope Foster and Kinship Carer Week raises the awareness of the public of the wonderful work of our foster carers and encourages more Queenslanders to make this invaluable sacrifice. Our carers are making a truly measurable difference to the lives of so many of our young people.

Asbestos in Schools

Hon. GJ WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training) (10.00 am): The Bligh government takes the issue of asbestos in schools extremely seriously. This week at two schools in the Mackay region parents were notified of a situation in which some classrooms, science labs and staffrooms may have been exposed to asbestos dust as a result of work undertaken by contractors. The school was not alerted to the potential asbestos concerns immediately after the work occurred in September last year and, as a result, some students and staff continued to use those classrooms. This is an extremely serious situation. It is totally unacceptable and an investigation is underway.

There are rigorous, established processes governing the way in which work should be done on school sites. The principal is a senior official and has a duty of care to all staff and students. It is the principal's responsibility to ensure the safety of students and staff, particularly when it comes to asbestos related issues. Any failure by a principal to fulfil those obligations will result in disciplinary action. The director-general has issued a directive to all principals reminding them in the strongest possible terms that they have a responsibility to fulfil their duty of care to all students and staff every day when it comes to facilities management and asbestos issues.

Legal advice is being sought with a view to suing the contractor for breach of contract in failing to fulfil their obligations to this school. EQ will not re-engage this contractor for any further work. In the Mackay North State High School, the department was able to work with QBuild to have the majority of these buildings cleaned and tested by independent authorities overnight on Tuesday to ensure they were safe for occupation. I am advised that clean-up and testing continued yesterday and all classrooms and staffrooms have now been cleared for occupation. Access to the 19 rooms in total was restricted until they were cleared for occupation. Students and staff were accommodated elsewhere in the school. All parents were notified of the situation in a letter from the school on Tuesday. I am advised that, likewise, the school at Moranbah was made safe for students and staff to continue their education.

Education Queensland will also assist parents who may have concerns by making available expert advice from qualified occupational health professionals. The situation that has occurred in this case, I underline, is totally unacceptable and I expect answers to come from this investigation and appropriate action to be taken on all fronts.

Road Projects

Hon. CA WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Main Roads) (10.04 am): Just like Jonathon Thurston cutting through the Broncos defence tomorrow night, we are on a winner too. The Bligh government's Growth Management Summit later this month is all about getting Queenslanders involved in shaping our state's future. Managing growth is a top priority. That is why we are rolling out a record \$18 billion road building program over the next five years. We are building a first-class road network and generating jobs right across our state. That \$18 billion means 30,000 jobs a year. It is a win for motorists and a win for workers at a time when job security is more important than ever.

Even behind the scenes, our road workers are making a real difference to the lives of everyday Queenslanders. Every week, somewhere in Queensland, hundreds of engineers, road workers and construction staff are hard at work in their local community. Take the men and women upgrading the Ipswich Motorway. They have got 40 community projects on the go. They are working with the native stingless bee rescue group in Ipswich. Together, they will walk the 18 kilometres of the road corridor in search of beehives to relocate these native bees. They have given \$10,000 worth of equipment to the Jindalee Rotary Club to help them tackle graffiti. They have donated more than 50 water-filled barriers to the Darra Oxley Pony Club for showjumping.

Workers along the Wacol to Darra section have raised more than \$30,000 for the RSPCA, Angel Flight and Youngcare. Workers from the Darra to Springfield transport corridor have raised funds for the Cancer Council and the Western Suburbs Special School. Up the coast in Rocky and out west in Toowoomba, computers have been donated to the RSPCA Pet Shop, the Rockhampton amateur radio group and the Salvos. In the capital of North Queensland, in my home town of Townsville, staff on the Bruce Highway upgrade have sold burgers, soft drinks and chocolates to raise money for local Scouts and the RSPCA. They are forging partnerships with their local communities.

I have often spoken in this House about the big projects, the big picture. Yet there is a lot of work going on behind the scenes. We are building more than roads; we are building a better, brighter future for Queenslanders. It is about managing growth. It is about generating jobs. It is about building stronger regional communities.

Western White Gum Tree

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland) (10.06 am): The western white gum is listed as vulnerable under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act. In fact, state government surveys indicate that only about 1,000 mature trees still exist in the wild. Much of this gum's habitat has been cleared and it is now only found in a relatively small area north-east of Chinchilla.

Some years ago, the state government began investigating the potential of the western white gum as a plantation species. There was good reason for our interest, as this tree produces beautiful timber that is perfect for flooring, furniture and construction. It also is suited to low rainfall areas and copes well with frost. But to do further work with this tree, it was essential that we set up a breeding program because of its vulnerable status. Wild seeds were collected and seed orchards were established at Dalby. These orchards serve two purposes: to act as conservation plantings and to allow for selective breeding to produce trees that grow faster and straighter. Poor trees have been progressively thinned from the seed orchard.

This ongoing work has now resulted in the first major collection of improved western white gum seed, with 70 million high-quality seeds harvested. That is enough seed to potentially plant out 70,000 hectares and to service the needs of the Queensland private plantation industry for the next two years. There is another benefit to the western white gum. It copes well with saline conditions so it could potentially be used to address the dryland salinity problems that are beginning to emerge in Queensland. There is enormous potential for the western white gum, but none of it would be possible without our work to produce millions of seeds. This project fulfils our Q2 ambition of a strong and green Queensland. We are protecting a vulnerable tree for future generations while at the same time supporting the timber plantation industry.

Council Rate Rises

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.08 am): All levels of government have felt the impact of the global financial crisis, including councils large and small. Their revenue is down, yet there is no less an imperative for councils to keep their capital works programs running and jobs flowing. In 2009 amalgamated and non-amalgamated councils had no choice but to raise rates. Average rate rises across Queensland's councils were commonly between five and eight per cent. I will give some examples: in the Tablelands Regional Council, rates went up six per cent; Gladstone, up 5.3 per cent; Townsville, up eight per cent; Cairns, up eight per cent; and Isaac Regional Council, up eight per cent—and they were all amalgamated councils. Some more examples include: Balonne Shire Council, up five per cent; Ipswich, up 5.7 per cent; Brisbane, up 6.4 per cent; Burdekin, up 7.5 per cent; Redland, up 7.92—and they were all non-amalgamated councils.

Some ratepayers really felt the pain. The Gold Coast increased rates by more than 11 per cent, and in Mount Isa the pain was even greater—and neither of those latter councils were amalgamated. So, despite claims to the contrary, rate rises did not correlate with amalgamation. Councils increased their rates to keep pace with costs, to continue delivering infrastructure and capital works programs such as libraries, roads, bridges and to generate much needed jobs.

I have to compliment the amalgamated councils on their tremendous work and more especially because of the impacts of the global financial crisis. There were some of Queensland's mayors and councillors who were not in favour of the amalgamation decision at the time that it was made. Nonetheless, they have accepted the task of building a stronger regional council and have firmly fixed their sights on the future, not the past. Many amalgamated councils such as Moreton Bay, Cairns, Bundaberg, Somerset, Townsville, Central Highlands and the Fraser Coast have spoken about the financial and other benefits they are already seeing consequent on amalgamation. As well as reform, the global financial crisis has put pressure on council bottom lines everywhere, and I commend them for their determination to keep rolling out infrastructure and jobs in their local communities.

Population Growth, Affordable Housing

Hon. KL STRUTHERS (Algeester—ALP) (Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women) (10.10 am): More people are moving to Queensland, and that means we need more affordable housing. That is why we have been active in supporting and growing the Brisbane Housing Co., the Gold Coast Housing Co. and other programs offering a range of affordable housing options. The Minister for Planning and infrastructure and I are convening an affordable housing summit to be held in Brisbane next week. The summit will be a round table discussion involving residential developers, local government representatives, state government agencies and peak bodies from the community housing sector. Through the forum we will explore opportunities and strategies to deliver affordable housing to meet the needs of a growing Queensland population—a population that has doubled over the last 20 years. This is an opportunity for stakeholders to meet with the government to express their ideas and thoughts and to be part of a proactive time in Queensland's planning history.

Each year 115,000 people are moving here, and we are on a mission to make sure that all people who need affordable housing can find it. Already we have taken a lot of action. Our government is rolling out more than 4,000 social housing units under the Nation Building Program and 1,600 dwellings under the Bligh government's Future Growth Fund. We are also rolling out up to 10,000 affordable dwellings across Queensland under the National Rent Affordability Scheme. Owners of units and homes built under the NRAS will be subsidised by the state and federal governments to rent out the properties at 20 per cent below market rates. This means more working couples, families, seniors and single people who do not necessarily need or qualify for social housing can find a place to live at a rent they can afford. All this construction means 10,000 jobs for builders and tradies in the 2010-11 financial year alone. Planning for population growth is a big task, and the Bligh government is meeting that challenge head-on.

Services, Non-Government Sector

Hon. A PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs) (10.12 am): Thousands of Queenslanders rely on state government funded disability services each year. As the state's population continues to grow, the number of Queenslanders with a disability will also increase. Late last year an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report predicted that 2.3 million Australians would have a profound or severe disability by 2030. To meet the ever-increasing demand for disability services in the years ahead, the state government will need to work more closely than ever before with our non-government service providers. The good news is that we are delivering more funding than ever before to the non-government sector. In 2009-10 we are providing nearly \$490 million to our NGO sector right across Queensland. This is nearly half a billion dollars.

Tonight I will be attending a dinner at Parliament House with the CEOs of the G8 who represent Queensland's eight biggest disability service providers. With the support of the Bligh government, these organisations deliver essential front-line services to thousands of Queenslanders with a disability each year. The G8 includes the Endeavour Foundation, which we give approximately \$50 million in state funding each year and which assists approximately 3,000 Queenslanders with a disability right across the state; the Cerebral Palsy League; and Lifeline Community Care. Other NGOs included in the G8 are Centacare, FSG Australia, Multicap, Life Without Barriers and the Spinal Injuries Association of Queensland. This week the Spinal Injuries Association of Queensland celebrated its 50th anniversary. I would like to congratulate Mark Henley and his team at the Spinal Injuries Association of Queensland. They help more than 1,500 Queenslanders with a spinal injury right across the state. They are doing a remarkable job, and I think all members of the House should congratulate the association on the amazing work that it does.

The Bligh government recognises the great job these organisations are doing day in, day out. Unlike the opposition, we are planning for the future and working on a 10-year disability plan. I am confident that our plan will secure even stronger partnerships with the non-government sector in the years ahead. We will continue to help more and more Queenslanders with a disability each and every year.

Nature Refuges

Hon. KJ JONES (Ashgrove—ALP) (Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability) (10.15 am): Today I have excellent news for conservation, biodiversity and the protection of important habitat in Queensland. I am pleased to announce to the House that Queensland's total protected area has hit the 10-million hectare mark. This has been achieved following land protected as nature refuges nearly doubling from 900,000 hectares to 1.7 million hectares. That is twice the size of Melbourne protected within more than 360 nature refuges. This contributes significantly to our commitment to achieve 20 million hectares of protected area by 2020. Increasing our protected areas is a key strategy of the Bligh government as we manage the impacts of growth. In fact, combined with other forms of protection such as national parks and forest reserves, it takes our total protected area to 10.3 million hectares.

We have entered into 13 new conservation agreements with landholders across the state and amended one agreement to significantly extend an existing nature refuge. As a result, Mr Acting Speaker, you would be very pleased to know that we now have the largest nature refuge located near Weipa, in your electorate. It covers a massive 283,000 hectares. Other new refuges have been signed in a range of different locations from the Sunshine Coast and Gympie, out west to the Simpson Desert National Park, Blackall and Clermont, and north to Mackay, Mareeba and Port Douglas. These agreements represent voluntary protection by Queenslanders who own areas of high conservation value. They range from nationally recognised wetlands and threatened vegetation to vast tracts and corridors of forests and bushland serving as important habitat for many threatened plants and animals including koalas, turtles, frogs, rock wallabies and several species of birds including the cassowary.

These new protected areas also provide vital landscape linkages—a critical way of adapting native species to the potential effects of climate change. We have provided more than \$2.3 million to the owners of six of these nature refuges through incentive programs to help them protect the important conservation values of their land. Partnerships with the likes of regional natural resource management groups have been critical to the success of the program. AgForce endorses the program as a vital income stream and a good guide for sustainable land use for landholders.

Workplace Safety

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.17 am): The Queensland government places the safety of workers at the top of its list of priorities. That is why I issued a ministerial statement earlier this week in relation to foil insulation. That is why we launched the zero harm program last year, and that is why we are about to conduct the state's largest ever safety education and audit campaign for medium-sized businesses. Later this month the inspection program will start. Within 12 months it is anticipated that every medium-sized business in Queensland—more than 7,700 of them—will be inspected to ensure they have effective systems in place to manage workplace health and safety. These businesses employ about one in five workers, yet they account for about one in three workers compensation claims lodged each year. The only way we can tackle this high number of workplace injuries and fatalities is to target the areas of greatest concern.

As part of the education and audit campaign, all medium-sized businesses will be offered a free voluntary safety advisory session with a workplace health and safety expert to help them identify any problems before inspections start. The free voluntary advisory sessions will allow Queensland's medium-sized businesses to work with us to discuss workplace health and safety issues, identify problem areas and develop better safety practices.

Businesses that take advantage of the offer will be given time to apply what they have learnt and make improvements to their safety systems, if needed, before being inspected. The initiative is being implemented as a response to the high percentage of workers compensation claims lodged by medium-sized businesses—those with annual payrolls of between \$1 million and \$10 million. The initiative will help medium-sized businesses reduce the number of injuries and fatalities occurring in their business and increase their capability to manage workplace health and safety risks and obligations.

The initiative will be conducted in two separate waves—with half of Queensland's medium-sized businesses to be contacted this month and the other half from September 2010. The initial response by businesses wishing to register for these sessions has been very positive—with a quarter of the businesses contacted in the first week registering their involvement and already half of the planned 57 advisory sessions booked out. I would urge all medium-sized businesses to get behind this initiative to help us reduce their claims but, more importantly, protect our workers.

Emergency Services, Capital Works Program

Hon. NS ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (10.20 am): The Bligh government is planning for continued population growth in Queensland by funding a massive \$163 million capital works program within our emergency services agencies. During this financial year a budget of \$19.25 million will support the building of two new ambulance stations and replace, refurbish and redevelop a further 18 stations in key growth locations. Seven of these 20 projects are complete, eight are currently under construction and one is at the tender stage. The remaining four projects are in the project development stage with design or contract documentation underway.

Recently I announced the successful tenderers for the new Springfield Ambulance Station in the member for Bundamba's electorate and the replacement Stanthorpe Ambulance Station in the member for Southern Downs's electorate. My parliamentary secretary, the member for Broadwater, recently turned the ceremonial first sod on the Runaway Bay ambulance project.

A budget of just under \$21 million will be used by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service to build four new fire stations and six replacement or redeveloped facilities. Of these projects, three are complete, six are under construction and land is currently being sourced for the remaining project. Building works are complete at the new Redland Bay and the replacement Nambour fire stations, and both have been opened recently. Major redevelopment works are also complete at the Southport Fire Station, which is planned to be opened later this month.

Building works are progressing well on the \$78 million Queensland Emergency Operations Centre at Kedron. This is the department's most significant emergency services capital project. The building is on track to be completed by the end of 2010 and operational by June 2011. The Bligh government is committed to building strong and safe communities, especially as the population of these communities continues to grow. Contrast that with the approach of the National Party which, at the last election, committed to slash the \$18 billion capital works program and do away with thousands of job opportunities for Queenslanders.

Mr Nicholls: Oh, that's a lie.

Mr ROBERTS: Twelve thousand a year.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Member for Clayfield you have used an unparliamentary term. I ask that you withdraw it.

Mr NICHOLLS: I withdraw, Mr Acting Speaker.

Rail Network

Hon. RG NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (Minister for Transport) (10.22 am): QR Network's business continues with major investments in new or replacement coal rail infrastructure as the state's export coal industry anticipates an upswing in demand for Queensland coal. Last financial year QR Network invested nearly \$500 million in the Queensland coal rail network and this year it will invest an additional \$230 million—helping haul more coal to export ports for mining companies. This represents investment in below-rail infrastructure, essentially the track, and does not include the millions being invested in new locomotives and wagons.

For example, an \$80 million Goonyella system upgrade is one step closer to completion with tracklaying underway to duplicate 10.5 kilometres of track between Coppabella and Ingsdon in Central Queensland. Excellent progress has been made since February 2009 when civil works commenced. The project is now ahead of schedule and due for completion this July. The project is on target to deliver increased capacity for customers in the Goonyella system with significant milestones achieved recently when critical track work commenced and civil construction works were completed.

This project and others in the Goonyella system will significantly boost track capacity, which will be available to operators such as Pacific National and QRNational to haul coal to the export terminals at Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay. Over the past three years, QR Network's infrastructure investments have increased the Goonyella system's capacity by 30 per cent to 130 million tonnes per annum to keep pace with demand at the privately owned Hay Point coal terminals.

The Coppabella to Ingsdon project follows a series of upgrades on the Goonyella system, most recently the Coppabella yard upgrade, Stephens and Harrow passing loops and the \$500 million Jilalan rail yard upgrade. Through the delivery of a \$1 billion works program since 2006, COALRail—part of QR Network's rail infrastructure business—plays a vital role in improving Queensland's coal rail network and supply chain performance through the effective delivery of both new infrastructure and upgrades to existing infrastructure.

Kangaroo Point Park

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology) (10.25 am): I hope honourable members of the House have had the chance to visit Brisbane's newest park at Kangaroo Point. Several thousand people turned up to see the Premier officially open the park last month and enjoy the million dollar views of the Brisbane River and CBD. This government is committed to providing more recreational facilities across the state and strongly encourages Queenslanders to experience our great outdoors.

The Kangaroo Point Park, covering almost one hectare, is the latest example of that commitment and offers something for everyone. The park includes a series of viewing promontories along the cliff side, an amphitheatre, an accessible pedestrian loop around the park, a modest cafe, an open green expanse in the centre of the park, barbecues, tables and play spaces.

A collaborative design workshop funded by Arts Queensland in March 2009 set the framework for the park's design. Project Services then refined and developed the design and the park was delivered by the Department of Public Works in consultation with key stakeholders, including the Brisbane City Council.

Queensland company Hutchinson Builders were contracted for major parks work development, while another Queensland company, Rosenlund Contractors, undertook demolition works. Both companies performed admirably. Around 75 jobs were supported by the project and approximately 250 people worked on the project during construction. During construction the budget was increased to allow for the reuse of the beautiful Brisbane tuff stone which was excavated and used in the walkways and feature walls. I invite members to have a look at that; it is magnificent.

Brisbane tuff was not the only thing to be recycled from the site. In fact, Kangaroo Point Park was the pilot project for our government's whole-of-government recycling policy. More than 90 per cent of building materials from the former TAFE buildings have been recycled. I will say that again because that is a record. More than 90 per cent of building materials have been recycled. This far exceeds the original target of 60 per cent and demonstrates a new direction in green construction.

At the park's opening the Premier also unveiled the winner of the state-wide poll for the major public artwork. The winner, British artist Wolfgang Buttress's *Venus Rising*, is a lace-like sculpture stretching some 30 metres into the sky and is sure to become an icon for the city. Of the 3,490 people who voted, 59 per cent voted for *Venus Rising*—a clear winner. That is nearly as good as my margin in Rockhampton. The park has already proved its popularity at the Australia Day fireworks and is sure to be a great option for families, friends and tourists to gather in a tranquil setting so close to the city.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Media

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.27 am): The Brisbane Council of Elders expressed to me its view that there are too few visible television and other media people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are so many talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, but they are drastically underrepresented in our newsrooms, publications, over the airwaves and on the small screen. If we are truly going to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teenagers to be our leaders of the future, then the community needs to encourage them to become our next generation of journalists, actors and production staff, and that includes the business end of town.

As the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, I have taken this up with a number of media organisations and asked them what they are doing. I am pleased to say that Foxtel's Chief Executive and Managing Director, Keith Williams, has told me his organisation sees reconciliation as a pillar of its corporate responsibility. In 2007 when Foxtel welcomed national Indigenous television to its platform, it gave over six million viewers access to Australia's first national Indigenous television service. Embedding reconciliation into its three-year creative strategy, Foxtel will this year be airing a series of short stories featuring six talented Indigenous performing artists, and I look forward to seeing and hearing more on that front. Unlike the opposition—which seeks not to recognise Aboriginal people in the Constitution preamble, in welcomes to country—our government is supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders to achieve a full career.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Issues Paper

Mr MOORHEAD (Waterford—ALP) (10.29 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Economic Development Committee's issues paper No. 2 titled *Inquiry into the road safety benefits of fixed speed cameras*.

Tabled paper: Economic Development Committee, Issues Paper No. 2, March 2010, titled 'Inquiry into the road safety benefits of fixed speed cameras' [1892].

The committee's inquiry will consider the most effective and efficient means of utilising new and existing fixed speed camera technology to make Queensland's roads safer.

The Economic Development Committee has the road safety jurisdiction, formerly the province of the Travelsafe Committee, and the committee takes this responsibility seriously. In 2009, 22.1 per cent of all Queensland fatalities involved speeding drivers or riders. Fixed speed cameras are one tool that we can use to reduce the number of drivers speeding. Research has found that fixed speed cameras can reduce average vehicle speeds and create a safer road speed environment. However, public concerns over the appropriate location and use of these cameras demands a considered approach. The committee's inquiry is an opportunity for community and stakeholders to respond to the issues of speed enforcement raised in the issues paper. I commend the committee's issues paper to the House.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Issues Paper

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (10.30 am): I lay upon the table of the House an issues paper prepared by the Social Development Committee in order to seek public submissions for the committee's inquiry into addressing cannabis related harm in Queensland. The inquiry uses as its starting point the research paper published by Drug Free Australia titled *Cannabis—suicide, schizophrenia and other ill-effects* and the committee will consider the risks associated with cannabis use, particularly for young people, and strategies to reduce the level of cannabis use in Queensland. I commend the issues paper to the House.

Tabled paper: Social Development Committee, Issues Paper titled 'Inquiry into addressing cannabis related harm in Queensland' [1893].

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Solar Hot Water Program

Mr LANGBROEK (10.31 am): My first question without notice is to the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading. Minister, Conergy solar hot-water systems that have turned up in homes all across Queensland as a result of Labor's botched scheme carry a warranty conditional on the installer being licensed. Given that the minister advised the House that Conergy was found to be unlicensed, will the Labor government now reveal how many consumers have been left unprotected because they have void warranties, and when will he answer the question that he failed to answer yesterday?

Mr LAWLOR: I thank the honourable member for the question. Yesterday I did undertake to get back to the House with information about that question, and this gives me the opportunity to do so. More than 1,600 Queensland families are enjoying the benefits of their new solar hot-water systems installed as part of the Queensland Solar Hot Water Program administered by the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy.

The Office of Fair Trading, as part of its consumer protection role, receives and considers complaints against installers and suppliers of solar hot-water systems. The first installation under the program was on 8 October last year. Since that time the Office of Fair Trading has received from consumers 16 complaints regarding solar hot-water systems. None of these complaints related to safety issues—none of the complaints.

I am also advised that, as part of the government's ongoing operational procedures, a comprehensive audit has been conducted of all tradespeople involved in the installation of systems undertaken to date under the program. Its findings confirm that all installations were completed by plumbers and electricians with the appropriate occupational trade licences. As a result, the state-wide audit by the Office of Clean Energy can confirm that all systems installed under the program have been installed by tradespeople with appropriate and current occupational trade licences required for the installation of hot-water systems under the Queensland regulatory requirements. In addition, the Brisbane City Council has been inspecting and approving installations under the program and has advised that the rate of reinspection of systems under the program has been very low to date. I do not have figures of the reinspections by the Brisbane City Council, but that is in addition to the auditing program that I have just mentioned.

The interesting thing about the email or letter that was sent to various people is that I did discuss this with the particular person involved on election day. He expressed to me his concern that the system that would have been in place—or that he anticipated would be in place—would result in a detriment to his business, with jobs being lost and so on. He expressed his concerns about reshuffling employment from local small business to just one or two tender partners, an unfair selection process system and installation based on price not efficiency, among other concerns. But the interesting thing is that he did tender and he was successful and he was rolling out 30 solar hot-water systems per week under this program.

Home Insulation Program

Mr LANGBROEK: My second question without notice is also to the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading. The State Emergency Service at Mackay says that the majority of roofs it has tarped this wet season were left unsecured by insulation installers. Minister, these are roofs in North Queensland left unsafe by the Labor Party's botched home insulation scheme. Given that we are still in the cyclone season, how many homes are in this dangerous state and when will the minister order their rectification?

Mr LAWLOR: I thank the honourable member for the question. As part of its ongoing consumer protection role, the Queensland Office of Fair Trading does receive and consider complaints against insulation installers, and I presume that these will be some of those complaints. Just by the way, yesterday Minister Greg Combet announced that anyone who was concerned about their insulation could contact the Australian government safety hotline on 131792. A memorandum of understanding between the Office of Fair Trading and the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts was established to enable the Office of Fair Trading to provide the details of complaints received against registered insulation installers to the department.

The Office of Fair Trading has finalised—and I mentioned this before—208 complaints since January 2009. The complaints relate to issues associated with simple requests for assistance to obtain refunds, complaints about installers' workmanship, the cost and also concerns about safety issues. Details of these complaints have been provided to the federal department. As I said, there have been 208 since 1 January and 181 complaints in the 7½ months since this scheme started. Of all the insulation complaints received since 1 January, 17 indicated some type of safety problem. Only five of those were actually valid and were reported to the federal department. With regard to the issue that the member raises about the installation and the lack of workmanship, if complaints have been made to the Office of Fair Trading they will be properly investigated and, if necessary, those installers will be prosecuted.

Bligh Labor Government

Mr KILBURN: My question without notice is to the Premier. Can the Premier please update the House on what the government has been delivering for Queenslanders over the past week?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for his question. The government has been on the job delivering for the people of Queensland. This week the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and I started construction on the Queensland Children's Hospital. That means that we now have under construction in Queensland the newest children's hospital in Australia that will provide the best tertiary level care for children from all over our state.

We have been working with local councils and SES emergency workers right across the south-west helping to secure townships during the worst flood crisis that they have experienced.

We are moving to keep people safer on our roads with the introduction of legislation that will bring Queensland to the forefront of managing drink driving and discouraging drink drivers. One of the other things I did this week that is important in terms of delivering on jobs is that I launched the joint venture between Wagners and the Wood Group that will secure 1,000 jobs in the Toowoomba area, on current estimates, that will deliver Queensland's slice of the pie for one of the new emerging boom industries in this country.

We have a clear economic strategy, we have a jobs plan, and we are rolling out that plan. In our infrastructure program, we are providing jobs for Queenslanders. In our Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, 20,000 job seekers have now been assisted. In our Green Army program, there have been 62 projects with 883 work placements to date and 306 traineeships. Our tax rebates for apprentices and trainees have now been applied to 18½ thousand apprentices and trainees.

The good news this morning is that our jobs program continues to work for Queenslanders. Today's unemployment figures show that trend unemployment in Queensland has dropped again—from 5.8 per cent to 5.7 per cent. This month is the seventh consecutive month in which jobs have been created and unemployment is being beaten. So we have had jobs growth for seven consecutive months. Why? Because we have a jobs program that is delivering and securing jobs.

What is the program of those opposite? To sack 1,000 people a month. One thousand people a month was its program—get rid of 1,000 jobs, take 1,000 jobs a month out of the Queensland economy. That is what they went to the election with and promised and, thankfully, the people of Queensland rejected their crazy strategy. Our program means jobs for Queenslanders.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Gregory, I heard that. It is unparliamentary. I ask that you withdraw.

Mr JOHNSON: I withdraw and I apologise.

Health System

Mr McARDLE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Last night when Labor members were patting themselves on the back because of their great contribution to health, one Labor MP skited—

In the Bligh government, health policy is run by the Premier and the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, not by bureaucrats or party officials.

If this is so, will the minister today visit Mr Hans Hagen, a 70-year-old Forest Lake resident who is listed as being in need of urgent brain surgery within 30 days, to explain to him in person why he has been waiting 267 days for urgent brain surgery? Or will the minister continue to sit here and pat himself on the back for the great job that he says he is doing?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. If the honourable member gives me the details, then I am more than happy to have my department urgently examine it. I say this: if someone is waiting over that period for that sort of surgery, then I would be extremely concerned about it. I imagine that, rather than speaking to me, one of the most important things that someone in that situation would be seeking would be to actually have the surgery done, and I expect that to happen.

Regrettably, in the past what happened in politics in Queensland—and it used to happen in housing and in the days of jobs under Bjelke-Petersen, and those people on the other side of the chamber spend their time glorifying it—is if you were connected with them you got your house earlier and you got other things done earlier. I do not expect that to happen. I expect our clinicians to appropriately prioritise people. If there is an issue with that, then that is a matter that is of significant concern to me. I should not be saying who should go in what order on a list.

Having said that, the most important challenge confronting us in health is an ever-ageing population with ever-increasing demands on our health system. One of the most important things that we can do in the political sphere is to provide the money and the resources to provide for that to happen. In 1996-97, what was the health budget then? It was \$2.7 billion. Now it is \$9.3 billion.

Mr McArdle: You said we couldn't go back to the past last night.

Mr LUCAS: No, the member legitimised it last night by his resolution. It is regrettable that a serious question like this is asked and I am not allowed to answer it by the opposition.

I would have thought, for people in Queensland, that we would engage in a debate about how we might continue to fund and raise the funds for the further demands on us for surgery and medical treatments into the future. I have not heard one suggestion from the opposition or one alternative policy from the opposition, notwithstanding the massive increase by this government in funding. I am more than happy to have that matter examined.

People's Question Time

Mr WATT: My question is directed to the Premier. Can the Premier update the House on the first ever people's question time, which was held on 26 February, and advise the House of when the next question time will be and what the subject will be?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. This was an interesting experiment in e-democracy and we saw people very keen and willing to participate. Thousands of Queenslanders took up the opportunity. There were more than 2,000 separate log-ins to view the video stream live. We received 180 questions from all over Queensland, both in the lead-up to and during the session. I can say that in every single one of those cases the questions were much more intelligent, carefully thought through and well researched than any of the questions that we get in here from those opposite.

An opposition member: All your Labor mates.

Ms BLIGH: I take that interjection which implies that the Queenslanders who participated in people's question time were in some way associated with only one side of politics. Queenslanders are people who are interested in their community and they took the opportunity, in some cases, to make critical comment of me and the government and to ask probing and tough questions. In this process, I do not see the questions beforehand and I do not control which questions get put to me. That is done by an independent facilitator.

As I said, the panel, the Minister for Education and Training and I discussed questions ranging from moving year 7 into high school through to air conditioning in schools. Queenslanders are very interested in what is happening in their schools and I thank them for their involvement.

I am pleased to advise the House that the next people's question time will be held on 24 March and the topic for that one will be the challenges and opportunities of growth in Queensland. Clearly, at the end of March we will have our growth summit. This is an opportunity for people to participate in that public debate. I am looking forward to hearing again from people about their issues. It is an opportunity for them to put questions directly to me. Obviously, with that many questions being put it is impossible to answer all of them in one session. What we are doing is ensuring that everybody who asks a question is provided with a response that deals with the major issues that were raised during the one-hour session.

I thank the Queensland University of Technology which is partnering in terms of establishing the technological parameters of the program. We will learn more as we go through it, but from the very first people's question time it is clear that Queenslanders are engaged with government, they are engaged with the ideas of our time, they are seeking an opportunity to play a role, to influence and to shape. Under this government they will get that opportunity.

Mr Wilson: They are thinking for the future, unlike those opposite.

Ms BLIGH: Queenslanders are interested in the future of Queensland, they are interested in shaping it and I want to hear what they have to say because, unlike those opposite, these are real Queenslanders who are interested in a better future.

Local Government Reform

Mr SPRINGBORG: My question is to the Minister for Local Government. The Beattie-Bligh government was warned that its forced council amalgamations would result in higher rates, higher costs, bloated bureaucracy, more inefficiencies and less community representation. Given that Labor's forced amalgamation agenda now lies in tatters, does the minister finally admit that forced council amalgamations are just the latest Bligh government debacle?

Ms BOYLE: I hope the member for Southern Downs was listening when I read out to the House some of the information about the rate rises in local governments and how there was no correlation between the rate rises of the amalgamated and the non-amalgamated councils in 2009.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Ms BOYLE: That information is and has been on the local government website and all council websites. The member opposite can say it but that does not make it true. In fact, councillors and mayors who were not in favour of amalgamation at the time are coming out publicly, openly, and declaring already—two years down the track—huge cost savings and benefits from amalgamation. Let us have a look at Moreton Bay Regional Council.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I am on my feet. I have warned you three times today.

Ms BOYLE: Moreton Bay Regional Council, within the first term of the amalgamation, achieved \$34 million in savings. The Cairns Regional Council has a report that says it will achieve \$7.3 million in savings just in administrative costs in the next five years. The big councils involving the difficult amalgamations are reporting huge benefits. Bundaberg, for example, which was an amalgamation of four councils—some component councils not being financially strong—is reporting tremendous savings. Compliments must go to Mayor Lorraine Pyefinch who has taken on this hard job and is leading the council superbly. Recently she said that the amalgamation has brought savings in areas such as machinery purchase. She stated—

We are able to look at our fleet across the whole region. Because we can bulk up a contract we can negotiate a much better price. Because of the potential to get economies of scale we can get better value for the dollar. There could be millions of dollars in that.

This is not just the case in relation to the bigger councils but the smaller councils as well. Somerset has reaped savings in libraries, road construction and in additional employees being taken on for maintenance purposes. Amalgamations are going well.

However, Queensland councils are very nervous of the policy of the LNP government. 'Wind back amalgamations', those opposite are saying. They will deamalgamate Noosa; they will deamalgamate Douglas from Cairns. Deamalgamation is their policy, and that is back to the future indeed. It is most unsettling when councils have led the way in difficult times, are finding the benefits and reporting the benefits for all of us in Queensland to see.

Jobs

Ms FARMER: My question without notice is to the Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development. Can the Treasurer please update the House on the latest job figures for Queensland?

Mr FRASER: I thank the member for Bulimba for her question and her interest in job creation. On a number of occasions I have visited her electorate where projects like the Green Army are giving Queenslanders a go to get into the labour force for the first time, to get skills to get their first job and to give them a start in life.

As the Premier said this morning, the ABS released its labour force stats at 10.30 Queensland time and, as the Premier said, unemployment went down in Queensland—down to 5.7 per cent. There was job creation again in Queensland last month: 3,700 jobs were created in Queensland. That is the seventh month in a row that jobs have been created in Queensland. That is jobs created in August, September, October, November, December and now January: 24,600 jobs created over the last seven months. That means that, as of today, right now, with the release of the ABS statistics, the target for our

100,000 jobs commitment has been reduced to 88,200 as we are on our way to delivering on the commitment. What we see in action is evidence of an economic plan. We have held our nerve, made the decisions and jobs are being delivered. That is the plan that we put in place for Queensland. That is the commitment that we gave to the people of Queensland, and we are delivering on that commitment and delivering on jobs.

Mr Nicholls interjected.

Mr FRASER: We do so while the participation rate—the number of people looking for work in Queensland—remains the second highest in the country. That jobs growth that we have seen in Queensland outstripped Western Australia last month. I note the inane interjections once again from the Barnaby Joyce wannabe shadow Treasurer about full-time jobs. I am happy to tell him that last month, of the 3,700 jobs created, 3,300 of them were full-time jobs. What we see from those opposite is nothing—idleness and, as of last night, idle threats. Last night in this parliament the shadow minister for natural resources made idle threats against the officers of the Department of Environment and Resource Management, questioning their integrity and their independence.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. I find the Treasurer's dishonesty offensive. I said the officers would be forced to use real science, and I stand by that statement. I find his words offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr FRASER: Their idle threats that they extended last night to officers of the Public Service, as they have done to the Treasury before—

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The member for Callide has found offence in something that you have said. I have given you the opportunity to withdraw. I now ask you to withdraw.

Mr FRASER: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I withdraw. The idle threats that have been extended by members of the LNP have gone to the Queensland Treasury. They have gone also to the CMC; the Integrity Commissioner, David Solomon; the Police Commissioner, Bob Atkinson; and the Electoral Commissioner. The LNP is questioning the integrity of the boundaries of this state without a shred of evidence. What we saw last night was a window to the future. The idleness of the members opposite extends to idle threats against every institution that supports government in this state. Their idleness continues to see them have a jobs target of zero and no economic plan while this government delivers jobs right across the state for the people of Queensland.

Comments by Premier

Mr NICHOLLS: My question is to the Premier. It has been 1,553 days since the Premier seconded a motion to exonerate the former member for Sandgate, declaring—

For those of us who are colleagues of the member for Sandgate, for those of us who have worked with him, for those of us who have sat with him around a cabinet table and know him to be a decent man—a man of integrity ...

When the Premier was distracted from her job yesterday when she was called to another building in George Street, did the Premier reflect on her past actions and statements and does she finally concede she owes Queenslanders an apology for them?

Acting Speaker's Ruling, Question Out of Order

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Upon receiving advice I rule that that question is asking about a matter that is currently before the court. The question breaches the sub judice rule and therefore is out of order.

Community Safety

Ms STONE: My question is for the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services. Can the minister inform the House how the Labor government has made the Queensland community safer?

Mr ROBERTS: I thank the member for her question and her interest in law and order issues. The Bligh government is tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. The government has put in place a number of initiatives to support the Police Service and Corrective Services to achieve that goal. For example, we have a commitment to maintain the police to population ratio at equal to or better than the national average. The current rate is around one officer for every 427 people; the national average is around one officer for every 440 people.

We have a commitment to have an additional 600 police officers over this term. We have introduced telephone intercept powers for the Queensland Police Service. We have introduced tough criminal organisation laws, which the National Party opposed in this parliament. We are expanding our prison system. With the capital works program over the last couple of years, this year and into the

future, we will have an additional 1,200 new cells for our prison system. We are supporting the continued rollout of tasers for our police officers to give them every possible tool they need to deal with criminal activity in the community.

The National Party regularly talks tough about crime, but when we look at the facts of law and order we see that those opposite are as weak as water. Let us look at what they have delivered. They delivered low police numbers and high crime rates in this state. That is what the figures tell us. In terms of the police to population ratio, when the Nationals were in power it was one police officer for every 507 people. Under Labor it is one police officer for every 427 people—a significant improvement. Not only was crime higher under the National Party; clearance rates were also lower. In terms of offences against the person, under the National Party 62 per cent of offences were cleared. Under the Labor Party up to 72 per cent of offences were cleared. The overall rate of crime has reduced by 21.5 per cent under Labor, property offences are down 42.5 per cent and offences against the person are down 18.7 per cent.

In terms of escapes from high-security prisons, there were 13 in the last year of the National Party and there have been zero under the Labor Party. In terms of drugs in prisons, under the National Party in its last year 25 per cent of people tested positive to targeted tests for drugs. Under the Labor Party it is 3.8 per cent. We have reduced it. The National Party in this state is all talk and no action when it comes to law and order. Those opposite are as weak as water. The facts show that what they delivered to the people of Queensland was low police numbers and high crime rates.

Schools, Solar Panels

Mr SEENEY: My question without notice is to the Premier. Following Labor's failed insulation scheme and Labor's failed solar hot water election promise, I refer now to Labor's \$60 million promise to install solar power in state schools. After two years, only approximately 20 per cent of the promised solar panels have been installed. Is the solar schools scheme another false green promise from a failed Labor government?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. This government is serious about solar. We believe that Queensland can and should be the solar state of Australia and we have a range of policies to make that happen. I want to make one comment on the solar hot-water scheme. I want to make it absolutely clear that our government is redesigning a solar hot-water scheme and we will deliver one. Mr Acting Speaker, do you know why? Because it gives people an opportunity to generate clean, green energy and, more importantly, it gives them a real opportunity to lower their electricity bills. For most households, electric hot water will contribute up to 30 per cent of the cost of electricity for the house. If they can eliminate 30 per cent, then that is a good thing, and we are determined to help Queenslanders achieve just that.

Let me go to the schools program. I am very pleased to advise the House that it is actually on track. Of the 1,250 schools in Queensland which we are determined to deliver solar panels to, 515 now have those solar panels. We are close to halfway through the program. As I understand it, that program is on track.

I have been into some of the schools that have these panels. I would recommend to some of the members opposite to go and have a look, because it is not just the panels that are important in this program. These panels are connected to software that can be accessed within classrooms so that children from the youngest of ages can log on in the classroom with their teachers and see how much electricity is being generated by the panels on their roofs. They can see the cumulative annual total and they can understand the contribution that their school is making to energy generation in Queensland.

Mr Wallace: They want to go back to the carbine light.

Ms BLIGH: I take the interjection from the minister. Solar is an important part of our future. Labor is going to create a solar future here in Queensland. We will do it at the household level, as I have described. We will do it on public buildings like schools. We will do it in partnership with organisations like the Clinton Foundation, which we have funded to work with us to identify the best place for major solar thermal energy in Queensland.

Queenslanders understand the power of the sun. They want to be part of these programs and we will deliver these programs for them. Mr Acting Speaker, do you know what? As we do that, we will be creating jobs. All of this is not only about great solar energy. It provides the possibility of a solar industry here in Queensland that will create jobs and hopefully one day we can expect to see solar manufacturing. That is what we should aspire to, to further diversify our economy. That will see our work and our jobs and employment programs even more successful than they are now, while those opposite sit with a zero jobs target and a zero jobs policy.

Surat Basin

Mr SHINE: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland. Can the minister please update the House on measures underway to handle the massive growth predicted in the Surat Basin?

Mr MULHERIN: I thank the member for Toowoomba North for his question. As we know, the member for Toowoomba North takes great interest in what happens within his region. There are great opportunities that will come that region's way because of the Surat Basin. Last week I had the privilege of being in Dalby with the mayor of Western Downs, Ray Brown, and his councillors at the Ostwald Bros complex, where we launched the Surat Basin Future Directions Statement. This is really about government looking at the lessons we have learned from the Bowen Basin and the pressure it puts on communities with rapid growth. We want to make sure we get it right.

LNG is worth \$40 billion to the Queensland economy. The Surat Basin takes in the regional councils of Toowoomba, Western Downs and Maranoa and has very strong links to Banana through to the port city of Gladstone. We want to make sure that we work together with those communities and industry to ensure that we handle that growth. The Surat Basin Future Directions Statement is really about a structured way forward in dealing with this growth. We want to work with local government. We want to work with communities. We want to work with the federal government. We want to work with industry. So part of that statement is really about some work that we have to do in the short term. It is a document that looks 30 years ahead.

Some of the work that will be completed to assist in dealing with growth by January 2011 are: the preferred settlement pattern for the Surat Basin to guide regional planning; a regional planning framework to be developed by 2010; a regional transport investigation by December 2010, covering various transport modes as well as alternatives or complementary non-infrastructure solutions to transport issues; a resource town housing affordability strategy to improve the availability of quality affordable housing; social impact management plans by July 2010 to better understand what social infrastructure will be required because of this growth; and of course an economic strategy for the Surat Basin region. There are a number of communities in that area and we know that agriculture as an agribusiness is very important to that area. So we will be developing a framework around that.

We have the strategic cropping land policy statement, which is about how we protect cropping land. We also have a workforce development plan—and we had the announcement yesterday of the Wood Group Wagners consortium—to make sure that we have the skills there to take the region forward.

(Time expired)

People's Question Time

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Premier's special people's question time. Given that Queenslanders have never, ever been given a say on the Bligh Labor government's forced privatisation plans, will the Premier give Queenslanders—the owners of these assets—a special people's question time to ask about Labor's deceitful privatisation plans and will the Premier guarantee this special question time will take place before any asset is privatised?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I indicated earlier, this has been a really successful program.

Mr Johnson: Have a referendum.

Ms BLIGH: This has been a success to date but it is early days. I indicated—

Mr Lucas: You didn't have one before you pulled up the railway line.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Ms BLIGH: I indicated that we would learn as we went along about how to ensure that as many people who wanted to have a say on something could.

Mr Johnson: Didn't sell it.

Ms BLIGH: No, you sold Suncorp, that is what you did, and you did it without a referendum and without a people's question time and without so much as how do you do, as I recall.

One of the ideas that we have thought of is having some structure. We have had the first session and the one I have identified around some structured topics so we can have a couple of people there with expertise as well as the political representatives, but it has been my view that we should also structure into the program some that are completely open without any containment at all on the topic,

just as you would in question time here or just as I do when I face community cabinet. So there will be plenty of opportunities for Queenslanders through the people's question time to raise issues around the asset sales with me if they wish to do so, and I would be very happy to answer their questions.

Do you know what? Since we made this decision to have community cabinets—and I think we have had eight or nine of them; I would have to go back and check—I have had one question on asset sales in that entire time: one. So I am very happy to answer questions on asset sales. I do note that there are hardly any questions on asset sales from those opposite. They have not wanted to ask about that today. Even on Tuesday when it was clearly going to be the issue of the day, there was one question, just one. That was all they could think of, just one question. What we have on privatisation over there is the fraud squad. All along the front bench, they are all on the record saying that government assets should be managed in a way that is in the interests of people and commercial businesses are not the business of government.

So we have an economic program that is about restoring the budget to strength. Why? Because we want to build Queensland. We are securing the infrastructure program. It is a very simple program: have a budget that is capable of borrowing the money needed for infrastructure. What does that do? It creates jobs. What is that doing? It is driving down unemployment. Every piece of evidence is pointing to the fact that our strategy is working. We have a clear strategy and we intend to continue with it. What have we heard from those opposite? A whole week of parliament has gone by again and there has not been a single new idea. We have weary, tired, old folk coming in here with no spring in their step and nothing to say.

Local Government, Funding

Mr WETTENHALL: My question is to the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. Minister, how much of the Bligh government's funding for local councils is actually going into rural and regional Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: That is a very good question from the member for Barron River, and I am very pleased to give him the answer. Our record investment in local government funding stands at \$1.97 billion since just 2006. Significantly, more than three-quarters of this funding, administered through the local government service division of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning, has been invested outside the south-east corner of the state. That is over 79 per cent, totalling some \$1.5 billion, which is going to regional and rural Queensland.

I thought some members of the House might like to hear how that translates in their electorates. For example, the member for Gregory may be interested to know that \$22.4 million has been committed to the Barcaldine Regional Council to rebuild earlier flood damaged infrastructure. Almost half a million dollars will go to a Central Highlands waste water treatment plant, \$2 million will go to work at Emerald Airport, and more than \$384,000 will be spent on an upgrade of Quilpie shire's town water supply.

I thought the shadow spokesperson for local government, the member for Warrego, might like to hear what is happening in his electorate but he has left the House.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Members on my left, please come to order. Minister, it is a long-held practice in the House that we do not refer to absences of other members. There could be any reason why the honourable member is not here.

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to let constituents in the electorate of Warrego know that we have been providing funds which subsidise their ratepayers on some huge projects. We have provided disaster relief to the Bulloo Shire Council, there is \$3.75 million for waste projects in the Western Downs Regional Council, and we have provided \$1.14 million for the Maranoa Regional Council for a water project. The member for Gympie might be interested to know about projects with his council. We have provided \$131,000 for a multipurpose community centre at Maranoa—sorry, that is over in the Warrego electorate. In Gympie, there is \$11.7 million for the Gympie sewage treatment plant and \$8.7 million for the Cooloolooloo sewage treatment plant.

These funds are being spent in councils all over Queensland. They subsidise the pain for ratepayers because they are essential projects that could not otherwise be afforded by the ratepayers.

Ambulance Service

Mr MALONE: My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. I refer the minister to the Queensland Ambulance Service's outdated analog network. When will the network be upgraded to eliminate the thousands of black spots across the state, including in Brisbane and the south-east? When will this government start doing the right thing and reimburse paramedics who are forced to use their own mobile phones to call for backup because the Queensland Ambulance Service network does not work?

Mr ROBERTS: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government has invested heavily in upgrading technology within the Ambulance Service, as the member is well aware. Millions of dollars have been spent on upgrading the computer aided dispatch system, and money has been spent on upgrading the communication systems that ambulance workers use. Every opportunity has been taken to invest in the Queensland Ambulance Service and to improve the resources that are available to ambulance officers.

Communications equipment is a significant issue for all emergency services, and it is an area where a number of significant improvements have been made in recent years. The member is continually out there seeking to undermine public confidence in the Ambulance Service. Again, I just point out the fact that we are currently investing heavily. We have invested \$78 million in a new 000 emergency communications centre at Kedron which will be the hub for coordinating communications and dispatches across Queensland. As I have indicated, there is a computer aided dispatch system which integrates both the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and it has significantly increased the capacity of the services to respond to incidents.

There are a few other things I would like to talk about with respect to our investment in the Ambulance Service because the investment has not just been in communications technology, although I have to say I am very proud of that and I am continuing to improve on it. For example, funding was recently made available for GPS systems and navigation systems in all ambulances across Queensland. The member has put a question on notice and he will get a comprehensive response to that showing that we have rolled out GPS technology to enable ambulance officers to get to locations with that supporting advice. In terms of the other investments that the government has made in the Ambulance Service to assist ambos to do their job, we had an extra 250 ambulance officers last financial year, an extra 50 this year and an extra 250 in the budget the year before, and we are rolling out 140 to 150 new vehicles a year.

That is the investment this government has made in the Ambulance Service. The investment that the National Party is proposing—which I have not heard anything about—pales into insignificance in terms of the investment that we are putting into technology. We are keeping our ambulance officers up to speed with the most modern technology to respond to the demands which are growing year by year within the community.

In terms of ambulance officers, we have the best ambulance officer to population ratio in the country. We are supporting our ambulance officers with technology. We are supporting our ambulance officers with the training they need to do to their job. We are supporting our ambulance officers with the resources they need to do their job. It is about time we heard something positive coming out of the member for Mirani's mouth about the Ambulance Service. He and a number of his colleagues continually seek to undermine public confidence—not just in the Ambulance Service, but in the fire service and Corrective Services. Wherever it is, opposition members are all about undermining public confidence. I am proud of the service that the Ambulance Service provides to the people of Queensland and we are providing them with the resources they need to do their job.

Health System

Mrs SCOTT: My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health. Australia is facing a rapid ageing of its population, with a resulting increase in pressure on our health system. Could the Deputy Premier advise the House of what actions the state is undertaking to deal with this? How has the LNP dealt with the matter both now and in the past?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. The intergenerational report lays it all out there in stark relief for us. By 2050 the population of Australia over 65 will double, those over 80 will quadruple and those of working age will almost halve. That is a challenge that confronts us in health. It is not a linear acceleration; it is an exponential one. The great challenge for us is to deal with people whose health conditions as they get older get worse.

It was very interesting to read the article in the *Courier-Mail*—which I tabled—from the member for Gympie titled 'Baby boomers "selfish", says shadow infrastructure minister David Gibson'. The article states—

'It never ceases to amaze me when I listen to the baby boomers who are just incredibly selfish in expecting that other generations will pay for their retirement,' said Mr Gibson ... 'We have a situation here where we have a generation that has paid their taxes, and I'll accept that, but has done nothing to prepare themselves for retirement.'

Tabled paper: *Courier-Mail* article, dated 11 March 2010, titled 'Baby boomers "selfish", says MP' [1894].

This is a generation that did not benefit from compulsory superannuation—which was brought in by Labor and opposed by the Tories—and that is now aged 65 and retiring. That is what the shadow minister says for all those people who, in increasing numbers, are ageing and are therefore having more health issues confronting them, which is therefore putting more pressure on the health system.

Have we seen a policy announcement from the other side of the House on how it might deal with that? No. We have heard another purler from Barnaby Joyce. He told ABC NewsRadio that the only reason health spending would ever rise in the future was because of Labor profligacy. It is good to know that the fundamental budgetary problems of an ageing society are to do with politics. That is what he said. In other words, an ageing population with four times the number of people over 80 by 2050 is all Labor's fault, and we should do nothing other than keep the current level of health expenditure. That shows how bereft they are.

We know that in 1996-97—and it is all legitimate because they raised it last night—the health spend at the state level was \$2.7 billion. Now it is over \$9 billion. Elective surgery in 1997-98 was \$81,000—

Mr Messenger: 'I know the member for Sandgate well. He is an honest man.'

Mr LUCAS: I thank the parliamentary whip for the opposition. They have put you in the least visible place in the whole chamber, and that is good for them and us.

Staffing of doctors has more than doubled from 3,300 in 1996 to 7,080 today. We had a health quality complaints commissioner; you did not have one. You had Goss's health rights commission on which you put a National Party ex-staffer to Joh. That is your attitude to things. We publish our results quarterly. Under someone who was a health minister in that government, you did not know what happened because you did not publish it.

Criminal History, Charges

Mr FOLEY: My question without notice is to the Attorney-General. A constituent of mine was charged due to allegations that the complainant minor later admitted were false. He lost his house defending these charges, which were later withdrawn by the police prosecutor at court. Even though no conviction was recorded, this has tarnished an innocent man's record and continues to make it difficult for him to find employment. What can be done to expunge these false charges from his record, as every time he has to disclose them he feels like he is being treated as guilty until proven innocent?

Mr DICK: I thank the honourable member for his question. In respect of employment, the advice I have is that there is no general obligation to disclose a criminal charge to a potential employer. However, for certain professions and occupations that is required. For example, under section 332 of the Corrective Services Act, an applicant for employment with Corrective Services has to disclose a conviction or charge of an offence. The recent passage of the criminal history screening bill, which I understand is to commence shortly although in a staged fashion, means there is now a link between screening by the children's commission for blue cards, disability services for yellow cards, teacher registration, screening of some Public Service employees, and screening of health students on clinical placement. All of these will require a disclosure of a non-conviction charge.

There are also other circumstances where charges would need to be disclosed such as health practitioner registration, admission as a legal practitioner in Queensland and joining the Police Service. The existence of a charge for which there is no conviction is not a disqualifying fact in all of those circumstances. However, it is a matter where something must be disclosed and then decision makers make a decision subsequently. That happens in admissions before the Supreme Court in cases of not only charges of criminal conduct but also actions of dishonesty—for example, plagiarism at university. Then the court makes a decision about whether the individual should be admitted to practice.

I acknowledge the distress that that process can cause for individuals, but the purpose of the provisions is to provide the greatest information to employers to allow them to make appropriate choices for the protection of the community ultimately. There is a general concern which I think all honourable members would acknowledge in the community that persons who have been guilty of criminal offences are not employed in positions of trust. There are many reasons charges are not proceeded with, and employers must be able to be informed of all relevant circumstances. However, it does not mean a person who has not been convicted will not get a job. There is a general need for provisions of these types, and community interest supports them, in my view, to ensure protection is available to the community.

It is a protective mechanism generally, and that is why I think all members of the House supported the criminal history screening bill. They present difficult issues and difficult problems for government to develop proper policy mechanisms and policy frameworks. As I say, the general principle is that individuals are not required to disclose charges if they are not proceeded with, but in certain circumstances they are required to do so. I hope that answer is of some assistance to the honourable member and his constituent.

Seniors

Mrs SULLIVAN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. Could the minister please advise the House what steps the Bligh government is taking to address the growing needs of seniors in Queensland?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. She is always going in to bat for seniors in her local area. About 500,000 seniors lived in Queensland in 1990. By 2021, that number is expected to double. The Office for Seniors in the Department of Communities on a daily basis meets the needs of Queensland's older citizens. At the moment it is leading the charge on a seniors consultation strategy.

Last year I travelled from Townsville to Toowoomba and Barcaldine to Brisbane and heard from more than 700 seniors directly about the issues that matter to them. We also received hundreds of submissions for our 'Positively ageless' consultation paper put out last year so we could find out what is needed to improve the lives of seniors in Queensland.

Seniors talk to me about the need to break down some of the ageist stereotypes and to create more age-friendly communities and age-friendly housing and workplaces. They talk to me about the need for more affordable housing and home based services, and many other things. The Office for Seniors is using those submissions as we speak to develop an action plan and strategy that will be released later this year to respond to the changing needs of older Queenslanders. Other actions we are already taking include \$150-plus million worth of concessions and the Time for Grandparents Program so that grandparents caring for children outside the child protection system have access to time-out.

The Bligh government acknowledges the great economic and social contribution seniors make to Queensland in economic, social and cultural life. Nationally, seniors contribute more than \$60 billion to the economy through volunteering, mentoring, caring and as active members of the paid workforce. All ministers in the Bligh government are ministers for seniors, and we are all taking action to create a better future for our older, valued Queenslanders.

Road Safety, Schools

Dr ROBINSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Will the minister explain why the government built and then removed a school crossing at the new Thornlands Bayside State College leaving behind a dangerous, unsupervised traffic island? Will the minister finally understand the importance of child safety and take immediate action to reinstate the safe crossing?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Minister, you have one minute.

Ms NOLAN: I will have a look at the specific local issue for the member and report back to him. In general terms, the way safety outside schools works is that officers from my department work with school communities to establish what is safest—is it flashing signs, is it supervised school crossings, is it unregulated school crossings; what is the best mechanism to ensure safety around each individual school? That is the general principle. I will look into the member's specific local matter and come back to him directly and let him know what has happened there.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: The time for questions has expired.

CIVIL LIABILITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 March (see p. 817) on motion of Mr Dick—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (11.30 am): I rise to participate in the debate on the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I congratulate the minister on introducing these significant amendments to our current laws in Queensland.

I would firstly like to touch on the amendment to the Civil Liability Act relating to the abolition of the statutory limitation period for dust related conditions. I have had constituents approach me who are stressed, anxious and fearful because they do not know what the future holds because they have suddenly been diagnosed with an asbestos related illness and have only days to live. They had been to see their solicitors. They had been to see their doctors. Their family did not know what the future would hold for them. They were very concerned about the possibility of having to make an application so legal proceedings could commence in order to ensure a future for their family.

I am very pleased that the minister's amendment will ensure that that will not need to happen. I am very pleased that he is proposing that the amendment be retrospective. I know that the families in my electorate—two in particular—will be very pleased when this amendment is finally law in Queensland.

Another provision relates to future indexation of monetary amounts in the Civil Liability Act, the Motor Accident Insurance Act, the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act, including a threshold to determine whether legal costs are recoverable and caps on general damages. That indexation proposal is very sensible. It is very good to see that all of us in this House, irrespective of our political persuasions, support the intent of this bill.

I also support the provision that responds to the court case involving the *Sullivan v Gordon* damages matter. That is also sensible. It is good to see that common sense is prevailing in Queensland and there is support for this across the political divide. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—LNP) (11.33 am): I rise to speak in the debate on the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The opposition will be supporting the bill. I point out that this is a very sensitive matter across Queensland. I think we can all recollect a time a number of years ago when it was almost impossible for small organisations—for instance, those running community halls—to get liability insurance. It is a very sensitive matter and we certainly do not want to return to the situation we had a number of years ago where a lot of community organisations and community halls closed down or were ruined because they were not able to access liability insurance.

The whole issue of liability insurance is of continuing concern. Even though most organisations are now able to access liability insurance, it still has a significant impact on and is a burden for those volunteer organisations. Most members of parliament would not have in their electorates CWA halls or community halls that have been built on a voluntary basis and are run by volunteers.

Years before liability insurance became an issue I recollect that in most cases the local shire council covered the liability for the hall. We have moved on from those days. The amalgamated shires that we have now really do not want to know about this. It is a continuing issue in our communities.

Mr Springborg: That's true.

Mr MALONE: People like me, Lawrence and the member for Hinchinbrook, who represent rural communities, know about this. The old shire councils that were community based and represented the area took on board not only the civil liability but, in most cases, the maintenance of those local halls. I am not being overly critical, but with the new amalgamated shires—and I am talking about the two or three shires that I represent—that is at the back of their minds.

Mr Springborg: It's not a priority anymore.

Mr MALONE: I take the interjection. There are bigger fish to fry for the bigger amalgamated shires. A lot of those communities have no other access to community based meeting rooms and places where the community can interact and this becomes an issue.

It is also an issue for the sporting organisations that run, for example, rodeos and campdrafts throughout the state. I raised in this parliament only a few weeks ago the escalating cost of putting on events where there is some element of danger. Their organisational responsibility for these events is that they have on site a QSA ambulance paramedic and vehicle. The cost of providing that is increasing substantially. It is becoming an issue of real concern for organisations when putting on weekend events.

A lot of the profits that come out of the campdraft or rodeo go into paying for the ambulance paramedic on site for that time. I think it is about time that, as Queenslanders and Australians, we recognise it is only right that the community service obligation that so effectively covers the transport of passengers around the city of Brisbane should extend to the bush. When organisations run rodeos and campdrafts, the government could at least be a bit generous and cover the cost of providing an ambulance service for that event. This comes under the legal liability that it has. I believe the government should look at supplying that service to those community groups.

We need to bear in mind that, in just about every case that I can think of, these events are run by volunteers. They spend a substantial amount of money out of their own pockets and heaps of their time maintaining the rodeo or campdraft grounds. That is a substantial cost to those individuals.

I have some concerns in relation to this matter. In this legislation we are indexing legal costs and payouts. This comes under the jurisdiction of the minister. I would indicate to the minister that this has to be looked at very carefully and kept at the front of our minds as we move forward. We do not want a situation where people cannot access liability insurance and, more importantly, if they do access it they cannot afford to work with their communities and run functions at their community halls or function areas. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (11.39 am): I am delighted to speak to the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It delivers to the people of Queensland much awaited reforms in this important area which does not, I suppose, receive the public attention that I think it deserves.

Mr Messenger: You dragged the chain there. You should have brought it in earlier.

Mr SHINE: The bill of course was introduced last October and I will refer in my speech, if the honourable member for Burnett wishes to listen to it, to some involvement which I had the pleasure and privilege of being related to in terms of this legislation during the time—to which I think the member opposite is referring—that I was the Attorney.

First of all, however, I want to acknowledge and declare my interest in this area in terms of my occupation prior to being elected to parliament not just as a lawyer but as a lawyer who was entirely concerned with the area of personal injuries law acting solely for plaintiffs. I think it is important to divulge that in a sense to the House, although it is not news to most members here. I also want to acknowledge the work of the former member for Bulimba, Mr Pat Purcell, with respect to the dust related matters. Yesterday my friend the member for Everton most appropriately referred to people who have been intricately involved in that area over a long period. I want to mention Mr Purcell who was, when I was Attorney, the most persistent advocate amongst members of parliament and would continually bring this matter before me with respect to the role that I had as Attorney, which was limited. It was more the responsibility probably of the minister for industrial relations at that time. I think that the work that Pat Purcell did needs to be recognised. I commend him for it and I know that the people affected by dust related disease—and you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker, what was involved there in his efforts—would be very appreciative of his efforts.

I also acknowledge that I have been—not currently—a member of the Australian Lawyers Alliance which is a very involved stakeholder in this area representing plaintiff lawyers primarily but not exclusively in Australia, and of course I am currently a life member of the Queensland Law Society as well. In terms of Australian Lawyers Alliance, I had the privilege in February of last year to address its conference on the coast. I want to quote a few passages from the introduction of my address, which stated that the ALA has—

... a true commitment to justice, a relentless pursuit of equality before the law and a high level of engagement beyond the often closed and stuffy circles of us lawyers, with the community at large.

Criminal law reform and human rights are often seen as the sexier side of the lawyer's world. The media—both in news and fictional crime dramas—focus on such matters.

But for most of the community it is the issues that will be discussed here today—motor accidents, personal injuries, ethics and broader questions of liability that are likely to have a greater impact on their lives. These are issues the ALA should be commended for tirelessly pursuing, refining and advocating for change in.

In terms of personal injuries reform generally, this type of reform has been—and some other members have referred to it even today—a key pillar on the agenda of this government. Notably, we introduced pioneering personal injury law reform eight years ago which changed the litigation culture in Queensland and reduced its impact on public liability insurance premiums. Members will recall that the purpose of the personal injury law reform agenda at that time was to facilitate the ongoing affordability of insurance by, first of all, reducing the cost of legal proceedings, reducing sometimes frivolous claims for minor injuries and limiting the size of large claims. Along with the Civil Liability Act 2003, the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act 2002, PIPA, was the cornerstone of the personal injury law reform agenda.

The act, PIPA, which prescribes the precourt procedures or steps that must be taken by a claimant prior to issuing proceedings and actions for personal injuries was introduced to encourage the early settlement of personal injuries actions by ensuring each party is fully apprised of such other case. The detailed procedural requirements contained in PIPA include mandatory early notification of claims following an injury or the appearance of symptoms, early exchange of information to facilitate early settlement and avoid costly litigation, and a prohibition on recovery of legal costs for claims under \$30,000. Alongside PIPA there is also the Motor Accident Insurance Act 1994 and the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003. These two acts prescribe the precourt procedures for claims arising from motor vehicle accidents and claims by injured workers.

Although there is broad similarity between the different precourt procedures, one has to be conscious that a lack of uniformity in key areas such as time limits, forms and costs has been a source of frustration, if not confusion, for some legal practitioners and consequently for their clients. I urge the Attorney—particularly at this stage of things in Queensland so far as ministerial responsibility is concerned where, fortunately, we have not only a lawyer of course as Attorney-General but a lawyer as industrial relations minister and a lawyer as Treasurer and they therefore have a better understanding than most of these issues—that it would be an ideal time for this matter to be progressed in terms of reform. There are of course moves towards uniformity of court procedures across jurisdictions—that is, involving other states, particularly through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General. So it only makes sense that in Queensland we align the procedures within our very own jurisdiction as much as possible.

I indicate my pleasure in seeing the reforms in this legislation dealing with dust related claims and the effect of the amendments to do away with the major inhibitor on bringing those claims up till now—that is, time limits. In the common law world, the origin of legislation imposing limitation periods can be traced back of course for centuries. Limitations legislation is intended to prevent a plaintiff from taking an

unreasonable length of time to commence proceedings to enforce a right or rights claimed by the plaintiff. The imposition of limitation periods has been justified on a number of grounds based of course on fairness, certainty and public policy. Delay in bringing proceedings may unfairly prejudice a defendant's ability to contest the plaintiff's claim. Evidentiary problems are likely to increase as time passes and it may not be possible to trace witnesses for example, or those who may be able to be found can no longer sufficiently recollect events. Written records may also have been lost or destroyed. There should be a time when people can feel confident about arranging their affairs in the knowledge that a claim can no longer be brought against them.

This is not just an argument in favour of fairness for the defendant; third parties also need to have confidence that rights are not going to be disturbed by a long-forgotten claim. Insurers set their premiums based on an exposure to liability that they are able to identify at a given time. If the limitation periods are altered retrospectively, this exposes the insurer to liabilities they could not envisage at the time of setting the premium. Either their shareholders or subsequent premium holders then have to foot the bill. So those are the general considerations that one has to take into account. I congratulate the Attorney for bringing, as I said, this particular amendment to the House notwithstanding those general considerations because of the inherent justice of the claim of people suffering from dust related matters, particularly those who are in dire straits. I think the member for Nicklin gave an indication of people approaching death in great distress and great anxiety that these matters have not been dealt with.

I also mention the amendments to sections 37 and 43 of PIPA. The amendment to section 37 is to ensure that it is consistent with the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 so that prior to compulsory conference parties are required only to sign a certificate of readiness for the compulsory conference but not for trial. The reasons for this amendment are that parties cannot be in a position to sign a certificate of readiness for trial prior to the receipt of pleadings and undertaking discovery and interrogatories, the requirement adds expense to claims that would otherwise be unnecessary and there is a perceived concern among practitioners in particular of the risk of misconduct proceedings being commenced against a practitioner who inappropriately signs the certificate. They were the reasons upon which it was argued that that section should be amended to require the certificate of readiness for trial to be done away with at that time. The amendment to section 43 was in order to streamline the process to commence urgent proceedings for urgent need if the parties agree.

The Attorney-General in his second reading speech made reference to most of the aspects of the bill. He referred to the indexation of monetary amounts. Clearly, in retrospect that should have happened when the legislation was first introduced. There is no logical reason that caps on awards of damages should not be adjusted in line with increases in the CPI as time goes on as well as the cap on the expenditure of legal costs. This amendment is in the interests of claimants in particular.

Reference was made to the effect of the *Sullivan v Gordon* damages, which I think is self-evident. Again, in my experience that does not have a huge consequence in practice. Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile reform. However, I raise with the Attorney-General reference to section 38 of the Civil Liability Act. The Attorney-General stated in his second reading speech—

This amendment will ensure that a volunteer undertaking community work for a parents and citizens association who otherwise meets the requirements of the division is entitled to the protection from liability provided by section 39 of the act.

I take it that that amendment clarifies that P&C members are covered. I ask the Attorney-General: would that apply to parents and friends associations as well as parents and citizens associations? I think in that regard a different act might apply. I ask the Attorney-General if he would kindly make mention of that matter in his summing-up. I would appreciate that.

Finally, I make reference to a couple of matters that were raised in the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee report. It refers to a number of matters, but I want to refer particularly to the limitation period. The benefit of this amendment does not apply where there has been a previous unsuccessful application to extend the statutory limitation period. The report states at paragraph 10 that this—

... would create differences in rights of individuals who made an unsuccessful application to extend the statutory limitation period prior to enactment of the legislation and rights of those who had not made such an application. For the latter group, under new section 47, an action out-of-time might be brought. For the former group, it appears there would be no change in the right to bring an action—an action would remain statute-barred.

I would ask the Attorney-General to comment on the decision to not extend the benefit to those—comparatively few, I would have thought—who have been unsuccessful in their applications in the past. The report also makes reference to the loss of consortium, or loss of servitude claims. The Attorney-General might make some observations as to the relevance of loss of consortium claims in the 21st century. I think such claims were originally brought in several hundred years ago to compensate men for the loss of their wives during a period of time. Bearing in mind that it was International Women's Day this week, it just seems that awards of damages in that regard are perhaps not appropriate, bearing in mind that we have *Sullivan v Gordon* and *Griffiths v Kerkemeyer* anyway and that the awards of damage are fairly minimal.

Finally, I make note of the fact that this legislation provides annual indexation of all amounts, which is to be welcomed and which will automatically take place on 1 July each year. That is one of the justifications—and it is a good one—for why such amounts are dealt with by way of regulation as opposed to having to be the subject of an act of parliament every time a change is required. I congratulate the Attorney-General and the government on this significant reform to personal injuries law in Queensland.

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (11.56 am): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill proposes to amend a number of acts, among them the Civil Liability Act. The stated purpose of the amendment to the Civil Liability Act is to rebase and facilitate the future indexation of monetary amounts in the act, including the legal costs threshold and the caps on general damages. In particular, the bill proposes to reinstate damages for the loss of a claimant's capacity to provide gratuitous domestic services.

The matter that I want to canvass today relates to the proposal contained in the bill to partially reinstate damages for the loss of an injured person's capacity to provide gratuitous domestic services. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill outline the fact that a decision of the High Court of Australia in 2005 held that damages for loss of capacity to provide gratuitous domestic services are not part of the common law of Australia. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill suggest that this amendment will provide for a circumstance where damages may be awarded for loss of an injured parent's capacity to care for a disabled child. As the shadow minister for disability services, that is obviously something that is of interest to me.

Under the new provision, it is proposed that damages for loss of an injured person's capacity to provide gratuitous domestic services may be awarded by a court only if the injured person died because of the injuries suffered or general damages for the injured person are assessed at the amount provided for in section 58 of the act; the recipient was a member of the injured person's household when the relevant injury happened; before the relevant injury happened the injured person provided the services in question to the recipient; the recipient was or will be incapable of performing the services personally because of their age, or physical, or mental incapacity; but for the injury, the injured person would have provided the services for at least six hours per week for at least a period of six months; and the need for the services is reasonable in the circumstances.

So the explanatory notes accompanying the bill state that the relevant time to assess whether the recipient was a member of the injured person's household and whether the injured person previously provided the services to the recipient is when the relevant injury happened. If the symptoms of the injury are not immediately apparent, the relevant injury is taken to have happened when the nature and extent of the injury was known. For example, if the injury relates to an incapacitation due to exposure to asbestos, the relevant time to assess whether the recipient was a member of the injured person's household is at the time of diagnosis and not at the time of exposure to the asbestos. The purpose of the requirement that the recipient was not or will not be capable of performing the services themselves is to ensure that the services that the injured person has lost the capacity to provide are necessary to the recipient for their basic welfare.

By way of example, an adult child with no particular disabilities or incapacities would be capable of cooking their own meals and doing their own washing and cleaning notwithstanding that prior to the injury the injured parent performed these tasks for them. The purpose of the time requirements in the new provision in this bill is to ensure that these types of damages are only awarded if the recipient has an ongoing need for these significant services.

However, the bill also proposes to allow a court to disregard certain periods of time when the recipient would not have been in the care of the injured person when determining whether their services would have been provided to the recipient for at least six hours a week for a period of at least six months. In addition, the bill proposes to make special provision for unborn children of the injured person.

The bill does not propose to provide a definition for domestic services. The particular domestic services that might be reasonable in a claim will depend on the circumstances of the case. The bill takes reasonable steps to avoid situations whereby an injured person may attempt to claim twice for the same loss by addressing potential overlaps between several sections of the amended act. This may occur if an injured person seeks damages or compensation on a number of grounds, including damages for gratuitous services provided to the injured person, rehabilitation services paid by an insurer and damages recovered by the recipient as part of a dependency claim or loss of consortium action.

The bill also sets out a number of factors a court may take into account when deciding the value of any gratuitous services that the injured person has lost the capacity to provide. The court will be required to take account of the claimant's capacity to provide the services before the relevant injury happened and to make an allowance for the normal vagaries and uncertainties of life. As the explanatory notes outline, for example, an injured person who at the time the relevant injury happened

was already suffering from the early stages of, for example, Parkinson's disease, might reasonably be expected to have a declining capacity to provide the services. A court will be given an opportunity to award damages for those years that an injured person would have provided the services but for the shortening of their life by the injury. Those years are sometimes referred to during legal proceedings as lost years.

As members can see, the proposed changes in this bill are significant. Insofar as these changes provide an opportunity for a safety net to be put in place for the ongoing care of people with disabilities in Queensland, this is a welcome development. Given that people with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable in our community, it is important that the threat to them of losing support services that they are currently relying upon as a result of a service provider incurring an injury is minimised. These gratuitous domestic services are in many cases the cornerstone of support to people with disabilities. In many cases, although not exclusively, parents caring for their children with a disability bear a great deal of the cost of care and support to those individuals which reduces what would otherwise result in an increased demand for additional services provided by the government. The government would be keenly aware of that and would know that that would be the case.

This bill, providing for compensation to be paid in certain circumstances where a person with a disability loses the support of someone providing gratuitous domestic services, will provide something of a limited buffer against increased demand for additional disability support services in Queensland. It is undoubtedly a limited buffer, but for those people with a disability who will be entitled to receive compensation in these circumstances it will be an important buffer against the threat of them being unexpectedly caught out in the event that someone providing gratuitous services can no longer do so.

Not everybody with a disability is lucky enough to be the grateful recipient of gratuitous domestic services. It has long been a concern that there is not an adequate provision of funding for disability support services, particularly for respite services for parents caring for disabled children. While it is true that the levels of dependence and demand on carers are acute during childhood they never really diminish and ageing carers in particular are in desperate need of options for ongoing care for their sons and daughters. While it is certainly a good thing that the role of parental carers is recognised in this provision, it would also be positive to see an improved government response through improved and expanded respite services for people in the circumstances that I have described.

I acknowledge that the Minister for Disability Services during her tenure has stated on a number of occasions that one of her priorities is supporting ageing carers faced with these types of issues. I welcome the focus that the minister has tried to bring to the issue of older carers and the demands that they face. However, I am sure that the minister would acknowledge that there is a very long way to go. The reason why there is a very long way to go is that the issue of older carers having a serious lack of support to assist them with the care of their children with disabilities has gone unaddressed for such a long time. Both sides of politics ought to accept their share of the blame for that neglect. In pursuing additional support for carers, the minister will certainly enjoy my support and cooperation in the future.

There is a history of bipartisanship in this parliament in relation to pursuing measures to support carers of people with disabilities. My predecessor as the shadow minister for disability services, the member for Burdekin, ought to be acknowledged because she sought to provide those people who care for people with disabilities with increased acknowledgement in this state by introducing a private member's bill, the Carers (Recognition) Bill, which was historically supported by the government at the time. That is a lasting achievement of the member for Burdekin in the disability services portfolio of which she can be justifiably proud and is an example of genuine support for carers.

Of major importance is the ongoing need to provide services in communities across Queensland: urban, regional, rural and remote. This bill seeks to provide for a circumstance that, where a provider of a gratuitous domestic service is no longer able to provide that service to a dependant, such as a person with a disability, that compensation can be used to provide that dependant with ongoing care. The obvious question that follows from that scenario is where is that ongoing care going to be provided and who is going to provide it. The compensation will provide resources to pay for the support in the event that the care is no longer provided on a gratuitous basis. However, we must support and grow government and non-government disability service providers across Queensland for this purpose. In summary, I support and welcome the amendments relating to these changes to the Civil Liability Act.

I would like to speak briefly about the proposal in this bill to amend the definition of 'community organisation' in section 38 of the Civil Liability Act to ensure that a volunteer undertaking community work for a parents and citizens association is entitled to the protection from liability provided by section 39 of the same act. I welcome and support this amendment in the strongest possible terms. I have more than 40 schools either located in my electorate or servicing communities in my electorate, being state, Catholic and independent primary and secondary schools. Parents and citizens associations and parents and friends associations are the heart and soul of many of these schools. I am certain that the same can be said for the schools in many of the electorates of many other honourable members. The efforts and contributions of the members of P&Cs and P&Fs in many cases ensure that the school has what it needs to function properly.

To be truthful, I was rather anxious when I first examined this bill that this issue was not already settled and accepted and that this amendment was necessary to clarify matters at all. P&Cs and P&Fs have been such an enduring part of the life of our schools that I would have thought that issues such as this would have been previously considered and addressed. That it has not is somewhat of a concern, but it is a very good thing that we are acting now to correct it.

I associate myself with the remarks made by the member for Toowoomba North in his contribution to the debate insofar as he made an inquiry to the Attorney-General about whether or not the bill would extend its protection to parents and friends associations in addition to parents and citizens associations. It was a question that I was going to raise in the House as part of the debate and I acknowledge that the member for Toowoomba North has shown an interest in that important matter.

Mr Dick: The amendments I have circulated will address that.

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the Attorney. I am grateful for that clarification. It is an important one. However, it should be noted by members of parents and citizens associations and parents and friends associations across Queensland that the explanatory notes accompanying the bill clarify the fact that a volunteer is not protected from personal liability if the liability is one that is required under statute to be insured against. The bill makes it clear that the protection from liability is excluded where the statutory requirement to insure applies to the volunteer in ordinary circumstances. For example, a P&C or a P&F volunteer would not be considered to be insured or protected from liability as a volunteer of a community organisation under the Civil Liability Act if they are involved in an accident or an incident involving an uninsured vehicle because the Motor Accident Insurance Act requires a person operating vehicles in ordinary circumstances to be insured, which is fair enough and I am sure all members would agree with that. In any event, this bill does provide enhanced protection to P&C members and, as we have heard from the Attorney, P&F members as well. I support the bill.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—LNP) (12.10 pm): The purpose of the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is to make amendments to the civil liability and personal injury regime in Queensland. The bill's explanatory notes claim that the amendments, which are a direct response to stakeholder comments and feedback, include: rebase and facilitate the future indexation of monetary amounts in the CLA, the MAIA and the PIPA, including the legal costs threshold and the caps on general damages; ensure that a de facto partner of an injured person can claim damages for loss of consortium—this will obviously ease the financial burden on partners who are forced to stay at home and care for their injured loved ones; remove the requirement in the PIPA that parties must sign a certificate of readiness for trial prior to the compulsory conference; streamline the process under the PIPA if parties agree to the urgent commencement of proceedings; abolish the statutory limitation period for dust disease related personal injury claims; reinstate damages for the loss of a claimant's capacity to provide gratuitous domestic services; amend the definition of 'community organisation' in section 38 of the CLA to ensure that a volunteer undertaking community work for a parents and citizens association is entitled to the protection from liability provided by section 39; and clarify the operation of section 43 of the CLA. An important part of this bill, as we have said before and many other members have commented on, makes changes to dust related injuries.

The media has reported, described and summed up this legislation in the following way—

New laws, to be introduced in State Parliament on Tuesday, will help ease the financial burden of a partner forced to stay home to care for a loved one.

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice Cameron Dick said changes would also see the maximum damages available for personal injury increase from \$250,000 to almost \$300,000.

"Suffering a personal injury can have a significant effect on every aspect of someone's life," Mr Dick said.

"The increase in the amount of general damages is a recognition of the pain and suffering an individual can experience as a result of a devastating personal injury."

I am very impressed by the Attorney-General's statements, and that is one of the reasons that I am supporting this bill. However, this legislation has taken its time reaching this place. Blame, I believe, can be laid squarely at the feet of the member for Toowoomba North. I will quote from a lawyer who alleges the same allegation. I am glad that the new Attorney-General has fixed the problem as soon as he could. It took the new Attorney-General to do that. That is probably why the new Attorney-General will be the next Deputy Premier in the very near future.

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! The member for Burnett has the call.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. In an article posted in the *Lawyers Weekly* on 29 October 2008, lawyer Mark O'Connor challenges the then Queensland Attorney-General, Kerry Shine, to explain why he has not publicly followed up his February 2007 promise to review the state's restrictive injury compensation laws. Mr O'Connor writes—

It has become a legal iniquity, the way injury compensation laws in Queensland were savaged by the State Government in 2002 and 2003.

A sophisticated fear-mongering campaign driven by insurers and blaming lawyers and litigation rates for huge losses in the insurance industry, such as the collapse of HIH, drove the state Government into ill-conceived and draconian measures to rein in personal injury claims.

Personal injury lawyers were branded as “ambulance chasers” and injury victims seeking compensation were smeared as greedy. Lawyers and claimants were an easy target and easier for the public to comprehend than the inner complexities of the insurance industry, which was largely responsible for its own financial woes at the time.

In Queensland the personal injury compensation landscape was radically changed with the *Personal Injury Proceedings Act 2002* (PIPA) and the *Civil Liability Act* a year later. The amounts payable to injury victims were slashed and a claims threshold imposed which effectively made it uneconomic for people to pursue less serious claims. Insurers were the big winners.

Attendant with PIPA was a crackdown on lawyers’ [advertising] personal injury services, especially “no win, no fee” methods—restrictions which continue to this day. It is iniquitous that there are no restrictions on advertising methods employed by the insurance industry.

Since then, Queensland’s injury compensation laws have effectively subsidised insurance companies, and because the five-year-old compensation laws were not inflation-linked, victims are still being paid in December 2003 dollars. This means people are receiving in real dollars much less than they would have received even five years ago.

This travesty is long overdue for review, yet in state Government circles, injury compensation laws are a subject never to be acknowledged or publicly discussed.

Attorney-General Kerry Shine briefly raised hope of an overhaul of the laws after the former solicitor was appointed Attorney in late 2006.

It is now 2010 and finally we are addressing some of the inequities in the law.

Because of this government’s incompetence, corruption and dysfunction, there are many former and current patients of the Queensland health system who will be and are affected by changes to the civil liability and personal injury regime. They will appreciate the increase in the cap regarding personal injuries, and that is one of the reasons that I am very happy to be in this place supporting this legislation. The ceiling caps on claims under civil liability and personal injury legislation were often blamed and used by government bureaucrats and government paid lawyers as an excuse for the minimal and grossly unfair payouts that were offered to victims of Queensland Health under the ‘special compensation process’ set up by former Premier Peter Beattie. Already we have signs that Beattie’s promises even then to the victims are not being honoured. Victims are now being made to pay for health services and treatment that Beattie promised would be free.

There is a group of approximately 1,500 people from the Burnett-Bundaberg area and related spouses, including 87 widows and widowers, who were injured because of the systemic failures and crises in Queensland Health between 2003 and 2005 at the Bundaberg Base Hospital. History almost repeated itself recently when 268 patients who received their dental treatment at the Bundaberg Base Hospital were injured because Queensland Health allowed them to be operated on with dirty and unsterilised medical equipment. All of these people will need to rely on this legislation in the future if they are ever going to continue their fight for justice and proper, fair compensation. There are many practical examples. I propose to bring one example before the chamber this afternoon.

All of the survivors and victims of Queensland Health have been deceived and cheated by this government. And anyone who says that they have not been cheated have been tricked by a slick government PR machine or indeed are part of the Labor PR machine. In particular, the comments made by Beryl Crosby, a person who receives many benefits from this government, have not been helpful to the majority of Queensland Health victims who are now battling to receive fair compensation and justice. All will have to rely on the civil courts and legal system in their fight for justice.

The practical example that I bring before the chamber this afternoon is, firstly, that the Labor government’s ‘special compensation process’ was unfair and corrupt. Patients were made to sign non-disclosure forms before they even walked into the mediation room and saw what this government was offering to them.

Lawyers were given \$7,000 while in many cases widows of victims received only \$8,000—just barely enough to cover the cost of the funeral. The government still to this day refuses to release and covers up the basic figures associated with the compensation process: the total amount paid out, the total number of people compensated, the total number of people deemed ineligible and why, and the total number still to be compensated. There was only one occasion when former Premier Beattie released the total number of people paid compensation and the total amount paid, but the government soon reversed that—as soon as we started doing the simple math and worked out the minimal amount being paid out in compensation.

Recently we have seen a new batch of patients and victims of Queensland Health who will be consulting with lawyers in order to mount a group action or take individual action for personal injuries in order to force the government to provide fair compensation to them. There were 268 people operated on by medical staff using unclean dental equipment, and they were therefore placed at risk of being infected with HIV and other diseases because of a clear failure of this government.

I will give the House a practical example of a person who will have to use this legislation to seek justice and compensation if the health minister, those opposite and Premier Bligh do not wake up to themselves and find some compassion within their hearts. I was recently approached by Fran Dix, one of the 268 victims of the Bundaberg dental crisis, who suffered a stroke the morning after her bungled dental treatment. Fran and her husband, Martin, have expressed their anguish at having to wait for blood test results and the possibility of having contracted HIV or hepatitis due to Queensland Health's huge blunder. Mr Dix wrote to me in an email—

Having the worry of that awful wait, twelve weeks, for the outcome from the blood tests, the unknown are you really going to get the result that you are clear from 'HIV'.

This alone for someone to be told you might have contracted HIV, Hepatitis is very daunting, so someone suffering from a stroke and having to cope with this additional stress, this has caused my wife to become more anxious, and have anxiety attacks.

In closing, the question that this health minister, this Attorney-General and this Premier will have to ask themselves is: is this government going to establish a fair, special compensation process for people who have been clearly injured by this government, or will they force these new victims to use the provisions of this bill? I support the bill.

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (12.22 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the debate on the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As has been enunciated by a number of members on both sides of the chamber, there is much within this bill to be praised. I, too, applaud the amendment of the definition of 'community organisation' in section 38 of the Civil Liability Act. The amendment will ensure that a volunteer undertaking community work for a parents and citizens association is entitled to the protection from liability provided by section 39 of the same act. I know this will give a level of security and certainty to such volunteers and to school communities in general. P&C volunteers, alongside our schools' principals and teachers, play such a critical role in the education and development of our children. Their contributions to fundraising and improving the amenity and equipping of our schools are priceless—one the state government would struggle to duplicate were they suddenly withdrawn—so this amendment makes sense.

I would like to turn now to the concerns raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee in its *Legislation Alert*. The key concern surrounds the retrospective application of the legislation and also the delegation of legislative power. I note that the member for Brisbane Central in her speech went to some lengths to address both the concerns raised by the committee and the government's justification specifically for the retrospective application of legislation. So rather than rehashing the issues and the responses raised by the member for Brisbane Central, let me turn my attention to what I consider to be the more serious question of regard for fundamental legislative principles—the delegation of legislative power.

The committee draws the parliament's attention to clauses 8, 12, 13, 32 and 48 and also to clauses 14, 35 and 46. I suggest, based on the government's proposed amendments which have been circulated, we should also add clause 6 to the mix. Each of these clauses delegates legislative power. The first cluster of clauses do so to prescribe by regulation monetary amounts currently prescribed in the relevant acts. They do so by amending the Civil Liability Act to allow the threshold for entitlement to damages for loss of consortium or loss of servitium to be prescribed by regulation. Currently, the threshold for assessment of general damages is set at \$30,000 or more.

They also delegate legislative power by allowing the amounts used for the calculation of general damages currently provided in section 62 of the Civil Liability Act to be prescribed by regulation, and also by allowing the threshold amount beyond which the court must inform parties of a proposed award to be set by regulation. Furthermore, it amends section 32 of the Motor Accident Insurance Act to allow monetary limits to be prescribed by regulation and the schedule, or dictionary, of the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act to allow monetary limits to be prescribed by regulation.

The second cluster of clauses—that is, 14, 34 and 36—goes on to insert new sections in the Civil Liability Act, the Motor Accident Insurance Act and the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act to provide a mechanism by which annual indexation of prescribed amounts occurs by regulation. I believe it is worth putting on the record some of the committee's comments on this delegation of legislative power. I refer to the *Legislation Alert*, which states—

First, the committee notes a number of matters regarding the scope of the power to be delegated to the Governor in Council to prescribe the annual indexed amount. In each of the relevant sections, subclause (8) states that the section 'does not limit the power of the Governor in Council to amend the amount prescribed under a regulation for a limit'.

It continues—

Second, it is noted that each new section would allow amendments to regulations to have retrospective effect. In each new provision, subclause (6) would state:

A regulation notified in the gazette after 1 July in a year and specifying a date that is before the date it is notified as the date from which the amount prescribed as the limit is to apply has effect from the specified date.

The explanatory notes do not identify any retrospective effect on rights and liberties of individuals. I will acknowledge that the Attorney-General has addressed this in his response to the committee, which states—

In relation to clauses 14, 35 and 46 of the Bill, I note that the Committee has identified that the explanatory notes do not identify any retrospective effect on rights and liberties of individuals. However, given the expectation that indexation will occur on 1 July each year and that it will be in accordance with a specific formula outlined in the legislation, I note that any retrospective operation would be very limited. For example, there could be retrospective operation where there is a short delay in obtaining the figure for average weekly earnings from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Given the long tail nature of personal injury claims, a short delay such as this would not adversely affect claimants or defendants.

I thank the minister for responding to this concern in his correspondence.

Finally, the amendments proposed by the government also delegate legislative power in clause 6 to do with the definition of 'community organisations'. As we just heard, that is to counteract some of the concerns raised by others around definitions of P&F associations and so on. I must admit that this considerable delegation of legislative power worries me. I therefore would appreciate it if the Attorney-General, in his summing-up, could give some further explanation regarding the way in which regulation will be used to set monetary amounts and thresholds and modify definitions. With those comments, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (12.28 pm): I rise in support of the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill modernises and improves the civil liability and personal injury regime in Queensland by effecting amendments to the Civil Liability Act, the Motor Accident Insurance Act and the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act. The fundamental principle governing the issue of civil liability is how a society is able to support and adequately compensate an individual for any injury that they may incur as a result of the actions or inactions of another party.

The Labor state government acted earlier this decade to provide certainty and support not only for those people who unfortunately suffered an injury as a result of the actions or inactions of another party but also for the people of Queensland generally. A major consideration for the government earlier this decade was the prevention of hardship for individuals, non-profit organisations and professionals in respect of insurance premiums. As a result of a number of major events earlier in the decade, insurance premiums—particularly public liability insurance premiums—increased significantly, in some cases by up to 1,000 per cent. These increasing costs impacted severely on the sustainability of non-profit organisations, small businesses and professional occupations, particularly medical practitioners.

The explanatory notes to the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act highlighted the key policy objectives of this government in striking the right balance between providing adequate support to those who sustain injuries as a result of the actions or inactions of another party and managing the needs of parties to have access to affordable insurance options. The explanatory notes state—

... the amendments are aimed at ensuring an appropriate balance between benefits and the cost of premiums, and ensuring adequate compensation for the moderately and seriously injured, rather than those with relatively minor injuries.

Make no mistake, though: this regime is not just about insurance premiums. This legislative regime is about supporting people who suffer personal injuries whilst at the same time managing insurance costs and premiums. This bill continues and improves that regime by reforming some of the prescriptive requirements under the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act and, in turn, streamlines the process for trials, compulsory conferences and the urgent commencement of proceedings.

These amendments improve access to justice and create further efficiencies in respect of the administration of justice in Queensland. Most significantly, this bill provides for the indexation of monetary amounts and thresholds used for the calculation of general damages under the relevant acts. As a result, the cap on general damages will increase from 1 July 2010, and from then continue to increase in accordance with the indexation formula. This amendment is critically important to the inherent justice of the personal injuries compensation regime. This amendment ensures that injured Queenslanders receive compensation that is fair and reflects current standards of living.

I note that this bill will also abolish the statutory limitation period for dust related conditions. These conditions, including conditions involving exposure to asbestos, are horrible medical conditions which sadly do not manifest themselves for some time. This amendment will support those people who develop a dust related condition whilst at the same time improving access to justice.

I commend the minister, his staff and the department for their work in respect of this bill. The bill contains good amendments which will provide real and positive support for Queenslanders whilst at the same time improving access to justice in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms FARMER (Bulimba—ALP) (12.32 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In particular, I would like to address the amendment to the Limitation of Actions Act 1974, which abolishes the statutory limitation period for personal injuries claims involving a

dust related injury. The former member for Bulimba, Mr Pat Purcell, was a very vocal advocate for the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society. Through him, a meeting was organised with officers from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the minister's office at which a submission was presented requesting that this amendment be made.

I absolutely concur with the comments made earlier by the member for Toowoomba North when he acknowledged the efforts that were made by my predecessor in his pursuit of appropriate acknowledgement of the needs of those affected by dust related diseases. I know that I speak on behalf of all members of the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society when I say that his support has been pivotal. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work done by Shirley White in the preparation of the submission. Unfortunately, Shirley is no longer with us, but her family and friends would feel very proud today of her contribution in achieving this important milestone for dust disease sufferers.

The amendments contained in this bill mean that the normal limitation period prescribed for the bringing of proceedings for personal injury resulting from a dust related condition, or from smoking or other use of tobacco products, or exposure to tobacco smoke is abolished. The amendments will apply to injuries occurring before or after commencement of the amendment provided that judgement has not been given in the action, the action has not been settled or discontinued and there has not been a previous unsuccessful application to extend the statutory time limitation.

The diseases caused by toxic dust are often latent, arising many years after exposure. With some latent illness, such a period is manifestly too short to enable many such diseases to become apparent, to be investigated and related to exposure, and to be the subject of appropriate court proceedings. Another limitation problem is that some conditions are caused immediately upon exposure to the hazard, and thus a cause of action is complete long before the symptoms, let alone the full disabling effects, become apparent. This means that, when an injured person's disability has progressed to the point where symptoms become apparent, they may well be out of time under the statute of limitations or so seriously ill that their ability to pursue their claim is compromised. These amendments ensure that sufferers of dust related diseases and injuries from smoking, tobacco products or exposure to smoking can still access the legal system for compensation despite the fact that their symptoms may commence many years after their first exposure.

The bill also amends the Law Reform Act 1995 to provide that damages for loss of, or impairment of, consortium are available to the spouse of an injured person. Under the existing provision, loss of consortium is available only to a wife or husband of an injured person. By changing this definition to 'spouse', this ensures that de facto partners are also included. Under the Acts Interpretation Act 1954, 'spouse' includes a de facto partner.

Part 6 of the bill amends the Motor Accident Insurance Act 1994. Section 55 of the act currently provides a limit on the costs that can be recoverable when a matter proceeds to trial and the court awards damages equal to or less than \$50,000. Different limits apply depending on the amount of the final offer and whether the court awards \$30,000 or less or more than \$30,000 but less than \$50,000. These amounts have not changed since being introduced, and so these amendments will replace the figures with 'upper offer limit', 'lower offer limit' and 'declared costs limit'. This will facilitate indexation of these amounts through regulation every year. The Motor Accident Insurance Regulation 2004 is also amended to prescribe the amount of the upper limit, lower limit and declared costs limit, and a formula for calculating the amounts for the period between 2 December 2002 and 1 July 2010.

The bill also amends section 37 of the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act 2002 to remove the requirement that parties must sign a certificate of readiness for trial prior to the compulsory conference. This addresses concerns that at present a party cannot certify readiness for trial prior to receipt of pleadings and the completion of discovery and interrogatories. The removal of the requirement for a certificate of readiness for trial is supported by most stakeholders. However, some concerns have been raised by the insurance industry that the removal of this requirement will result in increased litigation rates and legal costs, and delay in settlements.

To address these concerns, the other requirements of section 37 have been retained. These include a requirement that all parties must obtain all investigative material required by the party for the trial and all medical or other expert reports from all persons whom the party intends to call as a witness. This will ensure that the compulsory conference continues to promote and encourage the early settlement of claims.

The PIPA is also amended to allow for the monetary amounts to be prescribed by regulation. This will facilitate the annual indexation of the amount. This means that the Personal Injuries Proceedings Regulation 2002 is also amended to prescribe the amounts previously included in the PIPA. This means that for injuries occurring after 1 July 2010 the 'upper offer limit' will be \$58,900; the 'lower offer limit' will be \$35,340 and the 'declared costs limit' will be \$2,950. These amendments are necessary for the proper administration of civil proceedings in Queensland and to ensure that injured Queenslanders are able to be compensated fairly and equitably for their injuries.

The abolition of the statute of limitations for dust related diseases is a welcome improvement for those suffering from these conditions, and reduces the burden on them to have to apply for an extension of time due to the very nature of their illness. This is usually at a time when their state of health means their ability to pursue their claim is compromised.

I would like to acknowledge the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society and, in particular, Ray and Helen Colbert for the many hours they have spent not only advocating for these amendments so that they have reached the final point that they have today but also for their unwavering care of and commitment to sufferers of asbestos related disease. As with Shirley White before them, it is a humbling experience to work alongside such exceptional human beings, and I thank them for that privilege.

I would also like to thank the Attorney-General for his commitment to seeing these amendments through and for his compassion for sufferers of dust related diseases. I know that the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society is extremely grateful for his close attention to these matters. I congratulate the Attorney on this bill and commend it to the House.

Ms DAVIS (Aspley—LNP) (12.39 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2009, which was introduced by the Attorney-General on 7 October 2009. As the shadow minister, the member for Southern Downs, indicated in his contribution, the LNP will be supporting the bill.

The bill provides for amendments to a number of acts and regulations. The key amendments include increasing awards of general damages by 17.8 per cent and to facilitate future indexing based on annual growth in wages; allowing de facto spouses to claim damages for loss of consortium; allowing damages for the claimant's loss of capacity to provide gratuitous services to others; and abolishing limitation periods for dust disease claims. These amendments will certainly have an impact on the way residents in our suburbs will be able to go about their lives after suffering loss or injury and they are reforms that I am of a mind to support.

As noted, under this legislation awards of general damages are to be increased by 17.8 per cent for injuries occurring on and from 1 July 2010. This change will apply to personal injury claims regulated by the Civil Liability Act, the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act and the Motor Accident Insurance Act. Following introduction, the indexation of general damages will take place at the end of each financial year using a formula reflective of growth in annual wages.

I see from the minister's second reading speech that the indexation of gaps on general damages is to ensure that injured Queenslanders continue to receive compensation that is fair and that also reflects current standards of living. I agree that it is appropriate that individuals be adequately compensated for injuries and damage. However, it is also important in providing this compensation that any increase in insurance costs, particularly public liability insurance, would not negatively impact on the work of many dedicated community groups through increased premium costs.

We are all aware that the 2003 legislation that was brought forward assists with the very serious issues surrounding the challenges facing the community sector in obtaining insurance. At the time, many small community organisations were having enormous difficulties securing public liability insurance. I am glad that the parliament supported the 2003 legislation.

Dwindling resources and the ever-challenging problems relating to fundraising mean that these organisations are disproportionately affected by insurance premium rises as their revenue base is continually stretched. The capped civil liability regime has worked. We just need to monitor the upper limits of claims to ensure that these groups are, once again, not priced out.

The bill also proposes amendments to the Law Reform Act which would allow de factos to make a claim for damages for loss of consortium. These amendments will have retrospective application in that they will apply to claims where the limitation period has not yet expired, where the court has not yet granted final relief and where there is no agreement to compensate for the claim. Monetary amounts will be adjusted on 1 July each year by the percentage change in average weekly earnings over the preceding four quarters.

I would, however, flag that the removal from statute to regulation could be seen as reducing accountability as we are all aware that regulations are easy to alter and do not have to come before the parliament. I echo the sentiments of the member for Southern Downs in relation to the application of the strict formula by the Attorney-General and the fact that there does not need to be a break or check on the process getting rampantly out of control.

This bill also proposes to eliminate the statutory limitation period for personal injury occurring as a consequence of dust related conditions. Importantly, the ending of the limitation period does not extend to injuries as a result of smoking or the use of or exposure to tobacco products. As we are all aware, the issues relating to dust related injury are highly emotional and complex. Based on what we now know with regard to the lengthy progression of asbestos dust fibre disease, this is an important step to acknowledge the harm from exposure that previously precluded victims from making claims.

The proposed amendments will allow a claimant to seek damages as a result of loss of capacity to provide domestic services to another person. I note that the minister makes reference in his second reading speech to proposed strict limits on when a court may award damages under section 59A and that damages will not be available for minor injuries where general damages have been assessed at less than \$35,340.

I also note that this award will only be made if certain criteria are met, including residential requirements, necessity of service and a reasonability test. The ongoing provision of services to disabled family members in this instance may be very important. Hopefully this legislation will ensure that those with a disability can continue to be provided for should their family carer be injured.

I am pleased that there are minor amendments to the definition of a community organisation so that persons who undertake volunteer work for parents and citizens associations are entitled to protection from liability. I am also pleased that the Attorney has indicated that this definition will also apply to P&Fs. I will be supporting this legislation, but I do have some reservations regarding insurance affordability for certain not-for-profit service providers in our community and the powers of the Attorney-General with regard to the new regulatory adjustment process. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. KL STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women) (12.44 pm): I want to take a couple of minutes to speak in favour of the amendment proposed in the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill to abolish the statutory limitation for dust related conditions. In doing this, I pay tribute to campaigners like Ray Colbert and Helen and the late and much loved Shirley White and other courageous people who have fought the good fight to get justice for sufferers of asbestos and dust related conditions.

Last year I was very pleased to be able to meet formally with the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society and follow up on its request for a grant to assist with the delivery of services to families in its organisation who have a member suffering from asbestos related diseases. I certainly commend the Attorney-General for supporting this action, which will improve access to justice and compensation for sufferers of dust related diseases. I have attended a number of conferences and meetings of the Asbestos Related Disease Support Society and I know of its good work. I know that it is very appreciative of the work the Attorney and his department are doing with regard to this legislation.

Ray, Helen and others have been around the House over the past 24 hours. I am not sure whether they are in the gallery today, but I certainly want to say good on them. They are courageous people. They deserve access to justice. This is another step in the right direction by this government to give the support that they much need.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—LNP) (12.46 pm): The Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill that we are debating today is supported by the LNP. It really is the first major amendment to the Civil Liability Act 2002. At the time that bill was debated there was massive concern and we had many debates in this parliament about the issue of insurance. Community organisations were in crisis. There were forums held around the state. I well remember the forum held at the Rumours Convention Centre, Toowoomba. A huge number of people turned up. A lot of people were very angry about the cost of insurance.

It forced a lot of community organisations, sporting clubs and people running halls and facilities to consider their futures and decide whether they could manage. The problems were twofold. Firstly, there was the sheer cost of having adequate insurance to cover themselves. Secondly, was the fear of the consequences for people who had given their time to be on committees or part of an organisation or given their time to coach kids or run various community based festivals, carnivals or other things and whether they were adequately covered. Previously they just turned up to do something and suddenly there were extra processes that were mooted that had to be undertaken.

We have seen a gradual evolution since then. The original civil liability bill endeavoured to bring about a balance between the cost and enabling organisations to address those costs and them feeling safe and secure in running whatever it was they were running. This has meant a number of changes. We now see in many organisations the necessity for people responsible for certain activities to be trained or have particular certificates. In some instances, it does make becoming a volunteer a little more difficult for people because they may have to have some sort of coaching certificate or be trained in the safe coaching of kids or in the safe running of events. For many events and festivals now, someone has to be responsible for the safety of the event and making sure that the layout of their particular festival or event conforms with certain safety rules with regard to who, for example, provides the electricity, how the stalls are laid out, how the event is run, the safety standards if animals are involved and those sorts of things.

We have entered a different era where more thought and organisation have to be given to an event. On the other side, there has been a degree of certainty involved as to the type of cover that is available and that can be obtained and what organisations have to do to provide for the safe

management of an event or a centre. That in its own way not only helps keep insurance costs down but also provides for a safer event for patrons and a safer event or function for those involved in organising it.

I noticed amongst other things in the bill that volunteers undertaking community work for P&C associations will be entitled to protection, because previously P&Cs were not able to incorporate and therefore were not covered by the various clauses of the incorporation act which other organisations have been covered by. The definition of 'community organisation' will now ensure that a volunteer working for a parents and citizens association is entitled to the protection from liability provided by section 39. I understand, if I am correct, that the minister is bringing in an amendment or addressing the issue of P&Fs. Some 70 per cent of the schools in Toowoomba have P&Fs. It is important that they know exactly where they stand and they can feel confident as well.

With regard to the issue of capping or the setting of amounts and the adjusting of those, the amendments maintain a cap which is calculated yearly on the rising costs of living expenses and average income. For example, when this regime comes into place the first rise will be in the order of 17.4 per cent based on the four previous quarters. If there were a number of years where there was a rise of 17 per cent to 18 per cent per year, it will be difficult to maintain that balance of providing fair compensation to people who have been injured. Obviously, the compensation that they get has to help care for them and maintain them relative to the cost of living, and I understand that. However, if there were four lots of 18 per cent rises over four years resulting in a 72 per cent rise over those four years, that sort of rise—whilst it would not bring about a 72 per cent increase in the premium; I understand that—might force up premiums.

That is something that will always have to be watched, because many of these organisations are part of the fabric of our society. Whether it is a hall committee, a festival, a show, a sporting club or any of those sorts of organisations, without them we would have nothing. There was a concern before 2003 that the then legislation would result in a sterile society that did not have volunteer organisations and people would not be able to go along and enjoy their club or their sport or their hobby or their community. To maintain that very important fabric of our society, we have to ensure that we always keep this balance right.

There are a number of other issues covered by this bill, in particular the removal of time limits in the cases of dust related diseases. These diseases are very complex, particularly those relating to asbestos and other illnesses. At the time that those materials were used there was no idea of what the long-term consequences were going to be, and in those times there were no safety mechanisms to protect people working with those sorts of materials. These diseases are the types of diseases that, in many instances, do not show themselves for some time. I think it is quite a humanitarian move within this bill to remove those time limits because that is going to provide for fair and caring treatment of those people who suffer from these particular diseases where the suffering does not come until sometimes decades after they have used this particular material.

We always have to keep an eye on this issue so we never go back to the situation that existed prior to 2003 when there was a crisis as to whether organisations would be able to exist and volunteers would be able to be volunteers due to what happened at that time in terms of liability claims and insurance. Those problems were able to be managed and contained by the Civil Liability Act. This bill is adjusting that act to provide for fairness while at the same time ensuring that that balance is maintained—that is, that there is not only fairness but realising that there is a limit to what volunteer organisations can fund in terms of insurance cover.

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (12.55 pm): I rise to make a very brief contribution to this debate, and members can hear from my voice the reason I am going to make a brief contribution to this debate. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Industrial Relations, I have the great honour of working in the areas that relate to workplace health and safety and to work closely with Workplace Health and Safety in its efforts to ensure that Queensland is a safe workplace and that workers who unfortunately suffer an injury that is work related are able to access remedies and be provided with ongoing support.

I thought it was important that I comment on one of the most significant changes that is proposed in this bill, and that is the abolition of the limitation period for personal injury occurring as a result of dust related conditions. The amendments contained in this bill mean that the normal limitation period prescribed for the bringing of proceedings for personal injury relating from a dust related condition is abolished. Importantly, this amendment is retrospective and will apply to claims regardless of whether the right of action has accrued before or after 1 July 2010. However, it will not apply to claims where judgement has been given, the action settled or discontinued or an application to extend a limitation period has been previously refused. These amendments effectively ensure that sufferers of dust related diseases and injuries can still access the legal system for compensation despite the fact that their symptoms may have commenced many years after their first exposure.

I acknowledge the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society for its engagement and work with government to bring about these changes. I acknowledge the work of the member for Bulimba and the member for Waterford in their advocacy in relation to these types of injuries and diseases. I also acknowledge the former member for Bulimba, a strong advocate for sufferers of these diseases and a strong advocate for the society who worked very closely with people involved in that issue. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (12.58 pm): I, too, will keep the House for only a few minutes. I was going to focus on all of the amendments today, but I will not be doing that. I think the changes are very fair, very reasonable and much appreciated. I particularly like the changes to the definition of 'community organisation' contained in section 38. I will not go into that either, but the fact that it provides protection from liability for negligence for individual volunteers engaged in community work for a community organisation will be very much appreciated. That protection is only available, of course, where the volunteer acts in good faith, and there are exceptions to that. I commend the work that has been done on this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm.

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (2.30 pm), in reply: At the outset, I want to thank all honourable members for their contributions to the debate on the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2009, in particular those members of the government who have supported the bill. But I also want to acknowledge those members of the opposition who spoke, almost unanimously to a person, in support of the legislation. I want to thank them for their support.

I particularly acknowledge the contributions made by the member for Algeester, the member for Yeerongpilly—not only in his role as a member of this place but also as the Parliamentary Secretary for Industrial Relations—and the members for Bulimba and Waterford, who all spoke about the very important role in our community that the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society plays in Queensland. I want to associate myself with their positive comments about the work that people such as Ray and Helen Colbert do. I also want to acknowledge their input and their contribution to this bill. Their work each and every day is in helping and supporting Queenslanders who suffer from some of the most insidious diseases that any individual could unfortunately be subjected to—diseases such as mesothelioma and asbestosis. I want to acknowledge their work and their support each and every day for Queenslanders who suffer from such illness, generally through no fault of their own.

This bill implements important changes to the civil liability and personal injury regime in Queensland. The measures contained in the bill have been drafted carefully to strike a fair balance between the rights of victims of negligence and the stability of the insurance market. Key initiatives in the bill include the removal of the statutory limitation period for dust related conditions, the partial reinstatement of Sullivan v Gordon damages for seriously injured Queenslanders, the indexation of caps on general damages and an amendment to ensure that loss of consortium is available to the de facto partner of an injured person.

At the outset, I would like to note that a number of the initiatives contained in this bill would be of particular importance to those persons in our community who are, most regrettably, suffering from a dust related condition. Firstly, the removal of the statutory limitation period for dust related conditions will mean that a person suffering from asbestosis, mesothelioma or another dust related condition will no longer need to make an application to the court to extend the limitation period. There is no doubt, in my view, that the removal of this hurdle will improve access to justice and reduce the stress and cost associated with pursuing a claim. Secondly, although as a general rule dust related conditions are excluded from the Civil Liability Act 2003, the amendment in this bill to partially reinstate Sullivan v Gordon damages has been drafted deliberately so as to capture a dust related condition that is not otherwise excluded from the act. That would include claims by a home handyman or other persons.

Although a person who has contracted a dust related condition as a result of their employment will not be entitled to Sullivan v Gordon damages, I can assure the House that there are already substantial statutory lump sums available to those people under the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003. Furthermore, I have also given a commitment to the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society to consider how, if possible, workers with a dust related condition are compensated for gratuitous services they provide in the context of the review of the WorkCover scheme which is currently underway. I thank again the members for Waterford and Bulimba for their work with the society and for their advocacy on behalf of the society.

I will turn now to the matters that were raised in the course of the debate. The member for Southern Downs, along with a number of other honourable members, raised concerns that the bill will return us to the days when small not-for-profit organisations were unable to access affordable public liability insurance. I assure all members of this House that the government remains committed to ensuring that community based not-for-profit organisations, sporting associations and parents and

citizens associations can continue to access affordable public liability insurance. Although I acknowledge that a number of the amendments in this bill may impact on insurance premiums, actuarial advice obtained by the government in relation to parts of the bill, and indeed the insurance industry's own estimates, I am informed, indicate that any impact on premiums will be relatively small.

Those honourable members who have raised concerns about the impact of the bill on small not-for-profit organisations may also take some comfort from the fact that the insurance scheme established by this government in 2002 for not-for-profit organisations is still very active to this day. As part of the scheme, Aon Risk Services Australia Ltd is engaged by the government on a fee-for-service basis to assist not-for-profit organisations locate the most appropriate insurance options available across a range of underwriters in the general insurance market. I am advised that Aon has been very proactive in developing new insurance markets and service options for not-for-profit organisations, but I would say that the government will, of course, keep this matter under close and careful scrutiny. If there are any problems or any significant issues that develop, we will act.

It is important, as many members indicated, that we provide the right environment for community organisations to function effectively in the Queensland community so that they can support, and play a significant role in, local communities, big and small, right throughout the city of Brisbane out to the rural and regional parts of our state and so that they continue to operate and function effectively and not be overburdened by excessive insurance premiums. That is something that the government will keep under review and it is something that we are very committed to doing. Of course, it is our reforms that have stabilised the insurance market in Queensland to ensure that those community groups can continue to function. We have no intention of changing that policy and we will continue to support them the best way we can.

The next matter that I would like to address relates to the amendments in the bill to allow monetary amounts in the Civil Liability Act 2002, the Motor Accident Insurance Act 1994 and the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act to be prescribed by regulation. I appreciate the concerns raised during the debate that these amendments may result in parliament having fewer opportunities to scrutinise changes to the monetary amounts, including changes to the caps on general damages. However, I consider that the bill as it is currently drafted provides a transparent and efficient mechanism—and a very important mechanism—for the annual indexation of monetary amounts. As was acknowledged by the member for Southern Downs, the bill will not result in the government having an unfettered discretion to change monetary amounts as and when it sees fit, and I appreciate his contribution in that regard. Rather, the bill includes a strict formula that I and future Attorneys-General must abide by when recommending changes to the monetary amounts to the Executive Council.

The method by which this annual indexation will occur is identical to the way in which the cap on non-economic loss in the Defamation Act 2005 has been indexed since 2006. The member for Gladstone raised concerns about the indexation being used to reduce the amounts of damages that can be awarded. As I have said, the bill sets out a strict formula that must be applied in determining the indexed amount each year. The bill also provides that if the application of the formula means that the amount will be same or less the Attorney-General need not make a determination.

I now turn to the next matter that I would like to address. The member for Southern Downs asked specifically what consultation had been undertaken in relation to the amendments. I would like to take this opportunity to put on the record my thanks to those stakeholders that made a submission to the bill. Those stakeholders include the Insurance Council of Australia, the Motor Accident Insurance Commission, the Queensland Law Society, the Bar Association of Queensland, the Australian Lawyers Alliance and the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society. It was through this consultation that the government was able to make an informed decision as to whether the bill adequately balances the rights of victims of negligence with the need to maintain the affordability and availability of insurance. Given that there are no amendments in this bill that will specifically affect the not-for-profit sector and that the premium increases resulting from the bill are expected to be small, the not-for-profit sector was not directly consulted on the bill.

The office of the State Actuary was able to provide actuarial advice on the impact on insurance premiums and the insurance companies themselves also provided input on the effects of any changes. Community organisations generally would not have the resources to provide information of this complexity. We went to those individuals directly involved and impacted by these legislative amendments. Of course, many of those representative legal bodies represent lawyers who deal with and represent not-for-profit groups on a daily basis. We are confident that the mechanism is one that will protect and in a sense enhance not only the civil justice system in Queensland but also small not-for-profit organisations.

Finally, I would like to briefly acknowledge the comments made by the member for Lockyer in relation to personal injury arising from exposure to nanoparticles. As stated by the member for Lockyer, nanotechnology is an area where the science is by no means definitive. If nanotechnology related personal injury does become an issue in the future I can assure the House that the law of negligence remains intact and there is nothing in the Civil Liability Act 2003 which would prevent a person who has

suffered this kind of personal injury from pursuing their claims. As science and technology advances there may be an impact. The general principles at common law of how a negligence action must be pursued will continue to apply as modified by statute. All employers know that they have a duty of care to their employees and that there could be in a workplace environment the possibility of a common law claim for negligence. That applies regardless of technology. Regardless of systems of work the principles of negligence will still apply. I thank the member for Lockyer for his contribution in an area that is one that is continuing to grow and stretch the boundaries of science and technology and how so many things will happen in the future through not only business but also consumer products and so on.

I also thank the member for Toowoomba North for his comments. The honourable member asked whether the amendments in relation to P&Cs also extend to parents and friends associations. Other members asked similar questions. I would note that there is no specific need to specifically include parents and friends associations per se as they can be incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981, thereby coming within the definition of a community organisation. This of course stands in contrast to the position of state school parents and citizens organisations as these groups are prohibited by statute from being incorporated under existing law. As such, a specific amendment as has been made that was required to ensure these groups were covered. That was a significant matter that needed to be achieved through this legislative measure. There was in a sense a potential gap in the law where volunteers working for parents and citizens organisations would not have been covered and those volunteers would not have been able to avail themselves of the protections under the Civil Liability Act so it was important that it be clarified. Any other community group, of course, is capable of availing themselves of those protections as required subject to them satisfying the requirements of the act, particularly incorporation.

It is important to note that under the amendment that I am proposing to move through the parliament in consideration in detail, any community not covered can apply to me as the Attorney-General to have that organisation declared to be an eligible organisation by regulation. That is another mechanism that can be used to cover any other groups that might not otherwise be covered by the legislation.

The honourable member also asked why the abolition of the limitation period will not apply to people who have been previously unsuccessful in an application for extension of time. The essential principle in this regard is that a court's decision must be and must be seen to be final. A defendant who has successfully opposed an application by a person suffering from a dust related disease to extend the limitation period has a legitimate expectation that the claim will remain barred. In the interests of fairness and certainty, it would not be appropriate to introduce retrospective legislation that would effectively override a court's decision. If legislation were to operate in this manner it would have a significant adverse effect on defendants. This is because of the time and resources the defendants may have allocated to the original application and because defendants will have since arranged their business affairs on the basis that the injured person's claim is forever statute barred.

The amendments with respect to the loss of consortium are being made to ensure that there is equality before the law with respect to this head of damage. In Queensland a husband has a common law right to claim damages for loss of consortium. Loss of consortium includes loss of benefits such as comfort, society, assistance, companionship and support. While the Law Reform Act 1995 vests a statutory right in a wife to seek such damages, a de facto partner of an injured person is not currently able to seek compensation for loss of consortium. The bill will address this anomaly by amending the Law Reform Act 1995 to extend the right to claim damages for loss of consortium to a de facto partner of an injured person. This amendment is consistent with the Discrimination Law Amendment Act 2002. This act was introduced to ensure that de facto partners, regardless of their sexual orientation, have rights and obligations consistent with those of married spouses wherever possible. Ensuring that there is no discrimination against any group, particularly those groups who are in partnerships, regardless of their sexual orientation, is an issue that is very critical and important to this government. I spoke at length about that during the debate on the surrogacy bill this year. Overwhelmingly, Australians do not support discrimination against same-sex couples or other people in similar gendered relationships. The numbers are, in fact, very strongly supportive for anti-discrimination measures and this is one that we are pursuing in the parliament through this bill.

At this stage I am not convinced that a loss of consortium claim should be abolished in Queensland. In 2003 the government introduced a threshold test to ensure that loss of consortium is only available if general damages for the injured person are assessed at \$30,000 or more or the injured person died as a result of their injuries. This test has been effective in ensuring that loss of consortium is restricted to those in the greatest need. I believe the existing law in this area, together with the amendments being considered today, strike the right balance between the rights of victims of negligence and the stability of the insurance market.

I note that the member for Burnett commented on matters relating to dental issues at the Bundaberg Hospital. A very fundamental point that is before the nation at the moment is the fact that the federal opposition, including senators from the Liberal and National Party representing Queensland, are

opposing and blocking the Rudd government's dental scheme, which would provide \$52.8 million for dental care and 180,000 more appointments for Queenslanders. It is a scandal that the Senate is acting in such an obstructionist way. We know that this Senate that was elected in 2007—and continuing senators from earlier elections—is the most obstructionist Senate in 30 years in Australia. We all know what the Senate of 30 years ago did. That Senate perverted the Australian Constitution and brought down a democratically elected government for its own perverse political purposes and that is what we are seeing in the Senate today.

I am calling on the member for Burnett and all of those members opposite to ask Senator Boswell in particular and Senator Joyce—we know that Senator Joyce has spoken at length about how much he seeks to stand up for Queensland—to stand up for Queensland on this occasion. We note that, regrettably, notwithstanding his public comments since his election, Senator Joyce was very quickly rolled and appears of his own desire to support the federal opposition's proposal to interfere with wild rivers legislation in Queensland. One has to ask, after all of that bluster, all of that volume, all of that hot air from Senator Joyce: where was he standing up for Queensland and this parliament when that legislation was passed unanimously? Where was he then? Senator Joyce has been shown up for the political hypocrite that he is. He spoke long and hard on his election about how he would stand up for Queensland and our state. This morning on radio he did it again. He has now been captured by his colleagues in Canberra. He is a pale shadow of someone who would stand up for Queensland.

I would also ask the member for Burnett to speak to his party colleagues—Senator Boyce, Senator Brandis, Senator Ian Macdonald, Senator Mason and Senator Trood—and ask them to stop acting in what I think is a very cruel fashion for people who need dental care in this state and ask them to release that money so that it can flow through to Queenslanders.

In conclusion, I thank all honourable members for their contributions during this debate. There were very positive contributions made on both sides of the House. I acknowledge those contributions that were made in what is a very significant law reform measure. This is about making the law more accessible to Queenslanders. That is the Labor mission. It is always our mission when it comes to law reform to ensure that the system of justice in our state remains open and transparent but accessible to all Queenslanders. It is a mission that I take very seriously on a personal level as the Attorney-General.

I also thank the officers of my department who have been involved in drafting this legislation, in particular Belinda Myers and Imelda Bradley for their hard work on the bill, and I commend the bill to the parliament.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Before moving on, I would like to acknowledge in the gallery this afternoon students and teachers from the Oakey State School in the electorate of Condamine.

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 DICK (2.51 pm): I move the following amendment—

1 Clause 2 (Commencement)

Page 6, line 8, ' , 15'—

omit.

I table the explanatory notes to my amendment.

Tabled paper: Explanatory notes to Hon. Dick's amendments to the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Bill [1895].

I indicate to the parliament that amendment No. 1 amends clause 2 of the bill which provides for the commencement of the bill. This amendment will ensure that clause 15 of the bill, which is itself the subject of an amendment to be moved during consideration in detail, will commence on assent.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 5, as read, agreed to.

Clause 6—

Mr DICK (2.52 pm): I move the following amendment—

2 Clause 6 (Amendment of s 38 (Interpretation))

Page 7, line 13, from 'chapter 7'—

omit, insert—

'chapter 7;

(g) another entity prescribed under a regulation.'.

In speaking to this amendment, I indicate that the government values the contribution that volunteers make to community organisations across the state. Under section 39 of the Civil Liability Act 2003, a person undertaking volunteer work for a community organisation, as defined in the act, is entitled to receive protection from liability in certain circumstances.

Clause 6 of the bill will ensure that a parents and citizens association established under the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 is a community organisation for the purposes of this section. Amendment No. 2 amends clause 6 of the bill to make a further amendment to section 38 to allow an organisation to be prescribed by regulation as a community organisation. This amendment will provide the government with flexibility to respond to requests received from organisations that wish to be considered a community organisation for the purposes of section 39 of the act.

As was the case with parents and citizens associations established under the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, there may be other organisations in the community which organise important and essential work by volunteers but which do not meet the existing definition of 'community organisation' due to their unique organisational status. The factors that would be taken into account when deciding whether an organisation should be prescribed by regulation as a community organisation include the organisation's legal status and structure. Each case would be decided on its merits.

Mr DOWLING: Just on paragraph (g) 'another entity prescribed under regulation', could the minister provide us with an example of what sort of entity may be caught up in that? Obviously to make such an amendment there must have been some groups that came on to the radar that he might have been expecting to fall into that category otherwise he would not be making that provision. My supplementary question is about the process and the requirements. The minister has touched on this briefly. There is a set prescription. Could the minister give some indication of what that process might involve and what sorts of costs might be associated with such an application? I thank the minister for his response.

Mr DICK: I thank the member for Redlands for his question. At the outset the important thing from my perspective was to ensure that we did not have any gaps, and it appeared that there was potentially a gap in respect of parents and citizens associations which otherwise possibly would not have fallen within the exemption regime for volunteers and volunteer organisations under the act. So, as the bill was prepared and subsequent to introduction, I was reflecting on that, and it made me think that we needed a general catch-all provision to ensure that any other organisation which felt that they were not otherwise covered under the law could have an opportunity to make representations or submissions or seek coverage, in a sense, to the umbrella protection of the act.

So there is no specific group in a sense that motivated it. I was interested of course to ensure that volunteers in independent schools and Catholic schools had protection. Generally they can avail themselves of that provision through incorporation, and that has been the law effectively since 2002. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no specific problems with volunteer parent groups in particular—P&Fs and other independent school associations. So generally the law has worked well. But I thought it appropriate that we had a provision for people to make application if there was a case where they might not otherwise be covered—perhaps a general unincorporated association or maybe a smaller group. So I wanted to ensure that that was the case. That is why the amendment is being moved.

In respect of application, the application will be straightforward. It will effectively be a submission that an individual will write to either me or the Department of Justice, whatever they wish to do. It would be an initial request from them for this to be considered. I do not anticipate at this stage that there will be any fee charged for that matter to be progressed or considered. I do not anticipate a large number of applications being made. If there were and that develops, there might be another statutory response that might be more appropriate. But it is really for those exceptional cases that we have not anticipated where people may want to afford themselves of that coverage under the act for volunteers. We will still have to look at it on a case-by-case basis.

We want to ensure that individuals or perhaps commercial entities are not trying to cover themselves through the act, but I do not anticipate that people will do that. We will have to look at it, as I have said, on a case-by-case basis. We will have to look at the entity, the structure of the entity, the number of members and what they in fact do. I do not anticipate that it will be a difficult process, but

there may be a process of asking questions and getting more information. I am hoping it will be relatively straightforward. I always hope for things to be straightforward. If it is not, then we will deal with it in some other fashion. I hope that answers the member's question.

Mr DOWLING: I thank the minister for his response and comprehensive comments. Paragraph (f) does specifically say 'parents and citizens associations' formed under the education act. The law, being what it is, is a terribly prescriptive instrument. While the minister has suggested that it does include other school bodies in the private school sector—and he used the example of parents and friends associations, which again is a different association—could the minister confirm that it will also pick up all of the PT&FAs and other associated groups so that they will have that protection as the minister has outlined?

With the law being what it is, unless they are specifically named it may well see them excluded by virtue of the fact that the legislation has named a parents and citizens association but it does not specifically say a parents and friends association or a PT&FA or what have you. I appreciate that some of those will be caught up under the other definitions in the regulation by virtue of the fact that they are largely from private schools with a religious background or a church background. They may well be picked up through that. I ask the minister to give some certainty and clarification that it will not allow those other entities by virtue of their title and their formation to be missed out.

Mr DICK: The law required an amendment because the Education (General Provisions) Act excluded P&Cs under the Civil Liability Act. There was in fact a potential gap there for those groups, so we needed to remedy that. At the end of the day, any other church based group was already subject to the general provisions of the act. So if they fall under one of the definitions, particularly in subdivision 1 of division 2 of the act, those definitions in section 38—including a 'corporation' and 'a church or other religious group'—will fall within the definition of 'community organisation'.

I am not in a position to provide absolute definitive clarity on that issue because, again, it depends on the organisation and the entity. We needed to act because there was a potential problem with parents and citizens organisations in state schools because there was an exclusionary provision in the Education (General Provisions) Act. We needed to remedy that to protect those volunteers. Otherwise, the system appears to have been working well.

There do not seem to have been any problems since this act commenced in 2003. I do not want to make a blanket comment in case there is one particular group that for some reason does not fall within it, but the definition of 'community organisation' in section 38 of the Civil Liability Act is quite broad. I am not aware of any problems. If problems manifest themselves, of course we will act. We have that other provision now to make regulatory provision for entities. I am confident the system is working well. I have not received any representations from the Catholic Church, the independent schools association or any other Catholic education association that it is a problem. My understanding is that it is not, but I am always happy to look at that.

So my view is that people are generally covered, but I do not want to provide definitive advice because it really would depend on the entity. To this point over the past seven years, there does not seem to have been a problem manifest in relation to those groups. I understand the honourable member's concern and interest. It is one that I hold as well in a sense, but I am confident that the law has operated well and that volunteers in those organisations are generally protected.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 14, as read, agreed to.

Clause 15—

Mr DICK (3.02 pm): I move the following amendment—

3 **Clause 15 (Insertion of new ch 5, pt 7)**

Page 15, lines 12 to 21—

omit, insert—

'85 **Retrospective effect of section 59A damages provisions for dust-related claims only**

'(1) The section 59A damages provisions apply to any dust-related claim, even if the relevant breach of duty has happened or happens before 1 July 2010.

Note—

The section 59A damages provisions commence on 1 July 2010.

- (2) However, the section 59A damages provisions do not apply to a dust-related claim if, before the date of assent of the amending Act—
- (a) the claim was settled; or
 - (b) a proceeding for the claim was started and—
 - (i) the proceeding was discontinued; or
 - (ii) judgment was given in the proceeding.
- (3) The section 59A damages provisions apply to another type of personal injury claim only if the relevant breach of duty happens on or after 1 July 2010.
- (4) To remove any doubt, it is declared that in a proceeding for a dust-related claim started before 1 July 2010, section 59A damages may be claimed even though the section 59A damages provisions have not yet commenced.
- (5) In this section—

amending Act means the *Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2010*.

dust-related claim means a claim for personal injury damages resulting from a dust-related condition.

section 59A damages provisions means sections 5, 7, 59, 59A to 59D and 60 and schedule 2, definition *section 59A damages*, as amended or inserted under the amending Act.

This amendment replaces the transitional provision inserted by clause 15 of the bill with a new transitional provision. The purpose of the new transitional provision is to ensure that the amendments in the bill to partially reinstate *Sullivan v Gordon* damages have retrospective operation in the case of dust related claims that are not otherwise excluded from the *Civil Liability Act 2003*. Retrospective operation of this amendment is justified, given that most dust related claims arise from exposure to asbestos many years in the past.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 15, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 16 to 51, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (3.03 pm): I move—

That the bill, as amended, be now read a third time.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Long Title

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (3.03 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.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 9 February (see p. 55), on motion of Mr Mulherin—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Mr HOPPER (Condamine—LNP) (3.04 pm): The act being changed is the *Agricultural College Act 2005*. The bill changes the name of the board from the Australian Agricultural College Corporation Advisory Board to the Board of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. It expands the functions for the board. The new provision specifically empowers the board to advise the corporation sole of the AACC on the performance of the corporation's functions. The bill specifies that the board will in future consist of between five and eight members appointed by the minister. One member can be nominated from the corporation sole, nominated by the associate director-general. The existing legislation did not specify minimum or maximum numbers of board members.

In relation to eligibility for membership, the bill outlines requirements that must be met. A person cannot become a member of the board if the person has been convicted of an indictable offence or is an insolvent under administration. A person must have the qualifications, skills, experience or standing that the minister considers appropriate for membership of the board. In considering those qualifications, skills, experience or standing, the minister may consult with the corporation.

The bill amends the term of office of the chairperson or deputy chair to be no more than three years. It specifies that the term of office of a board member is no more than three years, with provision that the three-year appointment does not prevent a person from being reappointed for a subsequent term or terms.

It speaks about remuneration arrangements. We certainly agree with this side of the bill. Currently, the act states that a board member is not entitled to any remuneration—well, if you put the time in, surely you can get some remuneration—other than the reimbursement of reasonable expenses and travel allowance, unless approved by the minister. This will be replaced by an entitlement to remuneration decided by the minister. The bill also clarifies that any public servant employee appointed by the board is only entitled to remuneration if the board meets outside of normal work hours.

The bill allows for the minister, at his discretion, to remove a board member if that member becomes incapable of performing the member's functions because of physical or mental incapacity or is guilty of misconduct. It amends the act to require the board to meet at least four times a year, rather than the current requirement to meet a minimum of twice per year. The bill talks about disclosure of interests. Members must advise of any interests that might cause a conflict of interest. A requirement of the board's chairperson is to report within one month at the end of each quarter to the corporation and the minister on the corporation's performance.

The bill also corrects an error. This provides that a document that refers to the board's former name be taken as reference to the board under its new name. It defines certain terms as they apply in the act. Definitions are inserted for 'board', 'corporation', 'indictable offence' and 'insolvent under administration'.

The second part of the bill is the amendment of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936. The bill amends the act to provide for the employment of overseas trained veterinary surgeons and veterinary specialists by Queensland universities. The amended section will allow veterinary surgeons to grant special registration to overseas trained veterinary surgeons and veterinary specialists employed by the University of Queensland or James Cook University for the purpose of engaging in research or teaching veterinary science. This special registration will be increased to a 12-month period.

The four agricultural colleges in Queensland at this moment have been left to totally wither and rot by this current Labor government with a minister who obviously has not been too concerned about the future of agriculture in Queensland, let alone Australia. These agricultural learning centres have had their hearts torn from them. The Labor government has fostered and encouraged a lack of confidence by our young people to enter the agricultural or horticultural industries. This lack of confidence has seen significant falls in enrolments at all campuses since 2005, although the agricultural industry is in desperate need of graduates. I hope that this bill, and any further bill put before the House, can help to increase that.

The lack of investment in agricultural colleges and training centres by this Labor government has led to a rapid decline in industry involvement in investment. The government has let these assets be run down to the point where it thinks the only way forward is to sell, sell, sell. The removal of the local boards by this government has led to the communities surrounding the four agricultural colleges losing interest in what was happening within those colleges, and this lack of interest has contributed to industry removing their involvement. Communities in regional and rural areas took ownership of these agricultural colleges and proudly supported them during difficult times. Once the Labor government removed the local content, communities were disenfranchised.

Prior to 2005, the four colleges were active and the communities supporting these colleges were actively involved in the decision-making process by the colleges via the local board input. Now the local boards are gone. We are talking about remuneration to the board in this bill now. We have one board covering all colleges. The local input has been taken from our agricultural colleges. When Tom Barton brought this legislation into the chamber a few years ago, that was the start of the breakdown. Local board management incorporates regional knowledge and local industry knowledge that is relevant. Taking this local element away to a central point of control means losing on-the-ground experience. That is the problem we are facing: on-the-ground experience is being lost.

There have been radical changes to the syllabus. Courses have been reduced from approximately 1200 hours to 400 hours, which has devalued the certificate. Changes to the syllabus made students wary. Students graduating from these four agricultural colleges in the late 1990s and early 2000 had a 97 per cent employment rate. Their work ethic and attitude were highly valued. The colleges created a culture of excellent work attitude. Many students were employed on recommendations from the college rather than face-to-face interviews with potential employers.

The Labor government put no value on the success of the colleges prior to 2005 and has dismantled the colleges ever since. The lack of confidence portrayed by the government has been an insult to rural and regional people and agricultural industries. The Labor government and Minister Mulherin, the minister responsible, continue to treat country people like second-class citizens.

The auditing process has become ridiculous. Audits used to take place four to five times a year, and auditing has now increased tenfold in some instances. It is another example of bureaucracy gone mad under this government. Instead of looking to produce a package for industry, students and employees, the Labor government has continued to erode the asset. Instead of building courses that are diverse, targeting industry and engaging industry, this government wants to sell off the colleges piece by piece. Instead of looking to the marketplace, the Labor government wants to shut down some of our colleges.

There is no doubt that practical training is more expensive than theoretical training, but for the agricultural and horticultural industries this training is essential. The agricultural college used to provide courses that implemented theory into practice to provide graduates that were work ready. Agriculture involves a great deal of hands-on work that is supported by theory.

The loss of local industry leaders on boards has been a grave mistake. Taking away this local content has exacerbated the loss of confidence by students, industry and communities. Each college is unique to its own area and offers students an insight into practical agricultural training that is heavily supported by theoretical learning. The Longreach college was a pastoral college providing training for young men and women in the sheep, wool and cattle industries. There is no other training facility that provides this. Students come from western Queensland and western and central New South Wales to participate in these courses.

In 2004 the Dalby Agricultural College, as it was known, had approximately 150 students. From 1998 to 2003, the number ranged from 100 to 140 approximately. In the past three years, enrolments have been 27, 32 and 32 respectively. This decline coincides with the amalgamation of the colleges. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; it was a massive mistake. Whilst the drought and resource boom have had some effect on numbers, the Labor government should acknowledge its role in this reduction of enrolments. There still remains a great demand for employees in the agricultural and horticultural industries, and a great gap in knowledge is beginning to emerge.

How do we fix this? The LNP would engage with industry to target courses for their needs. We would look to the marketplace. We would build courses with diversification, not break courses down or give them the chop. Greater efficiency and changes in technology enable fewer people to carry out the same operation as a decade ago, but primary industry still involves the manual work of people.

The LNP would restore confidence into agricultural colleges by developing a syllabus that is diverse and adaptable, and that looks to the future of agriculture in Queensland and in Australia. Courses that reflect the changes in agriculture need to be developed. These courses would allow for students to respond to industry demand. Responsibility at the local board level needs to be restored to provide input from industry. This would encourage industry and community involvement, which would in turn encourage students to have the confidence to return to these colleges. Instead of strengthening and investing in the future of agriculture, this government has dissected the industry one piece at a time and is selling off these pieces. There needs to be local representatives on these boards to provide the local knowledge and to build the courses that the industry wants and needs to meet the many challenges that the agricultural and horticultural industry face.

Much change has occurred in primary industries. The change to what type of industry takes place in rural and regional areas has been well documented. Once towns and communities survived purely from primary production. Now the resource sector is present in many regions. This has brought many changes, some for the betterment of the community and some to the detriment of the community. We can utilise these changes to the benefit of these colleges by diversifying into training courses for the resource sector in the areas of Dalby and Emerald. Students should have the option of moving between campuses to complete various core elements of their course composition. Where will students interested in a career in agriculture go to obtain these skills? Where will students be able to practise the theory they learn? Nowhere, as far as the Labor government and the minister are concerned, and they do not care. Agriculture and its importance to the Queensland economy are lost to this Labor government. It has little regard for the next generation of young farmers who will be producing clean, green food, fibre and foliage for the people of Queensland for centuries to come. If we take away that education, we take away the knowledge.

I can remember when I was dairying in the Bell district there were many field days put on by the Dalby Agricultural College. At many of those field days there was not standing room to see what was being done. It was an education facility and it was used by the whole community. We held community events at those colleges. They were a wonderful community service. This Labor government under Minister Barton sacked the boards, took away local input, took away local knowledge and formed one board to run all these colleges now. That local input is simply not there for the colleges.

We heard a statement from a minister—he did not state in the House—that these colleges were the last of the Bjelke-Petersen era and they had to go. That says it all, and there has been a degrading ever since. We have situations now where the pay to staff has been significantly reduced, and there is no supervision in some instances for students. They are dealing with heavy machinery and other things which could cause a lot of problems. There has been a lack of staff hours in recent times that is totally unacceptable.

What we see here is a wonderful organisation that has been totally broken down. I made a statement this week that the Dalby college and the Burdekin college land will be sold. We have a government with an \$85 billion debt. It is paying \$12 million interest every day, and we have a minister who is selling off the farm. We will never be able to replace these facilities. I lived in Dalby when the Dalby Agricultural College was built. It was a live, vibrant education facility. It has been stripped and has now withered away. That is totally unacceptable.

This piece of legislation only deals with two minor issues. If massive input and huge amounts of energy are not put into protecting our colleges and we do not have local leadership of them again, they will wither and be destroyed. The same thing will happen as happened with the dairy research station on the Tablelands and the wheat research station in Toowoomba. You are going to sell these facilities to put money into the government coffers. That is what this is all about. You know you are going to sell them—

Mr Mulherin interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! Members should direct their comments through the chair.

Mr HOPPER: That is exactly what is going to happen. The government will have its greedy mittens on the assets and they will be sold. We will be barking from the background and the minister will not sleep if he goes ahead with what he is planning.

Mr WENDT (Ipswich West—ALP) (3.20 pm): I am pleased to rise today to speak to the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. As this House has been aware, the primary purpose of the bill is to amend the legislation governing the function of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation, the AACC, and in particular the role of its advisory boards. I believe that the strengthening of the AACC's advisory board to provide advice on a wider range of issues is a great step towards increased participation with industry in the operations of the AACC.

A key plank to achieving this aim is to ensure that the AACC meets the needs of the changing training market. Traditionally, the board focused on just curriculum related matters. However, under this legislation the board will now be able to advise on the college's strategic direction, as well as those operational and financial issues affecting the corporation.

It is hoped that through this new independent board industry will have a voice on the full spectrum of matters affecting the corporation which, of course, also has an impact on the provision of quality training outcomes for students working in or seeking work in rural or related industries. As the minister has previously touched on, these amendments were preceded by extensive consultation with industry during 2009 where it was established that there was a need for a stronger corporate governance framework and greater input from industry. These consultation rounds also highlighted some of the issues currently facing the AACC, including changing industry and student demand, declining student enrolments and continued poor financial performance of the colleges.

These findings were also reflected in two key reports during 2009, those being the national AgriFoods Skills Australia *Environmental Scan* and the *Queensland rural skills and training demand report*. Both of these reports were prepared by the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation and both reports provide a very clear understanding of the factors that are shaping and impacting agricultural industry workforce training and the future demand for vocational training, and the AACC is far from immune to them. For example, the 2009 AgriFoods Skills Australia *Environmental Scan* identified three defining issues. These were the attraction and retention of skilled and semiskilled workers, the adoption of higher skill levels across the workforce and the adoption and diffusion of new research practice and technology across the industry.

Make no mistake, these issues are real across a number of industry sectors, but, unfortunately, are especially prevalent in Queensland's \$10 billion agricultural industries. What this says is that plainly the AACC has a big role to play and as such it is felt that it needs the expert guidance of industry to meet current and future training expectations. Additionally, the reports did more than outline the factors that are affecting the demand for AACC's training products and services.

For instance, the *Queensland rural skills and training demand report* clearly identified that if the primary industries sector is to be more involved in vocational education and training then this training needs to be delivered in a format which better suits their needs. This includes the delivery of training in

local regional area skill sets at a time that suits the seasonality of a particular sector and delivery of in-demand higher level skill sets so industry can address issues such as climate variability, biosecurity and, importantly, animal welfare issues.

I believe that the AACC is responding to the changing training market for agriculture which has been identified in these reports by reinvigorating the way it delivers training to students and by building stronger relationships with industry. As such, the establishment of a new board will give the AACC the expert advice it needs to guide itself into a new era of training delivery where it will once again become the training provider of choice for the rural and related industries. As such, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—LNP) (3.25 pm): It is with much pleasure that I speak to the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. I believe this is a very important piece of legislation in many ways. It is about recognising how we can hopefully take these agricultural colleges forward. I say from the outset that there have been a lot of anomalies within the operation of agricultural colleges over the last period of time. Former minister the Hon. Tom Barton introduced legislation in this area in about 2005. The colleges then came under the department of employment, training and industry relations. Later we saw them transferred to the Department of Education and Training. Now we see them where, I believe, they should rightfully be and that is under the guidance and management strategies of the department of primary industries. I think that is where Queensland's agricultural colleges should have always been. I know when the honourable member for Toowoomba South was the shadow spokesperson for primary industries he had as part of his policy that agricultural colleges would once again come under the umbrella of the department of primary industries.

We have seen many anomalies in this area over the past few years. Those changes have been detrimental in many ways to the ongoing viability of the operation of these four magnificent complexes in Queensland. I have two of these facilities in my electorate of Gregory. I have the old Longreach pastoral college as it was better known and the Emerald Agricultural College as it was better known. They are now under the umbrella of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. I believe the way we progress the colleges from here needs a lot more consideration. No doubt the minister and the government are in the box seat. The government would have an objective about how it intends to take these colleges forward.

I am very grateful that I was a party to the process where the government, through the minister, held forums right around the state where it canvassed ideas and participants expressed different points of view. I attended the one in Emerald and I also attended the one at Longreach. Some very worthwhile and important discussions came out of those forums. People had definite views and visions with regard to taking these great facilities forward.

A lot of people think that these colleges are there for the prime objective of training young people from rural Queensland in the business of agriculture, whether it is pastoral industry training that comes out of that magnificent complex at Longreach or agricultural industry training that comes out of Emerald and Dalby or the training on the Wet Tropics, which is a totally different concept altogether, that comes out of the facility at Burdekin.

I know that on numerous occasions the minister has said that we have to look at diversifying in Bundaberg where vegetable growing has become an integral part of that region. No doubt vegetable growing is an integral part of agriculture, regardless of where it is in the state. We certainly have to move forward in progressing that industry. We need to teach people, whether they are young people or older people, the finer art of producing quality product.

One point I want to emphasise today is that many of the students who go to these colleges are not rural young people. Many of them come from urban areas from around our state and interstate. That is a point of difference I had with the former minister, the Hon. Tom Barton, some time ago. At that time he said that we do not need those interstate people coming to Queensland, but they are an asset when they come to our state. We have witnessed the boom in the mining industry. Now we cannot get enough personnel to work in the resources industry. Many young people do not want to just work in the resources industry but want to work in agriculture. These colleges give a whole new outlook to those young people in that they can take advantage of these pastoral colleges or agricultural colleges.

I heard the shadow spokesman, the member for Condamine, say that 97 per cent of young people who come out of these institutions find themselves in employment. The good thing about that employment is that, most times, 97 per cent stay in Queensland. They are an asset to the agriculture industries of Queensland. Many of them go to the territory or back to their own states, but what a wonderful thing it is that we can get those quality young people, whether they come from a city base or from a rural base, to be an integral part of our agricultural industries.

Ms Darling: And young women—lots of young women!

Mr JOHNSON: Absolutely. I take that interjection from the honourable member for Sandgate. It is a very good interjection and it is a very good point. The greater number of those young people now are young women. Every year I give a \$500 bursary to each of the colleges in my electorate and the majority of the young people who win those bursaries are young girls from coastal and other areas.

I will share with the House a very good story. A woman wrote to me after her daughter won the bursary at Emerald a couple of years ago. She said that that \$500 helped her daughter go to that college. When her daughter was a young girl, all she wanted to do was be on the land and have a pony. She was able to take advantage of the courses at the Emerald Agricultural College and went on to find a career in animal husbandry. Today she is working as a vet nurse for a vet operation looking after thoroughbreds at Randwick in Sydney, and she got her start at the Emerald Agricultural College. She was a city based girl from Rockhampton. Another young woman from Cooroy who was a recipient of my bursary a couple of years ago has gone on to a career in horticulture. These colleges mean that those young people from the city who do not want to be in the city can get an opportunity to be trained in agriculture.

The important factor with this legislation is that we recognise how we are going to take these colleges forward, and that is local management. I cannot emphasise local management enough. In hindsight, we are all pretty good at making mistakes, but I think many good management strategies have been put in place in the past that have not been recognised as such. If we are going to be boofheads, we will not achieve anything. As the explanatory notes state—

The AACC is a corporation sole (a type of legal entity consisting of a single person) created under the Agricultural College Act 2005, with the corporation sole currently being the Associate Director-General ...

The real issue now is that body of personnel who are going to work with that sole person. There are some very good personnel such as those who have given very valuable input to the colleges at both Emerald and Longreach, and no doubt other people have put forward the same ideals at Dalby, the Burdekin and other parts of the state.

As has been said, up to 150 or 200 people have attended these forums. Given the quality and expertise of our farmers and graziers and other industry leaders who have been participants at those forums, that intellectual capacity and that intellectual leadership is something that we now have to take advantage of and put those personnel on to that board to ensure that we get the full and proper outcome so there can be a resurgence in these college operations over the next couple of years. I believe that the minister has made a recommendation that over the next two years we have to ensure that we can take these operations forward.

Another issue I want to touch on is Indigenous training. I believe this is a very worthwhile cause, especially in Longreach, and I refer of course to Boyd Curran. He is a grazier from Longreach—

Mr Watt: A good man—a very good man!

Mr JOHNSON: Absolutely! I take the interjection from the honourable member for Everton. Boyd is a bloke who has certainly shown compassion, understanding and care to our Indigenous brothers and sisters. He has brought many young people down from Mornington Island and Doomadgee. They have had a training program over the last 10 years at Lawn Hill and Riversleigh north-west of Mount Isa, and that program has worked very well. Boyd is now in control of a program called Beyond Billabong which over the last 12 months has seen many of these young people, mainly young men, come from places like Mornington Island and Doomadgee. We are trying to now incorporate young people from Woorabinda in the eastern end of my electorate, because there are many young people from there who could certainly take advantage of this program.

Mr Seeney: Do they vote for you?

Mr JOHNSON: They do, actually. The honourable member for Callide asked me if they vote for me. They have been very good supporters of mine. I know the ones at Baralaba and those places are good supporters of his, too.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: I take that interjection from the honourable member for Callide. He, like me, is an old ringer from the Top End. He is a Roper River ringer. He knows what it is all about in terms of training Indigenous people and working with Indigenous people, and that is exactly what we have on this side of the House—people who understand the needs and the values of these people.

I come back to Boyd Curran's program. Our agricultural colleges have a very specialist role to play in training these people. In terms of the way they present themselves now—and it is a credit to Boyd and his team—those young people are clean and spotless in their approach, their manners and their courteousness. It is something that I am fiercely proud of, and I know Boyd Curran and those other people are as well.

The fact is that 55 per cent of those people have gone on to meaningful employment since they have done the program. Another 25 per cent have gone on to do further training. Some of them have even taken themselves back to school. Boyd was telling me only today that one of those students is now resident in Longreach and attending the Longreach State High School to advance their education so they can find purpose in their future employment. I think this is all good. Boyd said to me that he is negotiating with the state government to expand the program to females so they can take advantage of it, and I believe that that is going to be a very worthwhile program for the young women who become part of it. He told me that he is working with Annette Whitehead in the Premier's office who is doing great work in assisting him in this field, and hopefully we will see some productivity come as a result of that.

Returning to the board structure and these people with expertise, I know that we cannot have them all from one area. We have people who are specialists in their field, whether it be irrigation, dryland farming, the pastoral industry, the wool industry, horticulture or vegetable growing, or whatever it is. These are specialist areas, but the thing about Queensland is that our state lends itself to every type of agriculture that can operate here. We have the best cattle industry in the world, and I do not say that lightly. We have a quality cattle industry. It is a \$13 billion industry. It is not only in the cattle industry but in the wool industry, the grain industry and in horticulture that we have the best farmers spending many millions of dollars to get the best quality product so that Queensland can be a force to be reckoned with in international trading markets.

I think that is something on which we have prided ourselves for a long while. In the early days people such as Sir James Walker, who was one of the founders of the Longreach Pastoral College, had the vision to put in place these agricultural colleges to give young people specialist training in agriculture. We now have specialist agricultural courses at institutions such as the Gatton Agricultural College, which is now part of the University of Queensland, and the veterinary school at Townsville, which offers a wonderful program. The honourable member for Condamine's daughter, Jodi, is just about to graduate from that veterinary school. I think that is a wonderful commendation for a young girl from country Queensland.

These agricultural colleges give young people the opportunity to excel and work in other parts of the state and familiarise themselves with the different types of diseases that can be found in various parts of the state and different types of environment, such as wet areas or tick areas. I think that these colleges could train many more young people in the area of stock inspection or plant inspection so that they can become an integral part of biosecurity, which is the buzzword. A few years ago we witnessed the citrus canker outbreak at Emerald. The whole citrus industry on the Central Highlands was destroyed. Thank the Lord the citrus canker outbreak did not extend down into the Dawson or the South Burnett area and destroy the citrus industry in that area. The citrus farmers have been established for a long time. The Pressler family's operation at Emerald is one of the most sophisticated modern orchards in the Southern Hemisphere. I know that the Pressler family are fiercely proud of their operations, as are we.

We have the situation with the clearing dip at Alpha. I have said on numerous occasions that we need a part-time operative there to scratch those cattle. There are many people who have been in the cattle industry all their lives but they have no comprehension or understanding at all about the fine art of identifying ticks or cleaning cattle. I think that these agricultural colleges can be a way in which that specialist training can be provided so that they can become an integral part of the cattle industry—whether those people go on to be members of the Stock Squad in the Queensland Police Service or follow a career in biosecurity. There is certainly an area at Alpha where we can make that happen. We have to inform the young people in the high schools in this state of the types of training that are available to them. A lot of people think that they can go to university and become a doctor or lawyer, but they can also go to a Queensland agricultural college and have a career in agriculture that could take them to every corner of Queensland or, for that matter, every corner of Australia.

Today the spotlight is on the quality of food and fibre, and food and fibre is what rural and regional Queensland is all about. I know that the mining industry is an integral part of our Queensland economy, but so is our agricultural industry. The most important point to make is that our agricultural industry is always going to be there. We have seen the ups and downs of the mining industry. I hope that we see a boom in mining as that will be advantageous to our state for a long time. But we also need our agricultural colleges, especially at places such as Emerald, so that they can provide training for young people.

My time is almost up. In closing, I say to the minister that it is absolutely paramount that when that board structure is put in place it has on it members who are committed to training in agriculture and who know exactly what is going on not only at the Longreach Pastoral College but also at the agricultural colleges in the Burdekin, Dalby, Biloela or wherever else so that those institutions can go forward and they can once again be the great training grounds for agriculture that we once knew them to be.

Interruption.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Dissent from Acting Speaker's Ruling

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—LNP) (3.44 pm): I give notice that under standing order 250, this House dissent from the ruling of the Acting Speaker in relation to my question to the Premier this morning, 11 March 2010, which was ruled out of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Pitt): The motion is noted.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 897.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—LNP) (3.45 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. On the surface, this is rather innocuous legislation, but it makes amendments for charting the way forward into the future. Firstly, for the benefit of the House, I want to declare an interest. I put on the record that in the past I have had extensive involvement with the Burdekin Agricultural College as I was on its board for some years and I held the position of deputy chair. However, in saying that, I would like to say that when those colleges were first formulated, those boards had genuine responsibilities. Those boards were not just simply a tick-and-flick process for the minister in terms of considering advice that a board would give. Those boards were not just advisory bodies, as we are talking about today in this legislation. Those boards had financial control of the colleges. They could make decisions that reflected the local needs and the direction of those colleges. The board members represented the local industry and local industry had a stake in the direction of those colleges.

While I am speaking about the boards as they existed previously, I would like to acknowledge the work of a previous board chairman, Mr Les Searle. He worked for many years as the chair of the Burdekin Agricultural College Board and he was chairman of the board while I was a member of the board. Nobody is more passionate about agricultural college training than Les Searle. He gave many years of commitment, over and above the hours that he needed to put in. He has been awarded an OAM for his services not only to the Burdekin college but also for his many other services to the community of the Burdekin, including Landcare. I know that Les has watched with great sadness the deterioration and the demise of a lot of these rural colleges.

The lack of consultation and engagement with the community over the years has seen the industry and the agricultural colleges become very fragmented. What was once a cohesive voice from the boards and the agricultural colleges has now fallen away. Clause 5 in this bill provides an avenue for the board to be selected by the minister. That provides a further opportunity for the minister to be desensitised to the plight of the need for training in agriculture. The future will no doubt see at best training selected from the top down rather than from the grassroots up, as was the case in the infancy of the agricultural colleges.

I believe that the minister has lost touch with reality with this structure. The agricultural colleges had a sound ethos in providing a diverse range of training in industry. That training gave the students, the teachers, the potential employers and the wider community a confidence that could be proven and built on. In the late 1990s and 2000s, the graduates from those colleges could take heart that there was a 97 per cent graduate employment rate from the four colleges. That really is a mark of industry relevant training. That high employment rate also brought about a passion for improvement and a feeling of a job well done. In this bill, we are looking at a potential aberration by this government that will see the loss of trained agricultural workers and, what is more, the stifling of future leaders in the agricultural sector.

The minister must acknowledge and resolve to turn this around before it is too late. The bill before the House today is a relatively simple bill that specifically deals with the structure, governance and accountability of the board in relation to the Australian Agricultural College Corporation, which is the area that I will be focusing on this afternoon. The second part of the bill amends the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936 to facilitate accreditation of the veterinary science degree courses offered by the University of Queensland and James Cook University.

The specific changes to the act in relation to the board are that this bill empowers the board to advise the corporation sole on the performance of the corporation's functions. Currently the board may only advise on the delivery of training. The board in future may consist of between five and eight members appointed by the minister, and eligibility requirements have been set out. The term of office is outlined as three years and a remuneration package may be awarded at the discretion of the minister.

The four agricultural colleges in Queensland have had a very proud history since the 1970s. It is disappointing, to say the least, to see the decline in their service delivery and student numbers. The agricultural college structure in Queensland, with four autonomous colleges in different regions of the state catering to different agricultural production and climate conditions, has been unique in Australia. I think it will be a very sad day to see a change in that situation. No announcements have occurred, but we can certainly see what is going to happen. I know that the minister, as recently as October last year, was making statements that the Burdekin Agricultural College was not for sale and that there were no plans to shut down the Burdekin campus. The spin attached to that was that the Burdekin Agricultural College would still have a presence in the Burdekin. I certainly hope that it will, but I have no doubt that it will probably not be at the college campus. I hope that it will not be just on a website.

Quoting from a newspaper report in October last year a spokesman from the minister's office said a report on the state's four agricultural colleges had just been released. He said that report did not talk about the closure of any campuses. That report certainly flew in the face of what happened a couple of months later when students gradually started to leave the Burdekin college. Many things have occurred since then; we have seen cattle being sold and students no longer enrolled there. The further spin words were that the DPIF was reviewing its assets around the state with a view to taking a fresh approach to primary industries in Queensland. The report on campus options recommended that the campus be included in the DPIF's current review of assets.

I have been disappointed with the protracted delays by the minister in relation to this issue. There have been so many spin words and talking around in circles. Nobody is in any doubt of what is likely to happen to the Burdekin campus. Prolonging the pain is certainly not beneficial to anybody. I ask the minister to come clean with his plans, to lay it on the table and just tell the community straight. I know the community's feelings and I know that the minister is aware of the community's feelings. They are not happy. Prolonging the issue will not make it any easier for anyone. I have no doubt it is not making it any easier for the staff either. I know that the minister is aware of the feelings of the community. A petition that I lodged earlier this year had over 1,700 signatures on it. There was a public meeting called by the mayor which was attended by over 100 people. Certainly we saw a lot of very strong feelings.

I have frequently stated my views on how very wrong I believe it will be for the government to sell this campus and lose the facility that is there. The Burdekin campus caters for tropical agriculture that no other training facility in Queensland actually caters for. I am aware that the students there have been directed to Emerald and Longreach. No doubt those facilities are offering very good training, but there is no way the students will ever learn sugarcane farming there.

Mr Johnson: It is pretty wet at Longreach now so we might be able to grow it.

Mrs MENKENS: I take that interjection from the member for Gregory. They may be able to grow sugar cane there for a while. However, let us get back to seriousness. I do not think it will be a major training arm of Emerald or Longreach. The Burdekin campus is a very valuable site, which is all the more reason the government should retain it. I believe it will never be replaced if it is sold. The main campus at Burdekin is made up of the administration centre and student accommodation. Attached to that is a 400-hectare sugar farm, a 125-hectare small crop section and over 2,000 hectares of general grazing country. Also attached to it is a cattle property by the name of Beckers, a 4,500-hectare operating cattle property which is located 20 kilometres from the main campus. It is a very, very valuable site. The Burdekin campus, because of its infrastructure and facilities, is the only college in recent years that has come out with a profit. It has delivered the highest number of training hours and it has come out with a profit. We have here a facility that is actually producing a profit for the government. To actually be looking at that campus from the government's perspective, with dollar signs attached, is very, very disappointing.

Since 1976 the Burdekin Agricultural College has provided many young men and women with a unique opportunity to experience firsthand the realities of a rural lifestyle—living, learning and working at the college as part of a commercial farming environment. Many of those students did come from rural areas themselves—they may have been sons and daughters of people on the land—but many of these students did not. Many students who have gone through these agricultural colleges were city based students who did not fit into normal academic type classrooms. These students have done very, very well in the agricultural training area. They had to be encouraged to attend an agricultural college and I put to the government that that encouragement has diminished over the years. I am aware that student numbers have hit an all-time low. I put it on the record that I believe that the Labor government has spent years gradually allowing these facilities to fail.

Mr Malone interjected.

Mrs MENKENS: I do take that comment, but I think that the important point to remember about these facilities is that they gave students another area; they gave them this time away from home and an essential growing-up period. It built their self-esteem. It gave students who were low achievers an opportunity to realise they could do something in the practical field. I believe that the encouragement for those types of students to be able to broaden their experience has diminished.

Infrastructure has not been kept up at those colleges. I have been very disappointed in recent years on the balance of the boards while the colleges were still running as independent entities, because the balance of the boards changed significantly. Basically they changed to reflect many departmental people, who were very good people but they were not industry representatives. As a result of the industry losing that representation, industry inevitably lost its enthusiasm and commitment to these facilities.

Just recently the *Queensland rural skills and training demand report* was released. That particular report highlighted a serious shortage in training facilities in the areas of welding and the operation of machinery. The Burdekin campus has the facilities there. It has some tremendous workshops there. Over the years it has been used as a training facility for welding and all of those things. Here is a facility that could be used to address this urgent need for basic advanced skills. These advanced skills are needed in primary industries and other industries right across the spectrum. Here we have a facility that could be used, but it is being left to fall by the wayside. I am very, very concerned—it is probably getting quite obvious—about the future of our agricultural colleges, particularly our Burdekin campus.

In the long term, food security is of global concern. We are hearing a lot of comments about food security. We are hearing a lot of criticism about food sources being used for alternative fuels because we are going to see a world food shortage. I do not actually agree with that sentiment. Firstly, Australia is set to lead the world in food production but, more importantly, we are set to lead the world in food technology. Tropical food technology is a very important area and we have those facilities. To bring the agricultural college campuses under the former department of primary industries and fisheries I think was an excellent move. One would hope that the department will use those facilities to carry out further science and technical work to advance food production technology.

We do support this bill, but I am disappointed to see what lies in the future for our agricultural college campuses. I am concerned that the board that has been put in place will have an advisory capacity only. We are now seeing a top-down approach to running the college. There is no longer a bottom-up approach from the industry. However, I certainly urge the minister to ensure that those people on the board do have hands-on agricultural industry knowledge and have a passionate heart for training, because agricultural training is absolutely essential in Queensland.

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (4.02 pm): In speaking to the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I speak for the current and future generations of those who have chosen to build a life and a career that relates to agriculture and who expect to attend a first-class learning institution. The bill changes the name of the existing board from the Australian Agricultural College Corporation to the Board of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. The functions of the board will be expanded and the board will consist of five to eight members appointed by the minister. Previously there was no specific required number of board members. There are also guidelines pertaining to the suitability of board members and their conduct.

As the shadow minister for primary industries indicated earlier in relation to the Labor Party removing the boards from the agricultural colleges, we can see the devastation that removing hospital boards has caused in the past, especially in rural and regional Queensland, when back in 1985 we had maternity services and medical services in our local hospitals. Local board members were very important to those communities. Those on the boards were people whose mums would attend the hospitals and whose children would attend the hospitals. It is the same with those who were on the boards of the agricultural colleges. There was a lot of passion because family members attended those colleges through the generations. We can see the problems caused to the agricultural industry after the wiping out of those boards. It is likewise with the hospitals.

An amendment allowing and extending the employment of overseas trained veterinary surgeons and specialists is also welcome. This amendment allows the Veterinary Surgeons Board to grant special registration to overseas trained vets employed by the University of Queensland or James Cook University. However, the direction in which this government is heading to close down, sell or drastically cut back on the provision of a first-class agricultural college is a disgrace. We are continually seeing this.

I thank the minister for accommodating us and allowing me and the previous shadow minister for primary industries to visit the Kairi Research Station and the Walkamin Research Station. We could see the low morale of the staff. We could see that the Kairi Research Station was starved of funds. It was not fully accommodated and it was not functioning to its full capacity. Likewise, it had a 200-head dairy herd. If it were functioning to its full capacity, if a bit of money and support were injected into the Kairi Research Station, it could have been self-sufficient.

Mr Hopper: The only tropical dairy herd in Australia.

Mr KNUTH: That is right. It was the only tropical dairy herd in Australia. Those on the other side of the House might say that it is a good thing to close it down, but I cannot understand their logic.

Mr Hopper: Cows sold for \$3,000 a head. That is why they closed it down.

Mr KNUTH: \$3,000 a head and prime agricultural land. On top of this, in an area that has a high volume of rainfall each year, heavy dew and continuous drizzle, that research station was very important for research and extension. The area from Kairi to The Jump Up, halfway between Atherton and Mareeba, has completely different rainfall. To say that research and extension will cover the Tablelands area from Mareeba is completely outrageous and ridiculous. There are still a lot of people up there who are angry that the last remaining dairy herd was sold off at Kairi Research Station.

Instead of maintaining and updating our agricultural college campuses to equal the best in the country, the government has consigned them to the shelf marked 'irrelevant'. Yet this is all about equipping employees in primary industries to take their place with world's best practice, having been exposed to the latest technologies, techniques, research and hands-on experience, including research and development. This is about making sure that our college offers first-class accommodation on campus so that students and families feel confident that students are safe and able to concentrate on the task at hand. This is all about recognising that Australia's future does not depend upon boardrooms in some city skyscraper but upon the productivity of the land which will provide for those who live and work in the cities.

Agricultural college campuses in Queensland are an endangered species when they should be a flourishing breed of vibrant learning institutions offering up-to-date, diverse courses that are adaptable to the current needs of the industry—courses that reflect industry demands. Each college campus is designed to reflect the agricultural industry in that area. For example, the Longreach campus provides theory and hands-on experience in the sheep, wool and cattle industries. The Burdekin campus exposes students to the sugarcane and cattle industries. When first established, this campus also offered courses in basic machine operation and welding. In view of the lack of training facilities that offer this instruction, it would make sense to not only maintain the Burdekin campus but also expand its curriculum to include these subjects once more. The Mareeba campus is in the same situation. It is starved of funds and there is no certainty.

We are tired of hearing the minister's unrealistic spin on a 'fresh approach' and more services via the internet when blind Freddy can see that a first-class curriculum, integrating theory with hands-on experience at the campus offering exposure to the industry of choice for the student, is the backbone of pastoral industries.

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (4.09 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As indicated by the Minister for Primary Industries in his second reading speech, the key purpose of this bill is to amend the Agricultural College Act particularly to address issues relating to the need for strong corporate governance of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. Industry consultation during the dialogue for action indicated that industry felt disenfranchised from the AACC.

Further, a number of operational assessments indicated that the AACC has experienced declining student numbers and reduced profitability due to drought and competition from other industry sectors. There is also a view that the AACC business model is not optimised to meet the training needs of industry and the training markets that now exist in Queensland. Without reform, there is a real risk that the AACC would become unsustainable. This would be a monstrous tragedy for our rural communities, the agricultural training industry and agriculture in Queensland more generally. We must act now with a genuine view to reform to support the AACC. This bill achieves that objective of reform.

As a corporation sole formed from the amalgamation of four separate agricultural colleges in 2005, the AACC has had an advisory board for many years but with limited powers and a restricted scope of influence. As stated, the bill seeks to change this by broadening the range of matters the board can advise on, including the corporation's strategic direction, operational, administrative and financial policies, as well as other issues that may affect the AACC.

It is important that the board has a wide mandate in terms of the issues that it can advise the AACC executive and corporation sole on and that it is supported by and engaged with industry. This new board, provisioned with an expanded scope, will play a key role in reinvigorating the AACC into a more industry relevant and sustainable organisation. The board will be independent and industry led, consisting of between five and eight members drawn from a formal selection process. To ensure all appointments are made fairly and equitably, a three-person selection panel will be established to consider all applications received and to interview a short list of candidates.

The selection panel will be chaired by a member from the AACC Industry Consultative Committee, which was established in 2009 as an interim measure to oversight the activities of the AACC until such time as the board was put into place. The other two positions will be filled by representatives from the AACC's host agency—the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation—and its primary grant funding provider, the Department of Education and Training.

The selection panel will be looking for Queensland candidates from a range of backgrounds, particularly those with skills, knowledge and expertise in one or more of the following: primary production, education and training, financial matters or other interests relevant to the operations of the AACC. From the short-listed candidates, the selection panel will make a recommendation to the minister on the proposed composition of the board. The minister will have the final approval on the board's composition and appointment.

Increasing the influence and relevance of the board of the AACC is an important first step in progressing the AACC and reconnecting it with the needs of industry. As the minister alluded to, the AACC has fallen on rough times over the past few years, suffering from a steady decline in student enrolment numbers and a consequent continued reporting of poor overall financial performance. While the decline in student numbers is a result of numerous factors, one fact was prevalent throughout the minister's consultation with industry in mid-2009: the AACC needed to reconnect with industry to start delivering training products and services tailored to the sector's needs.

The creation of this new independent advisory board, strongly led and voiced by industry representatives, will ensure that the corporation does not repeat history but remains connected with the rural and related industries and its constantly evolving demands for flexible skilling products and services. This bill represents the start of a new future for the AACC. By giving the AACC the strong governance it needs, the AACC will once again become the provider of choice for the rural and related industries. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—LNP) (4.14 pm): I rise to speak on the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill itself is a very simplistic bill. It has implications in terms of the composition of the board and some other issues. The direction that the minister is taking the board in is fine, but I think along the track we have lost direction unfortunately. It has just been raised in the parliament that the number of people going through the agricultural colleges has decreased substantially and the financial return from the colleges is somewhat diminished. That equates to a downgrading of the colleges. The agricultural colleges in Queensland were put in place many years ago with a lot of forethought and with a strong commitment by industry right across Queensland.

If we look at the assets that are at the behest of the agricultural colleges in Queensland, and without actually delving into all of the assets that are there, I believe they would have well on the other side of \$100 million. It has been suggested that, as the government is highly in debt, the minister has come up with an idea that he can help the Treasurer get over that debt by flogging off the colleges. I hope that is not the case because I believe that, as we move forward into this great new era that we are seeing, Queensland particularly has the opportunity to be the agricultural export capital of the world. Indeed, I was just at a briefing with the Savannah Group on the Gilbert River. We need to look at the opportunities we have in north Australia, and more particularly North Queensland, for the development of enhanced and increased agriculture through our region.

I want to look at the individual colleges, and I will pick on the Burdekin, for instance. The sugar industry has been in a difficult situation for quite some time. Hopefully, the light of prosperity is shining a little brighter on the sugar industry. One of the biggest constraints we have in the sugar industry is that the average age of our farmers is well on the other side of 60. We have 80-year-old farmers out there toiling to produce a crop every year. That is not a healthy situation for any industry to be in, particularly the sugar industry, because it is a hands-on type of industry.

How are we going to get new farmers into the industry? The answer is by training them. I do not necessarily mean the trainees should be sons of farmers. We have actually lost a whole generation of people on the land, and that is not just in the sugar industry but right across all of our industries. We have to actually encourage those people who traditionally have not been exposed to agriculture or have not been part of the agricultural scene.

My brother, who is somewhat younger than me, went through the Burdekin Agricultural College, and a substantial number of people who were at the colleges were not necessarily from traditional farming backgrounds. Indeed, as has also been indicated in the House before, there were people from interstate as well. As we move forward in this great new era of food production and we look at the world statistics and the need for produce to be grown to feed the rest of the world, we will certainly need a whole new generation of people to move on to the land and be a part of that future.

When we look at the returns from agriculture in recent years, we can see that agriculture was the only industry in Queensland that held up through the global financial crisis. Indeed, because of the agricultural industry, Queensland did not dip down to the very low levels that other states did during the global financial crisis. Some years ago I remember a former minister—probably two or three ministers ago—who changed the agricultural boards into a single board.

An honourable member: It was Barton.

Mr MALONE: I take the interjection. I was not going to name the person, but it was Tom Barton. I interjected on the member for Burdekin, saying that under those auspices the agricultural colleges changed direction. They changed direction from being very industry specific to a very broad range training area, almost like a TAFE college. The ethos, the pride and a lot of other things disappeared with that change in direction.

It reminds me of what happens over the years when a government wants to get rid of something—a railway line, for example. You close down all the stations. You make sure there are no engines to pull the grain wagons or the cattle trucks. Then you do an inquiry into it and find out that the railway line is not being used, so we had better close it down. In the scheme of things, it was an engineered result. I am concerned, quite frankly, that where we are heading with the agricultural colleges in Queensland is a result of the exact same thinking.

I have to say that, as a farmer and a keen observer of agriculture in Queensland, I think we are heading in the wrong direction. We have to maintain our agricultural training colleges. We have to put a whole new generation of farmers and graziers through those training colleges. If we do not do that, we are selling out our history, we are selling out a generation of farmers, and we will never be able to compete on the world scene to the extent that we should.

I am fortunate to be part of a skills centre that a number of people within the community of Sarina have set up. It has a facility which runs cattle, goats and chickens. It also runs horticultural, agricultural and a whole range of other pursuits which under normal circumstances you would think most kids would not be interested in. Also attached to that is an engineering centre which has cutting-edge lathes, welders and all the facilities that you need to do an apprenticeship in engineering. We were fortunate to be able to do that as a community in conjunction with the school. Currently 75 per cent of the students at Sarina State High School for a different course go through that skills centre.

There is an opportunity within some of our agricultural colleges in Queensland for Education Queensland to set up courses for students who are not fitting into their regular high schools. Those agricultural colleges have an ability to take in those students. With the facilities that those agricultural colleges have, I am sure those young students will graduate from courses which will certainly enhance their lifestyle. I believe it could turn a lot of those students around.

There is an ability for vocational training to interest students. I am not talking only about boys. At the skills centre in Sarina more than half of the students are girls, and the centre does a damn good job of turning those students into worthwhile citizens. I give a bursary each year for the students who graduate there. I think it was two years ago that I recollect a female student who was concerned about her fingernails if she got involved in agriculture. I observed that as she went through her course she became very interested in working with cattle. That was a complete surprise. I think it was more of a surprise to her. She liked working with cattle so much that on her days off she would turn up early, work with the cattle and go home late. Ultimately, upon her graduation she became a jillaroo. There was such a transition that took place in that girl who walked into the skills centre and who now lives more than 500 kilometres off the coast. It is just amazing.

In conclusion, even though we are supporting the legislation before the House today, the ultimate direction for agricultural colleges in Queensland remains to be seen. I implore the minister and the government to be aware of the asset they have and not view it simply as a financial nest egg to reduce Labor government debt.

Ms BATES (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (4.26 pm): I rise today to contribute to the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 introduced by the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland. The Liberal National Party will be supporting this legislation, as it brings the Agricultural College Act 2005 in line with current standards for statutory entities. I note that this is the first piece of legislation that the minister has introduced into the parliament since my colleague the member for Condamine, Ray Hopper, became the shadow minister. I also note the grassroots, real-life experience of the member for Condamine on issues relating to this portfolio in comparison with that of the minister. This experience I have witnessed personally in my electorate at the Mudgeeraba Agricultural Show and on a visit to FarmFest last year.

As a member of the LNP's backbench committee for this portfolio, and coming from a rural background from generations of dairy farmers, I am taking considerable note of the differences in approach to legislative matters and look forward to a greater understanding of my rural constituency in Numinbah Valley, Lower Beechmont, Caningeraba and Natural Arch and being able to represent their concerns in this place.

The stated objective of this bill is to broaden the ambit of matters an appropriately skilled board may advise on in relation to the Australian Agricultural College Corporation and to implement enhanced corporate governance and accountability arrangements in line with current standards for statutory entities; and to amend the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936 to facilitate accreditation of the veterinary science degree courses offered by the University of Queensland and the James Cook University.

In July 2008 administrative responsibility for the Australian Agricultural College Corporation was transferred in order to expand agribusiness workforce skilling and training to meet industry needs into the future as part of the Fresh Approach initiative. As such, the corporation is accountable to the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland. The AACC operates an agricultural college comprised of five campuses across regional Queensland which includes campuses at Emerald, Mareeba, Burdekin, Dalby and Longreach.

The AACC aims to be the pre-eminent provider of rural skilling and training in Australia. However, under this Labor government the agricultural colleges in Queensland have been left to wither under the watch of a minister who quite obviously does not understand rural and regional Queensland and the needs of these areas. In my role as a member of the LNP's health committee, I have spent time recently in many areas in Far North Queensland and far-western Queensland observing and listening to locals concerned about a whole range of issues including health, roads, economic viability of country towns and individual concerns regarding the way the Bligh government has eroded and neglected country Queensland.

This government has continually eroded the agricultural colleges by neglecting this most valuable asset. Young people are not being encouraged into agricultural industries and we cannot run rural Queensland from a desk in Brisbane. Continual redundancies from the DPI have not been made up by new graduates. The lack of confidence in this government and the minister is evidenced by the significant falls in enrolments at all campuses since 2005. Prior to this time the colleges were active within their local communities, with the communities themselves supporting the colleges.

Now we see more decentralisation of services in the rural sector, akin to what is happening within Health in rural areas. This government would like to see many country towns as ghost towns, where there are no medical services and very little business activity. Eventually all the young people will move to the cities as there are no learning options other than the city universities.

From a health perspective, I have seen this occurring over many years. Whilst universities have their place, people cannot learn nursing out of a book—just like they cannot learn agriculture and farming practices out of a book. There is a genuine need to increase the number of enrolments at all campuses and bring back local boards, which this Labor government has no interest in other than to increase the top-heavy bureaucracy running elements of our society from distant ivory towers. Radically changing the syllabus, reducing courses from approximately 1,200 hours to 400 hours and devaluing the certificate only serve to make students wary of participating in studies where they will not get the education that they need nor the recognition for their studies that they so rightly deserve.

A mere 10 years ago the agricultural colleges had a 97 per cent employment rate. The work ethic and attitude of graduates were highly valued and the colleges themselves created a culture of excellence and a reputation of graduating outstanding future employees. The continued insult by this Bligh government to rural and regional constituents is appalling. These country areas are the backbone of our history in Queensland, yet they continue to be treated like second-class citizens by a government that has little or no comprehension of the contribution and the ethos of agricultural industries and those who work in them.

A classic example of this is the Longreach college, which provides training for young men and women in pastoral pursuits in the sheep, wool and cattle industries. This facility is unique and attracts students from all over Queensland and New South Wales. In 2004 the Dalby Agricultural College had approximately 150 students. In the past three years the enrolments have been reduced to low single-digit figures. This decline coincided with the amalgamation of colleges. Local communities lost interest with the removal of local boards, and this has significantly contributed to the decline in the industry and the interest of new young blood in the sector.

The government claims that the reduction in student numbers and profitability in recent years was due to drought and competition from the resources boom affecting the appeal of agriculture as a career choice. This is the same argument that this government uses when closing down local hospital boards and closing operating theatres and maternity services in rural and regional Queensland. It then tries to spread the propaganda that these facilities closed because they could not attract nurses and doctors.

It does not take Einstein to work out that if there is nothing attractive in the area then we will not attract employment to the area. This is the justification for stripping services out of country areas, in much the same way that it is doing with the agricultural sector. The motherhood statements that are made by this government—that the AACC needs to reinvigorate the way it delivers training to students, boost enrolment levels and build a stronger relationship with industry to ensure industry needs are met by AACC courses—are hollow.

The Liberal National Party remains unconvinced that this is not just more smoke and mirrors by the Bligh government to sell off yet another of our valuable Queensland assets without the permission of Queenslanders. As quoted by ABC Southern Queensland on 24 June 2009—

The State Opposition says it is convinced more than ever before that the Government wants to sell-off Queensland's agricultural college.

The State Government is reviewing how the college's five campuses are run. The Primary Industries Minister and senior departmental officials addressed a meeting at the Dalby campus yesterday in southern Queensland.

The LNP Member for Condamine, Ray Hopper, was also at the meeting and says no guarantees were given that all five campuses would not be sold off.

'De-invest to reinvest was used quite often and I'm very worried what they're looking at. This is going to be a short-term fire sale and you know it's unacceptable,' he said.

Primary Industries Minister Tim Mulherin says the review is needed because enrolment numbers have fallen over the past few years.

The Liberal National Party would restore confidence in the agricultural colleges by developing a syllabus that is diverse, adaptable and looks to the future of agriculture in Queensland. These courses need to reflect the change in agricultural needs and should respond to industry demand. Responsibility for the running of these colleges should be at a local board level which, in turn, would encourage industry involvement and community involvement, ultimately encouraging students to have the confidence to return to the colleges and thereby strengthening investments in the future of agriculture.

This Labor government continues to dissect the industry one piece at a time and sell off even more of our assets. Our most valuable assets are the graduates from these colleges who will shape the future of the industry over many years to come. Where will students interested in a career in agriculture go to obtain these skills if the current facilities are devolved to such an extent that they are nonexistent? Where will students be able to practise their skills and put their theory into practice? This government has little regard for the next generation of young farmers who will be producing clean, green food, fibre and foliage for the people of Queensland into the future.

Policies are best written and administered by experts in their fields. Not unlike health, I am sure the previous ministers for health were very good union representatives but they knew nothing about health. Similarly in this portfolio, the sooner this portfolio is run by someone who knows what it is like to cope with drought and flood and who knows one end of a cow from the other, the better off rural and regional Queensland and the primary industries sector will be.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—LNP) (4.34 pm): The Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill that we are debating this afternoon is very important. It makes a couple of amendments to the Agricultural College Act. One is—and this is a fairly major change—to broaden the range of matters that a skilled board may advise on in relation to the Australian Agricultural College Corporation—the AACC—and to enhance the corporate governance provisions relating to the board. This is a fairly substantial change. At the moment, the board looks at quite a limited range of governance issues. This bill will widen that governance quite an extent. I understand that PricewaterhouseCoopers did a study which recommended governance models that would be more appropriate.

The other provision of the bill relates to international lecturers in veterinary science for courses conducted at the James Cook University and the University of Queensland. It provides better working arrangements and allows them to have a tenure of at least one year. This will make it easier for those universities to attract international lecturers.

We have five agricultural colleges in Queensland. They are based in Dalby, Longreach, Emerald, Burdekin and on the Atherton Tablelands. Each of them was originally established to look after discrete and distinct areas. For example, the Dalby Agricultural College is in the middle of some of the best black soil, flat treeless plains in the world. It is some of the most fertile ground in the world. The area has the Waco soil types that will retain moisture in an incredible way. The college provided training in the specialised farming techniques that are needed in this area and general farming and grain-growing training.

The Longreach Agricultural College was established, and still is, in the centre of an extensive pastoral area, both sheep and cattle. The Emerald college was based in an irrigation area that had irrigated cotton, irrigated horticultural crops as well as extensive grains crops. That was not so much on the flat ground but more on the rolling areas that had contour banks. It was located in the Central Highlands grain area and the cattle area of Central Queensland. The Burdekin college was outstanding when it came to tropical agriculture and tropical livestock raising. The Atherton Tablelands college was able to tap into the unique needs of the Atherton Tablelands, particularly tropical horticulture.

When those colleges were put in place, they fulfilled a need and they were extremely popular. They were governed by local boards. There have been a lot of changes in recent years in the education system and a lot of changes in terms of the way people attend school, attend TAFE and attend university. The change has been rapid given the use of the internet and people wanting to undertake courses in quick time. We have seen private universities offer courses that take two years rather than the traditional four years. I am taking into account that there have been these changes.

The demise in attendance we have seen at these agricultural colleges really commenced from the time that the Labor government changed the structure of these colleges. Taking away local boards and local ownership breaks the heart and soul and spirit of these places. Just as we are seeing in many areas of Queensland where councils have been amalgamated, those whole towns, districts and areas that once had ownership, local leadership, local spirit have just been tacked on to some bigger regional area and they have lost their spirit of belonging, their leaders at Anzac Day ceremonies, their school events and all the rest of it. It just denudes them of the social structure that they once had that is so important, particularly in rural areas.

The government put all of these colleges into one big amorphous organisation and gave it the name Australian Agricultural College, and I do not know whether we have named anything else that the Queensland government runs as 'Australian'. We have always been proud to give our colleges, our schools, our various departments and government corporations the name 'Queensland'. Yet here we have five colleges in Queensland and we have called them the Australian Agricultural College. It never made any sense to me, but someone was obviously having a bit of an egotistical moment. So not only did they give it this name that they thought was a great name—which is not accurate because they are Queensland agricultural colleges in Queensland providing mostly for Queensland—but also on top of that they destroyed the very nature of these colleges. I have no doubt in my mind that not necessarily this minister but the ministers who preceded him were the ones responsible for the breakdown of these colleges, which has resulted in the situation where they are now desperately casting around for ways to save themselves or make themselves more relevant.

All of that work could have happened before with good local boards. If previous ministers of the day felt that they needed refreshing or felt that they needed to have a bit of expertise, they only had to look around, for example, in the Dalby area, let alone expanding out from Dalby, at some of the talent that is available—some of the agricultural exporters and manufacturers in the area, some of the educators in the area. One only has to look at some of the boarding schools in the Toowoomba area or the high school principals in the Western Downs. They would have only needed to look at some of the entrepreneurs in the area—the people who can really make things happen. Those people would have said, 'This is what we need. This is what is relevant today. What we had 10 years ago might be less relevant.'

In the 1990s the Dalby Agricultural College had so many students that it had one of the strongest teams in the under 19 rugby competition in Toowoomba. Against all of the Toowoomba city sides, Goondiwindi, Roma and all the rest of them, it had one of the strongest sides because of the number of boarders and the strength of that school. These colleges should have been moving, adapting and changing with the times. I am speaking in particular about the Dalby Agricultural College because, in years gone by, it would have taught things such as basic ploughing and so on. Farmers on the Darling Downs led the world in farming in black soil, in moisture retention, in moving from maximum tillage operations to minimum till and then finally to zero till, and farmers on the Downs developed specialised equipment to allow for trash to flow through instead of getting caught in conventional equipment. People in that area designed equipment so that in one pass that equipment could not only cultivate but could plant the seed, provide the water drop under pressure, the fertiliser, the Atrazine, and measure the seeds per metre. All of those things—the whole range of things—could happen in one pass.

That advanced technology was the sort of thing that the Dalby Agricultural College specialised in, and that was the sort of technical expertise that the young men and women who were moving on to those properties or taking over needed then and still need today, because the innovation and the increase in knowledge is just amazing. At the same time there has been massive development in the mining industry so that many people are working both on the land and working as contractors or subcontractors in the mining industry. In terms of the techniques and talents that they need in driving heavy machinery, earthmoving equipment, mining equipment and all of the associated computerisation and mechanical skills and so forth, all of that could have been introduced at the college.

With regard to issues of management of intensive livestock, Dalby is probably right in the centre of the most intensive feedlotting area of Queensland. That college could have taught what was required in finding the markets, selling the products, workplace health and safety and livestock welfare, the handling of the grain, the feeding of the grain, the mix, the veterinary management and so on. There is an enormous amount of knowledge that needs to be known for people who are going to work in those types of enterprises—that is, either the big feedlots or the smaller 50 head or 500 feedlots that are on individual properties.

They are only some of the things that the colleges could have and should have been doing to refresh and renew themselves. But, no, they were in this great big one amorphous organisation that lost that local leadership, the local drive, the belief in the place that local people have. The people in the Dalby area were quite passionate about that college, and I know they were in other places as well because I know some of the people who have been very passionate about the Longreach Agricultural College and what it can do. For example, Longreach is in the middle of a pastoral area where years ago

jackeroos were thrown on a horse and everybody laughed when they got thrown off. Now with workplace health and safety, they have to have quality horses, quality gear and quality instruction in order to be safe to proceed. People have to understand all sorts of things—the welfare of the animal and the workplace health and safety of their own employees. That is just one small facet of the pastoral industry, let alone all of the other issues of medication, water supplies, fencing, trapping, the use of equipment, genetics and everything else that is necessary to know.

I believe that these colleges have great potential for the five very different areas that they represent. Even though times have changed, I give credit to the gateway school system, which has been implemented by the minister and which is providing a number of schools with a pathway towards agricultural colleges. However, that is limited because it is within school grounds. If you go to the average school today you wonder how they can fit in all of the different classes and activities that they are doing, but it is great that the pathways program exists within a number of our schools. There are some pathway schools in the Toowoomba district, but that is only one small facet to get young people interested in taking their first steps to move towards an agricultural or rural career and profession.

The opportunity exists now for these agricultural colleges to be used in conjunction with schools, industry, TAFE and universities. We should be making more use of these magnificent grounds and the infrastructure that they have. For example, the Dalby college has wonderful buildings that could be utilised more, as could its extensive black soil areas, classrooms and convention rooms. These colleges could be linked up with a university, and I have spoken previously with people about linking them up with university business courses. Let us have business courses with a major that relates to things that happen in agriculture. We all recognise that everyone on the land needs to understand business, banking, borrowing, financial repayments, exporting, export credits and profit and loss. We should build into that also the opportunity for them to learn how to run big rural operations; how to run intensive operations; how to manage the finances of machinery, because machinery on properties might be worth \$2 million by the time you take the harvesters, tractors, trucks and all the rest of the gear that is required into account; and how to run—and this is a bit of a hobbyhorse of mine—event management. Part of a business degree might be about event management given all of the rural festivals, the agricultural shows, the field days and the big horse events that happen. The other week there was an event in Tamworth revolving around horses that went for seven days and which was attended by thousands and thousands of people.

There is Ag Show, FarmFest and various carnivals and events that people run which are important to their district. The equine industry itself has become massive, and you only have to drive past the University of Queensland Gatton college, which has a business course, to see the number of students. They are mostly all girls and they all have a horse there and that college is knocking them back with a stick because they all want to do the course. There needs to be interesting courses at universities that are about business management, where students then spend six months or a year at the Dalby Agricultural College or the Longreach or Emerald or Burdekin agricultural colleges as part of that course. Whether they do their course from James Cook University up north or USQ down south, we can make good use of these colleges, revitalise them and rebuild them.

But to do that we have to have people who know and understand the local area. Sure, there is going to be a board now that is going to have a broader look at the training, but it is the local drive, the local enthusiasm and the local pride and passion in these places that will make things happen. There are just so many opportunities to use these facilities to bring into these areas people who would bring new skills. Those people might be lecturers in business or economics. They might be lecturers in sophisticated information technology relating to farm machinery—all the computerised systems that measure the fertilisers, the water pressure, the seeds, the chemicals and so on and work out how to put all of it together, or how to repair and maintain the system. All of those skills could be brought into our rural towns. Those different sets of skills are important and bring a real hybrid vigour to employment and the needs of the communities in those areas.

I think the past 10 years have been a tragedy and a shame. The neglect of these colleges started right at the top, with the way in which the structure was put in place—the way local people were basically pushed aside and not taken any notice of. The government did the usual Labor thing and made the agricultural colleges one great big enterprise. This whopping big operation was given an 'Australian' title, not a 'Queensland' title, as if that was going to fix things. The real solution was to get the board structure right so that there was a good mix of professional people with entrepreneurial talents—people involved in the education area who could see outside the square and local people who could get the sales and the marketing going to make people want to go to the place.

Under Labor, the colleges have declined. The word has got around: 'Why would you want to go there? There are only 20 people there. You would be lonely wandering around.' People do not want to go to those places. They want to go to successful places. The Marcus Oldham College in Victoria has a great reputation. That college markets itself and people want to go there. Our five colleges in Queensland should be better than Marcus Oldham College. They should be great assets, they should be versatile and they should be relevant to the needs of the day.

The needs of the day have changed since the 1990s, when people went to agricultural colleges for two years after completing year 10. Now, young people should finish year 12. They should have an opportunity to be part of their school leadership, their school play, their school arts and sports facilities and all rest of it so that when they leave school they are well-rounded people who can become part of society. But there should also be a place for these agricultural colleges. These colleges should offer long-term and short-term courses. They should be associated with universities and TAFEs. These colleges should be vibrant places that hold field days.

During the last election campaign we had a policy to bring these colleges back under the responsibility of the DPI. We wanted to make these colleges vibrant places that held field days or trials and where true research was undertaken—not fiddling around the edges but proper stuff where people were getting out and undertaking grain or cropping research, or undertaking research into breeding stock that was relevant to the area in which the colleges were located.

These agricultural colleges have enormous potential. We are supporting this bill in the hope that the new governance board can bring back some real direction to these colleges which have the potential—mostly and firstly—for young people but for those other people who need to undertake refresher courses at various stages of their career in agriculture. There is an opportunity for people to become involved in associated industries. As I said earlier, many young people are not only working on their properties but also working as contractors in the resources industry.

Through this bill we have to fix the mistakes that Labor governments have made in the past. We have to get the overall governance right. We should remember the principles of local management, local ideas and local drive so that we can bring back these organisations to their former glory and not continue the decline that was imposed on them deliberately back in the days of Minister Barton. At that time these colleges were set up to fail. They were never going to make it under the structure that the minister introduced. Let us hope that this structure can bring about an improvement in the agricultural colleges so that they can once again be useful to the young people of rural Queensland.

Mrs KIERNAN (Mount Isa—ALP) (4.54 pm): I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. The honourable member for Mackay has already explained that the key purpose of this bill is to amend the Agricultural College Act 2005. However, it also serves the important purpose of amending the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1939 to assist in the training of veterinary science students enrolled in Queensland universities.

It is a necessity for all tertiary institutions to achieve and maintain accreditation by the relevant authorities for the degree courses that they offer to students. In this case, the veterinary schools of the University of Queensland and James Cook University must seek that accreditation from the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council. The AVBC accreditation criteria demand a certain ratio of registered veterinary surgeons and veterinary specialists in the teaching staff of each faculty of veterinary science.

There is some urgency related to this matter as the first graduation of veterinary science students from James Cook University is scheduled for the end of the 2010 academic year. Without course accreditation, those graduates will not be able to register as veterinary surgeons. The science degree course at the University of Queensland, although accredited, must maintain that status after the review, due in June of this year. Obviously, any obstacle to registration will have a very negative impact on a significant number of students, their families, the universities and the veterinary science profession as a whole.

The problem to be overcome is that, despite advertising widely, the universities are just not able to employ sufficient numbers of registered Australian trained veterinary surgeons and veterinary specialists to meet accreditation requirements. Currently, the act does not allow the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Queensland to register overseas trained veterinary scientists for teaching and research except on a very short-term basis. That is, the act provides only for the registration of visiting professionals for an initial period of six months, which can be extended by three months from time to time. That type of registration, with the associated uncertainty, is just not sufficient to entice overseas trained veterinarians to move to Queensland to teach in our universities.

This amendment bill will provide a special type of registration to allow the Veterinary Surgeons Board to register overseas trained veterinary surgeons and specialists where it considers that a person's training is appropriate for research or teaching in veterinary science. Registration will involve the payment of an annual fee and the requirement to comply with any conditions imposed by regulation or by the Veterinary Surgeons Board. Registration will not be restricted to any particular period of time, except that that registration will cease at the same time as the person ceases to be employed by the relevant university. Registering overseas trained veterinary surgeons and specialists will not reduce opportunities for Australian trained veterinary scientists as that registration is confined to the purpose of employment for teaching and/or conducting research.

In conclusion, it really only takes a single occurrence of the Hendra virus or equine influenza to make us realise just how important it is to train sufficient numbers of veterinary scientists in Queensland to meet the continuing demand of both the private and the public sectors. On that note, I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland) (5.00 pm), in reply: I acknowledge the contributions of members on both sides of the House. There were a number of issues raised in the debate that must be addressed. The member for Condamine has made comments in relation to declining enrolments. The member for Condamine may not be aware that enrolment in agricultural courses across Australia at a tertiary level has been in decline for a number of years. If we go back to when these colleges were originally set up in the fifties and sixties, most kids went as far as grade 10. What kids from farming backgrounds did was then go to the agricultural colleges. Most kids now go on to a senior level of education. The member opposite is blaming the Labor government for all the sins of the past.

Let us look at some of the outlandish statements he has made. If those opposite get into government they will develop a new training syllabus. It shows his ignorance. He does not know that all states and territories—

Mr HOPPER: I rise to a point of order. I find that comment absolutely offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr MULHERIN: I will withdraw if he finds it offensive, but I want to let the member for Condamine know that there is a national vocational education training system in Australia. All states and territories have signed up. It has stood the test of time of federal governments, both Labor and Liberal. It was set up because industry demanded change. The member for Condamine said the decline was because the Labor government reduced the hours of training from 1,200 to 400 hours, which was repeated again by the member for Mudgeeraba, who also displayed her ignorance. Why was it reduced from 1,200 to 400 hours? The training syllabus was developed and endorsed by industry, not government. What those opposite will do if they ever get on this side is tear up a national agreement. My mind boggles at some of the thought bubbles of the member opposite.

Another issue raised by the member for Condamine was the need for training to be relevant to industry. When the agricultural colleges came over to the former department of primary industries and fisheries, now part of DEEDI, we put together an advisory council that consisted of industry representatives—AgForce, NABRAC, QFF, Growcom—that gave us advice on what industry wanted. Industry wanted a combination of training packages. They wanted residential training; they also wanted point of time and point of place on the job training. They told us that the current system will not work, that we need to broaden the training experiences. It was quite interesting that the member's colleagues, the members for Gregory and Toowoomba South, seemed to be more in tune with the direction that we want to take to ensure that this institution, the AACC, will be the premier training provider.

One of the other reasons for the decline in enrolments, and this has been brought about by industry demanding we have a more flexible way of delivery, was the introduction of competition in the marketplace. What we are seeing as part of that declining enrolment is people turning to alternative training providers who could deliver what they wanted at a point of time and place. This legislation is simply about strengthening the powers of the board. We have gone out and consulted. We invited the member opposite to one of the engagement processes. I remember reading in the media that he felt he was the lone voice. He was the lone voice! Everywhere we went people were saying we had to get on and fix the problem. We recognise that we have to have boards that have the appropriate skills and links back into industry that will tell the chief executive officer of the corporation what is needed in relation to training.

The amendments that are put forward here today are about giving greater powers to the board. This is a two-stage reform process. If this works, and everyone in this House wants it to work, I want to go down the pathway of a statutory model—that is, industry running and owning the corporation.

There was much discussion about the local boards. The member for Gregory was correct when he said there had been anomalies with respect to the operation of the AACC in previous years. The member opposite harked back to the past and how great the boards were. I want to give him some examples of serious breaches of governance under the stewardship of local boards, the very model that the member for Condamine has been prosecuting in this debate today. These breaches include significant deficits, qualified audits, loss of training registration and serious breaches of the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977.

For example, Longreach had financial management, planning and reporting deficiencies and had previously been deregistered from training for four months for noncompliance with the registered training organisation requirements; at Dalby the minister at the time appointed an administrator, PricewaterhouseCoopers, in response to the Queensland Audit Office's concerns about its financial viability over a three-year period; Emerald received a qualified audit in 2002 for unauthorised trading in cotton derivatives and financial difficulties necessitated a major restructure in 2004; and Burdekin-

Mareeba received an unfavourable audit report in 2002. In 2005 the government formed the Australian Agricultural College Corporation as a corporation sole to improve the governance. Since that time the corporation has been focused on adjusting for the major shifts in the national vocational education and training market. These have included changes to what industry demands.

I compliment the member for Gregory, who is very passionate about Indigenous training, and Boyd Curran for the excellent work that he is doing in Beyond Billabong. In relation to comments made by the member for Burdekin that they have a great workshop at their college and that industry needs welders, this is what industry is telling us. They do not need to go to a residential college. What they need is at point of time and place. A good example of that is the Burdekin college, which delivers training courses for the sugar industry in Mackay. The member for Toowoomba South was talking about partnerships. The other week we saw 600 cane farmers receive training in agricultural chemical use. That was a partnership between Canegrowers—the organisation—the BSES and the AACC.

The member for Toowoomba South spoke about the involvement of the university sector. We see that already at Birregurra. The University of Queensland Veterinary School uses that facility to train veterinary undergraduates in artificial insemination. It is a partnership with DPI, the agricultural college and the University of Queensland. When one looks across the other side there is complete division between what the shadow minister wants and what some of the supporters within his party see as the future direction.

The member for Mirani spoke about the skills centre at Sarina. I commend the member for Mirani because he has been very passionate about this. When these skills centres were set up by this Labor government the member for Mirani got heavily involved in that local community because that is what the community wanted. I believe in the reform process. The constant theme is to make agricultural careers relevant. The Sarina school could be a potential candidate for our Gateway Schools program. Kids who want practical learnings can walk away at the end of their secondary education with a certificate II level of competence, which is what industry wants. By embedding an agribusiness syllabus within secondary education we will have kids who will want to go on to higher learning that can be provided in a residential combination at the AACC. We are also developing strong linkages with the university sector. Looking at agribusiness, we are talking about lifelong learning from secondary to vocational education to the tertiary sector. This will assist us in the longer term to address the skills that are needed in the agricultural sector.

The deans of agriculture recently said that there will be a 36 per cent shortage in the number of agricultural scientists in this country. This is not a phenomenon just in Australia; it is an international shortage. It is very important for us to make sure that we have the right environment in secondary education, the vocational education sector and right through to the tertiary level.

The member for Dalrymple went on about the closure of the dairy farm on the Tablelands. I think the member for Condamine and the member for Dalrymple want to go back to the days of having state run farms. I do not think that is what industry wants. Industry signed up to the national R&D strategy around dairy. I want to compliment the QDO for their tremendous support of what we are doing in that area of reform.

I mentioned the member for Toowoomba South. He has a vision for the future of the agricultural college. Most of it fits in with my vision for the future. I want to make mention of the member for Mudgeeraba. The member for Mudgeeraba indulged in personal attacks during her ill-informed speech. I refer the member to the editorial in today's *Queensland Country Life* for my credentials in the bush. She should have a read and learn something. When the member starts to demonstrate that she knows which way is up, I might pay a bit more attention to her.

In closing, I congratulate those members who made a positive contribution. I think these changes will certainly ensure that we get the right skill sets on the board. The selection process for the board will be through recommendations made to me. What came through loud and clear in the engagement process we had across Queensland was the need to have people on the board with industry understanding and the right skill sets. We will also be able to set up local advisory committees that will advise the board. So the changes we have put forward here today for the agricultural college will certainly assist the Australian Agricultural College Corporation to become the premier training provider for rural and related courses.

I also acknowledge the member for Mount Isa for her contribution to the amendments to the Veterinary Surgeons Board. I know that the member for Condamine has a daughter attending James Cook University. It is crucial that when she graduates at the end of the year she is able to practise in the great and noble profession she has chosen. So I think that amendment has the support of both UQ and JCU veterinary schools. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Clauses 1 to 5, as read, agreed to.

Clause 6—

Mr HOPPER (5.13 pm): I have heard some things in my time in this chamber, but in all my born days I have never seen such a wolf in sheep's clothing as I have today. The minister has run around the state holding meetings and consulting with industry and he has pushed the 'deinvest to reinvest' button, selling off everything he possibly can to raise money for the massive debt in this state. He stands here in this chamber tonight abusing us in opposition because we do not like it. When is the minister going to take some responsibility for the actions he has taken recently and is going to take in the very near future? When is he going to do that? That is all I ask.

This clause talks about the board. The minister also spoke about—

Mr Mulherin: Clause 6 talks about board membership.

Mr HOPPER: Clause 6, section 23—

Mr Mulherin: Relevance, please.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! Minister, the member for Condamine has the call.

Mr HOPPER: If the minister read all of clause 6, he would pick up on what I am about to speak about. Earlier we talked about when the boards were sacked. The minister talked about that and he talked about how badly the colleges were run. We were in the worst drought in Queensland's history and this government demanded a profit return. The government did not class the agricultural colleges as educational facilities; it classed them to return a profit to government. That is exactly what happened. Now, the minister stands in this chamber and says that the boards did no good. Clause 6 says that 'a person must have the qualifications, skills, experience or standing the Minister considers appropriate for membership of the board'. I ask the minister: what qualifications and skills will these people have?

Mr MULHERIN: I thank the honourable member for the question. The skill set required is to provide advice to the corporation sole CEO in matters of training, financial and strategic planning. The board members will have those skills. Through the establishment of local advisory committees, they will report back up to the board. Those committees can be set up around a local community or sectorally. The appointment of the board members, as I said, will be an independent process where there will be a representative from DEEDI and also from Education and Training. It will be chaired by one of the members of the advisory council that was set up by industry to assist us in reforming the colleges.

On the issue of corporate governance, I do not step away from the claims I made about the Queensland Audit Office findings on those individual boards. I feel that the member for Condamine is trying to prosecute the debate that occurred back in 2004. What we need to do is move forward. I believe that these reforms will certainly position the college as the premier training provider. We will be able to reach out to greater sectors, and this is what industry wants.

What came through all of those engagement processes I entered into is that they wanted that connection back to the industry sector and the community. I believe that the people who will put their names forward will certainly have all of those qualifications that the member for Toowoomba South and the member for Gregory were so passionate about in prosecuting the case to have people on the board who have the appropriate skills and who have those links back to industry.

Mr HOPPER: I hope that the minister is genuine in what he is saying. I note that he said he would take advice from DEEDI and Education and Training. There is a element here that we could certainly fill this board with Labor Party hacks if we wanted to see further erosion. We are very concerned about that. I hope that the minister will consider who goes on the board—that they will have strength in agriculture and have wide experience so that they can really have some input. It has been destroyed to the extent that it is now, so we will certainly be watching closely.

Mr MULHERIN: We will advertise extensively through the rural organisations, the agripolitical organisations, along with the bible of the bush, the *Queensland Country Life*. As I said, the chair of the independent panel will be one of the people who has been on the advisory council assisting the corporation's CEO in the reform of corporate governance and all of the other issues that we had to address when it came to changing from local boards to the AACC model.

Clause 6, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 18, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland) (5.19 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. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland) (5.19 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.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. JC SPENCE (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (5.20 pm): I move—

That the House, at its rising, do adjourn until 9.30 am on Tuesday, 23 March 2010.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. JC SPENCE (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (5.20 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Hervey Bay Special School, Air-conditioning Units

Mr SORENSEN (Hervey Bay—LNP) (5.21 pm): When the Hervey Bay Special School opened in 1986, there were 38 students. This number has steadily increased. There were 52 students in eight classes in 2005 and, in the last five years, they have seen a 61 per cent growth in student numbers to 83 enrolments in 14 classes. The special school has a very small but active P&C committee. They have raised considerable money for items such as quick-release wheelchairs, bike helmets, water tanks and other items of need.

This special school is seeking funding for four air-conditioning units. All of the students would benefit from the air-conditioning units but more than half the student numbers would especially benefit. Many of the students are in wheelchairs and suffer from seizures and have found that the hot weather makes them more prone to seizures. Every time a child has a seizure, they lose a little part of them. One of the students was in an air-conditioned classroom last year and had approximately three seizures in the year. This year, in a non-air-conditioned classroom, the student has had over 40 seizures in the last month. This child's parents have spoken to a paediatrician and the school nurse and both feel that the student would benefit greatly from an air-conditioned classroom.

The installation of four air-conditioning units would benefit all of the students. As the government does not pay for air conditioning in schools in this area, the school is looking to the community for assistance for the wellbeing of the students. As this is a most pressing issue, I will personally work for a positive outcome. Also, because it is classed as a school, it cannot apply to the Jupiters fund or the gambling fund for funding. It is a pity that cannot be done. I appeal to the government to give consideration to this special school when it rolls out its air-conditioning policy in its future budgets.

Education, Capital Works Projects

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (5.23 pm): The Bligh government wants to ensure that Queensland continues to grow and prosper and that young Queenslanders are in the best possible position to meet the growing and challenging demands of an ever-changing society. A good education prepares young people to enhance their abilities and puts them in a position to continue lifelong learning so they can further improve on their opportunities.

Education is the key to all Queenslanders achieving their maximum possible potential, and it begins in the classroom. In saying this, it gives me great pleasure to recognise the government's funding commitment for local schools in the electorate of Greenslopes under the latest round of the State Schools of Tomorrow funding program. Over \$4 million will be invested into five schools across the Greenslopes electorate for upgrades to 27 classrooms, science labs and libraries.

I am delighted to announce that Cavendish Road State High School is receiving \$1,114,500 for upgrades to its library and science facilities. I recently also made representations on behalf of the school regarding repairs to the boundary fence of the school, with remedial work now in the process of being carried out. I thank the education minister, the Hon. Geoff Wilson, for that commitment. Coorparoo Secondary College is receiving \$1,154,662 and Holland Park State High School is receiving \$692,797 to upgrade its science facilities. Holland Park State School is receiving \$281,135 for minor refurbishment works, while Marshall Road State School is receiving \$1,124,541 for major works to support innovative teaching and learning.

I am also proud to announce that \$920,000 has been allocated from this program towards the refurbishment of the science block at the Mount Gravatt State High School, which will proudly celebrate its 50th anniversary of educating southsiders this year. Four science classrooms will be redesigned and upgraded to provide a modern learning environment for students. This refurbishment is likely to involve the replacement of old timber benches, the upgrading of gas, water and power supplies, new lighting, computer connections and furniture, and new floor coverings.

Reconstruction of the school's administration block is also progressing well following the devastating fire late last year, with completion due by the end of May 2010. Due to the amount of water and smoke damage to most of the ground floor, the building has had to be almost completely rebuilt. Part of the library is currently being used as a temporary administration block, but QBuild is working diligently to complete the rebuild as quickly as possible.

On top of this, the Bligh government is making a further investment of \$30.2 million to deliver high-tech learning facilities for the School of Distance Education, which will be relocated from its current West End base to Coorparoo Secondary College in the Greenslopes electorate. This investment will see an upgrade to the existing library to include an administration centre, a staff annexe, a new catering canteen block, a prep to year 5 staff learning centre and a visual arts centre for the Coorparoo college students.

It is fantastic to see local schools and our local community benefiting from the government's substantial investment in this area. I want to congratulate all schools on their successful applications, particularly all school principals, and I also thank all schoolteachers, teacher aides, administration officers and everyone else who make such a great contribution to educating the next generation of Queenslanders. This sort of investment makes me very proud to be part of a government which puts Queensland children first by investing in education.

Gary Larson Oval; Collapse of Building Companies

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—LNP) (5.26 pm): Gary Larson Oval, situated in Miriam Vale, is the sporting hub of Miriam Vale. Its main tenants are the senior rugby league club, known as the Magpies, the junior rugby league club, also known as the Magpies, and the Miriam Vale Touch Football Association. Gary Larson Oval at Miriam Vale does not have the change rooms, toilets or showers to properly cater for all the players, participants and families who visit the oval. The facilities are substandard. I have been contacted by the Gary Larson Oval Enhancement Group and its committee chair, the local sergeant of police, Owen Harms, who is a very well-respected man in the community. Owen wrote to me—

What we would like to do is remedy this situation, via constructing a multi purpose building that will provide: Change rooms, toilets, showers, disabled facilities/refs room/storage, and canteen/bar facilities.

This building would be constructed on the newly leased grounds.

Today I am calling on the Premier and the Minister for Sport to support the upgrade of this iconic regional sporting oval and to provide funds for an upgrade to construct a multipurpose building. As we all know, Gary Larson is a great Queenslanders and was a great representative for our state.

On 17 June last year, I delivered a speech in this place calling on the government to help victims of a building company, Coral Coast Homes. It appears, judging by the government's actions, that it fell on deaf, arrogant ears. This government, through its Office of Fair Trading and the BSA, was warned many times at least a year before the builder's collapse about the illegal acts and it failed to act to protect pensioners, families and retirees. Today it has been revealed that yet another local Bundaberg-Burnett company has gone into liquidation, Designer Homes Wide Bay. Once again, many people's lives in the Burnett will be shattered, including homeowners and subcontractors.

My office spoke with subcontractor John Ivich of John Ivich Plastering, who has now lost over \$30,000 from the collapse of Designer Homes Wide Bay. Unfortunately, Mr Ivich was also caught up in the Coral Coast Homes debacle and has lost thousands of dollars already from that sorry mess. Mr Ivich and his wife are absolutely devastated by this second blow, which will hurt his family and his small business. This is a man who employs apprentices and other locals who rely on him for work. If he keeps losing out like this, he will have to start laying off workers, which he does not want to have to do. The fault will be entirely with the BSA and this government, who have failed time and time again to protect subbies and home builders.

Mr Ivich made the comment that something needs to be done to protect subcontractors in the building industry. He said, 'Homeowners are protected by insurance at least. Why isn't there any protection for subbies?' I want to know, along with the people of the Burnett, whether the BSA again failed to act to protect the families and workers of my area. How long has the BSA known about this particular company's difficulties? Have people been unnecessarily ripped off again?

(Time expired)

Runaway Bay Ambulance Station

Ms CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (5.29 pm): Last week, it was my pleasure to turn the sod to commemorate the start of the construction of the new \$2.1 million Runaway Bay Ambulance Station. I was joined on the occasion by the Commissioner for the Queensland Ambulance Service, Mr David Melville; the assistant commissioner for the south-east region, Mrs Jayne Barnes; acting area director, Danny Murphy; and officer in charge of the Runaway Bay station, Henry Wizar. Also at the occasion were representatives from the construction company, Reed Group.

A new Runaway Bay Ambulance Station was an election commitment I have been determined to deliver for the people of the northern Gold Coast and for the hardworking staff who are based at this station. The turning of the sod marks another project milestone, as the delivery of this new station moves a step closer.

There are now 17 ambulance officers based at Runaway Bay. Whilst the station still provides an appropriate and effective service for our area, to ensure adequate staff amenities are conducive with a safe and healthy workplace and inclusive of more modern features for the staff, in my view it really needed an upgrade. During a visit by the Minister for Emergency Services, Neil Roberts, I am pleased to say that I convinced the minister that the station did not just need an upgrade but that the staff needed and deserved a new replacement station. The staff at Runaway Bay Ambulance Station are held in high regard by our community. As the local member, I recognise how important it is for residents to have a well-supported, well-resourced and well-staffed ambulance station. I am indeed proud of the work achieved by the Queensland Ambulance Service with regard to Runaway Bay.

I say thanks to our ambos for their dedication, commitment and compassion. The Runaway Bay ambos work hard to deliver exceptional health care to the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. So far this financial year paramedics from Runaway Bay have responded to more than 1,800 life-threatening cases. Our ambos deserve this new station, and I am pleased that finally construction will be underway.

The new Runaway Bay Ambulance Station will provide a state-of-the-art facility for our paramedics to assist them in carrying out their daily duties to the best of their abilities. The Runaway Bay Ambulance Station officers are supported by the Gold Coast Local Ambulance Committee. I would like to thank the volunteer LAC members for the valuable role they play in supporting our ambos and for their advocacy on behalf of the community.

The Bligh government is committed to ensuring our ambulance service remains the best in the country. That is why we have allocated \$19.3 million in capital works funding this financial year and \$20.9 million to fund 150 new and replacement ambulance vehicles across the state. Along with the community, I look forward to watching the new Runaway Bay Ambulance Station taking shape over coming months.

Asbestos in Schools

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—LNP) (5.32 pm): This morning we have seen from the government serious admissions in relation to asbestos contamination in a number of North Queensland schools. This is an outrageous situation that should not still be occurring after all we know about asbestos. The only treatment for asbestos related cancer is prevention. There is no way of checking teachers or students to see whether or not they have breathed in asbestos fibres. Their only option is to get on with their lives and hope that they are okay. The only way of dealing with this is to ensure that we do not contaminate the classrooms and teachers' rooms of our schools.

This morning in this place we saw a minister trying to blame headmasters and contractors, but we have seen not just these North Queensland schools but also Gold Coast schools and a whole range of problems, and the minister cannot escape his responsibility to keep our kids safe in their schools.

One of the things that seems to be ignored in the North Queensland episode is the advice in relation to the dangers that clothing presents when taken home. The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission says that clothing should be destroyed or, at the very least, if a worker's clothes are exposed they must be fully decontaminated and shoes wet-wiped after exposure to asbestos. Where were the warnings and instructions sent home with these children from North Queensland who were for months in potentially contaminated classrooms?

There is another ugly side to this, and that is the bullying of whistleblowers who are concerned to try to make our schools safe. We saw someone from Asbestos Removal Technology trying to urge QBuild to do procedures correctly and to protect the safety of our schools only, in effect, to be black-banned. This is the ugly side—

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

Dr FLEGG: I haven't even mentioned you, Minister.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Moggill, please take your seat.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The member is misleading the parliament. That matter is under investigation, and that has been reported to this parliament.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, there is a process for raising complaints about misleading the House, and I refer you to the standing orders. I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Today I got another statement from another building industry worker who on three occasions was told by QBuild that he was to boycott Asbestos Removal Technology. We should be standing by the people who are trying to do the right thing and trying to keep our schools safe.

Mr Schwarten: We are. We are doing that.

Dr FLEGG: If the minister on the other side who is so vocal and the Minister for Education have any intention of doing the right thing, they will intervene—

Mr Schwarten: We have done it already—

Dr FLEGG:—and have the boycotted business reinstated for all of their contracts.

Mr Schwarten: It's being investigated.

Dr FLEGG: They should intervene and reinstate—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired.

Mr Schwarten: It's being investigated.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will wait for the House to come to order.

Dr FLEGG: It's a whitewash. There is no investigation.

Mr Schwarten: It is so being investigated.

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

Keppel Electorate, Funding for Schools

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (5.35 pm): Unlike the people who come in here and want to complain about schools, I, like the member for Greenslopes, would like to bring to the attention of this House the good that will come from funding under BER and State Schools of Tomorrow. I have 23 schools in my electorate, and they range from schools with 11 children through to a school with about 1,700 kids. Throughout my electorate, the money that has been spent by both the federal government and the state government is quite remarkable. We have opened a new hall at Emu Park. Along with the hall and library, \$1.8 million went into it. The Mount Archer State School on the north side of Rockhampton is quite a large primary school. Its hall has been completed and students had their first assembly in it the other day. That cost \$1.5 million. The hall at the Yeppoon State School has been finished. Along with that, funding from State Schools of Tomorrow will turn that school into a very modern school and the children will get the benefit of it.

The one school that I want to bring to the notice of this House is Parkhurst State School. Some of our small schools have had library buildings and smaller buildings built. I was at Parkhurst State School for the induction of its school leaders, sports leaders and school council last week, and it has a new library and science building. It is not quite finished yet, but the design of this building has been done under BER. Other items have been completed from funding under State Schools of Tomorrow. I am told that this building is an architectural showpiece and would be nominated for a national architectural award. The building is tremendous.

This is a school with 270 children who are ably led by the principal, Mr Lyle Walker. The rest of the staff are also great. What has now been done with the funding from both state and federal departments is nothing short of amazing. I think it is time that everyone in this House, regardless of where they come from—and I know there are a lot of schools in opposition electorates—should say that our children are going to get one of the best educations they will get, and that comes because of joint funding from the federal and state Labor governments. I will spell it out—L-A-B-O-R governments. Let them complain. There is nothing to complain about in my schools.

Southport, Student Accommodation

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (5.38 pm): In December 2009 in the 'Public sector informant' the headline by Scott Prasser and Nicholas Aroney read 'Queensland under Bligh Labor: living in a state of perpetual corruption'. How true those words are.

Tabled paper: Article from The Public Sector Informant, December 2009, titled 'Living in a state of perpetual corruption' [1896].

This week a massive petition of 1,237 petitioners—one for every person who is going to be placed on the site—was submitted by residents of Southport surrounding the GCIT site between Ridgeway Avenue and Benowa Road, Southport. These residents are opposing a proposed 1,200 bed foreign student hostel literally in their backyards. The site is home to our last remaining native untouched coastal hardwood remnant forest. It is the only significant green space in Southport other than the playing fields of the century-old Southport School on the shores of the Nerang River. The density of the population in inner Southport has tripled in 10 years, with no increase in green space. Southport now has 16 major high-rises, four over 30 storeys or more—and there are more being built—with massive block-to-block bases.

This student accommodation comprises 600 very small rooms in five three-storey buildings. This exceeds any reasonable definition of density. The Labor government, via the TAFE and GCIT, are pressing ahead in spite of overwhelming opposition from all places, including the council. There is no identified need for this proposal. The \$7 million new building that GCIT is getting from the Korean developer is not needed and may well go unused. The existing building is used very sparingly.

The developer is projecting income of \$300,000 per week for the site when for 39 years it will pay \$1 per year rent to the state. That is the rent proposed by the state Labor government. Over 39 years this is a \$2.5 billion return over development and charges, including interest and rates. In percentage terms, that is a 2,500 per cent return. The development was proposed after a trip to Korea by former Premier Beattie. The GCIT share is \$3.1 million per year if the QAC supplies 300 students. If it does not the maximum penalty is \$350,000. The deal was approved by Treasury, the executive committee and GCIT.

This development and the actions taken by government employees to pursue it raised great suspicion about the probity of the process. It is impossible to accept any justification given for the peppercorn \$1 rent for the not needed \$7 million replacement building. It is a poor return for a dangerous and high-density development in our only green space site in the middle of Southport.

(Time expired)

Mental Health Services

Mr MOORHEAD (Waterford—ALP) (5.41 pm): Tonight I would like to discuss the important mental health initiatives being undertaken in Logan City, particularly when it comes to early intervention and support for young people with a mental illness. With one in five Queenslanders experiencing a mental health problem in their lifetime, the Bligh government is investing in better mental health services.

The initiatives announced yesterday in parliament by the Minister for Disability Services will be warmly welcomed by the Logan community. I must express my gratitude to the minister for her support for mental health services in our community. A \$6.5 million investment in the Bligh government's Time Out initiative will deliver home and community based services to Logan residents aged 18 to 25 experiencing early symptoms of mental health problems. Early intervention like this is the key to preventing the onset of chronic mental illness years into the future.

Logan will be one of the first Queensland locations to benefit from this new early intervention program. Importantly, the program is in the safe hands of Youth & Family Services (Logan City), a key community service organisation in Logan. The initiative will support young people in their own homes, ensuring they can access clinical support, counselling and, where required, specialist public mental health services. The Time Out initiative will support over 100 young Logan residents. After young people complete the program, and for those in home based care, outreach workers will be on call to help them for up to three months.

I would also like to take this opportunity to promote the initiatives being advocated by the Centre Against Sexual Violence, an essential service supporting women survivors of sexual violence, particularly cases of historical abuse. CASV has undertaken a great deal of research on the links between survivors of sexual violence and mental illness. Unfortunately, many people who present to mental health services have underlying issues of post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions arising from cases of sexual violence. In some cases these underlying conditions are identified and in other cases the underlying causes remain unaddressed.

These circumstances create a risk of survivors of sexual violence cycling through mental health services that may not necessarily address the nub of their problem. I hope that this matter is one that can be given the significant consideration it deserves by clinicians and policy makers within Queensland Health. It is an important opportunity to prevent mental illness, keep people out of hospitals and provide a quality of life for people living with a mental illness.

Drug Abuse

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—LNP) (5.44 pm): It has come to my attention that this government has incurred some \$700,000 worth of expenses developing yet another flashy internet campaign, this time targeting drug abuse. In normal circumstances I would welcome any initiative addressing these issues. However, when the government has chosen to waste money on an unproven, flashy internet campaign when a comprehensive, evidence based resource produced in Queensland already exists something has to be said.

In 2007, two solicitors from regional Queensland, Mr Adair Donaldson and Mr Peter Shannon, from Toowoomba and Dalby respectively, developed the acclaimed 'Putting youth in the picture' resource for youth, parents and employees. What is unique about this resource is that it recognises that our dedicated teachers, school based youth health nurses, human resource managers and crime prevention officers need a multifaceted resource that comprehensively covers a whole raft of issues to help them connect with youth. Sexual assaults, youth violence, drug use, cybercrime and underage parties are all comprehensively addressed in the resource.

These men went through the usual avenues of dealing with government. Firstly, they had to go to the Premier's media advisers, then the policy advisers from police, education, communities, liquor licensing and Health before the buck was passed to the federal government. Most people would have become disheartened. However, to their credit, and with the support and guidance of experienced health and teaching professionals, they developed the training resource themselves. It was launched in October 2008. Since that time it has attracted wonderful support that would be the envy of any government department. For example, they have been retained by the NRL, the AFL Players Association and iconic Queensland employers like Ergon Energy and Bundaberg Rum. To give an appreciation of how widespread the support of the resource is I seek leave to have a list of schools and organisations where the resource is being used incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

St Margaret Mary's College; Dalby State High School; Loreto College; Warwick State High School; Springwood State High School; St Margaret's Anglican Girls School; Moreton Bay College; Pittsworth State High School; Toowoomba Grammar School; Harristown State High School; Toowoomba Youth Justice Service; Oakey State High School; Qld Health; Qld Health—14 schools—South East Queensland; Saint Stephen's College Limited; MacGregor State High School; The Southport School; Burnett State College; Columba Catholic College; Drinkwise Australia; Pittsworth State High School; Moree Women's Refuge Ngala House Inc—6 schools; Capella State High School; Relationships Australia—Longreach; Queensland Health (ATODS); Longreach & Capella Queensland Health (ATODS); Scots PGC College; Fairholme College; Longreach Queensland Health (ATODS); Queensland Health (ATODS)—4 schools; The Southport School; Brisbane Boy's College; Woodridge State High School; Cavendish Road State High School; Saint Augustine's College; Dalby Regional Council—4 schools; Qld Health Brisbane North Population Health Unit; Wavell State High School; GAGAL (3 schools—Gladstone area); NRL—Westfield Sports College; The Salvation Army (Bundaberg 2 x schools); The Armidale School; Mountain Creek State High School; Cannon Hill Anglican College; Rochedale State High School; Concordia Lutheran College; Loganlea State High School; St Paul's School; St Hilda's School; Carmel College; Helensvale State High School; Windaroo Valley State High School & Wesley Toowoomba LIAG & Ergon Energy—approximately 11 schools and 1 TAFE; St Joseph's Nudgee College; Matthew Stanley Foundation—6 schools; DEET—Behaviour Support Service—17 schools; St Joseph's College Gregory Terrace; ATODS—Gayndah; St Aidan's Anglican Girls School; Tin Can Bay P-10 State School & Mary Valley State College; Anglican Church Grammar School; Warwick Police District; DEET—Behaviour Support Services; Griffith Sports College; National Rugby League Ltd; AFL Players' Association; Griffith University Residential Colleges; Redcliffe Dolphins Rugby Leagues Club; Ergon Energy; Oakey Army Aviation Base; Griffith University

Mr HORAN: To give members an idea about how students are responding to the resource, hardened teachers have reported that students at the end of the lessons have stood up and applauded and commented that it was the most constructive lesson they have had in their schooling. These men created an Indigenous version. Catherine O'Sullivan, the state manager of the department of employment, education and workplace relations, recognised the value immediately and funded the implementation of the resource in five remote Indigenous communities in Queensland.

In summary, the resource is evidenced based, independently evaluated, supports state and federal government initiatives, has a proven track record and is currently being used in more than 116 schools. If this government wanted to, it could ensure that it was available to every school, business, community organisation and sporting club throughout Queensland for a fraction of the cost of what this government has just spent on an unproven, flashy internet campaign looking at a single issue.

The only thing I can assume from the manner in which the government has dealt with these men who have produced this resource is that the government is not interested in considering innovations from the people of Queensland. The sad thing is that the government is depriving our dedicated public servants of access to a resource that has great potential to help address the many issues facing youth and families today. I call on the Premier, as a politician and a parent, to meet Mr Donaldson, examine this wonderful resource and look at it as a practical, proven resource to help young Queenslanders. It would save this state a lot of money and would be a wonderful asset to the young people of this state.

Windaroo Valley State High School

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (5.47 pm): Take a group of excited high school students, add one packed train during peak hour and you have a recipe for another tabloid news story about our young people. At a time when the media has its focus squarely on what it perceives to be 'wrong' with our state schools and Generation Y, I rise tonight to inform honourable members of a very good news story from one of the state high schools in my electorate of Albert. On a recent legal studies excursion to the Supreme Court in Brisbane, 16 year 11 students, together with their teachers Mrs Miller and Mrs Kucks, travelled by train to the city. Upon their return to school, to her great surprise, principal Kay Louwrens received an email from a member of the public, Mr John Campbell, praising the students' courteous conduct on the train. He wrote—

At a time when there is often a negative focus on high schools, it is a genuine pleasure to compliment several of your year 11 students and their teachers ...

When he was on the train, Mr Campbell, himself a senior lawyer, said the students' legal studies textbooks caught his attention. He wrote—

What further caught my attention was the fact that your students acted with great maturity and respect at all times. They were well dressed and appeared to interact with their teachers respectfully.

Mr Campbell went on to congratulate the staff at Windaroo Valley State High School. He wrote—

Full credit to those teachers who were obviously having an early start to their day, so as to permit a relevant field trip to the Courts ... I think that such good examples of both teachers and students working well in the name of your school should be recognised.

And I agree.

Mr Schwarten: Hear, hear!

Mrs KEECH: I take the minister's interjection. I was therefore very pleased indeed that one of my local media outlets published this good news story in the *Beenleigh Alive* magazine. Thank you to journalist George Anderson for his strong support of Albert's young people. As a state member I have always been very proud indeed of the amazing students who graduate from this school. Through the strong and dedicated leadership of principal Ms Kay Louwrens, the hardworking teachers and admin staff, as well as the support of the state government and a very vibrant P&C committee, Windaroo Valley State High School students as our future generation continue to achieve impressive results in the academic, sporting and cultural realm. These year 11 students are bucking the trend. They are enhancing the reputation not only of their own school but of each and every respectful, intelligent and talented high school student in this state. Keep up the good work!

Question put—That the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 5.50 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, 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