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THURSDAY, 10 MARCH 2011



The Legislative Assembly met at 9.30 am.

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



SPEAKER'S STATEMENTS

Colour for a Cure

Mr SPEAKER: I am delighted that there is a bit of colour in the House this day. It is all for a good cause and I thank those members for doing that. All of us know people who are suffering from cancer and I thank you for participating in a great cause.

Parliamentary Behaviour

Mr SPEAKER: On the subject of matters of privilege, I remind members that when I am on my feet I expect all members, regardless of where they sit in this House, to sit down immediately and desist from their conversation. If that does not happen, then I will have no hesitation—and I expect that the House will support me—in taking action against that person.



PRIVILEGE

Speaker's Ruling, Alleged Deliberate Misleading of the House by a Minister

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have ordered that a ruling regarding a complaint by the member for Gladstone against the then minister for infrastructure and planning of deliberately misleading the House be circulated. I have decided not to refer the matter to the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee and I seek leave to have the statement incorporated in the parliamentary record.

Leave granted.

SPEAKER'S RULING—ALLEGED DELIBERATELY MISLEADING THE HOUSE

On 25 November 2010, the Member for Gladstone wrote to me alleging on behalf of her constituent that the then Minister for Infrastructure and Planning had misled the House in his Answer to Question on Notice No. 1684 tabled on 4 October 2010.

The member's complaint was that the minister misled the House as when he stated that the proponents for LNG Gas projects on Curtis Island were not in breach of Society of International Gas Terminal and Tanker Operators (SIGTTO) guidelines for LNG selection.

In accordance with Standing Order 269(5) on 17 December 2010, I wrote to the minister, enclosing a copy of the member's allegations and requested a response.

On 14 February 2010, the minister provided a letter of response.

The minister's response details that his statement was made on the basis of advice from the LNG proponents and Maritime Safety Queensland which indicated that the projects are in compliance with the recommendations of SIGTTO. In addition, the minister notes that Lloyd's Register has assessed the first such project as compliant.

For the benefit of the House, I table a copy of all the correspondence in this matter.

It is well established that are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member has committed the contempt of deliberately misleading the House:

- firstly, the statement must, in fact, have been misleading;
- secondly, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and
- thirdly, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House.

It is clear that a misrepresentation can constitute a deliberate misleading of the House and a contempt, only if all the elements described above can be established.

In this case, I believe the minister has adequately explained his statement and I do not believe that any of the elements have been sufficiently made out. Furthermore, I consider it unlikely that further investigation by the IEPPC would adduce such evidence.

I have, therefore, decided not to refer the matter to the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee.



SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Broadcast of Parliament, Archive Facility

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, you may be aware that the broadcast of parliament archive facility was launched on 15 February—the first sitting day for 2011. I appreciate the fact that some members have contacted me regarding how we might improve that further and I thank them for that. That will be happening—at least the investigation of it. I thought it appropriate today that I report to the House about the use made of the facility. Up to and including midnight on Tuesday, 8 March 2011, the total number of clips viewed by the public was 5,434. The maximum number of concurrent users—that is the number of users online at any one time—was 90.

PETITION

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

Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park, Fishing Huts

Mr Cripps, from 1,151 petitioners, requesting the House to recognise the legitimate rights of North Queenslanders with established fishing huts within and adjacent to the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park to continue to enjoy a lawful recreational pastime [\[4054\]](#).

Petition received.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Natural Disasters, Disaster Management System



Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Reconstruction) (9.34 am): The unprecedented and devastating weather that has impacted Queensland since December has served to underline the strength of this state's disaster management system. We saw local, state and federal government agencies and non-government organisations working together to prepare and respond to widespread flooding and destructive cyclones. I again place on the public record the thanks of all Queenslanders for the excellent job done by all involved in preparing and responding to the cyclones and flooding.

Our government knows that a well-organised and well-resourced disaster management system is essential to ensure that Queensland can prepare and respond to any disaster that impacts the state. That is why last year we introduced changes to the Disaster Management Act to streamline and enhance the system. Later today I will officially open the new State Disaster Management Centre at Kedron. The Disaster Management Centre is part of the new \$78 million Queensland Emergency Operations Centre built at the existing Department of Community Safety complex at Kedron Park. The centre will house Emergency Management Queensland's disaster coordination centre and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's disaster operations centre and will provide an enhanced facility from which the police and emergency services agencies can respond to large-scale disasters. During normal operations, around 60 staff will work from the facility. During a large-scale incident or disaster, that number will increase to around 200.

This next-generation centre features the latest in technology, ensuring that those making decisions during an emergency have the most up-to-date information. It also features a dedicated media centre to assist in keeping the public informed of vital information during an emergency. The centre has already proven its worth, having been used extensively earlier this year, despite not being fully completed, in the preparations and response to the devastating flooding and cyclones that impacted our state. The Queensland Emergency Operations Centre will also house the new Brisbane region communication centres for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service. These functions will become operational in the coming weeks, ensuring that this project will have been delivered on time and on budget.

Our government made some hard decisions to ensure that projects like this one could proceed. Because of those decisions, our emergency services agencies now have a state-of-the-art, world-class new centre that will act as a base for their life-saving activities for decades to come.

Business Events Tourism



Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Reconstruction) (9.37 am): Yesterday I announced the details of our \$10 million tourism recovery package with the tag line Nothing Beats Queensland. Our message to the rest of Australia and the world is that Queensland is well and truly back in business and nothing is going to keep us down.

Today I can announce that the world's premier business travel and meetings organisation, the Global Business Travel Association, has decided to come to Brisbane for its annual 2011 Australia-New Zealand conference. I am particularly pleased, because the organisers moved the event from Sydney to the Mercure in Brisbane to show support for our state after our recent natural disasters. This is a big win for Brisbane. Collectively, this organisation and its 5,000-plus members manage more than \$340 billion worth of global business travel, conference and meetings business. This year's conference is expected to attract delegates representing all sectors of business travel in Australia, New Zealand and Asia.


Business delegates provide a big economic hit to the regions that they visit. On average, they spend more than five times that of leisure tourists every day they are here. The business events industry is worth more than \$17 billion to the national economy each year and we want to make sure that Queensland gets not only its fair share but more than its per capital share of that business. That is why, after the recent natural disasters, we are investing an extra \$1 million through Events Queensland to help attract key business events to Queensland and deliver an economic boost to key regions all over the state.

From here in Brisbane, down to the Gold Coast and up to Cairns, Queensland has the most diverse and comprehensive portfolio of convention facilities where people can do business of any state in Australia. These funds will be divided between the state's seven convention bureaux—the Gold Coast, Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, Mackay, the Whitsundays, Townsville and Cairns—to further reinforce the message nationally and internationally that Queensland is open for business.

Each bureau is being provided with \$100,000 in funds to assist them with their marketing in the immediate future. A \$300,000 national bid fund and other marketing activity will also help to secure much needed business events across the regions of our state. This is in addition to a further \$2 million investment from July this year which will also go to this purpose.

I take this opportunity to thank the event organisers at Global Business Travel Association for doing their bit to support Queensland. As we said in the House yesterday, nothing beats Queensland, and nothing beats Queensland for a great business event and I am sure the conference will be a resounding success.

Police Service, Disciplinary System


 **Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Reconstruction) (9.40 am): My government is committed to ensuring that we have an effective and accountable Police Service that operates to the highest ethical and professional standards. That is why, as part of our integrity reforms, we asked the Crime and Misconduct Commission to review the current process for dealing with police discipline and misconduct. In December last year the CMC tabled its report *Setting the standard*. The report found that in many instances the current police disciplinary system has worked well. However, it also highlighted issues of complexity, workloads and timeliness within the current police disciplinary system. The CMC made 11 recommendations about specific aspects of the police disciplinary system, including a review of staffing levels of the QPS Ethical Standards Command; introduction of a power for the commissioner to transfer an officer in the public interest; allowing for apologies by a police officer without an admission of liability; and introduction of a commissioner's 'loss of confidence' power to provide a basis for the dismissal of a police officer on loss of confidence grounds. Importantly, recommendation 3 of the CMC's report was that the QPS, in consultation with the CMC, review the policies and procedures, steps and processes in the current police disciplinary system.

I am pleased to announce today that following discussions with both the chair of the CMC and the Police Commissioner I have appointed a panel of independent experts to undertake the review recommended by the CMC report. The panel of experts will bring an impressive mix of skills and expertise to this task. Simone Webbe is a barrister and former deputy director-general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet with extensive experience in models for good governance and accountability; Justice Glen Williams is a former Court of Appeal judge who was also chair of the expert panel that developed the model for the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal which has jurisdiction over police disciplinary proceedings; and Felix Grayson is a retired police assistant commissioner who has worked at the CMC and has extensive experience in the handling and investigation of corruption and misconduct matters. I have asked the expert panel to provide me with a report by the end of April 2011. The government will then consider the report and respond to the recommendations together with the other recommendations of the CMC's original report, *Setting the standard*. In doing so, we will ensure that quick action is taken to implement an improved model for dealing with police misconduct.

I think that everyone in this House would endorse the view that the vast majority of Queensland Police Service officers every single day continue to serve the public across the state with the utmost integrity and commitment. My government is committed to supporting the thousands of police officers who do the right thing every day by ensuring that there is a fair and robust disciplinary system in place to

deal with those few officers who do not meet the high standards of conduct and competence expected within our Police Service and thereby bring down the reputation of all of the others. Public confidence in the Queensland Police Service is fundamental to our integrity framework and we are committed to doing everything we can to support our Police Service in working to the highest standards of conduct and accountability.

Brisbane Valley Rail Trail

 **Hon. PT LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Attorney-General, Minister for Local Government and Special Minister of State) (9.43 am): The award-winning Brisbane Valley Rail Trail did not escape damage during the recent flooding. Unfortunately, every town along the Brisbane Valley rail corridor from Yarraman to Wulkuraka was also directly affected by the floods. The state government is working in partnership with councils and the community to repair the damage and reopen closed sections of the trail as soon as possible. Thanks to the hard work of volunteers at a working bee last month, the Moore to Linville section of the trail has now reopened. However, the remaining sections of the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail are still closed. Another working bee is planned for tomorrow along the Yarraman Weir Walk and trail head. It is hoped this clean-up will go just as well as the last one and that this section of the rail trail will be open again very soon.

As one of the many people who have walked the rail trail, I know how important it is to get the trail back up and running as quickly as possible. As the member for Ipswich West and chair of the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Steering Committee knows well, in the last three years the trail has been a catalyst for renewed confidence, focus and action in the communities along the trail. At the turnaround point on my walk along the Fernvale to Lowood section of the rail trail I stopped in at the Lowood IGA to buy the ingredients for lunch. I made some nice ham and salad sandwiches in a park before setting off back to Fernvale where, I might add, it is not that long ago that I had a pie from their excellent pie shop after visiting flood damaged areas in Somerset shire with Mayor Lehmann.


An opposition member: I bet you had more than one pie!

Mr LUCAS: Actually, I had two. I had better correct that so that I do not end up before the privileges committee. An estimated 30,000 people use the rail trail each year, from students who access the trail to get to school and people enjoying their daily exercise to people taking part in large-scale events such as the rail trail fun run and tourists keen to visit the region. Having witnessed the enduring community spirit of this region over the past two months, I have no doubt that we will see another great turnout at tomorrow's working bee as locals fight back against the devastation of the recent floods.

Following the working bee an information session about the extension of the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail to Yarraman will be held. I am pleased to welcome Toowoomba Regional Council as our newest partner on this project. Extending the trail to Yarraman in the Toowoomba region increases the length of the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail to almost 161 kilometres, making it officially Australia's longest recreational rail trail. This further acclaim for our already award-winning trail and the recovery efforts to come will provide a desperately needed economic boost for all the local communities along it.

The preservation of former railway rights of way as rail trails is not just an important part of our heritage; it is also an important part of state planning. Transport corridors can change over time. For example, old cane corridors in Cairns will one day be public transport corridors. It is after things like ripping up and selling the right of way on the Gold Coast railway line—which that lot opposite did in 1965, supported by the member for Currumbin—that government has to come back and buy it all again later on at massive expense. Heritage planning makes altogether good sense.

Business Investment; Jobs

 **Hon. AP FRASER** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for State Development and Trade) (9.46 am): The Bligh government recognises that innovation stands at the core of all competitive economies. Innovation leads to investment and investment leads to jobs. That is why we stand shoulder to shoulder with innovative businesses through our Business and Industry Transformation Incentives, or BITI, scheme. The BITI scheme provides grants of up to \$250,000 to businesses to help turn world-class ideas into reality. Since the scheme was introduced, 31 future-focused Queensland companies have shared in almost \$6 million in funding.

Applications are out now for the next round of this scheme and this funding round closes on Friday, 25 March. These grants are available across the state and I strongly encourage members on both sides of the House to promote the program to their local businesses. Shaping an innovative Queensland for future generations is everyone's business.

Our government is committed to being on the front foot when it comes to driving economic growth in this state. We know that facilitating and fostering major investment, both in the south-east and across the regions, is critical to supporting and creating Queensland jobs. Our drive towards our election

commitment of creating 100,000 net new jobs continues. We have clocked 18 straight months of jobs growth. Whether that run continued through February will be revealed in the next jobs data due later today. It is highly likely that the effects of the natural disasters which have hit production will see that trend reverse. We have made no secret of the fact that job creation is our No. 1 priority. The addition of the Coordinator-General to the economic development portfolio cements this agenda.

There are currently 25 projects under active assessment by the Coordinator-General with a total capital investment potential of over \$58 billion, the potential to create almost 37,000 construction jobs and over 21,000 ongoing operational jobs. In the last three weeks we have seen action in major project facilitation. The Hummock Hill island resort, a \$915 million vision to transform a former grazing farm into a tourism drawcard, has received approval and could cater for 2,800 visitors and create 350 construction jobs and 700 ongoing jobs. The draft terms of reference were released for public consultation on the proposed \$1 billion export terminal on Balaclava Island, which could employ up to 800 construction workers and 100 full-time jobs ongoing. The Byerwen Coal Project was declared a significant project by the Coordinator-General. JFE Steel is a project partner of QCoal on this proposal, which could deliver \$1.5 billion worth of investment, 500 construction jobs and up to 1,000 operational jobs.

There is work to be done in Queensland and there is an opportunity to be realised. The government remains committed to driving economic development, building a stronger Queensland economy and creating more jobs, just like we said we would.

Weapons Act



Hon. NS ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (9.49 am): Queensland has a rigorous weapons licensing system which balances the need for community safety with the legitimate interests of weapon users and owners. A review of the Weapons Act and regulations commenced in 2008 and involved extensive stakeholder engagement. The review recommended significant changes to the act to make it more user friendly and, as a result, the act and its regulations were rewritten.

Following the 2009 election, and given the extensive range of proposed amendments arising from the first review, in 2010 I reconvened the stakeholder review committee to ensure that the draft rewritten act and regulations addressed the needs of stakeholders and the community. In August last year I released a draft exposure bill and called for further submissions from the public on proposed changes to the legislation. The draft exposure bill attracted more than 2,500 online comments and submissions from individuals and organisations and raised a number of significant and legitimate issues on some of the proposed changes to the act. I am mindful that the consultation process undertaken to date has been lengthy. However, the issues raised during the public consultation justify additional consideration. In short, I want to satisfy myself that we have got the balance right between the need for modern and responsive weapons laws and the interests of law-abiding weapon owners.

Therefore, today I am announcing that the government will proceed with amendments to the Weapons Act in two distinct stages. The first phase will deal with those changes that are considered relatively straightforward and are arguably less contentious and have already been announced by the government. These changes include increased penalties for behavioural offences, regulation of possession of hand-held battery operated lasers, a requirement for weapons licence applicants to complete an approved firearms safety course, expansion of the current definition of bladed weapons in line with a national approach, tighter regulation of rifles designed to use high-capacity magazines, clarifying that a person may possess a knife in a public place for genuine religious reasons, and removing the requirements for RSLs to licence and register permanently deactivated public monuments. Stage 2 will focus on the more contentious policy issues, such as the regulation of imitation weapons. I look forward to updating the House on the progression of these matters throughout the year.

Get Set for Work Program




Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Skills and Mining) (9.52 am): The Bligh government is committed to providing jobs for Queenslanders. That is why we are investing \$13 million in the very successful Get Set for Work program. This targeted program gets in early to help young people who have either dropped out of school or who are at risk of dropping out find jobs and stay in them or improve their chances of doing so. All up, the investment is expected to help more than 2,000 young Queenslanders participate in 69 projects right across the state including six projects in North Queensland to help some 280 young people, nine projects in Central Queensland to help more than 210 people, 12 projects in Southern Queensland including places like Bundaberg and Maryborough to help some 320 young people and 42 projects in the south-east corner to help 1,520 young people.

All of these projects are run by local community based organisations that have established networks with employers and others within their communities. Organisations help participants develop key job skills including budgeting, how to search and apply for jobs, and how to plan for a future career. In just one example, last year SCISCO Career Pathways on the Gold Coast worked with 62 young people at Southport and Palm Beach. Almost 90 per cent of participants are now either earning or learning. I am also pleased to announce that this year SCISCO has expanded to a third location at Coomera and expects to assist 90 young people.

I would like to take a chance to reassure the member for Bundaberg that we are working to support people in his electorate, particularly considering recent employment impacts in that city. This financial year three Get Set for Work programs are being funded with almost \$350,000 to help 65 people in the local area. It is part of a \$3 million employment package in Bundaberg that is helping almost 800 people. It is complemented by our Jobs Assist package, which has helped retain 680 jobs and has created 90 jobs. Get Set for Work projects are producing great results for young Queenslanders.

Natural Disasters

 **Hon. GJ WILSON** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Health) (9.54 am): Many people have played an integral role during the recent natural disasters that have had such a significant and wide-ranging impact on our state. In particular, today I would like to personally pay tribute to our many Queensland Health staff who did a tremendous job in caring for people in flood and cyclone affected communities right across Queensland. Many did this tirelessly, in spite of the fact that they themselves were directly affected by the floods or Cyclone Yasi. Our Queensland Health staff—from doctors, nurses and allied health right through to those in maintenance and administration—have been out on the front line from the very beginning, and these same staff are now continuing to play a significant role as the communities recover and start to rebuild their lives.

Of Queensland Health's 16 health service districts, 15 in total were affected by the recent natural disasters. In every flood and cyclone affected suburb, in every evacuation and recovery centre, Queensland Health has had women and men out there caring for people affected by these devastating weather events. This care and support extended to a range of different areas, from working to keep the doors of our hospitals and health facilities open so that affected communities could receive the care they needed right through to providing treatment for minor cuts, vital counselling and support. Queensland Health also played an integral public health role in the aftermath of these natural disasters, including administering free tetanus vaccinations for anyone involved in the clean-up.


There are many stories that could be recounted about the tireless efforts of our Health staff from all over Queensland. Today I would like to acknowledge some examples of this, such as our teams in Central Queensland who worked to establish the Gracemere clinic when the town of 7,000 was completely isolated from Rockhampton during the floods. Their response to this event was nothing short of incredible, with staff banding together with the Gracemere Family Practice, the Queensland Ambulance Service, SES and local pharmacist to treat as many as 139 people visiting the clinic for medical assistance. Many staff took extraordinary measures to get to work, and thanks to these efforts we were also able to maintain services in many of our hospitals and health facilities such as our staff at Rockhampton Hospital, who were transported to work via SES boats so that they could fill the shifts. There is also the great story of Maryborough Hospital's peri-operative unit nurse manager, Kim Stronach, who used a canoe for several days running to get to work during the floods. We had staff who returned early from holidays to fill shifts, staff who volunteered for extra hours and staff who slept overnight in our hospitals to ensure health services could continue.

There is no denying that these Queensland Health staff are true heroes. These efforts continued in the response to Cyclone Yasi, including the extraordinary work of our staff from Cairns right through to Brisbane in evacuating Cairns Base Hospital—the largest hospital evacuation in Australia's history. This evacuation saw more than 250 patients transferred to Brisbane over an 18-hour period at the same time as a temporary emergency centre was also being set up to assist the community in Edmonton. It truly was a remarkable effort in a time of great stress. Again, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work of our Queensland Health staff who so willingly stepped up to this challenge. I want to also thank our staff who manned the 24-hour Queensland Health telephone service 13HEALTH during the floods and cyclone, a valuable source of support for residents.

The commitment and efforts of all of our staff during these events is nothing short of exceptional. It is something that I have found deeply moving not only in terms of what they have achieved but also through their ability to put their patients above all else in spite of personal hardships. I thank each and every one of them for their continued efforts—efforts which will continue. Queensland Health will continue to play a key role in the aftermath of these events, providing vital advice on a range of public health issues up and down the state, and we must also continue to play a role in supporting them in this important task.

Queensland Health is assisting the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to develop a comprehensive response to the natural disasters that have battered Queensland. Alongside other relevant agencies such as the Department of Communities, Queensland Health is participating in the development of a human social response that includes a plan to manage and respond to mental health issues. Our staff will be integral in continuing to help protect people involved in the flood and cyclone clean-up; ongoing mental health response issues, which will take many months in some areas; and working with government and non-government health bodies in this important area. I thank staff for the work that they have done and the work that they will continue to do.

National Disasters, Schools

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Minister for Education and Industrial Relations) (9.59 am): Rebuilding Queensland schools after our state's summer of sorrow is a top priority for the Bligh government. Communities were battered and swamped by floods and cyclones during the past two months, and so were many of our schools. But just as Queensland communities have shown extraordinary determination and resolve to recover from these setbacks, so too have Queensland schools.

A total of 186 schools were damaged during Cyclone Yasi last month—and, thanks to the hard work of school communities, the Department of Education and Training and QBuild, all were reopened within seven school days. Of the 92 state schools damaged in the devastating floods, 89 were open for business on the first day of the 2011 school year. These mighty efforts meant that thousands of students were able to continue their education in familiar surroundings.

Today my thoughts are with those school communities facing a second round of damage and disruption from heavy rainfall in North and Far North Queensland. Eight state schools are closed due to flooding this morning, with several others open but difficult to access due to road closures.


I am pleased to report that after an extraordinary clean-up and repair effort Milton State School students and teachers returned to their own classrooms last week. Milton was one of the three schools so badly damaged in the floods that classes had to be moved temporarily—in this case to the Academy for Science, Mathematics and Technology at Toowong. The recovery and rebuild at Milton was completed well ahead of schedule and all grounds and buildings passed safety checks.

When I was appointed as the education minister just over two weeks ago, I made it a priority to visit disaster affected schools. On my second full day in the job, I toured Silkwood, El Arish and Tully state schools and Tully State High School in Far North Queensland. Tully State High was by far the school hit hardest by Cyclone Yasi, with extensive damage including the destruction of the top floor of B block.

I was pleased to be able to tour the school with the member for Hinchinbrook and acknowledge his advocacy for affected parts of his electorate. Repairs are well underway at the school, support is being offered to students to ensure they are not disadvantaged in their studies and consultation is taking place to give the school community a voice in developing significant rebuilding plans. I have also visited Port Curtis Road State School in Rockhampton and intend to visit flood affected schools in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley next week.

Many Queensland schools face a long road to recovery following the floods and cyclones. But the Bligh government is focused on rebuilding our schools so that principals, teachers and other valuable school staff members can get on with the important job of educating young Queenslanders.

Hinze Dam, Wall Upgrade

 **Hon. S ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Energy and Water Utilities) (10.01 am): As we continue to rebuild those parts of the state devastated by the recent natural disasters, it is important that key infrastructure and services also are maintained in regions that escaped much of the impact of our wild wet summer.

The Gold Coast is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. The most essential of services for a growing population is the provision of an adequate and secure supply of drinking water. The government is providing that essential service, and today I announce work has now been completed on an upgrade of Hinze Dam—the Gold Coast region's primary water storage facility.


The dam wall has been raised 15 metres which doubles the facility's water storage capacity. The dam wall has been raised from 93.5 metres to 108.5 metres. It is now the largest central clay core and rock dam in Queensland. I am advised that the upgrade will ensure greater water security for the region's growing population for at least the next 50 years.

There is another benefit from the government's \$395 million investment in this project. The Gold Coast hinterland is known for sudden and intense rain. The higher wall at Hinze Dam now provides increased flood protection for more than 3,000 homes in suburbs that flank the lower Nerang River and have on occasion been subject to flooding. Residents in these suburbs can now rest easier knowing the higher dam wall can hold back 309,700 million litres of water.

Local residents and visitors to the dam also will benefit from an upgrade of recreational facilities around the dam that is now underway as the second phase of the upgrade. The work includes an information centre, a cafe, new lookout points and improved walking and bike tracks. Sailing, canoeing and paddle boats are still allowed on the dam lake but, as it is a drinking water storage facility, vessels powered by carbon based fuels are not permitted.

The work was completed by Hinze Dam Alliance construction group despite the wettest spring and summer on record. The weather challenged construction efforts, yet the alliance workers completed the dam wall upgrade on time and within the \$395 million budget. I take this opportunity to commend their efforts to the House.

Electricity Industry

 **Hon. RG NOLAN** (Ipswich—ALP) (Minister for Finance and the Arts) (10.04 am): Today I can confirm that the Bligh government is delivering on its commitment to maximise the economic life of Queensland's electricity generation assets. This follows extensive consultation, as part of the government's review of generating companies, with the current generation companies, unions, competition regulators and, most importantly, employees.


I can today confirm the final corporate structure of power stations under the government's restructured government owned electricity generators. The restructure will result in the current three generation companies—CS Energy, Stanwell Corporation and Tarong Energy Corporation—being merged to form two new companies from 1 July 2011. The restructure will be achieved by the reallocation of assets to the existing CS Energy and Stanwell corporate entities, using the provisions of section 161 of the Government Owned Corporations Act.

After feedback from the consultation process, the government has altered the draft generator allocations to place the small hydro power stations and Mackay gas turbine within with the Stanwell-Tarong portfolio. We have also decided to combine the ownership of the Glen Wilga coal resource in the Surat Basin, currently held by Tarong Energy, with the adjacent Kogan coalmine which supplies fuel to the Kogan Creek Power Station. Otherwise, the reallocation of portfolio assets is unchanged from the preferred structure announced on 25 November 2010.

The changes announced today to the allocation of Queensland's electricity generation corporations strengthen these entities for the future. The restructure will keep the generators in public ownership, and allow them to meet the challenges of both a competitive national electricity market and to transition in a future where climate change must be addressed.

It is anticipated that the restructure will come into effect from 1 July 2011—consistent with the target we set out last year. Ensuring the employees and unions had the opportunity to comment on the reallocation of assets is crucial to the success of the implementation of the review. I am pleased that consultation will continue throughout the implementation of the new structure.

Downer EDI


 **Hon. JH JARRATT** (Whitsunday—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Manufacturing and Small Business) (10.06 am): On 27 October 2010 the state government announced it would invest \$189 million to buy another tilt train and upgrade the two existing tilt trains. On that date it was announced the work would be carried out at Maryborough's Downer EDI facility, providing support for 800 direct and indirect jobs in the Wide Bay region. Awarding the \$189 million contract to Maryborough's Downer EDI facility meant security for 500 direct jobs at the workshop plus an additional 300 jobs throughout the region.

The news that Downer EDI have today decided to pull out of a global tender to provide Queensland Rail with 200 three-car sets is both devastating and disappointing. Downer EDI has long provided manufacturing capacity for rolling stock in Queensland. This company received the backing of the state with the award of the \$189 million tilt train contract to ensure they could maintain their workforce and retain a strong position in order to compete for the Queensland Rail rolling stock contract.

Queensland Rail's procurement process for the new generation passenger cars is subject to the government's local industry policy. This policy provides for a full, fair and reasonable opportunity for competitive local industry to tender for work. The government has to ensure that Queensland Rail has developed a detailed local industry participation plan for this tender. It includes provision for a weighting specifically allocated to the assessment of local content in the bids received to make it a formal part of the evaluation criteria.

I want to acknowledge the strong advocacy of the member for Maryborough, who understands what is at stake here. He has been dogged in his support of Downer EDI since becoming a local member and he has knocked on every door and left no stone unturned in his quest to support this company and the jobs in his local community. The member for Maryborough backed this company. The government backed this company. Unfortunately, they have decided not to back their own workforce and to back out. As stated, it is both devastating and disappointing.

Natural Disasters, National Parks

 **Hon. KJ JONES** (Ashgrove—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Resource Management) (10.09 am): National parks right across Queensland took a massive hit during the floods and cyclones of the past summer. There has been millions of dollars worth of damage to tracks, roads, camping grounds, car parks and other facilities. Following the major flood and cyclone events—combined with severe wet weather and storms throughout summer—almost half of all parks in Queensland were closed for some time due to safety concerns as a result of the damage or general wet season closures.

A massive effort has been underway to get as many of these national parks open again as possible. Our rangers have been working around the clock to get the most popular parks open. We have had teams moving around the state fixing tracks and fencing, repairing popular camp grounds and visitor facilities, assessing safety in remote areas and working with local councils to get roads reopened. I am pleased to announce today that as a result of this hard yakka we already have been able to reopen 40 flood affected national parks since the end of January. A further nine cyclone affected parks have been reopened since mid-February.

At iconic parks and facilities such as the Mamu Rainforest Canopy Walk near Innisfail rangers were able to quickly repair broken safety rails and remove debris so the majority of the facility could reopen to the public within just one week of the cyclone. I am sure the honourable member for Mulgrave and all the members around Townsville would agree with today's *Townsville Bulletin* article calling on Prince William to visit the Mamu Rainforest Canopy Walk during his visit to Queensland this weekend.

At Magnetic Island National Park near Townsville and Green Island National Park near Cairns rangers have also worked quickly to clear fallen trees and reopen walking tracks and day use areas affected by the cyclone. In the honourable member for Hinchinbrook's electorate at Cardwell, the Reef and Rainforest Information Centre suffered a lot of damage when storm surge washed through the lower levels of the building. Our rangers have worked hard to conduct urgent repairs and this important tourism gateway has now reopened, although at a reduced capacity. Our intention was to get it open as soon as possible. I have spoken to the member for Hinchinbrook about how important it is for his community to prioritise the parks in that area so we can help get people back to normal life.


Day use areas, walking tracks and camping areas on island national parks offshore from Cardwell have also been badly damaged, including the iconic Thorsborne Trail on Hinchinbrook Island. While these parks will take some time to repair and open, work has commenced and some sites will be made safe and functional in time for the Easter holidays.

In the south-west, 80 per cent of the track network in the Bunya Mountains National Park near Toowoomba is now open, after rangers worked tirelessly to repair retaining walls, foot bridges and tracks. A similar effort has also taken place on the Sunshine Coast following a large landslide above the walking track in Mount Coololum National Park. I have spoken to the member for Maroochydore about that. Rangers immediately engaged a geotechnical engineer to advise on work required to reopen the track, then undertook the works including track realignment, diversion drainage, safety fencing and soil stabilisation. The track is now open for all visitors to enjoy this very special part of Queensland.

Finally, in the south-east corner, many hundreds of kilometres of walking tracks and firebreaks affected by storms and floods have been traversed by rangers in the massive task of ensuring the walking tracks are now safe for visitors. In the Lamington National Park, approximately 160 kilometres of walking tracks were impacted by more than 70 fallen trees and substantial storm and water damage. All of the tracks have now reopened with some diversions around major landslides and erosion.

Our national parks are a key part of Queensland and a key part of the tourism sector in our state. We are working overtime to reopen these to support the tourism industry in Queensland.

Rabbit and Wild Dog Barrier Fence

 **Hon. TS MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Agriculture, Food and Regional Economies) (10.13 am): I am pleased to inform the House that a new entity will be established to manage both the rabbit fence and the wild dog barrier fence to create greater efficiencies. As part of the 2008 Webbe-Weller review it was recommended that the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board need no longer operate as a statutory body.


We are committed to maintaining the integrity of both fences. We are not talking about ceasing operation or abandoning the fences. We are establishing a new entity which addresses the recommendations of Webbe-Weller and will effectively deliver on our commitment to the retention of the wild dog fence and the rabbit fence.

It is proposed the new entity will commence on 1 July 2013. The length of time to implement the single entity has been extended due to recent natural disasters, in particular flooding. We are conscious of the fact that we do not want to divert the attention of local authorities away from important recovery activities to establish the single entity.

The chairs of both the rabbit board, Mr Rod Towner, and the wild dog panel, Mrs Donna Stewart, are supportive of this time frame and have indicated that they have more confidence in the proposed solution with a longer lead time. The process is based on key recommendations of Biosecurity Queensland's comprehensive review of all pest animal barrier fences. It was decided that a new single entity be established to manage the rabbit and wild dog barrier fences.

The review has confirmed that the barrier fences, particularly the rabbit fence, provide considerable benefit to the protection of industry, the natural environment and local councils to ensure these pests do not get into the coastal and urban communities. The collective management of both fences through a single entity will create greater efficiencies which will result in better protection from these pests.

Gold Coast, Events

 **Hon. PG REEVES** (Mansfield—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport) (10.15 am): Events based tourism, particularly sports tourism, is vitally important to our economy. The line-up of events that lie ahead, especially on the Gold Coast, will give our economy and tourism industry a real boost.

Over the last few days, it has been all about surfing. Thousands of people flocked to Snapper Rocks to watch 10-time world champion Kelly Slater beat Taj Burrow to take out the Quiksilver Pro, and teenage sensation Carissa Moore win the Roxy Pro. Images of the coast and its beaches were beamed around the world, highlighting it as a premier tourism destination. The competition was watched online by more than 1.5 million people across a staggering 192 countries. For the first time in the history of surfing, the event was broadcast on live free-to-air TV across Australia. In fact, it was in the top five shows on ONE HD. Through a partnership with the Quiksilver and Roxy Pro and Events Queensland, we have secured this world-class event for the coast for three years. Nothing beats our beaches, just like nothing beats us Queenslanders.

We can also look forward to the Gold Coast Suns setting up base at the redeveloped \$144.2 million Gold Coast Stadium. There is three months to go until the Suns take to the field at their new home on 28 May against Geelong. The turf has been laid. The roof structure is complete. The solar panelling is producing power for the venue. The internal fit-out of function spaces and player dressing rooms is well advanced.

From May, the Suns and the new stadium will be the next 'must-do' attraction for locals and many tourists. The redevelopment has generated more than 1,100 jobs during construction. Once operational, it will create 700 jobs per event, and will contribute an estimated \$340 million to the economy over the next 10 years.


In October, the streets of Surfers Paradise will roar to life with the Gold Coast 600 kicking into top gear. The V8s on the Gold Coast are always a highlight on the sporting calendar. Last year, more than 170,000 ticket holders soaked up the high-octane atmosphere. Over the past 20 years, the race has generated an estimated \$700 million for the economy. This means jobs. This means tourism.

That is why the Bligh government, through Events Queensland, will continue to invest in major events including the NRL All Stars and the upcoming Gold Coast Airport Marathon. We want to show Australia and the world that the Gold Coast and Queensland are open for business. To give an update to the House, talking of sports tourism this week the Broncos are playing the Cowboys and already 43,000 seats have been sold. Hopefully, we will see over 45,000 there. For the Roar versus the Mariners grand final, 47,000 tickets have been sold. We expect up to 50,000 people to attend. Good luck to the Roar and the Broncos.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! What about some decorum.


Department of Communities, Concessions

 **Hon. KL STRUTHERS** (Alger—ALP) (Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women) (10.18 am): We know that many Queenslanders are doing it tough. We know for them that every dollar counts. This financial year we have continued our mission of creating a fairer Queensland for all Queenslanders, and our record speaks for itself. This year is not over and we have already helped out Queenslanders in need with the number of Department of Communities concessions now topping one million transactions. This means, as at the end of February, \$67.8 million has been provided to more than half a million pensioner households who are claiming our electricity rebate worth up to \$216 per annum per household.

This also means that about \$30 million has been provided to over 250,000 pensioner households that are claiming a subsidy on their rates bill worth up to \$180 per annum per household. A further \$10 million has been provided to approximately 150,000 South-East Queensland pensioner households that are saving money on their water bills with our water subsidy worth \$100 per annum per household. In the last budget we introduced a new medical cooling and heating rebate and already 1,200 Queenslanders with multiple sclerosis and related conditions are getting \$216 worth of help with their power bills. It is part of our plan to create a fairer Queensland for all Queenslanders through delivering more than \$1.3 billion in concessions, and that is why even in the toughest of economic times we stuck to our plan to deliver the broadest range of concessions of any state or territory. We increased our concessions and introduced new ones.

The Queensland LNP boasts about and wants to emulate the Western Australian conservative government. What did that government do? That government ripped \$17 million out of its concessions program last year. We have been holding Every Dollar Counts forums around the state to help people find out what they are eligible for while the LNP wants to cut back on concessions. At the Toowoomba community cabinet this weekend we will be holding an Every Dollar Counts stall for members of the public to check out what rebates, loans and concessions they are eligible for, including flood support information. We have a plan to help Queenslanders doing it tough, and we are sticking to that plan.

Building Industry


 **Hon. SD FINN** (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (Minister for Government Services, Building Industry and Information and Communication Technology) (10.20 am): Queensland's building industry is vital to the state's economy. It is a major generator of investment, jobs and growth in communities throughout the state. Our building industry is delivering the infrastructure Queensland's growing population needs. It is building the schools, roads, hospitals, homes, sports facilities, ports and rail lines Queenslanders need for the future.

The state's building industry is worth \$70 billion a year to the Queensland economy. It is the biggest employer in the state and provides jobs for 235,000 Queenslanders. The Premier has asked me as building industry minister to develop a long-term strategy for Queensland's building industry, and that is why I am in the process of establishing a Building Industry Unit within my department. This unit will report to me on the key issues and opportunities facing the building industry in Queensland and will advise me on ways to ensure Queensland remains a world leader in building and construction.

I am pleased to say that in the face of the construction downturn caused by the global financial crisis the state government pressed ahead with its building program. We made a very conscious decision to keep investing in vital infrastructure and to support jobs. The Department of Public Works is managing a \$9.5 billion capital works program which includes 3,950 actual building programs. It is a program that is delivering health facilities, education centres and courthouses and other vital infrastructure throughout the state. In addition to supporting jobs, our capital works program is building the cleaner and greener buildings of the future. The Department of Public Works is implementing a whole-of-government program to make government office buildings carbon neutral by 2020. It is also overseeing a program to reduce energy consumption across government by 20 per cent by 2015.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the outstanding work done by the Building Services Authority. Last night in Rocklea I attended a BSA seminar where BSA staff and building industry experts, along with other government department officials, were informing flood affected residents about the safest and best way to negotiate rebuilding projects, and I thank Ian Jennings and his hardworking team at the BSA for all of their great work.

Colour for a Cure; Yarrabah

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.23 am): Before I begin my ministerial statement I ask for the indulgence of the House to appreciate the fact that I have yellow hair today.

An honourable member: It's green!


Mr PITT: Everyone is colourblind. I want to make sure that people are aware that there are a number of people across Queensland who are suffering through the tragedies of lymphomas, leukaemia and related blood disorders. There are some 30,000 Australians living with those diseases, so this is for a great cause.

Today I rise to speak about the stoicism and strength of the Aboriginal community of Yarrabah in the heart of my electorate of Mulgrave. I pay tribute to this community and to its collective courage. The march of time and three big cyclones—Winifred, Larry and Yasi—have changed the local landscape. But one thing that will never change is the way that the people of Yarrabah pull together when tragedy strikes one of their own. A few weeks ago the community was bracing itself for the worst that nature could throw at them. Several beachside streets were evacuated. Friends and relatives went to higher ground and others who were on higher ground opened their hearts and their homes to people in low-lying areas. While some families bunkered down at the Yarrabah PCYC, others sought refuge in Cairns. They woke with relief the next morning knowing that the full brunt of the cyclone had passed them by.

While the town's infrastructure was not badly damaged, the same cannot be said for a number of homes in the community. If there is one thing that stands out above all else it is that when tragedy strikes people will move heaven and earth to help, and they were not alone. Staff from the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council and my department—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services in Far North Queensland—also swung into action. The teams worked together to determine the extent of the damage and to assess what was needed to get the community back on its feet. Around 50 households needed help from the community recovery effort. A week after the cyclone, the teams arranged for community recovery centre outreach staff to provide emergency payments and help to those families in need. I commend them for seizing the day and I commend them for stepping in to help their neighbours. Mayor Percy Neal and others also lent a hand to help with the clean-up at Jumbun.

As we know, further to the south it will be a long road to recovery for communities on the Cassowary Coast, and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority will play a pivotal role. I have every confidence that it will spearhead the drive to recovery and cut through red tape to rebuild the Cassowary Coast more quickly. When we bounce back, our future will be bigger and brighter than ever.

Bribie Island Bridge, Repairs

 **Hon. CA WALLACE** (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Main Roads, Fisheries and Marine Infrastructure) (10.25 am): Yesterday in this House the member for Maroochydoore attacked Main Roads workers over temporary repair work done to pedestrian railings on the Bribie Island Bridge. The member opposite said that repairs were held together with gaffer tape and garden ties and that Main Roads was failing to maintain the bridge network. I understand that the LNP thoroughly researched this issue. Indeed, when she was driving over the bridge recently the member for Pumicestone saw two well-dressed women vigorously shaking the repair work with obvious intention of dismantling it. The local member was quite rightly aghast at this apparent vandalism—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the minister.

Mr WALLACE: The local member was quite rightly aghast at this apparent vandalism but could not stop on the bridge to confront the bridge wreckers. All was explained when the member for Pumicestone saw the car at the end of the bridge. It had large stickers on it saying 'LNP candidate for Pumicestone'. If the member for Maroochydoore was the other person present, she needs to explain why she was trying to destroy public property.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: I call the minister.

Mr WALLACE: Pedestrian railings on the Bribie Island Bridge were damaged late last year when a truck crashed into them. Replacement panels were ordered as soon as Main Roads was aware of the damage. However, the replacement panels are non-standard and they use a special type of aluminium. This meant a longer manufacturing process. I am pleased to advise the House that the new panels will be finished by the end of this month and installed a week later, weather permitting. To prevent this delay occurring again, Main Roads, at the request of the member for Pumicestone, has now ordered a stockpile of 20 new fence panels for the bridge.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Resume your seat. I will wait for the House to come to order. I call the minister.

Mr WALLACE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The truth hurts.

Mr SPEAKER: Round off your ministerial statement.

Mr WALLACE: I am informed that gaffer tape used in the repairs had no structural purpose. It was meant to cover large bolts which could have scratched pedestrians. The ties were used to hold protective mesh. I am told that this is standard practice. In fact, temporary sections of the railings were bolted to the kerb and to upright posts. Rails were locked to posts with fixing clips—with fixing clips.

Ms SIMPSON: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Mr WALLACE: Oh! Here is the bridge wrecker herself, Mr Speaker!

Ms SIMPSON: I rise to a point of order. In respect of the minister's accusations against me, I take offence and ask that they be withdrawn. But I also want the minister to clearly state—

Mr SPEAKER: No, no.

Ms SIMPSON:—that this bridge is dangerous.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Ms SIMPSON: It is not safe.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! You can do that in a personal explanation later. Let us go back to your point of order. You are demanding a retraction because you find it personally offensive, member for Maroochydore?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes.

Mr SPEAKER: Okay. Minister, you will withdraw.


Mr WALLACE: I withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Maroochydore, you can do the rest of it as a personal explanation, and you can seek leave to do that at a later hour this day. The minister will finish off his ministerial statement.

Mr WALLACE: The member for Maroochydore got her facts wrong in relation to the repairs to the Bribie Island Bridge. She has insulted Main Roads workers and interfered with public property. I say to all members in this House: keep a close eye on your roads and bridges; you never know where the member for Maroochydore will strike next.

INTEGRITY, ETHICS AND PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE


Report

 **Mr SHINE** (Toowoomba North—ALP) (10.30 am): I table report No. 113 of the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, titled *Matter of privilege referred by the Speaker on 23 November 2010 relating to the alleged deliberate misleading of the House by a member*. I commend the report and the committee's recommendation to the House.

Tabled paper: Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee: Report No. 113—Matter of Privilege Referred by the Speaker on 23 November 2010 Relating to an Alleged Deliberate Misleading of the House by a Member [\[4055\]](#).

NOTICE OF MOTION

Parliamentary Pension Scheme

 **Mr McLINDON** (Beaudesert—TQP) (10.30 am): I give notice that I will move—

That members of the Queensland parliament who retire or have retired on a parliamentary pension be prohibited from accepting any remunerated position with the Queensland government or any business or entity that receives funding from the Queensland government unless they revoke their parliamentary pension while so employed.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Visitors to Public Gallery

Mr SPEAKER: Before we begin question time, I wish to advise members that we will be visited in the House today by students, teachers and parents of the Richmond State School and the Townview State School combined, the Ferny Hills State School from Ferny Grove, the Glenden State School from Mirani and, with an arrangement I have with the Speaker of the New South Wales parliament, the Sir Henry Parkes Memorial School of Tenterfield. We will also have students from the Hillcrest Christian College, which is in the electorate of Mudgeeraba.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Natural Disasters, Bureau of Meteorology



Mr LANGBROEK (10.31 am): My first question without notice is to the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier was asked for a third time if she would table the cabinet minutes from the October meeting when the state government was warned of pending natural disasters. The Premier claimed yesterday that the minutes of the October meeting could be found on the cabinet website, and I table her response.

Tabled paper: Extract from the *Record of Proceedings* of 9 March 2011 including the Premier's response to a question without notice titled 'Natural Disasters, Bureau of Meteorology' [\[4056\]](#).

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Those on my right will cease interjecting. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr LANGBROEK: On the cabinet website for the entire months of October and November, only seven cabinet decisions are published. None of these decisions and actions relate to floods, cyclones or any preparations for natural disasters. None. I table those documents.

Tabled paper: Search of Queensland Cabinet website regarding documents released in October 2010 [\[4057\]](#).

I now ask the Premier for the fourth time: will the cabinet minutes be made public, or is it a fact that the state cabinet did not make one decision or take one action despite the flood and cyclone warnings?

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Those on my right will cease interjecting.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, which as is so often the case contains a complete untruth. Those who were at question time yesterday and were listening will know that what I told this parliament was that cabinet decisions are recorded on the cabinet website and that I was not aware of whether or not the October decision was there at this stage but if it was not it would be at some time in the near future. So what? There is nothing unusual about this.

Mr Dick interjected.

Ms BLIGH: I take the interjection from the Minister for Education. We are the first government in Australia's history to publish these decisions.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Both sides of the House! The Premier has the call. The Premier is answering the question that was asked of her. I ask for decorum and courtesy on this occasion.

Ms BLIGH: I note the state of agitation and titillation by the Leader of the Opposition about this decision of the cabinet. I am sorry to disappoint him, but I can advise that what is most likely to be on the website when the decision appears is that, (1) the cabinet was briefed by the bureau and (2) the cabinet noted the contents of the briefing. It is nothing more exciting than that.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Toowoomba South will cease interjecting.

Ms BLIGH: As I outlined in the last sitting of the parliament when opposition members were still trying to flog this particular dead horse, what we did immediately was to hold a public press conference where we told people what was in the material. We then saw the contents of that press conference on every news bulletin and in every newspaper, in every major daily. We told the people of Queensland what we were doing. What were we doing? We had extra preparedness for our emergency services, ensuring that every CEO of every government agency was making appropriate leave arrangements so that senior people were available right throughout the December-January period.

This government took the warnings seriously and took every opportunity to prepare. What did those opposite do? When all of that material was put into the public arena, they put out a press release saying, 'We should keep more water in the dam. We should fill the dam up further.' So, despite all of that information being put into the public arena and all of it being available on the bureau website—in fact, it would have been open, in my view, for the shadow cabinet to have invited the bureau for a briefing, but they did no such thing—what they did was take all of that information and come out and call on the government to fill the dam up. The rank hypocrisy from those opposite knows no bounds.

Mr Wallace interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister for Main Roads will cease interjecting. Those on my left have been called to order. I say to those on my right that if the Premier has the call then it is not just a call that is respected by one side. I ask both sides to desist.

Torres Strait Islands, Safety of Public Servants

Mr LANGBROEK: My second question without notice is to the Minister for Health. I remind the minister of the rape of a nurse at Mabuiag and the Premier's personal commitment to fast-track measures to ensure the safety of nurses in the remote Far North. I now refer the minister to this January report from the director of nursing at Thursday Island Hospital, and I table it.

Tabled paper: Status Report for Thursday Island Hospital Infrastructure—Critical Issues—Extreme Risks as of 7/01/2011 [4058].

It finds poorly secured external and internal doors, no closed-circuit TV monitoring of the emergency department, no closed-circuit TV monitoring of the helipad, deteriorating locking mechanisms and electrical failures of the smoke alarm system. Minister, it has been three years since the Mabuiag nurse rape case, why has Labor still failed nurses in these remote areas?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Patient and staff safety is absolutely paramount for Queensland Health, as it is across all agencies. I am advised that regular maintenance checks are undertaken across all facilities. In this particular case, it has been identified that maintenance is required and that maintenance has been directed by the director-general of Queensland Health to be undertaken. Indeed, there are senior officials attending to that in the Torres Strait as we speak.

Why are we doing that? Because as Minister for Health, I want to make sure that Queensland Health and all related agencies—whether it be QBuild, DPW or any other agency—jointly and cooperatively make sure their shoulders are to the wheel to ensure that all maintenance arrangements and all maintenance requirements on Queensland Health facilities including staff facilities, especially in the TI, are done in an absolutely timely and complete way. We know that QBuild workers work very hard on the ground and work cooperatively with Queensland Health. I have told my director-general that I want no stone left unturned to ensure that the standard of maintenance provided in those facilities is indeed provided in a timely way.

That is why work is being undertaken as we speak, so I am advised. I am also advised by the director-general of Queensland Health that he has dispatched senior officers to the Torres Strait, because I want nothing less than the most senior people verifying that the right things are done by those staff and patients on TI.

North Queensland, Weather Conditions

Mr WETTENHALL: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier provide the House with an update of the weather situation in North Queensland?

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Those on my left will cease interjecting.

Mr Wallace: It might be funny to them.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister for Main Roads, I have already asked you once. This is the second time.

Ms BLIGH: I note the humour from those opposite. I do not think that what is happening in North Queensland today is at all funny. I thank the member for his care and concern for his fellow Far North Queenslanders.

I think it is important to put on the record of the House that after the devastation of Cyclone Yasi we are now seeing significant bad weather not only today and yesterday but we can expect to see it well into Saturday and the weekend. I am worried about the people of Far North Queensland. I know what they have endured. I know that the member for Hinchinbrook has met over and over and over again with his constituents and he knows the difficulties they are facing.

We continue to see schools closed in the Far North region, particularly in the Ingham area: Ingham State School, Ingham State High School, Toobanna State School, Trebonne State School, Halifax State School, Victoria Plantation State School and another two, Kennedy State School and Murray River Upper State School. So this is already causing considerable disruption in the communities in this area, some of whom have already seen their schools devastated. I pay tribute to the school staff who did so much work to get schools back and operational.

Similarly, we now have the highway cut in a number of places. So those people who were trying to rebuild their lives and needing to go to places like Cairns and Townsville are now cut off again. I am pleased to advise the House that we have sent 10 officers up to Cairns. They arrived yesterday and they are assisting those who are already based in Mareeba, Innisfail and Cairns from the QFRS. An SES team from Cairns arrived in Cardwell yesterday. So they were able to get through and I am pleased to see that.

I also take the opportunity to again say thank you to His Royal Highness Prince William for his decision to visit Australia. I welcome the comments from the mayor of the Cassowary Coast. I think it is an opportunity for a bit of a morale boost. It is a clear symbol that the world knows what is happening to people in this region and, more, that the world cares. I also hope that we see blue skies when the Prince is here and that the images of him in Far North Queensland that will be beamed around the world are images that tell a very positive message, firstly, about the strength and resilience of communities in Far North Queensland and, secondly, about what a great time of the year it is to be visiting Queensland.

Thursday Island Hospital

Mr McARDLE: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to the damning report on the Thursday Island Hospital by the director of nursing which finds that patient safety has been compromised, including the operating theatre being out of commission, the emergency nurse call system has been out of commission since October and is beyond repair and the sterilisation of operating equipment could not be guaranteed. After more than a decade in power, why does this long-term Labor government still insist on Third World standards in this Queensland hospital?

Mr WILSON: I refer to the answer that I gave previously and to which I now add that, in relation to all services provided on TI, I have made it abundantly clear to the director-general of Queensland Health that not only should patient safety—

Mr McArdle interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Caloundra, you have asked the question. The minister is answering the question. I am listening carefully to his answer. I would ask you to respect that.

Mr WILSON: Not only is patient and staff safety absolutely paramount but the quality of health service delivery must be first class in that area—just as we expect in any part of Queensland. I have made it abundantly clear to the director-general of Queensland Health that he needs to ensure, through the appropriate officials in that area, that that is the standard of care being provided to people in that area. Why? Because they deserve nothing less. After he examines the issues that have been raised with him and after he fulfils the responsibility that I have given to him, if there be issues that need to be addressed the member can rest assured that they will be addressed.

I have made a commitment that no stone will be left unturned in addressing whatever might be the legitimate concerns, firstly, about the provision of appropriate and timely maintenance to facilities at that hospital in relation to staff and patients and, secondly, the provision of proper nursing and medical care. No stone should be left unturned to ensure that people in that local community have the benefit of a reasonable entitlement, just as people do in any other part of Queensland. That is the responsibility of Queensland Health.

As the new minister, I have made it abundantly clear and I have made it abundantly clear to the director-general that that is the responsibility that Queensland Health needs to discharge. If the organisation cannot discharge it at a local level, then remedies and interventions need to be identified by the director-general of Queensland Health to ensure that those sorts of issues that have been raised and that are going to now, as I understand it, be addressed do not continue to arise in any systematic way.

Christchurch Earthquake, Sports Fundraising

Ms van LITSENBURG: My question is to the Premier. Recently, State of Origin greats came out of retirement for a charity match to benefit Queensland disaster victims. Can the Premier update the House on the latest charity sports match and who will benefit?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for her question, although I am a little shocked by her appearance. I commend her and others for their commitment to Shave for a Cure. I think I am glad they coloured their hair rather than shaved it, but I am not sure.

Mr Fraser interjected.

Ms BLIGH: The Treasurer tells me that he is a permanent member of the Shave for a Cure club. I am very pleased that we are seeing our sporting greats come together to support our colleagues across the Tasman who have suffered so much in the Christchurch earthquake disaster. I know that the member for Redcliffe—and those members who listen carefully to her speak will not be surprised—has a very strong New Zealand background. She is from Christchurch and she has three sisters and their families living in that city. So, like many other Queenslanders, she has been watching anxiously as the earthquake has unfolded.

Many will be pleased to know that there will be a Classic Rugby match tonight for Christchurch. It has been organised by Marto from Triple M in just nine days. Tonight's game at Ballymore is now a sell-out and it will see more than 20,000 fans raising money directly for the people of Christchurch. Some of the legends of rugby in Australia and New Zealand will take to the field one more time—some recently retired and some long retired. Marto, a former Australian fullback, will lead the Classic Wallabies. The other Wallaby greats will include George Gregan, Tim Horan, David Campese, Toutai Kefu, Chris Latham and Pat Howard. Former All Black Captain Reuben Thorne will lead the New Zealand squad, with a number of All Black greats—Justin Marshall, Christian Cullen, Geoff Wilson, Kees Meeuws, and Caleb Ralph. All of the money raised will be going to a very good cause. As we saw with the Origin Greats in Sydney when they came out for our flood relief appeal at the time, when they pull on those jerseys they play for real.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Ms BLIGH: The Deputy Premier always tells me that rugby is the game they play in heaven, so I am sure that tonight will be a great experience.

I am also pleased that Tourism Queensland is partnering with this event. When the Wallabies take to the field they will be wearing jerseys that will have emblazoned on the back 'Queensland, Where Australia Shines'.

I know that there will be plenty of New Zealanders watching the game right across the north and south island and I certainly hope that they get an opportunity to think about a Queensland holiday at the same time. This has been a very difficult time for our state, but I think we all know just how difficult it is going to be for Christchurch. I applaud Triple M and Marto. Some members might recall that Marto ran as a candidate against me in the last election as a way of highlighting some of the more absurd aspects of our democracy. He made quite an amusing time of it over the four weeks.

(Time expired)

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

Mr SPRINGBORG: My question without notice is to the Premier. The Premier would be aware of the precedent in Queensland whereby royal commissions and commissions of inquiry have been provided with all relevant cabinet documents. I table the front page of the Fitzgerald report.

Tabled paper: Extract from report of the Fitzgerald commission of inquiry of 1989 [\[4059\]](#).

Can the Premier assure Queenslanders that she has provided the commission of inquiry into the floods with every single cabinet document—both submissions and minutes—that relates to preparedness for natural disasters; construction, delays and management of dams and other water infrastructure; assessment and rejection of flood insurance; and rejections of applications by councils for flood mitigation funding, or does Labor intend to keep these documents secret for another three decades?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I again draw to the attention of the House that this commission of inquiry has been established under the Commissions of Inquiry Act of Queensland. All of the powers of a full royal commission are available to this commission. That means that it has the power to require documents, to compel witnesses and to tap phones, if necessary. Every single possible power available to any royal commission is provided to this commission of inquiry. Any suggestion that there would be any document denied to it, not only by the government but by anybody, is nothing more than palpable nonsense.

I am happy to advise the House that the commission has requested of the government documents and material in relation to preparedness for and response to these events. Those documents have now all been collated and will be provided to the commission on time as they requested. If throughout the commission's deliberation it requests anything else from my government, it will receive every assistance and nothing will be denied it. Any suggestion otherwise just shows how low those opposite are prepared to go.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to clarify some issues that were put into the parliamentary debate yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to the commission of inquiry. The Leader of the Opposition tabled a letter to a group of businesspeople in response to their request to the inquiry to appear before it. The Leader of the Opposition tabled it as evidence that somehow people were being denied any chance to have their story heard. What was not read into the parliamentary record from the Leader of the Opposition's document, and I do it now, was this—

In any event it does not seem that such leave would be necessary.

It then goes on to say—

Nevertheless, you will be given an opportunity to communicate your experiences and concerns to the commission. That could be effectively done by provisions of submissions and statements by affected individuals. Officers of the commission would be available to assist in the preparation of their statements.

The court will actually come to you and help you make a statement and a submission. It does not get much easier than that. This commission of inquiry, established under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, with all the powers that it needs, is fully independent, is competent to do the task and deserves bipartisan support.

Jobs

Mr RYAN: My question without notice is to the Treasurer and Minister for State Development and Trade. Can the Treasurer update the House on the latest jobs figures?

Mr FRASER: I thank the member for Morayfield for his question and for his strong commitment to the reforming economic agenda that this government has pursued as we seek to promote jobs and the jobs of the future. The reality of this morning is that the Australian Bureau of Statistics has in fact released its latest monthly update, and the news within that is sobering if not surprising. Of course, given the breadth of devastation that has occurred across the state's economy, as I said earlier, it was likely that our trend performance of generating jobs would end—and that has been the case, with the Bureau of Statistics today saying that there was a net loss of jobs through Queensland last month of some 1,400 jobs. I do note within that that there was a gain of 700 full-time jobs and a loss of 2,100 jobs; nevertheless, this means that there was a net loss of jobs across the Queensland economy last month.

As I indicated last month, the data for January was remarkable and somewhat unbelievable. The bureau has also revised downwards its projection for what occurred in January to record job losses also through the month of January. I do not think this information and this data will come as any great surprise to anybody in Queensland. It now means that the official data accords with everyone's unofficial assessment of the depth of devastation that has occurred to many sectors, businesses and industries over the last couple of months. This means that our net jobs target has moved back out now to stand at 29,400. But this government remains absolutely committed to pursuing jobs-generating growth as our No. 1 task. We are absolutely committed to delivering 100,000 net new jobs into the Queensland economy over the term of this parliament. We will continue to do that by pursuing new industries, such as solar and LNG, and investing in innovation and new technology. That remains our central task.

On the other side of the chamber we see an opposition leader without an agenda at all. Yet again another week goes by with him having nothing to say, not even fronting up to the television cameras to explain his position of not having anything to say—running away yet again. This is an opposition leader who does not believe in anything and no longer stands for anything. There is a job vacancy opening up soon and it will be on the other side of the chamber. This is an opposition leader who as a dentist believed in fluoride but now does not. He used to come in here as a privatisation junkie, advocating for the sale of public education, and now pretends he opposes it—the intellect who now debases himself by selling out to the right-wing powerbrokers of the LNP and the humanist who sold himself out. But when you stand for nothing you fall over. There will be a job vacancy in this state over the coming months and the job vacancy will be over there.

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

Mr BLEIJIE: My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to an admission by the commission of inquiry into the floods that it only received 30 applications seeking leave to appear before it, yet fewer than half have been granted leave to appear. Given the relatively small number of applications, will the Premier follow the example of Victoria and give a guarantee now that she will provide the commission with the proper resources and funding to allow all 30 parties, including ordinary Queenslanders, to be given leave to appear?

Ms BLIGH: I think it is probably best for me to put on the record the statement that was put out yesterday by the commission in relation to some of the accusations being falsely made by those opposite. The commission had this to say—

No-one is being denied an opportunity to be heard by the Commission. Obviously, not every person in Queensland affected by the floods will be invited to appear in person at a hearing.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Stop the clock. Premier, resume your seat. We will wait for both sides of the House to come to order.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Premier and the member for Rockhampton will cease interjecting on the Premier. The Premier has the call.

Ms BLIGH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. To continue quoting from the statement—

As it was emphasised previously at the Commission's opening hearing, there are different ways in which individuals and organisations have the opportunity to be heard, which do not necessarily involve appearing as a witness. The public hearings are only part of the work of the Commission.

Everyone is invited to make a submission.

I repeat—

Everyone is invited to make a submission.

The statement goes on—

Where individuals' experiences are directly relevant to the terms of reference, and will bear on what findings the Commission should make, their statements will be taken and may be tendered as evidence.

Some of those people will be asked to give evidence as witnesses.

The commission goes on to say—

Where leave to appear as a party was refused, the Commission took pains to emphasise to the individual or organisation concerned that it was anxious to liaise with them and to find out what they had to say about their experiences, their concerns and what steps might be taken for the future.

There is no difference at all between this commission of inquiry in this respect and every other commission of inquiry held here in Queensland and around Australia. The commission has to work out how to conduct itself within the time frame and within the budget that it has been provided with. If honourable members think about it, it is logical; if the commission only deals with people in public hearings, it will never get around to the material that other people have submitted—

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mr Lucas: Well, go and appear before the commissioner and suggest it.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Kawana and the Deputy Premier will cease interjecting.

Ms BLIGH: I would just make the point that there are many people who will want to present material to the commission who will not want to do it in a public hearing. They should be given the right to do it in whatever way suits them, and that is what will happen. Again, a commission of inquiry has been established with all the full powers of a royal commission, giving every opportunity to every single person to make a submission. It will take evidence from anybody who wants to provide it and it will provide for public hearings wherever appropriate.

Local Government, Electoral System

Ms GRACE: My question is for the Deputy Premier and Attorney-General, Minister for Local Government and Special Minister of State. Can the Deputy Premier provide information to the House on Queensland's electoral system?

Mr LUCAS: As members would be aware, the former Attorney-General advised the parliament on 16 February that optional preferential voting will be used at the next Queensland election, which is due by March 2012. The member for Kawana obviously was not listening at that time because on 2 March he said that Labor refuses to rule out a voting change. Wrong, wrong and wrong. I will re-emphasise that. The optional preferential system will go with us into the next election. It will be the system that we will use.

As an aside, the member for Kawana professes to be a solicitor, an officer of the court. A number of us here are barristers and solicitors and a number of us have practised for quite a significant period. For him as an officer of the court to come in here and imply that the Premier can tell a royal commission how to conduct its affairs in relation to what witnesses it seeks to have appear is an utter disgrace. It is an utter disgrace for an officer of the court to suggest that. The member for Caloundra would not get up and say that, my colleague the minister would not get up and say that and the former Attorney-General would not get up and say that. If he has such little regard for his profession and his position as an officer of the court, that says a lot about him.

Let us talk about preferences, because when it comes to preferences—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Deputy Premier, under the standing orders you will answer the question that was asked of you.

Mr LUCAS: I will do that. When it comes to preferences, the people of Queensland need a 'please explain' from the opposition because it is getting very hot and heavy again between the LNP and One Nation. Secret backroom discussions are taking place between the LNP and One Nation and another grubby preference deal is coming. How do we know this?

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Stop the clock. We have plenty of time.

Mr LUCAS: How do we know it? Because One Nation preferences elected Senator Brett Mason and Bruce McIver called to thank One Nation Director Ian Nelson, and they got talking. McIver said that he told One Nation that the LNP would not put One Nation last again because times had changed. How could the Liberals who are in the opposition possibly accept that? How could they sit there and do that? When Barry O'Farrell in New South Wales categorically rules out giving preferences to Pauline Hanson, how can the Leader of the Opposition sit there with former Liberals and have Bruce McIver rolling over the top of them?

I say this: my leader, the leader of my party, leads the party; the party does not lead her. The Leader of the Opposition cannot even lead his own rabble here, let alone tell the leader of the party what to do. We stand for leadership. We stand up to One Nation. They do it in other states on the conservative side of politics. This opposition cannot.

Bauxite Leases

Mr SEENEY: I have a question without notice to the government. I presume it is a question that the Minister for State Development should answer, or maybe it is a question that the Minister for Mines and Energy may want to answer or maybe it is a question for the Special Minister of State, who wants to answer every question every morning. My question is to the government.

Mr SPEAKER: To the government? I am sorry, the question has to be directed to a minister.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you for the advice. In that case, I will direct my question to the Minister for State Development and allow him to perhaps pass it on to another minister if he cannot give us the answer. I refer to the compulsory acquisition and reallocation of the Pechiney bauxite leases and the condition imposed by the government to construct an aluminium refinery in Queensland, and I ask: now that it has become obvious that the successful tenderer, Chalco, has not been able to construct a refinery in Queensland, will the government be recalling tenders for the leases it compulsorily acquired to ensure that there is fairness and openness in the allocation of this huge bauxite resource?

Ms Bligh: Are you feeling sorry for Pechiney, are you? We didn't compulsorily acquire it; it belonged to the people of Queensland.

Mr Lucas: Unlike Joh, who had it for 30 years and did nothing.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Premier will cease interjecting. The question is directed to the Minister for State Development.

Mr FRASER: I thank the shadow minister for the question and I have an answer for the opposition. The answer for the opposition is that this is a matter that the government decided upon last year and, indeed, made public comment about. There is no secret about the fact that prior to 30 June 2010, when it appeared that the obligations were unlikely to be met by Chalco, the government made it clear that this meant that the agreement would come to an end, and that is exactly what happened. At that time we also said that we would continue those discussions with Chalco about what they might put to the government in order to be entitled to continue to seek to develop that resource for the benefit of the Queensland economy and, in particular, for the benefit of the Aurukun community which the Chalco proponents had worked diligently to support and to seek to provide economic development opportunities.

However, if it is the case that under the original terms there is neither the ability to meet the original terms nor an equivalent investment of value to both the local community and the Queensland economy, then this agreement will come to an end. That is it—full stop. In entering into this process there were very clear rules of the game for the government and for the successful proponent. If they were unable to meet those terms, then one thing would happen and that is that the agreement would come to an end—that is what occurred—and, secondly, if those discussions are unable to provide a viable alternative of equivalent investment, then that arrangement would come to an end. In that regard, that is the state of play at this point. I am more than happy for that to be on the public record.

It is important that over recent times we have seen a very clear change between what the LNP used to do in this place and what is occurring now. In the space of a couple of hours between Monday and Wednesday we have seen that the Leader of the Opposition was asked three questions—just three measly questions—by Drew Hutton of all people when he was standing on a stage. What did the Leader

of the Opposition do? He swooned and fainted. He could not even hold a position in a debate with Drew Hutton. What we find now is that the people of the investment community around this state, around this nation and around the globe are quivering at the prospect of this Leader of the Opposition ever being in a position to determine policy in this state because he cannot hold a position under the fire torch of just three questions from a three-time, five-time, nine-time failed Greens candidate. The investment community knows that this week they have seen the LNP being riven asunder. The LNP does not know whether it can support mining anymore or whether it supports agriculture. This campaign against investment certainty will be to the detriment of the Queensland economy. The investment community and the Queensland economy deserve so much more.

(Time expired)

Wivenhoe Dam

Mr WENDT: My question is to the Minister for Energy and Water Utilities. Can the minister update the House on the recent release of water from Wivenhoe Dam to improve the flood protection for downstream communities?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. Seqwater advises that the full supply level of Wivenhoe Dam has now been reduced to about 75 per cent of total storage capacity. The release was done slowly over 11 days and was completed last Wednesday. Small releases will continue to be made until around the end of the wet season to maintain the dam at around 75 per cent, taking into account any storm inflows or further rain.

Releasing water to increase the dam's flood mitigation capacity was the responsible thing to do. We just do not know what rain is around the corner, as evidenced by what is happening in the Far North at the moment. The last thing we would want to see happen is for another heartbreaking flood for those homeowners now rebuilding after the devastation they endured in January.

Let us not forget that just a few months ago the LNP wanted to reduce the flood buffer in Wivenhoe Dam. Let me refresh the House with a couple of classic comments from the member for Callide. He said, 'I believe it would be absurd to release water from Wivenhoe Dam at the current time.' He said that back in March last year. He then asked me a question in October last year claiming that releasing water from the dam means government is failing to plan for drought. But it does not end there.

He was followed up by his mate the member for Southern Downs, who told 4BC last December, 'Certainly the LNP has a view that it's high time we looked at whether we can store a little bit more water in that dam.' But the cracker came yesterday when the member for Callide was asked by Madonna King: 'So are you saying Seqwater should have released a lot more water earlier on?' Seeney replied: 'I think that's fairly obvious. That's very obvious.' What is obvious is the difference between this government and those opposite. They will promise anything if they think it can buy them a vote.

What they lack most of all is leadership—leadership from the member for Surfers Paradise. Leadership means acting decisively and facing up to hard questions, questions like these that the Leader of the Opposition must answer today: did he know, for example, that the member for Redlands had accepted a \$1,000 donation from a quarry company when he advocated for it in the chamber on Tuesday? When did he know this? Does \$1,000 now buy the LNP's opposition to a bill? But, most of all, what action will he immediately take against the member for Redlands for his deceptive and possibly corrupt behaviour—sack him from the front bench? This cash for comments scandal smells and it stinks.

Mr DOWLING: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find those comments offensive and I ask they be withdrawn.

Mr ROBERTSON: Mr Speaker, I withdraw.

Mr SEENEY: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I draw your attention to the standing orders that require ministers to address the questions that have been asked. While there is a longstanding practice that they can answer the question any way they like, there is a requirement in the standing orders to address the question that has been asked. I ask the standing orders to apply.

Mr ROBERTSON: Mr Speaker, this is about leadership.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Let me rule on the point of order. There are two aspects. As I understand it, the accusations being made by the honourable the minister are the subject now of investigation by me as to whether they should be referred to the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. I would ask for that to be respected. The second thing is that the question specifically asked about Wivenhoe. Under standing order 118(b), I ask the minister to round off and talk about Wivenhoe.

Mr ROBERTSON: Mr Speaker, I certainly respect your view about the reference to the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, and I have deliberately stayed away from that. What we are seeing here today is a return to the bad, brown paper bag days of the old National Party. I will finish on this point.

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

Mr ROBERTSON: Mr Speaker, I will finish on this point.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Stop the clock. Allow me to hear the point of order.

Mr SEENEY: Mr Speaker, I submit that the minister is treating your previous ruling of 30 seconds ago with absolute contempt. I submit, Mr Speaker, that the standing orders require him to address the question that was asked, as you so ruled.

Mr ROBERTSON: Did you know about the \$1,000? Did you know about the donation?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have heard the point. Minister, I will ask you to round off your answer.

Mr ROBERTSON: Mr Speaker, I will finish on this point. I have become quite a fan of the tweets of the member for Redlands, who tweeted last night—

Tomorrow is another day, not sure what to expect? Courier Mail Journo wanted to do a follow up story on quarry issue...

Mate, you have just found out what kind of day you are about to have.

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

Mr Robertson: If you had any honour, you would resign—you would resign immediately. Cash for comments—that is what this is about.

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

Mr Robertson: Cash for comments.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister will cease interjecting. The member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: Mr Speaker, I submit that the minister for a second time in less than a minute treated your ruling with absolute contempt. I move that the minister be dealt with by the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Let's leave it at this: I did rule that the minister go back and answer the question. He has not done it. Therefore, I will not give him any further time. Let us move to the next question.

Mining Industry, Workforce

Mr KNUTH: My question without notice is to the Minister for Employment, Skills and Mining. I refer to the recent media reports of the increase in violence and social disruption in mining communities, and I ask: will the minister commit to support realistic fly-in fly-out percentages to ensure the balance is returned to sustain family friendly communities and choice for workers?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank the member for Dalrymple for his question. As he knows, these are issues that I have taken some interest in and there have been many opportunities to have representations made to me by people in various mining communities not only in my current role but in my former role as the minister for infrastructure and planning. These are significant issues for the nature of the continued growth of our great and very important resources sector—a sector that I am not entirely sure after the last few days has the absolute and unquestionable support of all members of this House.

But I do want to respond to the member's particular question around the significant issues of how these communities continue to grow. There are various opinions and various concerns that are very real and appropriate. That is why I understand that these matters are the subject of significant review when it comes to EIS processes that are undertaken in the various applications that are made to government for resource projects, be they processes undertaken by the Coordinator-General or be they other processes undertaken by government. Those EIS processes require not only environmental statements but also social impact statements that reflect upon the social impacts of those projects and the conditions of those projects.

So, for instance, projects have been approved in recent times in recent years which have percentage requirements of local employment as opposed to fly-in fly-out employment and drive-in drive-out employment. Those percentages have been proposed by the companies involved, by the proponents. There are proposals from companies who want to take that further and look to further levels of fly-in fly-out. They are matters that government needs to take very seriously and it needs to analyse all of the issues that are referred to by the member for Dalrymple. That research certainly will be looked at by the government in terms of determining future policy on these matters.

Public Transport, Passenger Safety

Ms DARLING: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Can the minister inform the House what is being done to crack down on crime and antisocial behaviour on our transport network?

Ms PALASZCZUK: I would like to thank the member for Sandgate very much for her question. I know that safety on the network is a very important issue. I also note that we are building 100 extra car parks at the Sandgate train station. The member has raised issues with me about safety and security. We have extra lighting going in there following her concerns.

Passengers and staff on our public transport network should have even more peace of mind following a number of safety initiatives that I am pleased to announce today. Today I would like to announce that 14 new senior network officers have graduated and will join the network providing customer safety, revenue protection and customer services on our TransLink network. These officers are a group of highly trained people authorised to use extended powers to detain when dealing with some of the more serious issues on our public transport network. In total, the 22 senior network officers work in conjunction with the Queensland Police Service's Railway Squad and TransLink. TransLink officers will provide a safer, fairer public transport system for all South-East Queensland commuters.

Last week the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Rail and Crimestoppers introduced another joint initiative to help solve crime: displaying appeals for assistance on passenger information display screens at stations, with immediate results. Also, on the weekend many members may have seen disturbing footage of a young man narrowly escaping death while darting across tracks in front of a fast-moving train at East Ipswich. This was a near miss incident. It could have ended in tragedy for both this young man and his family. We will continue to monitor and crack down on this type of behaviour.

I announced on Saturday that 47 train stations across the city network will undergo security updates under a \$3.3 million injection of funds from the Bligh government. This money will go to enhancing our digital video recording equipment. This means that images captured will be of much higher quality and will be able to be handed onto police. In addition, we have also announced 11 mobile dog patrols and a new police outpost at Robina.

Whilst I am talking about safety on the Gold Coast, I want to comment on what the member for Gaven said yesterday. He came out criticising the light rail project on the Gold Coast, saying it is unsafe. Studies have clearly shown that the light rail system is an incredibly safe mode of transport. What did the shadow minister for transport say? The shadow minister for transport has supported the project. What has the Leader of the Opposition said to me? He has said that he supports the project. The LNP's policy is to support the light rail project because it is good for the Gold Coast and it is a safe mode of transport. It is a \$900 million injection of funds.

Dr Douglas interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: What is your answer? You say we should build buses. The people of the Gold Coast want this light rail, the members on the Gold Coast want this light rail and the government will support it and the government will build it.

A1GP

Mr CRANDON: My question is to the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. What steps is the Queensland government taking to recoup at least \$2 million of taxpayer funds which have been lost as a result of Labor's A1GP fiasco?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I have said in this House many times, the A1GP let Queensland down by not meeting its obligations to the Queensland government. We welcome the news that another investigation into the actions of the A1GP World Cup of Motorsport and Mr Tony Teixeira is occurring overseas.

The Queensland government was not and still is not the promoter of motor-racing events. The previous promoter did make the payments that it was required to make under the contractual obligations prior to the 2009 event. Once the A1GP finally advised the event promoter and the Queensland government that it was not able to attend, quick action was taken to terminate the contract with the A1GP to ensure a fantastic event could be staged. Those who went to that event would attest that it was a terrific event. It was backed up by a great event last year—the V8 Supercars.

The event held in 2009 saw the V8 Supercars as the main racing category. We also had the Aussie legends. It was a fantastic event attended by about 205,000 people. The success of the V8 Supercars series was repeated in 2010. V8 Supercars Australia was the event promoter. It is great to have a Gold Coast company as the promoter for that event. They also did a great job in Townsville and they will continue to do a great job.

In addition to ensuring a successful event, the Queensland government agreed to having two reviews undertaken. We learned the lessons of these reviews and have taken the tough decisions to ensure that the Gold Coast motor-racing event will continue to be a success. It means jobs for the Gold Coast.

As the Minister for Sport, I worked with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that a great event was held on the Gold Coast in 2010. It saw some of the biggest changes since the event's inception. Following the review of the 2009 event, the promoter partnership with IMG was dissolved. Certain matters relating to the actions of the A1GP were referred to the Queensland Police Service to investigate. It is pleasing to see that our UK counterparts agree with the Queensland government that the actions of the A1GP need to be investigated. In relation to the recovery of funds paid to the A1GP by the event promoter, the liability for that was assigned to IMG as part of the settlement. I have previously advised of this both inside this House and outside this House.

I am proud to be working with organisers to ensure that a very successful motor-racing event continues to be held on the streets of Surfers Paradise and Main Beach. The Queensland government would be happy to provide input into any investigation with regard to the A1GP, wherever it occurs.

Police Resources

Mrs KEECH: My question is to the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services. Can the minister advise the House on how the government's commitment to fund an additional 203 police positions this financial year is benefiting local communities in Albert and across Queensland?

Mr ROBERTS: I thank the member for her question and for the strong support she shows the Police Service in her electorate and across the state. As members are aware, the government gave a commitment through this year's budget to fund an additional 203 police positions. That is part of the commitment to increase police numbers by 600 over this term of government.

The Police Commissioner has finalised the allocation of the 203 officers. Some of those officers have already been deployed and the others will be deployed throughout the state over the next few months. I can advise the House that the far northern region will be getting an additional 13, the northern region will be getting 15, the central region will be getting 16, the north coast region will be getting 22, the southern region will be getting 17, the metro north region will be getting nine, the metro south region will be getting nine, the south-east region will be getting 45—the Premier announced that within the last couple weeks—plus an additional six for the Burleigh Police Beat and 55 non-regional positions with two positions to be allocated. As I have indicated, some have been deployed and some are to be deployed.

This commitment is evidence of Labor's support for the resources that the Police Service needs to address the issues of law and order throughout this state. This is in stark contrast to the record of the National Party in government. I think we tend to forget sometimes just how bad the Liberal and National parties were when they were last in government, particularly when it comes to the chronic underfunding of police and emergency services. Labor's investment in police resources is paying dividends. The police-to-population ratio has reduced from one to 507 under the National Party to around one to 434 under Labor.

Overall crime rates have reduced significantly over the last 10 years. There has been a significant decline in crime rates. In the last 10 years, offences against the person have reduced by 20 per cent and property offences have reduced by 48 per cent. On the Sunshine Coast, where the members for Noosa and Kawana come from, offences against the person have reduced by 39 per cent and property offences have reduced by 56 per cent.

The member for Kawana is the shadow minister for corrective services. I refer to him quite fondly as the shadow minister for fashion police. He has this absolute fixation on the colour of prisoners' uniforms. I can understand why he is so concerned about what prisoners wear, because under the National Party prisoners escaped on a regular basis. In the last year of office of the National Party government, 28 low-security prisoners and 13 high-security prisoners—12 of them from behind razor wire—escaped. Their record on law enforcement is absolutely woeful.

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

(Time expired)

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is a point of order. I will hear the point of order.

Mr ELMES: The minister is living in the last century. If he would start talking about what is happening this week or last week, he would do much better.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! It is not a point of order. It is a point of view, but it is not a point of order.

Nambour Hospital, Car Parking

Mr WELLINGTON: My question is to the Minister for Health and relates to the Nambour Hospital, which has recently undergone significant expansion. Will the minister investigate the car-parking needs of our hospital and receive a delegation from the Glenbrook Drive Concerned Citizens Action Group?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question and recognise that he has been a fierce advocate for improved medical services at the Nambour Hospital and in that local area. I do recognise that there are some significant issues to do with parking. As the member has indicated, there has been significant investment in this hospital. Some \$150 million has been invested to create a 96-bed ward block. There is also work currently underway on a cardiac catheter lab, a vascular procedural suite and an endoscopy suite together with a range of upgrades of key clinical support areas such as pathology, radiology and pharmacy.

There is pressure on the car parking provision for the hospital, and I do recognise that. I note that it is a shared responsibility between Queensland Health and the local council, and I know that the local member has been working on a committee set up to examine the options by which we might be able to augment the car parking provision at the hospital. We have to make sure that we get an option that is viable, that gives best value for money and indeed is the best way in which to spend taxpayers' dollars in the delivery of improved health services in that area.

I would be happy to meet further with the member and with local constituents, should he wish me to meet with them, and also with council to explore what the options might be. At the end of the day, of course, we have to ensure that the options are economically viable and provide value for money in the context of ensuring that every dollar is spent to maximise the quality and accessibility so that we get services sooner to people in that area. After all, we are delivering health services here. That is where our priority needs to be focused. However, at the same time I am happy to examine opportunities to improve the parking situation, or at least to ameliorate some of the pressure that is there at the moment.

Natural Disasters, Tourism Industry

Ms JOHNSTONE: My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Manufacturing and Small Business. Many tourism operators and small businesses in North Queensland are rebuilding following floods and Cyclone Yasi. Could the Minister for Tourism, Manufacturing and Small Business please inform the House what is being done to plan for future tourism opportunities in the wake of recent natural disasters?

Mr SPEAKER: I call the minister. You have one minute.

Ms JARRATT: I thank the member for the question and for her interest in tourism in North Queensland. This morning I am happy to announce further funding under the Queensland government's Tourism Projects Prefeasibility Grants Program. This \$400,000 program seeks to assist communities across Queensland with prefeasibility funding and seed funding for exciting new tourism opportunities. These opportunities exist in areas right across the state including Eromanga in south-west Queensland, Longreach and the Gympie hinterland. The honourable member for Townsville would be pleased to know that there is \$11,000 for a study of Magnetic Island visitor markets in her own electorate of Townsville. Another very exciting project is \$10,000 to support a study for a desert walk and interpretive centre on the big red sand dune near the Simpson Desert. So we certainly are getting this money out and about across the state into many areas which have been affected by flood and cyclone.

(Time expired)

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The time for question time has ceased. Honourable members, I just remind you to support the shave for cancer. The donation buckets are outside the House should you want to make a donation.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Bribie Island Bridge, Repairs



Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (11.32 am): I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

Leave granted.

Ms SIMPSON: The Minister for Main Roads has misled the parliament this morning about the state of the Bribie Island Bridge and my actions in drawing attention to it. I did visit the bridge at the invitation of the LNP candidate, Lisa France, and with the chamber of commerce president and another chamber member, a channel 10 camera crew and a newspaper photographer after hearing that the pedestrian railing was held together with gaffer tape and garden ties since it was damaged in November last year. I did not know, though, that the footing of the original railing had also been damaged and, by being ripped away, the footpath was also uneven. This pedestrian path on the bridge is dangerous, as I

personally discovered. The purpose of a railing on a pedestrian path of a bridge is to keep pedestrians safe and to keep them separate from traffic and to provide stability for people walking on the bridge. I found out that it barely does both when I fell over on the damaged footpath in the presence of a camera crew and witnesses. I was fortunate that I did not injure myself. My intention was to draw attention to the condition of the bridge.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Please come to your personal explanation.

Ms SIMPSON: I did grab the railing to break my fall, but even then I almost fell into the traffic because the temporary railing does not provide protection for pedestrians.

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Those on my right will cease interjecting. I will ask the honourable member to come to the personal explanation and round it up.

Ms SIMPSON: According to the minister, trucks are not the real threat to the integrity of this railing; it is pedestrians. The bridge is dangerous. It is still dangerous. I seek an apology from the minister. I have witnesses as to what actually occurred. We want to see this bridge fixed. It is still dangerous with this temporary repair which has been in place since November last year. Pedestrians should be able to walk on this bridge safely and many locals have found that it is not safe.

Ms SPENCE: Mr Speaker, I think this is well beyond the realms of personal explanation.


Mr SPEAKER: And I think we have finished.

COMMITTEE SYSTEM REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

Resumed from 9 March (see p. 485), on motion of Ms Spence—

That the report of the Committee System Review Committee, titled *Review of the Queensland parliamentary committee system*, tabled on 15 December 2010, be noted.

 **Hon. SD FINN** (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (Minister for Government Services, Building Industry and Information and Communication Technology) (11.34 am): I am pleased to rise and continue my contribution to this debate. I feel a bit like that famous Merv Hughes hat-trick that was achieved over three overs and two innings, but I will pick up from where I left off yesterday afternoon.


Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr FINN: He is a Werribee boy, too. The report we consider today will change both the culture and functioning of the Queensland parliament. The most significant reform we consider is the development of the portfolio based committees which will consider legislation in the period between its introduction and debate in the House. Committee consideration of legislation includes opportunities for public inquiry, questioning of ministers and opportunities for input of all members of the House in considering draft legislation and the impacts of legislative detail. This reform will bring with it the greatest change we have seen in both the functioning of the House and accessible democracy, with an increased rigour applied to the development of legislation and opportunities for public input. I know there will be members and, most particularly, ministers who are nervous about these proposals. But as legislators we should never be concerned about subjecting both our planned laws and our underlying judgements to the scrutiny of public attention and to the rigour of our colleagues. I believe legislation will improve significantly as a result of this process with fewer instances of retrospective changes and a greater community awareness of legislation being considered, resulting in better drafting and laws that better reflect community expectations.

The other key reform I make brief comment on is the creation of the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, the CLA. The CLA effectively forms the House committee and determines the passage of business of the House, functional aspects of the parliamentary precinct and the resource allocations for maintaining the precinct. The CLA brings together senior parliamentary leaders, reflecting the make-up of the parliament, and includes the leaders of business of the House. In many respects, the CLA formalises current practices where bipartisan discussion ensures smooth passage of House business where there is substantial agreement. There has been public comment on the make-up of the committee, and some of it a little unedifying, in my view. We all need to see the proposed reforms as bigger than any individuals but acknowledge that substantial cultural shift will challenge current and former members. It is the intention in the creation of the CLA that it will consult with relevant office holders when making decisions affecting the best management of parliamentary proceedings. This model enables a committee of elected representatives to determine appropriate rules and to consider legal and umpiring advice in that determination.

I also support the recommendation to retain the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee and the proposal for a non-government chair of this committee. Bipartisan decision making is already enshrined in the deliberations of that committee, and a non-government chair will improve the transparency and accountability to community members who access that committee, some of whom we fail to convince of the probity or independence of corruption investigations. I recognise and support the proposal of government to retain the integrity and ethics committee as a stand-alone committee, and having considered this in more depth believe this improves on the committee's recommendations. This will enable separation of CLA members from deliberations arising from integrity and ethics matters relating to themselves or arising from determinations of the CLA.

This is a detailed report with many of the recommendations able to be debated during enacting legislative changes, and I will take that opportunity to make more comment then. It was a privilege to be a member of this committee and to be part of deliberations with experienced colleagues about how to reform our parliamentary democracy. I thank all of my fellow committee members for the frankness and confidentiality in which proceedings were conducted. Whilst this was indeed refreshing, it was also essential to the reform task at hand that we had a free flow of ideas and debate. There is great commonality of purpose across the political divide as well as a determination to ensure Queensland has a robust, fair and accessible democracy. The strongest democratic systems will be subject to regular review and reform, and I trust that these reforms will serve us well in future years.

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (11.39 am): The recommendations in this report by the Committee System Review Committee represent a fundamental shift in the way the parliament of Queensland will operate. Unfortunately, since the Theodore Labor government abolished the Legislative Council of the Queensland parliament in 1922, the Queensland parliament has suffered from a structural weakness that has resulted in a lack of accountability and a limit to the ability of the parliament to scrutinise the executive.

One of the cornerstones of the great system of representative and responsible democracy which Queensland had inherited from the Westminster parliament was bicameralism. That system included an upper house that was charged with reviewing legislation passed by the lower house as a check and balance on executive power. At various times, other parliaments founded on the Westminster tradition at both national and provincial level have discontinued the use of their second chamber for a variety of reasons. However, that move has usually been associated with the establishment of a vigorous committee system so that the accountability and scrutiny system of the single remaining chamber is enhanced to compensate for the loss of the upper house. That has not occurred in Queensland until now.

The recommendations proposed by this committee report canvass the most significant change to enhance accountability and scrutiny mechanisms in the parliament of Queensland since these were substantially diluted by the abolition of the Legislative Council in 1922. The proposed recommendations relate mainly to how the committee system of the Queensland parliament will be constituted but, importantly, the report also makes recommendations on how the work of those committees will be related to and inform the work of the Legislative Assembly and its consideration of legislation. In many respects, it proposes to put the work of the newly constituted committees at the centre of the work of the Legislative Assembly and enhances their relevance and importance to the legislative process.

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

I welcome these proposed recommendations for two reasons. Firstly, I am a very strong supporter of the Westminster system and the concept of parliamentary sovereignty in that system. I consider that an enhanced role for parliamentarians in the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, which includes the proceedings of parliamentary committees, as opposed to the House being dominated by the executive, is a positive thing for accountability and scrutiny. I support efforts to enhance the influence of parliamentarians in the proceedings of the parliament.

Secondly, I would welcome the end of the current manifestation of the parliamentary committee system that has been in place since the passage of the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill 2009. That bill resulted, in my opinion, in some unfortunate changes to the parliamentary committee system of the Queensland Legislative Assembly that further reduced standards of accountability and scrutiny mechanisms in our unicameral parliament. The bill amalgamated the public accounts and public works committees without increasing the resources available to the committee or increasing the number of members on the committee. The bill effectively doubled the responsibilities of the newly established Public Accounts and Public Works Committee while halving the resources available to it and halving the number of members dedicated to the scrutiny of the executive in these areas.

That bill also added broad policy development responsibilities in the area of law, justice and community safety to the existing statutory responsibilities of the former legal, constitutional and administrative review committee. These responsibilities were added to the responsibilities of the new Law, Justice and Safety Committee without any increase in the resources available to the committee or any additional members being appointed to that committee. As a member of that committee both in the 52nd Parliament and now in the 53rd Parliament, I have been concerned about the nature of the work that the committee has been asked to undertake, effectively at the behest of the executive relating to issues it was finding politically difficult to handle, such as liquor licensing and local government electoral systems—not because the issues were not important but because of the way the issues were referred.

It has been very frustrating to have the important oversight functions of the committee sidelined in favour of the priorities of the executive. My fellow committee members on the Law, Justice and Safety Committee will have heard me regularly refer to these politically expedient referrals as good old-fashioned wild goose chases. I am confident that, even if they will not stand up and say so during the course of this debate, they will have at one time or another shared my frustrations.

The recommendations in this report propose to establish a range of portfolio based committees that will also have oversight responsibilities. Importantly, however, these recommendations also include proposals to significantly enhance resources available to these committees to make the proceedings of these committees central to the work of the parliament, including dedicated time during the course of the parliamentary sitting week. The committees will have their roles enhanced by doubling as estimates committees in these portfolio areas and the fact that there will be a dedicated time to debate committee reports in the parliament.

While it is proposed by the recommendations in the report for the number of members on each committee to be reduced from seven to six members, I note also the recommendation to provide for the inclusion of participating members. Importantly, there is a recommendation to formalise the requirement by way of statute for the relevant committee to provide bipartisan support for a number of statutory appointments that report to parliament.

I have been a bit nervous about a couple of recommendations in the report. For example, I am not sure that I agree with the recommendation that proposes to give the members of a particular portfolio committee more of an opportunity to contribute to the second reading debate on a bill relevant to their portfolio committee and to reduce the time available to parliamentarians who are not members of the committee. It has been explained to me that during the course of the second reading debate members of the relevant portfolio committee may need more of an opportunity to explain how the committee came to the conclusions that it did in formulating the recommendations in its report. I would argue that the committee report should do that and that when the bill comes before the House as a whole each individual member comes to this place on an equal footing as far as contributing to the debate is concerned, save of course for the responsible minister and the representative of the official opposition.


It has also been explained to me that the members of the Committee System Review Committee felt that the second reading debate in the House can sometimes be too drawn out and even repetitive and that sometimes such a second reading debate does not make for the best use of the House's time. I appreciate those concerns but I remain unconvinced that, having provided their report to the House, members of the relevant portfolio committee should be afforded additional time during the second reading debate. I believe that once the bill comes to the House as a whole each member ought to be afforded an equal opportunity to contribute to that debate.

Perhaps there ought to be a compromise in this regard. I acknowledge that members of the Committee System Review Committee are excited about the enhanced opportunity for parliamentarians to play more of an active role in the framing of legislation and actually be legislators, particularly through the committee system, as opposed to acting much like an ombudsman for their electorate in the parliament. I share their enthusiasm in that regard. However, all of us as members of parliament get to this place in the same way—that is, by securing the support of a majority of the constituents in our electorate. Once we enter this House, we are their representatives and advocates as much as we are legislators and members of a group of parliamentarians, and we ought to come into this House as equals on that basis when it comes to carrying out legislative and other aspects of our responsibilities.

I think it is important that provision is made for the Speaker to join the Committee of the Legislative Assembly as an ex officio member when that committee considers responsibilities associated with those that will be formerly the responsibility of the Standing Orders Committee. I was pleased to learn from earlier contributions to this debate by members of the Committee System Review Committee that recommendation 13 will be reconsidered to provide for the participation of the Speaker in that regard. I am also not convinced that recommendation 46, which proposes lay members to be included as members of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee, is a very wise thing to do. Individuals who are not members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly ought not be members of

parliamentary committees. If there is a concern that members of the PCMC do not have the necessary skills and experience to discharge their responsibilities on this committee, which are very significant and serious, then surely recommendation 28, which recommends that committees have access to the appropriate expertise and assistance required for the conduct of their inquiries, ought to adequately address this concern.

However, on balance I am pleased to support the thrust of the recommendations in this report. I want to acknowledge and congratulate the members of the Committee System Review Committee, who have obviously worked hard and worked together in good faith with the genuine aim of achieving better legislative outcomes for the parliament of Queensland. Such outcomes will be a benefit to all Queenslanders.

 **Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (11.50 am): I rise to speak to the *Review of the Queensland Parliamentary Committee System*. The committee, as noted on page 11 in the introduction, was asked to consider the following in its inquiry—

- The role of parliamentary committees in both Australian and international jurisdictions in examining legislative proposals, particularly those with unicameral parliaments;
- Timely and cost effective ways by which Queensland parliamentary committees can more effectively evaluate and examine legislative proposals; and
- The effectiveness of the operation of the committee structure of the 53rd Parliament following the restructure of the committee system on 23 April 2009.

The committee was also asked to include in its report options on models for structuring the committee system.

I remain a supporter of an upper house. This report has not changed that view. However, what this report does, in that section dealing with the committee restructure, is endeavour to re-enliven the intent and importance of proper oversight of executive government. In that context, I support the general intent of the report.

There are, however, individual issues about which I hold concerns. Pages 1 to 12 of the report generally deal with the history of this parliament and the executive summary, including 55 recommendations. Pages 17 to 75 generally deal with the changes to the committee system. Recently on several occasions I have listened to the comments of the Clerk of this parliament in relation to his considered views on improving the committee system. In some measure, these recommendations reflect those views.

The committees proposed in the report to oversee the parliamentary portfolios have the potential to better exercise an investigation of bills and the functioning of government departments, provided the committee membership reflects the composition of the parliament and not just the major parties. These are significant recommendations in relation to committees. Currently, a great amount of work is done by committees and, as importantly, the secretariat staff who support parliamentary committees so well. Much of this work, once reported on, is relegated to the shelves of the Parliamentary Library and archive, libraries dotted about the country and they also receive the attention of those individuals and groups directly referred to or affected. In relation to estimates committees, I hold the view that the intent of estimates is sound. The process, however, has degenerated into a plethora of dorothea dixers by the government members of the day along with attempts by non-government members to understand the budget documents that are presented as abstrusely as possible and to examine beyond the ministers the senior government staff. Currently, it is solely the discretion of the minister as to whether staff are exposed to direct questioning.

I have concerns about the proposal to reduce the opportunity to speak to bills to 10 minutes for any speakers other than the Leader of the Opposition or nominee and the members of the relevant portfolio committee, who will also have 20 minutes. All other members will have only 10 minutes. Since having the privilege of being in this place, I have held the view that the time for speaking to bills should remain at 20 minutes. Many times speakers take up only a portion of that time. I acknowledge that there are several members who speak their full time, but they are the minority. This debate shows the importance of this time allocation as standing orders were suspended in order to give each speaker 20 minutes because of the importance of the debate. From the perspective of members of the Queensland community, every bill will have importance to them to varying degrees, depending on its impact. We are their voice in this place. I feel very strongly about the need for the 20 minutes to remain to ensure that members have adequate time in which to speak to complex or controversial bills or in cognate debates.

Overwhelmingly, my major concerns reside with section 5 of the report, pages 13 to 16 inclusive, which relates to a number of matters. The proposal to establish the Committee of the Legislative Assembly is of itself not a concern. I do have concerns about a number of interrelated matters. Yesterday, the Leader of the House, the Hon. Judy Spence, organised a briefing for the Independents— and I thank her for that. I could only stay for part of the discussion and we talked about the make-up of

the CoLA. I remain very concerned that that committee does not reflect the parliament; it only recognises representatives of the major parties and gives absolutely no opportunity for the crossbenchers, regardless of the numbers, to be represented on that committee.

Members of the committee responsible for the formulation of this document have spoken here effusively about the cooperation they have experienced in their deliberations. Indeed, the member for Sunnybank as well as the member for Nanango spoke to me at length about the confidence that I could have that the Independents and any minor party members would be appropriately considered. I have been here long enough to know that that notion is fanciful. Over time, the major parties have made it clear by word and deed that they will isolate or disadvantage Independents and minor parties if it suits. I refer to a document that was circulated on 6 January under the hand of the Premier, which proposes to give parties and party candidates double the funding cap for elections and half that for Independents. It proposes to allow double the donations to parties as Independents. The proposals are astonishingly and unapologetically discriminatory—and you wonder why some members of the crossbenches are sceptical.

In the briefing yesterday when I raised my concerns, the chair advised, 'I expected those concerns from you, but the opposition will not support you.' This is precisely my point. Unless representation on that committee reflects the breadth of representation in this House, there will be a very real risk of partiality or inequity. It will need only a contentious situation to arise when all parties in this place will retreat to their trenches and members of the crossbenches will be left struggling for fair and equitable consideration.

The Committee System Review Committee report also very obviously precludes the Speaker from being a part of this changed structure. CoLA is proposed to take responsibility for many of those functions currently administered by the Speaker as an independent entity. I have to say that the current Speaker has set a firm course of consultation and cooperation wherever possible. The committee's report at pages 17 to 75 give relatively detailed explanations for proposed changes. The section relating to the establishment of CoLA and the exclusion of the Speaker are scant at best.

Several examples are given of structures in other parliaments. The parliament of Victoria has a business committee. It does not cover the role of the Speaker, but meets to plan the business of the House. The Australian Senate Selection of Bills Committee meets to discuss the progression of bills. Neither of those structures deal with the business currently managed by the Speaker in this parliament and proposed to be moved to the politicised Committee of the Legislative Assembly. Some may object to that description. However, we are talking about a proposed committee to oversee the parliament and guide the committees overseeing the executive, yet the majority on the committee will be members of the executive.

In relation to the Leader of the House, when I have checked previous holders of that position, all but one have been or are part of the executive. The only Leader of the House in the past 15 to 18 years that I could identify not being part of the executive was Tony FitzGerald, the Leader of Government Business when Borbidge held power. Our current Leader of the House is also a parliamentary secretary who, while not a direct member of the executive, is very much obligated to maintain cabinet solidarity.

The report then speaks of the Parliament of Canada's Board of Internal Economy, which deals with financial and administrative matters. It examines and approves the annual budget estimates for the House of Commons. It also approves and controls the budgets of the various committees. Who makes up this committee or board? The Speaker is the chair. There are also two ministers nominated by the government, the Leader of the Opposition or nominees and other members with equal representation from government and non-government.

The final example given is the National Assembly of Quebec's Committee of the Legislative Assembly. This committee is chaired by the President—or the Speaker—and includes the Vice-President of the Assembly, the House leaders, the whips and the chairs of standing committees. The report goes on to detail Quebec's CoLA responsibilities. So why then, when citing similar structures in other Commonwealth parliaments as the basis for change in our own, do we want to isolate the Speaker from responsibilities that the Speaker has such direct interest in?

Indeed, this report purports to base establishment of the CoLA on these jurisdictions but fails to replicate their structure. I would also quote from two publications relating to jurisdictions cited in the committee's report. Firstly in relation to the New Zealand parliament, *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, by David McGee, states—

The Speaker is chairperson of the Parliamentary Service Commission and has principal political responsibility for the services and facilities provided to members of Parliament.

In relation to the House of Commons Canada, another jurisdiction cited by the committee, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states—

The Speaker is the head of the House of Commons administration and is responsible for its overall direction and management. The House administration supports Members of Parliament, individually and collectively, in their parliamentary roles as well as the House itself as an institution.

I would seek clarification from the chair of the review committee, the honourable member for Sunnybank, in relation to the feedback the committee has received concerning these proposals from the Integrity Commissioner. From my perspective, moving the majority of the responsibilities from the Speaker to a politically constituted committee is a return to the days of the Public Service Commission. I would appreciate knowing the views of the Integrity Commissioner.

A predecessor to this proposed Committee of the Legislative Assembly, the Parliamentary Service Commission, bears some concerning similarities to the proposed CoLA. A dissertation prepared by Timothy Moroney for his Masters in Public Administration states—

The establishment of the PSC was to ensure that the Queensland parliament gained a measure of operational and financial independence, free from executive government control. However, as will be seen, the policies of the Goss Labor government led to a strengthening of executive and departmental control over the Parliament, which hampered the PSC's independence, creating organisational difficulties and resulting in both the Labor Speaker and the Opposition arguing for and gaining its abolition.

...

In particular, besides the parliamentary reforms relating to the establishment of an effective committee system, the public sector reforms had a major influence on the Queensland Parliament's operation, staff morale and inevitably led to divisions within the Parliamentary Service Commission because of executive government control.

When discussing the Parliamentary Service Commission executive government control Mr Moroney observes—

However, statements by the Leader of the House in 1991, (Hon. Terry Mackenroth) identified a particular attitude to his role in the PSC as a member of the executive. After claiming that his occasional wins regarding PSC decisions were due to his persuasive arguments, he stated that not only was he the Parliament's representative, but that he was also there as the Cabinet's representative to ensure that there was an input from the government.

When dealing with the CJC's report into the misuse of travel entitlements and the subsequent resignation of the Leader of the Opposition, Labor's Chairman of Committees and two Labor government ministers, all returning to the back bench, Mr Moroney observes—

Officers of the PSC suffered adverse criticism for their failure to direct these matters to higher authorities, but it was recognised that an unequal power relationship existed between parliamentary staff and members of Parliament, which at times could induce a cautious approach.

I fear that, with the transfer of the responsibilities as proposed in this report, this parliament will embrace these same potential risks. In light of the history, I seek clarification from the member for Sunnybank as to what consultation occurred, in addition to the submission by the Speaker to the committee's hearing, with the Speaker's office and the office of the Clerk in relation to these changes to the Speaker's responsibilities. Not only would that be an exercise of natural justice, particularly in relation to the Speaker; such discussion would enhance the committee's deliberations in light of the extensive experience of the Clerk of the Parliament.


Unless I have misunderstood the committee's reference, the specific matters relating to the recommendations capturing the role of the Speaker appear to fall outside the scope of the resolution of this parliament in February last year. In this debate, part of the reasoning for what has been presented as the critical need to move the current administrative responsibilities from the Speaker's office to the CoLA has been cited as a lack of committee meeting space. How many representations have been made to past and present Speakers' offices in relation to this matter? A second complaint related to the cost of the Christmas tree outside parliament. Again, what representations were made to the Speaker's office in relation to this matter? It was Speaker Tony McGrady who introduced the lighting of the Christmas tree in the forecourt. Surely if this expenditure caused concern then the Speaker's Advisory Committee, which was formed when Speaker Reynolds held that post and continues under the current Speaker, would be one conduit for concerns to be formally considered.

There are other contradictions that are not addressed but are extremely important. If CoLA is to be in charge of electorate offices' infrastructure and services, who will the electorate officers be responsible to? I certainly would have concerns over my staff being answerable to, again, a potentially very political committee. Call it bipartisan all you like; my experience in this place indicates to me that there are times of intense sensitivity where individuals cannot compartmentalise their political personas and their committee obligations.

If CoLA is the final arbiter on minor things such as booking rooms in this parliament, booking weddings, concerns regarding the allocation of members' parking or bedroom allocations, who is the final arbiter? Is it the committee of six parliamentarians? What if one or more of those complainants are on the committee? When parliament is not sitting and there is the call to use the family suite, does the member have to apply to the committee? I know that there are delegations that can be put in place, but it is this detail that no-one seems to have addressed. Remember, the devil is in the detail.

The proposed membership of CoLA is the six most senior party representatives—busy people with significant responsibilities. Is it even reasonable that they deal with these housekeeping matters, especially in light of the fact that there has been no substantive reason for not including the Speaker on this committee and that position retaining responsibility for the parliamentary precinct?

I look forward to a more effective committee system. I look forward to the CoLA being truly representative of this chamber by recognising both the Speaker and the crossbenches. The elephant in the room is the exclusion of the Speaker from CoLA.

 **Ms NELSON-CARR** (Mundingburra—ALP) (12.06 pm): I am always pleased to consider any appropriate mechanisms to keep governments accountable and allow scrutiny of the executive. This committee system as proposed could bring about the most significant changes to the Queensland parliament since 1922. Under democratic governments, the responsibility of the executive government is to the parliament and the parliament is responsible to the House. I am happy to see that selectively filtering away good news while concealing bad news will be a thing of the past because all that does, of course, is jeopardise the wellbeing of the organisation by concealing any need for possible remedial action.

The opportunities to facilitate and direct public participation in the legislative process are welcome indeed. For the committee and for Queenslanders to inform, educate and influence legislators is a welcome change and will obviously allow legislators to consider policy implications in details of the bill.


The 55 recommendations to enhance the parliamentary committee system were made, as we have all heard, with bipartisan support. This has to be commended. Questions, however, remain for me. For instance, how do the other jurisdictions such as New Zealand, which has been mentioned, compare to this new Queensland model? I am pleased to hear an acknowledgement that the present committee system is underresourced. I hope that if the new committee system is to have the influence it is now being afforded it will be resourced accordingly. When one compares the committee system as we have it to an upper house, the comparisons are almost negligible. I would hope that the resourcing would improve significantly.

Having bipartisan attention to and influence over the executive makes a lot of sense. I look forward to hearing just how this will be rolled out. At the moment committees get little attention in parliament, and this will be dramatically changed to fit in with the new model. Separation of powers is fundamental to our democratic system of governance. I can see that under this new committee system questions, scrutiny and investigations of all new bills and the executive itself will be considered.

This brings me to the office of the Speaker. Historically, much of the tradition of parliament has centred on the office of the Speaker. The Speaker of the Queensland parliament, once elected by members of parliament—and that is usually after a general election—has roles that are ceremonial, procedural and, of course, administrative, as well as being an MP representing his or her electorate. Enforcing the observance of all standing rules and orders during business in the House is, of course, paramount. I am somewhat concerned that breaches of privilege in particular will not be given independent consideration despite the proffered bipartisan nature of the executive and the fact that the Speaker will only be involved in an ex officio capacity. Why would the Speaker not be as involved in overseeing all other committees as, indeed, has always been the case?

The report actually gives no indication that this overhaul is a result of anything. I know the member for Toowoomba North has done some research which indicates that the Speaker has had a role forever, either deliberative or holding a casting vote. I would be keen to know the reasons for this recommendation that would see the executive arm of government having all the control of the legislative functions along with the leader of future houses not being just in charge of government business, which is the case now, but leaving the independence of the Speaker to control the House. Perhaps this is the reform of the legislative process that we need. However, I am a little nervous and I would welcome the consideration in detail of this important work.

The independence of the Speaker has been either debated or questioned for a long time, especially since the holder of the position is appointed by the government majority in the House. To make decisions independently can be difficult, but I do believe our current Speaker performs a professional executive role, stepping aside from debate in the chamber. Taking part in the scrutiny, debate and even voting in the chamber on legislation does not sit comfortably with our current Speaker, who does not take sides on business before the House. Having said this, independence and impartiality cannot be prescribed through standing orders. Therefore, it depends on the person in the position. In this case, the Queensland Speaker has all the necessary capabilities to be an effective Speaker according to our Westminster system. Such dramatic alteration of this tradition remains something I just do not understand and I look forward to further consideration as proposed. I do commend the committee for this report and I look forward to hearing the deliberations that will occur in the near future.

 **Ms FARMER** (Bulimba—ALP) (12.11 pm): I rise to speak briefly on the review of the Queensland parliamentary committee system. At the outset I would like to congratulate the members of this committee, headed by the member for Sunnybank and Leader of the House, on their dedicated and thorough approach to this review. To have a bipartisan committee whose membership included long-

serving members of this House, a minister and former ministers and whips, parliamentary secretaries and committee chairs has obviously been of great benefit in achieving an outcome which will challenge all of us to ensure that in this House we are being the best that we can be. I understand there were many robust discussions in the formulation of the final report and I am certain there will be even more robust debate as we take steps towards implementing this reform.

Since my election to parliament, I have been fortunate to be a member of several estimates committees and also of the Public Works and Public Accounts Committee. As members will know, this committee, through its public accounts function, has an oversight role to assess the integrity, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government financial management by examining government financial documents and by considering reports of the Auditor-General. I have been proud to be a member of this committee and, like all its members, I am extremely conscious of its role as a scrutineer. However, I am also conscious, as all of the members of the committee are, that with more time and greater resourcing we could do more. This issue is one which is critical to the need for this review of the committee system and I note in the report that it was an issue which was raised frequently in the submissions to the review committee.

All of us need to have our actions challenged on a regular basis, to have our way of doing things, our assumptions and expectations, questioned. It is important for all of us as human beings to know that we are sufficiently objective about our actions, that we are at our most effective and at our best. It is important for us as elected representatives and it is most definitely and critically important that we do it as members of this House.

Labor governments in this state have a strong record of challenging the status quo on accountability, ranging from the establishment of the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission and subsequent reforms to the establishment of the estimates process, the restructure of the parliamentary committee system introduced by the Premier in 2009, the release of the discussion paper *Integrity and Accountability in Queensland* later that year and the subsequent government response. None of these things has necessarily been comfortable to do. However, we have never backed away from a challenge to the way we operate and we most certainly are not backing away from this now.


This is a groundbreaking and historical review. There are so many excellent recommendations and I will not comment on each one of them. However, the ones that resonate most strongly with me include the proposal to have a robust mechanism for a high level of scrutiny, which is something we must as a parliament ensure we have in a unicameral system; that members of the public will have greater opportunity to be informed about and engaged in the making of the laws of this state; that sufficient time and resources are allocated to committees to make sure they are doing their job in the most effective way possible; that committees will be established on a portfolio basis so that members are well informed and best equipped to undertake their work; that the estimates process will also include the decision makers within the bureaucracy so that we can maximise accountability for the public policy that is being implemented in this state; and that a CLA will be established which ensures the most effective operation of the parliamentary process.

I do note the recommendations regarding the role of the Speaker across a range of functions. All of us in this House recognise that the role of the Speaker is a critical one and that our final decisions about this review—whatever they may be—must reflect the greatest respect for the position and for the independence it must have. I am certain that that respect will ensure that we make the right decisions on these matters.

I commend the work of all of the existing parliamentary committees. There has been some landmark work produced by those committees just in the time that I have been a member of this parliament. They have been so ably supported by the parliamentary research staff. However, it seems that most of us are excited at the prospect of having our way of working challenged, and this is as it should be. None of us would complain about being more accountable, none of us would complain about being more transparent and none of us would complain about being second-guessed on our work. This is what the public expects of us.

I heard the member for Callide refer yesterday to the fact that members of the committee came to the task of conducting the review as parliamentarians and not as members of a political party. This is to be commended and it is the approach that most of us have taken as we debate the report and we will do so as we debate the final outcome. I do find it sad that, against the backdrop of the strong bipartisan approach to the development of these recommendations and the enthusiastic bipartisan support which has been evidenced in the debate, the only person who has chosen to use his contribution for political point-scoring is the member for Surfers Paradise, the Leader of the Opposition. That he should not see this as an historic occasion when he should rise above politics and talk about the future of the people's parliament—the big picture—must be a great disappointment to his party. It is certainly very telling to the people of Queensland.

I congratulate the review committee again and thank them for the opportunity to be here in this parliament at the time that such important reforms are being debated. I certainly look forward to their implementation and to working with everyone in this House to be the best we can possibly be.

 **Mr GIBSON** (Gympie—LNP) (12.17 pm): Political commentators in both the media and academia have been writing for decades the death notice of the Westminster system of government. They often highlight its failures, noting the dominance of the executive over the parliament, the strong party discipline that, in their view, stifles debate, and the legislative complexity that places the Public Service at an advantage over the minister. These same political commentators often simplify the political debate to a discussion about nothing more than sporting teams seemingly obsessed with just winners and losers. These concerns have been raised regarding both unicameral and bicameral parliaments around the world. Indeed, in 1976 Lord Hailsham told BBC viewers—

We live in an elective dictatorship, absolute in theory, if hitherto thought tolerable in practice.

For a unicameral parliament like Queensland, these concerns regarding an elective dictatorship and a simplistic focus upon winners and losers seem even more heightened. But what is often missed is that at the heart of politics are the ideas that we discuss and debate in this very chamber. It is the ideas of both parties that this parliament is called upon to debate in the form of bills. It is the ideas that each political party put forward that is the basis of how they will govern and it is those same ideas to which they are held accountable at the next election.

Today it is this idea of committee reform that we are called upon to debate in this parliament. I note that it is not the first time that this parliament has debated committee reform. The Fitzgerald inquiry report listed reforms of the parliament that were meant to revitalise the operation of the parliament reducing the dominance of the executive and, amongst other things, establishing parliamentary committee reform to enable greater review of government activity and conduct inquiries into matters of public policy and public concern.

It has been 22 years since the Fitzgerald report made its recommendations. If we were honest, those recommendations that were implemented 'lock, stock and barrel' have not achieved the outcomes desired by its author to ensure a vigilant parliament that would help ensure accountability and prevent the recurrence of corruption and poor government. Clearly the recent jailing of a Labor minister for corruption and dubious expenditure blow-outs in projects such as the water grid and the Traveston Crossing Dam have shown that what has occurred since the Fitzgerald report has been an illusion of reform and that the real reform sought by Tony Fitzgerald was not fully achieved.

The report we have before us today gives us an opportunity to step into new ground and we have heard from many about it being groundbreaking and innovative, a new dawn for parliamentary committees. Indeed, this report is a credit to all those members who were involved in the committee because it does have the potential to be such a fundamental change to the operation of the parliamentary committee system. Much has been said by other speakers with regard to the culture of change that is necessary. But I put it to this parliament that the culture of change will not come from this report alone. It will and must be driven by us as the members of the parliament.

Change is a modern reality, and there is much written in management literature about the change within corporate structure. Leadership is often listed as being essential to bring about change, and we have heard through this debate commitments to these changes by both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. However, what is more important than just a declaration from these leaders is that they show their commitment in their behaviour. It will be tempting for any executive to look for ways to limit the influence of the parliament in scrutinising its performance, as it will be tempting for any opposition to look for ways to politicise the processes, seeking those 'gotcha moments' rather than an in-depth examination of the efficiency of government.

If these changes are to occur, they must come from us. For these changes to be successful, they must be properly resourced. This includes both the direct resourcing of the committees to perform their new tasks and broader resourcing. I have heard many references in members' speeches to the Canadian experience. I note that in Canada they have the provision of a parliamentary budget office in that parliament which enables committees to gain independent financial advice. I note that recommendation 44 of the committee's report refers to expert advice and assistance for estimates and financial reviews being something that could occur with greater resourcing or greater support from the Auditor-General. I would say that we need to do more than just enhance the role of the Auditor-General; I believe we need a parliamentary budget office.

Looking towards the estimates functions of these reforms and having been a member of estimates committees in the past, I know firsthand how difficult it is to move through those financial reports in trying to gain the information that is necessary to hold a government to account. The budget process needs to become more transparent. The information that needs to be provided should be shown in a consistent manner. This methodology of changing the format of budget papers each year so that it is difficult to compare one year with the previous year does not help with the view of transparency or informing public debate and building accountability and confidence. In my view a parliamentary

budget office could provide, at the very least, responses to requests from parliamentary committees for assistance but also medium-term analysis of the financial situation, looking for structural budget issues. It could also do an analysis of government budgets, including spending programs and whether they have been achieved or otherwise, and look at baseline budget estimates.

Regardless of whether this parliament moves towards a parliamentary budget office or enhances the role of the Auditor-General, what will need to occur is a greater resourcing of these changes, for without the additional resources we will fall back into what has occurred since the Fitzgerald era, and that is the illusion of reform without any real practical improvement.

I would now like to draw my remarks to some specific concerns regarding recommendations within the report—firstly, with regard to petitions as contained in recommendations 47 and 48. It is noted that the Queensland parliament has broken new ground with the use of e-petitions, along with the standard paper petition. I know, as many members of this parliament do, that there is an increasing awareness of the role of petitions and a desire of members of the community to petition the parliament. I am concerned that petitions will not be automatically referred to committees, and I would like to ask the Leader of the House and the chair of the committee whether the public will be able to petition a committee directly seeking action on a matter that is within its jurisdiction.

Ms Spence: Yes. The answer is yes.

Mr GIBSON: Thank you for that. It is not clear in the recommendation, but if the public can—


Ms Spence: They can just write to them even.

Mr GIBSON: If they are able to do that, that would be excellent. I thank the minister for that quick response. With regard to recommendation 52 and committees embracing technology, I note the desire for greater use of videoconferencing, and I fully support this. With a state as decentralised as Queensland, videoconferencing is a natural progression and will ensure that all members of this great state are able to be involved in committee hearings.

I place my concerns on the record with regard to those in the community who are deaf or hearing impaired. Videoconferencing has the potential these days for closed captioning. I would ask that, as the committees and the parliament's IT services look at this technology, they include within their ambit those issues of closed captioning so that the videoconferencing can ensure that those members of the deaf and hard of hearing can be involved in committee hearings. I would also flag the use of Auslan interpreters. I acknowledge the great work of the parliament to date with regard to the use of Auslan interpreters. I encourage all committee members that, where appropriate, they acknowledge and incorporate Auslan interpreters, even if they are advised beforehand that there will be deaf members in the gallery, so they can be aware of what is occurring.

Primarily the objects of these reforms are with a view to greater accountability and transparency and that will require resources to be provided to the committees and independence of the committees to do their job. It would be naive of us to think that these changes will not cop some flak from time to time. Rightly or wrongly, there will be the need for finetuning of these changes in the future. However, it would also be naive to view the parliament solely from the perspective of standing orders and committee procedure.

Our parliament has evolved tradition, custom and culture which are in themselves important as they capture intangible elements of the parliament and should not be dismissed. Indeed, any changes that are indifferent to tradition are fraught with danger. That being said, whilst I have some reservations about the changes that are proposed within this report, overall I am supportive of it and I am confident that, with the support of all 89 members of this House, these changes will not produce just the illusion of reform but will in fact generate reform that is worth the effort.

 **Mr McLINDON** (Beaudesert—TQP) (12.28 pm): I thank the committee for its review of the committee system. I thank the chair of the committee for giving a briefing to The Queensland Party and the Independents. That was much appreciated, even at short notice. Whilst there is good intent and a lot of objectives within the 55 recommendations, there are shortfalls in terms of the recommendations that could have been made.

I would like to start with understanding and appreciating history. As we know, the states were formed first. There was certainly a bit of argy-bargy between the states and then after Federation with the federal parliament. In this decentralised country and in particular in this decentralised state, we have seen over the decades a centralising of power. We are seeing this with the rifts between Canberra and the states. What we have seen is that as the population of Australia and Queensland increases the centralising of this power increases. In the fullness of time that will not be able to be sustained.

I note that the chair of the committee has said that the review of the committee system was the most comprehensive assessment of our parliament's structure that has been undertaken. I would beg to differ. In terms of the fullness of this debate, I do not think they have gone deep enough or wide enough in terms of including real measures to make the Queensland parliament more accountable. Having said that, there was obviously good intent. What needs to be addressed—and this was alluded to by the

chair in the foreword—is the fact that our parliament is often criticised for not having a house of review as do other states. She goes on to say that they have included some annual costs of upper houses in other states and a comparison of the Queensland parliament's committee budget.

Queensland is in a unique situation, being a unicameral parliament. We are currently seen as one of the least accountable state parliaments in Australia. We have the golden opportunity to make Queensland one of the most accountable states in Australia. That would be achieved by the reintroduction of the upper house. It may not be called the upper house; it could be a board of review, a second checkpoint, a filter. The current system is flawed and has extreme shortfalls. We are still ignoring the elephant in the room which is the fact that we do not have a second checkpoint, like every other state.

The model which I have been proposing for some months now, which I am working on to be part of a bill to be introduced into this House, is the reintroduction of the upper house and for that issue to go to a referendum. It is all well and good to say that people do not want an upper house. They may not. How many people actually understand it? How many people have we asked? As we approach 90 years without an upper house, I think it is time to put it to the people. We need to go beyond that and put models to the people. That is the way we would get a very democratic outcome.

The model of The Queensland Party is that the mayors would form a body of councils. That would balance the ledger in terms of the disparity between rural and regional Queensland and South-East Queensland. As we know, 61 of the 89 seats are in South-East Queensland. That means there is a bottom-heavy voter base for the major parties and the system works against the needs and wants of rural and regional Queensland.

I have met the good mayor of the Torres Strait, Fred. The further north one goes, the more one hears the people wanting to be part of their own state. We have had talk of splitting the state and North Queensland breaking away from southern Queensland. It indicates that the people are looking for another system—a better system.

We have a golden opportunity to look outside the square and look at a model that does not just reflect the models in the other states, because I think they, too, are flawed to a large degree. If there is a political party that has power in the lower and upper house then it undermines the role of the secondary place that the legislation goes through. I think we have a golden opportunity to make that a house largely of independent mayors, and that will balance the ledger for rural and regional Queensland.

I would like to see that type of model as the blueprint for the whole of Australia—in every state. Only then would we have a genuine second checkpoint in the parliament. We have seen over the last couple of years very contentious issues—issues such as the water takeover and the debacle still facing water users and consumers today because of the argy-bargy between local and state governments and the state taking that off the councils. Something like that would never have happened under the model that The Queensland Party is proposing. I think it would be ideal to have that as a recommendation and put it to the people. I call for a referendum at the local government elections in March next year. What better time to do it so that the local governments and the mayors realise that they should have a seat in George Street as well? The mayors are busy, but this review process would only be triggered for legislation that was divided on in the lower house and received a one-third vote against it. This would make sure that the safety net was not abused. Some 90 per cent of the bills in this parliament are passed with bipartisan support. Roughly 10 per cent of bills would have to go to the second checkpoint. It is a very rational approach.

If people from places like the Torres Strait who want to separate from the rest of Queensland had a seat in the red chamber then it would change their outlook. They would be proud of being part of Queensland. If those in the regions of North Queensland knew they had a second voice it would help. Members might think it is a radical plan, but the other states would use it as a benchmark for what they are doing.

As we know, the Westminster system never talked about political parties. They were never mentioned in the original models. Yet we have found ourselves in a situation where the system has been overpoliticised and the party machines have taken over.

Mr Horan: So you formed a new one.

Mr McLINDON: That is right. I take the member's interjection even though he is out of his seat. The member for Toowoomba South said that that is why I formed a new party. That is exactly why I formed a new one. It is a vehicle that can give autonomy to members to truly represent their electorates, as was originally intended in the Westminster system. If the member would like a copy of The Queensland Party's constitution, I am more than happy to send him one.

The member for Rockhampton has also made the suggestion that the Speaker be independent of the parliament. This is something I have mentioned in the past as well. I support the member for Rockhampton in this call. It could be a former Speaker of the House or someone who is not elected and does not have a duty first and foremost to their electorate. That is certainly something that should be looked at.

The Premier stated yesterday that there was no real support for an upper house. We could ask most people on the street what an upper house is and they would think it is the second level of a Queenslander. They need to understand that we are the most unaccountable state in Australia. The only time we are accountable is the short-term cycles of 2¼ years when we go to the polls. Currently the scores are 51, 32, five and one. Why would we keep going back to a footy match when it is the same score every single time?

Legislation appears to be signed, sealed and delivered before it is even debated in what I refer to as the George Street theatre. This is certainly not good enough. I do not think the proposed new committee system will go far enough. The nine new committees that reflect the portfolios will create mini lower houses with the government advantage at every point of the way, barring the PCMC. All we would have with these nine committees is a four to three scenario—four government members and three non-government members.

At every step of the way any legislation is signed, sealed and delivered. It is not a genuine approach in trying to achieve a greater level of transparency and accountability. I think it is fluffing around the edges. I am very disappointed—despite my seven years in the Liberal Party, three years in the National Party and 18 months in the LNP—that at every step of the way the so-called conservatives who uphold the Westminster system have stated that they are for an upper house and yet the LNP has failed to put a model forward. It has failed Queenslanders. It cannot constantly have a position that is pie-in-the-sky. This is one of the critical reasons I left the party. It is not because I walked away from the party; the party walked away from its conservative base. It is as simple as that.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr McLINDON: Well may they chuckle now, but they talk about the Westminster system and say that they want an upper house and what did they do in the Joh era? It was never reintroduced. There is no genuine will; there is no genuine desire. That is why we have bipartisan support now. What we have is the Coles and Woolworths of Queensland politics. What we are seeing is a pacified merger which will actually dilute genuine scrutiny in these so-called subcommittees and the parliament. We actually need to step outside the parliament and look from the outside in rather than from the inside out. At some point we have to stop kidding ourselves and realise that we have to stop this dictatorial process that Queenslanders have found themselves in. That is why so many people have disengaged.

I have released another policy today and I challenge the Leader of the Opposition: what is his policy on an upper house? He cannot say that he is for it and then not even mention it or not even produce a model to the Queensland people. The opposition clearly lacks leadership and vision and it is disappointing to see that it is not actually fulfilling the role of an opposition, hence The Queensland Party.

The nine superportfolios should be a reflection of nine superportfolios in the government. I think we have too many portfolios and we have lost our way in terms of the roles and responsibilities of state government. Maybe those superportfolios could have a senior and a junior minister, because there is no way that one minister could properly handle their portfolio for all of Queensland's 4½ million people. I think they need a right-hand person alongside them as well, and this is something that The Queensland Party will be announcing in the weeks to come. We will announce the real roles and responsibilities of ministers to ensure that we are not overlapping and overstepping on federal and local government responsibilities. It is like having mini lower houses where the score is already won by the government. What we are doing is duplicating on nine smaller levels what already exists in the House currently, which is flawed.

The member for Waterford is right in that the upper house was rather obstructionist in the lead-up to 1922 when it was abolished, and it certainly was not in the spirit of debate that it was abolished. If one reads the history, it was put to a referendum in 1917 when people voted overwhelmingly in support of keeping it despite its shortfalls at the time. I would never look at introducing an upper house where members are appointed, as they were back in the day. I want somewhere where they are popularly elected, there are no extra politicians and huge cost savings in terms of accountability. That is the model that The Queensland Party will be putting to Queenslanders in the lead-up to the next state election. I have actually received an overwhelming response on that from many of the mayors—including some who might surprise you—in terms of supporting this model and also support from councils. Because they are often at the whim of state government, they know that they could be overridden overnight on so many different issues. They certainly look forward to a healthy balance of accountability and a ledger that actually represents the whole of Queensland, not just the south-east.

I also give credit to the Leader of the Opposition for indicating that the report should have included section 56 and acknowledging that this was something which was lacking—that is, for it to be illegal to lie. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for still standing by his decision that that should have been included in the recommendations.

It is interesting to note that when the upper house was abolished there were 51 members of the ALP—Theodore actually voted for that—and there are 51 members today. So it is amazing how things have not changed, even after 90 years.

Ms Grace: The more they change, the more they stay the same.

Mr McLINDON: Correct. I take the interjection from the member for Brisbane Central: the more things change, the more they stay the same. The old saying is that if you keep doing what you have always done you will always get what you have always got. Unless we start looking outside the square and being genuinely brave and genuine to the Queensland people, we are still going to experience the same shortfalls in the system. To add salt to the wound, in 1934 they doubly entrenched it in that they had the audacity to turn around and say, 'If you want it back you need a referendum.' It originally did go to referendum in 1917 and the people wanted it to stay. It is no surprise that the Labor Party's position is that it does not want it reintroduced. However, we need to look at a different model with no extra politicians, huge cost savings and where they are not appointed but are already popularly elected by the people. I certainly look forward to introducing that bill in the coming months into the parliament and to the public debate.

I also want to acknowledge the member for Gladstone for her comments in that she has grave concerns that we are politicising this committee. She said that the elephant in the room was that there was no Speaker appointed to the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, and that is extremely concerning because the Speaker in the Westminster system is the independent authority that oversees the operations of the House. The current situation is that the Speaker comes from the government of the day, but I believe that if it has to be an elected person it should be one of the Independents. However, I think that the current Speaker has done a very creditable job in executing his role as the Speaker of this great parliament and has ensured that he has exercised that in a bipartisan manner. Regardless of the behaviours of yesterday's, today's or future Speakers, I believe that it undermines the role of the Speaker to disregard his input into such an important committee that oversees the operations of this House, and that to me is a very grave concern.

I moved a notice of motion regarding parliamentary reform on 14 September relating to time limits in question time and speaking to bills. I am disappointed that the committee has taken up a couple of them in terms of making speeches shorter, but I still think that in question time in fairness to the taxpayers of Queensland questions should be able to be asked from the government to the opposition. When in opposition or on the crossbenches, we too should be accountable to the Queensland public. My motion suggested that 15 questions should be asked from the opposition to the government and five questions should be asked from the government to the opposition. That way you raise the bar and hopefully would not have a complacent opposition, because it too knows that it is going to be in the firing line, and there is nothing wrong with that. That might prevent some comfortable arrangement of it being happy to sit in opposition. That is something that should be looked at and is required in terms of proper accountability. That is something that we should certainly look at. I also believe that a vote to guillotine legislation should be made up of two-thirds of the parliament so that it cannot be steamrolled. We have seen numerous pieces of legislation being guillotined in this parliament, and I think that is quite concerning.

There also needs to be a realignment of the portfolios—for example, Child Safety and Sport. Sport should be in Tourism. Child Safety should be a stand-alone portfolio. I thank the minister for getting on to an issue that I had in Beaudesert the other day within 10 minutes. In giving it justice and for him to be able to respond to that was certainly a surprise to me, and I thank the good minister. However, Sport should go to Tourism and we should start realigning these nine portfolios to truly reflect—

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr McLINDON: With all due respect, Minister, I think there are a lot of children who would like one person's focus on the more serious issues rather than cars going around a track. That is fine because it is good tourism dollars, but I do not think we should mix a very serious issue with cars going around a track. If the good minister dedicated as much time to Child Safety as he does to Sport, the department would not be such a debacle.

Recommendation 15 states—


The Committee recommends that all committees consist of six members with three members nominated by the Leader of the House and three members nominated by the Leader of the Opposition to reflect the composition of the non-government membership in the House.

There has been very little weight, if any, given to Independents or minor parties within this document, and this is the problem with our political system. It is a primitive two-party system that has been taken for granted for far too long not only in this state but also in this nation. What we have seen is a cosy arrangement between a false opposition on one hand saying it is going to make these changes and then when it gets into power it exploits the same shortfalls of the current government. We need a genuine approach of looking at this holistically and saying, 'How can we get Queensland right?' In 20

years how can we go from the lowest tax state to hitting \$90 billion? It has become a private enterprise. This parliament has become a private business that has separated itself from the 4½ million people that it supposedly represents. That will continue to happen until we are willing to lift the lid on George Street and open the doors to democracy, until we are willing to make these radical changes and until we can lead by example to the other states. I believe that their upper houses are flawed in that model, too. So much has changed in 110 years since Federation, and we have to understand that we need to adapt as well.

If the opposition wanted to truly reflect on its conservative so-called values and its respect and dignity for the Westminster system, I challenge it today to put a model up for the upper house. If not, it should take it off all of its documents and not talk about it at the convention anymore. It should get rid of it and say that it is not for an upper house, because it cannot on one hand say it is and yet sheepishly endorse 55 recommendations that do not make any reference to the possibility of reintroducing an upper house. So, yes, I am calling for a referendum at the next general council elections in March to put it to the people. Our system of government is flawed. It does need changing. Let us be brave enough to put a clear, concise model on the public agenda and let us educate the public to say that what is going on in this House is not good enough.

We are going to come and go. It is as simple as that. There are going to be more politicians in this place who will be left with the same shortfalls and who will get incremented into the pits that we are currently in. If we have the vision, the capacity and the tenacity to say, 'We want to change this indefinitely,' then that truly would be historic. This document is not historic at all. It tinkers around the edges. It fails to look at the elephant in the room, and Queenslanders are screaming out for a better democratic system in this state. That is what I will be proposing with The Queensland Party. I look forward to proposing that so that all communities can truly have a say in this great state so that the next 90 years will not be as flawed as the past 90.

 **Hon. DM WELLS** (Murrumba—ALP) (12.49 pm): This could prove to be the wisest and most far-sighted initiative of the 53rd Parliament. The honourable member for Sunnybank made modest reference to her career—a career which I watched and can report upon. It was a very distinguished career in which she achieved much, including, for example, significant improvements to the building code, reforms in the corrective services area, significant fair trading reforms as well as a significant reduction in the crime rate. She said that, in light of her career, this would be nevertheless a significant achievement were it to come to fruition. May I say this, Mr Speaker, through you: Judy, if this does happen, this is your finest hour. This is a potentially great reform, and I would like to explain why.

A great deal of the debate that occurs in this House—probably more than 90 per cent of the debate—is debate in the context of settled policies. The public generally thinks that we are going at it hammer and tongs arguing the point nearly all of the time, but really what we are doing most of the time is refining settled policies. In that context, the suggestions that honourable members make in the course of the debate can often be very, very generative suggestions indeed, but very few of them get taken up and the obvious reason for that is that it is too late. For example, by the time the opposition spokesperson moves the amendment, everybody is already locked in, the debate has to be completed within X minutes, and if it happens to be late at night the Parliamentary Counsel has probably gone home but if Parliamentary Counsel has not gone home—because some of them do work late at night—there probably is not time to draft it and check it, and so on and so forth. So good ideas get wasted. There are in fact, I suggest, in many debates enough crumbs of wisdom discarded to make another healthy loaf.

I know of very few occasions when ideas that have been raised extemporaneously in the chamber actually do resonate in legislation. The one case I do know about was 22 years ago. Paul Clauson was the Attorney-General and he was introducing a legal bill and the then shadow Attorney-General, which happened to be me, indicated a desire to move an amendment of a comparatively technical kind. His adviser, Brian Stewart, said to me, 'Yes, this is obviously right and if you give us a bit of a slack we'll spend a bit of time and get it drafted properly so that we can improve the legislation.'

So I only know of one occasion. There undoubtedly would have been other occasions over the last couple of decades but very rarely does it happen. But with these reforms, it will happen all the time. With these reforms, the suggestions made in the chamber now that have merit will already have been made before the committee. With these reforms, the combined wisdom of honourable members is going to be infused into each piece of legislation. That is why this is such a great reform that I think is really generative.

I know that the member for Sunnybank and her colleagues have spoken of the New Zealand precedent. Like the committee, I also visited New Zealand. I have seen the New Zealand system in operation and I have seen how well it works. What it does is incorporate the accumulated wisdom of an entire parliament into the legislation which that parliament produces, something which we have not been doing. I would like to indicate my respect to all the members of the committee for what they have achieved by getting this on the table.

This is a free debate. I am told that the committee welcomes constructive criticism as well as adulation. In those circumstances, I specialise more in the former than in the latter so let me return to my comfort zone. The worst recommendation in this report is one that has received very little attention—that is, the proposal to appoint lay members to the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee. I would see this as a derogation from democracy. Appointing people to parliamentary positions has had a rather dubious history in Queensland. The upper house we abolished in 1922 was a non-elected House where everyone was appointed. We actually used to have a house of lords in Queensland. I concede that the recommendation here is not to appoint a whole chamber of members; they were not proposing to appoint a house of lords, just one or two law lords on the CMC committee. Mind you, that one or two would hold the balance of power on the CMC committee. Decision making, therefore, would pass out of the hands of people who have a mandate from 30,000 people and into the hands of some non-elected individual with no democratic mandate whatsoever. Exactly why anyone would want to do this is not clear. I could not see any reasoning for it in the report.

The very notion of lay members is an odd one. The committee is entirely composed of lay members already. If the committee wants certain expertise available to it, it can second experts to its staff or consult them, but the fact is that the work of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee is best done by democratically elected representatives and that is why Fitzgerald said to set it up that way.

If we are going to have in a democracy a branch of the executive, and the CMC is part of the executive which has the powers of a standing royal commission and the resources of an espionage agency—and I believe implicitly that we need to—then the oversight of that body has to be in the hands of a bipartisan group of elected people. Organisations develop their own culture. Closed organisations, as crime commissions necessarily have to be, develop their own cultures more stridently than many others. When you invest men and women with God-like powers, it is only a short step for them to disregard the rights of mortals. They need to have some sense that they have to account to the people's elected representatives in order to remind them that their role is being performed in a democratic environment.

Much ink has been spilled over the proposal to set up a Committee of the Legislative Assembly, which has already been fondly referred to by previous speakers even before its existence as the CLA, or referred to rather more bibulously by some speakers as CoLA. This committee would include the Leader of the House, the Premier, the Deputy Premier and their respected shadows. I note that the member for Sunnybank advises that it is no longer intended to go ahead with the proposal to invest these individuals with the powers of the Privileges Committee. That is good because to do so would be like sacking the judiciary in a football game and appointing in their place the captains of the opposing sides. The work of the Privileges Committee is indeed special work and requires members to make dispassionate and judicious investment of time. It needs to be done by people a little bit more removed from the ruck and tumble of the parliamentary contest or at least a little bit removed from the epicentre of that contest.

It is also proposed that the Committee of the Legislative Assembly should determine the budget and make submission to the government for the money. The Speaker is not to have this role and is also divested of a role in maintaining the parliamentary precinct. This leaves me wondering who, if not the Speaker, is to provide the submissions to the budget review committee. If the committee, not the Speaker, is to make the submission, does this mean that the Premier and the Deputy Premier have to sign off as members of the committee on the submission and then when they get to the other side of the budget review committee table knock it back because it is too high?

If the Speaker is not going to be involved in the decisions regarding the construction and maintenance of Parliament House, who is? If day-to-day management decisions are going to be made by a Committee of the Legislative Assembly, are we really going to have a committee of high-powered, political heavyweights deciding the personnel in electorate offices? Does this seriously mean that six of the busiest people in the state are going to be turning their attention from what current economic challenge or natural disaster happens to be the order of the day to a discussion about what to do about some broom cupboard in the Parliamentary Annexe? If it is not going to be the parliamentary committee but the minister for public works who decides these things, then what of the objectives stated by a number of committee members that MPs should have more involvement in the day-to-day running of the parliamentary precinct? May I suggest that careful thought needs to be given to lines of accountability here. You cannot have the Speaker front the estimates committee unless you give him, or in some future parliament perhaps her, a role in the disposition of resources, but if the Speaker does not front the estimates committee you lose the capacity to require a level of accountability for what happens in this precinct that has now become traditional.

A scrutiny of legislation committee performs a very specialised task. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has been retained, I note, in New Zealand along with the other reforms that we are proposing here. Perhaps that is because of the specialisation. It would be nice to think that the portfolio committees would all have regard to the fundamental legislative principles when they were making whatever recommendations they were going to make with regard to the bills before them. But the reality

of it is that their focus is going to be, like the focus of the minister who initiated the bill, on the reality of achieving an outcome as far as the legislation is concerned. They are not going to have the specialised attention to the fundamental legislative principles that would be capable of being delivered by a scrutiny of legislation committee. So I do have some concerns here. I am not quite sure about this one, but I do note, at the expense of being repetitive, that in New Zealand they have retained it.

Sitting suspended from 1.01 pm to 2.30 pm.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O'Neill): I call the member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: Madam Deputy Speaker, may I congratulate you on your sense of tradition and of the history of this parliament in your unilateral action of bringing back the wig! But more seriously, can I compliment you on the support that you and other colleagues are giving to the cause of defeating leukaemia.

When one makes a speech that is punctuated by a break, one feels an irrational sense of obligation to say something of substance both before and after the break. However, I forbear. To say something different would risk a charge of inconsistency and to say the same thing again would be merely tedious. So I will simply refer to what I said before lunch and say that, those details aside, this initiative is a brilliant one. The honourable member for Sunnybank and all of her colleagues will probably be remembered in the annals of those who are familiar with the workings of this place for generations to come.

If these reforms are introduced, the parliament will be placed to take into account in its legislation the constructive suggestions of a much wider range of members. The benefits to the people of Queensland will be profound.

Mrs SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (2.32 pm): I am always delighted to follow the member for Murrumba, the Hon. Dean Wells. He is such an astute speaker. I am pleased to rise to speak about this issue of fundamental change within the current committee system. Over the past couple of days I have listened to both government and non-government members who were on the review committee, and all speakers were clear in their support of the process. One comment was that they all worked together as parliamentarians and not as members of a political party. In fact, at times some of the members of the committee on the same side of politics argued. It is a very comprehensive report, with a lengthy number of recommendations—in fact, they total 55—that are sound and very reasonable and, if implemented, will make a huge legislative change to the way in which this parliament operates. As the chair of the review committee, the Hon. Judy Spence, said, the recommendations reflect our own unique parliamentary circumstances and were never intended to copy entirely any other parliament.

I have found the experience of chairing the Environment and Resources Committee very rewarding. I have enjoyed working with my colleagues and valued parliamentary staff on a number of detailed reports. It has been a wonderful experience and I believe very worthwhile. I am now far more knowledgeable in the areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency, which we covered in our initial reports. We have had several open forums where interested people could come along and express a view and my committee was able to ask questions. From this experience and the work undertaken, my only concerns over the past few years were that the committee could not meet as regularly as I would have liked, that our resources were definitely extremely limited and that the reports we spent so much time on may well end up on a shelf somewhere and not given the entire credit that they deserve.


I was happy with the current system, but I have only ever known this one. I have not known any others. As I have said, I have got a lot out of the ERC, but I have listened to the review committee members about overseas committees, such as the ones in New Zealand and Canada, which have a much more important role.

Queensland does not have an upper house and the committee does not recommend it. I am pleased about that, as I think the idea of more politicians would upset many residents for any number of reasons. The review committee unanimously agreed that the change was necessary and that this is the time to implement it. The 55 recommendations are a blueprint for change and so far in the debate have been widely accepted by both sides of the House. I want people to be interested in the work of the committees and I want other parliamentarians to be even more interested. I believe that these fundamental reforms will certainly achieve this.

As chair of the ERC I made a submission to the Committee System Review Committee and I raised two issues. One was about the fact that the House allocates very little time to debating committee reports and the recommendations made in them. In my submission I noted that, excluding estimates committee reports, oversight reports and annual reports, there have been 191 substantive committee reports tabled since 2000 yet the House has spent a combined total of only 45 minutes debating them. The Clerk made the same point in his submission. I was heartened to see that the CSRC picked up on this issue in its report and that my suggestion that at least one hour each sitting week be dedicated to debate of committee reports has been recommended. Yesterday afternoon I was further heartened to hear that the government has indicated it will be supporting this recommendation.

The second point I raised in my submission was that it should be possible for the House to debate committee reports together with the government responses to them. This is about the timing of these debates. This issue does not appear to have been picked up by the CSRC but could still be addressed in the revision of the standing orders. I remain hopeful that this will happen.

I would like to commend the committee for its work. I certainly appreciate all the time and energy that it committed to it and I look forward, certainly, to being a part of a strengthened committee system.

 **Mr DICKSON** (Buderim—LNP) (2.36 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to this debate regarding the review of the parliamentary committee system. The review committee was established by this parliament on 25 February 2010. The purpose of this committee was to conduct an inquiry and to provide a report on how the parliamentary oversight of legislation could be enhanced. The inquiry also examined how the existing parliamentary system could be strengthened to enhance accountability.

I note that yesterday the Leader of the House said that she believed that ‘... senior members of our committee have been occupied as ministers, shadow ministers or opposition leaders for the past decade or so’. As such, the members realised they had not taken a sufficient interest in the way the parliament was being run or, indeed, how effectively the committee system had been operating.

I understand that, except as a matter of urgency, newly introduced bills will be considered by a committee, which can also facilitate public hearings before the bill is debated in this parliament. There has not been an upper house or house of review in Queensland since 1922. The committee report says that the committee should ensure greater accountability. Currently, the parliament has a large government majority.

The changes to the system will establish nine new committees to scrutinise government portfolios such as Police, Transport and Education. These new committees will have the power to forensically examine issues such as the Queensland Health debacle. Yesterday I heard the Deputy Leader of the Opposition say that senior public servants—acting directors-general and above—should also appear before these committee hearings. I think that is a good idea.

One reservation I have regarding the recommendations of this report is to how the role of the Speaker may be affected or diluted. I note the comments yesterday of the member for Rockhampton, who was part of the review committee. The member for Rockhampton stated in the chamber—

... I was most surprised when the committee report came down that the Speaker actually went public and registered his disapproval with it. I think that was improper. I think it was intemperate.

The member for Rockhampton continued—

I think it was a discourtesy to the members of the committee.

The member for Rockhampton then went on to say that the committee’s case was virtually ‘vetoed at the outset’ by the Speaker’s comments. I want to place on the record that I believe that both sides of this parliament, and indeed the people of Queensland, have been well served by this Speaker. Unfortunately for the member for Rockhampton, the Speaker asked publicly a number of legitimate questions regarding the possible undermining of the Speaker’s role and authority. Recommendation 12 is that the responsibilities for the management of construction and maintenance of the parliamentary building and electorate offices, along with the relevant budget, be transferred to the Department of Public Works. I see that recommendation 4 of the committee is that the Department of Public Works be overseen by the Transport and Infrastructure Committee. I wonder if there is a position on that committee for the Speaker.

Recommendation 18 of the committee is that the Crime and Misconduct Act 2001 be amended to provide that the chair of the PCMC be a member nominated by the Leader of the Opposition. I think that is a good idea, too. The report calls for greater use of open and publicly broadcast proceedings of the PCMC meetings. I am a member of that committee. I do not know if that will be possible in a lot of circumstances. There is so much information that we get that a lot of people will never hear about. I think that is probably the way it should be. One never knows what those findings will be and who will be hurt in the process. I do not think that that will be publicly voiced a lot or very often.

Regarding the voting rights of committee chairs, I note that the committee was satisfied that as these proposed committees will have an even number of government and non-government members it is desirable for chairs to have a deliberative or casting vote to ensure that deadlocks can be resolved. That is another positive.

Finally, on the question of resources for these committees, I echo the words of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The committees will not be able to function correctly or deliver better outcomes for Queensland if they do not receive appropriate funding. Last year’s annual report for the New South Wales upper house shows that the Legislative Council had an operating cost of \$26,083,000. If our committees are going to cost even several million, as long as they deliver better outcomes for the people of Queensland I believe every Queenslanders will be very, very happy with this motion before the House today.

I echo a lot of the statements made by many members that it is time for change. The way we will be judged in the future is by the outcomes we produce. I commend the committee for the hard work it has done. I know that its members have been looking around the world at different policies put forward by different governments. I think that we have to give this a go. As a speaker said earlier today, if you continue to do the things you have done in the past nothing will change. This is a great opportunity to have better outcomes for the people of Queensland. I commend the minister for bringing it forward.

Mr FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (2.42 pm): I rise to participate briefly in this debate. I have a number of concerns, which I have raised both privately and publicly with some of the key players concerned. In some respects there is no doubt that this is one of the most sweeping changes that has been proposed for the Legislative Assembly in Queensland for a very, very long time. It is not just changing the way committees do business; it is quite a significant restructure—we might say that it is a whole new and parallel universe to the way some of the Westminster parliaments are run.

I do have some concerns, particularly in relation to the role of the Speaker. I think the Independents have been substantially overlooked in this process when one considers that we are now six out of 89 members. That is quite a significant number. I am concerned also that in some ways this is a centralisation of the power of the decision making of the parliament with the two major political parties, which sometimes are at war with each other and sometimes seem to collude with each other. It is a somewhat interesting situation. There has been much said about the general public being able to have a greater confidence in the parliament, but the general public are very cynical about the self-serving nature of political parties and how they do things to favour themselves.

On the question of resources for the new committee, in a brave new world of trying to save money we might say, 'Well, let us move away from a Speaker directed parliament to a committee directed parliament or an executive arm of government directed parliament.' The problem with all of those things, as we have seen with local council amalgamations, is that they are never as cheap as what one thinks they are going to be. Sometimes the savings are wildly exaggerated.

What we are talking about with these recommendations is a fundamental shift of power, as I see it, away from the parliament itself to the executive arm of government. I, for one, have a great deal of respect for our current Speaker. In the eight years that I have been in this parliament I believe that he has been the most fair-minded and balanced Speaker that I have come across by a country mile. I think he has been treated shamefully in some of the things that have gone on in this parliament in the last couple of weeks. Many people talk about Westminster principles, notions of responsible government and the separation of powers. The whole thing becomes a little bit waffly, a little bit esoteric at times, as we try to come to grips with the philosophical positioning of power. I have for a long time been an advocate of having an independent Speaker in the House. I believe that that is an absolute must for the future of our parliament so that people have confidence in the decisions and the way that it is run. I guess in some respects this is not about individuals—or at least it should not be; it is about the institution of parliament and how it most appropriately exists and operates and, more importantly, moves on to the future. As I said, I have some concerns that if this new beast is not resourced properly then all of the good intentions in the world can go haywire very, very quickly.

Members ought to pause and consider the leadership of the House. The Leader of the House is the Leader of Government Business, not necessarily the Leader of the House on behalf of all members. I spoke to the Leader of the House about my concerns when we met a couple of days ago and she is clear on how I feel about that. I think that there should be some representation by the Independents—one person representing all of the Independents. This is a House where people are duly elected by their electorates. It is not a situation like New Zealand where they have political parties putting in people who are not necessarily elected. However, having been to the New Zealand parliament on a number of occasions and seen the way the committee system works in terms of scrutinising legislation, I would agree with the Leader of the House that it is a very robust system. In some respects, teasing out issues in a bill before it hits the floor of parliament has a great deal of merit. I did joke with the Leader of the House that we might just turn up with a rubber stamp if that is the case because I cannot see too many divisions if it is ironed out in the policy committee stage. Of course there still will need to be robust debate on that. One of the questions I would put to the Leader of the House is how she would see that happening. If all the heat is taken out of a bill back in the kitchen and not in the parliament, does that in some way take some of the moral turpitude out of what happens here? We like to engage in robust debate and I think that is certainly something that would be considered appropriate by the general public.

As I said, overall there are some very good points in the proposal. I have two main sticking points. Firstly, I think it is a broad and brave step to move away from a Speaker-controlled parliament to a parliament that is essentially controlled by the executive arm of government. I am not convinced that that is the best option. In fairness, even though I have always been very strong in my support for an Independent to be the Speaker, I must say that I believe that our current Speaker, whilst he is a member of a political party, has been very, very fair, perhaps to the detriment of his own relationship with people within his own party at times. But he has certainly played with a very straight bat and that needs to be recognised.

The second concern I have is that I would like to see the Independents recognised. I think the general public get sick of the fact that they perceive political parties as feeling like they own the parliament rather than the situation being that we are 89 members who are duly and equally elected by our constituents to represent them in this place.

Mr Schwarten: I'm elected because I'm a member of the Labor Party.

Mr FOLEY: Are you?

Mr Schwarten: Absolutely!

Mr FOLEY: Yes, but you are elected to represent all the people of—


Mr Schwarten: No, I am elected because I am a member of the Labor Party.

Mr FOLEY: I take that interjection from the member for Rockhampton. I am not elected because I am a member of the Labor Party; I am elected because I am an Independent.

Mr Schwarten: They want an Independent there. That's why.

Mr FOLEY: That is right. It is a broad church we run here and there are a few denominations.

In conclusion, as I said, it will be interesting to see the way that this pans out. It is inevitable that this will be introduced because the majority is certainly supporting it. I have raised my concerns and I look forward to seeing how those questions are answered.

 **Ms STONE** (Springwood—ALP) (2.50 pm): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the motion before the House. In 2001 when I was first elected I was very happy to put up my hand to go on the public works committee and I was very pleased that I was elected for that committee. I have to say that as a new member of parliament, I looked at some of the other committees and they appeared to be a foreign language. If that was put to our communities I think they would think they are a foreign language as well.

At that first meeting a member of parliament who had been around for quite a number of years said to us new members that the committee room was not the place to get hot and sweaty over disagreements. The fact is that the government has the numbers. That is the report and if we were going to get hot and sweaty over anything we should do it in this chamber or, obviously, if there is media present, at a committee hearing.

I am not too sure when the blandness of our committees crept in. I am not too sure whether it was a result of the media dropping out of inquiries or whether it was actually the blandness that made the media drop out.

During those years on the public works committee the media inquired about Suncorp Stadium I do not know how many times. They kept asking the committee when would we hold an inquiry into Suncorp Stadium. I was very pleased to hold an inquiry on Suncorp Stadium when I became the chair. Interestingly, with all that media questioning, not one media person turned up to the committee hearing.

As I said, I do not know when the blandness came into our committee system. Many of us attend national conferences with our counterparts from other states. From talking to them we have probably realised that there are better ways to set up our committee system. As we heard before, some of us have travelled and seen other committee systems in action and have certainly learnt a lot from those travels.

I am very pleased today because I believe that this report and its recommendations will result in our committee system being more contemporary. That was shown when we started receiving referrals to different committees in the last few years such as the issue of alcohol related violence and those other issues out there affecting our communities. That certainly has changed our committee system as well.

I want to talk specifically about recommendation No. 45, which states—


The Committee recommends that the bipartisan support of a parliamentary committee be statutorily required for any appointment (including reappointment) to any of the following positions—

and those positions are listed in that recommendation. The Law, Justice and Safety Committee has certainly had the oversight of many of those that are listed. I have to point out the use of the word 'consult'. At the moment that word means so many different things to different people. In one instance the committee was asked to nominate the chair for the selection panel. In another instance the deputy chair and the chair were asked if they would like to go on the selection panel. Then there was another incident in which we were given 24 hours notice and told, 'This person is being announced tomorrow. Can you convene the committee quickly and consult with your committee and get this through?' I am fortunate that I do have good committee members who came on board to do that. We certainly have seen the worst and the best in that respect. I say to the Leader of the House and the chair of this committee that that certainly does need to be looked at. There does need to be some criteria because it is working in many different ways in this process.

With those few words I would like to say I am very pleased to be able to support what I think is going to be a much better committee system that will look at the issues affecting our state.

I want to go back one more step. The thing that I have never been able to understand in our committee system is that we debate in this chamber the committee's recommendations regarding the bill. However, I have never understood why we did not have a process of the committee actually sitting down with the minister and going through those recommendations and explaining a bit more before those bills came to the House. This process will assist that process. Those reports cannot contain everything we have done. They cannot contain all the research, otherwise we would have volumes 2 and 3 sitting there as well as volume 1. The reality is that the reports are there and we put in as much information as possible as a brief and then the rest is really the committee's information and knowledge.

I think this process will be much better in terms of those recommendations being better understood by those bringing in legislation. With those few words, I support the motion before the House.

 **Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (2.55 pm): I would also like to say that I support the motion before the House. Given some of the previous contributions to the debate, I thought I would do a bit of research into the role of the Speaker, how the position of Speaker is established and how it functions in other parliaments. I understand that in the British parliament the Speaker of the House, by statute, is a chairman of the House of Commons Commission, the body responsible for the management and administration of the House of Commons. The commission comprises the Speaker as chairman, the Leader of the House, a member appointed by the Leader of the Opposition and three other members appointed by the House, none of whom may be a minister of the crown.

The book *How Parliament Works by Rogers and Walters* states—

Not only does the Speaker have the task of chairing the House, he is also an enormously influential figure in almost every aspect of the way that the House and its administration are run.

It goes on to say that the most important of the Speaker's statutory responsibilities is as the chairman of the House of Commons Commission.

In *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* it is noted that the Speaker is the chairperson of the Parliamentary Service Commission and has political responsibility for the services and facilities provided to members of parliament, and the control and administration of the parliamentary precincts is vested in the Speaker on behalf of the House. Also in the Canadian parliament, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states—

The Speaker is the head of the House of Commons administration and is responsible for its overall direction and management.

It goes on to say—

... all matters of administrative and financial policy affecting the House of Commons are overseen by the Board of Internal Economy ... The Speaker chairs the Board of Internal Economy.

In January I note that Queensland's Integrity Commissioner, Dr David Solomon, someone whom I hope all MPs in this parliament respect, prepared a commentary on what he saw as some of the major issues arising out of the Committee System Review Committee report. Dr Solomon had this to say in relation to the report—

... the committee, in Recommendation 12, also wants to transfer responsibility for the management of construction and maintenance of the Parliamentary buildings and electorate offices, and the relevant part of the parliament's budget, from the Speaker to the Department of Public Works. No reason is provided for this unprecedented transfer of power over part of the physical structure of the Parliament from the Parliament to the Executive Government. Making such a change would constitute a significant departure from the traditional independence of Parliament, and further diminish the role of the Speaker (and of the Clerk, who under the Parliamentary Service Act is the chief executive of the Parliamentary Service).

In my view the Parliament should retain both the Standing Orders Committee and the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, with the latter having oversight responsibilities in relation to the Integrity Commissioner.

I think it is important that we do acknowledge what an eminent person such as Dr David Solomon has said.

I also did some research in relation to these issues. A survey of 16 Australasian legislatures indicate that the presiding officer is a member of the Standing Orders Committee or its equivalent in 15 of those jurisdictions, and in 11 of those instances the presiding officer was also the chairperson of that committee. Given these matters and the contributions of everyone to this debate perhaps all members should take a deep breath and rethink some of those proposed recommendations.

I would like to place on record my personal support of John Mickel as Speaker of the House. During the recent flood disaster, the Speaker was one of the first to provide help and assistance not only to me and my electorate officers personally and by phone but also to members of our community. I believe that he has been fair and impartial in relation to his duties, and no doubt a lot of members of this House would attest to that.

My electorate office was the only one actually wiped out during the flood disaster. My staff and I, as everyone in this House knows, were operating from a tent at the side of the road. It was known as the tent embassy. There were a couple of hiccups initially in relation to me getting established in some sort of temporary office, but I have to say that John Mickel and Neil Laurie came out to Goodna to see what they could do to help out, and I would like to thank them for their care and compassion during that time. They also helped source temporary accommodation, and I would like to thank them for never, ever questioning my unwavering view to rebuild in the same shopping centre and in fact in the same space. So the member for Logan, John Mickel, in my view has done a good job, and I believe that he will continue to do a good job in this parliament. We should all give credit where credit is due.

I would like to turn now to the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. For some 35 years the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee and its predecessor have operated efficiently and effectively to serve this parliament. I am the current chair of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, and I was a member of this committee in my first term of parliament. Wayne Goss as Premier of Queensland in 1995 said—

The lesser known Committee of Subordinate Legislation has also played its part in the committee system. This committee is the oldest of the major standing committees. For 20 years, it has examined Government regulations to ensure that they do not infringe rights or liberties without good cause. On a number of occasions, the Government has agreed to amend regulations which the committee considered did not pay sufficient regard to individual rights, or required redrafting to express those rights more clearly.

Also in 1995 the then Premier, Wayne Goss, said about the new Scrutiny of Legislation Committee—

This committee will be a major safeguard of Queenslanders' rights and liberties against Governments that want to equip themselves with unwarranted and excessive powers. The committee will alert Ministers and the House to breaches of civil and legal rights in proposed legislation which it considers to be ill conceived or dangerous. Governments will then have to convince the House that there is a greater public interest in the action they propose than in the individual freedom it may limit.

I point out to the House that Queensland will be the only jurisdiction without a stand-alone Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. I believe that this is a backward move. For example, in the ACT there is a Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, which performs the functions of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. In New South Wales there is a Legislation Review Committee. In the Northern Territory there is a Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation and Publications. In South Australia there is a Legislative Review Committee. In Tasmania there is a Joint Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation. In Victoria there is a Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. In Western Australia there is a Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, a Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review and a Standing Legislation Committee. In the Australian Senate there is the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills, which is a legislative scrutiny standing committee, and the Senate Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances, which is also a legislative scrutiny standing committee.

In relation to the technical scrutiny of legislation, I would like to point out that all parliaments in Australia and New Zealand have a committee to conduct scrutiny, at least for subordinate legislation. These designated committees conduct technical scrutiny of bills based on principles related to the rule of law in relation to civil liberties or human rights. There are two aims. The first is to produce better laws by informing parliamentary debate about the consistency of legislation with identified principles and by influencing the future drafting of legislation—and it is this which I believe has been the greatest success of the current Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. The second aim is to raise the political costs for a government wishing to pass laws which may be inconsistent with identified principles. Furthermore, experience has demonstrated that these twin aims are achieved most effectively when the principles against which legislation is examined are explicit. The committee is able to operate with a sufficient degree of nonpartisanship and where it exercises and/or accesses relevant expertise. It facilitates the principle of legality where legislation may affect fundamental rights. It assists parliament to squarely confront the effect of legislation on those rights.

There is also professional development for members relating to technical scrutiny when they are on these committees—for example, human rights principles, administrative law and constitutional law. It also allows development of expertise in this parliament in relation to constitutional law. For subordinate legislation, it facilitates parliamentary control of delegated legislative power, ensuring that the parliament is provided with information regarding disallowance matters and issues relating to lawfulness. I think we need to point out that in New Zealand technical scrutiny is in fact undertaken by the Legislative Advisory Committee, which is serviced by the Ministry of Justice, with select committees examining relevant matters during examination of bills, assisted in respect of legal issues by legal staff from the Office of the Clerk.

I would like to point out also the benefits of technical scrutiny by a designated committee. Firstly, it encourages a consistent approach across Queensland legislation, assisting achievement of purpose that Queensland legislation is of the highest possible standards. This is particularly important in relation to the Legislative Standards Act, section 3. There is a constant nature of principled advice invaluable to preventing abuses of power or excesses of power. There is a counterbalance to power of the executive as able to ensure consistent focus on key issues such as parliamentary control of delegated power and uniform national laws. There is also unanimous, authoritative and non-partisan reports to parliament on

objective examinations of legislation completely independent of the executive and the courts. There is also a legislative tidying-up role, so to speak. Past committee reports have addressed general systemic legislative issues such as the use of Henry VIII clauses, instruments falling within subordinate legislation and subject to parliamentary scrutiny by way of tabling and disallowance, and scrutiny of matters for constitutional validity.

I would like to speak briefly in relation to Public Works having responsibility for this parliamentary building. Maybe it is because I remember Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen and his contempt for Queensland architecture that I am so concerned about this. But I can certainly remember when the Bellevue was knocked down in the middle of the night and how this parliament was known as the circus tent, particularly by public servants up the road in George Street. I can remember back to the 1970s—

Ms Spence: I think the Labor opposition might have contributed to that.

Mrs MILLER: It might have, too. But I remember when Parliament House was encased in some sort of tent. It was just incredible.

An honourable member: For West Indian termites.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, the tent caper was to get rid of West Indian termites. I was always told as a public servant that this was a result of decades of neglect of this most magnificent building. I am glad that the government has thought this through somewhat and that the parliament and the electorate offices that all MPs have will still be under the control of this parliament. It is my view that it should be retained as it is today.


I believe that portfolio committees may in fact be a good move. But I also believe that we should keep the stand-alone Scrutiny of Legislation Committee and that it should be kept in its current form. This is a view that I understand is shared by some academics and by the Queensland Integrity Commissioner, Dr David Solomon. I also think that if we are going to bring this system about—and I am sure that we are because it has bipartisan support—the new system should be reviewed in about two years to measure its cost, its efficiency and its effectiveness; how it has improved public input; how it has improved public debate; and how it has improved the application of fundamental legislative principles, the monitoring of subordinate legislation and how legislation is implemented in the departments and agencies.

With regard to my later comment, as everyone knows I was a public servant in my previous life—before I came into this parliament—and I can assure people that some of the pieces of legislation that came out of this parliament were very difficult to work with. Those developing the legislation had no idea what it was like to actually have a piece of legislation handed to them and be told, 'Off you go, you have to implement this.'

Dean Wells, a former Attorney-General, is in the chamber at the moment and I point out that one of the pieces of legislation that I had difficulty implementing and administering was the Justices of the Peace and Commissioners for Declarations Act. I think this is an issue about how legislation is put together in line departments. I am actually of the view that we should not have policy sections of departments drafting legislation without them talking to those who are going to implement that legislation. That is where it all falls over. It falls over when we get policy people who sit behind desks—who have never seen anyone in the community implement legislation—drafting policy and drafting guidelines for Parliamentary Counsel, and who very rarely talk to the specialist administrators who will be on the front line actually administering the legislation. The member for Murrumba knows very well that when I had issues trying to implement that particular act we ended up having to go back and amend the act on a couple of occasions because it was so very difficult to implement. That is because we had no input into what the legislation was going to look like from an administrative capacity.

I am a product of the School of Public Administration at the Queensland University of Technology. I was also taught about the role of a public servant by some of the most eminent public servants in this state, particularly people like Neil Macpherson. Basically their view was that as much of the legislation should be as broad as possible and we had to trust the public servants in relation to implementing that legislation. His view was that if it was not written in the legislation that one cannot do it then one can do it.

I think there needs to be some flexibility in relation to legislation in so far as the capacity of the Public Service to actually read the legislation and be able to implement it in a fair and impartial way on behalf of the government but also on behalf of the people of Queensland. With those few words, I support the motion.

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (3.12 pm): I would like to contribute to the discussion on the report of the Committee System Review Committee. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the work of the members of the committee from both sides and the Independent. The Leader of the House and the Leader of Opposition Business have put in a fair bit of work. Everyone has put a fair bit of work into it. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has done so too.

It is a comprehensive report containing a detailed examination of most of the facets of committee work in the Queensland parliament and also a good examination of the systems used in other parliaments. I commend the members of the committee for the time, energy, effort and enthusiasm they have put into it. As the Leader of House has said, they have a combined 130 years of experience. Who would have thought such a young looking group have spent so much time in this place. I think their time spent in here has been well applied in this report.

I would also like to acknowledge the bipartisan spirit that seems to have been enjoyed, at least amongst the committee members if not necessarily amongst all members in this place, in relation to the results of the report. Reading parts of yesterday's debate it was interesting to see the different views that were put forward by certain members in relation to the role of the Speaker, in particular. I suggest that I might have detected a little lack of bipartisanship on one side of the House in terms of some of the comments that have been made on the way through—particularly judging from some of the comments made by the member for Toowoomba North. The report contains 55 recommendations that are quite far reaching. If implemented as proposed by the committee they will probably be the most far reaching in many decades, it has been said.

At the outset, let me say that I enjoy being in this parliament. To no-one's great surprise, I will be running again. I enjoy being in this parliament for a variety of reasons. I disagree with those commentators—particularly in the media—and those cynics and critics outside of this place who say that this parliament has not or will not be able to achieve much that it has set out to do. Certainly it has achieved much over the past 151 years. We in this parliament have dealt with complex and difficult matters sensitively, compassionately as well as rigorously and robustly. I do not believe in some timid type of gentele debating club where everyone sits around and has afternoon tea and cucumber sandwiches. I believe in a big, robust and passionate parliament where people can express their views forcefully, passionately and with all the vigour that they want to bring into this place on behalf of their constituents. That is what this democracy is all about. I make no excuses for anyone in this place. I defend it vigorously in terms of what it is. Some people might think it gets a bit rowdy. Some people might think it gets a bit childish at times but it brings our—

Mr Schwarten: It is not a mausoleum.

Mr NICHOLLS: Exactly right. It brings the passions of the people who speak to us to life here in this place. That is exactly what it is for. It should not be a home of elites discussing things far above what they consider to be the common herd. It should be a place where we are all able to express our views vigorously.

Having said that, it does not mean we have to stay the same forever. There are better ways to move forward. There are better ways to go about the business of this place as technology changes, as education changes and as expectations change. I am very keen to support change in this place that makes it a better place as a representative place for the people of Queensland. I believe that the recommendations in this report will drive that better representation for the people of Queensland.

The history of Westminster democracies is one of mostly measured, sometimes violent but nevertheless significant advances in transparency, in openness and in accountability. We start traditionally with the Magna Carta. We ride through the English civil wars where we talked about lopping the heads off kings, past the Glorious Revolution and the end of James II in 1688. We talk about the Bill of Rights, which is still applicable today and still governs what we do in this place today and what most parliaments, based on the Westminster system, still do today. We had the establishment of the American colonies and their Bill of Rights, the British colonies throughout the world, the American Revolution, the Statute of Westminster and the Australia Acts. They have all traced a great history of the empowerment of elected representatives at the expense of the Crown.

If one sees what has gone on one sees the whittling down of the exercise of arbitrary prerogative and the transfer of power to the people through their elected representatives in places like this place today. Today, the Crown is represented by the executive government. Inevitably the changes that we have seen—those great battles that have taken place over the past millennia that have led to where we are today—have been fights about the tensions between the powers of the executive and the powers of the parliament. Sometimes the executive, the Crown, gets a little ahead and sometimes the parliament pulls it back again. But mostly the advance has been in favour of the parliamentarians, in favour of the openness and transparency that is being increasingly and rightly demanded by the electors, by the citizens, of any state. That has certainly been the case here in Queensland.

Anyone who has read the book that was recently released, *The ayes have it*, can read the history for at least the last half century of the changes in democracy and what some people might have loosely termed democracy back in 1965 or 1975 to where we see ourselves today. I do not think anyone would realistically say that we have not come a long way and that we have seen the change and the devolution of power from the executive, even in a strong unicameral house, a strong unicameral system like we have here in Queensland, to the representatives of this place. We saw that with the public accounts committee—something that was championed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by predecessors of this party and also taken up by people on that side.

Mr Hinchliffe: Some bits of the party.

Mr NICHOLLS: We are all one big family sharing in the same heritage now, particularly when it comes to advances—

Mr Hinchliffe: We're all Roundheads now, too, are we?

Mr NICHOLLS: As opposed to the Cavaliers. We all take those obligations seriously and we all understand that the people we represent take those obligations seriously, and God help anyone who tried to curtail the powers of an Auditor-General these days or wanted to take on an independent officer of the parliament. That would be frowned on not just by the people involved in the debate in this place but also by the wider public and by the media who take a greater interest in it. So power has quite rightly moved to the parliamentarians, and commensurate with that is the openness and transparency that we talk about and which these reforms are going to drive even further.

Let me address some of the nonsense that I heard earlier today from the Queensland Party, whose leader actually does not believe in the constitutional role of political parties, if one were to believe him, but who in the same speech—

Government members interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: He does not believe in their role—he believes they have no constitutional role—but in the same speech whinges and carries on because he is not being included in what is being done in this place. He cannot have it both ways, and in fact he is wrong. We all know that political parties have a longstanding constitutional role. Because they are not mentioned per se in the words of the Queensland Constitution or the Australian Constitution does not mean that they do not have a role. Of course they have a role. We have statutory office bearers who come from those political parties who have a role. The United Kingdom Constitution is not written down. It constitutes a whole history of precedent, of practice, of tradition, of acts—whether it was the Act of Union, the Act of Settlement, the Bill of Rights—that all come together to create the Constitution of the United Kingdom, and we have the same principles applying here. Who says that the reserve powers of a Governor or a Governor-General have to be written down? Because they are not written down, does that mean that they are not actually there? Of course not. The leader of the Queensland Party complains that he was not taken into account, that he was not consulted and that he was kept out of the debate. The price of admission to the debate about these sorts of things is to make a mature contribution and not simply to parrot ideas that are not even one's own. I say this to the Queensland Party: if it wants to be involved in a mature debate about how this place works and operates, it needs to make a mature, considered contribution to it and not go sprouting off the latest idea that was sent to it on a blogsite over the internet.

We need to be wary of dodgy theories of constitutional laws that have no bearing in fact, reality or parliamentary history and we should describe that type of speech as know nothing rot that goes along with the conspiracy theorists who talk about the Brigalow Corporation or the other conspiracy theorists who want to pay all of their fines in 5c pieces and do not believe in using cheques. It all comes together in one place and we should dismiss that rot for the rot that it is. It is like saying that astrology is the same as astronomy. It is the same sort of rot. I think we need to deal with some of those stories that are put about and that are taken up without any real sense of knowledge or belief.

For some time I have believed that the Queensland committee system has been stuck in the past despite the advances that have been made. My understanding when I came here and heard about the committee system was that it would act in a bipartisan way and that we would be able to investigate and get to the bottom of things and we would be able to hold the executive government accountable. I think a number of people on both sides have indicated that that belief that I held and that many of them held was becoming more and more illusory as we went on as the committees did not in fact investigate and were not free to investigate some of the things that they should have investigated.

It always struck me as odd what the government of the day did not want those committees to investigate, because inevitably it actually leads to better government. It is an advantage for the government of the day to be able to have these things explored. It puts the wood on the bureaucrats, on the office holders and on the executive to perform better and it gets rid of the propensity, if you like, to cover up mistakes and to hide things that are going wrong, and it delivers a better outcome. I could never understand why governments never wanted those committees to investigate things—whether it was, as the member for Rockhampton spoke about, the backflow device or whether it was the construction of Suncorp Stadium or whether it was the operation of tasers. All of those things would be better handled if there was an opportunity to investigate and the government said willingly, 'We want to see this investigation undertaken by a competent committee of office bearers and we want the report to come back so we can do it better next time.' I think the public would accept that, because I do not believe that the public expects perfection. We might think it does, but I think it is in fact pretty smart about these things and realises that mistakes can be made. Oppositions of course are very smart about these things and realise that governments should never make mistakes, but nonetheless we can do a lot better and our committee system has been stuck in the past for a while, particularly estimates committees, which are better than nothing but not a lot better than nothing. We need to do better.

I came to the idea of looking at the committee system after having spent a little bit of time in the States and looking at the way its committee system works. They are very powerful committees that are set up to investigate issues and can subpoena witnesses. This has led to great things that have seen the overturning of positions taken by powerful people—whether it was MacArthur wanting to run for the Republicans and talking about what he would do in North Korea or whether it was about the Patriot Act and what it was doing to people under George W Bush. There was great power in those committees all the way through.

Mr Hinchliffe: They've also been misused.

Mr NICHOLLS: Absolutely; the House Un-American Activities Committee. But I think the demagoguery that is prevalent in the United States is something that is less prevalent in Australia provided we stand up for the things that make sense and we stand up to, as I say, the know nothing debates that we sometimes get caught up in.

I was privileged enough to go with the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee to New Zealand with the member for Toowoomba North. While we were there talking to David McGee about ethics matters, we also had the opportunity to look at the operation of the committee system in a unicameral system. As has been said by the member for Callide and others, all sides of the parliamentary debate in New Zealand recognise the strength of the committee system and what it did. In fact, we were meeting with the Speaker of the New Zealand Assembly, Dr Lockwood Smith, when he said, 'You'll have to excuse me. I'm about to take a constituent down to a committee hearing. He wants to make a presentation.' I thought, 'That is just fantastic. Here we have the Speaker who is about to engage with fellow parliamentarians from across the ocean and who has to run parliament in 2½ hours time, yet he has a constituent that he wants to put into the committee system so they can give their point of view.' I thought, 'What a great system where that can take place, where you can get those views.' They take their constituents down to those committee rooms and get that feedback. That opportunity for public participation in the committee system is going to be wonderful and I think people will take it up. I know we get a bit cynical about it, but I think there will be enough people out there who will be interested enough to take that role on, and I hope that is the case.

If adopted, the recommendations in this report will move the Queensland parliament well into the 21st century. They will set up future generations of Queenslanders and parliamentarians for better legislation, a better understanding of their own legislation and ultimately a better government. There are some real benefits to it. However, the challenge is not just adopting the report and adopting the recommendations in the report but also in changing ourselves and adapting to a new system, to changing the mindset that we come into this place with and to understand what is expected of us when we sit on those committees. I think we can still come back in here and have the robust red meat debates that we are used to having and enjoy in order to get our philosophy across and express our point of view. But when we go into that committee system we have to go in with a view that, whether we like or dislike a particular piece of legislation, we have to make it a workable piece of legislation and make it the best piece of legislation that can come through, and I think that is very important. In the estimates process it will require all members to adopt the view that they are there to examine the executive and to hold the executive accountable. I think that that will require a change in mindset. There may well be some additional work that needs to be done with the parliamentarians to get them up to speed to understand how it works.

The member for Callide said that it is a great pity that not everyone here can go to New Zealand, but there might be opportunities to bring someone from New Zealand here to say, 'This is how it works,' and to explain how it works and to give us that—

Ms Spence: We're thinking of doing a seminar later in the year.

Mr NICHOLLS: Doing that type of thing would be wonderful for the people who have not seen that system in place. So those changes that we are talking about and the changes here will only take off and be effective and deliver those results for Queensland if we as MPs are prepared to change our attitudes.

There are a couple of recommendations I would like to talk about. I would like to point out my strong support for the changes to the speaking times which I think are long overdue. A number of people have said that. I know that I am getting to the end of my speaking time now—and I am expecting a motion to be moved to grant me an extension of time—but I know how much those opposite do enjoy the fact that I do stand here and take up every moment of my allotted time, both entertaining and amusing them as well as soundly berating them on the way through and beating them with the impeccable logic of my arguments.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that there is a culture, certainly in the opposition, of feeling that you need to speak for your allotted time—that in some way, shape or form if you do not take your full 20 minutes or your full hour you are somehow short-changing someone or you will be criticised for not doing the job when in fact we all know that after some period of time the debates are just people

bumping their gums for the sake of being able to say that they stood up and bumped their gums. It would be far better to appreciate the elegance of a brief but succinct and powerful argument than to have just a long, rambling speech. The opportunity to do that with bills and expand that to other speaking opportunities I think is vital. So I welcome the recommendations in relation to the changes to time limits.

As others have done, I express some concerns in relation to the role of the Speaker. We were all raised with the belief in the independence of the Speaker, the respect due to the Speaker and the role that the Speaker plays in this place. I have listened to the explanations given today and yesterday in relation to that role, and I get some comfort from the fact that the role of the Speaker is well understood by those making the recommendations and by the government in terms of what they are proposing to take up and the Speaker's role sitting on the Committee of the Legislative Assembly so far as standing orders are concerned.

I think the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee should be a separate committee, and I notice that the government has examined that. I do not think it should be a function of the House committee; it should be a separate committee for the important role it plays. It is not a policy role; it is, if you like, an internal role for the behaviour of the parliamentarians. I think that is important. It obviously needs to be properly and adequately resourced by the government. I support the vast majority of these recommendations. I thank the committee for its excellent work on this report.



Mr MALONE (Mirani—LNP) (3.32 pm): I certainly will not be using all of my allocated 20 minutes and I certainly will not be bumping my gums, as the previous speaker said. I take pleasure in speaking briefly to the report on the review of the parliamentary committee system in the Queensland parliament. I also congratulate the committee—the Leader of the House, who was chair, the Leader of Opposition Business, the deputy leader of the LNP in Queensland and the other committee members.

I have read through the report. I believe that it is a very substantive report that will certainly change how we handle business in this place. It is timely that we actually look at this. I entered this parliament in 1994. Some of the more experienced members of this parliament would realise that the committee system we have today was actually introduced in 1994. I recall the debate that we had at that time when we welcomed the estimates committees into this place. I can recollect the complimentary terms that were attributed to the committees and how they were going to be the best thing since sliced bread. We were going to be very accountable and there was nothing the government would get away with. They were going to make this place so much better and make the government accountable. I have to say that the actions that followed did not live up to the rhetoric.

I have been involved in quite a number of estimates committees over the years. All the way through we have seen certain ministers grandstand. I recollect a certain minister for primary industries who, regardless of the question you asked him, would spend the full three minutes allocated talking about something that was related in no way whatsoever to the question that was asked.

Mr Schwarten: He took more than three minutes.

Mr MALONE: Indeed, member for Rockhampton. If an interjection was made then another three minutes would be allocated, so with one question your allocated 20 minutes went down the drain. In recognising the member for Rockhampton across the floor, can I say that I was the shadow opposite him on a number of occasions, including for housing and public works I think. He was not a minister who wanted to answer every question; indeed, his comment to me was that he would prefer somebody from the department answered the question so he could find out what was going on. I really accepted that. I do not think it is necessary, quite frankly, for the minister to answer every question, even though it seems to be almost a badge of honour for the minister to answer every question and basically have 60 or more people sitting behind him like dummies. Unfortunately, the estimates committees have become almost irrelevant in a lot of ways. We could not continue with that and I think the step forward we are taking today will enhance the role of parliament.

Over the years we have seen come into this House legislation that has ultimately been brought back for amendment time and time again. We have seen legislation that probably should never have seen the light of day in this parliament without substantially more scrutiny. We have wasted many hours in this parliament debating legislation that I believe should never have seen the light of day. With the committee system being proposed now, legislation that does come before the House will be properly considered. Hopefully most of the issues will be debated before the bill actually gets into the parliament and is amended.


I think it will be a real test for all of us to work through the new system. I agree with some of the other speakers I have heard today that we should be able to review the system in a couple of years to make sure it is meeting the expectations we have of delivering good governance to this state.

In terms of the select committees being proposed, one of the issues that has to be looked at carefully is the resourcing of the committees. They will have a substantial workload and they will be very powerful. It certainly will be an issue in the public arena. The parliament needs to properly resource those committees and make sure they are able to meet the expectations we have of them.

I have actually served on quite a number of select committees—public works et cetera—and it was always disappointing that the government, through the chair of the committee, would not allow debate or scrutiny of certain projects. I understand that if the boot was on the other foot and we were in government we would probably do something similar. It was a fault with the way the committees were set up that all capital works projects in Queensland were not able to be scrutinised. Quite frankly, had we been able to scrutinise the South-East Queensland water grid and a few other projects, like the Traveston Dam, we may not have wasted huge amounts of public money. From the Queensland government's perspective, that would have been a far better outcome. The committees would have had the ability to scrutinise the spending of the government.


Obviously, the Committee of the Legislative Assembly will be a very powerful committee for the members of parliament to take back the operations of the parliamentary precinct. I believe that is a step in the right direction, but I also caution that the decisions that that committee makes have to also be brought under some scrutiny. I am not sure how that mechanism will occur.

Overall, I am heartened and I am very supportive of the report that has been brought down. I think a lot of very good work was done by the bipartisan committee and I congratulate all of those who were on it. From my perspective, one issue that I am not necessarily concerned about but I think we need to be very careful about is that we are moving very quickly to put this system in place. From what I hear the change is going to happen very quickly. As I said, we need to be very careful in the steps that we take forward, because they are very important steps. They are very significant moves forward for the Queensland parliament. We need to make sure that we have it right. Certainly, we need to make very deliberate movements forward in terms of putting together those committees, resourcing the committees and providing their role in the Queensland government, but we must make sure that we take the steps very deliberately and very carefully. With those few words, I support the report.

 **Ms van LITSENBURG** (Redcliffe—ALP) (3.40 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion for the *Review of the Queensland parliamentary committee system*. Our Westminster system is a time-honoured system of government that is among the most successful democratic systems in the world. That does not mean that parts of our legislative processes should not evolve to meet the needs of modern democracy and modern methods of operating. Queensland, along with New Zealand and Canada, have some of the minority of unicameral systems and there has been some discussion about accountability in unicameral systems. This Labor government is committed to a fair and accountable legislative system and it is prepared to take the courageous steps to do what it takes to ensure that Queensland has the best, most accountable legislative system that we can get so that we can deliver the best legislation and most democratic government possible for this parliament and for all Queenslanders. I believe that the vast experience of a high proportion of members of this government has enabled us to look broadly and objectively at how we can achieve better outcomes for this Legislative Assembly. I commend the opposition and crossbench members for their positive, bipartisan attitude that has enabled this process to be as successful as it has been in developing this report.

The review committee was bipartisan to ensure ownership and agreement of the new processes across the whole parliament. The review committee spent around a year looking into ways in which better accountability can be achieved and ways in which a broader number of parliamentarians from all sides of the House can have more input into the development of legislation. Under this proposal, the public will have an expanded opportunity to make submissions to the committees prior to legislation being passed.

I would like to commend the member for Sunnybank and the committee for their good work and their willingness to embrace substantial change to our committee system, which will affect the overall functioning of this parliament. The results could be a more collaborative parliament that would be able to achieve more effective legislation for the people of Queensland. I commend this review and its proposals to the House.

 **Mr HOOLIHAN** (Keppel—ALP) (3.43 pm): In speaking to the motion, I think it is fair comment to say that the Westminster system has been introduced in many countries in the world, albeit in a slightly different fashion. It has always relied on the tenet of the doctrine of the separation of powers. I think most of the people who sit in this House have at one time or another felt that they have become slight prisoners of executive government. Far-reaching proposals have been included in the review, and I have a couple of misgivings about some of them. But overall, I think that it will allow this parliament to start to properly administer and legislate.

I would like to thank the member for Sunnybank and the whole committee, bearing in mind that it was a bipartisan committee—it was a tripartisan committee because it included one of the Independents and in a parliament made up of a variety of groups or single people I believe that that was the way that it

should have been done. I will deal with the misgivings separately. The misgivings would have been even worse had I lived prior to 1922, which was when we abolished the Legislative Council. I think by this time in a modern society our Legislative Council would have become more and more—in the words of the Hon. Paul Keating—the same as the Senate: representative swill. That really ties the hands of the people's house.

All of us have come into this House—and I heard the member for Hinchinbrook mention about coming in—and we have become virtually an ombudsman for our constituents. But other than caring for our constituents and acting on their behalf, I would submit to everyone that we come into this House as legislators. We come into this House to be able to act in a way that advances the welfare of the people of Queensland and, in doing that for the whole of the state, we also do that for the people we represent.

The review that was undertaken has gone probably a lot further than what a lot of people would have liked and there will be people who will feel ill at ease. I thought I said 'unrepresentative' swill but I have just had a note passed to me to say that I said 'representative' swill. So I will change the comments by the Hon. Paul Keating to 'unrepresentative' swill. I thank the member for Murrumba for the correction of my diction.

As I said, we come into this House as legislators to advance the welfare of the people of Queensland and directly to advance the welfare of the people we represent. More and more we are dealing with an executive rather than dealing with matters in this House. I am sure that everyone would agree that in a lot of areas that has become very stylised. The estimates committees are a case in point. There were people who I sat with on estimates committees who expressed their concern that they did not feel that they had achieved anything. If you do not achieve anything, I think it becomes so much wasted effort.

The proposals seek to advance the abilities of people in this House to consider the legislation that comes before the House. I am sure—and I will probably get a lot of argument about this comment—that there are many people in this House who, quite honestly, when they stand up to give a speech have never, ever read the fine print in the bill. There will be people who will give an outline, or they will go into the explanatory notes, but they have never read the bill.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I will take the interjection by the member for Rockhampton. I think I could take it a little bit further. Sometimes I have had my own personal belief that some people may not have been capable of reading the bill. But that is something that has to rest with each one of us.

We come in here and we listen to debate and so very often, instead of having somebody who can talk about a bill, its background and the reasons why we need it, we have five four-minute speeches repeated over and over—usually from the other side berating the Labor Party.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I will take that interjection from the member for Brisbane Central that it may be four five-minute speeches, but it is the same thing over and over. What this review will do, in my view, is allow people to concentrate on the legislation that has come before the House, give due consideration to the reason why the bill is necessary and be able to speak at least knowledgeably about the bill instead of about everything else in the state of Queensland and forget about the bill. The proposals by the review committee for a reduction in speaking time I think will make people more concise in their approach to things.

Ms Grace: Less boring.


Mr HOOLIHAN: I will not take that interjection. It will make them more concise and it will help them to focus their thoughts on where they are going and what they are hoping to achieve.

I have a couple of reservations. As many people know, I am the chair of the PCMC. I have some reservations about the proposal for a layperson or laypeople to be appointed to that committee or, indeed, to any committee. I noted that the member for Hinchinbrook made the same point. It is a parliamentary committee and I have very grave difficulties in trying to justify the inclusion of a layperson who is not elected to parliament—maybe as an observer. The proposal in relation to being more open in discussions I think will certainly enhance the application of that committee. I do have real reservations about the appointment of lay members.

The other matter that is of concern to me, and I think the member for Gladstone mentioned this, relates to the Committee of the Legislative Assembly. I think that that committee certainly will enhance the way that the parliament operates, but I think that there should be some consideration of the crossbenchers being included on that committee. I did hear the member for Sunnybank or the Premier make mention of the fact that the Speaker will be included on matters which relate to standing orders and matters affecting the control and operation of the parliament. I think it is necessary that we look at the Speaker being included on that committee, together with members of the crossbenches.

The parliament as it is now has operated since 1959 but the committee system that we now have has not been around for anything like that length of time. We are not really only reviewing the committees. The member for Callide, being one of the members of the committee, made the point that it is really a legislative review, it is a review of how we finalise the legislation that controls each and every one of us in Queensland. Ultimately what we do today will impact on the future operation of this parliament. If we put in place now a system that will operate successfully into the future, then each one of us can hold our head up high and say we have achieved something for the future, we have passed on something to future members of this House who can say that it works really well and we become part and parcel once again of the legislature instead of being shunted sideways or being on a committee that sometimes brings in reports that are not acted on or have forced people to sidestep so that there is not enough notice taken of what is to happen.

The members of the committee have a combined knowledge of many years. It behoves all of us to follow through on what they have decided. I understand that the proposals came from all sides of politics. Ultimately each side of politics will benefit from what we decide with this motion. I support the motion. With the qualifications that I have outlined, I would like to see it implemented as soon as possible.

 **Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (3.55 pm): It is with real pleasure that I join in this debate. As a member of the committee I found the deliberations over the past 12 months highly satisfying. I think we have reached a point with this report to the parliament of bringing in a new, modern, refreshing and challenging era of the parliament of Queensland. I think that this will be one of the most momentous decisions that this parliament has made for many, many decades.

At the start of my contribution I want to congratulate the member for Sunnybank for her leadership of this committee. It was forthright, direct and efficient. It was a pleasure to work under her. I acknowledge the support that she got and the leadership we got from her deputy, Lawrence Springborg, the member for Southern Downs. The whole committee was cooperative. We did have some robust and intellectual debates, but we all had the one common purpose of bringing reform to this parliament that would be meaningful and that would bring back trust, belief and status to the parliament and, in particular, status to the system of committees.

Before I came into this place I did not know much about politics but I remember reading about the push that was on in the late eighties for committees. I wondered what they were all about and what they did. Committees had been formed when I got into parliament in 1991. I did not have the opportunity to be on one—because I was always a shadow minister, minister or opposition leader—until recent years when I have served a couple of terms on the ethics and integrity committee. I was amazed by the cooperation and bipartisanship of members by virtue of being on a committee. That ethos is there when a committee is formed which is not present in the hurly-burly of parliament, which is a place where both sides test each other out.

I have seen much in our committee system that falls well short of what I think the people and perhaps this parliament ever wanted to achieve. We have had a committee system that has been behind closed doors and dominated by the numbers to the point where a lot of what is done is not really what people might want to have done. It is more or less in a controlled situation. That has been a major weakness of it. Flowing on from that has been the fact that reports come into this place and not many people in this House, even if they have been on committees, will remember any reports that delivered much or were of any significance. I say that with due respect to all those people who have served on the committees and worked hard in the genuine belief of what they would achieve. Basically they have collected dust. One of the hindrances to the committee system has been it has been behind closed doors; everyone has been constrained by the regulation or the rule that if you go outside and talk about it you are in contravention of the rules of that committee.

The other aspect of committees has been the estimates committees. I have been involved in them as a shadow minister and a minister. As a minister I have been taken outside by the chair of the health committee, Judy Gamin, along with Jim Elder, my opponent at the time, for counselling. That was a fairly robust afternoon. What I see in the system is a massive use of departmental time. Generally, with some exceptions, Dorothy Dix questions go for three minutes. If the shadows interrupt that is sometimes taken as another question. I could give instances of people who worked well. One instance of someone from the other side who worked well was Mr Terry Mackenroth who would take any and every question and give you a 'yes' or a 'no' or give you an answer off the top of his head. He knew his portfolio. That was probably the exception to the rule.

Generally, a large part of the estimates process has been a charade. A large part of it has been a waste of 40 to 60 people's time from nearly every department for three or four weeks. In the end, it has not achieved a great deal other than occasionally having a hit. Sometimes someone will discover a quirky little thing such as that the director-general had their furniture shifted for free in a removal van and that becomes the story of the day the next day. Those are a couple of aspects of our committees that had to be fixed up.

I would exhort this parliament and the CLA, if it is formed, to stick to exactly what we have recommended: the nine committees and the CLA to oversee issues relating to the parliament and also the PCMC. If we try to compromise this report in order to save money or for any other reason and reduce the number of committees, we will not achieve the result that we set out to achieve through our 12 months of hard work, and I will explain why as I go through. The nine committees that have been recommended to be established cover, in most cases, multiple portfolios or, in the case of big portfolios, a single portfolio. These committees will be very challenging. Those who sit on them will be working in the parliament, because they will be part of the parliament, and they will be doing it under the glare of media and public scrutiny because it is intended that they will be open.

One of the important things in this report is the status of these committees. I believe that the committees that have been in existence over the past decade and a half have not had real status. Five or six people met in a little room. Everything they did was in secret and, ultimately, a report came out which was tabled in the parliament and that was about the end of it. I want honourable members to understand and envision that these new committees will constitute parliament on Wednesday morning. They will not be in a little back room at three o'clock in the afternoon while parliament is sitting. They will not be trying to squeeze in a meeting at lunchtime in an almost inconsequential way. These committees will sit from approximately 9.30 till one o'clock on Wednesday morning; it will be parliament. It will be different. If everything comes to fruition regarding the facilities required, hopefully we will have the adequate number of rooms—approximately nine rooms—with space for the media and interested members of the public if they want to come in. They will be open and public. It will be like standing up and debating or examining something in this parliament with people up in the gallery listening to us. It will be open and accountable and that is part of the new era. Honourable members need to understand that this is the new, upgraded, changed status of these committees. They will be part of the new parliamentary way of operating in Queensland. We would be world leaders in that if not for New Zealand, but we will be taking a good leaf out of its book.

In New Zealand, because these committees are open and are a genuine part of the parliamentary system and are not tagged onto a Friday afternoon or lunchtime, there is a strong belief and trust in these committees by the public, by the media—by everybody. As a result, ministers, shadow ministers and those other members involved in those committees have to take their work seriously and understand the status and the role they are playing. I believe these committees are going to bring new opportunities and challenges as well as a new satisfaction to the role of being a member of parliament for many people, particularly the backbenchers on both sides of the House. They will have a real role to play in relation to some aspects of legislation.

Another point I want to make is that what we have done in this report is very 'Queensland'. We have not considered for a moment reinstalling an upper house, because Queensland got rid of it in 1922. If we understand the psyche of Queenslanders—we like to get things done—we would assume that the public would not want another lot of politicians or another \$40 million spent on an upper house. This is a way within our existing budget and within our weekly sitting of parliament to have a new form of parliament—the committee form of parliament—every Wednesday morning which is open and accountable. It will enable shadow ministers and all those other people involved in these committees, be it backbenchers from the government or the opposition, to become specialists similar to medical specialists in surgery, such as orthopaedic or eye specialists, who become specialists in health or a specialist such as the Attorney-General. They can upgrade their skills. The skills of managing these committees will be very important as will the role of the chairman of these committees. They will have to manage their time to ensure that legislation is examined thoroughly and properly within a certain period. They might be able to tick and flick some legislation because it is simply mechanical. If they do not have an adequate amount of legislation they might hold an inquiry and look into a certain aspect of those portfolios. We will have these people in the parliament who will be specialists.

As the term of that parliament develops, they will become highly knowledgeable in their particular portfolio. Consequently, that is why we have looked at the speaking limits in the parliament. We have recommended that those people be able to speak for 20 minutes and 10 minutes for others so that we can deal efficiently with legislation. A committee could have dealt with a piece of legislation for up to six months, thoroughly examined it, held hearings and taken evidence from witnesses, undertaken consultation and gone through it bit by bit. I am not referring to the legislative principles but the real core of that business of which legislative principles is a part. This has to be about getting to the core and the real business of legislation. For example, in the case of transport, the committee might want to bring in the RACQ, the heavy haulage or livestock associations or someone from local government. Ministers will have to be good at their job. They will not be able to bring in legislation that is deficient. They will have to bring in good legislation that is fully researched and prepared. It will mean that shadow ministers will have to be on their toes because they will be part of committees where strict and detailed examination will be taking place.

This system is not for the faint-hearted. Under this system if a minister does not have any talent he or she will fail. If a shadow minister does not have any talent, he or she will be shown up by this system. If they have ability, they will be able to use this system, in the case of a minister, to bring in better legislation, make fewer amendments and have fewer challenges publicly to legislation, and the same would apply to the opposition. Overall, we will have a far better parliament for it. This reform will result in a new level of inclusiveness and trust by the people of Queensland. They will know that if something is coming into the parliament, firstly, there is pressure on the minister to carry out all the consultation and, secondly, there is a handbrake or system of double-checking so that if it is controversial or it has the potential to hurt or damage people they will have an opportunity to have a say.

One of the things that impresses me about the New Zealand system is that there is such trust and belief in the committee system that ministers accept 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the amendments put forward. It is a rarity in our adversarial system to get an amendment up. In New Zealand ministers know that, because something has been well researched and consultation and inquiries have been carried out, they would be silly and unwise not to accept the amendments of a well meaning, bipartisan committee.

I also wish to comment on the CLA. This will be a modern way of running this parliament by the 89 members of this parliament through the senior leadership people on both sides of the House—people who have been backbenchers, shadow ministers, ministers, premiers and opposition leaders, people who understand the needs of the electorate offices, people who understand the needs of this precinct and this building, which is the most valuable and most important heritage building in the state. When I and my colleagues on the committee approached this we did not think of the Speaker as the individual who he is today. I personally hold our current Speaker in the highest regard, and I know almost everybody in this parliament does. We thought: how do we maintain the status of the Speaker as the judge and umpire and the independent person in this parliament? Those qualities will remain. All of those powers will remain for parliament, for the hosting of dignitaries and the other aspects that are so important to this parliament. We looked at this as a modern way to run the parliament whereby the members of parliament manage the affairs of the precinct, the parliament and the electorate offices. If members like, they can consider it a board of directors, of six senior people who have come through the ranks and who understand. They understand the needs of the 89 members of this parliament and understand the need to maintain this building, look after the electorate staff and look after the electorate officers. They would be a board of directors who do that through a director-general, which would be the Clerk of the parliament. This system will provide to the members of this parliament the clout they need to seek the necessary funds for the equipment the need to serve the people in our electorates, to have the adequate staff to serve our people and to do our job as best we possibly can. It is a modern, it is a good way to do things and it allows the members of parliament to run the business of the precinct and the offices.

I think one of the important things in all of this will be the transition, and my colleague the member for Mirani expressed some concerns about time. It will be important that, if this report is supported by the parliament, the transition is done carefully and well. There will be matters of education of staff and education of members of parliament. There will be matters of the facilities that will be needed for the number of committees that we will have. There will be matters of education of the media to understand what is available for them to cover and report. The whole process and organisation of the transition must be done properly so that when the new system starts, when it is put in place, it works and it works according to the principles that we have established and that nothing goes wrong from the outset. So we do have to be careful not to rush it and to make sure that it is right, even if we have to have a rehearsal or two to make sure that people know where to go and what to do. Also, as part of that transition, there is the matter of transitioning the current legislation that is sitting on the table and new legislation that might come in and be subject to this new system so that we do not end up with any gap in our parliamentary process.

One of the principles we worked with is that whoever wins the election does have the right to govern. There is an expectation by the people of Queensland that if you are elected you have a right to govern. That principle is there. That can still happen. But we have brought in these checks and balances, consultation and accountability, that will not only take us into a modern era but also maintain and enhance the tradition of the people having input and things not happening in a dictatorial way.

Our unicameral system in Queensland has been operating for many decades on a winner-takes-all basis. There is no upper house. There is no handbrake. If you win the election, you have the numbers. You can win every single vote in here and there is absolutely nothing to stop you doing that. But now there will be a handbrake. There will be a way for people to have a say. There will be fair dinkum committees that will be open to the public and open to the media. The ultimate key to these committees working will be performance by and ability of the chairs who run these committees and the members of those committees.

A number of issues have been brought up today. There is the issue of speaking times. I know that would be examined by the CLA if it is so formed, but we do believe that 10 minutes is adequate, if members really put their minds to it, in order to speak to something.

Ms Spence: Even the member for Toowoomba South agrees with it.

Mr HORAN: Yes. There will be 20 minutes allocated to those members who are on the committee, so those specialists can talk to the bill. It is not dissimilar to federal parliament, where members have certain time limits. Our current system is that the shadow minister can speak for an hour and others are limited to 20 minutes.


The issue of the Speaker being on the Standing Orders Committee has been brought up. I think that is important. That recommendation has been well regarded by everybody and hopefully will come through. The issue of a layperson on the PCMC has been spoken about. It is something that we probably should not be frightened of. It is something that might well be important to those on the PCMC if they thought they needed particular advice in a certain area by some independent person.

Finally, on the issue of the ethics committee, some of the recommendations with regard to the ethics committee remaining in some form, with an identity of its own, I think have merit. As I said, I have served two terms on that committee and it has always done well. But the ethics committee should only deal with referrals, because we will have the Committee of the Legislative Assembly that can deal with other needs that might be in the privileges area and so forth. They should be dealt with by senior members from both sides of this House through the CLA. So members of parliament will have that opportunity for their board of directors, if you like, to manage those things.

I said at the outset that not only is this historic but also it provides, I think, one of the most refreshing and challenging reforms for this parliament. It is going to make this place relevant. It is going to make the job of the 89 members here relevant. Members will not be able to just sit on the back bench, on the opposition front bench or on the government back bench and just do the normal day-to-day things that happen in this parliament. They will be a bona fide part of this parliament. It will be a different parliament, with Wednesday morning being allocated to committee time.

I conclude by once again thanking my colleagues on this committee who put such effort and intellect into this report. I say to everybody in this parliament: please support this report because it will make this a better parliament that will be trusted, admired and respected by the people of Queensland.

(Time expired)

 **Hon. JC SPENCE** (Sunnybank—ALP) (4.15 pm), in reply: At the outset I would like to thank all the members of parliament who participated in this historic debate, and it has been historic on many levels. I think all members expressed a certain enthusiasm—some more so than others—for the possibility of changing this parliament. As the member for Callide said, we should be regarding this as a start of the reforms for the next 20 years of this parliament. He also added—and I am happy to quote him—that calling this debate and our review a review of the committee system does diminish its importance. What we have done over the last two days and during my committee is review the legislative process of the parliament of Queensland and how this parliament operates.

I think the contributions by so many members have been outstanding, but I am not going to single them out. I have to say at the outset, before I get to some of them, that I should be thanking our committee staff. Stephen Finnimore, our research director, who is sitting here as the Acting Clerk of the Parliament today, did an outstanding job, as did his assistants, Jo Mathers and Tamara Vitale. I would like to thank all the people who made submissions to our inquiry, many of whom appeared publicly before us. I would like to thank all the politicians and the staff of parliaments in other countries and other parliaments that we visited for advice, because all of them were very forthcoming and generous in giving us their time.

As I have said previously, there have been a number of outstanding speeches during this debate. It has been a unique debate—the first time the Queensland parliament has had such a lengthy, honest and forthright debate on a committee report, and I thank those people for their forthright views. I have to say that my greatest disappointment in the debate was probably the Leader of the Opposition, who stood apart from his colleagues and at times delivered a speech which was quite bitter and cynical, referring to one member as a Les Patterson like character and blaming the Beattie and Bligh governments for underresourcing in other areas. I think he failed to rise to the challenge, which his colleagues managed to achieve, of presenting a statesmanlike speech and presenting some alternatives and new ideas. There was no charity in his contribution. At no time did the opposition pressure the government into taking this course of action, into establishing this committee and being bold enough to ask members of parliament to examine the way parliament operates. I think we all have to acknowledge that it was the initiative of this government and this Premier. I think the opposition leader missed that opportunity.

Many members of parliament acknowledge that the new committee structure will only be effective if people are hardworking and if people show enthusiasm and bring to the table goodwill, as the members of my committee did when we went through our deliberations. I would also like to thank my deputy, Lawrence Springborg. Lawrence and I spent considerable time together studying parliaments in Canada. At all times he is a professional and I am proud to serve alongside him. I thank other members of the committee. We generally sat out of session hours. We found that the lunch hour on a Wednesday in a parliamentary sitting week was not an adequate way of reaching agreement on these major issues. So we sat during non-sitting weeks. Members would come down and we would thrash out these issues in three- to four-hour meetings, and that is how we expect committees to operate in the future. It is the only way you are really going to achieve some outstanding results. So I thank all of those members for their hard work and their maturity.

There were a number of common themes during the debate. I think just about all members realise that there is no enthusiasm in our community for the establishment of an upper house. I think the member for Waterford probably said it best when he said that there is no enthusiasm for creating another layer of politicians to oversee our current group of politicians. That is why we really were excited about the fact that a committee system could do a job with more effectiveness than an upper house if it was established along the lines that we are recommending.

Quite a number of members talked about the New Zealand committee system. There are some differences between what we are recommending and the New Zealand committee system. As I said when moving this motion, we did not copy any other system. While we were excited and impressed by many aspects of the committee system in New Zealand, we have not gone down that path conclusively. One of the differences is that in the New Zealand committee system the committees can actually change the legislation in committee. We all agreed that the government of the day, elected by the people of Queensland, at the end day, has to make a decision whether it will accept a committee's recommendations or reject them. At the end of the day, if a minister wants to reject the recommendations of a committee to change the legislation the minister can go down that path and justify himself or herself in this chamber.

One member questioned whether all the fire, lively debate, enthusiasm and ideas would be missing from this chamber because that would happen in committee. I do not think that is going to be the case. I think we will have that enthusiasm in the committee system and that enthusiasm when the bill comes back into this chamber. The difference will be that at least six members of the parliament will have a really good understanding of the piece of legislation and what it means and what the community has said about the legislation. We will have enthusiastic debate both in committees and when the legislation comes back into this chamber.

There are so many benefits in this for the opposition. I think many opposition members have acknowledged that. It will make their job of scrutiny much easier. It will make it much easier to hear community input. As the member for Toowoomba South said, it will reveal opposition members who are not up to the job, particularly shadow ministers. It will also reveal ministers and departments who have not done a good job. If a department or the minister has not done a good job of public consultation before introducing their piece of legislation to the House I am quite sure that that will be revealed during the committee's scrutiny of that legislation. Everyone is going to be brought up with the proposed changes.

I noted a number of members expressed their frustration with the current estimates committee process. The Goss government introduced that process in all good faith in the 1990s because previously not much of a process existed. It probably has been a stale process for many years. I think everyone from the government side and opposition side acknowledges that. We are all enthusiastic about creating committees of members who really understand the portfolio responsibilities and can study them from one year to the next. That will mean that they can operate in a less structured fashion when examining the estimates than they have done for the past 15 years or so.

Another common theme has been the need to resource the committees properly. The Premier and I have had long discussions about that. We will continue to discuss that. I am sure the Committee of the Legislative Assembly will discuss how we make that achievable within a state budget that this year in particular is going to be very challenging for the people of Queensland given the events of the last two months and the needs in so many communities in Queensland.

Many members of parliament emphasised the important and valuable opportunities they believe will exist as a result of having interest groups and members of the general public come through this place and express their views about pieces of legislation. Many members expressed their frustration with the lack of opportunity to be lawmakers.

I particularly liked the contribution from the member for Murrumba who, I think, was the only member to point out that a lot of good debate does go on during the second reading stage of legislation and ministers hear good ideas from backbenchers from both sides of parliament but it is not the time

then to have parliamentary counsel changing legislation so those good ideas get forgotten. The new proposal will allow those good new ideas to be explored more fully by the minister and by the government before that piece of legislation gets debated once again in this chamber. I thank the member for that contribution.

A number of members spoke about the Committee of the Legislative Assembly and our recommendation that it include six of the senior members of this parliament and not include Independent members of this parliament. Some of the Independents asked me how they are going to be represented if that is the case. I offer the Independents the opportunity to come and talk to me or come and talk to the opposition members who are on this committee if they want their particular views taken to the committee. I am sure the Committee of the Legislative Assembly will invite Independent members along to make presentations to the committee if they want us to pursue a matter on their behalf.

Some of the Independents have missed the fact that this new system will offer them more opportunities to participate in committees than they have had in the past because they can go and sit on a committee as a participating member. They have never had that opportunity in the past. So if they are particularly interested in an issue that a committee is looking at—whether it is alcohol laws or anything else—they can become part of that committee during those deliberations. This is actually offering every single member of the parliament much more committee experience than they have had in the past.

There has been quite a bit of debate about why we made the decision to exclude the Speaker from the Committee of the Legislative Assembly. I think one member said that we were centralising power in this committee. It is quite the opposite. What we did when we made the changes to the Parliamentary Services Act over a decade ago was, for the first time in the history of this parliament, centralise all these functions to one person, the Speaker. For the 100-year history of the Queensland parliament we had committees made up of members of parliament who made policies about how this parliament operated. We had the library committee, the building committee, the refreshment committee, the printing committee. For over 100 years members of parliament made the policies and oversaw the parliament. Then in one moment in the 1990s we took all of that away. Generally we have centralised all that in the hands of one person, the Speaker.

We believed it was about time we gave that power back to our peers, to a committee to look at those things. This is no reflection on the current gentleman who is the Speaker. I think other people have said this. I think our current Speaker is one of the best Speakers I have ever seen adjudicate this parliament. I think he is fair-minded. I think his decision making for the most part is very wise. We do not want to take away that authority, but we do want to empower members of parliament to have some say over the policies and procedures of this precinct. That guided our thinking when we came up with the membership of the Committee of the Legislative Assembly.

I expect that this committee will meet on Mondays and discuss the business of the week and how the parliament is going to proceed for the week. That has never been done in the Queensland parliament before. Traditionally the person who occupies my position of Leader of the House makes those decisions unilaterally. In the future I expect a committee will sensibly sit down and talk about how much time we are going to need for which debate. This committee will talk about how the other committees of the parliament are performing and whether they are busy. We expect to hear from chairs of those committees about their workload and about their resource need so that work can be distributed evenly to those committees.

We are asking for a sense of maturity about how this new board of management committee is going to operate. I offer the Independents the opportunity of coming to me—and I am sure the opposition members will say the same thing—with suggestions or making submissions to us in any form that they want. I think the member for Gladstone, who probably was most strong in this area, forgets the fact that while the Speaker sits here in a very independent fashion he or she is still a member of a political party.

We do not have the British system where the Speaker, on becoming Speaker, resigns from their political party and does not get contested at an election. Australian parliaments do not operate that way and the Speaker—whoever it is—is going to be a member of the Labor Party or the LNP or whatever party wins government in the future. They are going to contest elections and they are going to run political campaigns and they are going to go to their branch meeting and they are going to raise funds just like every other member of parliament. This way of thinking is stuck in the past and does not really reflect the reality of the role. However, what we do expect that person to do when they come into this chamber to adjudicate is to take off their party political hat and be fair and even in their decision making. We would all agree that most people—not everyone—who has sat in that chair and done that job has done that very well, as we expect them to do and will continue to expect them to do.

Rather than centralising any decision making, the new Committee of the Legislative Assembly is about sharing decision making, and we have not had that shared decision making for a long time in this place. As I said in my previous speech, there are many precedents in many parliaments of the world for

a committee to act like a board of management in that respect. Other members asked me how it will affect decision making around electorate offices and minutiae around this parliament. I expect that the Clerk of the Parliament will in effect still operate in the same fashion as he already does. We are going to have to change some acts of parliament, and I will talk about the timetable for that in a few minutes. One of the things we have done in the past is made the Speaker the employer of all of the public servants in this parliament. It is like making a minister the employer for the public servants in their department. In future we have to change that and make the Clerk of the Parliament the employer of the people who work in this parliament. I think that is the more appropriate separation of responsibilities than making a political person their employer. So, yes, we are going to have to look at those issues.

None of us when we framed this report and these recommendations thought that this work was finished, that we had all the answers, that we had thrashed out every bit of detail in the 10 months that we had to look at these reforms. That is why today after this debate is concluded I will be moving a motion to establish the Committee of the Legislative Assembly to continue going through the process of revising and resolving some of the difficult issues that we still have not yet agreed upon, and they are legitimate issues and we still have to continue to talk about them. This is really not the end of the process but, as the member for Callide said, just the beginning of the process and it is important that we get this committee established today so that we can start meeting and going through those quite challenging issues.

The member for Gladstone asked me what consultation we had had with the Clerk and others. Between tabling our report and this debate I have had lengthy discussions with the Speaker, the Clerk of the Parliament, Dr David Solomon and others and academics about how this is going to proceed in practice. Yes, I acknowledge that there is more work to be done. That is why I am proposing to establish this committee today so we can get on with that work so that we do not lose the momentum. I acknowledge that we are in many respects moving very quickly, but we have an opportunity at this point in time where there is enough goodwill and maturity in this chamber to make these necessary changes and we have to keep that momentum going.

I will now turn to the issue of the timetable to move forward. As I said, there is considerable work before we get the new committee system up and running. There will need to be changes to the Parliament of Queensland Act and the Parliamentary Service Act as well as potentially other legislation. There are other changes that need to occur in other areas. These will include changes to standing orders; determining the number of portfolio committees and their responsibilities; the code of practice for public servants assisting parliamentary committees; determining how to manage the existing inquiries which are being undertaken by parliamentary committees; the establishment of committee facilities; and, importantly, how we accommodate these changes in light of the regional parliament in Mackay. They will be matters that the Committee of the Legislative Assembly will be looking at.

I have already talked to the opposition leadership about these issues. The public servants in the Premier's department are already working very hard on preparing these legislative changes for deliberation. We would hope—and I do not know if it is achievable yet, and I think they do not know either—that we can bring those changes to the legislation in the next sitting of parliament in two weeks time. The opposition would like to see that happen and we would like to see it happen. The opposition has suggested—and I think we would agree—that we should suspend the 14-day rule and debate those changes as soon as they come into the parliament. Once those changes are made, then we can change the new committee system. I think we would all like to see the new committee system in place and up and running before the estimates this year, and the sooner we can get that happening the sooner those people can start melding together and understanding the portfolio areas that they are going to take responsibility for and act as a committee. They need to have some basis of knowledge before they go to the estimates process. That timetable might sound ambitious, but we are keen to make these changes, and there is goodwill on all sides. I thank the Premier very much for the attention that she has given to these matters. She and I have had many hour-long conversations about the importance of this work. Given her other priorities this year, which have been enormous, she has also found the time to make this a very important priority.

There were some other questions I have yet to answer. I did go to the issue of electorate staff and all of those matters before. Those matters now are dealt with by parliamentary officers who are supervised by the Clerk of the Parliament. That will not change. I do not see the Committee of the Legislative Assembly wanting to get involved in HR issues of electorate offices, and nor does the Speaker at this point in time either. They are very well dealt with, as all members know, by the staff of the parliament. Other members asked questions about the issue of people with disabilities. The member for Gympie made a wonderful contribution. We all do have to be very mindful when we create this committee structure that, if we are going to operate in a new century with change, we have to start modernising how we cater for people with disabilities as we are formulating our plans.

I thank the member for Springwood for sharing her contribution and her experience of how ministers conduct consultation regarding appointments and our recommendation. We do not have all of the answers in that recommendation, and that is why the Premier's response asks the Committee of the Legislative Assembly to look further at it and undertake further consultation. We would all agree that that needs to be standardised. There needs to be a clearer understanding of what is appropriate with respect to that consultation.

The member for Southern Downs has raised with me on a number of occasions the fact that the Premier's response talks about CEOs participating in the committee process in the first year before we get the opportunity to train other senior executive officers of the Public Service. I have talked to the Premier about the issue of associate directors-general. I think she is very positive and understanding of that, and we will get back to him. The member for Coomera wants to know—and understandably; it is a legitimate question—whether six months is going to be the anticipated time that a committee will have to deal with legislation. He wanted to know whether it will be the rule or the exception or whether we will give committees longer than six months. I would expect that we do have to make sure that committees get to all of their legislation in six months and not delay it any further. I would expect that committees will be very sensible when they look at legislation and their workload, and if legislation is quite mechanical and does not need a lot of public consultation they can turn that legislation over in perhaps a month or two months. We do not expect that every committee will see that they have six months for every piece of legislation. There would be an exception for a piece of complicated legislation or legislation that they believe requires a lot of community consultation.

We have not been prescriptive in how these committees will work. We talked a lot in our deliberations about whether we needed to be more prescriptive, but we think initially it would be better to allow the committee members—who, let us face it, are all sensible members of parliament—to go through these issues themselves and work out the best method of operation. Initially, each of the committees will give legislation and other matters different types of priorities. They will have to really look at the portfolio they are examining and they all will have different ways of operating.

I think I have summed up most of the common themes of the debate of the last two days and most of the concerns that some members of parliament have had with the recommendations. I would reiterate that these are historic reforms and all members have acknowledged that. It has been a unique time in our history and I thank everyone for the goodwill and spirit of cooperation they have shown over the last two days. I think we are looking forward to seizing the moment and keeping the momentum going and continuing these debates.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Order of Appointment



Hon. JC SPENCE (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (4.41 pm), by leave, without notice: I move—


That, notwithstanding anything contained in Standing and Sessional Orders:


1. A select committee, to be known as the Committee of the Legislative Assembly (CLA), be appointed to consider:
 - issues arising from the Report of the Committee System Review Committee tabled on 15 December 2010 titled "Review of the Queensland Parliamentary Committee System";
 - issues arising from the debate in the Legislative Assembly on the noting of the committee report;
 - the government response to the committee report; and
 - issues and matters relating to the reforms contained in the report and incidental matters referred to the committee by the Premier.
2. Further, that the committee have power to call for persons, documents and other things.
3. That the committee consist of six Members of the Legislative Assembly: Leader of the House (Chair); Premier (or nominee); Deputy Premier (or nominee); Leader of the Opposition (or nominee); Deputy Leader of Opposition (or nominee); and Leader of Opposition Business.



Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.42 pm): I wish to speak to that motion, if I might. I have listened to the summing-up of the leader of government business and I commend her for that summing-up. However, I believe it is important to again place on the record my concern and the concerns of others in this parliament, particularly those of us who are Independent or from the minor parties, that we do not have formal representation on that committee. I acknowledge what the member for Sunnybank

has said, but it is important that those concerns are again reiterated, and additionally that the committee does not incorporate the presence of the Speaker because of the important role not that the person holds but the position holds. I would like to place those concerns on the record. It is evident from what has been said here that I would not garner sufficient support to put an amendment through, but I believe it is important that those concerns are noted.

 **Hon. JC SPENCE** (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (4.43 pm): I am happy to acknowledge the contribution of the member for Gladstone. As I said, I know a couple of other Independents share those views but I believe that the majority of the members of the House believe that the Independents will be represented adequately by the offers that we have made. My door is always open to you.

 **Mr SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (4.43 pm): I too would like to briefly acknowledge the comments of the member for Gladstone. I say to the member for Gladstone that the make-up of this committee was based on, in my view, the statutory office holders of the parliament and the statutory office holders of the parliament will represent all members of this parliament, irrespective of their political party. As I see that committee operating, the statutory office holders of the parliament will represent all parliamentarians. I give my assurance to the member for Gladstone that, while I am on that committee, I will endeavour to ensure that happens.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.


Motion agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 8 March (see p. 392), on motion of Ms Jones—

That the bill be now read a second time.

 **Mr DEMPSEY** (Bundaberg—LNP) (4.45 pm): In returning to the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009, I can say that the Balance the Earth Trust is not required to give an annual report to parliament nor is it subject to an audit by the Auditor-General. This bill is consolidating funds and power into the hands of a trust that does not have the scrutiny of this parliament. We have just heard many speeches about the importance of scrutiny and having an open and transparent process. Many members from all sides of the House have spoken about the importance of scrutiny and how the mechanism of this House is called into question if we do not have proper scrutiny.

The Balance the Earth Trust will receive and administer millions of dollars in funds in offsets yet will be hidden away by the government and will not be accountable to the taxpayers of Queensland. This is absolutely unacceptable. I sincerely request that the government and the minister look at the amendments that have been put forward before the House to have proper checks and balances put into place in relation to these funds to ensure that the Balance the Earth Trust is accountable for its actions and finances—not just its finances, but also its obligations and the environmental needs that Queenslanders aspire to have coming from these trusts.

The Balance the Earth Trust was drafted by Clayton Utz lawyers and commenced on 22 December 2009. The founder was the state of Queensland, represented by the Department of Environment and Resource Management. The trustees were Darren Grover, the manager of EPA; Angus McDonald, the Director of Carbon within Ecofund Queensland; and Adam Meadows, previously from EPA and now a management consultant with PricewaterhouseCoopers. The settlement was \$10 and the fund was established for public charitable purposes.

The objectives, as in clause 4, were to acquire and hold land, design and plant forests, plant and propagate trees as well as maintain forests. There were a number of objectives. Some of these were as follows: to assist governments, corporations, businesses and individuals to protect or enforce the environment; to encourage carbon capture; to promote or carry out research; and to accept contributions made to the trust in order to meet requirements and conditions of the government or regulators. Further, it made provisions for a public fund, Balance the Earth Trust, to be managed by a public fund management committee of at least three individuals to be appointed by the trustees. The trustees are public servants—that is, an appointment will be made by public servants obeying a ministerial direction. I will say that again: obeying a ministerial direction.

Financial accounts will be prepared by the trustees for each accounting period and accounts need only be audited by a registered auditor. That is far less openness and transparency than having to be presented to a parliament. Advisory committees may be appointed by the trustees and the founder—which, as I stated before, is the state of Queensland—appoints replacement trustees. Trustees may be paid up to a maximum commission charged by the trustee company. Once again, where is the accountability? Where does this process show respect for the House and the people of Queensland?

As the minister said in her second reading speech, the Balance the Earth Trust is administered by Ecofund. The government announced the creation of this body in March 2008 and the business name was transferred from the EPA in May 2010. This company is called Ecofund Queensland Pty Ltd and, like the Balance the Earth Trust, was created by Clayton Utz, lawyers. Its sole shareholder is the director-general of DERM. A little bit before estimates—on 12 March 2010—Ecofund Queensland Pty Ltd was established.

As I mentioned, John Bradley, the director-general of DERM, is the sole shareholder who, obviously on behalf of the government, contributed a capital of \$3,280,700 to the company. That is taxpayers' dollars. So we have a director-general of DERM who controls taxpayers' money but who is a government employee within this minister's department contributing over \$3 million, plus other millions of dollars. We obviously have no ability to check the finances of the company and ensure that he is getting the best for all Queenslanders.

At that recent estimates committee hearing, as members would know, Mr Bradley stated—

I was just going to add, Minister, that Ecofund Queensland has obviously established accounts to support the program Reverse the Effect, which we were speaking about earlier in relation to the state's commitment of \$4½ million to match offsets. As part of that process, Ecofund has been also making use of the Balance the Earth trust fund, which was previously established within the then EPA, and through that program is in a position where it is looking to not only partner with householders that want to offset their motor vehicles but also provide offset services to a range of corporate clients. Ecofund, apart from that program, is also providing advisory services in relation to environmental assessment and assessment of regional ecosystems as part of the analysis of their offset requirements and is providing a significant number of those services in terms of advisory services as corporate proponents of projects need to assess their offset requirements.

He states further—

Obviously within Ecofund's life it is at an early stage. The fortunes of Ecofund are partly dependent on the environment in terms of the Commonwealth CPRS—

that is, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme—

therefore, the level of take-up is partly related to that regulation environment. But Ecofund is certainly active in providing the services it can.

Can't this Labor government at least admit the perception of conflict of interest when we have a DG, who answers questions about the relevance of the Ecofund whilst being the head of a publicly listed company on the Stock Exchange, receiving public money but who, again, is not answerable to this parliament?

The Ecofund corporate governance commitment No. 2, titled 'Corporate Governance Principles and Standards', states—

The ASX Principles were released in March 2003 and revised in 2007. Ecofund will align its corporate governance practices with the revised ASX Principles.

Obviously, one of those principles is to make money for the shareholders. Point 6 of the corporate governance commitment, titled 'Remuneration', states—

In accordance with the company's Constitution, Directors' fees are set by the shareholder and are consistent with the Queensland Government's *Remuneration of Part-time Chairs and Members of Government Boards, Committees and Statutory Authorities* policy.

If we have a number of public servants on these boards and trusts and so forth, I would like to know if they will then be remunerated in some other form and how much they will be remunerated through this process on top of their normal wages and salaries. Point 7 of the corporate governance commitment, titled 'Shareholder's interest', states—

Ecofund is required to keep the shareholder and responsible Minister reasonably informed and promotes the timely and balanced disclosure of all material matters concerning the company.

As a number of members have said today, it is important that parliament is able to look at the finances, budgets and operations of the various departments. But we still do not see them reporting any of this to parliament. We seem to be lowering the standard of accountability. Point 3 of the corporate governance commitment, titled 'Board of Directors', states—

All Directors are non-executive Directors and in accordance with the criteria set out in the ASX Principles; these Directors are assessed as independent.

Here we go. In relation to independence, how can the DG and the environmental—

Ms JONES: I rise to a point of order. I am curious as to the relevance of what the honourable member is saying, given that the bill does not go to the heart of what Ecofund does. There is no reference to that in the bill whatsoever, so I do not know why the honourable member is talking about it. There are no clauses—nothing in the bill—that relate to what the honourable member is talking about right now.

Mr DEMPSEY: The bill is about trusts.

Ms JONES: Yes, that is right. It is about trusts—the Balance the Earth Trust.

Mr DEMPSEY: And the management of those trusts. Today we are going through the accountability of those trusts and the management of those trusts. There is an amendment before the House in relation to how those trusts are going to be administered and the accountability of those trusts.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): Order! Just stay on the bill.

Mr DEMPSEY: Ecofund, which relates to this bill before the House, was an initiative of the Queensland government. Ecofund was established to expand protected areas in Queensland, meet Queensland's demand for environmental and carbon offsets, facilitate the revegetation of degraded land and develop the carbon industry in Queensland. Ecofund is an adviser, broker and educator in the carbon, renewable energy and environmental offset markets.

Currently, carbon offsets are voluntary. However, in the future carbon permits, if legislated, will be auctioned permits, forestry permits and international units. Is the government able to at least be upfront with the people of Queensland and explain to the people of Queensland how this fund is linked to its environmental Q2 policies and where the government is heading in the future?

The Bligh government has essentially hired a law firm to create a private company that will administer the environmental offset funds provided to the government. Pardon my cynicism, but the government has become rather creative by creating a private company under DERM control that is not subject to the proper checks and balances of government. It has deliberately set up a trust that will control millions of offset contributions but that circumvents the highest standards of accountability and transparency.

Ecofund directors are not answerable to the CMC or the Ombudsman. As a result, how Ecofund directors manage the Balance the Earth Trust will not be put under scrutiny. Without any form of accountability and transparency the reputation of the Balance the Earth Trust is also called into question. As long as this legislation enables Ecofund to be a law unto itself, the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009 is also called into question.

As stated earlier, the bill goes against the fundamental principles of the Westminster system and is an example of the disdain and arrogance that this Bligh government shows towards the people of Queensland. As we debate this bill, which amends a series of acts—the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Fisheries Act 1994, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Sustainable Planning Act 2009—I am left with a hollow feeling which occurs over and over again when we talk about transparency and accountability that is absent through the standard questions. What are they not telling us and what have they got to hide? One cannot trust this Labor government at the best of times.

Questions that do need to be answered, however, include: how many trusts are there? Who appoints the trustees? What are the remuneration arrangements for trustees? What is the source of financing for that remuneration? What is the reason for having a suite of trusts and not just a single entity? What is the criteria by which to determine an appropriate environmental offset? Who determines why an environmental offset should not be sought and the criteria for that decision? Who determines for each trust the value of a cash payment? How is land chosen for an environmental offset, how is the value attributed and what improvements will be added and charged for the funding source? Will local and regional councils have the power to establish their own environmental offset trusts and what will be the transparency and accountability requirements for these trusts? What process will be undertaken in the case of each and every environmental offset to determine which living and non-living things occur naturally within the affected area and how the impact of each of those living and non-living things will be remediated by the environmental offset? Will there be any report to parliament, Minister?

Ms Jones: No, it complies with the Trusts Act of Queensland.

Mr DEMPSEY: Will they be audited by the Auditor-General?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Bundaberg, let us not have the debate across the chamber with the minister. Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr DEMPSEY: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, will there be any report to parliament? Will it be audited by the Auditor-General? Will there be an annual report? Who will receive the annual report and who will have access to the annual report? How will Queensland taxpayers know that they are getting value for money and value in relation to the environmental outcomes? The government has not risen the bar; it has actually dropped it. Transparency, openness and accountability have gone out the window with this arrogant government that is blind in its obligations to this House in relation to accountability and deaf to the voices of all Queenslanders in relation to the parliamentary process and how the Westminster system is managed within this House.

I will read a quote that was cited in this House only a couple of days ago from the 1989 Fitzgerald report that deals with parliamentary democracy and accountability—

Parliament is meant to be the forum in which the necessity and worth of proposed laws, including those raising revenue and appropriating funds, can be debated. It should also serve as an inquest in which all or any aspects of public administration can be raised. The effect of modern practice is that the law is shaped outside Parliament. Ministers present bills to the Parliament which are the products of resolution in Cabinet and sometimes the Government party room (or both). Similarly, policy on executive and administrative matters is largely formed and developed outside Parliament. Laws and policies often address highly complex matters. Formulating them requires expertise. No Government will have all the ideas, expertise and insight on any particular topic. As well, Governments are not the only bodies which have these attributes. Whatever the expertise required, the solution to any problem is something about which people can and do reasonably differ. The best result will be produced from rational debate by those with opposing views. The community is entitled to such a result.

This legislation before the House is a creation of an arrogant government that has forgotten the principles of the Fitzgerald report in relation to presenting proper and accurate documents before this House so that they can be checked and the balances brought forward to ensure that Queenslanders get the best value for their dollar and do not have an impression of a government hiding behind different companies and trust accounts. These trust accounts deserve to be open and transparent and know that the Queensland government is behind them. If they are not we simply will not be listening to Queenslanders and we are not valuing the proper process of this government.

Mr DICKSON (Buderim—LNP) (5.06 pm): I rise to speak in relation to this bill with particular reference to a power project that will have a significant environmental impact in my electorate. In the explanatory notes—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Member for Buderim, before you start talking about power projects, I draw your attention to the purpose of the bill. Unless your speech relates to the bill or you can show me how the power project relates to the bill I will stop you.

Mr DICKSON: Absolutely, Mr Deputy Speaker. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill state—

The principal objective of the Bill is to include conditioning powers to place beyond doubt that environmental offset conditions may be imposed on development approvals, environmental authorities and other approvals for development.

Further—

These conditioning powers are administered through the Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy (QGEOP), which commenced on 1 July 2008.

I would like to quote directly from the Queensland government's environmental offset policy. The policy states—

The Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy (QGEOP) will equip government, industry and the community with an integrated, consistent and transparent approach to using environmental offsets in Queensland. Environmental offsets are used to replace the value of environmental features inevitably lost in development that supports a growing economy and population. This policy will guide the appropriate use of environmental offsets across terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, based on the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development.

The policy is based on the premise that offsets should only be considered after all environmental impacts have been avoided and minimised. My question is this: what if the impacts cannot be avoided? I would like to highlight a case in point within my own electorate. Since June last year one of my constituents has been endeavouring to have Energex and the state Labor government sit up and take notice regarding the potential environmental nightmare on her mother's property at Forest Glen. This 50-hectare property is a paradise which includes 20 hectares of freshwater lake. Platypus inhabit Eudlo Creek, which is beside the lake. DERM have confirmed that they have video evidence of platypus in this location. Indeed, I tabled the DVD of this footage during question time in October last year. Unfortunately, the property lies in the path of the proposed Energex overhead powerlines. The proposed corridor for these powerlines is 40 metres wide.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Buderim, I draw your attention to my original question. Could you please direct me to what part of this bill relates to what you are presently saying?

Mr DICKSON: It relates directly to the offset policy contained in this bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, what relationship to this bill?

Mr DICKSON: Because these powerlines are actually encroaching upon this property and they are using the offset policy—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Where in this bill does it relate to powerlines?

Mr DICKSON: Right here, Mr Deputy Speaker. The explanatory notes state—

...offsets required by the Coordinator-General under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 ...

That is where it comes into play. That policy is being used on this particular issue. I am highlighting that and going further into the bill, with your permission.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will allow it for the moment, but you are gravely transgressing in terms of—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DICKSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I cannot hear you, I am sorry.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Buderim is on his feet. I will allow you to continue, but you are right at the edge of not being relevant.

Mr DICKSON: That is not all. There is a significant number of gum trees on the property which will have to be removed to accommodate the overhead powerlines as well. There is physical evidence that these trees are koala environment and not just a food source in the corridor. My constituent's request is simple: put the proposed powerlines underground to protect this pristine environment and their natural wildlife treasures. The local government policy states—

An offset may be located within or outside the geographic site of the impact.

The policy states further—

Environmental offsets are only applicable when the impacts cannot be avoided or minimised, and if all other Government environmental standards have been met.

This matter of Eudlo Creek has received local, metropolitan and now national media exposure. It featured significantly on *The 7PM Project* late last year. I have a message for Ministers Jones and Robertson and the rest of the government: we need not make a mess of this because the world is watching this offset. We need to get it right.

The bill allows the administering authority to impose an environmental offset condition. Further, the administering authority can impose any condition considered necessary or desirable. The bill claims that this is simply to remove any doubt that an environmental offset condition can be imposed. The environmental offset condition may require works or activities to be undertaken, may require that the applicant enter into an offset agreement or the applicant may meet their offset agreements by making a financial contribution to an environmental offset trust.

As with most of these Labor government bills, there is a 'get out' clause for those who may want to. There are subsections that restrict the power to impose the environmental offset condition. An environmental offset condition may only be imposed if the administering authority is satisfied that the applicant has demonstrated that all cost-effective on-site measures to avoid and to minimise any negative impact on the development of the natural environment are being, or will be, carried out. This reflects the 'avoid, minimise, offset' hierarchy in this Queensland government's environmental policy. As I said before, what if the impact cannot be avoided? Even if they plant or earmark a few more gum trees somewhere else, what about the koalas on the site where their food source and corridor is going to be destroyed? How will the koalas know how to find their new offset food source? Is the department going to draw the koalas a map to that source? What about the platypus in Eudlo Creek? How are the platypus going to 'offset' the impacts of constructing pylons right at the creek? What if it is a platypus breeding environment? As I said earlier DERM has video footage of the platypus in this creek.

To that end, a constituent of mine received a letter from Minister Jones's office two weeks ago. The minister has granted to Energex an exemption. Under the Nature Conservation Act, Minister Jones has granted Energex an exemption for the clearing of least concern protected plants and an exemption from a species management program for certain least concern protected animals. The letter has been carefully crafted by the minister's office. The minister's letter gives absolutely no detail as to what protected plants and animals are deemed, in the minister's mind, to be proof of least concern. Are the gum trees protected plants of least concern? Are individual platypus least concern protected animals? I ask about individual platypus due to the carefully crafted words of the minister's letter to my constituent. Honourable members may recall that on 7 October last year I asked Minister Jones a question without notice in parliament on this matter. The minister replied—

When they submit that species management plan to the Department of Environment and Resource Management we assess that plan to ensure that we believe that it meets the standards in regard to not only protecting that individual animal but also protecting its habitat. For example—and this will happen in this case—we are currently in negotiations with Energex to ensure that they comply with the Nature Conservation Act in regard to the platypus that has been found in this creek next to this project.

The minister was crystal clear. The standards to be met include both individual platypus and their habitat. Not so crystal clear was the minister's letter on the question of the individual platypus and their general environment. The minister letter asserts that 'a protected animal's breeding place' and 'platypus nesting burrows' are 'not covered under the Energex approved species management program'. The minister's letter to my constituent has been carefully crafted so as not to mention whether Energex's approved species management program does not include individual platypus and their general environment. It mentions only the breeding places and nesting burrows. The minister's letter also states 'Energex has assured the department that prework survey will be conducted to ensure platypus breeding places'—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Buderim, could you please explain to me how the letter from the minister is relevant to the bill before the House, which is very specific in relation to the setting-up of a certain regime.


Mr DICKSON: It relates exactly to the offset policy which is being put into place. That is why I am making the House aware, through you, that this is absolutely—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Buderim, the bill is not yet in place. You are talking about a specific matter. Please come back to the bill.

Mr DICKSON: The reason I am talking about this transfer is because it is absolutely the basis of the bill. My simple question is: has the minister granted an exemption to Energex that allows them to disturb individual platypus and the general environment on this project? Unfortunately, the minister's letter raises more questions than answers. The question that these people are asking is about this offset policy. Is it going to work or not? When there is a koala habitat in a particular area where there is a row of gum trees growing along a particular habitat, these koalas use this as a corridor to get from A to B. I ask the minister: if you take a section out—and we will use this corridor here as an example—we take this here as an offset out of the middle of this corridor and place it—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Buderim, I have been very patient. Please come back to the bill or I will ask you to sit down. What you have just referred to has no relevance to the bill before the House.

Mr DICKSON: I will leave it at that. I am very sorry that I cannot make a point to represent the people of my electorate appropriately. I appreciate your time.

 **Dr DOUGLAS** (Gaven—LNP) (5.18 pm): This is the bill that delivers the environmental offsets that are possible for development approvals—known as DAs. In another fashion it facilitates environmental offset conditions that may be imposed on DAs, environmental authorities and other approval for development. As such, it impacts upon the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Fisheries Act 1994, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and Sustainable Planning Act 2009. The powers are to be administered through the newly created QGEOP, Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy.

Offsets are a good idea. Councils already use them. This bill is not strictly about the offsets; it is about the recipient issue. Offsets probably represent the sensible, regulated way of dealing with necessary developments that will possibly impact or even remove native habitats, vegetation and wildlife. It makes sense to correctly plan what needs to be done when these types of situations occur. Irrespective of some members' intractably ignorant attitudes that any development is unacceptable, these proposals merely regulate much of what occurs in the majority of cases. For those few occasions where developers need more than oversight, it enforces their compliance but gives them some flexibility where often, if it is absent, the development is impossible.

At this stage I would like members to allow me to make a detailed review of the concepts of the offsets and attempt to clarify confusing principles and correct some false assumptions. I do this because of the severe danger that occurs because the government has sought to inject its near monolithic Ecofund into the equation. The concept of offsets is not new, with the Labor federal government obsessed with climate change and with formerly an ETS and now a carbon price. Offsets for carbon emissions are the currency of survival for many whose future is either mutually assured or denied by the ability to lock in offsets and have the regulator approve them. Mining companies, farmers, builders and manufacturers will pursue all offsets at a rate that will probably be exponential by virtue of emotion rather than need. Governments are frightening them into responding. We have clearly seen that some utterly reject it, as the managing director of Rio Tinto has stated this week.

Like life, the pursuit and purchase of offsets will, in a regulated environment, most likely follow the lowest common denominator, for that is what happens when a centralist government sets a minimum standard rather than sets indicators with a view to the pursuit of best practice. Basic examples could be a mining company that buys marginal land and removes the stock carried on it, even if it is close to markets, is quite productive and has a reliable rainfall, in order to facilitate an environmentally sensitive mining plant when it proposes a new major open-cut development. For example, that property might be hundreds of kilometres from the primary mine site. It might be fenced, locked up, staff sacked, contracts closed and feral animals and weeds allowed to flourish. No remnant vegetation is then harmed because no-one looks at it, no CO₂ is emitted by cattle, no fuel is expended, and the offset can be given a calculated value that is very useful to the mining company. But good agricultural land is excised from the national register at a time of declining food production.

Honourable members should not laugh at these examples. This has begun to occur already. Worse still, examples are being actively considered that propose to do so on very good agricultural land being dealt with similarly and land adjoining mining leases currently being used productively. They have

been allowed to become unproductive and remain available for future mining exploration and development. Properties are currently being bought on the Western Downs as such, as we have heard in a debate this week.

This bill is big on motherhood statements about specific-issue offsets and the nature of the offsets. It is to be administered by a department that really knows very little about koalas, the types of vegetation they consume and complex local demographics. Just having your heart in the right place does not guarantee that you can make carefully considered, scientific, valid decisions about the offsets. If the regulation becomes too specific about the quality and quantity of science required to justify it and explain the offset then the obstructions, delays and barriers to development will only be further magnified.

So here it is, the crux of the issue of the offsets: it is all about quality and quantity. The key really has to be the quality of the offset and not just the quantity. It is somewhat important there be at least a measure of quantity in any offset because if there is not then the offset can be trivial and as such little substance to be of any significance at all. The quality of the offset is absolutely critical to the success or failure of the offset. Whether we are talking about vegetation, marine fish habitats, koalas, native flora or bilbies, it is a quality offset that must always be of paramount importance. If it is not then the whole process becomes a tick-the-box process that delivers no real environmental outcome. In fact, it might do the opposite. The bill does go into specifying—

Ms Jones: That's right. You are spot on.

Dr DOUGLAS: Minister, just listen to this. It might help you.

Ms Jones: I'm commending you.

Dr DOUGLAS: No, honestly, this is—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Minister—

Ms Jones: Sorry, I was commending him.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister. Member for Gaven, please direct your comments through the chair instead of discussing it with the minister.

Dr DOUGLAS: Sorry. I will speak through the chair.

Ms Jones: Sorry, Mr Speaker. He has obviously read it; that's all.

Dr DOUGLAS: The bill does go into specifying the mechanics of the process of the offset agreement policy. Yes, I have read it in detail. Whilst not overly proscriptive, it is a rather blunt method of ensuring both conformity and compliance. It is also an unfair impost on the cost of living currently with regard to situations like housing, and it could make those things out of reach for many people.

Science is not so mechanical. It is more whimsical, more elegant. It is adaptive and evolutionary. Nature is bound by some certainties that need to be stated. Change is inevitable. It is continuous and it is unpredictable, except when examined with a retrospectoscope—in other words, looking backwards. When dealing with nature, it is fair to say that a handle-with-care policy is the appropriate one. But do not assume that because platypus leave streams close to housing developments where owners insist on having dogs these same platypus will not survive, compete and then thrive in a previously unoccupied stream that does not have a nearby housing development. Nature surprises you and it makes you take another look at what happened when an intervention occurred.

This is what this policy, as prescriptive as it is, does not include, and I would urge members to consider that type of policy. It is a more scientific approach. This probably means that this policy will then require plenty of continuous adjustments as it attempts to adapt to all the vagaries of those micro-environments that might require offsets and what those offsets might be. The innovations will be quite interesting. Very much lateral thinking would be involved to consider them and, increasingly, the more ingenious they are the more likely they are and, yes, they will gain acceptance. By design, this implies changes beyond what some people now imagine, and in fact those offsets will look completely different from what we currently see. They may not involve any change to other contiguous or non-contiguous sites.

The explanatory notes highlight the QGEOP—that is, the offsets planning group—relating to the Queensland government decisions for development applications but note that local government may require environmental offsets as outlined in regional plans. It then specifies that the new Sustainable Planning Act 2009 has been drafted to utilise the conditioning powers. Honourable members, major stakeholders are opposed to this, including the UDIA, and that is a mistake. We need to go back and correct that step and listen to what they have to say. Without doubt, local governments, who administer much of the approvals process, are going to have a hell of a ride on this issue, and I doubt the department will be of any help.

The best solution would be to assume that it is all new and no-one will really know what to do. So then in every case when questions are raised they should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and assume neither the councils nor the developers are trying to subvert the process—in other words, assume everyone is trying to do the right thing and then try to work with them rather than against them. It would be easy to assume the reverse and develop, as I say, a guilty-until-proven-innocent view as a departmental attitude, and this would be wrong. If this is the case then the process will become obstructive, legally dreadful and hugely expensive. Talk about building a big bureaucracy when a small one was indicated!

Where this bill goes well beyond any sensible approach is the progression to the mechanism of contribution to entities such as the public companies that have been discussed by the shadow minister and the previous speaker to some extent that are government controlled entities, such as the Balance the Earth Trust or any of the other environmental offset trusts.

The prescription of either monetary payments or purchasing vouchers for such offsets is fraught with danger. I believe this is a flawed Labor strategy and it fails to recognise that problem. So confident is the current Labor government with the Ecofund that it is blindly going ahead into an area of de facto effective carbon trading when similar European governments were totally destroyed in Euro capital markets three years ago attempting to do the same thing. To have this funded by consumers who are forced to pay for Labor's cheap policy-for-votes backroom deals is awful. The hypocrisy is appalling. What these trusts will not deliver is that commitment to quality and, by definition, the strategy is inefficient, ineffective and is an emotional approach as opposed to a substantive one. The absurdity will be compounded if these funds are sold as capital expenditure by government year on year as our environmental policy processes are being delivered.

In my electorate of Gaven we have a significant feral deer problem. The department approved a cull. There appears to be a problem group of 100 of a 400-plus rusa deer in the Nerang forest.

Ms Jones: Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to ask what relevance the deer problem—

Dr DOUGLAS: I will explain.

Ms Jones: I cannot see how it has any relevance. It has no relevance to any clauses.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Minister, you did not claim it as a point of order. At the moment there is nothing that contravenes the rules of debate. There is no point of order.

Dr DOUGLAS: Just listen to it and I will—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gaven!

Ms JONES: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. He is talking about feral deer and national parks. There is no clause in this bill that refers to feral deer and national parks. This is about setting up an offset regime in Queensland.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, that is not a point of order. I call the member for Gaven.

Dr DOUGLAS: I will get to the point fairly quickly. What we have is a group of deer that may well have hybrid vigor association. So they are a cross between rusa and samba. They are living near housing surrounding the Nerang State Forest which has a quarry in the middle of it. The quarry currently has a deal that has to be negotiated on an ongoing basis. What we have is a feral deer problem surrounding this area. The problem is that we cannot get the deer cleared because we are negotiating a series of other deals. This will be resolved, but it will increasingly become a problem in many other areas. I could highlight a lot of those problems because I did some research on it. We have animals living in the area and we are trying to protect wallaby, bandicoots, noted birds and those sorts of animals. This is what good environmental policy should be. When we have poor quality offsets it will only make issues like feral deer serious problems when they should not be.

We must always consider the consequences of poor policies or inaction. I could clarify it later on for those who might need a little help understanding this. There are significant examples like this right across the state.


I want to give another example in my electorate of Gaven. On the edge of the electorate we have a development at Hinkler Drive. What actually happened was that there was massive land clearing using a rural land clearing permit. It exempted them from using all the standard things that they would use when establishing wildlife corridors, using native spotters and those sorts of things. They were exempt from doing those things. The outcomes that we achieved were less than they should have been. Subsequently, the developer has gone on to put in a development application. It looks fairly reasonable. But the reality is that at the time there was a weakness in the policy that should have actually delivered a slightly different outcome that would have been better. I would say to the government that they should use these examples carefully.

I believe in offsets and I think a lot of people do. I think that the progression to the trust was probably a jump too far. Offsets has to be a debate about quality over quantity, substance over fiction and innovation over base practice. In other words, it has to be about best practice and it must be nonadversarial. It must involve stakeholders at all levels and be fair to them. The process must be as transparent as it demands of those submitting proposals.

This bill is not enough of these things and it needs to improve in certain places. I have highlighted what they are. If it does none of those things then it is flawed as a regulatory step and it is unworthy of the cost of the implementation and disrespectful of nature and all the great beauty that goes with it.

Curiously, the private-public entity of the Balance the Earth Trust is created for this bill by Ecofund. Balance must mean exactly that—harmony. This is a belated reach for non-available land when quality offset land is largely absent. Increasingly across the state we are seeing that. Members may have heard the member for Hinchinbrook say the other day that two-thirds of the land in his electorate, for example, is totally unavailable for anything else so there is no capacity for offsets of land.

When we are charging people what we are really doing is charging them a service surcharge and basically then delivering it to a potential slush fund. That is not balance. That is not in harmony with nature and that is not what an offset policy should be.

 **Ms DARLING** (Sandgate—ALP) (5.34 pm): I rise to support the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009. After listening to the guff proffered by those opposite, I relish the opportunity to inject some facts into this debate.

Like other governments across Australia, Queensland has been using environmental offsets for some time as a way of managing the unavoidable impacts of development. The Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy commenced in 2008 and delivers on the government's commitment to create a framework for the use of offsets in Queensland. The Queensland government developed this policy after extensive research and consultation on the use of environmental offsets. The policy includes key principles and guidelines for how offsets should be used to counterbalance the impacts of development on state significant environmental values.

This will ultimately lead to improved consistency and transparency in the use of offsets as well as more systematic decision making in terms of when an offset is an appropriate condition of development. It also provides greater certainty to developers in terms of when an offset may be required.

I am pleased to note that in the shadow minister's speech he acknowledged that the opposition supports legislation that provides such an outcome for the government, development and the community. He stated—

We as the opposition certainly support actions that strengthen and legitimise environmental offset conditions on actions or developments that cause a negative impact on the environment.

I am very pleased to hear the opposition say that.

Not only does the Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy strengthen existing practices; it also paves the way for the future development of tailor made policy such as biodiversity. Queensland is Australia's most naturally diverse state and we have come to enjoy the variety of animals, plants and landscapes and the range of benefits and ecosystem services that they provide to the community. I will explain that expression. Ecosystem services underpin our ecology and economy and include services such as the provision of clean air and water, a supply of food and fibre, water filtration and groundwater stabilisation, a livable climate and recreational and spiritual experiences.

I have had the pleasure of assisting the Minister for Environment and Resource Management with some stakeholder consultation around our biodiversity strategy last year. I am pleased that her department is now developing an offsets policy for biodiversity which is expected to be finalised later this year. The offsets policy for biodiversity will further enhance the existing framework.

This bill supports the Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy by clarifying a number of the legal aspects of environmental offsets, including the requirement for decision makers and developers to consider offsets for residual impacts only. Measures that avoid and minimise the impacts should be considered in the first instance. This bill reinforces the role of offsets as a contemporary tool for environmental management that can help strike the balance between environment and development in Queensland.

I congratulate the departmental staff on their extensive work, on their research and on their consultation to inform the drafting of this bill. The only thing that those opposite have enlightened me on during this debate is the fact that they have no problem abusing their parliamentary privileges when they come into this place and bash hardworking public servants and engage in slanderous innuendo. If anyone had the misfortune to listen to the speech of the opposition spokesman for the environment on

Tuesday and the rest of it this afternoon, they might be fascinated by the fact that instead of starting by addressing the policy content of this bill he instead launched into conspiracy theories and accusations under the protection of parliamentary privilege.

If those opposite have any information of impropriety, then the appropriate place to refer that information to is the Crime and Misconduct Commission. But the fact of the matter is there has been no misconduct, no smoke, no mirrors and all that those opposite are left with is the ability to wax lyrical with the latest conspiracy theory. I think it is the word 'eco' in Ecofund. Climate change deniers and environmental sceptics really do shy away from anything that sounds like it could have something to do with environmentalists, so that word 'eco' spooks them every time.

Ms Jones: It's so corrupt that the Lord Mayor uses it!

Ms DARLING: I take that interjection from the minister. What the shadow minister is undoubtedly aware of is that over 80 per cent of Ecofund's year-to-date revenue has come from clients other than the Queensland government, including significant corporate and local government entities such as Wesfarmers, Curragh, Origin and—wait for it—

Ms Jones: Who?

Ms DARLING: The Brisbane City Council! I wonder whether those opposite think that Lord Mayor Campbell Newman would be involved in any entity that sniffs of corruption or inappropriate practices. Ecofund was audited by the Auditor-General last year and it will be audited again this year.

Ms Jones: By whom? The Auditor-General!

Ms DARLING: Yes, the Auditor-General. Whilst members opposite get whipped up into a frenzy of conspiracy and innuendo, let us look at the sorts of governance standards they themselves promote. The member for Mudgeeraba herself was the subject of media scrutiny in January this year while spruiking the membership of the Titanium Club. And what is this, may we ask? The first thing members should know is people pay for access to it.

Mrs STUCKEY: I rise to a point of order. I ask where the relevance to this bill is.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Powell): Order! There is no point of order, but I would remind the member for Sandgate that this bill has very particular purposes.

Ms DARLING: It does, and I will come back to the relevance, because I am answering accusations that were levelled at this government by the shadow minister in his speech on this bill when he cast a shadow over the operations of the policy formation of this bill. Therefore, I am bringing the House's attention to the policy formation practices of those opposite. A club like the Titanium Club is a proposed legislative and policy development framework, because the Titanium Club includes—

Mr Wallace: More cash for comment.

Ms DARLING: Well, participation in the Titanium Club forum means one can gain regular access to political and business leaders, become more closely involved with the political process, become a stakeholder in the future of a Liberal-National government in Queensland, entertain business clients and guests, meet prospective clients and business partners—

Dr DOUGLAS: I rise to a point of order. This is not relevant. This is a completely different issue, and actually I find the comments offensive.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you asking that they be withdrawn?

Dr DOUGLAS: I actually want these comments withdrawn, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gaven, the comments are not directed at you personally. I do not believe they need to be withdrawn. Member for Sandgate, I would ask you to come to the point very quickly, please. I have given you some latitude on this. I would ask you to return to the bill, please.

Ms DARLING: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am lucky I have a transcript of the speech of the shadow minister. As the first speaker in this second reading debate on Tuesday night his first few sentences talked about the policy direction taken in other areas. He named several people individually—people can read the transcript for themselves—and he went on to make some accusations with regard to Ecofund, so I will get to the point. After listening to the shadow minister this afternoon, he made more accusations about the style of policy formation of the government that goes to the heart of this very bill. I will sum it up by saying that the way the opposition would develop its policy on anything—if we ever get to hear some policies—is by saying with regard to the Titanium Club—

The activities enable members to contribute to policy development, be active and informed on issues, participate in stimulating, thought-provoking discussions and network with like-minded businessmen and women.

What do members think the Leader of the Opposition's response was to this? He said, 'Perhaps the wording could have been different.' The opposition should think twice before taking the high moral ground on this issue or any other issues. I am responding to—

Dr DOUGLAS: I rise to a point of order. Mr Deputy Speaker, we have been through this issue already. I found the comments offensive to the LNP and I asked that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gaven, there is no point of order. The comments are not personally offensive. There is no need for them to be withdrawn. Member for Sandgate, can you please conclude your remarks on this matter and move on.

Ms DARLING: I commend the minister and I, with pleasure, support the bill.

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (5.44 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill. Like the member for Sandgate's marvellous and, importantly, factually accurate contribution, I, too, will use my contribution to inject some facts into this debate—something which I have noticed members of the opposition have been struggling to do this afternoon. Among other things, this bill supports the Queensland government's environmental offsets policy and the specific-issue policies for environmental offsets such as the unavoidable loss of fish habitat to development or other works. One of these policies is the Mitigation and Compensation for Works or Activities Causing Marine Fish Habitat Loss policy, which was published by Fisheries Queensland in 2002. My contribution to this debate this afternoon will focus on this specific aspect of the bill.

It goes without saying that fish habitats are essential to the support of our state's fisheries and extend to the land, waters and plants associated with the life cycle of fish and other marine life. Quite clearly, these environmental offset policies protect and support key fish habitats in Queensland and, accordingly, these offset policies protect and support recreational, commercial and Indigenous fishing for Queenslanders. Further, if we did not support and protect fish habitats we would put at risk the processes of spawning, sheltering and feeding for finfish, prawns, crabs, squid, oysters and scallops. This would be a devastating result for current and future generations of recreational, commercial and Indigenous fishers. The offset policy has been an important tool to help address the residual impacts that result from approval of coastal development and ensures that the unavoidable impacts that cannot be mitigated through revised design, relocation and best practice are addressed through environmental offsets. Offsets have been an integral part of the coast development assessment and approval process for many years.

As honourable members may be aware, the offsets must be appropriate to the extent and nature of the impacts of the development and may include things like habitat exchange, signage, extension and educational materials, rehabilitation of degraded habitats, fishing facilities, or funding for fish habitat research, and over time we can point to many examples of successful fish habitat offsets in Queensland. We have seen fish habitats being donated to the state for declaration within fish habitat areas or within environmental reserves managed by local governments. So here we see the offset principle protecting fish habitats for current and future generations. But we have also seen the establishment of an honours scholarship program at the University of Queensland, James Cook University and Central Queensland University using funds obtained from fish habitat offsets. I understand that to date all students who participated in this program have earned first-class honours—a marvellous achievement. So here we see again the offset principle investing in fish habitat research and best practice for current and future generations. Further, we have seen the construction of boardwalks, fishing platforms, public boat ramps and signage, and the production of extension materials which highlight the values of fish habitats. Again we see the offset principle improving access to fish habitats for current and future generations. There is no doubt that recreational and commercial fishing along Queensland's coast are key economic activities that support coastal communities and respectively provide important lifestyle, tourism and export opportunities.

It is policies such as this that support the ongoing protection of fish habitat for not only common species but important rare and endangered species that can mean the difference between survival and extinction. Mr Deputy Speaker, you might be very interested to hear, and I think you should really listen to this, that one of those species that may benefit from the protection of fish habitat under this offset policy could in fact be the species of fish called the jack dempsey. Whilst not a native to Queensland—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr RYAN: It is a real fish. It is a real fish, the jack dempsey.

Mrs Sullivan: A shark, is he?

Mr RYAN: No, it is a real fish. There is a real fish called a jack dempsey, so there you go, that is very interesting. Whilst not a native to Queensland, this exotic fish species is known to prefer caves and nooks to hide in when kept in an aquarium; and in the wild, it can be found in muddy canals, swamps and drainage ditches, as it appreciates the slow moving murky water. Maybe that is where the shadow opposition spokesman is now—in those slow moving murky waters. I just imagine the murky waters of the LNP would be the ideal habitat for a jack dempsey. The jack dempsey thrives on a diet of crustaceans, insects—


Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Powell): Member for Morayfield, I remind you to refer to members by their correct title, please.

Mr RYAN: It is a real fish. It is a fish called the jack dempsey. It is not the member for Bundaberg, it is a real fish.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Morayfield, be careful in your distinction of the two, please.

Mr RYAN: The jack dempsey thrives on a diet of crustaceans, insects, worms, frogs, shrimps and other smaller fish. I can only imagine who is next on the menu for our Jack Dempsey. Fortunately, the jack dempsey fish population in Australia is considered a feral species and the population is in decline. This means that there is no offset requirement for the destruction of its habitat, but like their political counterparts the jack dempsey fish species are very adept at destroying each other and their own respective habitats.

The new arrangements introduced by this bill will ensure native species will have their habitat protected now and into the future. This is good news for the people of the Morayfield state electorate, especially the members of the mighty Morayfield Eels Fishing Club. They are good people and they love their fishing and I say hello to them tonight. This is good news also for Queensland's fishing and environment communities. This is good policy for the Queensland of today and the Queensland of tomorrow. I take this opportunity to commend the minister, her staff and the departmental staff on getting this bill before the House. I also commend the bill to the House and encourage all members to support it.

 **Mr CHOI** (Capalaba—ALP) (5.51 pm): Thank you for the opportunity to rise to support the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009. In doing so, I thank the minister and her team for their dedication and commitment to finding a practical way to protect and enhance the environment of the state of Queensland. This bill supports the Queensland government environmental offsets policy and the specific issue policies for environmental offsets. One of these policies is the offsets policy for net benefit to koalas and koala habitat which was released by the Queensland government in May 2010 as part of a new planning and development framework for protecting koalas and their habitat.

The survival of koalas in urban settings is an important issue for my electorate and that of the Redland city area. The Bligh government is taking strong steps to protect koalas through a \$55 million koala response strategy, including \$43.5 million to acquire and rehabilitate land, a \$10 million road retrofit program through Main Roads as well as \$400,000 for disease research funding. Already, the government has bought close to 150 hectares of land for koala habitat and has applied nature refuges to two important privately held properties. This is in addition to delivering the strongest koala planning laws through the koala state planning policy and state planning regulatory provisions that came into effect early last year.

The planning and development framework for protecting koalas and their habitat includes a state planning policy to guide future land use planning decisions, a state planning regulatory provision to ensure development applications currently being considered incorporate koala conservation considerations and a whole-of-government policy to manage the impacts of state community infrastructure activities on koalas and their habitat. The offsets policy in this bill supports implementation of this framework.

An expanded offsets policy was a key action of this government's koala response strategy announced in December 2008. The offsets policy requires that development avoid and minimise their impacts on higher value koala habitat, with any remaining impacts being offset to net benefit for koala habitat. This net benefit is based on replacing non-juvenile koala habitat trees with five trees for every one tree removed—that is, a five to one net benefit ratio.

The policy provides flexibility for development proponents to decide how they wish to acquit their offset liability. There are three options: firstly, self-delivery, where the proponent can source and manage an offset themselves; secondly, sourcing and delivery of the offset through an offset provider, such as Ecofund; and, thirdly, the provision of a financial contribution to the assessment manager, usually the local government or in some circumstances the state via DERM, to be based on a flat dollar amount per new tree required to be established. Financial contributions received will contribute to the state government's koala habitat protection and rehabilitation programs, aimed at increasing the overall amount of bushland koala habitat in South-East Queensland.

The amendments proposed by this bill in relation to offset conditions provide certainty to developers, local councils and state agencies with a role in development assessment. While there is still more work to be done, we are getting on with the job of providing the best possible chance for koalas for the future.

For example, Boom-ber-pee koala nature refuge will become an 18-hectare haven for Redlands koalas right in the heart of some of the region's prime koala country. Situated east of Springwood, Boom-ber-pee koala nature refuge will link with several existing protected areas, including Venman

Bushland National Park, Cornubia Forest Nature Refuge and a number of Logan City Council reserves. The 18-hectare property is currently home to a multi award winning eco bed and breakfast retreat that will co-exist with the nature refuge and local koalas. Containing remnant endangered and of concern regional ecosystems, the site will be a haven for koalas as well as glossy black cockatoos.


In addition, almost 900 hectares of land previously earmarked for future development in Thornlands and southern Redland Bay have also been protected. Another 7.6 hectare property on Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road, protected as part of the Bligh government's koala response strategy, has also been purchased. The government is also keen to develop partnership with local authorities, and a partnership with Redland City Council to rehabilitate a 3.5-hectare site in my electorate on Smith Street, Capalaba, took place last year. Over 2,800 trees have been planted at this site and 5.6 hectares of valuable state owned koala habitat at Alexandra Hills was handed over to Redland City Council as environmental reserve.

As I said earlier, in June last year, this government announced \$45.5 million to continue implementation of the response strategy. This significant funding will focus on protecting and rehabilitating koala habitat within the South-East Queensland region. An expanded offsets policy, new planning and development framework, koala habitat protection and rehabilitation program and enhanced surveying and monitoring were key recommendations of the expert koala task force, and the Bligh government is delivering on them. I listened to the contribution by the shadow minister—

Ms Darling: I feel sorry for you.

Mr CHOI: Me too. The conspiracy theories of those opposite know no end. The fact of the matter is that those issues that have been raised by the shadow minister are fiction, fantasy and scaremongering. The accountability mechanisms that are in place for the Balance the Earth Trust are enshrined in legislation, which the shadow minister has obviously either failed to read, at best, or most certainly has not been able to understand. It does not end there—not only are these responsibilities enshrined in legislation, but there are mechanisms contained within the constitution of the trust deed, which was made publicly available to the opposition through a question on notice last year. But wait, there is more. In case one was concerned that there was still insufficient transparency and accountability in place, the trust's records have been audited by the Queensland Audit Office.

If the opposition does not think the Queensland Audit Office is doing its job, it should say so. If the opposition does not trust the Queensland Auditor-General, it should say so. If the opposition does not believe in the integrity of the Audit Office, it should definitely say so. The fact of the matter is that when the opposition does not have a policy—which is more often than not—there is only one way it knows how to deal with it: twisting the truth and engaging in a scaremongering campaign and, if people do not buy it, scaring them some more. At some point, even in Queensland, the alternative government of this state needs to wake up to themselves and realise that you can only engage a small-target strategy to avoid scrutiny for so long. There will come a point in time when even this opposition needs to come clean and spell out clearly to the people of Queensland what it stands for. When it does, it may have a little more credibility, and even then we shall see how long it can keep a policy before it changes its mind, depending on the way the wind blows. This is excellent legislation. It is sound policy of the government. I commend this bill to the House.

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (6.00 pm): I rise to speak in this debate on the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009, which was introduced into the House on 12 November of that year by the minister for climate change and sustainability. As members are aware, this legislation has been sitting on the *Notice Paper* for over a year—some 16 months—while other legislation has been rushed through in a blink of an eye. I think I have amended this speech some five or six times during that period. It speaks volumes, though, about the Bligh government's commitment to environmental protection when it leaves this bill on the backburner for so long. Only one other bill on the *Notice Paper* has sat there longer—the Charter of Budget Honesty Bill, which was introduced in April 2009—and that one will not ever see the light of day as it languishes on the list.

The member for Sandgate's contribution epitomised not only the lack of talent on the government side but also their total disrespect for parliament's time in using a debate on an environment issue—which is important—to slander the LNP, and the member for Morayfield did not offer much more. The primary objective of this bill is to include conditioning powers to place beyond doubt that environmental offset conditions may be imposed on development approvals, environmental authorities and other approvals for development. The provisions contained within this legislation do not change any current practices in relation to the government's environmental offset policy. However, we are told that it is intended to create certainty and prevent any legal challenges to imposing offsets.

To achieve this objective the bill seeks to amend the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Fisheries Act 1994, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 to insert a conditioning power in each of those acts for environmental offsets. These are administered through the Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy. As members of the House have heard from the

shadow minister, the honourable member for Bundaberg, the LNP has reservations about aspects of this bill—and I say ‘aspects’ of this bill—particularly with regard to transparency and accountability surrounding the establishment and management of Ecofund. According to the explanatory notes, environmental offsets are required as a condition of approval where there is a specific-issue offsets policy under the QGEOP. Current specific-issue offsets policies relate to vegetation management, marine fish habitat and koala habitat. The exceptions to this rule are offsets required by the Coordinator-General under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 and the interim arrangements in place until a biodiversity specific-issue offsets policy is developed.

Types of offsets under the Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy include dedication as a protected area; entering into an offsets agreement; providing a financial contribution to an environmental offsets trust, being the Balance the Earth Trust; and providing a guarantee and/or financial assurance. A guarantee from a developer that they will at some point in the future offset the negative environmental impact of their development appears as a distinct weakness with this policy. It would be worth knowing how many developers have chosen this option since the program’s inception in July 2008 and the number that have come through on their promise. Perhaps the minister would be kind enough to inform the House of this figure. Offset programs should be to the benefit of the environment, not to the government. I repeat: offset programs should be to the benefit of the environment and not to the government. It is a major concern of the LNP that this Bligh government is using the offsets program as a replacement for government environment spending.

Offsets for koalas and koala habitats are of particular importance to my electorate of Currumbin, which, despite this government’s ignorance, has a significant, albeit decreasing, koala population. Where an unavoidable need for development arises that will impact on a koala habitat area, a net benefit, we are told, can be achieved through an offset. Examples include planting in areas of cleared habitat or securing vegetation from future development elsewhere. So why is it that the areas in my electorate have been omitted? I am told that habitat protection and restoration is preferred. However, projects to reduce the mortality rate of koalas due to vehicles can also be considered in an offset package. It is this case that I would like to prosecute further.

The proposed amendments to the Sustainable Planning Act will allow for environmental offset conditions to be on-site or off-site from the site of the development approval. Giving developers the option to offset on-site or off-site could result in an offset having no relevant connection to the destruction of habitat that an approved development will cause. Protecting current wildlife populations and ensuring their healthy survival should be the aim of all environmental policy presented to this House. Action needs to be taken now to halt the decline in the rapidly shrinking koala population. The government’s proposed offsets threaten to undermine the efforts of many in Queensland who are dedicated to protecting koala habitats.

Over the past two years the Bligh government has announced millions of dollars supposedly to try to protect Queensland’s koala population: \$15 million for acquiring new koala habitat, \$4 million for suitable landowners to rehabilitate their land for use as a nature refuge for koalas, a \$1 million habitat mapping project, a \$400,000 tender for research into diseases affecting the koala population and \$343,000 and \$440,000 respectively for the Daisy Hill Koala Centre and the Moggill Koala Hospital. That is over \$21 million, but I might add that there is not a brass razoo for Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary’s highly utilised wildlife hospital. Despite these allocations, the alarming fact is that the government’s capital spending on the environment has decreased from \$55.7 million—

Ms JONES: I rise to a point of order. I would really like to ask that the honourable member come back to the bill. Nothing that she is talking about now has any relevance to the bill before the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! Thank you, Minister. I am listening to the member for Currumbin. I am giving you a long bow. I just remind you of the particular purposes of the bill and I ask you to come back to the bill.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am very keen to speak further about koala habitats, which are a very clear part of the offsets of this bill, and the funding that is required to purchase them. The former shadow minister for climate change and sustainability highlighted that a \$400,000 grant to fund disease research was really money that had already been re-allocated. So if we are going to protect koala habitats and have offsets, we need to be considering disease—

Ms JONES: I rise to a point of order. That is not true. The member is misleading the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. Minister, if the member, in your mind, is misleading the House there is a process under the standing orders.

Mrs STUCKEY: There is a very good argument for a lot more koala habitats and I am pleased to see that that is one of the key policies mentioned in this bill. It is a real shame that the minister does not seem to value the fact that in Queensland the koala population has decreased by 64 per cent. I believe that is a very worrying and concerning figure. Numerous experts, including the respected CEO of the

Australian Koala Foundation, Deborah Tabart—who I am sure is going to enjoy reading my speech—has said that this government does not do and is not doing enough to keep koalas from extinction in our state.

Government members interjected.

Mrs STUCKEY: Isn't that something this very bill purports to be doing—protecting koala habitats? You would not think so from the noise in this chamber from members. As for the government's latest attempt at restoring its flaky environmental status, the \$1 million koala habitat mapping has been criticised by local councils all over South-East Queensland for its inaccuracy. Conflict between development areas as specified in the SEQ Regional Plan and the same allocation as zero development koala conservation areas has resulted in local councils crying foul at this government's poorly planned policies. The state's mapping—this minister's mapping—has ignored areas in Currumbin Waters and Elanora in my electorate and does not acknowledge the Gold Coast City Council's koala relocation program at Coomera. Local governments across Queensland are working hard to protect our koala populations and habitat. What good is the state government's effort if the local governments' more prescriptive and detailed mapping will not be used to its full potential?

Ms Jones: They can use it. They can use their mapping, Jann, you know that.

Mrs STUCKEY: When considering development applications and other planning schemes which fall under local governments, will the state government's flawed mapping take precedence over the detailed and carefully crafted efforts of local government?

Ms Jones: No. No.

Mrs STUCKEY: I ask the minister to respond civilly when she has her turn.

Ms Jones interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! I will wait for the House to come to order. Member for Currumbin, I think you are making your point there and you are getting pretty close to being off the bill. I refer you to the particular purposes of the bill and ask you to come back to the bill.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to thank the staff and volunteers at the Currumbin Sanctuary Wildlife Hospital. If it was not for them the vital service that the hospital provides to wildlife throughout our local community could not be maintained. As the House does not wish to hear at all about how many injured koalas there were or how this population is decreasing, I would simply implore the minister to prove that she values our koalas and maybe assist the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary.

In relation to the additional environmental concerns more broadly in this bill as they relate to the legislation, I would be hoping very much that the government has considered the report by the not-for-profit organisation SEQ Catchments released on 28 March 2010, *Managing what matters—The cost of environmental decline in South East Queensland*. The study addressed the need for the government to effectively manage the pressures that the expected population growth in South-East Queensland will have on the environment and our natural resources. The social cost, which I am sure the minister is aware of, is about to reach \$5.2 billion over the next 20 years if we have a do-nothing approach and we do not protect our natural resources. This is not to mention the economic downfall for primary industries and the tourism sector that will come as a direct result of environmental neglect.

The Labor government has a duty to protect the natural environment of Queensland from the adverse effects of impending population growth and urban expansion. The *Managing what matters* report highlights a number of areas that must be addressed at a policy level, including recognising community views, improving government planning and prioritising funding to deliver on the South East Queensland Natural Resource Management Plan targets. Unfortunately for our state, acting on these recommendations will require responsible governance and that is a concept foreign to the Bligh Labor government.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—Ind) (6.12 pm): I rise to make a short, but hopefully eventful, contribution to the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009. The minister, in her second reading speech, says an environmental offset is a positive action taken to compensate for unavoidable negative environmental impacts that might result from an activity or a development. I am opposed to environmental offsets. This is nothing more than a revenue raiser for this government. It has absolutely nothing to do with protecting the environment. It is protection money, full stop. It is a policy taken from the Mafia or the yakuza. It is bribe or extortion money to a government that is desperate for money. It is proof of a decade-long slide into a green tyranny. The Mafia used the threat of death or beatings to extract bribes and extortion. This government uses threats of massive fines found in their environmental legislation to force people to admit to environmental damage or to pay money to Ecofund. One does not have to do much in Queensland to inadvertently break an environmental law. Every day there is a new colour on the tree clearing maps. Every day there is a new regulation that has been snuck

through on the back of legislation that has come through here. For example, the fish breeding habitats magically appeared. The latest one is the wetlands declaration, another great big opportunity for developers to break laws, according to this government, and then pay their protection money to this government.

By way of example I ask this question: which offence under Queensland law attracts a higher fine or penalty: breaching the environmental laws and damaging a declared fish habitat or hiring an under-age girl, a child, to work in an adult escort agency?

Ms JONES: I rise to a point of order. I am really confused as to what an escort agency has to do with the environmental protection bill that we have before the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): I am listening to the member. The member for Burnett has the call.

Mr MESSENGER: By way of explanation to the minister, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am simply comparing the fines that are found on pages 11 and 12 relating to the amendment of the Fisheries Act 1994. It talks about environmental offsets being taken in a fish habitat including, for example, works or activities to enhance or rehabilitate a fish habitat. Say we broke that law. Just, for example, let us pick a wild example, say a Vietnam veteran suddenly decided that he wanted to repair a riverbank for a Vietnam veterans retreat where he had 40 acres—I will just pick this example out—and he repaired a riverbank thinking that he was doing the right thing in allowing his disabled Vietnam veteran mates to be able to access that Vietnam veterans retreat. As a result he breached the legislation and then all of a sudden he faced a \$300,000 fine. Let us compare that with, for example, breaching legislation and hiring an under-age girl to work in an escort agency. Members might be shocked to learn that if a person is charged with damaging a bank of a river in an area that is classed as a declared fish habitat area under the Fisheries Act 1994, page 94, they will face a maximum possible fine of \$300,000. That is a fact. If a person is charged with hiring an under-age person, a child, to work in one of the many escort agencies which advertise in our state papers then under the Prostitution and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009, page 16, they will face a maximum possible fine of \$10,000.

Under this government, under this Premier, these ministers and her government, if found guilty of this environmental offence a person faces a maximum possible fine which is 30 times greater than a serious child protection offence. That is the point that I am making in this place. Those opposite should hang their heads in shame for allowing this to continue. There should be a review—


Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! Member for Burnett, you have made your point. I would like you to move on to your next point and remain relevant to the particular purposes of the bill.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I refer to the bill, under the amendment of the Fisheries Act 1994, page 12, clause 17, environmental offset conditions. I wish to bring to the attention of the House another example of the kind of tyranny and heartache that these environmental laws that this government has propagated over the last decade bring to my constituents and the people of Queensland. I had a meeting, a very sad meeting and a conversation, with the widow of a man who took his life during a trial at the end of last year which is relevant to this legislation. The charges the widow's husband faced were of an environmental nature, allegedly a breach of the Fisheries Act. I wonder if they were offered environmental offsets instead of being taken to court. Maybe that is part of the deal here: a person pays an environmental offset and they will not be charged with a criminal offence. This person's husband faced a maximum fine of \$300,000 if found guilty of damaging a fish habitat, as is stated in this legislation, or illegally removing some vegetation. These charges were investigated and laid by officers of the Hervey Bay DPIF, including an officer by the name of Derek Smith. The widow of this deceased man wants answers from this government about the manner in which the investigation and the trial of her husband was conducted.

Once again, I refer back to the legislation and I go back to my original point. These environmental offsets have the great potential to be environmental bribes to this government. Environmental offsets have the great potential to increase housing prices for regional and rural landowners, for first home buyers. This government will find a way for every regional developer to break or contravene an environmental law or regulation. The latest one, as I described earlier, was the wetland declarations. They will have to pay the environmental bribe, the offset, to these nebulous, unaccountable authorities—and we have no real way of checking what they are doing with the money—through the government's environmental offset policy.

There is expected to be a population boom due to the flow-on economic benefits of the regional mining boom. That will happen. There will be housing shortages due to excessive headworks charges in the councils, lack of supply of land, lengthy approval processes and lack of transport infrastructure to support development. On top of that, regional and rural areas will now have to start worrying about the wetland declarations and all the different colours that come with this environmental legislation. On top of that, people are now facing carbon taxes and, in turn, an increase in interest rates—the whole bit.

The point that I am making is that these environmental offset fees will be paid by developers back to this government. The developers will pass the costs of those fees on to their customers in rural and regional areas. Those customers will be first home buyers and others. Finally, as I said at the beginning of my speech, the environmental offsets are not protecting the environment. It is protection money.

 **Mr DOWLING** (Redlands—LNP) (6.22 pm): Tonight I rise to speak on the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2009.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DOWLING: It is like the two old guys on the balcony from the *Muppets*. It is a joy to be here. This legislation sets out to amend four acts: the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Fisheries Act 1994, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Sustainable Planning Act 2009. These provisions are largely to be administered through QGEOP, the Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy. They touch on three key principles which are obviously vegetation management, the marine fish habitat and the koala habitat. I would like to talk to each of those because they are relevant. The principle behind offsets is certainly something that is not new to me considering my time in council. Councils have used offsets for some time. By and large, they are a valid tool.

Ms Jones: Tell your colleagues that because they didn't get it.

Mr DOWLING: I am sorry, Minister. I missed the interjection.

Ms Jones: I was saying you should tell your colleagues that because none of them got that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! We will not have a conversation in the chamber between members. The member for Redlands has the call and you will address the topics of the bill.

Mr DOWLING: As I started to say, the instrument itself is a reasonable tool and it is a tool that can work very well. My fear and my concern is that, like council, so many of these instruments start off with high ideals and they work well to a point and they work well in certain areas. However, it is the detail that snags them. I know that vegetation management is a big issue within my council. Council holds significant tracts of land, as is right and proper for local government to do. Some of those have been gained by offsets. The issues then become the vegetation management—the ongoing management of those parcels of land. While these instruments are valid, I do not believe there is sufficient policy in place, sufficient mechanisms in place and sufficient safeguards in place to get the good environmental outcomes to which we all aspire. It is the detail that lets us down. Quite often it is the follow-through that lets us down.

I can give honourable members example after example—certainly with regard to Redlands, and I know other councils suffer the same fate. The lands that they inherit or become stewards of are quite often weed infested or they have infestations of feral animals. In the Redlands feral pigs, foxes, cats and all manner of vermin are a huge problem. They actually attack the wildlife and destroy the vegetation. They destroy the very thing that we are setting out to protect. The flip side to that is that quite often governments tend to lock things away. While this strategy of having environmental parks, wilderness and areas of significance and habitat is good, before we love it, we have to learn about it, we have to know it and we have to understand it. We tend to lock things away and they become almost waste grounds.

In relation to these funds with the Balance the Earth Trust and the Ecofund, are there vehicles for those entities to partner with local government and to go back a step and actually start to really manage and improve those holdings that councils and even state governments have? They cannot just be set up as cash cows that these entities milk, especially considering their lack of transparency, openness and accountability. While they report through mechanisms, they are instruments of state and they have been established by state. Therefore, they need to come back here. There needs to be some due process, some thorough going-through of their audit process and their prioritisation, and that is critical.

I now move to marine fish habitat and flag again another issue in my electorate that has come to the fore. It is an issue that has been ongoing and it is an issue that has been tick-tacked and bounced around between various state government departments and the local council. It dates back even further than my time in council. The marine habitat in my area is contaminated with asbestos. This issue has been raised and strategies and reports have been put together to actually entomb it. That entombment application has come to this government. While one part of this state government has actually contributed to the funding of the entombment process by way of recreational funding for a new boat ramp and a car park facility, it then becomes part of the ongoing transport system within the Macleay Island community. However, the Department of Fisheries is actually impeding that process. I understand that it has rejected this application. It does not support it and it is opposing it and preventing it from proceeding. I would flag that that is a significant issue. Not only is that asbestos a health issue—and a significant one—to the residents and visitors of Macleay Island but it is also alleged to be entering the general food chain. So there is that knock-on effect and we all know the implications of asbestos.

I just wonder if there is capability for this fund to seek out those opportunities or to be directed to seek out those opportunities to actually get the good environmental outcomes that we want, to get the improved fish habitat, to get the improved wilderness and land reserves, particularly in Redlands. Redlands is largely protected through a combination of its urban footprint, and beyond that there is the Koala Coast. Those instruments largely protect it.

In the Redlands there is a huge tract of land that is quite literally infested with cats, feral pigs and foxes, all of which are not good companions for the wildlife and ecosystems that we are trying to preserve. That is where this process lets itself down. We do not spend enough time going back and getting pristine wilderness. I understand that council quite often does place conditions on an application so that, in the case of land transitions, it has to be free of weed when it is handed over. However, that is an ongoing thing. Weeds travel by wind, by bird and by other means. So there is that ongoing management. When we do not do it right we lose the very principles that we are setting out to achieve, and there are so many examples of where we do not do it right.

One of the other significant issues that again we have failed to properly address in many communities is rubbish. Council owned tracts of land and state government owned tracts of land are quite often remote and isolated. So what do people do? They dump car bodies, fridges, furniture—you name it. They pull up on the roadside and dump all their garden waste. This is because council dump fees—certainly Redlands has introduced dump fees—are actively herding people away from the dump, because with people's finances the way they are, with the increasing costs of water, power, rego, fuel and you name it, those \$16 visits to the dump are no longer affordable. They are no longer possible. So we are driving them out to country roads, quiet roads, back roads or parklands where they can offload their ute, their trailer or their boot full of grass seed, weeds and all of that. We are propagating a problem; we are not addressing those issues. We are not getting to the core of what these offsets are supposed to be about.

I want to also talk about koala habitats. I have pretty much covered this with so many of the other issues that I have touched on. Again, the koala is probably in many respects an iconic symbol. He is not the be-all and end-all of environmental issues, but he is an iconic symbol. He is akin to the dolphin out in the bay. He is the species that, if you can protect and preserve his or her habitat, by default you protect that which is underneath it and around it. I draw the attention of members to that.

It is about those offset management plans. It is about ensuring that these entities do not just stockpile cash and become land banks and financiers but that they reinvest it and reinvest it appropriately. They should reinvest it not only in their own assets and their own stocks but in those areas that are under the most pressure, that are the most critically vulnerable, that have the endangered species or the endangered ecosystem or that have marginal issues. Those entities have the ability to manage it. Again, those issues are critical.

It is about getting those things right and it is about being proactive and not being obstructionist. Quite often government departments by their charter have one Holy Grail. It is almost like they have tunnel vision where they focus on their little piece of a jigsaw puzzle to the detriment oftentimes of other things around it. I come back to the Macleay Island example. All of the authorities, all of the experts, all of the engineers have looked at this problem of a significant tract of asbestos buried underneath the beach. It is too deep to excavate and remove. That excavation would involve the removal of mangroves. Those mangroves are part of the food chain. The asbestos is getting into the ecosystem. The fish, crustaceans and other things there are also suffering from it. Then you go to the proposed solution—the affordable solution, the solution that actually delivers a benefit for another endangered species, and that is the people who live on Macleay Island, the residents of Redlands. They get a transport terminal out of this, they get some additional parking and they get that safety issue addressed.

While I realise and appreciate that I have focused largely on the Redlands, that is the community that I represent. As I say, these offset strategies are not new. They are not a new principle. They are not a new tool. This just opens it up. Again, I flag this by way of a question more than anything else. If there was a development application in the Redlands, for example, and the applicant opts to use the cash offset through either the Balance the Earth Trust or the Ecofund—as it is possible to choose that option as I read the legislation—and chooses to give that money to these other entities, is there an ability then for council to draw that offset back or is that opportunity now lost to that local authority because the offsets were not available in that local area? Again, I understand that Redlands is a finite location and there are not those opportunities to buy tracts of land to offset. Again, if the offset has to be done elsewhere, how does that community benefit?

I understand the principles of the offset, but again it needs to be a two-way street. Local governments cannot be expected to forgo those opportunities and to forgo that capital or that asset. They cannot be expected to forgo it and have it go down the drain quite literally and disappear out the back of nowhere where there is no significant benefit. If you set out to preserve a koala habitat, you

cannot then go to the back of Roma somewhere and do an exchange there. There is no way that that is going to benefit the koala. There is no way that that is going to benefit an ecosystem within that particular curtilage. They are the issues that need to be addressed. They are issues that need to be resolved. With those few comments—

Mr Reeves: Thirteen minutes!

Mr DOWLING: I could go longer.



Mr WETTENHALL (Barron River—ALP) (6.35 pm): I rise to support the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2010. The bill supports the Queensland government environmental offsets policy and the specific issue policies for environmental offsets. The bill will also support local governments who use offsets requirements under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009.

Although the Queensland government environmental offsets policy only applies to Queensland government decisions on approval for development, local governments may also impose environmental offset conditions to offset regional or local values which have not been addressed by the state agencies. When assessing those offset requirements for development approvals under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, local governments are encouraged to apply the principles and guidelines of the Queensland government environmental offsets policy. This will encourage greater consistency in the management of offsets across Queensland.

The environmental offsets which local governments may wish to impose are outlined in statutory regional plans. For example, the Far North Queensland Regional Plan states—

Urban development within the urban footprint or rural living area within an area of high ecological significance ... is located, designed and operated to avoid impacts on ecological values, or where avoidance is not possible, minimise impacts and then offset residual impacts so there is a net gain of the impacted values.

The amendments to the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 contained in the bill not only clarify the Queensland government's ability to place offset conditions on development approvals but also clarify this ability for local governments. The interests of local governments are an important part of the state's offset policy framework. The state government is currently considering the use of offsets through statutory planning schemes, and policy options are being developed to meet local governments' needs.

I understand that local governments have been keen to use offsets and, as a result of this bill, have had their power to impose those offset conditions clarified. For example, I understand that at the Local Government Association of Queensland conference in August last year local governments resolved that representations would be made to the state requesting a review of policy and regulations containing offset provisions to address two issues: the recognition of local governments throughout the policy application process and the ability of local governments to apply offset provisions through statutory planning schemes.

I just want to briefly comment on a couple of other features of the bill, in particular those provisions that give courts new powers to impose a new range of penalties for offences. Those new orders can be imposed in addition to fines as a result of a successful prosecution and will operate to be a significant deterrent to breaching the legislation.


Those new orders include: a public benefit order where the offender can be required to restore or rehabilitate the environment; a publication or notification order where an offender is named and the details of the offence that has been committed can be published; and a monetary benefit order where an offender can be required to pay an amount equivalent to the financial benefit that they have received from committing the offence. Those are very significant and worthwhile additions to the bill and have been called for by a range of stakeholders groups with whom I have had contact in the past. They are an essential weapon in the armoury to prevent environmental harm. They are very significant features of the bill.

The bill also makes amendments to the Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995 to pave the way for the finalisation of the Queensland Coastal Plan. The amendments will provide for a greater focus on coastal hazards. In the wake of recent extreme weather events, particularly in Far North Queensland with Cyclone Yasi and the associated storm surge, these amendments could not be more timely. What we do know from the science is that in the future as a result of climate change the cyclones that we will experience in our state will be more intense.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr WETTENHALL: I know that those opposite are climate change deniers and still have their heads buried in the sand on that particular issue. In any event, making provision for coastal hazards is good planning. The amendments in the bill do provide for that. They will provide for the coastal plan to

incorporate a state planning policy for coastal protection. The policy will address four major issues including development in coastal hazard areas, maritime development, protection of areas of high ecological significance and urban settlement patterns in the coastal zone. All of the communities that have been affected by Cyclone Yasi and the very significant storm surge that came with that event and the prospect of more intense cyclones in our region underscore the importance of incorporating those matters in the Coastal Protection and Management Act. With those few comments, I commend the bill to the House.

 **Mrs SULLIVAN** (Pumicestone—ALP) (6.42 pm): I rise to support the Environmental Protection and Other Acts Amendment Bill introduced into the House in late 2009. This bill amends the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Fisheries Act 1994, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Sustainable Planning Act 2009. These amendments reflect the relevant provisions of the Queensland Government Environmental Offset Policy—namely, that efforts must be made to avoid or mitigate environmental impacts before a vegetation offset is considered.

The bill is essential if we are to achieve the right balance between development and conservation of our native vegetation. These amendments support the Queensland Government Environmental Offset Policy, QGEOP, introduced to ensure offsets are used consistently and transparently by providing more detailed legislative requirements regarding those offsets. An environmental offset is defined as a positive action to compensate for unavoidable negative environmental impacts that may result from a form of development or activity.

It must be noted that an environmental offset is different to mitigation. The offset will address any remaining impact after all other attempts to initially avoid and then diminish the impact have been exhausted. The primary aim of the bill is to include conditioning powers to place beyond doubt that environmental offset conditions can be imposed on development approvals, environmental authorities and other approvals for development. It ensures legal certainty about conditions on development approvals which require vegetation offsets for clearing remnant vegetation.

These conditioning powers are administered through QGEOP which started in July 2008. QGEOP states that offsets should only be required as a condition of an approval where there is a specific-issue offsets policy. The three specific-issue offset policies currently in force are: one, vegetation management; two, marine fish habitat; and, more recently, three, koala habitat. The offsets for net benefit for the koalas and koala habitat policy were released by the state government back in 2006 as part of the koala conservation plan.

Koalas need our protection. That is why the Bligh government introduced the koala response strategy and a number of other reforms which not only aim to better protect koalas but expand koala habitat in the future. The new koala protection reforms include: \$15 million focused on buying new habitat and rehabilitating existing habitat; compulsory acquisition powers for koala habitat outside the urban footprint; new planning laws for councils to minimise koala impacts when assessing development applications in key koala areas; new controls for councils to ban dogs in new developments in koala habitat; new planning laws to allow land swaps in and outside the urban footprint for strategic koala habitat corridors; and koala friendly designs for all new and upgraded main roads through koala habitat.

The Queensland government has also put a freeze on the clearing or disposal of state owned land except in cases where there is a need to provide urgent social infrastructure. This freeze will remain in place until the state planning policy and the state planning regulatory provisions are finalised.

I want to take this opportunities to thank volunteer animal rescuers in South-East Queensland, particularly those who rescue koalas. I have had the pleasure of meeting members of the Moreton Bay Koala Rescue Inc. who continue to save koalas. I thank them for their dedication and efforts. The member for Morayfield and I are great supporters of this organisation.

Environmental offsets are not new. They have allowed some flexibility in development projects that face challenges of meeting everybody's environmental standards. But these changes add legal certainty. They make it clearer for decision makers, developers and the broader community.

Vegetation offsets form an important part of this state's vegetation framework by providing an effective avenue to ensure that, when vegetation clearing is absolutely necessary, the impacts can be offset. Consultation with both private and public sector stakeholders was widespread and feedback was considered as part of the drafting of the bill. I commend the minister and her staff for the work that she has put in. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mrs Sullivan, adjourned.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Acting Leader of the House) (6.47 pm): I move—

That the House, at its rising, do adjourn until 9.30 am on Tuesday, 22 March 2011.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.


Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Acting Leader of the House) (6.47 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

 **Mr RICKUSS** (Lockyer—LNP) (6.47 pm): I rise to congratulate the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry on sending me a letter advising that it will extend the dates for submissions from my area. I would imagine that for people in the areas that were badly affected by floods the commission will be more than happy to extend the time for submissions. People still need to realise, though, that they have to get their submissions in very quickly. The time frames are still very short. I encourage people to get their submissions in as quickly as they can, but there is some leeway when it comes to the current 11 March deadline. The letter states—


Generally the commission has sought submissions concerning issues of flood preparedness relevant to the interim report to be made by 1 August by 11 March 2001 and submissions concerning other matters by 4 April 2011. But, of course, we understand that many flood affected people in your electorate have much more immediate concerns and we will accept submissions from them at any time.

But as I have said we really do need to encourage people to get their submissions in as quickly as possible because the time frames are short.

I call on the minister responsible for the Department of Environment and Resource Management to put in place a moratorium on levees, particularly in South-East Queensland. As we have a flood commission in progress I call for a moratorium on levee banks being built in South-East Queensland.

Unfortunately, in my area of South-East Queensland people are starting to build levees on creeks which are going to impede floodwaters in the future, and this is going to be to the detriment of other members of the community. You cannot stop water from flowing on a flood plain without rediverting it somewhere else. We have to use caution with this issue and I call on the minister to ensure that there is a moratorium on building levees until the flood commission of inquiry brings down its report next year. I hope the minister takes heed of what I have just said, and I think the moratorium should date back to 1 January 2011. Unfortunately, the number of levee banks being built in the Lockyer is of real concern. Many people have contacted my office complaining about the fact that their neighbours either upstream or downstream are building levees that will redivert and push water in directions it has never gone before. This is a real concern. I call on the minister to put in place a moratorium on levees starting from 1 January 2011.

North Queensland Fury

 **Hon. CA WALLACE** (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Main Roads, Fisheries and Marine Infrastructure) (6.50 pm): I rise to report a shameful decision to the House. It is the decision of the Football Federation Australia to axe the Townsville based football team, the North Queensland Fury. Last Tuesday I was appalled, along with members of my community, to hear that the FFA would rescind its original promise to back our club for two years. It should be ashamed of itself. Clearly, the FFA does not want football to prosper north of the Brisbane line. It is isolating a huge catchment area of our region and its grassroots clubs. I would go so far as to say that the Fury's fate was sealed the moment Australia lost its bid for the football World Cup. If I recall correctly, it was only this time last year that the CEO of the FFA was encouraging everyone in Townsville and North Queensland to get behind the team. Now is not the time to penalise our town. It is time to follow through and maintain the support. The FFA should be given a red card, not our local team. This is a foul—an absolute joke—and I join with those calling for an inquiry into the FFA. The Fury, the players, the staff, the supporters, the sponsors and our wider community have been deceived by a succession of lies and false promises. Over the past—


Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is unparliamentary. You will withdraw that.

Mr WALLACE: A succession of untruths and false promises. Over the past eight months our team has won the hearts and minds of the region through sustained community engagement representing such a large region. This community engagement would only grow with time and resources. This decision will have an overwhelming impact on the younger generations in my

community. For those families who cannot afford to take their children to games held in bigger cities like Brisbane, they are losing their local legends—the team and players who have given so much to our community.


The local Fury advisory board had the goalposts moved by the FFA on numerous occasions and the Fury has always risen to the challenge and delivered the goods. I want to congratulate Rabieh Krayem and his board. They deserve a medal for keeping the Fury going. I know they and our community are gutted by this decision. I want to note that not once over the past eight months has the FFA executive come to Townsville to help the local advisory committee secure further sponsorships or investments. In fact, all moneys raised by the Fury during 2010-11 and future sponsorship were generated solely by the local advisory board. I thank my fellow colleagues the member for Townsville, Mandy Johnstone, and the member for Mundingburra, Lindy Nelson-Carr, who worked with me and Rabieh Krayem to secure sponsorship from the state government. I want to especially thank the sports minister who helped in that regard. He was great. The Fury was going to do it, but it appears that even that was not enough to satisfy the FFA. Can I humbly suggest that it renames the Football Federation Australia the 'Southern Football Federation Australia', because quite clearly that is where its focus is. It is disgusting!

Toowoomba CBD Master Plan

 **Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (6.53 pm): Toowoomba is one of the most beautiful cities of Australia and the second largest inland city of Australia after Canberra. Toowoomba Regional Council, which was formed from the amalgamation of eight separate councils encompassing most of the Darling Downs and the original Toowoomba city council, has undertaken an ambitious CBD master plan. This master plan was the result of many weeks of interviewing and consultation with people throughout the city and throughout the region to come up with a plan that would give Toowoomba a blueprint for the future—a blueprint that would encompass the inland city's beauty, the natural beauty of the trees and the parks which enhance our city, and to come up with an efficient way in which to manage the ever-increasing traffic that wants to access the CBD of the city. As a result of this CBD master plan, the council now has a blueprint to go forward to develop our city. Toowoomba is a city that serves the region of the Darling Downs, south-western Queensland, the Surat Basin and many other areas—a city that in a way is like a capital city of the area with 15 high schools, including eight boarding schools, three major hospitals, all of the services of accountants and lawyers and headquarters of various companies. So it is becoming a very important major city of inland Queensland and inland Australia.

The key for this CBD master plan is an outer-circulating road which will enable traffic to go from north to south and east to west and also access the CBD via an inner-circulating road and various link roads. I am proud to say that at the shadow cabinet meeting of the LNP last Monday in Toowoomba Fiona Simpson, the shadow minister for transport, took a submission, which I assisted her to prepare, to shadow cabinet about the catalyst to start this CBD master plan and the most important aspect for the Toowoomba Regional Council—the missing link of the outer-circulating road between Russell Street and Chalk Drive. The key to this is the provision of land from the disused goods yards of the Toowoomba railway station area. Tonight I am pleased to announce that the LNP in government would provide this land to the Toowoomba Regional Council so this most important piece of infrastructure—the missing link within the outer-circulating road—can be started. This will be the start of a plan that will provide for beautiful areas of parkland, residential, commercial, retail and entertainment areas within the precinct of the CBD that will be served by a very efficient outer-circulating road and inner-circulating road. The LNP will be providing the initial land for this missing link between Russell Street and Chalk Drive. I thank our shadow minister, Fiona Simpson, for her assistance and the LNP shadow cabinet for putting this through.

Greenslopes Electorate, Schools

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Minister for Education and Industrial Relations) (6.56 pm): Tonight represents the first opportunity I have had in 2011 to speak about the Greenslopes electorate, which I am honoured to represent in this chamber. From a personal perspective, a significant development since I last spoke in parliament about the Greenslopes electorate was the cabinet reshuffle last month and my appointment as the Minister for Education and Industrial Relations. It is a privilege to be appointed to this portfolio. Personally, I enjoyed a great start to my education at Marshall Road State School in Holland Park, one of the many schools in the Greenslopes electorate. That is why I was keen to return to the school on my first full day as education minister on 22 February 2011.


The Greenslopes electorate is home to many schools. I am proud to be associated with all of the schools in the electorate and I have seen firsthand the great work they are doing. In the past few weeks I have also been fortunate enough to attend many school leadership induction ceremonies at many of the schools in the Greenslopes electorate. I commend and congratulate those students who have been recognised by their local school communities as leaders. I also urge them to make the most of the opportunity that has been bestowed upon them. I want to take a few moments now to acknowledge the school leaders of Greenslopes.

I will reveal a little parochialism and start with my old school, Marshall Road State School. I want to congratulate school captains Grace Eadie and Kobe Pashen and vice-captains Sophie Burgess, Emma Turner and Joseph Forbes. At Holland Park State School the 2011 leaders are captains Michaela Brady and William Gunning and vice-captains Tiarnee Miller and Daniel Ellis. For Mount Gravatt State School the school captains are Jessica Siedlecki and Aqila Alawi and the student leaders are Ethan Cameron, Devarsh Chandat, Umair Khan, Georgina Mackeen, Chantelle Nemenzo and Rachel Ottley. At Seville Road State School in Holland Park, Hanad Mohamud, Iman Hashim, Selma Saldic and Travis McShane have been named as school captains.

Down the road at Coorparoo State School the school captains are Varun Hande and Charlie Barker and the vice-captains are Imogen Day and Marcus Flook. At Cavendish Road State High School the school leaders for 2011 are captains Nikki Keating and Ambrose Mollenhauer and student council president and vice-captain Taylor West-Taylor. The student leadership team at Holland Park State High School are Rebecca Bromwich and Thomas Kent, with support from vice-captains Emily Menzler and James Cuskelly. At Mount Gravatt State High School Rosil Bosco and Peter Gollagher have been named as school captains while the other school leaders are Sophie Mather, Phoebe Morris, Sabrina Oishi, Luke Leadbetter, Thomas Mawby and Danny Saba. Coorparoo Secondary College, which is scheduled to hold its leadership ceremony on 15 March, has chosen Tayla Woolcock and Brad McClelland as captains and Eleesha Archer and Toby Saltwell as vice-captains. Camp Hill State School, which will conduct its ceremony on 18 March, has named Olivia Wong and Darcy Brook as school captains and Ailish Hallinan and Asa Carroll as vice-captains.

In the past two years that I have been the state member for Greenslopes, I have met some outstanding achievers in our schools. I met three more on 9 March when I presented the TJ Ryan Memorial Medals and Scholarships at Parliament House. Three of the winners came from schools in the Greenslopes electorate, so it is worth making special mention of them here. Benjamin Tuckwell, from Holland Park State High, won a TJ Ryan Medal and Scholarship; Hannah Rienks, from Cavendish Road High School, was highly commended; and Kathryn Roberts, from Loreto College in Coorparoo, received a merit certificate. Congratulations to all these achievers and leaders in the Greenslopes electorate.

Creed, Cr G

 **Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (6.59 pm): On 29 November 2010 George Creed's family and our community lost a generous, gracious gentleman. George worked for the Calliope shire and more recently the Gladstone Regional Council for 34½ years. Such concern and compassion is rare. On many occasions George, consistently supported by Leonie, quietly worked to improve the lives of those in their local community and the council residents generally. In addition to his service as mayor, in 2006 George was awarded the Order of Australia medal for services to local government and the community. In 2000, he received a Centenary Medal. Although not a Rotarian, George was made a Paul Harris Fellow for his service to local government.


He held many positions, including the director of the Gladstone Port Authority, member of the Gladstone Aerodrome Board, member of the Gladstone Economic and Industry Development Board, chairman of the Gladstone Calliope Counter Disaster Committee, and patron of many groups, including the lifesavers. At the time of his death, he was president of the Raglan Rural Fire Brigade. George was the last captain of the Raglan Rifle Club before it closed. Among his many achievements, the Old Station Fly-In and Airshow is a standout, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for services like the Royal Flying Doctors and the Capricorn rescue helicopter. From humble beginnings, the Old Station Fly-In and Airshow grew to attract more than 6,000 people in 2007. The event was held 16 times from around 1990.

George was survived at the time of his death by his mother; his wife and partner, Leonie; his children and their partners, Elizabeth, Andrew, Ron, Chris, Nancy and Helen; and nine grandchildren. Sadly, on the day of George's funeral, his mother had a fall from which she did not survive.

It was not all work and no play. George was a typical Aussie bloke and he loved his toys, aeroplanes, helicopters, whips or antique pistols. If there was a bit of nonsense going on, George was in the middle of it. He had a wicked sense of humour.

George, Leonie and the family worked together daily. They were a close-knit family and George's loss has hit everybody hard. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with the family. I worked with George for many years. He was a man of great integrity and great dignity. He is a loss to our community. While it is some time since his death, it is still keenly felt. Our commiserations go to Leonie and the family, who continue to contribute to our community through their local community at Raglan and Bracewell and also at the Ambrose State School. They are an amazing family.

Frenchville Sports Club, Sports Awards

 **Mr HOOLIHAN** (Keppel—ALP) (7.02 pm): With the indulgence of the chair, I would like to endorse the comments of the member for Gladstone in relation to Councillor George Creed. He was really a great worker for his community.


In Rockhampton we have a registered club which is one of the largest regional clubs in Australia—the Frenchville Sports Club. It supports a lot of charities within the community, including the Salvation Army Red Shield, and over the years the club has presented thousands upon thousands of dollars to the local hospital. On 18 February the Frenchville Sports Club held their annual sports awards night. This club supports 13 separate sports. The night was attended by approximately 220 people. The president, Graeme Brady, and the sports director, Terry Kennedy, along with other people presented awards to a variety of people in relation to the different sports.

The Junior Referee/Umpire Encouragement Award was presented to Caitlyn Allison by Jack Livingstone from the Capricorn RSL sub-branch. The Most Improved Player went to Maddie Chandler for basketball, and that was presented by Meegan Armstrong and Todd Wells. The Team of the Year went to the Falcons A grade cricket side. They were presented with the Black Family Team of the Year Trophy from patron Merle Black. Incidentally, that was collected by the captain, Todd Wells, who is a director of the club but is also a country cricket player.

The Coach of the Year went to Lindsay Dean for junior football. Terry Kennedy presented Lindsay with that trophy. The Most Valuable Player Award went to Keanna Hopkins, and that award was presented by Maree Wahlin. It was the Maree Wahlin Trophy. The Club Person of the Year was Wendy Doyle for netball, and she received her trophy from Jeff Krause, the Frenchville Sports Club vice-chairman. I had the honour, together with Graeme Brady, of presenting Melissa Crossman with the award of Sportsperson of the Year for her sport of hockey. She received the Francis and Jessie Brady Sports Person of the Year Trophy. That is Graeme Brady's parents.

All in all, I would like to congratulate the Frenchville Sports Club on their support for sport and also for the community. I would encourage anyone who visits the Central Queensland area to take a few moments to visit Frenchville Sports Club and see how a successful club is run.

North Queensland, Fishing Huts

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (7.05 pm): This morning I tabled a petition on behalf of 1,151 petitioners in my electorate of Hinchinbrook opposing the proposed removal of fishing huts from the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park and the adjacent recreational reserve in the Palm, Cattle and Orient Creek areas of the Herbert River district. I am strongly opposed to the proposal by the Bligh Labor government to force the removal of these fishing huts inside and adjacent to the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park.


Fishing huts are a special part of our lifestyle in North Queensland. There was absolutely no consultation with the local community prior to the Bligh Labor government announcing the new national park in 2008. This petition was organised to give the people of the Herbert River district an opportunity to have their say. The petition objects to the proposed declaration of the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park because of our concerns it will mean the recreational activities pursued by my constituents in the area will be impacted upon.

Unfortunately, we have been proven to be right. Former environment minister, Andrew McNamara, stated in 2008 that huts on the recreational reserve adjacent to the national park would not be affected, but more recently this advice had changed. These hut owners have been double-crossed and have a right to be very angry indeed. I have been extremely disappointed with the bloody-mindedness of the Department of Environment and Resource Management in continuing to ignore the local community. All of the fishing hut owners, including those inside the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park, should be left in peace by the Department of Environment and Resource Management to enjoy a basic recreational activity, camping and fishing, which has been part of our lifestyle in North Queensland for generations.

The Bligh Labor government's plans to declare this new national park need to be reconsidered. I believe there is an opportunity for a reasonable resolution to the issue if the minister and DERM are willing to give consideration to working with hut owners to accommodate them in a new national park management plan. As the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park is yet to be gazetted, a management plan has not yet been developed. I propose that DERM work with hut owners in the area to develop a code of conduct for maintaining the huts inside the national park by providing permits to occupy to existing hut owners, which they have never previously had the opportunity to secure. Furthermore, existing hut owners are more than willing to pay reasonable annual rents in exchange for these permits to occupy. The annual rents from these permits to occupy could help to maintain the new national park.

No-one is saying that more fishing huts should be established inside or adjacent to the national park. The local community is prepared to draw a line in the sand as far as the establishment of any more fishing huts is concerned. All that is required is for the Bligh Labor government to demonstrate that it can be fair and reasonable in respect of this iconic recreational activity in North Queensland. I will continue to strongly advocate on behalf of my constituents in relation to this issue.

Bongaree Caravan Park

 **Mrs SULLIVAN** (Pumicestone—ALP) (7.08 pm): Would this state government deliberately kick residents out of their homes in a caravan park when our policy clearly states that we restrict the loss of caravan parks to prevent the reduction in economy accommodation stock? Of course not, but the Moreton Bay Regional Council, with a majority of conservative LNP councillors, would and it is doing it to the Bongaree Caravan Park residents, despite them being classed as permanents by the council for many years. This resolution to kick them out was passed at a meeting on 8 February. Permanent residents as defined by the council's own *Caravan park handbook: permanent and semi-permanent residents* have been allowed to modify and extend their homes by council on state land reserved for camping.

Council is trustee for the reserve and pays nothing to the state while running a profitable commercial venture raking in millions from the residents. Failed LNP candidate and now the local Bribie Island councillor Gary Parsons's representation of his ratepayers has been totally inadequate. He confirms this inadequacy in a press release stating—


A decision that Council had to make.

It was not and he knew it and he has known it for years. This is confirmed by former councillor John McNaught, who recalls conversations on the issue. The council should have moved to enter into a term lease with the state government, which will allow residents to stay. The council refused because it said it would cost money. The council says that it cannot afford the fee. I have evidence to the contrary. Firstly, the Moreton Bay Regional Council has been listed as one of the more wealthy in the *Business Review Weekly*; secondly, the operating surplus of the caravan park states that it made a \$463,589 profit in 2009-10; and, thirdly, point 2 of a council recommendation on the park at its meeting on 8 February said that the council is going to take steps to negotiate with the current park managers to buy 11 cabins and two cottages in the park, which are apparently owned by the manager. If the council can buy cabins and cottages, then why could it not buy the residents' homes when they chose to leave? Problems exist in the park because the council created them, not the residents.

Recently I attended a meeting at the Bongaree Caravan Park. There I met with residents who were very concerned about losing their homes and I promised them that I would apply as much pressure as I could to the council to force it to seek a solution that was good for them. At this meeting I asked Parsons to move in council to seek a term lease from the state government. Parsons said that he would. Did he do it? No. He added some words to change the intent. He asked for a peppercorn lease, which he knows cannot happen. He failed to move a simple motion, which I handed to him in writing, that would have allowed the council and the state government to start negotiations.

This council has taken the option that is the cheapest, the easiest and the best for it. It created this problem and, instead of looking after the residents seeking a lease and paying rent on land it is using for a commercial venture, it chose to evict the residents. After being caught out trying to rip off the residents, now the council is trying to rip off the people of Queensland. The council must apply for a term lease. That will then provide certainty to the residents and, in turn, they will be able to have a binding lease on their homes and never again have to worry about getting a letter from the council telling them they are out. I promised I would fight for them to get a better deal and I will. I am frankly dismayed, but not surprised, that Parsons would go back on his word so quickly. The people of Bribie Island deserve better council representation.

Gold Coast, Water Charges


 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (7.11 pm): Currently the greatest issue in my electorate—and indeed on the Gold Coast as a whole—is the astronomical leap in water charges that Gold Coast residents are suffering because of government incompetence. Make no mistake about it: the major part of these massive increases that residents are reeling from is due to the Labor government recouping its expenditure on the South-East Queensland water grid through the bulk water supply charge. Through lack of planning and implementation of water asset management, brought about by 20 years of Labor incompetence, a hurried, unfunded and expensive water grid was rammed into place when South-East Queensland fell on water challenged times a couple of years ago. We are now paying through the nose for our water charges due to the Goss-Beattie-Bligh trilogy of water failings. Who could forget the failure by the Goss government to plan for future water needs by cancelling the long-planned Wolffdene Dam for political expediency on the questionable advice of his then chief of staff Kevin Rudd? This debacle was followed up by the Beattie government's recycled effluent pipeline, which hardly anybody uses, and

which is a \$2.5 billion albatross incorporated into the bulk water price that Gold Coast residents are paying that will probably never, ever fly. The Bligh government compounded the debt with a half a billion dollar blow-out on the Traveston Dam, which their own Labor mates cancelled and which the residents of the Gold Coast are also now paying for through the bulk water charge.

What Gold Coast City residents should have realised when they were to be the recipients of the new water price sharing arrangement was that their water prices would skyrocket on top of the bloated bulk water price charged by the Labor government. Water has become an unaffordable commodity in a region where recent rains and floods have created an excess abundance of nature's lifeblood. It is sheer madness for the government to inflict water starvation on pensioners, the aged and financially disadvantaged residents when it should be a God-given right to access everyday drinking water at a reasonable price.

To address this ridiculous scenario I have sponsored a petition from a concerned Gold Coast resident, Mr Tom Bleier, calling on governments to provide potable water to residents at the cost of collecting and distributing potable water only, which is available on the parliamentary website. I urge all residents to sign up as many friends and affected residents as possible on this e-petition to send the loudest, clearest message to our government decision makers that these rip-off water charges are totally unacceptable and also to remind them that we vote. With a state election due within the next 12 months, we cannot get a better time to deliver our message on water charges.

Bulimba Electorate, Carbon Footprint Reduction

 **Ms FARMER** (Bulimba—ALP) (7.14 pm): I rise to congratulate businesses within the Bulimba electorate on their enthusiastic commitment to reducing their carbon footprint. I have spoken many times in this House about the way in which we in the Bulimba electorate like to work together—about our community approach to important issues—and I am pleased to say that a couple of initiatives run by the Department of Environment and Resource Management have evoked just that same response again.

Greening Australia is a wonderful organisation based in my local area, but obviously with a purview that extends way beyond my local boundaries. It has excelled itself yet again by sponsoring a ClimateSmart business sustainability cluster, seeking and receiving funding from the state government in order to do so. These clusters are fabulous initiatives, providing funding to sponsoring organisations to facilitate Queensland businesses to work together under the guidance of a trained consultant, who can direct the participants to the best and easiest ways in which to improve their resource efficiency.

A number of local businesses have already signed up to the initiative and I am sure there are more to come—Riverbend Books and Teahouse, Mary Ryan's, Willes Fine Foods, Sugo Mi, Baskin Robbins, Bulimba Child Care Centre, Pancho's Pizza, Vitalife and my own office. I congratulate these businesses and say to them that it is a great pleasure to work with them. The extent of their commitment varies according to capacity—from physical changes to their premises to simple behavioural change, which we already know from our own experience here in Parliament House can be so effective. Whatever is the case, I know that these businesses are grasping the opportunity with both hands and have all their staff on board and keen to go.

While I am talking about a commitment to green initiatives, I cannot refrain from mentioning two companies in my local area that have been honoured as ecoBiz partners. This is another excellent DERM initiative that supports individual businesses to assess their operations and make significant efficiency gains. I am speaking particularly of Australian Country Choice and Priestley's Gourmet Delights. ACC is already a strong sponsor of green initiatives through organisations across a range of sectors, but it has put its money where its mouth is with the ecoBiz initiative. It is an honour to have Australian Country Choice in my local area.

In this regard another excellent and conscientious company is Downtown Toyota. I had the great pleasure of joining the principal dealer of this company, Nick Pappas, his wife, Renee, and many members of their company and partner companies at the official opening of their new spare parts warehouse last week. They are now the largest Toyota parts dealer in Australia and have purpose built a warehouse to service an operation of this size. However, they have not only done it so that they can be suppliers and distributors of excellence but also designed it so that there is minimum waste. There is recycling and an efficient use of energy in what is an extremely large space. I congratulate all of these companies and their commitment to an important cause.

Question put—That the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.16 pm.

ATTENDANCE

Attwood, Bates, Bleijie, Bligh, Boyle, Choi, Crandon, Cripps, Croft, Cunningham, Darling, Davis, Dempsey, Dick, Dickson, Douglas, Dowling, Elmes, Emerson, Farmer, Finn, Flegg, Foley, Fraser, Gibson, Grace, Hinchliffe, Hobbs, Hoolihan, Hopper, Horan, Jarratt, Johnson, Johnstone, Jones, Keech, Kiernan, Kilburn, Knuth, Langbroek, Lawlor, Lucas, McArdle, McLindon, Male, Malone, Menkens, Messenger, Mickel, Miller, Moorhead, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nicholls, Nolan, O'Brien, O'Neill, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Powell, Pratt, Reeves, Rickuss, Roberts, Robertson, 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