



Speech by

Hon. R. GIBBS

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

Hansard 20 October 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Alcoholic Food Essences

Hon. R. J. GIBBS (Bundamba—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing) (9.43 a.m.), by leave: I rise to bring to the attention of the House an issue which is of increasing concern to me and the Government. In recent times, a marketing trend has emerged where alcoholic food essences are being packaged for sale in containers as large as 500 millilitres, which may be readily mixed with water to produce a palatable drink imitating liquor products such as rum, whisky, ouzo and the like.

The Liquor Act and regulations detail particular sales of liquor which are not required to be licensed. One of these exemptions allows the sale of alcoholic cooking essences if the essence is not used as a beverage or to manufacture a beverage. This commonsense exemption allows the sale of cooking essences in supermarkets, delicatessens and other stores. However, availability of these new generation cooking essence products from supermarkets and delicatessens, combined with a retail price from as little as \$4.60 per bottle, has made the product attractive, particularly to minors. Unfortunately, these essences may have an alcohol content as high as 80%, which is sometimes not detailed on the bottle label and which may result in a dangerous cocktail for young people.

It has come to my attention that some unscrupulous shopkeepers are marketing these essences as a liquor substitute, whilst hiding behind the exemption provided by the Act. Others are selling the product in ignorance of the fact that it contains a potentially lethal percentage of alcohol. My department's Liquor Licensing Division has written to all wholesale distributors of these products as well as some retail outlets who stock these essences advising them that unless the sale of the product is for cooking purposes, a licence is required under the Act. The Government is also taking action to amend the regulation to ensure that the sale of cooking essences without a licence is restricted to where bottle or container sizes do not exceed 50 millilitres, or, in the case of vanilla essence, in containers up to 100 millilitres, except in the case of sales to bona fide caterers. This will ensure that essences for domestic cooking purposes remain available from supermarkets and delicatessens, but larger quantities which are obviously marketed as a substitute beverage are only available from a licensed establishment. In the interim, I place all parties on notice that should my department's liquor licensing investigators discover any sign whatsoever of these products being sold as substitute beverages, action to the fullest extent that the law provides will be taken against offenders.
