



Speech by

**KEN TURNER**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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Hansard 10 November 1998

### **DISABILITY SERVICES**

**Mr TURNER** (Thuringowa—ONP) (12.26 p.m.): The Disability Act of 1992 aimed at facilitating community access for people with a disability. While most of the sections in this Act have gone a long way to improve the quality of life for the disabled, there are sections of this Act that are no longer workable. The Disability Act of 1992 is a six-year-old Act and, along with our subsidy scheme, is ready for review and update.

With the constant research and development and with the inventions being produced today, the mobility aids and equipment that are now available to people with a disability have made areas of the Disability Act outdated and redundant. The word "disabled" should never be linked with the word "incapable", yet certain sections of the 1992 Disability Act have rendered many of our people with a disability incapable of fulfilling their ambitions to better themselves and their lifestyles—an ambition that the abled take for granted.

Our subsidy scheme and rules governing eligibility for assistance are other areas which need to be addressed and changed to accommodate the growing number of people with a disability who are now able to enter the work force and community activities with the use of electronic wheelchairs and scooters. A wheelchair or scooter is as necessary for the physically disabled as a pair of shoes is for you or me, but the price of any motorised conveyance for the disabled is so outrageously expensive that no person on a disability pension could ever afford to purchase one without Government assistance and subsidy.

Our subsidy scheme restricts the use of electronic scooters to home use. This restriction has left many people with a disability with limited access to the community. People who have restricted use of legs, arms and hands but who are capable of moving around their homes with the use of crutches and wheelchairs currently do not qualify for subsidy of electronic conveyances. An electronic scooter manufactured for use by the disabled has been specifically designed for outdoor use. It is able to travel comfortably and smoothly on most outdoor surfaces and has an ability to climb hills and kerbs with safety, yet under our current subsidy scheme this machine is restricted to mostly home use. The opportunity of a person with a disability wishing to integrate into the community with the use of an electronic scooter is lost because of the inability to purchase such an expensive item.

There is very little difference in construction between an electronic scooter and a ride-on mower, yet the price of an electronic scooter is almost twice the price of a ride-on mower. And with a bit of luck, when you buy a ride-on mower you can get a whipper-snipper thrown in for free. One of the reasons for the very high price of medical aids is that the standard for the manufacture of this equipment in Australia is too low. A lot of the medical aids made in Australia are, to quote the users of these aids, "pieces of junk". Therefore, people with a disability are forced to buy quality products from overseas and then dismantle and rebuild them to specific needs. We have the materials and the expertise to manufacture top-quality mechanical aids here in Queensland. We only need to raise the standards to ensure that people with a disability who rely on these medical aids for mobility can do so with confidence and safety.

Not only do these people suffer a crippling disability; our laws and subsidy scheme are crippling their ability to participate in community activities. I am not talking about a couple of people or even a few but about many people with a disability who wish to go back into the work force as a paid worker or

a volunteer to contribute their knowledge, their experience, their capabilities and their skills for the betterment of themselves and the community. I therefore suggest that the Minister review the subsidy for electronic wheelchairs and scooters immediately. Let us get these citizens back into the community as soon as possible.

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