



Speech by

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

Hansard 27 August 1998

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth— ALP) (Leader of the House) (1.24 a.m.): I move—

"That, if a Bill introduced by a Member, who is not a Minister of the Crown, has laid upon the table of the House for a period exceeding ninety days and has not passed all stages, that Bill will be brought on for debate on the following sitting Wednesday evening. The House will continue to debate that Bill on each following sitting Wednesday evening until consideration of that Bill has been finalised. On those Wednesdays the House will break for dinner between 7pm and 8.30pm with the adjournment being moved at 11pm followed by a 30-minute adjournment debate."

In line with the commitment I gave to the Parliament during the last sitting week, we are debating this motion in this sitting week, even though it is 1.30 in the morning. I think the debate in relation to private members' Bills was had last time so I do not wish to debate the matter at length, but I think there is one thing that needs to be said: the Premier has given a commitment to allow in this Parliament private members' Bills to be debated.

In line with that commitment, it was at our suggestion that a trigger be placed into the Sessional Orders—it was not asked for by anyone—so that if a Bill was not debated within 90 days a mechanism would ensure that that Bill was debated. I know that the Opposition, upon seeing that, then moved to make the trigger effective after 60 days. I ask the Opposition to give the provisions contained in this motion the opportunity to operate to see how they work. At our first meeting with members of the Opposition in relation to Sessional Orders for this Parliament we spoke about the need to have some sort of trigger. It was suggested then that perhaps we could look at it. The Opposition was not happy with that, so I suggested that we place a trigger in the Sessional Orders to ensure that legislation was debated.

I am not critical of the Opposition Leader in saying this, but in line with our commitment I did offer the Opposition Leader the opportunity to debate his private members' Bill today in prime time—from 11.30 till 1—if it was going to take only an hour and a half. I am pleased that he did not take up that offer, in view of the current time. He said no because he wanted more than an hour and a half. It is his right to say that, and I am not being critical of him, but that offer was certainly in line with the commitment we made to debate his Bill.

The Opposition Leader's private member's Bill will be debated on the next Wednesday we sit. On that day the Government's transport legislation, which is on the Notice Paper, will be debated. If that Bill is dealt with in an hour we will then debate the Opposition Leader's Bill, and if it is dealt with in six hours we will then go on to his Bill. We will not stop debate on any legislation. Once the debate on the transport legislation is completed, we will allow debate on that private member's Bill. That Wednesday really is the last day available for consideration of legislation until the end of October.

With the Budget being brought down, we have one legislation day before the end of October. We will have two days to debate the Budget. We then have a fairly lengthy Estimates process. Then we will be back here. The proposition has been put by the Opposition that private members' Bills would then take precedence over Government business which has already been on the Notice Paper for a longer period. I think that is ridiculous.

Another alternative I had considered—I know the way members love to sit on Fridays—is to allow private members' Bills to be debated on Fridays. I think we should trial what we have. If we are not happy with things at the end of this year, we should look at the situation. Maybe we will say, "Let's make Fridays simply a private members' Bills day." Then if private members want to put up legislation it will be debated on Fridays. That is another possible alternative.

In the spirit of attempting to make this Parliament work, to give private members the opportunity to see Bills dealt with and passed, I ask members to support the proposition contained in the motion I have moved—that is, a 90-day trigger—and then after a period of time, at the end of the year, we can assess how that has worked. If the majority of members who are not Government members are unhappy with it at any time, they always have the opportunity to do something about it.
