



Speech by

Hon. R. GIBBS

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

Hansard 24 August 1999

TOURISM LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. J. GIBBS (Bundamba—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing) (3.33 p.m.), in reply: I will go through a number of the concerns raised by members in relation to the legislation before the House. Firstly, I place on record my appreciation to the Opposition spokesman on tourism, the member for Toowoomba North, not only because the Opposition is supporting the Bill but also because of the courtesy he displayed when I approached him at a late time in relation to an amendment that I will move during the Committee stage.

The honourable member for Toowoomba North, the Opposition spokesperson on tourism, made a number of points in relation to the name being changed from the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation to Tourism Queensland. The member for Gregory gave probably one of the best examples of the necessity for this change. The reality is that a great deal of market research revealed clearly that the organisation should be called Tourism Queensland, as opposed to Queensland Tourism. That finding was based on research done not only in Queensland but also in New South Wales and Victoria. The relevant bodies in those States are now called Tourism New South Wales and Tourism Victoria. It was felt that not only is it a more catchy and abbreviated way for people to refer to the organisation but also that people would look under "Tourism" before they looked under "Queensland" when searching for information. That came out fairly strongly in the research. The research has showed that it will be a handy tool for us in relation to our marketing in the future.

The new name seems to complement the new ads. We have launched the excellent ads that I think will win international awards again next year. These new advertisements feature surf-lifesaver Brian Voller and they have received wonderful accolades throughout Australia and overseas where they have been seen. It was felt that the name change would be an adjunct to the success of that particular campaign.

Reference was made to the scaling down of the board from 11 persons to nine. The member for Toowoomba North made a relevant point, which I do not particularly agree with, about the board reflecting the whole of Queensland. When I composed the board I certainly tried to look at areas of the State to be encompassed on the board—particularly north Queensland, south Queensland, central coast, the far west and the inland areas. I think we have come up with a board that is fairly representative of those areas. Terry Jackman, the chairman, comes from the Gold Coast. John Menzies also comes from the Gold Coast, but he is a person who it is very hard to say should leave the board because of the great deal of expertise that he brings. Bob Blair is from Rockhampton, Grant Kenny is from the Sunshine Coast, John Barton is from south-east Queensland, Judy Freeman is from Cairns, Bob Gleeson is from Barcaldine, Lorna Hempstead is from Townsville and Ron Clarke is from the Gold Coast.

At times I think we get a little too stuck on the point of view that people have about composition of boards per se. I appoint boards with the expectation that they will have a global view of their responsibilities.

Mr Santoro: Merit.

Mr GIBBS: Yes, on merit. They do not sit on a board simply to push a local parochial barrow. I think we have all seen too much of that in the past across a broad range of Government boards. If a person on a board is aware of a particular problem in their area or they see a need for the board to be pushing their area a bit harder, then I have no objection to them raising that. But I reiterate that I

expect board members to have an overall, global view of their responsibilities and not to be narrow-minded and parochial in their approach to their overall responsibilities.

It is interesting to note that, whilst the full complement of the board was 11 members, the previous Government actually had only nine people serving on the board. Again I come back to modern day management practices. In my personal opinion, nine is too many. I think the perfect number on a board, apart from one with one absent, is seven, because it may be a little too difficult to handle any more than that.

Ultimately, Tourism Queensland itself expressed to me that it believed the board was too big and too cumbersome. I said that I thought it should have seven members. It said, "Make it nine so that it can be a bit more representative of the State." Basically, that is why the membership has been set at nine. There have not been any behind-the-scenes moves. There is nothing sinister about it. It is simply a matter of trying to make managerial practices a little easier.

A number of members mentioned the ministerial advisory council. The ministerial advisory council was in place when we came to Government in 1989. It had been operating for a number of years. My observation of it when we came to Government was that it had been pretty much a failure. It met on average—if at all—twice a year. My disappointment was that, when it met, there was nothing of a global nature in any of the discussions that took place around the table. It became a whinge-tank, if you like, in many cases where people would raise personal problems that they were experiencing within the industry, or express that they were not happy with the lines of communication, or that their own businesses had a problem. I did not regard that as the role of the ministerial advisory council at all. When we left Government and members opposite came to office, I understand that during those two and a half years, only one meeting of the council took place, and I understand that the same sort of practice continued then. Notwithstanding that, the reality is that Tourism Queensland is now a much more professional body, I believe, than it has been in the past. That is no reflection on any previous Governments or members of the former body. It is simply reflecting a progression in people's expertise as they have gone onto the board.

One of the very first things that I asked the current chairman, when I approached him about doing the job for us, was to make sure that this was not going to be a board that was seen as a Queen Street group, that is, that it met only in Brisbane. I wanted it to be a board that reflected what we were doing as a Government with our Community Cabinet meetings, getting around the State and listening to people. I wanted the board members to talk to the local regional tourist associations, to get into a town two days before the board was scheduled to meet, to meet with local tourism operators and to see what they felt about their regions and what was going on. That is why they are in the electorate of the member for Gregory this week. They have been excellent in doing that. They are moving around the State and listening to concerns within the industry. Because of that practice, and because there is now a much more open line of communication directly into Queensland tourism, a la a person from Tourism Queensland who actually sits on each one of the regional tourism associations throughout Queensland, there is now a voice that is getting through to the top echelons of management, to the board, ultimately to the chairman and back to me, if necessary. So I believe that the need for a ministerial advisory council has passed its use-by date. It makes sense to me to be abolishing it.

I take note of what the member for Toowoomba North said about the importance of the Internet. He may be interested to know that Tourism Queensland was, in fact, the very first Queensland tourism association on the Internet, particularly in relation to providing information regarding our tourism infrastructure, places to stay, etc., and the Olympic Games next year. It has already been an outstanding success. I certainly am cognisant of the other comments that were made about the Internet and its importance in the future.

Only two days ago, I was discussing this very matter with a prominent person within the industry who has asked me to go to a display of a new system which a company—and I will not reveal the name of the company—in Brisbane has, whereby its clients no longer access the services of travel agents; everything is done through the Internet, straight into accommodation houses and straight into airline bookings. All members would be aware of the importance of that. In terms of the travel agency industry, it is obviously going to have to face up to this in the future.

In relation to the member's concerns about the name change—no, there is no cost involved in the name change. It is simply a matter of legislating. It will not be effective in relation to the staff in any shape or form.

The member for Toowoomba North referred to another aspect of the Bill, namely, the requirement for regulatory impact statements. He asked what the words "substantial change" mean. In reality, if there are minor changes within the precinct, there is no need for a regulatory impact statement. It is not envisaged that there would be any major changes in terms of the Indy Grand Prix race circuit. As the member may or may not be aware, that race circuit is the subject of a contractual arrangement. We are contracted legally in terms of the length and where that circuit currently wends its way throughout the streets of Surfers Paradise. To make any substantial change to it would require, as

I understand it, a contractual change. The amendment really does contemplate that the event would have to move at least a few kilometres for a new regulatory impact statement to be prepared.

The member also mentioned the Tourism Council of Australia. He would be aware that Tourism Queensland has a very close working relationship—as I do—with the Tourism Council of Australia. Discussions have been held with the council in relation to a number of things relative to tourism in Queensland. I understand that there were discussions with Tourism Queensland in relation to operational matters, but not the actual day-to-day or housekeeping matters as such. Tourism Queensland is a statutory organisation—a semi-Government organisation—in Queensland. On major issues, obviously there will be discussions. But on issues such as this, no, I do not think that it actually took that opportunity.

The member for Toowoomba North probably did steer away from what was basically a good contribution when he chose to have a swipe at the Goss Government. I was pleased that the honourable member for Gregory basically contradicted what the member said. If the member was fair-minded, he would know that, under the six years of the Goss Labor Government, we substantially increased and, I believe, set the benchmark, which Bruce Davidson—and I compliment him for this—carried on. We set the benchmark in relation to funding for Tourism Queensland, and we substantially increased funding in those six years.

Not only did we increase that funding but, through the Office of Racing, which I saw as a great complement to the tourism industry, we introduced the concept of the Matilda Highway and the western series, which put those areas on the map. We saw more than a need for racing in those areas. We saw a need to match up the tourist industry and the racing industry to hold special events in those country towns so that people would want to travel to them on a given day of the year and then, within a couple of weeks, move on to another major centre where another major event was being held. The proof of that is that the series is still recognised Australiawide as one of the most innovative schemes that was introduced, and it is still very successful. In fact, the Goss Government was involved in the centenary celebrations in the Winton area. Surely no Government could be criticised for the amount of money and work that we put into the Winton race series or the promotion of Winton in its centenary year. I am glad that the member for Gregory acknowledged that in his contribution.

The member for Toowoomba North also voiced concern about the future of our relationships with the Chinese market. I share that concern. We have put in a lot of hard work in China. The visit that I made there only a couple of weeks ago was very fruitful. At long last, we were able to get permission from Beijing to establish an office of Tourism Queensland in Shanghai. We also implemented an exchange scheme which will come into play later this year whereby a number of young Chinese people will be brought out from the Shanghai tourism bureau to work in Tourism Queensland, and we will be sending a couple of younger people from Tourism Queensland to Shanghai. They are very excited about that. But the possibility of people defecting or going missing from tours was raised at several meetings in China. I know that their screening of those who are eligible to come here is very tight. It is not just an open marketplace. They have a very tight screening process.

I was the person who was to go out to the Brisbane Airport to meet the first group from Shanghai into Queensland. I was expecting 26, and it was with quite some alarm that I found out two days before that the number would be only 24. But I share the view, which was expressed on television last night by Philip Ruddock, the Federal Minister for Immigration, that this is not about people entering this country illegally and thinking that they can come here under the ADS scheme. The reality is that the message will be sent very clearly to China and Beijing. Under the ADS, the agreement between the two Governments specifically addressed that concern.

If we find any Chinese who drop out of sight on these tours, or who defect—or whatever may be the circumstances—the agreement is that they will be sent home. I would think that upon their return to China there will be some in-depth rethinking about a number of the agents who will be able to send visitors to Australia in coming years.

The honourable member for Cunningham has a very good knowledge of the tourist industry and he was absolutely correct when he spoke about the wonderful opportunities for job creation within it. Without doubt, the tourist industry is the industry in this country—regardless of the primary sector, the mining sector or any other sector—which has the capacity for job creation. All honourable members, whether in Government or in Opposition, have raised the need for infrastructure in tourism areas. I certainly could not mount an argument as to why there should not be infrastructure, except to say that there are only a certain amount of dollars to go around. The cake is only so big. We simply cannot pour money into roads and other services overnight. However, I recognise the need for infrastructure.

The member mentioned such things as the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, which has been a great boon to Barcaldine. The member also mentioned the wool scour. I believe Labor kicked off this project when we were in office. The project was continued by the coalition Government. This Government also has a commitment to it. The member also mentioned the Jondaryan Woolshed. I believe this is a marvellous asset to the industry. About two and a half months ago we had a Cabinet

meeting at the woolshed, which I think the member for Cunningham attended. That Cabinet meeting gave members on this side of the Chamber a great opportunity to look at some of these things in the west.

The member's call for a new hotel in Toowoomba is a deserved call. The Government supports that concept. In fact, we instigated a number of discussions on this very issue. There is no doubt that Toowoomba is very well serviced by a variety of excellent hotels and motels but it needs, at the very least, a four-star accommodation house. I believe a start will be made on such a project within the next couple of months.

The member for Charters Towers spoke about a number of the same issues as the member for Cunningham, specifically the funding of roads and infrastructure. As I said, this Government has no problem with those issues. The member mentioned the fossil trail and the dinosaur exhibits in his area. He may be interested to know that at a Cabinet meeting in Mount Isa I received a combined deputation from the Mayor of Richmond, a representative of the Ilfracombe Shire Council and one other gentleman. It was as a result of that deputation that we put the proposition to the Royal National Association that the area mount a display at the Brisbane Exhibition. The members of the RNA were ecstatic about the success of the fossil exhibit. It was hugely supported by the public. I understand that an invitation has almost been written asking the exhibitors to return next year with an expanded version of what we saw this year. That was an opportunity for western Queensland to show an excellent product, which is still waiting to be discovered, to Australians and to people from international destinations.

The member for Gregory spoke in his usual eloquent, dulcet tones in this House. I sat here and I was absolutely amazed. I thought, "If this guy ever decides to leave Parliament he will undoubtedly make one of the most outstanding tour guides we will ever see." It was a wonderful, nostalgic tour through the west—through the heritage and through the culture of the area. He mentioned the icons of the west. I can only say that the honourable member should not have been in Parliament this week; he should have been out in the electorate so that the board of Tourism Queensland could see a true icon of the west at work in the west. The members of the board have missed something.

I was absolutely taken in by the honourable member's reference to the Tambo Teddies because a few months ago when I was out in the area I was shown a certain photograph. I know the honourable member is a huge fan of the Tambo Teddies. I do not know where the photograph came from, but it was a wonderful photograph of the honourable member with a little Tambo Teddy tucked up under his chin. The Tambo Teddy was lying on the pillow with the honourable member at night. When I saw it I said, "What a guy! The milk of human kindness does flow through this man." He has bluffed us; he is really a softie at heart. Anyone who loves Tambo Teddies has to be a softie.

The member for Gregory spoke about the camel races. I am aware of the member's participation in those races. My advice to the member is that he should be wearing a vest and a helmet because I would hate to see anything happen to him. I ask the member to remember the safety regulations which apply to all riders.

I want to mention two things in relation to the member for Gladstone's contribution. I want to assure her that there is absolutely no bias towards the regional tourist association in her area. The Government has a very good relationship with the association. I have enjoyed a good relationship with the association back to the time when Peter Corones, who is now the Mayor of Gladstone, ran the local RTA.

The member for Gladstone also mentioned Kroombit Tops. This is an outstanding spot and is something which is very highly featured in this Government's priorities in terms of tourism development of the area. I do not want to go into the matter too deeply because announcements will be made further down the track. Areas such as Kroombit Tops play an important role—as does the tourist industry—in relation to the regional forest agreement. Tourism has a great role to play there, but it has to be a sensible role. Kroombit Tops features highly in that strategy. Obviously, it is an area which requires a joint cooperative basis: namely some assistance from Government in providing infrastructure in the area and investment by private enterprise as well.

I want to address an issue that was raised by the member for Burleigh, who referred to a matter that I raised in this House last week. I refer to the Gold Coast Marathon. As usual, of course, our good friends at that very fair newspaper, the Gold Coast Bulletin, got it wrong once again. I made no threat in relation to the Gold Coast Marathon. I want to say today that funding for the marathon is guaranteed. No-one ever mentioned a threat to the Gold Coast Marathon.

What I did say was this—and Mr Robertson should remember it—that I have always had a good association with Terry Robertson, but I was appalled when he was quoted in the newspaper as attacking the Government for not funding a power boat race that he wanted to stage at the Gold Coast. The simple reality with regard to this event is this: the Queensland Events Corporation, which is recognised as the best of its type in this country, has costed this project on three occasions and,

contrary to Mr Robertson's figures that indicate that it would return \$20m to the Gold Coast's economy, our information does not agree with that synopsis.

I am told that it is a fallacy to say that the Victorian Government is taking on this event. My information is that the Victorian Government knocked back a similar event two years ago. The Victorian Government is not interested in it. I will be interested to see what happens with the Victorian Events Corporation.

What annoyed me more than anything about Terry Robertson is the fact that, as a trustee of the National Party—and good luck to him; I do not hold that against him—he came out and said that a decision by the Government not to fund this particular event was political. It had nothing to do with politics. I do not sit down and say, "Look, knock this event back for the Gold Coast," on a political basis. If the Queensland Events Corporation makes a recommendation to me, I look at it. There are times when I disagree and I say, "No, I think we should run with that particular event." I do not sit there and make a judgment on a political basis to knock out an event if it can legitimately bring \$20m into the Gold Coast, or into any other area of Queensland. It is the height of stupidity to suggest that that decision was made on a political basis.

It was even more distasteful that he then got on the phone and rang around to a number of respected people in the tourism industry on the Gold Coast and asked them to come out and bag the Government over its decision. I know one person whom he rang. This person, who is regarded highly in the area of organising major public events, said, "I will not do that at all because I happen to believe that the Government is right. This event does not stack up." So that person made one bad phone call. I had that information from a number of people and for him to do that was shabby. I simply say to Robertson that if he plays it square, he gets a square go with this Government. It is as simple as that.

The member for member for Tablelands spoke about a number of areas. Obviously, he is learning about the industry. I say good luck to him. It is not an industry that he will learn overnight. The member represents an area that has some wonderful natural assets and they are major features in our tourism promotions. I think that all members are probably aware of that. The member for Barambah also represents an area that has some wonderful assets. She mentioned the opportunity to visit her electorate and taste the local olives. I might take her up on that offer at some time because already that area is producing some wonderful wines. Olives and wines go very well together, so perhaps the invitation may be accepted at some time in the future.

I thank all members for their contributions. I am pleased that the Bill is getting the support of the Opposition, and that is very welcome.
