



Speech by

Hon. R. GIBBS

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

Hansard 27 October 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. J. GIBBS (Bundamba—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing) (8.35 p.m.): The Government obviously opposes the Bill being debated here this evening. I want to make it very clear that what needs to be exposed, in my opinion, is the blatant hypocrisy of the coalition parties in trying to make political mileage out of two isolated incidents which occurred on Anzac Day last year.

In relation to Anzac Day this year I made sure that, as a result of the pressure or otherwise that was being applied by the Opposition parties, we had a very close look at the activities of Anzac Day. We made sure that there was a cooperative approach by both the Police Minister's department and my own department. We maximised the attendance of Liquor Licensing Division inspectors throughout the State. We maximised the cooperation between the Queensland Police Service and my department right throughout Queensland to take a close look at Anzac Day and see exactly what was taking place.

This year not one incident on Anzac Day was reported. In the year before, supposedly two incidents were reported. I will refer to those in a moment. Before that, there were absolutely no incidents reported about Anzac Day that I have ever been made aware of in the entire time we were in Government previously.

I mention the amendments that were made to the Liquor Act back in the 1960s or 1970s. The RSL itself made a submission to that minor review of the Liquor Act by the coalition parties and it made recommendations that would have had the effect of the laws which apply today. The RSL itself agreed with those changes at that time.

I have sighted a copy of the Liquor Licensing Division briefing note dated 28 April 1998 to the then Minister for Tourism, Small Business and Industry. That reveals the truth about the Surfers Paradise incident, which is what the debate this evening primarily centres around. The note made it plain to the member for Noosa that there was no evidence to suggest any link between the incident at Surfers Paradise and patrons of nightclubs. In fact, at that stage Mr Davidson was advised that the then Premier was vaguely aware of an incident where some intoxicated person heckled participants at the Anzac Day dawn service. The brief says—

"The Premier apparently was not totally aware of what went on but has made some comment."

How typical! What has changed? As Premier, the member for Surfers Paradise made some comment. In other words, he grasped for an issue which was not important at that time because somebody had made a remark during the Anzac Day service. I understand that the remark was offensive and I understand that the person was intoxicated. That sort of behaviour should not be encouraged or allowed on Anzac Day. I do not have a problem with saying that at all. However, it was not an incident which deserved the knee-jerk reaction of the Premier at that stage, who did not know much about it—or certainly the Government of the day which, at that stage, did absolutely nothing about it, anyway.

Suddenly, members opposite went into Opposition. And because the member for Gladstone happened to think it was a good idea to do something about this—and, I suspect, draw some publicity for herself in her electorate—she decided to introduce an amendment, but that got rolled. Then Opposition members decided that they would jump on the bandwagon by suggesting this particular amendment which is before the Parliament tonight.

The brief that was then sent to former Minister Bruce Davidson goes on to say that the dawn service took place at 4 a.m. and that nightclubs, as a matter of law, ceased the sale of liquor at 3 that morning. It goes on further to say—

"Taking these points into regard, the criticisms about 5 a.m. trading do not hold water as on Anzac Day morning closing hours, as stated above, were 3 a.m."

Liquor Licensing advised the Minister of the day that—

"... right across the Gold Coast it was a very quiet morning."

So apart from that particular incident at the Gold Coast—that one incident at the Gold Coast—on Anzac Day last year, the briefing that was given to that Minister at that time says—and I quote again—

"... right across the Gold Coast it was a very quiet morning."

The briefing note also says that it would seem that media criticisms were somewhat unfair, as the actions of a couple of individuals were creating adverse comment. It goes on to say—

"It is not known where these individuals had consumed the alcohol and indeed they could very well have been from a private party or other function."

I believe that that brief, in itself, is clear evidence of the Opposition's hypocrisy in supporting this debate tonight. Opposition members knew full well a year ago that there was no need to impose new restrictions on licensed premises, but they ignored this advice just to try, in my opinion, to score a cheap political point.

I have to say to the Parliament tonight that when this issue first became one of some public debate, I was very conscious about whether or not we should consider making amendments to the Liquor Act. My gut reaction to it was that we should not. The member opposite full well knows that if we made changes to the Liquor Act every time we got a complaint about liquor licensing laws in this State, we would do almost nothing in this portfolio other than make changes to the Liquor Act.

It is significant to note that, right throughout Australia, Anzac Day in every other State in Australia—except for a small difference in Western Australia—is an open trading day. We are the only State in Australia that has a restriction on it. In other words, we say to nightclubs, "You must close at 3 a.m." In every other State in Australia it is open trading; it is no different from any other day's trading. I have spoken to Ministers in those States—and this is across-the-board politically: Labor Ministers and conservative Ministers—and they say to me that, by and large, they do not have reported incidents in those States of problems on Anzac Day at any time. I notice that one member at the back of the Chamber is shaking his head. If he has evidence to the contrary or he disagrees, he should at least stand up and say it. But that is the advice that I have received.

Mr Dalgleish: Prevention is better than cure. Don't wait for someone to get hurt. Do something about it.

Mr GIBBS: It is not a matter of waiting for somebody to get hurt. If we listened to people like the member, we would be going back and burning the witches at Salem again. That is what that lot opposite stand for. He should not talk to me about waiting for somebody to get hurt. If he is waiting for somebody to get hurt—I have no doubt that he would love to see that, because that is the sort of thing, unfortunately, that that lot love to thrive on: seeing people hurt out in the community, so that they can use it as some dreadful, emotive issue for themselves to beat up.

The simple reality is that wherever we have alcohol being sold—whether it be in Queensland or in any other State in Australia—there will always be incidents around alcohol. It is a bit like the old saying: if you are running a sheep property, a cattle property or whatever where you have livestock, at some stage you are going to have dead stock. It is the same rule of thumb. There is no difference. Except in this case we do not want dead stock at all. We make sure that the liquor licensing laws in this State are the best that we have in this country and that they are recognised as such.

This debate has been brought on, as I said, as nothing more than a cheap exercise by the Opposition. I have spoken to a broad cross-section of people throughout Queensland including, I might say, local governments. As I have travelled throughout Queensland, I have spoken to mayors and councillors, and there is not too much support for this amendment before the Parliament tonight.

However, having said that, I will give this undertaking to the Parliament. If it is shown in the future that on Anzac Day—or on any other day for that matter; just do not single out Anzac Day—because of irresponsible behaviour by patrons or licensees the liquor laws of this State should be tightened up and further changes made, I do not have a problem with that. I will not only listen to public opinion, I will look at what is happening in nightclubs, hotels, bistros and other places throughout Queensland.

That is what reviews of the liquor licensing laws are all about: listening to public opinion, gauging what public opinion is about, and letting people have a say. But there has been no evidence put forward to me—and it has not been put forward, as far as I am aware, to members on my side of the

Parliament—that we need to be making these changes at all. And as a consequence of that, I am not prepared—and neither is the Government—to adopt a knee-jerk reaction based on what was nothing more than a cheap political point-scoring exercise by Mr Borbidge when he was the Premier of Queensland.

I ask Mr Borbidge to remember this point in finality in this debate. He was in Government at the time. He had the opportunity to make the change, if he wanted to, and he never did. He never made the change. He waited until he was in Opposition, and then he came in here and tried to pull a cheap stunt. Let me tell him that people have seen through it, and he has not earned many brownie points out in the community by trying to pull this stunt.
