



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
LITTLEPROUD**

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

Hansard 24 March 1999

CORRECTIVE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (5.11 p.m.): There are two issues I will speak about in relation to the Corrective Services Legislation Amendment Bill 1999. I note with some personal satisfaction that, in layman's terms, this represents more power to the Minister, and I fully support that. For quite some time I have held the view that if power is to be given to anyone it should be to elected people rather than to appointed people or appointed bodies.

Having been in and out of Government twice now in recent years—the same applies to the present Minister—I can understand where the Minister is coming from. In the early 1990s the whole concept of corporatisation came into being. I was never a great fan of that concept. On re-entering Government with corporatisation as a reality, it became embedded in my mind that it was not all it was cracked up to be when we were out there pulling the levers as a Government—certainly as a Minister in charge of some sort of corporatised body and certainly also as a Government itself.

I agree that we should make Government departments more efficient. It was thought that making departments more businesslike would automatically make them more efficient. I think we have learned now that that is not the case and that we should perhaps look for other ways of deriving more efficiency from Government departments and Government rather than saying that they should be conducted like a business. One of the things Governments have to consider that very often businesses do not is the social aspect. That puts a different light on things altogether.

I draw the analogy of a business. If a person has bought a second business, very often they make one part of the business carry another part for a period of time for some specific reason. It could be until that part becomes productive or it could be because some particular aspect of the business has to be carried on or else the overall business will lose something in concept or focus. I think the same concept applies to Government in relation to social aspects. Some parts of the State need a bit of a hand. That has to be able to be done by a Ministry and a Government. It should not be left just to those people who are on appointed bodies, such as commissions, to take those things into consideration.

I know that the idea of community service obligations was written into the legislation. They sound good, but in my experience as a Minister they are not a keen enough tool for Government to use. On the other hand, it is very difficult for those in charge of appointed and corporatised bodies. They were asked to act as directors of a business, so long as they worked within the parameters set down in the legislation under which they operated. They had to remember that they were trying to make a profit and make things efficient. It was pretty difficult for them to take into account some sort of community service obligation.

The Government of Queensland and we as parliamentarians in Queensland should rethink corporatisation. I see that coming through in this piece of legislation. The current Minister for Police and Corrective Services wants to be a bit more in control.

One of the first things the Beattie Government did when it came to power was get rid of the Queensland fire board. I was not critical of that decision, because I could see what was going on. But I did raise my eyebrows when it was made known that an environment protection agency would be put in place, because that seemed to be rather inconsistent. There are environment protection agencies elsewhere in Australia, such as Environment Australia, that tend to tell the Minister exactly what goes

on. It is a bit like riding a horse with a loose saddle: you do not know which way it is going to move underneath you. I question whether the Government is being a little inconsistent in allowing an environment protection agency to be put in place while giving more power to Ministers in other areas.

Perhaps I am being unkind to the present Minister for Environment. In fact, power will still rest with him, but I have a suspicion that too much of the power will rest with the agency rather than with the Minister. He may find that he gets rather frustrated from time to time.

The next issue I will speak about—I see the Minister looking up; I am sure he realises what I will talk about—is the Maryborough decision. Surprise, surprise! The Minister will get some relief when he hears me say that I was never in favour of Maryborough being considered as one of the sites. The honourable member for Maryborough will not like my saying that. The basis for the original concept was that there were inland rural centres of south-east Queensland that needed a bit of a kick along. Somewhere down the track—it could have been because of political considerations and the hope of winning the seat of Maryborough—suddenly there was a bit of sympathy for the region.

At the time I spoke out privately and today I speak out publicly. I think Maryborough has done extremely well out of successive Governments. A lot of money has gone into Maryborough for the rail service and they have a fine engineering works. A lot of State money has gone to the area. I do not begrudge it that, but I make a comparison. The same amount of Government money has not been put into some of the rural centres that were desperately crying out for a different dimension to be added to their local economy.

Too many of our economies are based on the weather, primary production, the way the markets are and the profitability of farming. We are seeing the population drift away from rural areas. There is not enough money going through the rural populations. I use my own town as a case in point. We have a wonderful high school. We rear good kids, but we send them somewhere else to make their careers. That is one of the social aspects I am speaking about. Government should have its hands on the lever to make some part of Government business compensate for another area that needs a bit of a hand.

When I spoke in the debate on the Budget I made the comment that I did not expect that the decision relating to the prisons of Queensland should rest entirely with the budget of the Minister for Corrective Services. When we talk about giving some sort of assistance to some disadvantaged part of south-east Queensland, it is a whole-of-Government consideration. I would hope that the Minister got some assistance from his fellow Cabinet Ministers but, knowing Cabinet Ministers and the way they focus on their own departments, they are not always as kind as they should be.

Mr Sullivan: You would not have done that, though, would you, Brian?

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I am a pretty magnanimous sort of a bloke, but single-minded when it comes to trying to look after people in rural Queensland. Recently it has been said in New South Wales newspapers—it applies to Queensland—that we are in fact getting two States within one. There is the hustle and bustle on the coastal strip, where all the people live and all the money is being spent, and then there are the rest of us, who think we have made a magnificent contribution in the past but, because of the way business is turning and because of the industries we are in, who now find ourselves in stagnation and even in decline in some cases. We would like to think that we can get more equity in the way development is spread across the State.

I think the concept we had was right. Initially we thought about one prison in some inland area. Then Russell Cooper, the previous Minister, said, "Why don't we consider three?" I supported that wholeheartedly. I owe it to the people in my part of Queensland to express my disappointment that Maryborough got a guernsey and that Woodford, which is already in a part of the expanding south-east corner of Queensland, also got an expansion when the rural areas missed out.

I also put on record the fine work done by some of the councils in my area. The Chinchilla Shire Council and the Roma Shire Council put a lot of effort into their submissions. Chinchilla was not successful in getting on the short list of the then coalition Government. I am disappointed about that. Roma was successful in getting onto the short list. I know that Roma had special problems in terms of distance, but it deserves our credit because it was prepared to do something to make things happen and keep Roma a vibrant centre. I understand that the Minister is going out there next week. Those people will probably take the opportunity to express to him, eyeball to eyeball, that they are rather disappointed that the consultation they thought they were going to get did not come about. That is something for the Minister to handle. I owe it to those people to speak in this House and to say that I believe that their efforts in trying to do something for the local economy are to be commended. On their behalf, I express our disappointment that our concept of doing something for rural inland Queensland, which depends too much on primary product at the present time, was lost. It disappoints me that the decision that has been made for Woodford and Maryborough is going against us.
