



Speech by

Hon. D. HAMILL

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard 28 October 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Competition Policy

Hon. D. J. HAMILL (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) (9.44 a.m.), by leave: I wish to inform the House of the recent release of the Government's new guidelines for the public benefit test to be undertaken in relation to the National Competition Policy. These new guidelines for the public benefit test will enable the Beattie Government to ensure that the interests of people and communities are put ahead of economic ideology. Significantly, this is the first time that the guidelines have been made available publicly. This reflects the Beattie Government's unique consultative approach to economic reform. The guidelines have been made available on the Treasury Department web site and we welcome the comments and suggestions for further improvements from unions, consumer representatives and other community stakeholders. The revised guidelines will themselves be a living document and will be improved as necessary to reflect community suggestions and priorities.

Labor has been instrumental in humanising competition reform in Queensland. Whilst still in Opposition we demanded the rigorous application of a public benefit test to ensure that economic rationalism did not impact on struggling rural communities and industries. It was only because of the then Labor Opposition's successful amendment of the Queensland Competition Authority legislation being introduced by the Borbidge Government that social concerns received due recognition in that legislation.

The new and strengthened public benefit test guidelines do not just promise to reflect the concerns of the community; they explicitly set out the processes that review committees must follow to consider the social and employment impacts of proposed reforms. One of the flaws in the old guidelines was that they provided lots of detail about economic models and income transfers but had considerably less to say about assessing the impacts on people and communities. Under the new guidelines not only will review committees be required to undertake a detailed employment impact assessment and social impact assessment; they will also be given a rigorous process to follow to ensure the comprehensive consideration of these issues.

The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care has developed a framework specifically to assess the social impact of any proposed reforms, and I thank the Minister for her department's assistance in that regard. With these guidelines, the Beattie Government has put the focus back on people and we can be confident that any reforms do carry with them a real benefit to the community. The Beattie Government believes that competition policy can improve the use of taxpayers' money and provide ongoing community benefits, if it is administered sensibly. However, Governments are only there to deliver services to people. We must ensure that reforms actually deliver improved quality of life through better services and more jobs rather than simply embodying some economic rationalist ideology. I table the guidelines for the information of the House.
