



Speech by
**Mr DENVER
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MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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TRADE MEASUREMENT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (5.07 p.m.): I rise to speak about the Trade Measurement Amendment Bill, which is a terribly important piece of legislation. It is great to see that in this area Queensland is the leading State. Over the years Queensland has been a leader in the administration of weights and measures in this country.

It is fair to say that, probably because Queensland has done such a great job in this particular area and has been the lead agency—it has had the professional standards necessary—the Commonwealth Government has not seen fit to move in and take over, although I know that on a number of occasions it has looked at the possibility of taking it over. Queensland has always been able to indicate quite clearly that we are able to be the lead agency and to set the standards. That Queensland has been the lead agency means that we carry out this task in such a professional way. We have taken a more developed approach to the whole area of weights and measures than have other States. As the former Minister responsible for Consumer Affairs, I know that people used to talk about the fact that Queensland was much further advanced in this area than were other States. We put greater effort into this area in terms of resources—both financial and human resources. I trust that that will continue under this Minister.

I believe that it is terribly important that the States continue to set the standard in this regard. For this to occur, State Governments will need to continue to ensure that there is adequate support, otherwise the Commonwealth Government will step in. As the shadow Minister has already indicated, under the Constitution the Federal Government does have responsibility in this area. It is not very difficult at all for it to step in. This is one of the few areas under the Constitution of this country where the Federal Government has not stepped in and taken over.

All members would be aware that Commonwealth Governments of all political persuasions move into a whole host of sectors that are not their responsibility and take them over. We have seen that happen over a long period. But section 51 (xv) of the Constitution states that weights and measures are a Commonwealth responsibility. That gives the clear indication that, if the Commonwealth wants to, it can move into that sector and there is very little that the States can do about it. Therefore, it is important for us to ensure that we, as a State, continue to deliver those professional standards for which we have been noted. It is probably because Queensland has done so well under Governments of various political persuasions—and it goes back over many decades—and put so much effort into this that we have led the other States, and the Commonwealth has seen fit to allow us to continue.

I remember that, about halfway through the last term of the Government of which I was the Minister for Consumers Affairs, the matter arose that the previous Government had given some consideration to these changes. And as the Minister points out in the Explanatory Notes, agreements were reached in the early nineties. Nevertheless, the current Federal Government indicated little or no interest in the issue, and a discussion ensued that Queensland continued to lead the way in legislation in this regard and the States continued to retain their responsibilities for weights and measures. I look forward to the Minister giving an indication that this Government will continue to ensure that there are adequate resources. I am sure that all honourable members would admit that it is a fairly people-

intensive process. We have to have people checking on things and, of course, adequate funding needs to accompany that.

I think it is fair to say that no Federal Government can possibly deliver the types of checks and services that a State Government—whether it be Queensland, New South Wales or Western Australia—can deliver to ensure that weights and measures meet the required standards. Most people take the required standards for granted. But to someone on Thursday Island or in Birdsville who is buying flour or soft drinks, filling up their fuel tank or buying some fertiliser or whatever, if they find that the weights and measures of the products that they are purchasing are well out of kilter—no doubt underweight—they will lack certainty in their purchases. It is important that people have a sense of certainty when purchasing goods and services.

All honourable members would know that, from time to time, consumer affairs officers and trade measurement officers visit a range of shops and retailers across-the-board and find that someone has been short-changed—that weights are short for various reasons or that drink or fuel measurements are short. Quite often, that occurs through no fault of the particular retailer; sometimes it happens by accident, but sometimes it happens on purpose. Nevertheless, those matters are picked up and rectified, and all of us—purchasers and consumers—can go about our business with a degree of certainty.

Officers from the Office of Fair Trading travel throughout this vast State doing a range of checks covering fuel and weights and measures. Those checks are necessary to ensure that people maintain that certainty. I can think of no worse area in which to lose that degree of certainty and suddenly feel ripped off than in weights and measures. If that happens, there will certainly be a hue and cry. As I said, the Commonwealth has the powers to step in.

This issue also greatly affects businesses—the costs, the delays, the expense and even the shapes and sizes of containers, milk bottles, cereal boxes and so forth. Businesses need to be certain that the weights and measures of what they are selling to the consumers are in accordance with the required standards and that there is no discrepancy. Of course, a business can suffer greatly if something like this occurs, whether it be by accident or on purpose—and I say "by accident" because I am sure that most of these incidents occur by accident; nevertheless, they still occur. A business can go out of business very quickly if it is found to be short-changing its consumers in whatever products or services it might be dealing.

So it is important that all of us, as members of Parliament, ensure that the State Government—of whatever political persuasion—continues to deliver the types of services for which this State has been known in relation to trade measurements. And if we can set the necessary professional standards, other States will follow, and there will be no justification for the Commonwealth Government—no matter which party is in power—to step in and take over this particular role, which could not possibly be delivered in the same manner as State Governments deliver it. In other sectors, we have seen the Commonwealth Government step in. But no matter which party is in office, a Commonwealth Government cannot deliver the required services to the far-flung parts of this vast nation and State as well as a State Government can.

I am pleased with this legislation. I had a little to do with it when members on this side of the Chamber were in Government. Following various meetings, it was due to be ready towards the end of last year. I expected it to come in either late last year or early this year. I am pleased that it has finally come into this Parliament, and I congratulate the Department of Equity and Fair Trading on the work that it does in this particular regard.
