



Speech by

Mr G. HEALY

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Hansard 24 August 1999

TOURISM LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HEALY (Toowoomba North—NPA) (12.28 p.m.): At the outset, I inform the House that the Opposition will not be opposing the legislation that is before us today. As we all know, this legislation has a couple of main objectives, the major ones being an amendment to the Indy Car Grand Prix Act 1990 in relation to the necessity to prepare a regulatory impact statement and an amendment to the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation Act 1979 to ensure that it meets the contemporary needs of the corporation established under the Act.

When I examined the Notice Paper, I was a little surprised that this legislation was still so far down the list. I fully expected that it would be debated early this week or perhaps even last week, mainly because of the information that we had received in relation to the necessity to dispense with the regulatory impact statement. That was one of the reasons why I thought that this legislation would have been debated a little earlier. Obviously it has not been and I am happy that it has come on, because it is important legislation. It will give some members of the House, particularly members from the Opposition side, an opportunity to enhance their thoughts and to talk about some of the great things that are happening in their areas in relation to tourism. It will also give Gold Coast members in particular the opportunity to touch briefly on the continued success of the Gold Coast IndyCar Grand Prix.

As I said before, the Tourism Legislation Amendment Bill 1999 is a global amendment which has direct impacts on two Acts. It has been stated that the proposed amendments to the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation Act are designed to simplify and enhance the administration of the Act and ensure that the corporation is well placed to respond to the many challenges and opportunities confronting the tourism industry. Replacing outdated disclosure provisions and updating other provisions to reflect current practice in today's commercial climate will achieve these aims. Enshrining best practice principles into the Act will not only assist the corporation to provide high-quality product but will also encourage the industry as a whole to continue to strive for excellence.

Under this piece of legislation, the name of the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation—the QTTC—will be changed to Tourism Queensland. Since the establishment of the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation in 1979, many honourable members and other people have struggled with its title, particularly when attending tourism industry functions. The name change will probably be of benefit to the many people who have struggled with the pronunciation of the corporation's correct title. It is much easier to say "Tourism Queensland" than it is to say "QTTC".

A couple of questions in relation to the name change need to be raised. I would have thought that the costs involved in changing all of the letterhead, business cards, envelopes, promotional material, reports and other publications produced by the corporation would add somewhat to the corporation's expenditure rather than provide cost-based efficiencies. That process has to be undergone. The Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation promoted itself well. I have great admiration for those involved in the corporation for the way in which they have been able to promote Queensland's great tourism destinations over the years. A cost will be incurred with the name change. Perhaps that cost will be revealed later on. If not, it might be a suitable question for the Estimates committee hearings to be held later this year following the Budget.

When searching the telephone book or the Internet seeking information about Queensland, people normally look under the letter "Q". I question why the name was not changed to Queensland

Tourism rather than Tourism Queensland. Obviously, some research has been done in that regard. However, to me it would have made sense to name it Queensland Tourism rather than Tourism Queensland. That would have assisted people from interstate or elsewhere who are looking for information about our great State.

In his second-reading speech, the Minister stated that changing the trading name of the corporation to Tourism Queensland would assist the corporation in terms of a more aggressive marketing approach. I would have thought that strategic marketing objectives and product delivery would be more conducive to presenting a more aggressive marketing approach than would a name change. However, now that we have a much easier name to pronounce, at the end of the day we are probably a little better off.

Under the legislation, the number of members of the corporation will be reduced from 11 to 9 which, as the Minister states, will ensure greater flexibility and effectiveness. However, I urge caution in this respect. Queensland is a large State covering a vast geographical region. Much of this vast State is very appealing to tourists. Visitors to the State are attracted not only by the traditional drawcards such as the surf in the south; there are also other marvellous tourism destinations right around the State—for example, our hinterland, central, western, far northern and mountain regions. Those areas are very quickly building solid reputations in the Australian tourism industry. The Queensland tourism industry is a major contributor to this State's economic base and it has the potential to develop much further. In limiting the number of members of the corporation to nine, we have to ensure that those members are representative of our entire State and tourism industry, particularly in light of the fact that another component of the proposed legislation is the abolition of the Regional Tourism Ministerial Advisory Council.

In this House, the Minister gave the commitment that, upon the abolition of this council, regional tourism would not suffer in any way. If the Minister stays true to his word, he will ensure that the nine members appointed to the corporation in the future are truly representative of Queensland's entire industry. There is always a danger when representation is reduced. In this case there is a double whammy, because the number of representatives on the corporation is being reduced and, at the same time, the legislation is abolishing an entity that was able to feed to the Minister's office information that may have been of benefit to him when decisions are made on tourism policy in the future. Two changes are being made under this legislation. We have to ensure that the nine members of the corporation represent Queensland effectively. I can understand the reasons why the Minister has decided to abolish the Regional Tourism Ministerial Advisory Council. If my memory serves me correctly, it was established under Tom Burns, when he was the Minister for Tourism.

Mr Gibbs: No.

Mr HEALY: It was before then?

I understand that the council has met very infrequently. The expanded role of Tourism Queensland in relation to the regional tourism associations, which was certainly an initiative of the previous Tourism Minister, Bruce Davidson, who sought to have more representatives attending RTA meetings, will provide an opportunity for more input. I can understand the reasons for the abolition of the Regional Tourism Ministerial Advisory Council. However, we must ensure that regional areas have their say. There are people in the industry in the regions who are very intelligent and who have tremendous potential to promote their areas. They must be given the opportunity to offer feedback, comments and criticisms to the various bodies, whether it be Tourism Queensland or their own regional tourism association.

In this House, the Minister assured us that the reduction in the number of members of the corporation will ensure greater flexibility and enhance the effectiveness of the corporation. That is very desirable in an important and growing industry. However, we must ensure also that this greater flexibility and effectiveness is not the result of a reduction for the sake of a reduction. We must ensure that this smaller group has the skills, knowledge, proficiency and capability to respond to the emerging issues confronting the tourism industry. We must ensure that our tourism industry is represented fully and provided with the finest leadership available. Historically, the success of Queensland's tourism industry has been envied by all of the other States. We must not only ensure that this trend continues but also ensure that the industry continues to set the benchmark for Australian tourism.

As I said earlier, the coalition agrees that there is no longer a need for the Regional Tourism Ministerial Advisory Council as long as those other provisions are in place. As I said before, Tourism Queensland has internal structures and destination marketing plans which account for the depth and variety of tourism experiences throughout regional Queensland.

I wish to raise an issue in relation to the consultation process that took place on this piece of legislation. The agencies that were consulted were Tourism Queensland, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Department of State Development, the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and the Gold Coast Events Corporation Pty Ltd. However, I wonder why the consultation process did not

extend to the Tourism Council of Australia to give that industry focus, that business focus. I do not know why that is. Perhaps the Minister can explain that when he replies.

The Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation, as it was established back in 1979, was an initiative of the previous National Party Government. It was to create Australia's first non-departmental tourism marketing statutory organisation. Now in the late nineties, most of the other States have similar corporations addressing tourism, marketing, research, and policy and planning issues. However, Queensland needs a commitment from this Government that we can leapfrog ahead of the other States in the new century and ensure that there is sufficient resourcing for Tourism Queensland. That, of course, means an added benefit to the Queensland economy that will provide sufficient incentives to the small and larger businesses that market and deliver the Queensland Tourism product.

Queensland needs to enter the new millennium as the Australian leader in smart tourism. What we have to understand is that, with the power of the Internet as a catalyst, the knowledge revolution that is sweeping the world is already having and will continue to have a dramatic impact on the way consumers decide where they want to travel. All levels of Government have to play a particular role within the dynamic global tourism system. That is something that we have to make sure that we are on top of. Indeed, it is something that we have to make sure that we are at the cutting edge of.

Australia is already a world leader in tourism research. That is illustrated by the collaboration between industry, Governments and universities in areas such as the cooperative research centres for tourism as well as for the reef and the rainforest. These CRCs, I believe, will bring long-term competitive advantages to the Queensland tourism sector by investing in quality tourism research and ensuring the appropriate transfer and application of the research outcomes to all users, especially the private sector, and to Governments.

Over the past couple of months I have had the opportunity of receiving a very substantial briefing from CRC Tourism based at Griffith University. I was extremely impressed with the amount of cutting edge research that organisations such as CRC Tourism are involved in. It is the sort of thing that can be taken advantage of. They have many, many resources to be able to make sure that we are doing the very best for our tourism industry. I think that it is an important thing for these organisations, such as CRC Tourism, to be promoted. I believe they are doing a very, very good job. I certainly welcome the output that they are preparing at the moment from quite a few of the studies that they are doing.

The coalition's recognition and support for regional tourism reforms was evident and occurred under the previous Tourism Minister, Bruce Davidson, the member for Noosa, with much needed boosting of Tourism Queensland funding to Queensland's official regional tourist associations. The introduction of the regional destination marketing plans and the financial support to establish these plans has now made Queensland one of Australia's best convention and meetings destinations. That needs to continue.

Upon our return to Government, the coalition will ensure that Queensland leaps forward again in tourism for both holiday purposes and the high yielding conventions and meetings industry. We do not want to again witness all the talk and no action of seven years of the Goss Government, when minority special interests held sway over the decisions of the Government of the day. I just want to make a couple of comments in relation to—

Mr Gibbs: You were going so well.

Mr HEALY: The member knows what it is like—

Mr Gibbs: A nice, civilised debate.

Mr HEALY: It was a civilised, nice debate. I think, though, that the importance of what the coalition did when we were in Government has to be recognised, as well as the contribution that the member for Noosa made.

I will say that I was, and am, very impressed with a couple of initiatives that have occurred recently. I think they probably would have occurred, anyway, but the latest tourism initiative in relation to the Chinese who are now coming to Australia as a result of the fact that we have been granted approved destination status is very good. I am concerned, though, when I read some reports that perhaps some of these Chinese visitors, who will play an important part in the future of tourism in Queensland, may in fact be shunned because some of them may be charged bonds in their own country. We have this market, we have tapped into it and we are doing everything we can to ensure that the Chinese market becomes a strong and important one for Queensland, and I would hate to think that something like this could discourage some of those tourists from China coming to Australia. I am sure that the Minister is aware of that particular issue.

As I understand it, some of the Chinese operators are charging the bonds to make sure that their reputations are not tarnished if the tourists overstay their holiday in Australia or do not go back at all. I do not know that anything can be done about it, but I am sure that, at a level of discussion that I

believe would be taking place between the Queensland and Chinese Governments, certainly something could be done. As I understand, it is common practice in China whenever an ADS is approved that some of these operators do, in fact, charge this bond. Certainly I think Chinese tourism is a great initiative. I congratulate Tourism Queensland in this regard.

There are a couple of other issues I want to touch on briefly in relation to tourism generally across this State. One of them is that over the last six months or so we have seen a greater emphasis on regional tourism. I have undertaken some extensive tours throughout this State visiting all sorts of tourist destinations and talking to tourism operators. As I said before, these tourism operators have so much potential in their own little areas.

The thing we have to really focus on—and it is something that I think I heard Tourism Queensland's chairman, Terry Jackman, refer to at a couple of functions—is the need to make sure that our international visitors are able to get to these destinations in the quickest possible time. It is no use some of our international tourists—and this is something which I agree with Mr Jackman on—flying out here for from 12 to 16 hours and then getting on some form of transport that is going to take another four or five hours to get them to their destination. They simply do not want to do that; they want to get to their destination in the quickest possible time. I think that we have to come up with those initiatives to do that. If we are going to get our international visitors to see some of the magnificent things that we have here in this State, then we have to get them there in the quickest and most efficient way possible.

A few months ago I attended a symposium which was organised here in Queensland by the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety—CARRSQ—at QUT. It also involved the parliamentary Travelsafe Committee, of which I am a member. The symposium was on international visitors and road safety in Australia. The findings of this symposium on the number of tourists who are killed on Queensland roads are quite alarming. Whilst the number might not sound all that great—in fact, I think the average is about 30 to 40 international tourists killed on our roads each year—we have to come up with some initiatives to address that. That is what the symposium was all about.

Some of the statistical data that came out of that symposium was quite interesting, for example, the fact that the first thing quite a number of international tourists coming into Australia do after a 12-hour flight is to get themselves into a four-wheel-drive vehicle to get to their destination. Some of these international tourists have never driven a four-wheel-drive vehicle before in their lives. So they get off a 12 or 14-hour flight, get into a four-wheel drive and expect to see everything that this country has to offer. What is happening, of course, is that, because they are not used to the road conditions and because they are not used to the vehicle they are driving, they end up in strife very quickly. The statistical information from the symposium suggests that it will get even worse in the year 2000 with the Olympics in Australia and that the number of fatalities on our roads involving international tourists could, in fact, double.

The research done by the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety and outlined at that symposium is very, very good. I commend it to members of the House if they have not already seen it. It is one of those interesting things that we probably do not tend to think about—the fact that we can be endangering the lives of our international tourists. We do not want them coming over here only to succumb to major road accidents that may involve death or serious injury. We want them to be going back to their countries, telling people how good Queensland is and coming back again. That is very important.

The other issue that has arisen in relation to this piece of legislation relates to the Indy Car Grand Prix Act 1990. Primarily, this change is to allow the promoter to reduce costs by not being forced to prepare an annual regulatory impact statement declaring the geographical area where the event is to be staged. Obviously this is beneficial to the promoter, particularly when the geographical area has not altered at all from the time the last event was held. It is a sensible amendment.

The Minister has made a commitment to the House to ensure that a fresh RIS would be prepared in the event of the location being moved. That is quite admirable. A couple of questions need to be answered in that regard. One relates to the promoter altering the course within the same location and another relates to a change being made to the geographical location by way of, for example, construction of a residential property or commercial development within the existing course area.

I understand that the Minister has certain powers. Under the broad powers of section 15 of the Indy Car Grand Prix Act 1990, the Minister can direct the promoter to do certain things. If it becomes apparent that the interests of certain persons were not being adequately addressed through the consultation process, the Minister can intervene and direct the promoter to take certain action. I ask the Minister to expand on that in his speech in reply to the second-reading debate. Under the legislation as I read it, the geographical location of the event has to substantially change to require another RIS. What constitutes a substantial change and will another RIS need to be done if there are minor changes within the same location?

Ensuring that partnerships with event promoters are strong, workable, beneficial relationships is very important to this State, particularly with major international events such as the Indy Car Grand Prix. More important is our commitment to our community. The removal of the right of people to have a say in what happens in their own backyards is cause for concern. If it is all done appropriately, through an open and accountable process, then I think everybody should be happy.

I support the Tourism Legislation Amendment Bill. I caution the Minister that his various commitments to the people of Queensland and to the tourism industry of this State, particularly regional tourism, are on record. He is the accountable Minister. It will be a matter of waiting and seeing how this amendment affects the way we operate and the way we promote tourism throughout this State. I understand that the Minister will be moving an amendment at the Committee stage which we have agreed to support.
