



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 10 November 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (8.50 p.m.): I am very pleased to speak on the Liquor Amendment Bill 1999. As everyone knows, Anzac Day is one of the most special days of the year. The proposal before the House tonight is to restrict trading hours to midnight on the eve of Anzac Day. That is not a major change, but it is an important change. This amendment has strong community support. One only has to listen to the radio, talk to people and hear what is going on to know that the amendment before the House tonight has very strong community support.

Mr Fenlon: You want to ban refrigerators; is that the idea?

Mr HOBBS: The member for Greenslopes says that we should ban refrigerators. I am not sure that that would be a good idea. I do not think that the diggers would think that such comments contribute to the spirit of tonight's debate.

Tonight I wish to talk about respect for diggers and what they stand for. I have attended many RSL conferences and I know what great people the diggers are. They are continually helping one another, particularly the aged veterans. They do an enormous amount of work in their communities. A lot of them are getting on in years, but they are still doing a great job. I have the utmost respect for them.

Mr Johnson: Our next generation of diggers are up in East Timor—men and women.

Mr HOBBS: There is no doubt about that. They will be a part of the Returned Services League. Certainly I believe that they will be welcomed home in a much better fashion than the Vietnam veterans were. They will become a part of the RSL and they will keep it going.

There has certainly been a resurgence of support for Anzac Day over the last few years. More children are becoming involved in the Anzac Day parades, which they attend with their parents and grandparents. It is quite warming to see the strong support, love and affection that people have for the old diggers and to hear the clapping as the parade goes by. I think that we lost that a few years ago. Numbers were dwindling, but in the past three or four years there has been a great resurgence of interest in Anzac Day. Anzac Day is one of the most special days in the year. This is not just another holiday; it is Anzac Day. That is so important.

Anzac Day is a key day for many organisations. For example, Anzac Day functions held around Australia are always televised. In fact, a service is held every year on the other side of the world at Gallipoli. This is a very special place for people to commemorate Anzac Day. Indeed, a new memorial is currently being built at Gallipoli. Bruce Scott, the Federal Minister for Veterans Affairs, will visit Gallipoli again this year and further ceremonies will be held on Anzac Day. It is a heart-wrenching day that is a part of our history. It is a great day that we celebrate in support of the diggers and to remember those who did not come home.

Unfortunately I am unable to attend a lot of the services that are held on Anzac Day in my electorate of Warrego, because the electorate is so large and I am usually tied up in one place. However, I know that nearly every town and community holds some sort of function to commemorate Anzac Day.

The tentacles of the RSL stretch very widely; it is an organisation that is loved across Australia. I take this opportunity to advise the House of the progress of the RSL club in Charleville. Many members would be aware that the flood of 1990 damaged the RSL club. Extensions were almost completed

when, believe it or not, the building was burnt down. In typical RSL fashion, they kept things going in the old shed at the cordial factory. One of the sad things was that they lost a lot of the memorabilia that was housed in the premises that burnt down. They had gathered together a lot of extra memorabilia that was to be used in an exhibition, and it was all lost. It was so disappointing to lose so much memorabilia, which had been gathered from near and far. Unfortunately, these things happen. The new facility has opened and it is a focal point of the town. Graham Andrews, the Mayor of Murweh Shire and the local publican, has done a great job. He has put a lot of time and a great deal of effort into keeping the club going.

Mr Healy: It is one of the most magnificent clubs in the west.

Mr HOBBS: The Charleville RSL is a magnificent club. It is a great facility and it provides a great opportunity for people to get together. Certainly all the diggers will be there on the next Anzac Day, and that will be a wonderful thing to see.

Every town has either a community RSL hall or a memorial of some description. There is always a story associated with the hall or the memorial, such as how it was built, the number of people involved and things such as that. Many RSL clubs have been incorporated in new sporting complexes or the like, but people still say, "There is the old RSL hall." Some of the stories are quite extraordinary. One that comes to mind involves my home town of Tambo. The old RSL hall is now part of the bowls club, although it is still referred to as the RSL hall. Another example is at Mitchell, where a fantastic sporting complex has been built. They moved the old RSL building out of town. They set it on stumps and built a verandah around the building. It now holds pride of place and will be there for generations to come to enjoy. The people know the hall and they love it.

The legislation is based on the premise that we do not want drunks disrupting Anzac Day proceedings. We hope that that would not happen, and I do not think that it would happen in the west as much as it would happen in the bigger towns. However, it can happen and that is the issue here. It could happen anywhere. I ask members opposite: what is wrong with supporting this Bill? I cannot see how they could vote against it. It is not as if anything significant is holding them back. I can accept the argument that there should be consistency. However, the general public's view would be that that argument does not hold water. The general public is very supportive of this move. I do not believe that anyone could raise legitimate arguments in opposition to the shadow Minister's Bill. I would like to hear what Government members believe. However, there are no Government speakers on the list, just Opposition members—although it appears that the member for Fitzroy will speak to the Bill. I appreciate that.

Mr Healy: He's an RSL man.

Mr HOBBS: He is a returned serviceman. We would appreciate his telling us his views about how this will impact on people. I cannot see an argument against it.

This amendment Bill allows a certain amount of flexibility in that alcohol can be sold for consumption on a premises when it is consumed as part of a meal between 10 p.m. and 1 a.m. at special functions. So there is a small exception for people attending a special function. However, we do not want to see grog flowing freely in cabaret venues and other places. We do not believe that people need to have that option. This is one day of the year when we think some restraint should be shown. As far as I am aware, the RSLs support this legislation. I suppose a few of them might not. However, I understand the majority of them support it. I do not see why we cannot do something about this issue in the House.

Mr Healy interjected.

Mr HOBBS: As the shadow Minister pointed out, at its last annual conference the Local Government Association also supported this change. Nearly 1,000 members from local governments debated many issues over several days, and this was one of them.

Mr McGrady: There was nowhere near 1,000 delegates.

Mr HOBBS: Delegates and observers. The conference debated the issue and there was—

Mr Healy: Overwhelming support.

Mr HOBBS:—overwhelming support for it. I find it difficult to find reasons why there should be any opposition to this Bill. My family have been great supporters of the Returned & Services League. My sister Angela won the Girl in a Million Quest in 1966. We had a very active RSL branch in our home town and the members convinced her to enter the quest. We have had a close association with not only the club but also the people and the movement behind it. That has been a wonderful experience for me. I was only a young fellow at the time and—

Mr Healy: Not long ago.

Mr HOBBS: That is right; it was not long ago. During the call-up period, I spent some time at the 49th Royal Queensland Regiment. That gave me a bit of an insight into the digger's attitudes. Although

I did not go to Vietnam, I still had a good insight into how the diggers felt, and that has given me a close association with the issue. This is not a party political issue. We cannot say, "The Labor members are voting this way and the conservatives are voting that way." I do not understand why some sort of a compromise cannot be reached on this issue. Members opposite should be able to work out something. No honourable member opposite would want to have any early morning parade disrupted by drunks. The police cannot be everywhere at once. They have enough on their plate at present as it is. For example, on the Gold Coast it is very difficult for the police to control the public the whole time. They do their very best. I take my hat off to them; they do a fantastic job. However, there are times when they cannot be everywhere at once. That has been proven in the past. Let us hope that it is not proven next year.

In conclusion, I urge members opposite to consider some way around this so that a reasonable compromise can be reached and everybody will feel reassured that RSL members—the diggers—will have a good day.
