



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 10 November 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (9.51 p.m.): Tonight I take the opportunity to join in this debate. It has been a long debate and it has been a very emotional debate. At the outset, I state that I do not have any family members connected with Anzac Day, so I do not have the emotional attachment to Anzac Day that some of the other members have displayed in this Chamber during the course of this debate. I respect the emotion that has been displayed. I think for everybody it is an emotional debate.

Although I do not have that emotional attachment directly through family members, as part of my role in this job and before I had this job in other community leadership roles I have attended a lot of Anzac Day services and I am more than familiar with many of the RSL clubs in the rural communities in my electorate. I do not think that any of them would suggest that the problem of a disruption to services in those rural communities is very real. I do not think that anyone would suggest that there are statistics or that we should look for statistics about how many times the services have been disrupted or how many times incidents have been reported to the police. I think that the nature of these rural communities is that, if such a thing happened, they would sort it out fairly smartly themselves. Anyone who dared to transgress in that manner would feel the full wrath of the community and they would get sorted out pretty quickly, especially on an occasion such as an Anzac Day service.

However, what concerns those people—and I speak here tonight on their behalf—is the very thought of it happening, or the potential for it to happen. It is not an argument about how many incidents have occurred or what the police can do to prevent it from happening; it is the very thought of it happening, or the potential for it to happen, that makes people angry. That is a potential that has probably developed of late. It is not something that has been around for the past 80 years since Anzac Day services have been held. The development of the nightclub culture—and I use that term because I cannot think of a better one—or the idea that young people need to stay out at nightclubs until three or four o'clock in the morning is a recent development. It has arisen in particular parts of the State only in recent years. It has probably coincided with an increase in respect for Anzac Day, which has been referred to by many members. That is something that is common to all parts of the State, not just to those people who live in areas where these types of incidents are more likely to occur.

While people feel that increased respect for Anzac Day, they react even more strongly to the very thought that those services may be disrupted. I am pleased that the Minister is listening now, because he was not listening before when I made the point. It is not the statistics that are important; it is the thought of the services being disrupted and it is the potential for them to be disrupted that makes people angry. It has become more likely since the development of the nightclub culture, which has arisen in conjunction with an increase in respect for Anzac Day. I know that I am repeating myself, but I said it again for Minister's benefit because he was not listening when I said it the first time.

As I have said, this has been a very emotional debate. Although that is understandable, the debate has strayed somewhat from the core issue and it is probably as well that we remind ourselves just what we are debating. Some members have made the point that we should not be debating who has the most respect for Anzac Day. We all share the same respect. The member for Barron River said that nobody has a mortgage on the way we feel about Anzac Day, and that is very true. We should remember what we are debating. With due respect to some of the other members who have spoken, I think that they lost sight of that—possibly because it is such an emotional subject. We are debating the

Liquor Amendment Bill 1999, which seeks to amend the Liquor Act 1992 by replacing section 9(3), which relates to the trading hours on the eve of Anzac Day. It is proposed that liquor licences, including on-premises or cabaret licences, cease at midnight on the day prior to Anzac Day rather than at three o'clock, or four o'clock, or whatever other time.

The question that has been posed over and over again by speakers on this side of the House—and it has not been answered by the members opposite—is: what is wrong with that? What is the downside? Why not do it? Nobody has stood up and tried to justify or explain logically what is wrong with it. Why not do it? Why turn it into a political stand-off? What is the problem? That is really the issue. As I said at the outset, as somebody who does not really have any emotional connection with the subject, I am struggling to understand that point.

As I have sat in this Chamber and listened to the debate, which has gone on now for some time, it has been particularly noticeable to me that the majority of the members on the other side of the House do not have any great commitment to the course of action that they are pursuing. We have seen from the members opposite some impassioned performances about Anzac Day. In some instances, they were particularly good. However, there has been no commitment from them as to what this legislation is about. Nobody has been prepared to argue the crux of the matter. In fact, the body language and facial expressions of some of the members opposite on the backbench would lead me to assume that they have been, to say the least, press-ganged into this. I do not think that anybody opposite is terribly comfortable with it. I think the vibes that are coming from the Government side indicate that this is not a particularly positive or particularly well-accepted course of action.

This raises the question: what is the Minister's position? I hope that when he sums up this debate that he makes an effort to address the crux of the matter, which is: what is wrong with the proposal? As some members have said, it will not be the be-all and end-all. It will not cure every ill. It will not completely remove the potential for this sort of incident to occur. It has been said that revellers could come from private parties, and so they could. It has been said that people could buy liquor at takeaway stores the day before, and so they could. However, this particular proposition removes one source of potential disruption. No-one is suggesting that it will completely solve the problem. In the course of all the addresses that have been given by members on this side of the House, no-one has suggested that it is the be-all and end-all. No-one has suggested that it will preserve forever the solemnity and respect that we all want to see shown on Anzac Day. However, it will not do any harm either, so what is the downside? What is the reason for the Government's opposition to this Bill?

I say to the Minister, before he leaves the Chamber, that when he sums up at the end of the date, he addresses that issue.

Mr Gibbs: You don't understand Standing Orders. I don't get to sum up. You're spokesman gets to sum up.

Mr SEENEY: I apologise for that. You get that when you are new at a job.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): I remind the member for Callide to speak through the Chair.

Mr SEENEY: I apologise—through the Chair.

Ms Spence: Stop saying you're sorry.

Mr SEENEY: I am sorry if I put too much pressure on the Minister.

Mr Healy interjected.

Mr SEENEY: I am sure that, as the member for Toowoomba North has indicated, he will reinforce these points when he sums up the debate.

It is a shame that nobody from the other side of the House has taken the opportunity to address the crux of the matter. My good friend the member for Logan is sitting over there. Perhaps he may take the opportunity to do so. He is one of the better exponents on the other side of the House of the art of oratory. With his grasp of logic, he may take the opportunity to address the crux of the legislation, which has been ignored by every other speaker from his side of the House. I welcome the member for Rockhampton into the House, because I remember well the contribution that he made to the debate.

Ms Spence: It was the best one.

Mr SEENEY: I was going to say that it was a good contribution. The member for Rockhampton said very little that I disagreed with. However, like so many other Government speakers, he did not address what the Bill is about. He talked about addressing the reasons for this type of behaviour. That is absolutely right, but what is the downside to the proposition? Why can we not do both things together? Why can we not address the reasons for the behaviour, as the member for Rockhampton quite rightly suggested in his contribution to the debate, and, at the same time, accept the change that is proposed by the legislation? Why not do both things together? No effort has been made to outline the downside of the proposition.

Mr Swarten: I said that in my contribution. I said if I thought it would solve the problem, I'd do it.

Mr SEENEY: Before the member came into the Chamber I indicated that nobody is suggesting that this is the absolute solution, but it is a step in the right direction. It removes a potential in one particular area. We concede absolutely that there is potential for the problem to be created by other factors. That is absolutely right. However, what is the problem with removing the potential in this particular area, which can be done so easily, at so little cost and with so little downside?

Mr Swarten: I actually don't think that's right. That's where you and I differ, but I respect your views.

Mr SEENEY: We will agree to differ.

Mr Cooper: Three apologies in a minute.

Mr SEENEY: No, this is a serious issue and, probably for one of the very few times ever, I agree with the member. I reinforce what the member said in his contribution to the debate.

I do not think that we should turn this debate into a political slanging match. The member for Rockhampton and I know that we can both handle ourselves in a political slinging match. We could have a political slinging match about this issue, as we do on a number of other issues. That is fair enough, because this is a place of robust debate. The member for Fitzroy made the point, and I agree, that this should not be a political issue. He was dead right. It should not be a political issue. In a lot of respects, what the member said about the debate being turned into a political farce is right. However, it has been turned into a political farce by the stubbornness and the intransigence of the other side of the House.

No attempt has been made by members opposite to address the crux of the issue. No attempt has been made to address the issue logically and the issue is: what is the problem with agreeing with the Bill? It is fair enough that members may say that it might not solve all the problems. It is fair enough that members may say that it is not a perfect solution. However, it will remove the potential for this problem to be generated by one source. It will not take away the potential for it to be generated by every source, but it will reduce the problem.

Mr Swarten: No. I thought I did. This is where you and I disagree.

Mr SEENEY: Okay. The legislation will address what everybody knows the public perceives as a problem. There is a groundswell of support for the legislation. There is a groundswell of public disgust at the thought that Anzac Day ceremonies are disrupted. There is a groundswell of public concern at the potential for ceremonies to be disrupted by a very small number of people.

I take this opportunity to place on record my admiration for the increase in the Anzac spirit, which I think has been illustrated by the debate tonight. The depth of feeling and the emotion conveyed by many participants in the debate is a reflection of the increase in the Anzac spirit within the wider community. That is illustrated in many ways. It is important that, while we talk about a problem that is being caused by a small number of young people, we also acknowledge that there is a much larger body of young people who have very great respect for Anzac Day. Not only that, those young people are participating in the whole Anzac tradition in increasing numbers.

Mr Swarten: Ninety-nine per cent.

Mr SEENEY: That is absolutely right. The member and I have never agreed so much before.

A good illustration of this point is the cadets from the small community of Monto, where I come from. A couple of years ago when I had another role, a group of people came to the shire council with a proposal to form a cadet unit. I said, "Yeah, it will probably last a couple of months." Anyway, we gave them a bit of assistance and they set up the cadet unit. It has been an outstanding success. I will not try to quote the figures because I will get them wrong, but at some time or another a large percentage of the young people of the relevant age group from the district have been members of the cadet unit. Quite a number of young people who joined the cadet unit have gone on to become members of the regular Army. That cadet unit now has sub-branches in Eidsvold and Mundubbera. They, too, are growing and enjoying great support from the young people of those districts. Given that we have spent so much time debating unpardonable behaviour on the part of some young people, it is important that we acknowledge the contribution being made to the furtherance of the Anzac spirit and Anzac ceremonies by these cadet corps. Without exception, the cadets turn up to the dawn services. As most honourable members know, Monto is a cold place, especially in April. It can get a bit cold—

Mr Swarten: A bit?

Mr SEENEY: Yes, just a bit!

At the dawn service I attended the young cadets had the sleeves on their uniforms rolled up. They were absolutely blue. They stood to attention during the dawn service as I stood there shivering in

two warm coats. Their contribution to the dawn services and Anzac Day services throughout the district made us all feel proud. I congratulate them and wish them every success.

In the short time that I have left, I wish to reiterate the basic point that I have tried to get across in my contribution to this debate, which is that, although we can respect the emotion and the depth of feeling that has been demonstrated by just about every honourable member who has spoken in this debate, we have to remember what this legislation is about. We have to remember exactly what is being proposed. If honourable members are going to oppose this or any other proposal, let us them do it logically and sensibly and put forward some sensible arguments for why this proposition should be rejected. That has not been done by honourable members opposite. No downside has been pointed out in respect of this proposition. Nobody has stood up and logically tried to build an argument that this proposition will cause problems or any great inconvenience to anybody. Instead, there has been an outpouring of emotion, which is quite understandable.
