



Speech by

Mr J. HEGARTY

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Hansard 14 September 1999

LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

Mr HEGARTY (Redlands—NPA) (10.19 a.m.): Many parents are concerned that their children are failing to learn to read. There is evidence that a large number of school leavers seeking to enter the work force are unable to read at the basic level required for employment.

Recently, I attended a dinner at which Mrs Elizabeth Clarke was guest speaker. Mrs Clarke was a teacher for 30 years and has spent the past 10 years studying the brain. She believes that teaching phonics when teaching children to read is the answer to many of today's literacy problems. Mrs Clarke's speech was of great interest to me because, just a week before, I saw an advertisement on television for a new way of teaching people to read called "The Sound Way".

My office contacted the 1300 number given to ring for more information. It was a marketing company that is selling 20 video tapes and books on the concept of phonics. The company's present program is aimed at children aged from seven up but soon will begin to sell a program for children under seven in the same price range. I have no doubt these programs are selling well among Queensland parents who are deeply concerned that the school system is not teaching their children to read properly.

I understand, however, that Education Queensland owns the copyright to phonics books in the series Queensland School Readers Preps 1 to 4. These were issued by the Department of Public Instruction with Crown Copyright reserved. Many members of the House may remember these books and, I would hope, would remember how they benefited from simple phonics instruction when learning to read. Why are these books or modernised derivatives of them not used for phonics instruction in Queensland schools?

Whilst I understand that teachers currently have options as to how best to teach literacy to students, I expect, however, young teachers would not be so predisposed to phonics teaching if they had not been taught that way themselves. I call on the Minister to introduce teachers to phonics as part of their in-service training so that this world tried and successful method of teaching reading can be more widely used.
