



Speech by

Mrs J. GAMIN

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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RETAIL SHOP LEASES AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs GAMIN (Burleigh—NPA) (4.10 p.m.): I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate on the Retail Shop Leases Amendment Bill because it is on sensible legislation like this that Parliament deserves to spend a little quality time. Queensland deserves that time. Closer to home, my constituents in Burleigh certainly deserve—as do Queenslanders everywhere—to have such administrative arrangements made a matter of deep consideration.

The matter of retail shop leases is one of great importance to Gold Coast people particularly. The Gold Coast is the small business capital of Queensland—just as Queensland is the small business capital of Australia. In other words, the Gold Coast is at the cutting edge of small business.

Lease arrangements—and more particularly the obligations on tenants under such arrangements—are an essential element of any business plan. At the Gold Coast in particular, the revolution in retailing has provided great opportunities for small business. It has also created great challenges, and new challenges. Dynamic legislation is needed to accommodate these new challenges.

In the small retailing area—specialty shops and the like, of the sort that the Gold Coast in particular features because of the addition of the tourist trade to the local community—margins for traders can be very tight indeed. Business is cyclical. In a tourist area it is also heavily subject to distortions by reason of weather and other variables. The Gold Coast is also a high cost area, which adds a further disincentive to enterprises that might—certainly in the start-up stage—be rather more marginal than others.

For all these reasons, it is important to build better balance into the regulatory framework. It is vitally important that this balance is created through fairness and equity between the interests of tenants and lessors.

Small businesspeople face higher relative costs than bigger businesses across the whole range of their operations. A legal bill—even a legal opinion—represents a cost to a big business that is manageable or, at the very least, can be accommodated within the operating budget. This is not the case with a small business where the same dollar amount for service can equal a very high proportion of the business's assets.

The coalition—in Government and in Opposition and, indeed, historically—backs small business. It is pleasing to see that, so far as the Retail Shop Leases Amendment Bill 1999 is concerned, Labor has come to the party. In that general area, it is also pleasing to see that the benefits of plain English are being applied to the provisions of this Bill. That, too, is an immense help to ordinary people in understanding what is required of them and—just as importantly—what is required of other parties to their arrangement.

In that regard, measures to improve dispute settling arrangements are an important development which the coalition certainly supports. My colleague the honourable member for Toowoomba North has already made this point. I would simply add that these measures are very important indeed in the unique retail environment of the Gold Coast.

Limiting rent reviews to once every 12 months is a sensible measure. It is also good to see that this legislation—effectively the coalition's legislation—prohibits multiple rent reviews and insists that one basis only must be used for each rent review.

I know that the small business tenants who operate in my constituency will benefit from these improvements. That is good news indeed. Anything that boosts small business— that quarantines small business from cause and effect imperatives which it is simply not capable of dealing with on a sustainable financial basis—is good news.

We can all feel proud that Queensland's existing retail tenancy legislation—to which we are now debating further improvements—is recognised as best practice. It is surely Queensland's role within this Federation to improve best practice on a continuous basis. Our pre-eminent place in Australian society demands that we constantly seek excellence.

At the social level, it is important that we define and closely monitor the roles and responsibilities of both tenants and lessors. There is nothing in this sensible administrative arrangement that is anti-competition. We all understand—on this side of the House, anyway—that competition is what drives service and improvement. This legislation will clear the field so that small business can compete more effectively and in a fairer retail environment. I commend the Bill to the House.
