



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD

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CALL CENTRES

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (10.18 a.m.): Phone rage is something that politicians cop from time to time, but workers in call centres endure phone rage as a daily feature of their work. Recently, I hosted a breakfast for workers employed by call centres in Brisbane. This is a rapidly growing industry as airlines, banks and other customer service agencies phase out face-to-face contact and use telephone technology. As I listened to some conditions that call centre workers tolerate, I could not help thinking that this industry, whilst being good in terms of job creation, is at risk of being the sweatshop of the new millennium. I ask members to think about what it would be like to be crowded into a small workplace, dealing with hundreds of phone calls each day, with many callers under pressure and frustrated by long waiting times.

While the Brisbane City Council call centre staff reported good working conditions, other organisations did not pass the grade. Call centres do provide much-needed jobs, particularly if they are located in economically depressed regional centres. Call centre employers, however, must ensure that consumers receive fair and reasonable wait times and they must ensure that call centre workers receive fair and reasonable working conditions. Workers must have access to secure work, not highly insecure casual work.

I commend the Australian Services Union for its efforts in getting workers organised in this emerging industry. Next time that members dial up to book a flight or pay a bill and are left hanging for a while, spare a thought for the workers on the end of the line. They may be just as frustrated with this new form of customer service.
