



Speech by

Hon. KEN HAYWARD

MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

Hansard 11 March 1999

USE OF PLAIN ENGLISH IN GOVERNMENT CORRESPONDENCE

Hon. K. W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (5.24 p.m.): I just want to make a few comments in the short time that is left in this debate to support the motion moved by the member for Nicklin. I cannot imagine that there would be any opposition to making sure that all department heads ensure that plain English is used in all Government correspondence. Of course, this directive applies to all consultants working for this Government. As I said, I clearly support this call for the use of plain English.

I took the opportunity to speak in this debate because it is a matter that has disturbed me for quite a long time. As we all know, as MPs in this place we receive piles and piles of documents to read. Let us be honest with each other: the reality is that much of it is not read simply because of the sheer volume of it or, as is usually the case, because of the degree of interest or otherwise in some of the material that comes through.

I rang my office and asked my electorate secretary if she could send over something that it was obvious to her was not in plain English. I will use that example later in my speech. If this motion is passed, I think the test of this Parliament will be that plain English is used in all Government correspondence from now on. Of course, the obvious exceptions are when we are dealing with technical issues. But honestly, I think we all understand that those technical issues are directed in general terms to a limited audience or to specialist areas.

One of the examples that I wish to cite came in the form of a general letter from Queensland Transport. I would like to read one of the sentences into the record. I think that this letter was sent to every member of Parliament. It may have also gone to every person who owns a vehicle in Queensland—I do not know. It says—

"While some businesses may express concern about legal and registered ownership status of vehicles, our communication with affected owners will make it clear that the department's records do not denote or imply legal ownership."

I do not know what that means to people who just hear or read that, but I think that such a comment makes it very difficult not just for members of Parliament but certainly for any ordinary member of the public—especially someone who owns a vehicle in this State—to understand exactly what the department is trying to get at. I knew there was a problem when I got this letter because the salutation says, "Dear Honourable Kenneth Hayward MLA". I knew straight away that whoever in the department wrote the letter really had not put a lot of thought into it. As I understand it, the point about this is that a series of questionnaires have to be filled in, and they go to every vehicle owner in this State. I call for plain English to be used.

Time expired.
