Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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AUDIO VISUAL AND AUDIO LINKS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.52 p.m.): The Opposition supports this Bill, which in large part is a continuation of the reforms to court procedure brought about by the recommendations of the Litigation Reform Commission, which led to changes in the rules of court in 1995, and by the passage of the Courts (Video Link) Amendment Bill by the House in 1996.

The Courts (Video Link) Amendment Bill in fact was introduced first by the current Minister when he was the Attorney-General in the Goss Government and then reintroduced by the member for Indooroopilly shortly after the change of Government in 1996. This is indicative of the fact that measures such as this are not partisan and that all sensible people are keen to ensure that our courts and tribunals obtain the benefits of new technologies.

I will turn to the history and details of this Bill shortly, but I think the debate on this measure gives this Parliament an opportunity to consider the impact of modern technologies on the provision and dispensing of justice in Queensland. It is a critical matter and one which cannot always be evaluated in the light of purely financial considerations.

The Minister said in 1995—it is phrase which is worth repeating—that technology needs to be on tap but not on top. It is a sentiment with which I am in full agreement. Our legal system is by its very nature conservative. Change comes slowly. This is not necessarily because of any ingrained opposition to reform, but mostly because changes that are made must be demonstrated to be in the public interest. Change for the sake of change is a dangerous thing when the guinea pigs are members of the community whose liberty or life savings could be on the line. Yet our courts, if they are to continue to be relevant and capable of keeping pace with the demands and complexities of our society, must reap the benefits that new technologies bring.

I will outline some of the modern technologies currently being used or investigated by Queensland courts. First, as I understand it, real-time reporting is being used in some large, complex cases. This involves the reporter producing a transcript of evidence and it becoming available on computer screens almost immediately to the presiding judge and barristers. I note from this year's annual report of the Department of Justice that the State Reporting Bureau will be developing plans over the next 12 months to extend real-time reporting to regional operational centres at Townsville and Cairns. This is a development which has my support, and I hope that the bureau receives the necessary budgetary and IT support to enable this proposal to be expedited.

If I can digress for a moment, I wish to say that I had the very great opportunity and pleasure of attending the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration conference in Adelaide in August of this year. I was very interested to listen to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Western Australia, who talked about the virtual courtroom they are developing as a model in that State. They will have interactive computer technology. Basically, legal counsel for the defence, the prosecution and the judge will all be set up with technology. Also as a consequence of modern technology, they will have re-creations of the scene of a particular crime. That is the way that is developing. It is certainly the way our courts will develop at some time to come.

Second, there will be the development of computer-based crime scene simulations. This means that a jury can be walked around a crime scene—a house, a field, a jetty— stopping and allowing time for greater inspection, all within the courtroom. Not only does this save valuable time and money; it has the capacity to greatly enhance the comprehension of jury members about sometimes disputed and complex factual matters.

Third, many paper records are now being put in CD-ROM format rather than voluminous matters, including exhibits, transcripts and submissions being placed from floor to ceiling in paper format. It is part of the trend towards the "paperless" court. I hope we can achieve the paperless court. I remember, when I was at primary school in the 1970s, our teacher coming in and talking to us about the paperless office and the paperless world in many years to come—about how we would be able to look at everything on a computer screen. I think we all appreciate that that aspiration has not come to fruition in the way it should have done. Maybe email, which was not a part of the 1970s and probably 1980s to the extent that it is today, and other more interactive technologies will ensure that we will have a paperless court.

I recommend to anyone interested in this an article in the Victorian Law Institute Journal in 1997 by Derkley entitled Netting the Paper Deluge. This compared the presentation of two major and very complicated cases in the Victorian Supreme Court. One was the Estate Mortgage case and the other was the Pyramid Building Society case. The first was computerised and the second was paper based. The author made the following comment—

> "On the first floor, the court is wading knee deep through the paper trial. Every time a document is mentioned there's a mad scurry as everyone rifles through shelves and leafs through pages looking for the right piece of paper. Downstairs the atmosphere is strangely serene for a court ploughing its way through more than 30,000 documents. The only sound punctuating the drone of the presenter is the occasional click of a mouse button. "

Fourth, Supreme and Court of Appeal judgments are now available on the Internet. I welcome that. I know that my colleague the member for Indooroopilly was progressing that reform during his time as Minister. Obviously there were, and remain, concerns from the Supreme Court Library, which obtained revenue from the sale of the judgments, but I believe that the wider public interest is certainly served from being able to access this important element of the law. Certainly in the time of the current Attorney-General there has been significant progress in this area.

Fifth, the Supreme Court trial division recently ran its first on-line call-over week through the use of the Law Foundation's Themis network. In addition, the trial division is moving towards making more information available electronically, including the civil sittings grid and the chamber list. The court is even now using the Themis email facility to invite practitioners to nominate hearing dates for cases in advance of the sittings call-over. I note from the department's annual report that over the next year the higher courts will: make information about court services and criminal cases available electronically across the State through the upgraded courts information system; facilitate improvements such as online access to research material and electronic lodgment of documents; and enhance listing and trial date information available on line to the legal profession.

I also note that it states at page 25 that there is a proposal to install a video court facility at the Caboolture Magistrates Court. Of course, all of these developments cost money. In this year's budget I note that $1.225m has been set aside over this financial year for the higher courts technology upgrade and a further $200,000 for the replacement of equipment for computer-aided shorthand writers. Some may say that they are large sums of money. I would agree, but the benefits that the community would reap from having our courts system technologically up to date are enormous. I regard the injection of funds into our superior and summary courts as well as into key areas such as the State Reporting Bureau as being absolutely essential.

There is no magic in technology; it is how we use that technology. There are as many problems as there are benefits with the introduction of new technologies, and we have to be aware of that. It is important that the evaluation process be effective, because as the then Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, Warren Burger, said in 1972, the real question is not whether these changes will need to take place, but how rapidly the courts will be compelled to accommodate them. Earlier this year Mr Justice Moynihan gave a paper titled Law in the Digital Millennium. It is available for downloading from the court's own Internet page. It is another very desirable and extremely useful document. I recommend that web site highly. In addition, I encourage anyone truly interested in modern justice to read some of the speeches that are contained on that site.

Sittings suspended from 1.02 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Before the luncheon recess, I was quoting from a paper delivered by Mr Justice Moynihan titled Law in the Digital Millennium. That was a very edifying speech. It was of great assistance to me in preparing for this debate and in obtaining a better appreciation of some of the issues that this Bill touches on. His Honour said—

"The role of information technology in the changes we are dealing with is essentially neutral. It is how we use it that matters. Our range of futures may be positive or may be negative so presenting a range of choices reflecting threats and opportunities. In broad terms, for example, some postulate a negative outcome of technological and social change with isolated enclaves for the affluent with private police and justice systems while the less privileged are excluded from access to information, marginalised or excluded so that they resort to violence which is dealt with by rigid enforcement delivering a depersonalised justice or by the mass use of stupefying drugs.

On the other hand, technology can make justice more accessible, the community may become more involved in the collaborative resolution of its problems so leading to a better life for all."

There is no doubt that the benefits of utilising new technologies in our court system are many and varied. Each and every member knows full well that utilisation of emerging technologies in most spheres of human activity results in a far better and more effective utilisation of scarce resources. In the context of the court system, I outline some of the major advantages of the Government encouraging the adoption of new technologies—

reduction of certain court and tribunal expenditure through electronic storage, filing and archiving and the electronic service of documents;

reduction of waiting times for judicial officers, court staff and legal parties through streamlining the civil and criminal litigation process in some of the ways I have previously mentioned;

better researched and consistent judicial decision making by more effective accessing of electronically reported and stored judgments, which is already the case in New South Wales through a very advanced system pioneered by the Judicial Commission;

reduction of court costs for parties by having part of the court process conducted electronically;

facilitation of a more collaborative approach to litigation through information posted on the Internet, and there is already some research to indicate that that may promote earlier dispute resolution;

reduction in legal fees due to lawyers being able to more quickly, cheaply and effectively access information for clients; and

assist Australian lawyers competing for international legal business.

Between 1993-94 and 1995-96 it has been estimated that the export of Australia's legal services increased from $117m to $173m. It may be of interest to the House to appreciate that the Government of Singapore actually goes out of its way to attract international business to its courts. That Government regards the investment in technology in its courts as a strategic one that will result in major commercial operations wanting to come to Singapore to do business with the confidence that the legal superstructure is independent and state of the art. I think that many people forget the importance to the economy of having a legal system that is viewed favourably by the international business community. Strategic investment in our courts from the viewpoint of the economic benefits that that may bring is much too readily overlooked or not appreciated at all.

The legal structure in this State and the way that it is relevant to the future is an issue that is probably of some concern and interest to the Attorney-General, who is trying to undertake a process of legal profession reform. That is why it is very important to ensure that we are able to get it right and know that we have a system that is appropriate and competitive not only internationally but also nationally.

This importance of the legal system to the economy was recognised by Lord Woolf in his 1995 report to the British Lord Chancellor on the British civil justice system. He made it very clear that the British Government needed to invest in technology for the British courts if the United Kingdom was to maintain a competitive position as a leading forum for the resolution of disputes. Yet there are also clear disadvantages with new technologies, the most important of which is the inequality of resources and knowledge and the well-justified fear of perpetuating two classes of justice: one for the information knowledgeable or rich and one for the information "unknowledgeable" or poor. This is a particular problem in litigation where one party may have relatively unlimited access to electronic technologies to collect, retrieve, analyse and present information and arguments and the other side may not. The mere ability of one side to marshal that type of technological fire power may encourage the other side to settle, even if the settlement is on unfair terms.

Those are real issues that have to be dealt with by our judicial system, but we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater. We need to use new technologies fully and intelligently, but do so in a way that enhances the administration of justice and does not create injustices. I am sure that the broad discretions vested in our judiciary to accord justice to all parties will ensure that that never becomes a major problem, but it is one that needs to be exposed clearly and considered from the beginning.

As I mentioned, this Bill builds upon a process that has been in place in Queensland for a few years. Over the years, the courts were reluctant to allow the giving of evidence other than by a witness who was physically present in the courtroom. Concerns were expressed that it was of critical importance for the judge and the jury to see the witness and his or her demeanour, as that could be critical in deliberations. A whole host of other arguments were raised against allowing or compelling people to give evidence by video link. Civil libertarians have quite rightly raised concerns about whether an accused person who is not in a courtroom can be disadvantaged by the fact that the quality of the video picture and sound or even the angle of the screen may diminish that person's access to justice. On top of that is the issue of just how much such a process dilutes the capacity of the accused person to communicate effectively and confidentially with their legal representatives.

In an address last year, the Federal Attorney-General highlighted one of the pitfalls of using video link technology. He said that when he was a barrister addressing the High Court by video link from Western Australia, he realised after some time that the High Court judges could not hear him. That realisation came only when they were preparing to leave the bench. In fairness to Daryl Williams, one can only join with him in blaming poor technology for the High Court judges leaving him in mid argument. However, frivolity aside, there are considerable problems that can arise with video link technologies. From my research, it would seem that the first time that an English court allowed the use of video evidence was in 1974. At that stage I was only six years old. I am not sure when it was allowed in the various Queensland courts. In short, it is a relatively new development. I will not take up the time of the House in outlining the type of technical and procedural fairness arguments that have been raised in Queensland and elsewhere about using video evidence. I do however intend to draw the House's attention to an article that appeared in Proctor of April 1996 by Wendy Harris, who was an associate to a District Court judge when the rules of court were changed to allow the giving of evidence by telephone or video link. This was her analysis of how it operated in the Queensland District Court—

> "During the period of my associateship, telephone link-ups were used in numerous personal injuries actions for taking evidence from medical experts. More particularly, it was used for the cross-examination of experts as the witness's report had already been tendered and examination-in-chief was a formality. The party calling the witness was responsible for arranging times of availability. The link-up was usually made during a brief adjournment so as to minimise disruption to the court. Checks were made to ensure the equipment was working properly and that the witness could both hear and be heard through the voice box. Once court resumed, counsel calling the witness announced himself or herself, the name of the matter, the presiding judge and other counsel. It was important that at all times the witness was aware of who was addressing him or her. On each occasion involving a medical witness, no oath was administered by agreement of the parties and the judge. At all times the witness was easily heard by all participants including short-hand reporters.
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> Feedback from counsel was that it was a useful and helpful facility, but pointed out that telephone link-ups may be inappropriate where credibility is in issue. In one case where a witness's evidence was contentious and credibility in issue, a video link-up was agreed to by the parties where the witness was unable to travel away from home due to his incapacitated wife.
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> In the matter I observed, video link-up was through commercial services. The party calling the witness was responsible for arranging bookings at both ends of the link-up (including costs at first instance). It was advised that a variety of camera angles were available with different zooms or focus. However, it was agreed that only one camera with one setting would be used so the witness would see in one view the judge, the associate and both counsel. Counsel stood when examining the witness and the camera was set to accommodate this. All persons, including short-hand reporters, were ferried to the video premises and the link-up commenced at the arranged time. The witness, in the presence of a solicitor, and whilst holding a bible was sworn in by the associate.
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> The facility worked well, particularly the use of a document viewer to send images of documents on which the witness was cross-examined. There was some delay in transmission and this must be kept in mind when making objections, as in some cases the witness would keep talking after the objection."

Ms Harris concluded by saying that taking all matters into consideration "the new provisions will achieve their objectives of reducing delays and costs and ensuring that justice is done."

I have quoted from that article at length because it is very important when considering a Bill such as this to comprehend how the technology in question is working. As the above indicates—and this view has been expressed by others in other material—both video and audio technologies, when used appropriately, have assisted the courts and the various parties.

When legislation was introduced in 1995 and 1996 it dealt only with video link technology, and mandated its use in bail and remand proceedings. It allowed the court to use the technology in other

criminal proceedings, such as hand up committals, pleas of guilty and the taking of evidence where the parties consented to that taking place. Even in the case of bail and remand proceedings, the court was vested with a discretion not to insist on video link usage where the interests of justice would not be served.

There were some concerns expressed at the time about this legislation. Certainly it was justified on the basis that it would remove security risks in transporting accused persons from remand facilities to courts, and, in addition, there were considerable costs savings as well as time savings for the courts. In his reply, I would appreciate it if the Attorney-General would indicate how, in the opinion of his department, the legislation is operating. From discussions that I have had, there would appear to be general satisfaction with its operation and I have not received any negative feedback. I have to say that the current Queensland law is deficient in at least one respect compared with the legislation in force in New South Wales. In that State, the relevant legislation specifically requires that the operation of the video link facilities must be such as to ensure two-way communication of "television standard".

In addition, regulations can be made requiring additional provisions about the technical and performance specifications for video link facilities. One of the greatest concerns, at least with respect to criminal prosecutions, is that a defendant is not disadvantaged by not being physically present in the court. A provision of the type in the New South Wales legislation, despite its drawbacks, is a genuine attempt to at least ensure in the statute itself that certain minimum technical standards are maintained. This is one matter that I recommend to the Attorney-General, his advisers and his department for their attention.

This Bill has three objectives. The first is to enable Queensland to participate in a uniform scheme for the taking or receiving of evidence, and the making or receiving of submissions, from or in participating States. The second is to facilitate the giving and receiving of evidence, and the making and receiving of submissions, in Queensland court proceedings by audiovisual link or audio link. Finally, the Bill empowers Queensland courts to arraign and sentence people by audiovisual or audio links, but only with the consent of all parties. I will deal with the final objective first.

The proposition that audiovisual or audio links can be used when all of the parties are in agreement for the arraignment and sentencing of persons charged with criminal offences is unobjectionable. The fundamental point is that all parties must agree. That is very important and ensures that a provision such as this is not open to abuse. I was very pleased that the Attorney-General made mention in his speech of the fact that nothing in this proposal detracts from the right of victims of crime to have their opportunity to see the perpetrator of the crime being dealt with by the judicial process.

I was please because, as the Attorney-General knows, the amendments to the Penalties and Sentences Act only refer, as they can, to the prosecutor and the offender. They can only do so because people who commit a crime do so against society and not the victim, and it is the Crown who has conduct in almost all cases of criminal prosecutions. I would ask the Attorney-General if he would, in his reply, indicate whether he will be having discussions with the Director of Public Prosecutions to ensure that there will be appropriate liaison with victims of crime to ensure that their views are sought on whether the Crown will agree to video link sentencing procedures.

I also would like the Attorney-General to ensure that, unless there are compelling public policy reasons to the contrary, whenever a victim of crime wants the sentencing process to take place in court with the offender present, the Director of Public Prosecutions acts in accordance with that wish. This aspect of the Bill represents a further advancement of video technology into the criminal justice process. It is a step which is couched with some protections, and anyone interested in the administration of justice will welcome that. It does not mandate the use of such technology, but merely facilitates its use should the parties agree.

There has been some debate between the Attorney-General and the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee about the use in the legislation of the term "in the interests of justice". I note the Attorney-General's reply to the Committee about the views of the judiciary and the inherent discretions vested in judges and the role that they have to play. I agree with the Attorney-General, at least from the viewpoint of the law. However, I draw the Attorney-General's attention to a very interesting discussion of the politics of the phrase "in the interests of justice" in the New South Wales Parliament when it was debating video link legislation. That discussion is to be found in our Research Bulletin No. 3 of 1996 issued by the Parliamentary Library on the Attorney-General's I995 Bill.

In the circumstances I think that, to allay any existing concerns, it would have been prudent to have adopted the submissions of the criminal lawyers to which the Attorney-General referred. This Bill has as much to do with creating an atmosphere of acceptance as it does with black letter law. Once again, I say to the Attorney-General that he should keep the matter in mind when reviewing the legislation at some future time.

On a related matter, I would like to briefly mention the issue of the use of modern technologies facilitating the giving of evidence and the provision of justice to people who are in special and vulnerable circumstances, particularly children. It is often forgotten that one of the most progressive moves made by this Parliament in recent times was the passing of legislation introduced by Paul Clauson, when he was Minister for Justice, which, apart from a host of other things, introduced the first form of Megan's Law, I think, in Australia and also amended the Evidence Act to facilitate the giving of evidence by people defined as "special witnesses". These are people who, in the court's opinion, would be so intimidated as to be disadvantaged as a witness, and include emotionally traumatised victims as well as people suffering from intellectual impairment. The Act also specifically covered children under the age of 12. This Act allowed, amongst other things, the videotaping of the evidence of special witnesses instead of those witnesses giving direct testimony. It also allowed the accused to be obscured from the view of a special witness or to be excluded from the room in which the court is sitting.

Following the Four Corners report a few weeks ago about the terrible abuses that the legal system has perpetrated on young victims, there has been, quite understandably, quite a lot of debate about how these problems can be addressed. Fortunately, the member for Indooroopilly gave the Queensland Law Reform Commission a reference to investigate—

> "... the capacity of the legal system, both in its criminal and civil aspects to properly receive the evidence of children."

The commission issued a discussion paper on this topic last December, and Chapter 11 deals with closed-circuit television and screens as well as the use of video evidence. The commission quotes in its discussion paper the following comments of the Australian Law Reform Commission and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on the court experiences of child witnesses, and I would like those comments to be recorded in Hansard—

> "The legal system has traditionally given little support and preparation to child witnesses. Within the courtroom children are often subject to harassing, intimidating, confusing and misleading questioning. In addition, court buildings do not provide privacy for the child or promote the safety of the child outside the courtroom. A significant amount of evidence was presented to the Inquiry that children are frequently traumatised by their court experience due to these factors. The abuse many children suffer is compounded by the abuse perpetrated by the legal system itself."

Those are very tough, very telling comments and deserve, like many other criticisms of the current system, to be properly taken into account.

I am not about to enter into this debate when discussing this Bill except to say that, with modern technologies, there are many opportunities—and I mean creative, cost-effective and fair innovations—that can go a long way towards both meeting the needs of vulnerable witnesses and, at the same time, ensuring that an accused person gets a fair trial. I think it is a matter of the highest priority that all Governments start looking at the needs of our most vulnerable citizens and harness the marvellous opportunities presented by various technologies to ensure that our justice system remains relevant and receptive. I wish the Attorney-General all the very best as he considers the outcome of the Law Reform Commission on the issue of child witnesses, whenever that report comes about.

The other objectives of the Bill relate to the uniform legislative exercise that has, for the past seven or so years, been the subject of discussions by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General. As the Attorney-General pointed out when introducing this Bill, it will allow Queensland courts to take evidence and submissions by means of audiovisual or audio link from people in a State or Territory with reciprocal legislation. It also allows courts in those other States and Territories to take similar evidence from people in Queensland. In addition, the legislation deals with the use of these technologies for the giving and receiving of evidence outside Australia. I am pleased that, at last, all Australian States and Territories will have in place a scheme which will facilitate the giving of evidence by video link. It is long overdue.

I am also very pleased that our legislation recognises the overseas dimension. Courts have always had the inherent discretion to allow such evidence, and there are many reported cases of how that discretion has been utilised. But it is always discretionary, and in the exercise of the courts' discretion a range of approaches remain possible. It is essential that there be some statutory basis—some certainty—to this process and, in addition, that there be a reciprocal regime to actually facilitate the giving of evidence in this fashion beyond State or even national borders. Australian courts have used the discretions vested in them from time to time to allow the taking of evidence from other countries by means of video technology. One example included the taking of evidence from a historian in the trial of the alleged World War II criminal Ivan Polyuchovich as well as the cross-examination of a person who gave evidence on committal in Australia but who had returned overseas and would not return.

The advantage of this type of legislation is that it allows the giving of evidence in much more commonplace cases but, as a result, in a much broader array of circumstances. For example, when an overseas witness has to authenticate records or identify some evidence, the physical presence of the witness may not be necessary, and the video link could well not only save time, money and reduce inconvenience but actually ensure that the evidence can be given at all.

More than this, the Commonwealth is now actively using video link technology in a range of statutes. One statute of significance in this regard is the Crimes (Child Sex Tourism) Act of 1994. Under this statute, evidence can be given by video link from overseas, and without saying any more on this matter I think that all honourable members would appreciate how this could be critical, especially in the case of juvenile material witnesses who reside outside this country.

It is also very important, in the context of this Bill, to point out that, since 1 April 1995, arrangements have been in place between Australia and New Zealand to allow evidence to be given by telephone or video link by a person in either country in proceedings being heard in the other nation. The evidence used as the model by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General was in fact the New Zealand Evidence and Procedure Act 1994. One of the key provisions of that legislation is that a person in New Zealand who gives false evidence by video link in an Australian proceeding can be prosecuted for perjury under New Zealand law. It is important to note that, under the uniform Bills, the key issue of false testimony is dealt with. I am pleased that this key matter will be resolved under this exercise, as it is essential to have in place mechanisms to ensure that persons giving evidence from another place can be dealt with quickly and seamlessly should they commit perjury.

One other matter which is critical to this exercise is the extent to which this model legislation, taken together with recent Federal initiatives, may actually facilitate international cooperation. The Federal Attorney-General has recently pointed out that the Commonwealth Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act 1987 now makes provision for a magistrate to permit the examination and cross-examination of a witness via video link in response to a request from a foreign country. He pointed out that the recent amendment to the Act was relied upon for the first time in December 1997 in response to a request from New Zealand for assistance in obtaining evidence for the purposes of a prosecution under its Biosecurity Act in relation to a charge of smuggling protected fauna. In that case, apparently, a key witness was not prepared to travel to New Zealand. It is very easy to forget that, these days, crime does not respect national let alone State borders.

If there is to be a concerted effort to deal with the growth in various forms of trans-national crime activities, the facilitation of the giving of evidence across borders by the use of technologies is not only desirable but absolutely essential. When the coalition was in Government, it facilitated the attendance in Rome of a Queensland Public Service representative on the Australian delegation discussing the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court. It was no mistake that one of the proposals being considered in the context of the establishment of this court was the giving of trans-national evidence by means of video link technology. This Bill is important, not just from the perspective of interstate cooperation but also from the wider perspective of each jurisdictional entity within the Commonwealth working together so that some of the globalisation factors impacting on civil, commercial and criminal matters can be dealt with sensibly from a procedural and evidentiary perspective.

I read with interest the comments on this Bill by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee in Alert Digest No. 5. Of the matters raised by the committee, the only one I wish to raise is the concern expressed that the use of video link technology might deprive a court of the benefit of observing a witness's demeanour whilst giving evidence. I think that the Attorney-General's response to the committee's concerns, where he pointed out that the emphasis given to this matter can be overstated, is correct. However, even if it were not, the requirement that the parties be in agreement and the risk that, in some cases, evidence may not be given at all if video link facilities are not provided, more than compensates for the drawbacks.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my contribution, the Opposition supports this Bill. It is important because it is part of a uniform exercise that will facilitate the giving of evidence around Australia and overseas. It is important because it extends the scope of video link technology in the realm of Queensland criminal proceedings. Finally, it is important because this Bill is yet another example that, at long last, Governments, courts and legal professionals are using the advantages that modern technological developments are presenting in a way which facilitates the administration of justice in Queensland. I look forward to the courts being able, in the future, to continue to take advantage of modern technologies, and I encourage the Attorney-General, in consultation with the judiciary, to continue to explore ways to further this process. The Opposition has great pleasure in supporting this Bill and commends the Attorney-General for bringing it before the Parliament.