



Speech by

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 27 October 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (9.05 p.m.): We have debated this issue that is currently before the House over a long period. We have debated it as a motion and now we are debating it as an amendment Bill. In previous debates, some of us were criticised for being emotional. So I will endeavour as much as I can to stick to the facts.

I congratulate the Minister because, this year, there were no incidents. I genuinely congratulate him on that. A few moments ago during the Minister's speech I heard him say that he maximised the presence of liquor licensing officers and Minister Tom Barton maximised the presence of police. In Gladstone, there were police officers who, in previous years, probably were not rostered for duty. They made sure that anybody who could make trouble at the dawn service or the subsequent service was not in the vicinity. In Gladstone, it has been predominantly the dawn service where problems have occurred.

In the past, the Minister has said that there is no proof that the patrons of establishments have been the cause of the disruptions. I am aware of only two nightclubs in Gladstone that have cabaret-type licences. The Minister can correct me if I am wrong on that. One is Hooters and the other one is Players. One is located directly across the road from the RSL club. In the previous year, the patrons who were causing the greatest amount of heartache to the returned servicemen had come out of the club located closest to the RSL. They wandered up the street because the closing hour for the establishment occurred in close proximity to the time when the fellows and ladies who were returned servicemen and women and their families were assembling for the dawn service. So we have a fairly clear picture that the people who have caused the disruptions come from the licensed premises. Again, let me reiterate that I know that all of those people who turned out at the dawn service this year—in Gladstone, anyway—appreciated the fact that the police presence was evident and that no problems occurred.

The difficulty for me is that a great deal of energy was put into this Anzac Day. With the greatest of respect, that was to prove a point—the point being that nothing need occur. If I and the other members who are concerned could be assured that at every Anzac Day there would be the same concentration of effort by both licensing officers and police, that there would be the same level of rostering of licensing officers and police to be able to ensure that problems could be nipped in the bud, we probably need not have this debate. However, the Minister and I both know that a lot of these issues run hot and cold. It will die off and will not be a major concern for people for a couple of years until something quite unpalatable occurs. Then it will come back on the public agenda.

As I said, the Minister said that no incidents were reported for 1999. Again, on the public record, I congratulate the Minister. The Minister has also said that, the year before, there were two incidents. Without casting aspersions on the Minister's personal integrity, I question the accuracy of that. However, I would like to discuss the people who would complain. They are returned servicemen. We do not have in Gladstone any World War I returned soldiers. We have quite a number of World War II returned servicemen, Korean servicemen, Malayan servicemen, Borneo servicemen and Vietnam vets. No doubt, in the near future we will have returned service people who have filled a peacekeeping role in East Timor. At the moment, except for World War I, I think that in Gladstone we have representatives from all the other theatres of war.

As individuals, they and their spouses have tolerated fear, they have tolerated pain, they have tolerated deprivation and they have tolerated death—usually the death of mates whom they have become really close friends with. On a day-to-day basis, they tolerate memories. They are not complainers. I put it to the Minister that there is not a huge amount of complaint because they are not a generation of people who, historically, complain about things easily. They tolerate them. If they have been heckled at the dawn service on Anzac Day, they have an extra beer after the service. They do not enjoy it, but they do not complain about it. They take it in their stride.

If it was me, I would probably whinge endlessly, because I am not quite as tolerant as my dad. My children might whinge too; I do not know. It is fairly relative. I have not been through a war. I have not been through what my dad went through, and he complains a lot less than I do. I am not surprised that the diggers do not have a whinge when they get heckled in the street because, in comparison to what they are remembering on the day, that is fairly minor. The fact that there has not been a huge number of official complaints needs to be put in perspective.

The Minister talked about a report to the former Minister for Tourism, Small Business and Industry that stated that there was not a link between the incidents and nightclub patrons. In my area, there is a link. I have not done a survey of everybody in the State, but I would hazard a guess that where there are incidents, reported or not reported, there would be a link.

The pubs and hotels are obligated by law to close at 12 o'clock. That is a fact. We are not debating a huge shift. We are debating whether a few clubs and cabaret licence holders who can currently trade until 3 o'clock should be made to close at 12 o'clock. This amendment Bill is asking for those trading hours to be wound back to 12 o'clock—that is, three hours—one day a year. A member interjected during the speech of a previous speaker and said, "What about Christmas Day?" I support the closure of everything on Christmas Day. Midnight mass is not a problem. There are a very small number of days in our calendar year that are of very special significance. They are Christmas Day, Easter and Anzac Day. At 12 o'clock the pubs close. Currently, cabarets are able to open until 3 o'clock. We are asking for that time to be wound back to 12 o'clock.

The Minister also said that the past Government did nothing; therefore, it will be on the record that the past Government did nothing and coalition members need to answer to that. If complaints were made to the past Government about the activities of club patrons on Anzac Day from 12 o'clock until the dawn service and it did nothing, coalition members need to answer to that inactivity. However, we are dealing with what is happening now. The fact is that there is a Bill before the House now that will allow us to make a change for the better for people who have been prepared to sacrifice themselves, their safety and their memories. This Bill gives us the chance to say, "Thank you. We will wind these trading hours back to 12 o'clock for a small segment of the community."

Other speakers have mentioned that Anzac Day is an open trading day in other States. I do not care, because we are dealing with legislation in Queensland.

It has also been said that this is a cheap stunt that is being performed by the Opposition. I assure the Minister that this is far from a cheap stunt. It has only been in the past 12 months that these issues have been brought to my attention. It has only been in the past 12 months that others members and I have seen an opportunity to address the concerns of those who have come to talk to us. This is not a cheap stunt and it is not intended to be one. I would hate to see the Minister rationalise non-support for this amendment Bill on the basis of politics, because it goes far deeper than politics.

Mr Reynolds: It may be for you, but for your coalition mates it is a matter of political opportunism.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: If the member sees it as political opportunism on the part of a few, I would ask him to please not make a decision of such importance that will be to the detriment of so many who, on Anzac Day, gather to remember their mates and to remember their own sacrifices.

I have tried to look at this issue without emotion. However, it is one of those issues that one simply cannot look at without emotion. One cannot look at it in objective terms only. I would lay a bet that everybody here has either a parent or a relative who has served in active duty overseas.

Ms Boyle interjected.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I did not mean everybody. I said that almost everybody would have a relative or a friend who has served on active duty overseas. Anzac Day is a very special day for many of those people. I do not really understand the uniqueness of Anzac Day for them. I know that for some it is years before they will participate in Anzac Day. It takes years for them to come to terms with the memories that they have brought back with them. They find Anzac Day too much to cope with. It was 48 years before one person whom I know of felt able to participate in an Anzac Day service, not because they did not recognise the seriousness of Anzac Day but because they found that it took that long before they felt able to participate in the memorial service.

An article from the Courier-Mail of 28 April 1999 refers to Anzac Day. It states—

"Kids, if any of you happen to read this, then listen: Life is not like you experienced on Anzac Day. Life is full of problems, mostly small and most of which have to be faced by you alone, usually nagging away at your heart and your brain when you're alone in bed in the dead of night.

Face up to them, because most of your troubles will be self-inflicted with a solution in your hands alone. That's fair dinkum life. No-one will be there asking if you feel faint and would you like to sit in the shade. Expect someone to come along with a mental crutch at every turn and you will be very, very disappointed.

You'll need inspiration and I've got just the thing. This is it—that night on the TV news I saw my old mate, Eric Abraham, being driven along in an open jeep in Brisbane's Anzac Day parade.

Eric had his 101st birthday the previous Tuesday and when I called to wish him all the best he was as bright as ever and reckoned he could whip me over a 100-yard sprint any old day if it was not for his knees.

'My knees are buggered these days, but the rest of me is fine,' he said.

As he came on screen on Sunday night, I yelled at the TV: 'Giddy Eric'; but suddenly, something he did made me hold my breath. As his vehicle approached the Governor taking the salute, I could see what Eric intended to do. He was going to stand up in that moving vehicle to return the salute on those 101-year-old knees that he knows are buggered.

And you know something? He did just that. He stood tall and snapped a salute. No one there beside him to stop him falling out of the vehicle in case his old knees gave out, nothing to hang on to, no one there to spray his face with water or ask him did he feel faint.

That's what life's all about, kids. It's about learning to depend on yourself first and foremost. It's all about guts and determination, the way old Eric showed the world with that gallant standing salute last Sunday. That's life, kids."

To young people who do not even know about the sorts of experiences that people in the various wars have, the writer of that article was saying, "That's the sort of gallantry and bravery that you need to be looking for in your life's experiences."

I am not unique. I know that other speakers will speak fairly passionately about this Bill. Some may get up and speak passionately against the Bill. My dad went to the Second World War and, as I have said before, he used to tell us only the good stories. He used to tell us the funny stories. I never learnt the other side of the picture until I read some of the books that were available. The Government members will say, "Deal with the facts. Take the emotion out of it." We cannot do that, because the Bill is about our recognising what our parents and our parents' friends did for us so that tonight we might be free to stand in this place and debate a Bill such as this.

Mr Gibbs: You don't have a mortgage on it.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: No, I do not claim a mortgage on this. No-one here has said that we have sole ownership of those experiences. I am asking the Minister to use those experiences to support this legislation and recognise the gallantry and bravery of the people who were prepared to give up everything—whether they did or not—to give us our freedom and to support this Bill, which asks for three hours to be set aside on Anzac Day. We had a debate on this matter some time ago. Those of us who were emotionally involved in the issue were criticised and told that we did not have a mortgage on it. I am admitting to the Minister that we do not. The member for Bulimba showed his great emotional connection with the issue and then voted against it. That is his prerogative. I am not questioning it. But those members should not turn around and decry our right to be in contact emotionally with the issue when we passionately want to vote for the Bill. Many people have contacted my office expressing their disappointment that the Bill did not get up sooner. They will be very disappointed if the Bill does not get through on the basis of what the Minister has said. I will not defend his position. However, I believe there is huge community support for this Bill. It will not have an immense impact on the community or an effect on businesses. This is one day a year. This is being done as a mark of respect. Tonight this vote gives us the opportunity to say thank you to those people who have made a contribution during times of war. Timor shows us that it will not be relegated to the past; that it will be a feature now and in the future.
