



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 29 April 1999

MOTOR ACCIDENT INSURANCE AMENDMENT REGULATION (No. 2) 1999
Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.42 p.m.): I speak in support of my colleagues on the Opposition side. It has been interesting to hear some of the speeches from those on the Government side. I often think that it is a pity that Hansard is only published in black and white. If it could show some vision, we would see the cynical smiles on their faces as they start to say that this particular debate is all about politics, considering the way that members opposite acted up in this place a couple of years ago in opposing the responsible rise that we had to put in place to fix the financial mess that they had left behind when they did not have the courage to be fiscally responsible and impose the increase that was required.

We heard the sanctimonious bleating of the member for Cairns, who has taken over from the previous member for Cairns, a former Treasurer, who did not increase the premium when it was required because he did not have the courage to do so. Why? Because we were leading up to the Mundingburra by-election. Who was it left to? The coalition Government! When we came into Government it was left to us. We had to increase it by \$66, I think it was.

What a show members opposite put on. There were petitions and disallowance motions were moved. If they think that the moving of this disallowance motion was political, what was theirs? We moved that disallowance motion—

Mr Briskey: Why are you moving this motion?

Mr HORAN:—because there had not been a rise for many, many years and we were left with no option. It would have been like the workers compensation scheme that they virtually bankrupted when they left it almost \$400m in the red. Once again, we were left with the financial mess and we had to fix it up.

I noticed that the member for Cleveland asked, "What is your reason for opposing?" We are not going to be hypocrites like those opposite, but we have a good reason. When the premium went up nine months ago by \$20, did we oppose it? No, we did not! However, we are opposing it now because of the incompetence. We have to ask: what is happening in the Minister's department when he gets figures, he gets all the advice to make a particular increase and he makes such a blunder back in July that he increases it by, on average, \$20—somewhere between \$13 and \$22. He had his chance then to make a correct and accurate assessment, and what happened? He got it wrong!

Here we are nine months later with a \$40 increase. I suppose in another six or seven months the Minister will say that he got it wrong again, despite the advice that has been given to him. I think it is symptomatic of the way that the Labor Party is running the show, the way that it is running the Government. That is our reason. Honourable members will note that there was no objection to the increase last time, but how can we stand for incompetence like this? The Minister gets the advice, he has the actuarial advice, he has all the financial advice—the Insurance Commissioner and everybody else—and he gets it so wrong. But nine months later we are back here again, so what does he do? He blames everybody else—just as we see from the Beattie Government all the time. We saw Mr Schwarten today blaming the correspondence system and Mr Barton blaming some poor Ipswich

person for something that was in the paper about Mr Barton's shortcomings. It is always somebody's fault.

What we are here about tonight is objecting to this because of the absolute incompetence of the Beattie Government and the Treasurer to get it right when it first occurred. If honourable members look back over the history of the increase in these premiums, they will find—and I think I am right in saying—that, from around the late eighties to 1996, there was not an increase.

Dr Watson: No significant increase.

Mr HORAN: There was no significant increase. Then we were left holding the bunny and we had to make that increase of \$66 in 1996. It has not been necessary for an increase again until just last July, some two years later. So here we are within nine months and the Government has upped it again—it has approved an increase again. What on earth is it doing?

Mr Briskey: Because of society.

Mr HORAN: The member just said that it is because of society. That has happened in months. According to his logic, we will probably see another whacking increase in six or seven months.

Dr Watson: Who allowed the ambulance chasing?

Mr HORAN: That is interesting. I was going to get to that. The member for Cairns made some sensible contributions about what is happening with legal costs and asked where on earth it is leading us as a society. But again, who was it? It was Mr De Lacy, her predecessor, and Mr Goss who brought in all the liberalised advertising that has allowed all these particular problems to occur. We have the Government saying to us that it is going to have a review. It is saying that the problem is the ambulance chasing lawyers and tow-truck operators. In the words of the Aussie Rules ad: I'd like to see that.

Can honourable members imagine this Government curbing all the excesses of the lawyers when it was this very same Government that allowed the workers compensation scheme to blow out by \$400m and just recently it was this very same Government that allowed the workers compensation scheme to blow out further? No doubt it will be us again, in about two years' time when we come back into Government, who will have to fix up the financial mess that this Government leaves behind.

I would also like to make a comment about the review that is coming up about which the member for Cairns spoke. The rate of motor vehicle deaths and accidents has been decreasing dramatically. I think in this past 12 months the toll has been the lowest in Queensland for some incredible period. We have speed cameras, which are reducing the number and severity of accidents because there is not the same degree of trauma in accidents at lower speeds as there is when accidents occur at high speed. We now have the reduction of speed limits in residential streets. With all this, still we are seeing the premiums going up and up and up.

Following on from what the member for Gladstone said, we really have to wonder about the system. It is almost like an auction in the cattle yards where someone comes in and says, "What will you give me? Will you give me an \$80 rise, an \$80 rise?", and someone says, "\$40. We will give you \$40", and next thing we end up with the particular rise that we are debating here tonight in the Parliament. So there certainly is a need for this system to be fixed up. Everybody in this Parliament has to be concerned that, after seeing a period in which these increases have come with a reasonably substantial amount of time between them, suddenly this Government comes in and we get a rise early in the start of its term. It has been given all the figures, all the data, but it gets it wrong. Then nine months later, up she goes again. This is the problem we have. We did not oppose the \$20 increase but now we are facing an increase of another \$40. It is unprecedented to have the increases so close together.

Certainly I think the people of Queensland are starting to see just what this Government is all about. They see that this is the second rise in nine months. They have seen the rise in the meat levy. They have seen the rise in the fire levy. Suddenly they are starting to understand that we are back on the same track of unfunded Labor promises and largesse. All the good, sound schemes that were managed in a financially responsibly manner are starting to rust and fall away.

The gloss that the Premier likes to put on things—that everything is all right, that things will be fair and just and so on—is not real. I understand that this rise is somewhere in the order of 25% and that the rise in the meat levy was about 300%. We have also seen a huge rise in the fire service levy. All of that is in contradiction to the letter that the Premier wrote to the member for Nicklin last year, at the time of his decision as to which side he would support and who would be the Government of Queensland.

I think it has to be put very strongly on the record that the charade the Labor Party went through two years ago—the petitions, the disallowance motions and the publicity that it carried on with—was typical of the show pony attitude that was there when it was in Opposition and the show pony attitude that still exists. We see the theatrics almost every day in this place, but behind the theatrics there is very

little substance. The issue we are dealing with now demonstrates that. How much substance is there in the decision making? The Government has all the information and has experts all around it, giving it information. It should not have to increase this premium just nine months after the first increase. The Government should have got it right in July and there should not have been another increase for 18 months or two years. That is the way it has been in recent years.

That the Government made such a blunder, that it got it so wrong, erodes any confidence that may have existed in the Treasurer and in the Beattie Government. That is the real point of tonight's argument: the Government got it wrong. We did not object when the price went up by \$20. Now, nine months later, it has gone up by another \$40. The way the Treasurer is making decisions, it will probably go up another \$40 or \$50 in six months if his track record on decision making continues.

Time expired.
