Speech by

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Millennium Bug

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth— ALP) (Minister for Communication and Information and Minister for Local Government, Planning, Regional and Rural Communities) (10.19 a.m.), by leave: The Y2K or millennium bug is a threat the Beattie Government takes very seriously. Since we came to Government approximately 10 months ago, our Government has made it a top priority.

All State Government departments and agencies are required to take part in a rigorous Y2K monitoring and reporting system. State Cabinet receives monthly reports from each department or agency, signed by their director-general, stating exactly where they are in their assessment and rectification work. We are now making this information public each month, and I table a copy of that report.

I am pleased to inform the House that, although there is still a lot of hard work to be done, the results so far are encouraging. The report provides a breakdown for each individual department and indicates that more than 80% have already completed more than 50% of their assessment and rectification work.

It is also pleasing to note that critical "life-threatening" areas, such as health and emergency services, are on track. They will be the front line of response to any problems encountered after 1 January 2000, whether those problems are caused by technology failures or natural disasters.

In addition to this comprehensive monitoring system, we have put in place a number of other initiatives. This week I will introduce new legislation which will allow Government, local government and business to voluntarily disclose and exchange information about their year 2000 problems, rectification efforts and readiness without fear of legal ramifications. By removing the shackles of legal liability, larger businesses will now be able to assist smaller businesses with their Y2K preparation through the sharing of knowledge on the problem. This legislation will support the extensive work being undertaken by my colleague the Minister for State Development, Jim Elder, to assist the business community to come to grips with the problem.

In addition, reports on the progress of the electricity industry, Government-owned corporations and local governments with responsibility for water and sewerage are expected to be delivered to State Cabinet next month. Through initiatives such as these we have made good progress in tackling the Y2K problem.

Last week I attended a meeting in Adelaide of all State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for year 2000 issues. I am pleased to report to the House that our performance so far in dealing with the Y2K threat compares favourably with that of other States. However, it is important that we do not underestimate the potential of the bug. It is caused by a design fault on some dates stored on microchip-controlled systems. In simple terms, from the first day of the year 2000 some computers will think it is the year 1900 or some other date and shut down or go haywire.

Microchips are everywhere in our day-to-day lives. From the moment we wake, chips control whether we can turn on the lights, whether our alarm clocks work, whether we can start our cars, the traffic, escalators and elevators and hundreds more seemingly mundane tasks in an average day. However, by acting now as we are to identify the risks and take steps to minimise the impact, we can position Queensland to fully exploit the opportunities offered by the new millennium without the threat posed by the bug.