



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard 11 June 1999

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (11.37 a.m.): The Industrial Relations Bill recognises above all the importance of industrial harmony to the State's economic and social future. The centrepiece of the reform will be a reinvigorated Queensland Industrial Relations Commission with the power and obligation to intervene early in disputes and to consider the needs of not only the State's economy but also local and regional economies in its determinations.

In Mackay last year there was a protracted industrial dispute at a local heavy engineering company. The dispute went on for a number of weeks, causing severe economic hardship to workers and their families, the company and the economy of Mackay. The Industrial Relations Commission was powerless to intervene because of the restrictions imposed by the current Act. The new legislation will allow the independent umpire, the Industrial Relations Commission, to intervene and resolve a dispute such as the one at the heavy engineering company in Mackay, thus avoiding unnecessary economic loss to workers, the employers and the community.

The Bill will restore the balance in the workplace. This Bill is linked closely to the recommendations of the Gardner task force, which consulted widely with stakeholders and the community. The vast majority of the recommendations were agreed by all parties and included in the legislation. The legislation will replace both the Workplace Relations Act 1997 and the Industrial Organisation Act 1997, removing duplication and overlap which resulted from the existence of these two Acts.

This is modern legislation which will give Queensland a platform on which to proceed economically and socially into the 21st century. The legislation will provide employers and employees with the flexibility that is needed in the workplace for business and industry to prosper. It will provide employers and employees with a greater choice of agreements to best suit their needs.

Whilst members opposite have voiced their opposition to the Bill, the majority of Queenslanders will recognise that the legislation will bring balance to the State Industrial Relations Commission. It will look after the interests of all, setting up a stable and cohesive system that will help employers and employees. No doubt members opposite will say that it is the end of the world as we now know it—just like they did in 1891. Even the member for Crows Nest last night admitted that what the workers were trying to achieve over 100 years ago was now fair and reasonable. It has taken 100 years for him to come to that conclusion. But no doubt his grandchildren's grandchildren will say the same about this Bill in 100 years' time. I congratulate the Minister and his task force on the work they have done in preparing the legislation and I commend the Bill to the House.
