



Speech by

**Hon. D. HAMILL**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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Hansard 1 March 2000

**COMPETITION POLICY REFORM (QUEENSLAND) REPEAL BILL**

**Hon. D. J. HAMILL** (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) (5.30 p.m.): I rise to oppose this repeal Bill on behalf of the Government—a State Government that has, in fact, led the nation in the charge to humanise National Competition Policy in this country and return the control of competition policy to the hands of the elected representatives, the people of the States and of the Commonwealth. I might say that, in relation to this matter, last year this Parliament had a significant debate in relation to National Competition Policy when the House resolved unanimously to call for the dissolution of the National Competition Council and to hand the responsibility for the oversight of sensible competition reforms to the Council of Australian Governments.

We have consistently advocated the views of the Queensland Parliament in national forums to that effect. This Bill, however, is not and would not be an effective piece of legislation. In the time allocated to me this evening, I intend to demonstrate what a sham this Bill really is. If the Parliament were to pass this ill-conceived piece of legislation, it would not bring Queenslanders one iota of relief from the excesses of economic rationalism as administered through the National Competition Council aided and abetted by the Federal Howard Government. Not only would this flawed legislation throw away hundreds of millions of dollars in competition payments; this Bill would go further. This Bill would cost this State our capacity to prevent harsh competition reform being meted out to the people of Queensland.

The Beattie Government's emphasis on a balanced approach to competition reform has not won us many friends in the Melbourne/Sydney/Canberra triangle. Certainly our very responsible and very reasonable approach to competition reform has not brought us accolades from the various conservative institutions in Australia or the Federal Government or at times some of their friends in the media. We have been accused of trying to adopt bully-boy tactics in relation to our dealings with the National Competition Council.

Let me make this point: the Queensland Government will not resile from our fundamental responsibilities with respect to the Queensland economy and the Queensland people. We will continue to fearlessly advocate on behalf of Queensland and Queenslanders against the Federal Government, against the National Competition Council, against anybody trying to promulgate slash and burn economics in Queensland.

We have had to fight the good fight with the National Competition Council over issues in relation to water reform. Unfortunately, we frequently find ourselves dealing with an ideologically driven National Competition Council that seems to believe the template for all reform should be that which was followed by the now disgraced, the now defeated former Kennett Government in Victoria.

To those who support every injunction, every pronouncement, every policy adventure of the National Competition Council, I say, "Think again." The people of Victoria told the Kennett Government what they thought of rabid economic rationalism. They got rid of the Kennett Government. What we say is simply this—

**Mr Horan** interjected.

**Mr HAMILL:** The member for Toowoomba South is interjecting. I remind the member for Toowoomba South that the very piece of legislation which the movers of this private member's Bill are

seeking to repeal is legislation introduced by his Government in 1996. It is the competition legislation of 1996, the Borbidge/Sheldon Government legislation, which is being sought to be repealed. I do not believe they are right. I recall how the honourable member voted on this piece of legislation back in 1996. He does not believe they are right in seeking to repeal this legislation for the very reasons which I will further enumerate.

**Mr Horan:** You voted for it.

**Mr HAMILL:** I voted for the legislation they are seeking to repeal? Of course I did, as did the member for Toowoomba South, who continues to interject, and the then Premier whose Government's legislation this was. The legislation was introduced for very good reasons. It provides some protections for Queensland which otherwise would not be available were this legislation not on the statute books. If the member for Caboolture really wants to see that protection for Queensland stripped away, then he should proceed with this very misconceived measure which is currently being debated in the House.

This Government has been seeking to reform the application of competition policy in Australia. We have done a great deal towards that objective. I have already mentioned that we have sought to press the views of the Parliament, the views of all members of this Parliament, with respect to reform of the National Competition Council. We have actively sought the abolition of the National Competition Council. We have actively sought the transfer of the supervision of National Competition Policy measures back to the Council of Australian Governments—a council made up of the elected representatives of the Australian people. Therefore, it will bring these issues back into the arena of direct responsibility of democratically elected Governments rather than a non-elected body appointed by the Federal Government to advise the Federal Government.

We have demanded the right to provide community services to the community. We reject the proposition that we could be denied the right to provide community services by an unelected body. We believe elected Governments have the right to make decisions as to how the communities that they serve will be serviced. We do not believe in a non-elected National Competition Council telling us how to do our business.

We also believe in the removal of the financial penalties which are part of the regime currently being run by the Federal Government in conjunction with the National Competition Council. After all, democratically elected Governments are responsible for delivering policy that is in the public interest. What better way of gauging the public interest than testing the mandate of a Government to govern? What better way is there to test the public interest, to give the public a direct say?

**Mr Knuth:** You should be a philosopher.

**Mr HAMILL:** I am glad I am able to address such a persuasive argument in the honourable member's direction. I hope he will take on board these points.

**Mr Knuth:** I am trying to.

**Mr HAMILL:** The honourable member is very trying indeed.

In the past 20 months or so that we have been in Government, we have sought to reform the application of National Competition Policy in Queensland. Indeed, we were pursuing this agenda before this Government came to office. The member for Caloundra will well recall that in the companion legislation to the piece of legislation which the honourable member for Caboolture would seek to repeal I moved a series of amendments to ensure that the public benefit test which was to be applied with respect to National Competition Policy in Queensland was strengthened; that it gave full force to the range of matters listed in the Competition Principles Agreement which had been agreed to by Governments at the Council of Australian Governments. In our view, it was not good enough that the legislation presented in this Parliament in 1997 seemed to place such emphasis on efficient allocation of resources and pay no reference whatsoever to the other important factors that need to be recognised and adhered to in the determination of a proper public benefit test— issues such as impacts on regional areas, employment, occupational health and safety, the environment and so on.

All of those measures are proper, legitimate, important and vital to the consideration of a public benefit test, not simply the formula for the slash and burn economists, that is, efficient allocation of resources. If we took efficient allocation of resources to its most illogical conclusion, there would not be regional communities in this nation. We would be flat out having a separate regional economy in this part of the nation. I think those who simply adhere to the principle of allocative efficiency believe that the frontiers of this nation end at the financial markets in Sydney. Let me remind them that that is certainly not the view of the Queensland Government.

We have made a number of important changes to the administration of National Competition Policy in Queensland. Apart from ensuring that those elements of the principles agreement were clearly inserted in the legislation, we supported the Borbidge Government in the establishment of the

Queensland Competition Authority because, in common with the former Borbidge Government, we did not have confidence in a National Competition Policy that was simply going to be administered through the actions of a National Competition Council—unelected—and an ACCC which would not take into account the various factors that are relevant to a State which has such a significant population in its regions. That is why we supported legislation to establish a Queensland Competition Authority. That is why we supported this piece of legislation which honourable members opposite—whatever they call themselves this week—are seeking to repeal. It contains certain protections for Queensland by virtue of the powers given to the Queensland Government under the legislation.

We have reformed the public benefit test guidelines. We have made them available to the public for the first time. We have required review committees to undertake employment impact and social impact assessments. We have provided explicit procedures for such assessments to ensure that they are comprehensive. We have assiduously advocated on behalf of Queensland in relation to National Competition Policy. Slowly but surely our message is getting across. I may yet be able to permeate the cranium of the member for Burdekin this evening, but I have already been successful in convincing the Deputy Prime Minister of the wisdom of Queensland's position. In September last year, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Anderson, recognised the need for National Competition Council reform. He said there was a need for a more sensitive handling of issues. He reportedly told meetings in Queensland that "Governments should not abrogate their responsibility to make decisions by handing them out to statutory authorities". I could not agree with Mr Anderson more. The Queensland Government and this Parliament support that view. I just hope that the Deputy Prime Minister can get other Cabinet Ministers in the Howard Government to support that view.

The interim report of the Senate Select Committee on the Socioeconomic Consequences of the National Competition Policy called for a rethink of the role of the National Competition Council. That Senate committee, to which we made submissions, found that the public interest test had been defined too narrowly by the Federal Government in particular and that it should be widened to take into account the social consequences of reform, particularly in rural areas. It advocated a separation of the duality which has been the National Competition Council. It argued that the National Competition Council should not be responsible for both assessing the progress of reform as well as advising which States should be eligible for competition payments. I could not agree with them more. The Productivity Commission also—

**Mr Borbidge** interjected.

**Mr HAMILL:** I am glad the Leader of the Opposition is enjoying the speech. I note his support for the sentiments.

**Mr Borbidge:** One of your better speeches.

**Mr HAMILL:** I make a lot of them.

The Productivity Commission also expressed concern at the National Competition Council's potential conflict of interest when it released its report in October last year. The Productivity Commission found that further reforms need to take a greater account of the impact on the wider Australian community. It also echoed the criticism made by the Senate inquiry and this Queensland Government when it stated that it does leave the National Competition Council "open to criticism that it is both interpreting and making the rules". As someone who has had to negotiate with the National Competition Council, I can tell honourable members that the Productivity Commission report was spot-on. At times, we might think that the National Competition Council is remaking the rules during the negotiations. That is no way to instil confidence in a set of principles which are fundamentally important for Australia and the Australian economy.

**Mr Borbidge:** Australia's version of the House of Lords.

**Mr HAMILL:** I trust that, as the House of Lords has been reformed recently, so shall we see the National Competition Council reformed. The last thing I wish to see is the National Competition Council going on ad nauseam like those hereditary belted earls, dukes and barons who have vegetated in the Upper House of the Westminster Parliament for generations.

As I said, we have advocated on behalf of reform. I trust that in the forthcoming review of the competition principles, in which all States and Territories and the Commonwealth are engaged, we will see the Commonwealth accept the force of these arguments. They are not just our arguments, they are the arguments of a variety of jurisdictions and bodies that have produced bipartisan and tripartisan reports.

I have mentioned that we have strengthened the application of the public benefit test and its guidelines. That was in fulfilment of an election commitment. However, we have done other things to ensure that there is a proper balance in the consideration of competition issues both in Queensland and nationally. One of the decisions made by the Premier and me was to appoint a Queensland academic from the James Cook University to the Queensland Competition Authority. Professor John Quiggin gives a valuable perspective to the Queensland Competition Authority in relation to the

application of competition policy in Queensland. Professor Quiggin, an appointment of this Government, is internationally recognised as a strong critic of economic rationalism and he brings a great deal of knowledge about the social impacts of micro-economic reform to his responsibility as a member of the Queensland Competition Authority. I believe that Professor Quiggin has been asking the pertinent question: what are the real costs to our community of the proposed reforms? Let us understand the real balance sheet—the social balance sheet as well as the economic balance sheet. That has been his argument and that has been the task that we have entrusted to him on the Queensland Competition Authority.

Our actions speak for themselves in relation to National Competition Policy. We have gone further than any other Government in the Commonwealth to restore sanity to what after all ought to be a fundamental quest for Australian Governments through their economic policies. After all, who can deny the importance to Australia as a nation—and Queensland in particular as a region—which relies upon our ability to export into a world global economy, of our producers and our exporters being competitive, efficient, able to compete and able to find and establish a market for our production overseas? It is undeniable that that is important.

However, it is also the case that some of the zealots who have been driving the excesses in National Competition Policy have lost sight of that worthy objective. I have to ask: how does the review into body piercing actually advance the cause of our international competitiveness? I am still bewildered in relation to that question. Even as a philosopher, if I might use the description offered me by the member for Burdekin, I still find that that is a question beyond my ken and is far beyond an answer which philosophy may well provide.

How does the reform of newsagencies enhance our international competitiveness? That is a question which I asked in this House. Does it make an iota of difference whether the newspaper lands on the driveway or in the garden, or whether it lands one end first or the other, or whether the dog collects the newspaper before a person collects it? It is bunkum; it is nonsense. It is not advancing the cause of our international competitiveness. However, to simply try to say that we should not reform our economy is also a nonsense; it is also destructive.

What I say and what the Queensland Government says is that the cause of reform is an important one, but we are negligent if we overlook the social consequences. We must be cognisant of the social consequences. We must understand that there is a cost to change, as there is a cost of not changing. As a responsible Government, we must be sensitive to the needs of the community and seek to address the hurt, the disappointment, the downside to reform. After all, those who benefit from reform will quickly take the money and run. They are the happy ones. We do not hear from them. But those who have paid the price must be compensated. They must enjoy their fair share of the wealth that the reform has generated, and responsible Governments must redistribute that wealth to ensure that those who have paid the price do not miss out, and that is the philosophy of this Government. As a Government, we believe in equity and fairness. That is what we must do: in building an efficient economy, we must recognise that we have a social responsibility as well.

**Mr Feldman** interjected.

**Mr HAMILL:** I know that the member for Caboolture thinks that this Bill is the flashiest Bill he has ever produced. There are two clauses to it. The first one is the short title and the second one says "repeal". I urge every member not to be beguiled by the apparent simplicity of the measure that has been proffered by the member for Caboolture. This Bill is more about media headlines and grandstanding than about effective reform because there are, in fact, three fundamental problems with this Bill.

**Mr Feldman:** Tell it to the farmers.

**Mr HAMILL:** I will tell it to the farmers because the farmers would be very interested indeed to understand what the Bill, introduced by the member for Caboolture, would do for them. I am going to explain that in detail for the member here this evening so that they can understand the folly of his ways.

The first problem with this repeal Bill is that it would absolutely fail to achieve its objective, that is, the abolition of National Competition Policy in Queensland—absolutely fail. Contrary to the views of the member for Caboolture and what he would like to suggest, this Bill would not provide Queenslanders with any relief from National Competition Policy or of its major elements. The elements are these: review of regulatory legislation, provision of third-party access to infrastructure and the competitive neutrality of Government business enterprises. It would not absolve the Queensland Government from any of its obligations under National Competition Policy provided for in the competition agreements which were signed back in 1995. This Bill actually ignores the fact that those elements are contained in the COAG agreements, not the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Act, which requires State Governments to address National Competition Policy. That is why my Government has been seeking the cooperation of other State Governments and the Commonwealth for a review of those very competition

agreements. It is the principles agreement which has been subject to the review of the Commonwealth and the other States.

**Mr Borbidge:** Under the regional agreement it has to be reviewed this year, anyway.

**Mr HAMILL:** That review is due by April this year. That is the very reason why we have been so forthright in our advocacy of reform in relation to the principles agreement.

One of the key issues that we have been advocating is to reverse what we believe is the wrong onus of proof that currently exists within the way in which competition policy has been administered. The way the current arrangements sit is that there is a presumption in relation to any regulations that they should not be there and that the public benefit test should be used to justify a regulation. We would argue that the status quo should be accepted unless a public benefit test demonstrates that it should be altered. That is an important change—a very significant change—to what has gone on to date, but a change that I believe is absolutely consistent with the aspirations of the people of Queensland and, I believe, people elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

That is why we have been advocating a change out there in the national agenda, an agenda which includes, as I said before, the abolition of the National Competition Council. If we are trying to fix National Competition Policy, we can only do it by going to the real cause of the problem, and that is the national agreements. We are not going to be able to pretend to do it by simply ignoring the problem, by doing a sort of feel good, "pass a repeal Bill through the Parliament on a Wednesday evening" type of thing. It just is not going to work.

The second major flaw in the repeal Bill introduced by the member for Caboolture is that rather than actually providing relief to Queensland from National Competition Policy it would actually make its effects worse. This repeal Bill if carried by the Parliament will actually deliver the worst excesses of National Competition Policy and visit that upon the people of Queensland. Earlier, the member for Caboolture said, "Tell it to the farmers." Let me assure him that, if the farmers want deregulation overnight, then honourable members should clamour for the passage of this Bill.

I am conscious of the time, so I will move that the debate be now adjourned. I will further educate the members of whatever they call themselves later this evening.

**Mr HAMILL** (8.30 p.m.), continuing: Before the House adjourned this debate and proceeded to conduct a debate on a matter of significance, I was discussing the basic flaws which are quite apparent with respect to the Bill which is being put forward by the honourable member for Caboolture. I made the point that the Bill misses the mark altogether, that if the member for Caboolture really believes that this measure, designed to repeal the Borbidge Government legislation of 1996, will somehow remove competition policy from Queensland, then the honourable member is horribly mistaken. Anyone whom he has convinced that this Bill would remove competition reforms will be horribly disappointed because they will have been cynically deceived.

I had made the point before the debate was adjourned that this measure deals with the repeal of the legislation enacted by this Parliament in 1996. In no way does it touch the competition principles agreement and in no way does it touch the agreements reached at the Council of Australian Governments, the very agreements that this Government has been pursuing to reform in the current round of review—reforms which we are pressing now with the Commonwealth and with other jurisdictions as a part of the April 2000 review of the competition principles agreement. This is the time frame. This review is imminent and this House spoke clearly on the matter of the National Competition Council and the administration of competition policy when it resolved unanimously that we should see the abolition of the National Competition Council and the restoration of the control of competition reforms to the hands of the democratically elected representatives, that is, the Governments of the States, the Territories and the Commonwealth. So we cannot continue with this charade that this repeal Bill is going to achieve the objective of turning back the clock on competition reforms, because it simply will not do so.

The second major flaw in this Bill that has been put forward by the member for Caboolture is that, rather than providing any sort of relief from competition reform, in fact, if this Bill were to be enacted it would open up the full force of economic rationalism upon the Queensland economy. In fact, it would devastate certain of our industries overnight. There would be nothing that we could do to forestall the most wide-ranging change that could have ever been conjured up by those at times malevolent spirits who simply believe in the marketplace and that the marketplace will solve all ills.

I had heard by way of interjection that some honourable member up there on the grassy knoll was suggesting that we should be trying to explain this to the farmers. But it is principally quite a number of areas of primary production which have benefited under this piece of legislation. Do members of the City Country Alliance believe that the Government should not seek to protect industries in the public interest? Do they realise that it is only through this Act—the Act that they wish to repeal—that the Queensland Parliament can enact laws or in turn produce subordinate legislation which can exempt anti-competitive behaviour?

I hope that the honourable member for Caboolture has actually brought forth this private member's Bill in blissful ignorance of that fact, because if he understood what the Act that he wishes to repeal can do, then I suggest that his actions today in seeking the repeal of this legislation is one of the most cynical and unprincipled acts that any politician has ever sought to perpetrate in Queensland. For a group of people who claim not to be politicians, I think this is even more cynical indeed.

Were this Act to be repealed, as the members of the City Country Alliance would have us undertake, then Queensland would cease to be a participating jurisdiction under the Conduct Code Agreement and, therefore, would lose any capacity to enact legislation or to gazette regulations which would exempt certain industries in Queensland from the operations of the Commonwealth Trade Practices Act. I ask the member for Caboolture: would that not be a very clever outcome? He would have really achieved something! He could be really proud that he would have managed in one fell swoop to tear down large sections of the protection which this Act provides to significant sections of rural industry in Queensland. What a cunning plan! What a very clever little plot he has hatched on this one! In his endeavour to try to grasp a headline, to try to set out to be some sort of hero, he effectively managed to throw out the baby with the bathwater. But maybe he did not understand that by repealing this legislation he removes the power of the Queensland Government to protect vital rural industries in particular from the absolutely dispassionate operation of the free market—the level playing field. If it is really—

**Mr Feldman:** Where is that protection evident now?

**Mr HAMILL:** It is in the Act. This is the only bulwark that we have against the total operation of measures under the Commonwealth Trade Practices Act. Maybe the member for Caboolture has not quite grasped the fact that we the Queensland Parliament do not have the power to amend the Commonwealth Trade Practices Act. Maybe he has not quite grasped that fact yet. Let me assure him that what he is seeking to do by repealing this legislation is to say that he is quite happy to let the Commonwealth's legislation run unfettered across industry in Queensland. That is what he is doing. I will tell him that I have no hesitation in going out there and telling the community—telling all of those interests who have legitimate concerns about unbridled competition—that the member for Caboolture and his minions want to unleash the full force of competition regardless of the social consequences—regardless of the economic consequences upon their industry. Yes, he would have made a significant contribution in his short time in the Queensland Parliament. He would have made his mark all right, and people would not have forgotten what he, in fact, had done through his own stupidity, his own lack of understanding in relation to this legislation.

**Mr FELDMAN:** I rise to a point of order. I find that remark offensive and I ask for it to be withdrawn.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Fouras) Order! I ask the Treasurer to withdraw the remark.

**Mr HAMILL:** I am not quite sure what remark the honourable member would find offensive. If the honourable member found the remark offensive I withdraw it, but I would hope that the member for Caboolture never intended the dire consequences of his actions, that he had operated in blissful ignorance of the import of his actions in seeking to repeal this legislation. If it is otherwise, then pity the member for Caboolture and his colleagues.

I wonder whether the member for Caboolture and his colleagues are prepared to consult local timberworkers about their intention to remove regulatory protection in relation to the forestry industry and resource allocation. Resource allocation exists in Queensland because of an exemption under this Act, and only under this Act can we provide that exemption. Of course, if the member for Caboolture wants to remove timber allocations, then let him say so. Let him not posture in the way he has in respect of RFAs. Let him not posture that he is out there trying to protect the jobs of timberworkers when in fact what he is trying to do in the Parliament tonight is remove the power of the Queensland Parliament to provide timber allocations in relation to timber harvesting. I am sure that is a message he would be very proud to tell his constituents in Caboolture, a message which some of his colleagues might like to explain to those millers and timberworkers who are currently incredibly disillusioned because of the political posturing of honourable members opposite with respect to the RFA.

Maybe the member for Whitsunday, the member for Burdekin—who is reclining over there, but I hope this causes him to emerge from his torpor—and the member for Hervey Bay might like to explain to the sugar industry in their electorates that, by removing this legislation, as they want to do tonight, they would dismantle the regulation which protects the sugar industry. That is a cutting one, isn't it? Maybe they have not quite worked this one out. What they are on about tonight would strip away the regulatory protection which the Queensland Government has afforded the State's sugar industry. What a clever outcome! I am sure those honourable members would be proud to explain to the sugar producers, who are suffering such a tough time already because of the vicissitudes of the climate and the difficulties in the international market, that their clever little stratagem has resulted in stripping away the protection of Queensland's sugar industry.

Maybe they would like to explain to the chicken meat industry how the repeal of this legislation would help them after our review of the chicken meat industry in this State recommended regulation on the basis of a public benefit test. But no! They want to repeal the Bill which gives us the power to protect the industry. Aren't they a clever little coterie of ideologues in the back corner?

**Mr Braddy:** The grassy knoll.

**Mr HAMILL:** The Honourable Minister refers to the grassy knoll. This is one of the plots which was ill-conceived right from the outset. The only plot in this is a plot to try to get a headline, but what a headline they will get in the areas of sugar production, timber harvesting, the poultry industry and a whole range of other industries which have sought and achieved protection as a result of this legislation, legislation that they want to wipe away. Clearly, honourable members at the back of the Chamber simply do not understand the provisions of the Act which they wish to repeal. In fact, I have the awful feeling that in his search for a headline the member for Caboolture has been simply beguiled by the fact that a headline which says "Trying to abolish competition policy" will somehow reap enormous electoral rewards when in fact what it will reap is the devastation of a whole range of rural industries in Queensland which rely upon the very legislation that they wish to repeal.

I have seen some incompetent acts in this House over a number of years, but this one takes the cake. They cannot even work out the import of what they are doing. They have not researched the import of the measure that they have brought before the House. They would cause the ruination of significant sections of rural industry in the State for their own grubby political ends. Shame on them! How dare they insult the intelligence of this House with such an ill-conceived and grotty little measure as the one they have brought before the House this evening! However, there is a final problem. If we do not think that the enormity of what they will do is sufficient to condemn their Bill absolutely, there is the fact that what they would seek to do by this Bill is to have the Queensland Government turn its face against almost \$700m of competition payments which would be payable to the State.

**Mr Knuth:** This is what it is all about.

**Mr HAMILL:** The member for Burdekin, who does not mind dismantling the regulation which protects the sugar industry in the Burdekin, says that this is what it is all about. I refer the member for Burdekin to what I said before the House adjourned. Competition and competition reforms are important for the economy, but any responsible Government would recognise that we should redistribute gains made by those sectors of the economy moving forward in order to help those sectors of the community that suffer the consequences, the losers in the process. If we increase the size of the cake, then we can do better by those sections of the community to ensure that everyone gets a fairer share of the cake.

What sort of community representatives are they if they believe that we should wilfully determine to slash \$700m from services to the people of Queensland? What sort of people would argue that we should slash our provision in social services by \$700m? Obviously the same sort of people who think it is okay to devastate the timber industry, despoil the forestry industry and absolutely ruin the sugar industry, to mention but a few. Not satisfied with the economic ruination of substantial parts of regional Queensland, they say, "Oh, no! That's not enough! We'll also slash social services. We will slash social services in Queensland to the tune of \$700m."

**Mrs Lavarch:** To make it better, they believe in fortress Australia.

**Mr HAMILL:** I do not know about fortress Australia. I think they have been swallowing fortune cookies and choking on them in the process. This is the depth of the irresponsibility. This is not just incompetence; this is total irresponsibility.

I go back to what I said at the outset. This Government has not been prepared to simply sit by idly and cop some of the rubbish that has come from the National Competition Council. We have taken them head on and we will continue to take them head on. At the same time we are not going to make the people of Queensland suffer a loss of services simply to try to win some silly point which, at the end of the day, would prove to be a Pyrrhic victory. What is the point of seeing significant parts of rural industry in Queensland decimated and social services in this State slashed simply to make us all feel good? It will not make my constituents feel good. I suggest that it will not make constituents in Caboolture, Ipswich West, Hervey Bay, Lockyer, Whitsunday and Burdekin—if the member for Burdekin has joined the pack again; I am not quite sure where he is at—feel very good either.

There is no denying that sensible economic reforms, if properly managed, have the potential to bring significant benefits to the community. As I said, ours is a State that relies upon export. We need to be competitive. We need to have sensible reforms. This Government has stated it repeatedly and I will state it again: we do not believe in reform for the sake of reform. We do not believe in change for the sake of change. We believe in sensible reform that delivers real community benefit. That is the test. If it does not deliver real community benefit, then it is not worth doing. I instance, for example, the work that we have done in relation to the liquor industry. I have no doubt whatsoever that the National

Competition Council will say to us, "Oh, but unless you open the doors of the supermarkets to takeaway liquor sales you don't have a proper competitive market." What a load of rubbish!

There is a competitive market out there in Queensland; our public benefit test has proven that. There is real price competition when it comes to sales of liquor. There is ample access to the market. There is nothing to stop the supermarket chains purchasing liquor licences, as many of them have done. The public benefit test and the compassionate and responsible way in which it has been administered in Queensland is wholly consistent with national competition principles. It produces an outcome of which we can be proud, an outcome which is defensible, appropriate, socially responsible and which also provides some substantial benefits to particular sectors of the market. And isn't that the way it should be: sensible reform that delivers real benefit to the community, sensible reform that maintains employment—that grows employment—and sensible reform that is also socially responsible. That is the position of the Queensland Government, that is our position with respect to competition policy, and that is the way that we will proceed in relation to the sensible implementation of responsible reforms.

This Bill demonstrates just how dangerous, half-cocked and ill-conceived Bills in this House can be, how dangerous it can be when those in search of a cheap political point will put personal political interest ahead of the real interest of the community, the real interest of Queensland industry. It does not do any credit at all to the member for Caboolture to have brought such a measure before the House, a measure that is so ill conceived, so poorly researched and so irresponsible in terms of its economic and social outcomes, and that is why this Bill deserves to go down in a screaming heap.

Our Government has sought to reform the national model for competition reform with sensible, rational measures. I suggest to the member for Caboolture and those who believe this Bill is the panacea to cure all ills: if they believe that Mr Howard and Treasurer Costello will take a more compassionate approach to Queensland industry, then they should go ahead and press this measure, put their faith in the ACCC and put their faith in Mr Samuel and the National Competition Council, but do not count us in. We have experienced the excesses of these bodies. We know the problems. We have stood our ground; we will hold our ground. We will hold our ground in the interests of Queensland. We will not go along with members opposite in their reckless course to undermine the position of a substantial amount of Queensland industry.

Members opposite purport to help average Queenslanders. All they do is throw them out of work and cause misery in a range of industries, misery in their own electorates, and shame on them accordingly.

**Mr Sullivan:** Does the seconder of the motion realise what she's doing, too?

**Mr HAMILL:** This Bill is irresponsible. This Bill is a mark of the amateurish behaviour of the honourable members who sit in the far corner.

I urge all members to reject the legislation. This legislation, as I remind members, would repeal—

**A Government member** interjected.

**Mr HAMILL:** I get interjected upon, so I cannot help the challenge.

The legislation which is sought to be repealed is legislation which was enacted under the former coalition Government with the support of the Government when it was in Opposition. It was legislation which enjoyed the unanimous support of the Parliament. It enjoyed the support of the Government, the Opposition and also the Independent member for Gladstone. Why was that the case? It was because we recognised that, unless this legislation was enacted, Queensland would still be at the mercy of all of those elements that I have canvassed and we would still have no opportunity whatsoever to be the masters of our own destiny. If members opposite want to abdicate responsibility, they can go ahead. The Government will not. The Government will oppose this Bill, and continue the fight for economically responsible and socially responsible economic reforms in this nation.

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