



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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DATING AGENCIES

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (7.20 p.m.): I note that the previous speaker mentioned bleeding hearts. In fact, the matter on which I would like to address the House tonight is more to do with lonely hearts. I would like to pay my compliments to the Minister for Fair Trading for her recent initiative in reviewing the operations of so-called dating agencies in Queensland. This is a review that is long overdue. While it may not be a matter of major social policy, a matter on which Governments can stand or fall, it is nonetheless a matter of some genuine concern for a surprising number of adult Queenslanders who are alone, and not by choice.

We do not have precise figures, particularly with the present fashion in society of adults living in de facto relationships, of the number of single adults in Queensland. The best estimate through census statistics and other sources is that we have around 500,000 adult Queenslanders who are single. Of course, a significant proportion of those may well be happy with their single status or, even if not exactly happy, do not require any assistance from Government or any other organisations towards changing their marital status. There are, however, a very significant number—perhaps as many as half of that number, a quarter of a million—of adult Queenslanders who are alone and lonely and who wish that they had partners.

It is very difficult for those who are shy or who believe themselves not to be attractive because of disabilities or limitations on their lifestyles to be able to find a partner, and frequently they turn to advertisements. I have some examples of the kinds of advertisements that can be found in our daily papers. Generally these advertisements are in the personal sections and the introductions sections of the newspapers. The advertisements say things such as "Ladies, 20-plus, caring friendship introduction", or "Lonely? Don't be alone, just ring us. We have hundreds of gorgeous ladies for you."

There are lots of advertisements in the introductions section with ladies' names and telephone numbers. It is a difficult thing for those who may be in a position of genuinely wanting to meet somebody for friendship or potentially for a lasting relationship to discriminate between what may really be advertisements for sexual activity and what may be companies that are not really serious or genuine in their wish to match people up and assist them to form friendships and maybe lasting relationships.

To that extent this little action taken by the Minister for Fair Trading is, nonetheless, an important one. It may be that honourable members of this Parliament do not realise how serious and significant this problem is because those who are caught in it and those who are caught by unscrupulous operators in the introductions industry do not tell their story because of embarrassment or shame at their personal circumstances and because of having been duped.

One case that came to notice is of a young man in his late twenties with some physical disabilities. He is not a young man able to go to discos, nightclubs or hotels. He wanted, nonetheless, to find himself a partner and he paid some \$10,000 to an introductions agency and in exchange for that he received the telephone numbers of three ladies, all of them in different States of Australia—none anywhere close to his home in Cairns—and was told that that was value for his \$10,000. That is indeed a cruel thing to do with somebody's loneliness and their heart.

I suggest that honourable members support the Minister in the review of this sensitive matter. We often talk of generating family life, of loving, of experiencing the best of families. Helping those Queenslanders who are alone and lonely and who, were they able, would choose to be in a relationship is indeed a fine, albeit a small, matter for members of this Parliament.