



Speech by

GEOFF WILSON

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Hansard 4 October 2000

MR AND MRS G. GEARSIDE

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (11.05 p.m.): Many people in the community are doing it tough, and often it is those who are on fixed incomes, such as pensioners. Owing to price rises as a result of the GST, the failure of many pensioners to receive the \$2,000 in compensation that was promised by John Howard and the increase in petrol prices, pensioners are facing stiff financial circumstances without any extra financial burden arising out of the unexpected.

On 20 January this year, Mr Gearside discovered that a large carpet snake had moved into the laundry of his house. Mr Gearside and his wife, who are both pensioners in their 70s, live at Mitchelton. Mrs Gearside rang the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service seeking the assistance of an animal catcher who could remove the snake. Mr and Mrs Gearside are both very mindful of the fact that snakes and other native animals, especially in suburban areas, are protected.

They discovered that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service no longer provided the service that it once did of dispatching an animal handler to remove and relocate the snake. Eventually, they were put in touch with a private contractor, who came and duly removed the carpet snake.

When Mrs Gearside first contacted the contractor, they told her that they would charge her \$50. She explained that she and her husband were pensioners and that they could not afford \$50. The contractor kindly agreed to reduce the charge to \$30—a reduction of 40%. The carpet snake was successfully removed and the \$30 was paid.

Mr and Mrs Gearside believe that as snakes and other animals are protected by the laws of the State Government, they ought to be removed free of charge, especially for pensioners. This incident has put Mr and Mrs Gearside in a hard spot. They could not afford to pay \$30, let alone \$50.

I have made representations to the Premier, the Minister for Environment and Heritage and the Minister for Fair Trading about the issues arising out of this matter. It has been pointed out to Mr and Mrs Gearside that the QPWS receives thousands of calls a year regarding snakes in urban settings. Of course, the QPWS also receives thousands of calls each year relating to other wildlife. Although the laws protecting native fauna are designed to conserve the biological diversity of wildlife for the benefit of the wider community, the removal of native wildlife from a private home is the responsibility of the householder and not the State. However, Mr and Mrs Gearside beg to strongly disagree, as would perhaps many others in their situation. That is quite understandable.

The most common problems arise with snakes and possums within the urban setting. The fees charged by native animal handlers are at their discretion—some may offer discounts, others may not and the discounts may vary from contractor to contractor. Surely it would be only fair that pensioners, many who would already be entitled to discounts through the Seniors Card system, should also be entitled to a substantial discount on this service. Perhaps a condition of the licence granted to native animal handlers by the Government under section 88(1)(b) of the Nature Conservation Act 1992 could be that services provided to pensioners are free, or at least at a standard sizeable discount.

There may be other ways in which this outcome could be achieved. This is Seniors Week 2000. One of the objectives of the various activities organised around the State is raising public awareness and understanding of what life is really like for our treasured seniors. Mr and Mrs Gearside's experience may not loom large on the Statewide scale of major issues for the future, but to them and others in similar circumstances it matters a great deal. I urge the Government to give serious consideration to their plight and to the suggestions I have made or any other workable and practical solution.

Time expired.