



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 31 July 2002

TRANSPORT (COMPULSORY BAC TESTING) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (9.21 p.m.): I rise in support of the private member's bill introduced by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The purpose of this bill is to address the significant loophole that permits persons who are unconscious or feign unconsciousness to escape the current drink-driving laws. Members will be well aware that there has been a problem—obviously the member for Redlands is well aware of it—with the administration of drink-driving enforcement in Queensland for some time. To address this issue, the Travelsafe Committee inquired into this loophole and handed down a unanimous report recommending the introduction of compulsory blood testing of road accident victims. I listened with intent to the member for Redlands, and he certainly raised a number of points.

It is important to realise that, no matter what sort of legislation comes into this House, there will be ways and means of looking very negatively at it and suggesting ways to make it better. I am not necessarily condemning him for that. Certainly, there are areas that need to be looked at when a bill comes into the House. There are very few pieces of legislation that come into this House which do not have to be amended at a later time. I was really interested in one comment that the member for Redlands made—that is, that the police are creative in putting people behind the wheel, and he supports that. I find that comment rather interesting. I may talk to him later about that.

As the shadow minister for Emergency Services, I am well aware of the tremendous workload placed upon the provision of emergency services by the continuing tragedy of drink-driving on our roads. I for one find it very unacceptable that we have failed to address this issue over a period of time, particularly in recent times. I also find it passing strange telling the Clerk of the Parliament that the recommendations of the Travelsafe Committee would be too costly and much too hard. It is amazing then that, within a couple of weeks of the opposition introducing a bill which demonstrates that it is possible to overcome the problems indicated by the Travelsafe Committee, the government has introduced legislation into the House to look at this loophole. As other speakers have indicated, the government's proposal is not significant and does not actually address all the problems and the shortcomings we are currently looking at, but it certainly does indicate that this legislation should have been looked at some time ago.

One of the major reasons for introducing compulsory blood testing is to improve the deterrent effect. The Travelsafe Committee reported on page 8 that the legislative controls of drink-driving can in their own right create deterrents and reduce drink-driving behaviour, which unfortunately we see quite regularly on our roads. The Department of Transport reports that somewhere between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of fatal crashes involve drink-driving and that 20 per cent of crashes resulting in hospitalisation involve drink-driving. So it accounts for quite a big percentage of the accidents that happen on our roads. To suggest that the collection of blood from every trauma accident victim in the hospital is overwhelming is probably taking it a little bit far. If we also attribute these same percentages to the demand on the Queensland Ambulance Service, one gets an understanding of the economic drain caused to the state. Similarly, QFRS resources are significantly strained by the demands placed on it to have to attend accidents caused by drink-driving. Most members would be aware of the fact that in most cases the QFRS is not actually directly funded from accident crash victims, so there is a loss to the state in that regard. These services, dedicated to the welfare of Queensland, are having their resources squandered by irresponsible members of our society. I have to say that those same resources have also been squandered by the government, which for the last four years or more has sat

on its hands and failed to address this matter. Fortunately, the Deputy Opposition Leader introduced legislation that will address this matter and put it on the agenda.

I also want to emphasise the problems of driving under the influence of drugs. One of the consequences of blood testing undertaken under the compulsory blood testing model proposed by this bill is that we will gain a better understanding of the real impact of drug-drivers and the toll they are taking on our roads. That is probably a bigger sleeper issue than we probably all realise. Unfortunately, the area of drug-driving enforcement is another area where the government has failed to act. While the government has been anxious to decriminalise the possession of drugs, it continues to fail to address the question of drug-driving.

The Minister for Transport and the Minister for Police have made statements in the House about all sorts of policies that they have been examining. Unfortunately, in the real world we do not see any real impact in relation to drugs in terms of the driving public. As usual this government has used propaganda that is costing millions of dollars, yet still we do not see any real effort to address this problem. In conclusion, I find it appalling that we have continued to do nothing to address the issue of unconscious drivers and more particularly those who fake unconsciousness to avoid drink-driving laws. Consequently, I have much pleasure in supporting this bill introduced by the opposition, which takes the initiative and takes positive action in relation to both issues. I commend the bill to the House.