



Speech by

JOHN ENGLISH

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Hansard 9 August 2001

INTRODUCTION AGENTS BILL

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (3.38 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Introduction Agents Bill 2001, but before doing so I wish to point out that earlier in the week I spoke about the minister's review of the Retirement Villages Act. At the time, I neglected to table a non-conforming petition in relation to that review so I will now seek leave to table it for the information of the minister.

Leave granted.

Mr ENGLISH: This afternoon I should preface my remarks by saying that the information I am about to relate does not come from personal experience but from my investigative experience whilst in the Queensland Police Service.

Mr Copeland: That's what Lawrence said.

Mr ENGLISH: And, just like Lawrence, I am an honourable person.

It is important to understand what the introduction agents do. Introduction agents offer a service whereby members of both sexes can join an organisation and, as part of their membership, are entitled to a number of introductions to members of the opposite sex or the same sex who fit the description of the type of person they are looking for. The introduction agents charge a fee to arrange introductions. It is a reasonable expectation of any client signing up to an introduction agency that they should get a service in return, that is, they should get to meet someone. It is not fair and reasonable to expect any organisation to guarantee people love, romance, marriage or that they will live happily ever after, but it is a reasonable expectation that an introduction with another person should be an outcome from the payment of the money under the contractual arrangement. What progresses from there is up to the two people involved.

Because of the nature of the industry there are many avenues for exploitative practices to occur. It is a fact that many of these introduction agents have a large percentage of males and a very small percentage of females on their books. Given that bias, this raises a concern as to whether clients can have a reasonable expectation. Given the huge bias in the statistics, can any person signing up have a reasonable expectation of meeting someone?

Many introduction agencies claim that it is not their fault that they cannot find suitable partners for these people. They blame the clients themselves, saying, 'You've narrowed the field too much because you want someone with a heartbeat.' They seek to blame the consumer rather than admitting their own guilt and greed. They take the view that it is the consumer's fault that they cannot find someone, not the introduction agency's fault. I find this sort of conduct appalling.

Many of the introduction agencies seek payment of full fees up front. Recently, I built a house and there was no way that I was paying full fees up front to my builder. I paid him as services were delivered. That an introduction agency should expect full payment of fees up front is appalling. The scheduled payment that this bill calls for is a great step forward for consumer protection in Queensland.

Often when a client has not been able to find an eligible partner a blame game is played and they are told, 'We've got a bit of a problem, but if you pay us more money we'll have greater success.'

An honourable member interjected.

Mr ENGLISH: It is absolutely appalling.

An introduction agency will have a certain number of suitable clients on its books. What sudden result does an increased fee produce? Do they search their books and databases with greater scrutiny? What service do clients get for this alleged upgrade? That was a rhetorical question.

Mr Pearce: Maybe they've got a head like I've got.

Mr ENGLISH: The good member might have to pay a fortune.

I find the upgrade concept appalling. It might be reasonable when buying cars or a motorcycle. When looking for a relationship, what service do people get for this upgrade? If an introduction agency is operating correctly and it examines its database to find suitable prospects as a partner, I cannot see how anyone would get an improved service through purchasing an upgrade.

This bill will protect the consumers of Queensland. It will not, nor does it seek to, eliminate introduction agents. It seeks to regulate their behaviour and provide a level of consumer protection from unscrupulous operators in the industry. I commend the bill to the House.
