



Speech by

JOHN KINGSTON

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

Hansard 4 April 2001

RURAL POVERTY

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—Ind) (10.27 a.m.): I wish to address rural poverty. A 1997 report by the Council of Small Business Organisations titled *Jobs in our regions* found that the highest proportion of business activity in Australia is small-business activity. In the regions surveyed it was found that small businesses comprised up to 97 per cent of businesses and employed 50 per cent of the private sector work force. Further, the report found that regional small businesses were facing major constraints on their ability to compete and that policies at all three levels of government were not keeping up with the changing pressures on regional small businesses, mainly because of the profound lack of information on this important sector. Members should remember that this report was released before the GST.

This report recorded that the Wide Bay region was at that time recording some of the worst performance indicators, with some shires among those with the highest level of unemployment in Australia. In Queensland, the major findings included that one in five Queenslanders now lived below the poverty line; that poverty in Queensland had risen consistently—almost doubling—from 1982 to 1985; in 1995-96, Queensland had the highest 'after housing' poverty rate of 20.2 per cent, or 248,000 people; 274,000 people were living below the poverty line 'before housing'; and the number of single people under 25 in 'after housing' poverty had increased from 15 per cent to 37 per cent.

My observations within my electorate lead me to believe that rural poverty has further increased, especially among youth. Thus I recommend that rural poverty should be addressed seriously by the three levels of government, and especially by this House.
