



Speech by

Hon. KEN HAYWARD

MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

Hansard 3 May 2001

ROAD WORKERS; ROAD RAGE

Hon. K. W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (7.24 p.m.): I take this opportunity to rise in the parliament tonight to highlight the risks to road workers from road rage, driver abuse and, for some, assaults that occur as a result. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the member for Gregory, the shadow minister for transport in this parliament. I know that he was concerned about this issue when he was the minister, and he is concerned about it now as the shadow minister. It is a very serious issue. My experience is that there is little public awareness of the effect that violent actions can have on this group of workers. Many of those workers are very seriously affected by some of the events that occur.

I have thought a lot about this issue. I think that one of the reasons that it is occurring is that, as a group, road workers have been demonised in our society through jokes or snide remarks about their work activities. We all know that. Over the years we have all heard silly jokes about blokes working on the road for the council, the state or the Commonwealth. That shows the extent of the very important road network that we have in Australia. Demonising this group of people has contributed to what I think is a reduced concern for their safety.

I have brought this issue to the attention of parliament tonight because it was brought home to me vividly on Wednesday morning when I was driving to the parliament. I was stopped next to a stop-go sign. The driver behind me drove straight around me and confronted the stop-go operator. He was prepared to shovel him off the road. When I saw the driver ignore the stop-go operator and attempt to drive through the sign and the operator, I could not believe that that was happening. It was an insane event occurring in front of me.

I have always been aware generally of the risk of physical injury and verbal abuse that road workers suffer from ignorant road users, but Wednesday's experience highlighted the issues for me. No doubt such actions should and do constitute some sort of criminal offence. However, my experience on Wednesday has made me question how relevant that could be because, in the end, the driver simply left the scene. He simply drove off. Surely to ignore a stop-go sign and attempt to drive over the operator is a serious action and should not be treated as some kind of bizarre joke.

As I have said before, although three levels of government conduct roadworks, I am certainly aware—because I have spoken to him—that the minister and the shadow minister know of the problems of personal verbal abuse and risk of assault that road workers face. The minister, with the support of the shadow minister, has established a policy to assist road workers who have been subjected to abuse. I encourage road workers to avail themselves of the reporting and counselling services that are available.

Time expired.
