



Speech by

Hon. STEVE BREDHAUER

MEMBER FOR COOK

Hansard 13 September 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Taxi Drivers

Hon. S. D. BREDHAUER (Cook—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads) (10.06 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to officially release the Report on the Review of Taxi Driver Remuneration and Working Conditions. The report contains a number of important recommendations that aim to ensure minimum standards and conditions for taxi drivers in Queensland.

The former Minister for Industrial Relations, Paul Braddy, and I commissioned this report late last year. There were a number of reasons why this report was commissioned—

The NCP review into public transport identified a number of issues pertaining to the conditions of employment of drivers in the taxi industry.

Industry stakeholders had made numerous representations to me in regard to the working conditions of taxi drivers.

In particular, the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax earlier in July 2000 had led to a shortage of taxi drivers. This was threatening to lead to a reduction of services throughout the state. In Brisbane, in particular, a significant number of cabs were idle because there were not enough drivers to drive them. They were obviously worried and opposed to a 10 per cent impost on their passengers.

A joint review committee was established and it was asked to identify issues relating to driver remuneration arrangements and the safety of drivers. Consultation was undertaken with taxi drivers, taxi driver representative groups, the Taxi Council of Queensland, the Transport Workers Union and a number of other parties involved in the operation of taxis in the state. It is a long-held tradition that taxi drivers have opinions and are not afraid to share them. In this matter, their opinions were actively sought by the Beattie government and included in our review of their working conditions.

An extensive survey of drivers was conducted and written submissions were received. The committee also considered the approach of other states and best practice internationally. They visited taxi service providers in a number of regional centres to identify local issues impacting on the industry.

As a result, the committee has recommended a range of changes to taxi industry operations which are set out in the report. The proposed recommendations to be released for public consultation include changes to the Industrial Relations Act 1999. The changes as proposed will give taxi drivers the right to pursue unfair contract claims through the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. This is a right afforded to other self-employed people, and it will bring significant benefits to taxi drivers who are earning less than they would as an employee. While the report found that only a small number of drivers fell into this category, the changes will encourage good drivers to remain in the industry and will also help maintain the high standards set by Queensland's taxi services.

Another key recommendation is the establishment of a taxi driver workplace health and safety committee. Driver safety is becoming an increasing problem in the state, although we have nowhere near the number of incidents that occur in southern states. Some drivers are subjected to verbal abuse on an almost daily basis, theft occurs affecting particularly drivers in busy metropolitan areas and some are subjected to physical abuse. The committee will provide a forum for driver safety issues to ensure that drivers get the level of protection they deserve. The committee will monitor and manage driver workplace health and safety issues on an ongoing basis. In the immediate future, I expect the committee to recommend a number of requirements for all Queensland taxis. These requirements will ensure that owners, operators and booking companies are aware of their responsibilities in providing a

safe working environment for the taxi industry. The committee will also examine the issue of driving hours to ensure the ongoing safety of drivers and their passengers.

Some of the recommendations in the report fall solely within the jurisdiction of my portfolio responsibilities; for example, requiring taxi booking companies to have appropriate emergency procedures in place for drivers. I have asked Queensland Transport to implement these measures as a matter of priority.

Queensland Transport and the Department of Industrial Relations—and I thank Industrial Relations Minister Gordon Nuttall for his support—will be working hard to ensure that the recommendations are implemented as soon as possible. We are determined to improve the quality of life for the 14,000 taxi drivers who operate throughout the state. I table a copy of the report for the information of the House.
