



Speech by

ANDREW McNAMARA

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

Hansard 15 May 2002

ADOPTION OF CHILDREN AMENDMENT BILL

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (11.42 a.m.): I rise to speak very briefly in support of the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002. I expect that other members of this place, like I, were lobbied extensively by constituents of their electorates in the lead-up to the introduction of this bill to the House.

Mr Strong: Not as much as you were.

Mr McNAMARA: The interest in this area of the member for Burnett is well known to all.

Let me place on the record, without naming anyone, how much I appreciated that input on this issue from my constituents. All the people who spoke to me were utterly genuine in their desire to see children, whether local or foreign, adopted into loving and appropriate homes. Not one of the people who spoke to me complained about the cost of satisfying suitability criteria and the adoption fees payable, which in many cases of course is thousands of dollars. Nor did I receive any objection about the complexity and effort involved in completing the very substantial paperwork requirements which continue on for at least a year after the adoptive child arrives in the home. But two matters that everyone did raise with me were a desire that the process be made quicker and that more children be assisted to join adoptive families. This legislation, while openly acknowledged to be transitional in nature, with a further review due in two years, will specifically assist adoptive families in those two areas. Most importantly, the new legislation continues and reinforces the philosophy that the welfare and interests of the child concerned shall be regarded as the paramount consideration.

In keeping with this philosophy, the bill removes the requirement for adoption applicants to be assessed in chronological order. Assessments will be able to be prioritised according to the needs of the children requiring adoption. Importantly, this provision will not unfairly affect those 471 couples already on the foreign children's adoption list. A transitional clause has been included in the bill so that those current applicants will have their applications assessed chronologically; so their goalposts have not moved. I note that this transitional provision does not apply to applicants currently on the general children's adoption list. Those applicants will be automatically transferred to the new expressions of interest register. The reason for this is simple and practical enough. As at last count there were 303 couples on the Queensland general children's adoption list, but the number of children requiring adoptive placements and able to be placed in Queensland is minute. I note that only eight such children required placements in the year ended 30 June 2001. Accordingly, there is no realistic prospect that that list will ever clear itself chronologically within the next two-year period.

I congratulate those couples and families who make the very significant decision to try to adopt a child. It is the greatest commitment a person can make—to take permanent, personal responsibility for the care and education, indeed for the life, of another person. To provide a safe and loving home for a child in need is a gift beyond measure and deserves our thanks and praise. I believe that couples wishing to adopt a child will understand and accept the amendments made by this bill being for the purposes of streamlining the process to allow faster assessment procedures for prospective adoptive parents. Most importantly, those couples will also support the overriding principle that the welfare and interests of the child concerned are paramount and that they are the driving force behind this bill. I congratulate the minister and her department on bringing this very important legislation to the House. Queensland's legislation in this area had not been reviewed since the 1960s and the minister is to be commended for producing a more efficient and child-focused adoption process that reflects contemporary adoption practice. I commend the bill to the House.