



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard 17 April 2002

PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (11.30 a.m.): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak to the Private Employment Agencies and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2001. The object of the bill is to amend the Private Employment Agencies Act 1983 and the Industrial Relations Act 1999 to implement the recommendations of an independent review of the Private Employment Agencies Act. A technical amendment to the Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990 is also implemented by way of the bill.

As I mentioned, there was an independent review of the Private Employment Agencies Act conducted by an independent reviewer—as independent reviews often are—which included an independent public benefit test undertaken in accordance with national competition policy guidelines. This process ensured that the cost and benefits of legislation from a public interest perspective were fully considered. It was determined that the current licensing regime imposes significant net compliance and administration costs upon the industry and government without any significant benefit to job seekers. As a result of the findings of this independent review by the independent reviewer, a number of recommendations were formulated and submitted for consideration.

At this point, I point out that comprehensive consultation on the provisions of the bill has been undertaken with key industry stakeholders. I believe that all parties have expressed support for the bill and the important legislative changes that it introduces. These changes will address concerns that have existed with the operations and effectiveness of the current legislation for the benefit of both private employment agents and workers and will reduce the compliance and administration burdens that are faced by the industry operators and government alike. That is another very good positive.

Also at this point, I mention that Howard's IR laws have failed Queensland. It is obvious that the dogs on the waterfront approach to industrial relations of the present Prime Minister, John Howard, is responsible for up to 85 per cent of strikes across Queensland. An analysis of data supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that the overwhelming majority of industrial action in Queensland was under John Howard's confrontational style industrial laws. In comparison, there was little industrial action in those industries operating under the new industrial approach that was introduced by the Labor government in Queensland. The data shows that last April 5,700 working days were lost due to industrial dispute and that 79,800 working days were lost over a 12-month period. The strike rate was inflated by industrial action in the coal industry, which was responsible for almost 85 per cent of working days lost in Queensland in April 2001.

In comparison, before our new legislation took effect—when the coalition government was in power from March 1996 until May 1998—on average 11,200 working days per month were lost across Queensland. We have effectively halved the rate of industrial action in Queensland by the introduction of the state legislation.

The industrial relations reform introduced by the Queensland Beattie Labor government has contributed to the low incidence of industrial disputes across Queensland and it is clear that the Industrial Relations Act is delivering a fair and equitable framework for Queensland workers whilst ensuring a strong and effective economic environment. The federal coalition Workplace Relations Act has produced long and significant disputes such as those on the waterfront and those in Queensland's coalmining industries. This state Labor government and the Minister for Industrial Relations are

proactive in real job creation and ensuring that prosperity and improvements to our society will flow from positive legislation such as this bill before us today.

I also mention that it is quite timely that today I recognise a couple of old railway workers who are in the parliamentary gallery. Bill Wilson was a toolmaker some four decades ago in the North Ipswich railway workshop. He is down here with his wife, Norma, and my parents, Kevin and Priscilla Cummins. I know their keen interest in industrial relations and in this bill. As I say, my father and Bill both served proudly as apprentices and tradesmen in the North Ipswich railway workshop over four decades ago. They have joined my wife, Donna, and Daniel here today. I therefore commend the bill to the House.
