



Speech by

**CHRIS CUMMINS**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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Hansard 7 November 2002

### **FAIR TRADING AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr CUMMINS** (Kawana—ALP) (12.23 p.m.): The Office of Fair Trading is highly appreciated in our community. In speaking to the Fair Trading and Another Act Amendment Bill, I wish to mention a few instances of which I have become aware on the Sunshine Coast. Recently, a lady came to see me about a model-building kit purchased for her grandson at the local newsagency. I understand that a part of the kit has to be purchased each month until the whole set is purchased. Unfortunately, what the lady did not realise—and what most of us would not have realised—is that by the time the complete set is purchased over a two-year period the cost exceeds \$1,100, which is an exorbitant price for a child's model-building kit. Sadly, even though the kits had not been opened, the newsagency would not refund on the purchase. Like all other businesses, it is not obliged to refund on any article that is not faulty. Apart from the cost and the period it takes to collect all of the pieces to complete the model, we have to hope that the company distributing the kits also does not go out of business in the meantime. I feel that the distributors of this kit may be indulging in what can be termed as misleading advertising, otherwise known as bait or sucker advertising, whereby once someone is committed to the initial purchase they are caught up or trapped into continuing to purchase the parts for the complete article.

I contacted the Office of Fair Trading and was advised that some information should be provided on the packaging stating that it will take time to collect and complete the article. Again, we know how fads come and go. Unless a young person is a dedicated model builder, we would not expect them to maintain an interest in a project over such a lengthy period. The total cost should also be provided or, if not advertised on the packaging, all other information should allow the purchaser to calculate the total cost. Sadly, this is another case of buyers and consumers beware.

It is a sad fact of today's society that we have to issue these warnings. I regularly advise complainants to contact the Office of Fair Trading on the Sunshine Coast. Although I have opened my contribution with a negative issue that the government must address, I turn now to a positive initiative from the Office of Fair Trading. I commend the minister and the office on the recent launch of the *ABC 4 Toddlers* booklet. That booklet was appreciated by the mothers of the young ones at the centre where the booklet was launched. When I looked through it, I found it an interesting piece of literature.

As I said, the people of the Sunshine Coast appreciate the great work done by the Office of Fair Trading. We are coming into Christmas. Christmas is notoriously a time when we have to be wary. Not only does the office issue recalls or warnings for toys or articles that do not bear up to scrutiny—

**Mr Shine:** Christmas tree lights.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Christmas tree lights are a prime example. As an electrician, I know that they are often imported from China and can be quite dangerous. Christmas is a time of great festive spirit, and people should be wary when making a purchase. The previous member spoke about what retailers do to try to relieve us of our money. That is their business, but let us make sure that they have an obligation to purchasers.

I was happy to hear that there is now more readily accessible advice on offer via the Office of Fair Trading phone lines through its newly established statewide phone number. Queenslanders can more easily call the office with inquiries about unsafe products, scams, consumer or business rights and responsibilities. Everybody should note that it is a 1300 number. It is 1300 658030. Callers to the line

can obtain information for the price of a local phone call on consumer and business rights and responsibilities, occupational licensing, co-ops and incorporated associations and a range of other topics. Fair Trading advice line staff take around 6,500 calls each week from Queenslanders. That is an incredible number of calls. Over a year that adds up to a huge number of people who feel ripped off or taken, which is not a good feeling.

Callers can obtain information on refund rights, mobile phone contracts, door-to-door sales, used car purchases, warranties and guarantees, real estate transactions, and product safety and potential scams. This new 1300 number means that people anywhere in the state can be put through to the local Office of Fair Trading. As honourable members would realise, scammers often work an area. These scammers, whether they are roof painters or whatever, might go up north to central Queensland and come back through the Sunshine Coast or vice-a-versa. The local office is able to issue warnings upon the receipt of complaints.

If people do not know the best office to contact they can save themselves looking up the number by simply calling the 1300 number. There is also a credit helpline available as a local call in Queensland. People rack up the credit card bill as we get closer to Christmas. The credit card helpline telephone number is 1300 887 400. This is an initiative of the Office of Fair Trading and I commend the Minister and her department for that. The credit helpline offers free financial counselling, advice and information on how to use credit cards wisely and avoid the credit card trap. It is operated by Financial Counselling Services of Queensland Inc for the Office of Fair Trading up until the end of the financial year.

I have a personal rule that I stick by at Christmas time. I do not buy anything that I am offered by door-to-door salesmen. If I need something I have the ability to go out and get it. I realise that some of these amendments were brought about as a result of consultation. I commend the minister for the initiative of introducing stickers with regard to door-to-door sales. In the old days we used to see signs saying 'No Hawkers'. I could never understand what that meant. I remember a sign being erected on one of the ALP buildings in an effort to keep Bob Hawke away. However, those days are well gone.

I commend the minister for excluding such businesses as lawnmowing and dog washing from the provisions of the bill. These are genuine businesses. Instead of taking the dog out to be washed we have people coming to the house to undertake that duty. The people who try to rip off pensioners or the general community, such as bogus roof painters, are the lowest form of society. I commend the minister and her department for bringing this bill before the House in an effort to protect Queenslanders. I commend the bill.