



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 9 April 2002

SUICIDE, OLDER MALES

Dr WATSON (Moggill—Lib) (7.07 p.m.): Over the weekend I attended a conference on the Sunshine Coast. Another attendee at that conference, Mr Jack Backer, Treasurer of the Association of Independent Retirees, gave me a paper to read entitled *Suicide: a growth industry*. I will table a copy of the paper so that interested members can read it for themselves. Mr Backer made some interesting or, perhaps more appropriately, frightening or disturbing observations. These are points that I should have known and other members in this place may know, but we do not hear them regularly enough to fully appreciate their significance. Mr Backer's paper is concerned principally with older males. He makes some very telling points, and they are things that we in this place ought to be concerned about. He makes the point that more than twice as many people die by their own hand than are killed in road accidents.

In particular, it is a little known fact that older men have a very high suicide rate. What surprised me was that from 1990 to 1996 in Queensland the rate for men aged 65 to 74 was 25.54 per 100,000. The rate for men aged 75 and over was 42.57 per 100,000. This compares with 30.9 per 100,000 for the 18- to 24-year-old age group 10 years ago and 23 per 100,000 at present. Most of us in this place are aware of the tragic situation of youth taking their own lives, but many of us do not fully appreciate that in fact older males take their lives at nearly twice the rate of younger males.

As our population ages, this is likely to increase. There is no doubt that suicide is a very complex issue, but some of the risk factors for older males to which Mr Backer refers are declining physical health, depression and other mental illnesses, loneliness and social isolation—which we know is a real problem for the aged—and of course loss of loved ones and other major life changes. In fact, stress in anyone increases considerably when one changes jobs, retires or moves house. It becomes a major problem when one is older. It is a concern, and I know that the state Department of Families and the relevant Commonwealth departments are considering these issues in a very serious fashion. When one is confronted with and reads Mr Backer's presentation, the stark reality hits home.