



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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FAIR TRADING AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (12.18 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Fair Trading and Another Act Amendment Bill 2002 as this form of legislation is essential in terms of protecting the vulnerable in our communities. How many times have we heard of elderly pensioners living alone being approached and offered some deal they cannot let go by? These door-to-door salesmen know all the reasons why these people are vulnerable: because they may be a little feeble-minded in wanting to prove they can still maintain their independence from their children and have some control of their lives. Whatever the reason, once signed up to that great deal and finding themselves with time to think about what they have signed, the fear of being ridiculed by family members can actually make them more vulnerable in that they keep their mouths shut and stay trapped in a certain situation.

Unfortunately, high-pressure sales tactics are often used on elderly people, who are urged to 'Buy it now or you'll miss out'. These predators know that allowing their victims to contact their children or any other avenue for advice or guidance will result in the sale falling through. Such techniques are also used effectively on younger people or those with a slight impairment. In our parents' generation, signing a piece of paper was the only way to commit to anything. However, in this day and age there are other ways to enter into a transaction, such as phone authorisation and Internet sales. Internet sales are trapping many young people, who are incurring huge debts before they even leave their teens. Despite measures to halt these sellers of snake oil, other sales methods will be found and people will keep getting trapped.

I commend the minister for bringing forward this and other legislation which targets those preying on the vulnerable in our community. In the Nanango community a lot of people were concerned that their phone accounts had suddenly arrived bearing the logo of an obscure company they had never heard of. They wondered how it had happened, because they had not signed anything. People have to be wary of phone sales techniques, which when used catch more than just the aged or the vulnerable. Just about anybody can be caught. I doubt that any person in this chamber or one of their family members has not been subjected to a barrage of phone calls at lunchtime or at other times from someone giving a hard-sell routine. A lot of people just hang up on them, but a lot do not. I do not know how long it will be before companies give up these methods of procuring sales. One person I spoke to recently said that he was told he was the first of 48 people who had agreed to even talk to them. How many people through sheer loneliness talk to these people, as this gentleman did, and because of that loneliness reveal how vulnerable they are to becoming the next victim?

People are always looking for a bargain and often end up paying an extortionate amount for a similar product and service that could have been obtained by a local provider at half the price. I have always kept in mind a lesson that I learnt during my retailing experience that people are impulsive buyers and anything brightly labelled 'once in a lifetime' or 'wait, there's more' will attract anybody with a dollar in their pocket. One of the important things I learnt was the importance of keeping your product away from comparable products. If it is not open to comparison, if there is not enough time to compare, it is definitely not a good deal. People should leave the product alone, because if they purchase a product in those circumstances the purchaser will often end up being a victim.

I realise there are genuine and respectable door-to-door salespeople and that they will embrace this and all other legislation designed to protect the consumer. I note that the recommendations of the red tape reduction committee have been taken on board and this legislation allows these recommends to be implemented. One of any business's longest running complaints—and I faced this myself—is the amount of red tape, which can be quite daunting at times. I congratulate the minister on tackling this ongoing problem. The bill addresses these problems. I support the bill.