



Speech by

Hon. GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard 27 November 2002

WORKCOVER QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.43 p.m.), in reply: I firstly thank all honourable members for their contributions to the debate on what we believe are significant and sometimes long-awaited reforms contained in the WorkCover bill before the House this afternoon. I am particularly pleased to have received the support of the opposition. I thank the shadow minister for his support for the bill and also the member for Nicklin, who made a very worthwhile contribution. The other issue is that it is good news for both employers and employees here in Queensland and continues with the reforms of the WorkCover legislation in this state to ensure that not only is it amongst the best in the country but also that it delivers the best in terms of premiums and outcomes for workers in this state. The member for Nicklin made the comment that Queensland needs to set the pace and not be blindly led by the other states or simply lured by national schemes. That certainly was one of the driving forces behind the changes that are before the chamber today.

I also point out that the bill has come about as a result of fairly extensive consultation that we have undertaken with key workers compensation stakeholders in Queensland such as the employer organisations, the self-insurers, the unions and of course the lawyers. I want to express my thanks to all those people who took time to offer their advice and their views in trying to achieve the best possible results that we could put forward to the House today. One of the things that I have always tried to do as much as possible as a minister is to reach broad consensus on any legislation that I bring before the House, because I believe that if there is broad consensus on the legislation it makes for good law at the end of the day. Even though sometimes that is not always possible, it is important that we endeavour to do that in any case.

The amendments that we have been debating today in this bill continue the Labor government's election commitment of restoring the balance, and that was a commitment we gave during the last election campaign. The reforms introduced in this bill, as we have heard from a number of speakers, will result in a number of improvements to Queensland's very successful workers compensation scheme. As I have said, they are good news for both employers and workers in this state. In particular, I want to thank all honourable members from the Gold Coast who have been very supportive of me in terms of the cross-border arrangements. Many of those members made a number of representations to me in order to articulate to me the views of businesses on the Gold Coast and how important it was to get this cross-border coverage issue in place.

Mrs Reilly: Most responsive you were, too.

Mr NUTTALL: I thank the member for that. In terms of the changes in relation to cross-border coverage, I want to highlight what they will actually do. They will ease the administrative and premium burdens on employers that have good occupational health and safety records and will also ease the administrative and premium burden on those employers that employ Queenslanders who regularly work interstate. As the member for Gregory pointed out, the reforms will significantly ease the financial burdens on small businesses employing Queenslanders interstate as well.

For workers and their families, access to structured settlements is a very significant step forward. For the very first time we will have the opportunity for workers who have been seriously injured to have access to a secure income over the longer term. I note that the honourable member for Springwood

called on the federal government to move quickly to amend its current taxation laws that might unfairly treat Queensland workers and their families who choose settlements in lieu of a lump sum payment. I assure all honourable members of the House that I will be pushing very hard for those tax reforms at the federal level so that workers will have access to these new arrangements as soon as possible. I took the opportunity to raise that issue with the federal minister at the last ministerial council meeting of all industrial relations ministers a couple of Fridays ago in Melbourne. In addition to that, I have already written to the federal minister in that regard.

Importantly, the bill will also benefit the continued and future employment growth of our great state of Queensland, and I think that is really important. In conclusion, the reforms do demonstrate the Queensland Labor government's continuing commitment to ensure that we have the best and fairest workers compensation scheme in this country. I again thank all honourable members for their worthwhile contributions.

Motion agreed to.